

Concise vision needed for water

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I am often called upon to educate audiences on Arizona water management. In my presentations, I include my "Issues and Challenges" slide. I've recently added a graphic of a water glass that might either be half-full or half-empty. Contributing to the impression it is half-full are the many positive aspects to our water-management framework in Arizona, particularly our groundwater management in the Active Management Areas.

Notable achievements half-filling the glass include our assured and adequate water-supply program, our water-recharge and -banking programs, and our reliance on local groups to consider drought and watershed-based water supply-and-quality matters.

I am concerned, however, about our lack of a comprehensive vision, a deficiency that reflects both lack of a mandate for a statewide water plan and the limited resources to support coordinated water-planning efforts.

When I hear of water users from different parts of the state speak hopefully about Colorado River water as part of their future water supplies, I wonder if the groups know of each other. Not only is the state's Colorado River water allotment almost fully allocated but the infrastructure required to deliver water that might be secured could be very costly.

Predictions that the Southwest will become drier and warmer have raised many questions, particularly about Colorado River flow assumptions. I think it would be wise to take a statewide look to seek possibilities for economies associated with infrastructure investment, as well as possible conflicts in plans.

Looked at another way, the glass is half-empty. Contributing to the half-empty impression is my list of items requiring continuing attention: growth and the need for additional supplies; drought and climate variability; and water quality, to name a few.

Faced with my longer list, one might be tempted to give way to despondency and despair. Yet that would be premature because capable water professionals and officials recognize these troublesome issues and are working diligently to address them. The critical question is whether we are doing enough. I think we can do more as a state to plan for our future and involve a broad spectrum of people.

With growth temporarily slowed, now is the ideal time to assess where we are and what we need to be doing to prepare for the future, even in the face of many uncertainties and challenges. It is high time we assemble the resources and work together on a statewide water plan.

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