



Public Policy Review

By Sharon Megdal

Now's the Time to Fit Together the Pieces of an Arizona Water Plan



Over time, I have become more and more convinced that Arizona needs to do a better job of planning for our water future. We face water challenges within and outside of the Active Management Areas. I suspect no person knowledgeable about our complex water issues would deny we face challenges associated with growth and limited water supplies. Significant uncertainties abound, including

those associated with flows of the Colorado River.

A recent survey suggests that Arizonans recognize water as a major issue needing investment. The Center for the Future of Arizona's Gallup Web survey of 831 Arizonans asked that they prioritize six options for the best use of their tax dollars. The greatest number of respondents (28 percent) chose: "Adopt a water management plan that protects water supplies for the entire state." Rural areas and small cities registered greater support for water management planning than other sectors, at 28.7 and 29.6 percent respectively. Otherwise, little difference existed in the opinions by geography, attachment level, or age when it comes to water.

The next most popular policy option (21.5 percent) was "balancing population growth with preserving open space and recreational opportunities." Other options included mass transit systems, new highways and roads, improved interstate transportation and high speed Internet. Admittedly, survey results merely suggest what policies or investments citizens are likely to support in the future. Results clearly depend on the structure of the survey instrument itself. Nevertheless, they suggest that citizens recognize the need for investment in water infrastructure.

What do I mean by water planning? I recently responded to this question by stating that I would begin simply by identifying (1) what water needs have been identified by jurisdiction/water provider; (2) which entities may be looking at the same water sources (such as the Colorado River); and (3) where economies of scale could be realized for infrastructure investments. It was suggested that I call the exercise a "Needs Assessment" rather than a "State Water Plan." I have no problem with that; that is exactly what I am suggesting we do. One has to know the needs before one can identify the solutions.

So, by all means, let's get people together to talk about their needs and see where solutions overlap. Let's engage in a sustained discussion — in other words, we don't go home after collecting data — about water sustainability in Arizona. Let's discuss the water needs of current and future residents, agriculture and industry (including energy), as well as water needed to support the environment. Let's also talk about issues that may not be on the horizon for many of us. For example, the May issue of *Southwest Hydrology* iden-

tified carbon sequestration as an issue. What if efforts to sequester carbon in deep aquifers limit our future ability to use aquifers? Very few experts are discussing the treatment of poor quality groundwater as well as efforts to sequester carbon.

The Arizona Department of Water Resources has worked long and hard to collect the data presented in its water atlas. We need to take a collective look at that data and see what additional information we need to gather. We need communities throughout Arizona participating, much as they do with transportation planning.

Resources necessary to support a needs assessment, however, are limited since Arizona is cutting agency budgets. This makes it difficult to carry out existing tasks, let alone take on an assignment as significant as a statewide needs assessment/planning exercise. But all the work does not have to be done by ADWR. If we put our heads together, we can perhaps come up with a strategy involving the universities, and loaned executives from local governments, water agencies, industry and non-governmental organizations.

Arizona Cooperative Extension will be visiting some of Ari-

zonia's communities to conduct water listening sessions. County Extension and campus personnel will listen to communities' questions and concerns about water. This winter, we will host a visit by the director of the Oklahoma Water

Megdal on Blue Ribbon Panel

WRRC Director Sharon Megdal has been invited to join the Blue Ribbon Panel on Water Sustainability, established to provide advice to the Arizona Department of Water Resources, Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and the Arizona Corporation Commission. A prime task of the multi-agency collaboration will be to focus on increased water conservation and water recycling.

Resources Research Institute to hear about their participation in Oklahoma's water planning. At the WRRC, we recently received a grant from the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust (see page 3) to assess methods used to quantify the water needs of the environment, which will enable us to work more closely with stakeholders currently involved in this important work. Numerous stakeholders, including those outside the three-county Central Arizona Project service area, are participating in the ADD water process. Future needs of water providers and Central Arizona Groundwater Replenishment District are being considered. The Arizona Investment Council funded a study of water-related infrastructure needs that is posted on its web site.

The point is that many pieces of the puzzle are already being assembled. What we need is an overlay to bring the parts together for a comprehensive look at water and water-related infrastructure needs.

I continue to use the half-full, half-empty glass to summarize our water management situation. Some may say we cannot afford to undertake a needs assessment/planning exercise with the economy in a slump. Knowing that growth and prosperity will return to Arizona, I can only ask the question: Can we afford not to? 