



The Honorable Katie Hobbs
Governor
Arizona State Capitol Complex
1700 W. Washington St.
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Director Tom Buschatzke
Arizona Department of Water Resources
1110 W. Washington St., Suite 310
Phoenix, AZ 85007

May 8, 2023

Dear Governor Hobbs and Director Buschatzke,

The Water for Arizona Coalition is a collective of five conservation organizations with more than 60,000 members in Arizona. We are a public interest collective that works on state water policy with the mission of ensuring water security for all people.

On April 24, more than 100 residents in the Willcox groundwater basin sent [a letter](#) to Governor Katie Hobbs, the state Legislature, ADWR Director Tom Buschatzke, and Attorney General Kris Mayes, requesting action to protect local groundwater supplies, including asking for executive action to initiate proceedings to designate the Willcox basin an Irrigation Non-Expansion Area (INA). The letter explains the points of concern over the prospect of a new AMA that came out in the 2022 local Active Management Area (AMA) election, and how a new legislative proposal, SB 1306/ HB 2731 Local Groundwater Stewardship Areas, addresses those points and is the preferred option to protect local water supplies in Willcox. However, despite [broad support for the Stewardship Area bill](#) from Willcox residents and many other rural communities across the state, as in past years, a small handful of legislators have blocked the bill from advancing. In the absence of the Legislature providing another alternative, Willcox only has two options available: a new AMA or INA.

The letter from Willcox residents states: “Without any groundwater protections in place...there is a literal ‘free for all’ where only those with the deepest pockets and the deepest wells survive.” The letter references how many signers have lost access to water, have had to deepen wells at great expense, and how some have neighbors who have left the area due to water issues. We have also [seen firsthand](#) how people in the Willcox area suffer the consequences of unregulated groundwater pumping.

Therefore, the Water for Arizona Coalition is joining with Willcox residents to request immediate executive action by Governor Hobbs and ADWR to initiate INA proceedings in the basin.

We do not take this request lightly. The INA tool is rigid, permanent, and it will only affect irrigated acreage. However, alternative proposals for rural groundwater protection that would provide a more balanced, more flexible, and more locally-adaptable approach are purposefully stalled in the legislative committee processes each year. Willcox and so many other similarly-threatened communities across Arizona are left with no other recommended course of action than to initiate an INA (or AMA) and stop their groundwater basin bleeding.

Each year rural communities like Willcox endure inaction while conditions worsen, as more groundwater pumping occurs, accelerating the decline of local water supplies. Until we have an alternative, the Water for Arizona Coalition stands with the Willcox residents and other rural communities who wish to protect their water supplies, including using the only tools currently available to them.

The Legislature and Governor Hobbs still have an opportunity to pass an alternative option to new INAs and AMAs this legislative session, the Local Groundwater Stewardship Area bill. This legislation will provide residents like Willcox an alternative tool to protect their groundwater, while allowing them more flexibility to decide what protection measures to activate. We urge them to do so.

Sincerely,



Chris Kuzdas, Senior Water Program Manager
Environmental Defense Action Fund
& Co-Chair, Water for Arizona Coalition



Haley Paul, Policy Director
National Audubon Society
& Co-Chair, Water for Arizona Coalition



Kim Mitchell, Senior Water Policy Advisor
Healthy Rivers Program
Western Resource Advocates



Sinjin Eberle, Communications Director,
Southwest Region
American Rivers



Todd Reeve, Director
Business for Water Stewardship

The **Water for Arizona Coalition** is composed 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.

Member organizations: American Rivers • Business for Water Stewardship
Environmental Defense Fund • National Audubon Society • Western Resource Advocates

cc: The Honorable Ben Toma
cc: The Honorable Warren Peterson
cc: The Honorable Andres Cano
cc: The Honorable Mitzi Epstein
cc: Attorney General Kris Mayes

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