

Bills focus on strengthening rules on Arizona groundwater

Water diverted from the Colorado River helps supply cities from Phoenix to Tucson. But in other parts of Arizona, groundwater that has accumulated in the desert over thousands of years represents the only water source that many rural communities can count on as the Southwest becomes hotter and drier with climate change.

Some bills in the Legislature focus on bringing elements of the groundwater regulatory system in Arizona's cities and suburbs to groundwater-dependent rural areas that have been left largely without rules.

HB 2159, SB1385 and SB 1639 would expand existing rules to require developers of subdivisions statewide, instead of just in the mostly urban active management areas, to obtain state certification of an adequate 100-year water supply before beginning construction.

As the law stands now, county supervisors can opt in to these rules by a unanimous vote, something Cochise and Yuma counties have voted to do.

Sen. Lisa Otondo, D-Yuma, introduced SB 1639, which would prohibit anyone from selling subdivided land outside of an AMA unless they have demonstrated a 100-year adequate water supply. Supporters say this and other similar proposals would help ensure people have adequate long-term water supplies when they buy a home.

Other bills — HB 2738, SB 1635, and HB 2895 — would enable state water regulators to look at projected future groundwater use, instead of just current use, in deciding whether to form a new a “irrigation non-expansion area,” or INA, barring further growth of irrigated lands.

Ferris said she thinks it's critical to change the rules for creating a new INA because under the current law, the ADWR director's hands are essentially tied. The director can only consider whether there is enough groundwater "to provide a reasonably safe supply" for the lands that are irrigated "at the current rates of withdrawal."

Source: <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-environment/2020/02/14/arizona-groundwater-bills-farms-agriculture-measuring-reporting/4749278002/>

