

# **Tucson Regional Water Planning Perspectives Study**

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## Executive Summary

The intent of this report is to provide the Tucson region with an indication of the perspectives, including the hopes and concerns, of a representative sample of stakeholders about regional water planning. Forty-three interviews were conducted during March and early April 2008. While this study surely does not capture all of the opinions about regional water planning that exist in the diverse Tucson region, it does provide a starting point for understanding areas of agreement and differences among stakeholders.

All participants in the study were asked a common set of questions. Participants were categorized into six groups: elected officials; local jurisdiction managers; water managers; business stakeholders; environmental stakeholders; and miscellaneous stakeholders. The questions were open ended and assumed that some sort of regional process would occur, but did not further define the process. Questions fell into four general categories: goals and outcomes; participation, public involvement, and structure; assumptions and the region of focus; and concerns about engaging in a regional process.

The following themes were evident in responses across stakeholder groups:

- Stakeholders from each category favored the creation of some sort of long-range regional plan based on a common set of facts.
- Most stakeholders think everything should be on the table at the start of a regional process.
- Everyone who has an interest in participating in the regional process should be given the opportunity to do so.
- There was near unanimous agreement that the Tucson AMA (pictured in Figure 1 at the end of the report) should be the region of focus for regional planning.
- The majority of respondents did not favor the formation of a regional authority at this time.

Overall, the responses universally reveal a sincere desire to cooperate on regional water planning. For an area that has had historical difficulties in regional collaboration on water matters, this is an encouraging finding. All players are not yet on the same page regarding the approach to regional planning, but they appear to be interested in getting on the same page. While respondents may have been guarded in their responses, they seem open to a long-term undertaking. Water concerns have been heightened by the debate surrounding the November 2007 ballot proposition, the long-term drought, uncertainty associated with climate change, and our region's continued growth. Perhaps the stakes are finally high enough to warrant serious and broad efforts to collaborate on water resource planning.

## **I. Introduction**

Interest in regional water planning in Tucson and surrounding communities has been increasing. Nearly all segments of the Tucson community – from governments to citizens to private water companies – have begun to call for a more comprehensive approach to long-range water planning. Gaining understanding of similarities, as well as differences, in what different segments of the community would like to see emerge from a regional water resource planning process led the authors to undertake this study. The study is funded by The University of Arizona Technology Research Initiative Fund (TRIF) through the Water Resources Research Center. The study concept was developed prior to the joint regional process initiated by the City of Tucson and Pima County in February 2008 and is independent of that effort.

Through a series of 43 interviews, the perspectives of a wide array of stakeholders have been solicited. A synthesis of these perspectives is presented in this report. The report is largely organized by interview question. For each question, basic trends across stakeholder groups are identified and summary responses from each of six stakeholder categories are provided. While responses are synthesized to protect the identity of the participants, effort was made to fully report and preserve the integrity of each participant's opinions. The intent of this report is to provide the Tucson region with an indication of the perspectives, including the hopes and concerns, of a representative sample of stakeholders about regional water planning. Most responses, even those heard from only one or two, are represented in this synthesis report. While this study surely does not capture all of the opinions about regional water planning that exist in the diverse Tucson region, it does provide a starting point for understanding areas of agreement and differences among stakeholders. The final section of this report offers concluding observations.

## **II. Methodology**

Interviews were conducted during March and early April 2008. Interview requests were sent to 49 individuals in their capacity as representatives of organizations or constituencies. In six cases, the request was declined, no response was received, or scheduling an interview was not possible. Two interviews were scheduled in response to a request or suggestion. Forty-three interviews were conducted with a total of 47 stakeholders. A limited number of interviews included more than one participant. In these cases, the responses to interview questions were recorded as if from a single respondent to ensure disproportionate weight was not given to a particular point of view.

Participants are generally classified into six categories:

- Elected Officials (14)
- Local Jurisdiction Managers (6)
- Water Managers (9)
- Business Stakeholders (5)
- Environmental Stakeholders (7)
- Miscellaneous Stakeholders (6)

All participants were provided with an identical project description and list of questions prior to the interview. The questions were designed to generate discussion. Interviewees were advised that the report would not attribute statements to particular individuals. Interviews were generally

conducted in the presence of both report authors. Most were conducted in person and lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interview questions are provided in Appendix 1.

In an effort to ensure the candor of responses, interviewees were told their identities would remain confidential. In accord with the methodology shared at the outset with interviewees, every effort to report responses without identifying the respondent was made. A draft report was distributed to those interviewed. Interviewees were given the opportunity to review the draft and offer feedback. Comments clarifying perspectives or correcting omissions noted by the participants were addressed. Every effort was made to provide equal time and consideration to each interviewee's comments.

