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**Former Arizona Governor and Arizona Leaders agree the time to secure
Arizona's water future is now.**

"Check your politics at the door and look at the future of this state. Now is the time to act."

(PHOENIX, ARIZONA – February 24, 2022) Former U.S. Secretary of the Interior and Arizona Gov. Bruce Babbitt urged state lawmakers to take action to protect rural groundwater during a press conference Tuesday, Feb. 22, at the Arizona State Capitol.

Babbitt was joined by Rep. Regina Cobb (R-Kingman), Mohave County Supervisor Travis Lingenfelter, Haley Paul of the National Audubon Society, Demion Clinco of Sonoran Wines and Becky Fawson, Exec. Director, Kingman Area Chamber of Commerce.

"Arizona is at a crossroads. You've heard the headlines. Worst, longest, driest. These last 20 years have been record-breaking for their hotter temperatures and reduced snow in the high country," said Paul, whose coalition is calling for a statewide [Water Security Plan](#). "This worst drought in 1,200 years impacts all of our water supplies, from the Colorado River to groundwater. We've reached a point where more action on water policy is needed."

Arizona relies on groundwater for 40% of its water supply, yet across roughly 80% of Arizona groundwater resources are largely unregulated and unprotected, despite increasingly evident consequences of overuse.

Rep. Cobb's [HB 2661](#) proposes to permit county boards of supervisors in areas where aquifers have been determined to be "at risk" to establish new kind of water management area called Rural Management Areas (RMAs). In an RMA a council of local stakeholders would be empowered to develop their own plan to bring the aquifer into balance while using monies from the state lottery to develop and implement their plan.

"It is a ground up, not top-down planning model which empowers local stakeholders to resolve their own conflicts without being told what to do by some big government entity. This is a solution that could work to resolve threats to rural aquifers that are beginning to go dry," said Cobb, chairwoman of the House Appropriations Committee.

“We have an opportunity today to make some historical changes in water policy,” Cobb added. Lingenfelter voiced his support of Cobb’s rural management legislation, noting the substantial increases in groundwater pumping in Mohave County. Since 2012, the number of nonexempt wells (larger wells that can pump over 35 gallons per minute) in his county has grown from 97 to 236, or 88%.

“RMA is not an attack on agriculture, it’s a balancing tool that brings everybody together — from agriculture, ranching, industrial and residential because everyone needs to come together to create a framework and a plan to make sure our aquifer is sustainable,” Lingenfelter said.

Business communities in southern Arizona also are feeling greater water insecurity.

“We invested in our state’s agricultural traditions because we believe that Arizona could become a really important wine growing state, but we can’t do that without sensible water regulation,” said Demion Clinco of Sonoran Wines. “What we’ve seen in Cochise [County] is not just disturbing, but it puts our business’s investment at risk and makes us concerned about making future investments.”

“We were poised to grow, and we’ve held off on doing that because we are concerned about the water future in rural Arizona,” added Clinco, whose business has been affected by earth fissures caused by groundwater pumping. “We need Rural Management Areas.”

Arizona has a legacy of taking important steps to secure water supplies in parts of the state, including passage of the 1980 Groundwater Management Act when Babbitt was governor.

“I never imagined that we would do nothing for 42 years, and I can tell you today that we are running out of time,” Babbitt said during the press conference.

“This bill will give rural counties the option, and the power in each county to come together and to use tools for conservation and recharge to plan for their own future. Check your politics at the door and look at the future of this state, and say to yourself, ‘Surely it’s time to act,’” Babbitt said, referring to Cobb’s legislation.

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About the Water for Arizona Coalition

[The Water for Arizona Coalition](#) is a community of Arizonans who support innovative practices and smart policies to ensure a reliable water supply to meet the state’s needs. The Coalition was recently recognized as an Arizona Capitol Times “2020 Leader of the Year” for their efforts in protecting Arizona’s most valuable resource. Organizational support is provided by solution-oriented groups like American Rivers, Audubon Arizona, Business for Water Stewardship, Environmental Defense Action Fund, and Western Resource Advocates that collectively have over 60,000 Arizona members, as well as hundreds of hunters, anglers, and outdoor recreation enthusiasts across the state.