

# Column: Candidates should know 5 essential water facts

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With so much attention focused on Prescott's Public Safety Personnel Retirement System (PSPRS) debt in the approaching Prescott City Council election, it's easy to forget the new council will be setting critical water policy during their time in office.

Over the next four years, city staff will provide council with information and advice on technical issues, but council members make all final decisions on water policy. To do that competently, they must know some essential facts:

**Safe yield – Fact:** We continue to withdraw more water from the Little Chino aquifer than we and nature are putting back. Consequences of overdrafting include more wells going dry, increased pumping and drilling costs, reduced stream flows, and potential land subsidence.

**Big Chino pipeline –** In conjunction with Prescott Valley and Salt River Project, Prescott is engaged in research to further determine the impact of pumping from the Big Chino Water Ranch on the upper Verde River. **Fact:** U.S. Geological Survey and other studies have already shown the proposed pumping will have a negative impact.

Ultimately, council members will need to decide whether mitigation to offset pumping is workable and affordable, and whether the case for the pipeline should be put to Prescott voters. Even if the voters approved the pipeline, it would be only part of the answer. Demand must be reduced.

**Pipeline alternatives – Fact:** There are alternative water sources yet to be investigated. They include aggressive conservation, direct potable reuse of effluent, storm water runoff collection and extensive rainwater harvesting. Council members will decide whether and how much to spend on such investigation.

**Conservation – Fact:** Outdoor landscaping uses about 27 percent of Prescott's water. So far the City of Prescott has been quite successful in promoting conservation, but more remains to be done to encourage the use of drought-tolerant plants and limit the use of potable water outdoors. It will be up to the council to decide whether to institute further incentives and landscaping codes.

**Water rates – Fact:** Council members will soon need to substantially increase water rates in order to cover the costs of maintaining or replacing aging water and sewer infrastructure. Consideration will need to be given to residents who are already having trouble paying their water bills.

Candidates for Prescott City Council should know these five essential facts. We are overdrafting the Little Chino aquifer, importation from the Big Chino Water Ranch without mitigation will reduce Verde River flow, alternatives to importation have not been investigated, conservation should be part of any solution, and water rates must be raised to replace aging infrastructure but with consideration for those who can't afford to pay.

The Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) will host a forum on water issues for Prescott mayoral and city council candidates on Saturday, Aug. 5, from 10 a.m. to noon at the Granite Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 882 Sunset in Prescott. Candidates will be available to chat with the public before and after the forum. Read the questions CWAG will ask the candidates to discuss at [www.cwagaz.org](http://www.cwagaz.org).

Leslie Hoy is the CWAG media coordinator, a founding member, and a Prescott resident for 18 years.