

CAGRD: Walking a Tightrope Without a Net

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ABSTRACT

In 1993, the Arizona State legislature passed a law giving the Central Arizona Water Conservation District (CAWCD) the unenviable responsibility of providing replenishment services in the Phoenix, Pinal and Tucson Active Management Areas. This responsibility is commonly referred to as the Central Arizona Groundwater Replenishment District or CAGRD. Most thought the CAGRD would have a relatively small membership base and that it could rely primarily on spot-market water supplies to meet its replenishment obligations. However, record growth in the state over the past ten years, coupled with the State's adoption of new Assured Water Supply Rules, has resulted in extremely high membership enrollment and a potential annual replenishment obligation exceeding 227,000 acre-feet.

CAGRD is faced with a number of complex challenges that will take time, effort and cooperation to address. These challenges include:

- Continued enrollment of new members;
- Appropriate generation of revenues;
- Purchase of long-term water rights; and
- Location of replenishment with respect to member pumping.

There is no simple solution to any of these challenges. In fact, one person's ideal solution is another person's unacceptable problem. For example, some have proposed a 'cap' on enrollment in the CAGRD, while others argue that a cap will cause significant damage to the State's economy and send the message that Arizona is out of water.

It has become clear that the CAGRD is not going to go away. It is equally clear that if CAGRD fails in its roll as a replenishment authority, the State's Assured Water Supply program is also in danger of failing. Therefore, it is imperative that CAGRD continue to 'walk the tightrope' by working together with members from the broad water community to develop solutions to these challenges with which everyone can live.