



HB 2661 (water; rural management areas)

Water for Arizona Coalition | February 08, 2022

The Water for Arizona Coalition (WAC) **supports HB 2661** because it takes a critical, innovative step forward to address water challenges in rural Arizona.

The bill allows counties to create **Rural Management Areas (RMAs)** to enable local planning and management of groundwater resources in areas with identified water challenges. It establishes a fund to provide \$50 million per year from the state lottery to support RMAs, including funding voluntary, compensated land and water conservation plans to conserve and augment groundwater supplies within RMAs.

Groundwater is essential. It is the primary or even only water supply for homes, industry, and agriculture in many rural areas. Groundwater also supports flows in many rivers, creeks, and springs.

Rural groundwater resources are unprotected outside of Arizona's Active Management Areas (AMAs). Communities have few options for managing their water supplies. In some areas, groundwater levels are rapidly declining, jeopardizing the water supply and economic future of those regions.

HB 2661 would support rural communities in creating locally tailored solutions to meet local needs, by allowing county boards of supervisors to create an RMA for specific groundwater basins or subbasins to address local issues. All proposed management actions would be approved and implemented by the relevant local government or the Director of ADWR.

Under HB 2661 a Rural Management Area (RMA):

- Can be created in a groundwater basin, subbasin, or portion of a basin by majority vote of a board of supervisors after statutorily prescribed public meetings and opportunity for public comment.
- Can only be created if certain conditions are present—for example, if rates of groundwater use are approaching or in excess of recharge or there are physical indications of overpumping.
- Once created, is authorized to establish local management goals and an area plan.
- Is led by a local council composed of groundwater users nominated by the board of supervisors and appointed by the governor.
- May propose management actions for implementation by local governments or by ADWR; however, all existing irrigation and groundwater pumping may continue.
- May establish a program to approve and fund voluntary, compensated land and water conservation plans to conserve and augment groundwater supplies within the RMA.

RMAs are an innovative step forward in creating a framework for locally driven water planning, empowering communities with tools and support to meet local needs and goals. WAC looks forward to a stakeholder process to work through final discussion items and move HB 2661 forward.

The Water for Arizona Coalition is comprised of Arizonans who support policies and innovative practices to ensure a reliable water supply to meet the state's needs. Collectively, we have over 60,000 Arizona members, as well as hundreds of hunter, angler, business, and outdoor recreation partners around the state. Learn more at waterforarizona.com

