

## *Final Draft Proposal Revision*

### *LWVAZ Public Policy Position on WATER*

*March 7, 2023*

## **WATER**

Consensus 1975, 1979; Revised 1995, Amended 2009, Revised 2023.

### **GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

The League of Women Voters of Arizona believes that clean surface water and groundwater are essential, finite public resources that all citizens hold in common, and these resources should be managed sustainably for the long-term benefit of all residents and ecosystems of Arizona. Overwhelming scientific evidence indicates that climate change and increasing human demand for water in Arizona are reducing the quantity and quality of surface and groundwater resources throughout the state. The chronic overallocation of Colorado River flows and long-term drought have made the future of water inputs increasingly uncertain.

The League believes that Arizona should pursue policies that halt declining groundwater levels throughout the state, protect our watersheds and riparian natural habitats from degradation, require conservation by all water users, uphold our commitments to the Colorado River compact and reconcile competing claims on our finite water supply for the benefit of all citizens. The League believes that a strong statewide water management policy is essential to ensure Arizona's future quality of life and the economic well-being of our state. To reach these goals, the League supports immediate and sustained action by the Arizona Legislature and the Executive branch to develop and implement statutes, policies and programs that promote comprehensive long-range planning to regulate and sustainably manage all water resources in the state and to ensure their equitable use.

### **Water Resources and Supply**

Arizona's water resources are contained in our rivers and springs and in the geological layers that hold our underground aquifers. To sustainably manage these precious resources the state must understand their inputs, withdrawals and interconnections. The League endorses the following principles:

- Base water policy at every jurisdictional level on a scientific understanding of the direct linkages between climate, precipitation, surface water and groundwater.
- Monitor the hydrology, including groundwater levels, stream and spring flows, surface water diversions, and groundwater withdrawals from all new and existing wells in all aquifers and watersheds of the state.
- Monitor water quality across all state watersheds and enforce strict water quality regulations to prevent harmful contamination of our surface and groundwater supplies.
- Undertake remediation to remove pollutants from compromised water supplies. The cost of this remediation should be borne by the polluter.
- Recognize the protection of streams, springs, and riparian habitats as "beneficial use."
- Protect and restore stream and riparian habitats.
- Use data-based, predictive, scientifically accurate hydrological models for all groundwater basins and watersheds to predict water sustainability and to measure progress toward long-term sustainability goals.

- Make up-to-date, science-based statewide data on hydrology and water quality available to the public and provide Arizona citizens with information on water issues and choices.
- Evaluate proposals for augmentation of Arizona's water resources based on feasibility, cost, energy efficiency, environmental impacts, and the likelihood that it will enhance the availability and equitable distribution of affordable water to all citizens of the state.
- When augmentation is pursued to support new development, the costs of that augmentation should be borne by those who benefit directly from that growth.
- Promote and expand water recycling, reuse, and reclamation, including direct potable reuse, stormwater capture, and water harvesting.

### **Water Rights**

The League recognizes the application of the historic "prior appropriation for beneficial use" doctrine for surface water and the historic "reasonable use" doctrine for groundwater in adjudicating water rights in Arizona. To remove obstacles that this legal framework may present to sustainable water management and the protection of riparian ecosystems, the League supports taking the necessary steps to accomplish the following:

- Accelerate the general stream adjudication process to settle claims to surface water rights.
- Facilitate reclassification of surface water rights from one beneficial use to another.
- Ensure that, when water rights are transferred or new rights are established, the new rights are compatible with existing water management goals in the region.
- Facilitate the establishment of in-stream flow rights.
- Provide mechanisms for limiting non-beneficial or wasteful surface water use.
- Ensure that riparian habitats and in-stream flows are protected when any new surface water rights are granted, when there are water exchanges or changed uses, or when groundwater withdrawals have the potential to negatively affect riparian habitats.
- Assign a permitted quantity to all groundwater withdrawal rights.
- Plan and develop a priority system for modifying permitted quantities and uses of groundwater and/or surface water in times of shortage.
- Equitably allocate groundwater withdrawal rights to landowners who share a common aquifer.

### **Water Planning and Management**

The overarching goal of water planning and management should be long-term sustainability of all surface and groundwater resources of the state. Sustainability is achieved when groundwater levels are stabilized by balancing withdrawal and recharge, and when flows in streams and springs are maintained or restored to ecologically sound levels. In addition, water quality must be maintained or remediated in surface and groundwater water reserves throughout the state. The League supports the following actions to achieve these goals:

- Extend active water management to encompass all watersheds and groundwater basins of the state.
- Establish regional management plans for groundwater basins or sub-basins that are guided by input from the state but implemented and enforced at the local level to account for local conditions and issues.

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- Create a timetable for achieving sustainability goals within each active or regional management area and provide regular reports of progress to the Legislature and citizens of Arizona.
- Develop a comprehensive statewide water management plan which assesses our current water situation and identifies policies and decisions that will move Arizona strategically toward water sustainability. This state water plan should be updated regularly to guide water decision-makers in making policy choices.
- Provide adequate funding to water agencies at the state and regional levels to enable planning, monitoring, implementation, enforcement, and educational activities for water management across the state.
- Provide adequate funding to accelerate the General Stream Adjudication process.
- Update and amend the Groundwater Management Act of 1980, as necessary, to ensure that all water resources are managed sustainably throughout the state for the benefit of current and future generations.
- Develop an equitable permitting process to regulate current and future water withdrawals within all management areas.
- Ensure that management plans allocate sufficient water to maintain the ecological integrity of their associated riparian ecosystems.
- Establish authority for regional management entities to reduce allocations or limit new permits to bring withdrawals into balance with supply in all management areas.
- Incentivize or mandate robust conservation efforts for all water users.
- Require new residential and industrial development to comply with strict water conservation and sustainability standards.
- Base decisions regarding agricultural expansion, industrial growth, and new housing developments on the availability of adequate water resources within that management area.

### **Governmental Process**

The League supports:

- public participation at all levels of water resource management planning.
- equitable utilization of all water resources, and equitable distribution of the cost to ensure clean water among state water users.
- decision-making processes that are transparent, open to public scrutiny, and which request input from all water stakeholders.
- coordination and cooperation between federal, state, local and tribal water agencies and stakeholders.

The League believes that Arizona should continue to collaborate with other Colorado River Basin states in the Upper and Lower Basins to negotiate a fair and reasonable plan-of-use for Colorado River water. The League believes it is incumbent upon our elected officials to meet these urgent challenges.