

Your Turn: Arizona lawmakers want to decimate your groundwater (again)

In 2016, Gov. [Doug Ducey vetoed two bad bills](#), declaring, “I will not sign legislation that threatens Arizona’s water future.”

Masquerading as measures to “continue good water policy,” the same harmful agendas have returned in two identical bills, [Senate Bill 1507](#) and [House Bill 2512](#), which would undermine sound water management in Arizona.

One of their sponsors asserted the bills would let everybody “know that Arizona is not sitting on our hands and doing nothing on water.” Seriously?

These bills would not only undermine the 100-year adequate water supply requirement for new homes in certain rural counties. But they also would force the state’s Natural Resource Conservation Commissioner to tout the state’s “water-related advancements” while we were going in the wrong direction.

No, there is not 'plenty of water'

Some of the proposals are just wasteful or meaningless, but the real threat is the backwards idea that Cochise County — home of Sen. Gail Griffin, one of the sponsors — should be allowed to unilaterally end the adequate water supply requirement for that county and its municipalities.

There is [not “plenty of water” in Cochise County](#), as Sen. Griffin claims. Its groundwater levels have declined in recent years because of increased municipal, industrial and agricultural use, and one of the only tools the county and its biggest city, Sierra Vista, have for managing groundwater pumping is the adequate water supply requirement that these bills would

endanger.

It gets worse. The San Pedro River, which runs through Cochise Country, is the [last free-flowing river in the Southwest](#). An oasis in a desert landscape, it hosts two-thirds of the avian diversity in the U.S., millions of birds migrate through it every year, and it supports one of the largest cottonwood-willow forests in Arizona.

Congress established the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area to protect it — its water rights are superior to groundwater use for new subdivisions in Cochise Country — and if groundwater pumping jeopardizes the Conservation Area's rights, homeowners will be left high and dry, the definition of bad water policy.

These bills threaten good water policy

Arizona faces major problems that this legislation does nothing to address, including who speaks for the state on water issues. Meanwhile, precipitation in the Colorado River basin is tracking below 2002, the [lowest in more than a hundred years](#).

These bills ignore the falling water levels in Lake Mead, and if a shortage of Colorado River water occurs, central Arizona water users will be the first to suffer. In rural areas, where groundwater use is unregulated, wells are running dry and increased competition is depleting the common supply.

This [newspaper reported in 2015](#) that in Cochise County's Willcox Groundwater Basin, "Those who can afford it are drilling down to volcanic rock. Digging any deeper is cost-prohibitive, and water quality gets questionable at that point." Conditions have worsened since then, and these bills won't help at all.

In 2017, the governor's office convened representatives of Arizona's business community, farmers, mining companies, cities, counties and environmental

groups to address the water issues facing our state. The proposals endorsed by this group would improve our situation, but SB 1507 and HB 2512 are self-serving and dangerous.

These bills not only threaten our groundwater, a public resource, they undermine the principles of sound water management — they need to die, if not by a vote, by another courageous veto.

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