



# NEWS RELEASE

## Arizona House of Representatives

Representative Gail Griffin (R-19)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## NREW Chairman Gail Griffin's Statement on Democrats' Rural Groundwater Proposal

STATE CAPITOL, PHOENIX – State Representative Gail Griffin, Chairman of the House Natural Resources, Energy & Water Committee, issued the following statement on Democrats' rural groundwater proposal:

Many areas across rural Arizona are facing challenges with groundwater resources. To address these challenges, Republicans in the State Legislature have been working on solutions to secure Arizona's long-term water future.

In 2023, House and Senate Republicans launched a [Joint Legislative Water Committee](#) to address groundwater challenges and [find solutions](#) that work for rural areas, including recharge, replenishment, reuse, and the adoption of new technologies that help to reduce groundwater depletion while preserving local economies.

In 2024, Arizona Republicans [led on rural water policy](#), introducing numerous bills that, if adopted, would have:

- Established Willcox as an Irrigation Non-expansion Area ([HB2060](#)).
- Granted domestic well owners a private property right to groundwater ([HB2063](#)).
- Supported stormwater recharge in areas like Prescott, Pinal, and Willcox ([HB2020](#)).
- Allowed local residents to close the basin and require 10-15 percent cuts to stabilize the aquifer ([SB1221](#)).

We recognized [Willcox's qualification as an Irrigation Non-expansion Area](#) and explained why this designation was more appropriate than an Active Management Area, which voters resoundingly rejected by a 2-to-1 margin.

We also emphasized that Arizona water policy [must focus on groundwater recharge](#), noting that rural Arizona could benefit from [increased stormwater capture](#) through the development of [331 sites](#) that the Department of Water Resources and State Land Department [have stated](#) are suitable for increasing local supplies.

Since 2023, Republicans have held over 112 stakeholder meetings statewide, logging hundreds of hours to address water issues, strengthen rural communities, and promote best management practices—without compromising our principles. “[Consent of the Governed](#)” is a principle that has always guided Republicans and will remain central as we continue to work on rural groundwater policy.

This year, House and Senate Republicans have introduced over 20 measures on rural groundwater, including proposals that [conserve groundwater](#), increase [stormwater recharge](#), and make existing tools [more workable](#) for rural areas. Republican solutions also provide immediate solutions for [domestic wells](#) and seek to obtain [critical data](#) that lawmakers need to make informed decisions but are currently [not receiving](#) from state water agencies.

Republicans have continued meeting to find solutions, Democrats halted participation in June 2024 and, six months later, released an 87-page proposal without advance notice.

Like their [past rural groundwater proposals](#), Democrats’ latest plan echoes the same [anti-growth agenda](#) radical environmentalists, including the Environmental Defense Fund and Sierra Club, [have pushed](#) since 2020—policies that would [devastate rural economies](#).

In fact, in many ways it represents a step backward, including provisions that Democrats had agreed to remove in previous negotiations, including mandatory groundwater cuts of up to 40 percent over 40 years, groundwater withdrawal fees, and backdoor housing regulations that circumvent local control and strip county supervisors of their authority to approve new residential subdivisions in unincorporated areas.

Today, we are exposing the radical Left’s agenda and releasing a detailed, comprehensive analysis and one-page fact sheet on the Democrats’ 87-page proposal—with direct references to the bill—showing its key provisions. These include the following:

- Mandatory groundwater cuts of up to 40 percent over 40 years. (Page 50, lines 5-50).
- Unelected, Governor-appointed councils who would not be subject to groundwater regulations but who could impose new regulations on others, targeting individual water users and shutting down local industries. (Page 46, lines 20-32; pages 48-49).
- Mandatory groundwater metering and reporting requirements. (Pages 65-67).
- Groundwater withdrawal fees on personal groundwater use, which would be set and collected (with no cap) by the Governor’s Director in Phoenix. (Page 49, lines 12-14).
- Cannot drill a new or replacement well without government approval in Phoenix. (Page 48, lines 25-26; page 57, lines 9-21; page 62, lines 34-36).
- No local vote or economic impact study required to establish new areas. (Pages 37-40).
- A ‘menu’ of management goals that includes “safe yield,” even though the Arizona Department of Water Resources recently [acknowledged](#) that achieving “safe yield” is “pretty unlikely” in rural basins. (Page 47, lines 1-8).
- Creates a backdoor to bypass the county supervisors’ unanimous vote requirement for establishing new housing regulations in rural areas. (Page 49, lines 28-35).

Radical environmental groups like the Sierra Club seek to impose stricter regulations on rural Arizona than those in urban areas, crippling rural economies and housing availability. The Sierra Club recently [admitted](#) that adopting “*something stronger*” than an Active Management Area is what they want for rural Arizona.

For farmers, a 40 percent groundwater cut means a 40 percent cut in livelihoods. For local governments, it’s a 40 percent loss in revenue. This would devastate rural economies. If Democrats and radical environmental groups think a 40 percent cut is necessary to save Arizona’s groundwater resources, then why don’t they propose 40 percent cuts in the Phoenix or Tucson Active Management Areas, where over 80 percent of the state’s population resides?

Arizona’s agricultural industry generates \$31 billion annually and provides nearly 90 percent of all fresh produce and vegetables consumed in the nation, in addition to affordable beef, dairy, wine, cotton, pecans, and pistachios, and many other products for our local grocery stores and restaurants.

Significant innovations and technological advancements in agriculture are improving water conservation and efficiency. Arizona Republicans [have supported](#) and [continue to support](#) policies that incentivize the adoption of these technologies.

Does more work need to be done? Yes, but Arizona House and Senate Republicans believe in taking a different approach than the top-down method currently being pushed. Rural Arizonans deserve better. Together, we can find a ‘win-win’ solution.

Arizona House and Senate Republicans remain committed to collaborating with lawmakers and stakeholders to craft policies that support rural Arizona, sustain economic growth, and uphold local control—while advancing groundwater recharge, replenishment, and innovative water supply solutions for everyone. It’s time to put politics aside and pass real solutions for rural Arizona.

A copy of the comprehensive analysis on the Democrats’ rural groundwater proposal can be found [here](#).

A copy of the fact sheet can be found [here](#).

*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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