Groundwater Conservation Area

New Management Area:
Background, History and Key Elements

November 30, 2016
Groundwater Conservation Area
Background Willcox Basin

• Spring 2014; initial reports to ADWR of declining water levels and wells going dry in Willcox Basin
• Increasing large agricultural activity & increase in low water use crops
• In September 2014 public meeting organized by state legislative representatives; ADWR was asked to present known hydrologic conditions
• Public demanded action and assistance from elected officials and ADWR
• As a result ADWR: established a web-portal to report dry wells and completed a well measurement sweep of the Basin
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Background Willcox Basin

• In September and October 2014 ADWR was invited to several different community groups to explain the currently available water management tools in Arizona law (AMA & INA)

• Most groups recognized the poor fit of existing tools to the Willcox area.

• Late October 2014 multiple community groups coalesced into a smaller “Willcox Working Group” with representatives from the major water use sectors in the Basin

• ADWR was invited to assist this group to ensure proposals would fit in general GW code framework, be administratively compatible with ADWR’s structure, and have minimal regulatory burden
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Basic Structure

• Minimize regulatory footprint
• Small uses exempt from regulation
• Encourage conservation (all water use sectors);
  • voluntary Best Management Practice programs; conservation grants
• Limits but does not eliminate new groundwater uses
• Freezes large irrigation, but is divorced from the “tied to acres” model of the AMA/INA; field shapes can change as long as no increase in total acres or decrease in efficiency
• Allows portability with increased efficiency (Type-3 right)
• Type-3 may be used for any type of use and from any type of well
• Allows for limited addition of new low water-duty, highly efficient crop irrigation
• Protects existing GW users with well impact reviews
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Basic Structure

• Withdrawal Authorities required; exempt wells supporting exempt uses withdrawal authorities not required
• Withdrawal Authorities: meter & reporting requirements; use fee per AF
• Exempt uses: 35 gpm or less; stock, domestic, commercial and watering less than 2 acres; less than 10 af/yr
• Exempt uses: no meter; no reporting; no use fee
• Establishes local groundwater user council to advise ADWR setting conservation programs and use fees (fees used for conservation grants)
• New wells: impact review including 35 gpm or less wells used for irrigation and withdrawal authorities transferred more than 10 miles; exempt wells for exempt uses no impact review.
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• September 2, 2015 Willcox Working Group met and presented concept to elected state representatives and selected statewide water policy experts

• Willcox Working Group asked ADWR to draft legislative language to support the group’s GCA concept.
Groundwater Conservation Area concept

Conclusion

- Grandfathers in existing groundwater users
- Prohibits new large AG; allows portability to new uses
- Prohibits new large industrial; allows portability to new/expanded use
- Limited addition of new low water use AG; allows portability to new use
- Limited addition of new municipal demands; allows portability to new/expanded use
- Large users; reporting requirements; use fee to support conservation and supply augmentation programs
- Small users; exempt from regulation
- Local groundwater user council to guide programs
- Existing groundwater users protected with well impact requirements for new users
QUESTIONS?