



# NEWS RELEASE

## Arizona House of Representatives

Representative Gail Griffin (R-19)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Some Rural Groundwater Basins are Facing Challenges, but Lawmakers are Not Receiving a Complete Picture

**STATE CAPITOL, PHOENIX** – State Representative Gail Griffin, Chairman of the House Natural Resources, Energy & Water Committee issued the following statement on the Arizona Department of Water Resources’ characterization of Arizona’s rural groundwater basins as “critical”:

In 1989, there were [45.3 million acre-feet](#) available in the Willcox basin to a depth of 1,200 feet. That’s about *one-and-a-half* Lake Meads, *two* Lake Powells, or *twenty-seven* Roosevelt Lakes sitting under the ground in Willcox.

Today, the Department of Water Resources [can’t tell us](#) how much water there is beneath the surface, at least not to any depth below the “average” well depth in the basin, or 409 feet.

This hampers our ability to make informed decisions on rural groundwater policy. Arizonans deserve to know how much water they have before politicians start making decisions about their future. This is the first step in gaining local control.

According to the latest [Supply and Demand Assessment](#), 3.59 million acre-feet were withdrawn from storage in the Willcox Basin since 1990. That’s 108,800 acre-feet per year (on average).

That means there should still be approximately *41.7 million acre-feet* of water remaining in the Willcox Basin today, or approximately *383 years’ worth* of water at the current rate of decline.

That is 132 years *more* than the age of the United States of America.

*And*—keep in mind that this is only the amount to a depth of 1,200 feet. The Willcox Basin is actually much deeper—as deep as [4,800 feet](#) in some areas.

Many municipal wells can reach these depths. The City of Flagstaff, for example, has at least four wells over 2,400 feet deep.

If local residents come together, they can pool their resources, drill one of these “deep water” wells, install a single standpipe for water hauling, and provide a source of water for everyone that will last years—including for people who don’t want to be physically connected by pipes.

If private well owners are facing challenges, we have solutions: [HB2084](#), [HB2086](#), and [HB2274](#) all help to address [domestic wells](#) immediately by supporting the use of water hauling.

If rural county supervisors want more local control over their groundwater resources, [HB2572](#) and [HB2727](#) increase local control and make existing tools [more workable](#) for rural areas.

If rural residents want farmers to use less water, [HB2202](#), [HB2203](#), [HB2273](#), [HB2570](#), [HB2573](#), [HB2638](#), [SB1448](#), and [SB1518](#) all give farmers more flexibility to [save water](#), switch to less water-intensive crops, and use water in the most efficient way possible.

If historic drought is reducing the amount of groundwater recharge, [HCM2003](#), [HB2087](#), and [HB2207](#) focus on [stormwater recharge](#) and the development of 331 sites to increase the amount we receive when it does rain.

Are groundwater levels decreasing in certain basins? Yes, but the first step should be to stop the bleeding to prevent the rate of decline from getting worse. Then we can develop tools to help stabilize the aquifer and find ways to put more water back in the basin, such as groundwater recharge, reuse, and new technology for farming.

Republicans are working on these tools for rural areas, but we need a complete picture of the basins to know which tools make sense for which areas. We need all the facts.

How many years' worth of water we have at the current rate of decline? If the Department doesn't think there's enough water to go around, then it needs to tell us how much water "there is." If the Department thinks active management practices are necessary to preserve the existing supply of groundwater for future needs, then it needs to tell us what the "existing supply" is.

These questions are essential to determining which basins are "critical" and which are not. The Department should not be characterizing basins as "critical" without this information.

Adopting [HB2271](#), however, would give lawmakers this information. It requires the Department to include this information in each of its 5-year Supply and Demand Assessments.

Rural residents have a lot to hope for with HB2271.

In January, Governor Hobbs [announced \\$5.5 million](#) for "hydrogeologic studies" to help the Department "build groundwater models" to "provide crucial data"—acknowledging that the Governor does not have this information but sees it as valuable to advancing legislation.

Given the need for this information and the Governor's allocation of resources to obtain it, we are hopeful the Governor will support HB2271 and sign into law new Supply and Demand Assessments that include the total volume of groundwater in each basin.

*Gail Griffin is a Republican member of the Arizona House of Representatives serving Legislative District 19, which includes areas of Greenlee, Graham, Cochise, and eastern Pima and Santa Cruz Counties. She also serves as Chairman of the House Natural Resources, Energy & Water Committee.*

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