



NEWS RELEASE

Arizona House of Representatives

Representative Tim Dunn (R-25)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rep. Tim Dunn: Arizona has a Plan for Water

STATE CAPITOL, PHOENIX – On the 32nd anniversary of the signing of the 1991 Arizona Groundwater Transportation Act, State Representative Tim Dunn reminds Arizona leaders that the state has a plan to address issues identified in an integrated numerical groundwater model that was released on June 1st for the Phoenix Active Management Area (AMA) and 100-year Assured Water Supply (AWS):

We applaud Governor Hobbs and her administration for acknowledging that Arizona is not “out of water.” As she said on June 1, 2023, “We are not running out of water.”

Considering what Lake Mead and Lake Powell have gone through on the Colorado River over the last 15 years, groundwater in the Phoenix Metropolitan area is in amazing shape.

And the fact that the Phoenix Metropolitan area is experiencing rapid growth is a good thing. It’s good for our economy and tells us that people want to live here. We have one of the fastest growth rates in the nation.

But the updated groundwater model is going to have an impact. It tells us we need to check our speed and ensure we have enough water for future. But it’s nothing we can’t handle. We’ve dealt with this before.

When it comes to water, we’ve seen times of rapid growth and shortages. We’ve spent years debating the issues, and we’ve invested in looking to the future. We have a plan.

In 1991, we faced a similar situation. Worse than we’re facing today. And we knew we’d face it again.

Stan Barnes, a former state lawmaker and the chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources & Agriculture, thought ahead. He authored legislation to provide a solution.

The 1991 Arizona Groundwater Transportation Act established Arizona’s plan for meeting unmet demand in the AWS program. It set aside four groundwater basins, rich in groundwater resources, to give urban areas a source of water they could withdraw from, 30 years in the future.

These are the Harquahala, Butler Valley, McMullen, and Big Chino groundwater basins.

They were created over 30 years ago, precisely so we could withdraw from them in moments like today. Essentially, they are Arizona’s water savings account.

In a 2022 interview with the Queen Creek Tribune, former Representative Stan Barnes said the following regarding the groundwater basins:

“It was contemplated that the growth areas of Maricopa, Pima and Pinal counties would someday need water that existed in Harquahala Valley.”

“It was purposeful that the water that was being used in Harquahala would be used for supporting the urbanization in the growth areas of Arizona.”

Historically, in rural Arizona, we have opposed the idea of transferring water to meet urban Arizona’s unquenched thirst for growth. We opposed it in 1991, and we continue to oppose it. On behalf of my constituents in Yuma and along the Colorado River, I oppose it.

But the 1991 Groundwater Transportation Act set a compromise we could live with. Our state leaders knew the challenges, and they tackled them head on.

Urban and rural Arizonans came together and agreed to set aside the groundwater basins to give urban areas the water they’d need, while protecting rural communities and the fresh produce that America depends in the Yuma area.

The transfer basins contain well above the 4.9 million acre-feet that the Phoenix AMA needs. At least 20 to 30 million acre-feet in total, according to the Arizona Department of Water Resources. Harquahala alone contains between 15 to 20 million acre-feet.

Simply put, the 1991 Groundwater Transportation Act is Arizona’s plan for meeting unmet demand in the Phoenix AMA. Harquahala is the solution.

It provides the legal and physical supply that Arizona needs. With Harquahala, we can continue to have new growth on top of what is already in the pipeline.

After passing out of both chambers with a supermajority, it was signed into law by Governor Fife Symington on June 10, 1991. June 10, 2023, marks the 32nd anniversary of its signing.

This should be celebrated. And Harquahala should be utilized.

New technologies and breakthroughs in water efficiency will continue to stretch our water supplies even further. As additional options become available, we will take advantage of them. In the meantime, we just need to follow the plan.

With the release of the new groundwater model, Arizona is not slamming the brakes on growth. We’re just pumping the brakes a little and reevaluating our speed to determine what the proper pace should be.

We are at an inflection point, but we are prepared. Arizona has a plan. We’ve had one since 1991.

With Harquahala, all we need to do is tap into it and begin moving the water. Just like our former state leaders planned 32 years ago.

Tim Dunn is a Republican member of the Arizona House of Representatives serving Legislative District 25, which includes portions of Yuma, Maricopa, and La Paz Counties. Follow him on Twitter at @TimDunn_AZ.

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