

Column: 4 things you can do about Deep Well Ranch, AED

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Leslie Hoy, Special to the Courier

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Recent Courier articles about the Deep Well Ranch Master Plan (Master Plan) and the proposed Arizona Eco Development annexation might have left you thinking: “What the heck is going on?”

Followed by: “Where’s the water coming from?”

Add a third question: “What can I do about it?”

Some facts: The 1,800-acre Deep Well property now under review was annexed into Prescott in 2015. A 2009 water agreement negotiation resulted in a yearly water allocation of 450 acre-feet (an acre-foot is 325,851 gallons) from the City of Prescott’s groundwater portfolio and 500 acre-feet from recharged effluent credits, along with 900 acre-feet from the Big Chino pipeline, if it is built. The Master Plan forecasts 10,500 homes; without the pipeline, there will be water only for approximately half that.

Because the Deep Well Ranch was annexed under Proposition 400, a 2005 voter-approved initiative, the effluent collected must go to recharge our aquifer and cannot be used as credits for further development. However, the Master Plan calls for substantial landscaping, which requires irrigation water, water that cannot be recharged and will increase our aquifer overdraft.

Several Prescott Planning and Zoning (P&Z) commissioners and the general public have suggested amending the Master Plan to call for rainwater harvesting, a drought-tolerant plant palette, bioswales and other measures to reduce outdoor water use. The Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) recommends that the City Council include these measures when approving the Master Plan.

Perhaps soon to be a competitor of the Deep Well Ranch, Arizona Eco Development (AED) on Sept. 12 introduced to City Council a 3,250-home proposal for annexation by Prescott.

AED has 375 acre-feet of surface water rights (enough for 1,500 to 1,875 homes) they want to transfer to the city in exchange for groundwater. They hope to purchase additional extinguishment credits from elsewhere in the Prescott Active Management Area and to trade land near the airport for water from the city’s portfolio. The AED annexation must follow the Prop 400 process, which provides 60 days for public comment from the time the annexation goes to P&Z.

With the prospect of thousands of additional residents in Prescott’s future, CWAG is concerned about further overextending our water supply. You should be, too. Public input is helping to improve the Master Plan and can help shape the AED development. Here are some ways you can contribute:

- Submit comments to City of Prescott Community Development Dept. Director Tom Guice, tom.guice@prescott-az.gov, and City of Prescott Planning Manager George Worley, george.worley@prescott-az.gov.
- Attend P&Z meetings and City Council meetings when Deep Well Ranch and AED are on the agenda. Meetings are posted on the city’s web calendar and at www.cwagaz.org.
- Vote for council candidates who will carefully analyze the issues.

- Read the Master Plan at www.espirituloci.com/deep-well-ranch.html.

On Saturday, Oct. 14, CWAG will present “Deep Well Ranch: Impact on Our Aquifer and the Verde River.” Details at www.cwagaz.org.

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