### **III. Results of the Interviews**

This section provides the synthesis of interview responses. The results are reported under topical groupings and, as closely as possible, conform to the question numbers. In some cases, comments received from more than one question are combined.

#### **1. Goals for a regional process**

To begin each interview, an open-ended, general question was asked of each participant: What should be the goals for a regional process? While the question assumes that there will be some kind of regional process, it does not define what the process will be or the primary subject of the process. By leaving the question open ended, participants were given the opportunity to define for themselves the topics and goals covered by a regional process. As a result, answers to this question ranged from developing a plan and institutional structure to acquire new water supplies for the region, to developing a long-term water allocation plan for the region, to simply improving regional cooperation. Stakeholders from each category favored the creation of some sort of long-range regional plan based on a common set of facts. Suggestions for the focus of such a plan ranged widely, however, and included: joint consideration of planned growth and water supplies available to the region; a determination of current and projected water supplies on a regional basis; an inventory of existing and planned infrastructure; and drought planning. A second goal focused on water supplies. Water managers were nearly unanimous that a regional augmentation organization should be formed to actively seek-out and bring more water to the region, whereas environmental stakeholders focused on the Active Management Area's safe-yield goal and achieving it through allocation of the region's "wet" supplies. A final, common goal to all stakeholder groups is education. Most stakeholders saw education, both of the participants in the process and of the general public, as critical to the success of a regional process.

#### *Water Managers*

Water managers are the only sector where there was general agreement on a specific goal for a regional process – augmentation of existing water supplies. Most of the water managers interviewed favored a goal of developing an institutional structure for the acquisition of new water supplies for the region. This proposed entity would function as a wholesale water supplier for the region, but would not have any authority to directly deliver water to customers. Individual water providers and their retail systems would remain explicitly independent of the regional water supply entity. Through the regional process the specific goals of the entity would be defined and the governance structure developed, including a system for allocating new

supplies to municipal water providers. Most felt that participation should be optional. The manner in which electrical cooperatives operate was suggested by one water manager as a possible model for a water supply cooperative.

In addition to the formation of a regional augmentation authority or cooperative, water managers favored the following goals in priority order:

- Management of the water supply to maximize sustainability, including the adoption of common conservation standards across the region;
- The development of a regional water plan. Such a plan may include: joint consideration of planned growth and water supplies available to the region, a determination of current and projected water supplies on a regional basis, an inventory of existing and planned infrastructure, and drought planning;
- Education of participants and the public as a whole; and
- Communication, collaboration, and information sharing.

### *Environmental Stakeholders*

Goals suggested by environmental stakeholder fall into three complementary theme areas:

- Equitable distribution of water across sectors, including the environment and natural habitat;
- Addressing growth and its relationship to water; and
- Achieving the statutory water management goals for the Tucson Active Management Area (AMA).

Each of these goals relates to how the region uses available water supplies as it continues to grow. The desire for equitable distribution of water reflects the interrelationships of uses and sources of water. Distribution of water is directly related to achieving the goal of the AMA in all parts of the AMA. The goal of the Tucson AMA is safe-yield by 2025. Legally, the goal is achieved when the basin as a whole is in safe-yield, regardless of what is happening in specific parts of the AMA. Environmental stakeholders believe equitable distribution of water is needed to ensure both the Tucson AMA as a whole *and* the individual sub-areas within the AMA reach safe-yield. Growth is also related to this concept. Several people thought the region first needs to decide how and where we want to grow, and then, based on this vision, deal with issues of water allocation to support future growth. During this process, more growth may be directed to some communities than others; interviewees felt communities' future water allocations should be balanced to meet projected growth rather than on historical allocations. Environmental stakeholders consider education an important step in achieving these goals.

One environmental stakeholder thought before the goals of the process are defined, it must first be clear exactly what problem or problems a regional process is directed at solving. The need for a regional planning effort should not be assumed – stakeholders should first collaboratively evaluate the need for regional planning and then identify goals for the process.

### *Business Stakeholders*

Most responses from business stakeholders relate to the development of a long-term water strategy and ensuring long-term supplies for the region. Both of these issues are grounded in the need for certainty for continued economic development. A long-term water strategy is a broad goal focused on water planning for the region. A water strategy, much like water managers' goal of a regional water plan, will address issues like the long-term sustainability of water supplies, current and projected water demands and supplies, existing and planned infrastructure, distribution of growth, and development of new water supplies across the region. Finally, business stakeholders believe a goal of any process should be transparency. An open process that includes education is needed to ensure community confidence in the result.

