



Special Projects

Water Resource Issues Raised, Discussions Abound at WRRC Conference

The title of the Water Resources Research Center's conference, "Providing Water to Arizona's Growing Population: How Will We Meet the Obligation?," posed a very broad question to program participants. Unsurprisingly, posing this big question to a group with diverse and varied backgrounds — rural, urban, environmental, development along with elected officials, utility managers, and local, county, state and federal government officials — evoked a plethora of information and views. Following are a few of the issues discussed at the conference.

The speakers generally held the view that water will not be the factor limiting growth in the state. Grady Gammage, private attorney and senior research fellow at Arizona State University's Morrison Institute, described the situation: "We can continue to (expand) Arizona's population but we do so at a price. We do it at a price of a lifestyle that many people in urban areas currently enjoy." Lifestyle is the critical draw. Water is needed once people settle here, which they are less likely to do if congestion and poor air quality lessen Arizona's appeal and draw.

According to some speakers desalinization holds promise to landlocked Arizona, either for use to treat the state's brackish water

or, through an agreement with California, to treat ocean water. The most ambitious desalinization scheme — he called it "exotic — was offered by CAP's Larry Dozier who outlined a plan to construct a large desalting plant on the Gulf of California and a Palo Verde-sized power plant beside it. He said, "This would form a modular plant that would be able to perhaps produce a million-and-a-half acre feet of water per year."

Gammage challenged Robert Johnson, regional director, Bureau of Reclamation, after

Johnson said during his luncheon speech that his role as water manager is to provide information, with others making land-use decisions. Gammage said water managers need "to get over" that attitude and get more involved in decision making. In the conference's concluding remarks, Kathy Jacobs, executive director of the Arizona Water Institute, picked up on this idea saying that, although elected officials make the decisions, "They don't have to make those

decisions in a vacuum. We can communicate to them the implications of the decisions."

Present state water laws came up for criticism. Director of Water Resources Herb Guenther summarized what he believes to be a deplorable situation. He said, "Water laws are very convoluted; in fact, they are conflicting to a large degree. The problem is that we are unable to make reasonable decisions regarding growth.

"Outside AMAs we ask people to get a determination of adequacy, but if you don't, that is OK; you can build anyway. Those getting a determination of adequacy compete with those with a determination of inadequacy; nobody has priority."

Jacobs suggested that a water adequacy program would attract greater acceptance if it were reframed as a private property protection issue. She said it would gain further support if it were viewed as providing certainties for people making investments. Guenther's and Jacob's were two voices in a chorus of criticism of the water adequacy program.

Guenther also lamented his agency's lack of authority saying, "ADWR is a paper tiger. We growl and snarl and make all sorts of noises, but we have very little enforcement authority."

The Central Arizona Groundwater Replenishment District was vigorously discussed. Several speakers said CAGRDR was working just fine, enabling developers to more readily demonstrate assured water supplies. Warren Tenney, assistant general manager, Metropolitan Water District, very much disagreed with that assessment. He believes the CAGRDR is not serving the long-term water management interest of the state. He said that without CAGRDR subsidies, "Development and growth would be slower; our quality of life would be higher; and our economy would be less growth-based and more diversified and healthy."

Kris Mayes of the Arizona Corporation Commission believes her agency is making strides to protect public interest. She said explosive growth occurring outside Active Management Areas necessitates that actions be taken to protect public interest before granting a water company a Certificate of Convenience and Necessity to serve a region. She said that the ACC can enforce Orders Preliminary, which enables the ACC to outline preconditions to be met by companies before granting a CC&N; thus it would be ensured that specific needs and concerns of a service area are being met including a determination of an assured or adequate water supply.

Environmental needs were considered. Pat Graham, state director of The Nature Conservancy, said an approach to better ensure sustainability from nature's perspective would be "to identify those bounds that are necessary to support our ecosystems and decide water use and consumption (accordingly)."

In conclusion, Jacobs reiterated a message oft repeated at the conference when she urged a collaborative approach to acquiring water supplies rather than everyone looking out the themselves. She said, "We need a collaborative approach because competition is going to hurt everyone." ■

Making of the 100-year Assured Water Supply

In a comment from the audience, Phil Briggs told how 100 years came to be the measure of an adequate water supply. In the early 1970s the Arizona Legislature was discussing the need for a statewide water adequacy statute as a consumer protection measure. In a committee hearing the Arizona Director of Water Resources at the time, Wes Steiner, agreed with lawmakers that a long-time supply needed to be assured. When asked what he considered a long time Briggs said Steiner responded along of lines of, "I don't know. A hundred years?" And it was written into law.