

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on water sustainability. Water use is one of the most pressing issues facing our community. Tucson's water future is much more stable than that of most other western communities; however, Tucson's main water supply has come at an enormous price. To continue down a similar path moves this community away from achieving any semblance of sustainability.

We are limited in the amount of water that can be served in the Tucson region. Our water resources are finite and unreliable. In light of this harsh reality, it is just not prudent to actively facilitate new growth. Instead, land use determinations should be based on the amount of water currently available without causing further damage to the natural environment, and allowing for restoration of riparian systems affected by currently unsustainable practices.

Many proponents of growth, including the Central Arizona Water Conservation District, have a number of plans that they say will provide our desert region with as much water as we need, but only at the expense of the natural environment. These plans include desalination, ground water mining, and canal systems linking us to other, distant rivers, such as the Mississippi. These plans are simply unsustainable, and utilizing water from faraway sources like this would directly contribute to the environmental devastation in other areas. How in the world is shifting the environmental damage to somewhere else a sustainable way to guarantee water supplies for new growth?

Finally, it is important to understand the difference between "safe-yield" and "sustainability" when talking about groundwater supplies. Throughout this process Tucson Water and others have referred to "sustainable" ground water pumping as pumping out the same amount of water that can naturally be recharged. This is wrong. That definition more accurately represents "safe-yield" pumping because it does not take into account the water needs of groundwater-dependent riparian systems or other negative effects caused by excessive groundwater pumping.

Under safe yield rules, without allocating water for riparian systems, the remaining ground-water dependent riparian systems would eventually dry up and die, and previously lost riparian areas would likely never be restored. If Tucson Water and Pima County wish to truly achieve sustainable ground-water use in the Tucson AMA, some amount of water beyond simple safe-yield quantities must be included in the water budget for the maintenance of existing—and resurrection of lost—ground-water dependent riparian systems.

We cannot rely on the Colorado River to supply a constant increasing demand for water. The river was over allocated to begin with; we are in the midst of a serious drought, and the unknown effects of climate change are just starting to unfold. We cannot justify our recent level of growth to continue based on this unreliable source. Nor can we claim sustainability if we continue to drastically impact environmental resources to facilitate growth above the carrying capacity of our region. We are capable of constructing projects of an enormous scale, but just because we can do it doesn't mean we should. We continue to damage the environment to facilitate growth in the middle of the desert, growth that is ultimately unsustainable. It is time to go down another path.

We will be submitting written comments to the committee prior to your next meeting. Thank you.