

Session 6: The Urbanizing West: Limits to Water, Limits to Growth

“Linking Growth, Land Use and Water”

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Historically, throughout the United States, there has been a disconnect between water supply considerations and urban land use planning. Reasons for this disconnect range from the relative roles of federal, state and local government; to the character of growth; to the differing nature of land use and water resources planning. Water is typically regulated at the state and federal level with water quantity in particular regulated by the western states.

By contrast, the owners of water delivery and treatment infrastructure are typically not the states but are local governments or private water companies and irrigation districts. In addition, although land use significantly impacts water management, regulation of land use and growth is generally the exclusive domain of local government and actual land development investments are made by private property owners.

Arizona innovations to ensure sustainable water supplies sufficient for continued urban growth include: adoption of conservation programs and investments in utilization of renewable supplies by cities; within Active Management Areas (AMA's), the conservation and assured water supply requirements of the 1980 Groundwater Management Act; groundwater recharge and recovery programs including a groundwater replenishment district and the Arizona Water Banking Authority; water rights settlements with Native American communities; requirements for inclusion of a water resources element in comprehensive or general plans by larger or fast growing local governments throughout the state; 2005 legislative changes requiring water supply, drought and conservation planning by water

providers throughout the state; and finally 2007 legislative changes that allow cities and towns, as well as counties if they have a unanimous vote of their county supervisors, outside of AMA's to adopt an ordinance requiring new subdivisions to have a 100 year adequate water supply.

Arizona has been in a unique position relative to the linkages between water and growth. Within the AMA's, new development is subject to rigorous assured water supply rules. These rules require securing a 100 year supply of renewable or imported water as well as demonstrating adequate water quality and financial capability before any land can be subdivided. In the non-AMA, primarily rural areas, however, Arizona has had one of the weakest programs in the country. In these areas, weak state rules have generally been considered to prevent local governments from making stronger regulatory linkages between growth and adequate supplies. Though it is too soon to evaluate the impact of the recent legislation granting water adequacy authority to local governments throughout the state, or the 2005 water supply planning requirements, these will, at a minimum, raise awareness of water resources issues and likely increase the call to improve available information. This presentation will also briefly identify water supply adequacy approaches of other southwestern states.