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Op-Ed Column
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City of Peoria Mayor

Peoria's Sustainable Water Supply a Well Thought Out Plan

Diversity is the key component in stewardship of this limited natural resource.

PEORIA, Ariz. (April 23, 2015) – Like most of Arizona, Peoria has been in the grip of a serious drought for over 15 years. Yet water continues to flow to Peoria residents, and the City continues to grow economically. California is also experiencing drought, but municipal providers there have been ordered to cut back on water deliveries by 25%, and their economy is suffering. Why the stark contrast? Because Peoria and Arizona have been planning for drought for years.

Arizona is different than California and Peoria is different than other Arizona cities. In 2007 the Peoria City Council adopted “Principles of Sound Water Management”. This unique policy document guides decision-making related to water issues. Pursuant to these policies, Peoria actively pursues recharge, direct reuse of reclaimed water for landscaping and other non-drinking water demands, and continues to plan and build reliable water infrastructure. In addition the City’s water conservation program has been highly successful in educating residents on how to save water. In the past decade, residential customers have reduced their water consumption by an average of 15% - that’s 20,400 gallons per household per year.

Peoria’s water resources portfolio, acquired through decades of planning and foresight by city leaders, is a study in diversity. Like a well-balanced mutual fund, Peoria depends on a variety of replenishable sources of water including; Central Arizona Project water, Salt River Project water and Recovered (well) water.

Central Arizona Project (CAP) water supplied 41% of Peoria’s water in 2014. The CAP canal transports Colorado River water that originally fell as snow in the Rockies. Snowfall and other precipitation have declined during the drought, and it is likely that the Department of Interior will declare a shortage on the Colorado River in 2016 or 2017. Arizona agriculture will take the first hit in any shortage. But even if a shortage is declared, sufficient water will flow down the CAP canal to supply municipal providers. Additionally, Peoria, and the Arizona Water Bank store CAP water underground to be pumped if Colorado River water supplies are curtailed.



Salt River Project (SRP) water accounts for 33% of Peoria’s supply. This water originates in a different watershed than the Colorado. If SRP surface water were to run short, SRP has 250 wells to make up the difference. However, SRP water can only be served “on-Project,” meaning lands pledged as part of SRP over a century ago. Mostly those member lands are in southern Peoria.

Recovered water pumped from underground aquifers through Peoria’s wells is 24% of Peoria’s supply. Each year, Peoria stores more water underground than it recovers. This water is “banked”, just like a savings account for future use. Well water is part of Peoria’s reserve supply, and gives the City operational redundancy. If any one source is stressed, the system can be tuned so that other sources make up the difference.

Peoria also produces a steady supply of reclaimed water. Peoria makes beneficial use of 100% of its reclaimed water. Some reclaimed water is directly delivered to outdoor water uses including parks, landscaping and golf courses. That portion of reclaimed water not delivered for outdoor water uses is stored underground for the future. After years of percolating through soil and rock, this water blends with groundwater to become the City’s reserve against drought.

Drought is a recurring natural part of living in a desert. But good planning will carry Peoria through it.