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The Skinny

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EXPLORING NEW DEPTHS

Pima County Administrator **Chuck Huckelberry** wants us to drink straight from the toilet! Like dogs!

Well, not exactly, although Huckelberry's recent memo to the Pima County Board of Supervisors laying out the parameters of a water study with the Tucson City Council seems to have set off another weird wave of anxiety, similar to the one we recently saw from members of the business community who felt all left out of the conversation.

The supes voted last week to move ahead with the joint water study, which will include a survey of the state of the infrastructure and resources of Tucson Water and Pima County Wastewater. The study will also look at ways the city and county could better use treated wastewater, whether for turf irrigation, industry or recharge.

That element of the proposal has political gadfly **John Kromko** and others complaining that The Powers That Be were just waiting for their chance to pipe sewage into our taps.

So you've got the business community complaining on one side, and Kromko and Ko. complaining on the other side that Huckelberry has teamed up with City Manager **Mike Hein** to take control of the water supply, serve us crappy water and rule the world.

"Some people out there think Mike and I are hatching a secret plot," Huckelberry says. "If we knew what the answer was, we would. The problem is, there's no answer."

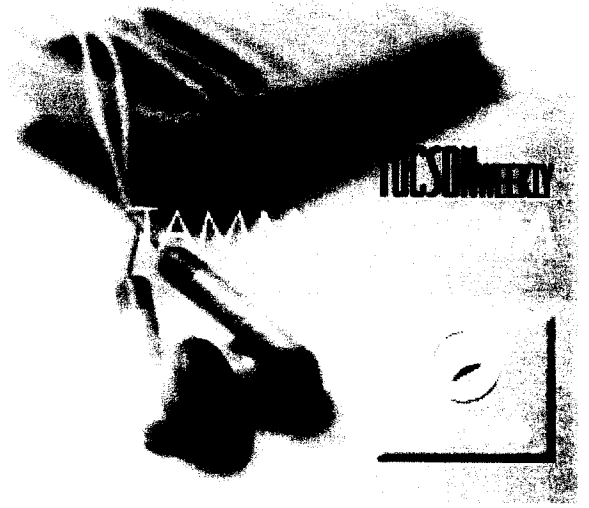
But there are plenty of questions, including a couple of really big ones that deserve to be answered:

- How much water do we have?
- How much future growth can we accommodate?
- Should Tucson Water provide water outside the current service area?

The answers to those questions will allow the Tucson City Council to finally set some real water policy. For all the talk about water over the years, that's something we've never seen the council members do.

Both Huckelberry and Hein say that they'll include opportunities for the public--whether it's the Southern Arizona Home Builders Association or Kromko--to weigh in as the study moves forward.

Is this the first step toward a giant new governmental authority that takes control of the water? We don't think so. It appears to us that the steps Hein is taking--putting a moratorium on new water hookups outside of Tucson Water's current service area, for example--is actually moving away from regional control.



When they approved the water study, City Council members made it clear that they were not interested in giving up control of Tucson Water, which is a mighty big impediment to any kind of new water authority.

FLOATING OFF

One person who won't be part of the upcoming conversation: Tucson Water Director **David Modeer**, who announced last week that he was moving north to take over the Phoenix water system.

Modeer's departure doesn't come as a huge surprise; the rumbling around City Hall had him a bit miffed that the City Council passed him up when they picked **Mike Hein** as city manager back in 2005.

And the most recent dust-up at City Hall--the revelation that Modeer was talking to the town of Marana about selling the northwest-side city the pipelines and water rights for the Marana customers now served by Tucson Water--didn't seem to sit well with Hein, given that the city manager cut off the negotiations as soon as he heard about them.

Hein says that before he starts negotiating with Marana over the price of the pipelines that Tucson Water owns inside the town, he expects Marana officials to explain where they will come up with the water that Tucson Water now provides those customers--and what rates they'd charge their customers for that water "to determine whether it's even feasible to begin discussion."

Hein remains diplomatic regarding Modeer's departure, saying: "I appreciate all the great things that Mr. Modeer has done."

Shortly before he announced his departure, Modeer told *The Skinny* that he didn't see much likelihood that a single water authority would ever take over all of the local water companies.

"That will be very difficult to accomplish," Modeer says. "Not only the city of Tucson, but other jurisdictions are going to be very reluctant to give up the ability to set their own policies and rates for their own citizens."

Modeer says the local water providers could band together to seek out new supplies of water, using a regional voice to have more influence than, say, Metro Water might have on its own.