

## Water Debate Continues at CAP Confab

Written by Helen Stephenson

Nearly 200 regional business leaders and elected officials met Thursday at Prescott Resort to hear what panelists representing varying perspectives on sustainable growth and water supplies have to say.

The luncheon was hosted by members of Central Arizona Partnership (CAP), a group of businessmen working toward balancing growth needs and a vital economy.

CAP President Brad Fain opened with introductions and acknowledgments of CAP sponsors and board members, as well as elected officials in attendance representing Prescott, Prescott Valley, Chino Valley, Cottonwood, Yavapai County and the Arizona legislature.

Former Arizona Senate President Ken Bennett followed with an in-depth explanation of the amount of water believed available in and adjacent to the Prescott Active Management Area. He used varying sizes of stacks of water bottles to illustrate his points along the way that kept those attending listening intently, trying to a grasp onto where we are in this area in terms of water availability.

Bennett then served as moderator to the panel of five speakers and asked questions leading them to the end point of conversation of the need for "cooperation and collaboration."

"This is an area I hope we are mature enough to work on together in a collaborative way rather than a litigative way," Bennett said. "I've heard both extremes over the years and neither extreme is usually right.

The reality is it usually falls somewhere in the middle."

Panelists representing state and federal opinions included Arizona Department of Water Resources Director Herb Guenther and Herb Dishlip, a retired administrator with ADWR and the Bureau of Water Reclamation as well as a consultant hired by the City of Prescott for guidance on the Big Chino Pipeline project.

Dishlip and Guenther agreed no way has been found yet to measure exactly how much water is under the ground and although importing water from the Big Chino Sub-basin will eventually impact the Verde River, there is no way of determining at this point how long that will take.



**Former Senator Ken Bennett stands beside stacks of water bottles.**

Guenther said building a pipeline to import water into Prescott and Prescott Valley to meet the state-mandated safe yield requirement by 2025 may be a bridge toward a greater solution.

"My prediction is we will go to desalinated ocean water and instead of taking Colorado River water to the coast, we will be taking ocean water to the desert," Guenther said.

"I also would predict that some day you'll have toilet to tap water. We call that the yuk factor."

Guenther said three things need to be determined in this area:

Whether or not Yavapai County residents can put together a consensus plan that all the cities in the area are willing to sign off on.

Whether they will be able to

negotiate a settlement and agree on who gets how much water or end up spending years litigating with each other, in addition to the Center for Biological Diversity and Salt River Project, which wants all the ground water for the Phoenix area.

And whether there is a sufficient cost ratio to move forward on building a pipeline.

Dishlip said the pipeline is not a particularly hard project to construct but how to allocate the water imported, what is physically going to be available, how much pipeline design will cost, how much it will cost to extract it and other issues remain at the center of debate.

Panelist Chris Hoy, president of the Citizens Water Advocacy Group, said before any steps are taken toward importing water, his group wants to see a mitigation plan. They believe importing water from the Big Chino aquifer will reduce inflow into the Verde River by 86- to 88-percent.

“Eventually there will be a reduction in flows, so our policy is we need to have a mitigation plan now before we start pumping,” Hoy said. “There is not one in place now. Another concern we have is safe yield. There is no penalty for being out of compliance. We’re advocating more serious penalties.” Guenther said although inflow and outflow levels of the Verde River can be measured, a mitigation plan cannot be put together until there is some hydrological knowledge of what lies below the ground in cracks and fissures and artisan wells.

Another factor Guenther brought up was whether or not exempt wells are withdrawing more water from the ground than importing

water would. The answer to this question is unknown at this point and unquantifiable the way current Arizona water laws stand.

Adding to discussion on policy for importing water, potential lawsuits and eventual impact on the Verde River was the topic of growth.

Panelists Doctor Jim Horton, president of Yavapai College and Yavapai Regional Medical Center CEO Tim Barnett pointed out the quality of medical services and education are directly correlated to growth.

They said they understand that accommodating anticipated growth needs is the reason behind safe yield measures and they are taking a number of actions to conserve energy and use recycled products but more can always be done.

Although no real consensus was reached by the panelists in terms of balancing growth with environmental protection, panelists did agree that some type of consensus must be reached in order to collaborate on an overall policy.

Cottonwood Mayor Diane Joens and Verde Valley County Supervisor

Chip Davis, who represent public interests that for years have had concerns about the Prescott area

taking water from the ground that will decrease the amount of water available in their communities, came to the meeting willing to work toward a balance of understanding on the sustainable growth issues.

House Representative Lucy Mason said after the meeting it’s good to see folks on both sides of Mingus Mountain attending the conference to try to understand both sides of the issue.

“I’ve heard most of this before, going back at least 10 years” Mason said. “People have got to get over their own agendas and issues and come to the table to work these issues out. I’m glad to see progress and a coalition of efforts in this direction but there’s still dissent on which direction to go.

“SRP is the 800-pound gorilla in this picture and we’ve got to seal this community on both sides of the mountain and address SRP if we’re going to reach safe yield up here.”

Prescott Valley Town Manager Larry Tarkowski added, “A resolution needs to happen. If they are unreasonable, we’ll have to plan other options.”



From L-R: Chris Hoy, Dr. Jim Horton, Herb Guenther, Herb Dishlip, Dr. Tim