



HB 2679 Factsheet (water; rural management areas)

Water for Arizona Coalition | February 08, 2021

The Water for Arizona Coalition (WAC) **supports HB 2679** because we believe it holds significant promise and innovative potential to help address water challenges in rural Arizona. The bill proposes to establish **Rural Management Areas (RMAs)** to allow for local planning and management of groundwater resources in certain rural areas within counties that border or contain the Colorado River.

Groundwater is essential, especially for rural communities. It is the water supply for homes, industry, and agriculture. In many rural areas, it is the primary or even only available water supply, and also supports flows in many rivers, streams, and springs.

Rural groundwater resources are unprotected. Outside of Arizona's Active Management Areas (AMAs) groundwater is unprotected. Local communities have very few options for managing their water supplies to meet local needs. In some areas of the state, groundwater levels are rapidly declining, jeopardizing the water supply and economic future of local communities.

HB 2679 would support certain rural communities in creating local solutions to meet local needs. Different areas have different needs and challenges when it comes to water. HB 2679 **allows county boards of supervisors** to create an RMA for specific groundwater basins or subbasins to address local issues, but only the Director of the Department of Water Resources may approve the management plans. Only Colorado River counties may designate an RMA under the legislation.

Under HB 2679 a Rural Management Area (RMA):

- Can be created in a groundwater basin or subbasin by majority vote of a board of supervisors after public meetings and opportunity for public comment, and the board may also rescind the RMA by a majority vote at any time in the future.
- Can only be created if certain conditions are present in the area (for example, significant increases in water use or physical indications of overpumping).
- Once created is empowered to establish local management goals and a management plan.
- Is led by a local advisory council composed of groundwater users appointed by the Governor.
- *May* engage in a number of planning functions, including recommending best management practices and other measures for meeting water management goals.

RMAs are an important, innovative step forward in creating a framework for communities to pursue locally driven water planning and promote water security. WAC believes there are three opportunities to further advance RMAs that would support local communities' successful RMA implementation: (1) clarify and confirm authorities in the legislation; (2) expand the set of tools that communities can draw from; and (3) ensure sufficient state support for local planning and management functions.

WAC believes that **rural communities need to be given tools and support** to secure their water future according to local needs and conditions. HB 2679 takes an important step forward in providing this support in certain counties and groundwater basins.

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.