### *Local Jurisdiction Managers*

Local jurisdiction managers responses fall into three categories: enhancing regional cooperation on water issues; ensuring there is enough water for the region and augmenting current supplies; and strengthening governance. Through enhanced regional cooperation, local jurisdiction managers would like to decrease competition between jurisdictions for common resources. Jurisdictions can more effectively plan for the region's future – both in terms of water and growth – by working together to develop consistent growth plans. Like other stakeholder categories, local jurisdiction managers felt the region needs to develop approaches to augment current supplies. This process is aided by cooperation. Finally, one manager thought local jurisdictions needed to have more control over the governance of private water companies.

### *Elected Officials*

Elected officials are generally very consistent in what they thought the goals of a regional process should be. The goals they suggest are also consistent with those offered by the other stakeholder categories. The most commonly expressed goal is collaboration between and among jurisdictions, water utilities, and stakeholder and citizen groups and consensus on the results of the process. As a prerequisite to achieving this goal, several officials identified public education; establishment of a common fact base for ongoing cooperation; and maintaining a process that is open to all interested parties, including the public. Each of these prerequisites can be seen as a necessary step for achieving the second major goal put forward by elected officials: the development of a regional water plan. Such a plan – as was also suggested by water managers and business stakeholders – could incorporate the other goals commonly suggested by elected officials: achieving sustainability of water supplies and developing new water supplies for the region. Another important component of a regional plan is the development of infrastructure inventories and determination of future infrastructure needs.

### *Miscellaneous Stakeholders*

This group, because of the lack of consistency in institutional perspective across the participants, yielded the greatest diversity in suggested goals for a regional process. Responses ranged from general to very specific:

- Cooperation and agreement on a accepted set of facts;
- Improved water management;

- Determination of an agreed upon population carrying capacity for the region;
- Education of participants and the public;
- A single, regional water rate; and
- Development of new water supplies for the region.

## 2. Topics for discussion: what's on the table and what's off

Participants were asked to comment on any issues that either specifically need to be addressed or specifically should be left off the table. Although some felt strongly that certain items must be kept off the table, the most common response to this question was that everything should be on the table. The majority of respondents in nearly all categories felt that in order to have a meaningful and successful process, everyone will need to come into it with an open mind. Starting out by placing things off limits will only make people defensive or suspicious of the process. The result of taking things off the table may be that some stakeholders are reluctant to participate, resulting in a loss of faith in the process by the larger community and/or an ineffective process because essential issues are off the table. Responses by category are summarized below. In most cases responses are listed in bullet form. However, additional explanation is provided on points respondents thought were especially important.

### *Water Managers*

Not surprisingly, water managers provided a great deal of detail about what should be both on and off the table. There were strong opinions from several water managers that anything interfering with the retail operations of water utilities should be off the table. For example, they feel a regional water authority that takes over retail water operations from all regional water utilities is unacceptable and that it should be understood from the beginning that this result is not a possible outcome of the process. The reason for taking retail operations off the table was not simply protectionism. Water managers felt that consolidating utilities would reduce accountability. Utilities that are based largely on current political boundaries and governed by city/town councils are clearly accountable to a specific constituency. A large regional authority may be less accessible. There was also concern that loss of control over water decision making could compromise the self-determination of cities and towns in the region. One water manager went as far as to say any form of regional governance should be off the table. The effort instead should focus on cooperation first and only consider a regional authority if it becomes clear that one is needed as a result of the cooperative process.

A number of issues were called out by water managers as things that should be specifically addressed by the process:

- Development of a regional process that ensures equitable participation for all;
- Approaches to financing regional efforts resulting from the process;
- Identification and acquisition of new water supplies; and
- Voluntary sharing of water supplies between utilities in the region.

### *Environmental Stakeholders*

The majority felt everything should be on the table. The following specific issues were called out for special attention:



- The population carrying capacity of existing water supplies;
- Providing water to meet environmental and natural habitat needs as well as human needs;
- The quality of potable water and treatment of water for contaminants of emerging concern;
- Changes to state law to ensure the region can meet its goals; and
- The potential of the Central Arizona Water Conservation District to serve as a regional water supply augmentation authority.
- One respondent thought a regional authority should be off the table.

### *Business Stakeholders*

The majority felt everything should be on the table, but with caveats.

- The use of water to restrict growth should be off the table.
- Only supply side issues should be on the table, while retail operations should be left as they are.
- Revisiting the Intergovernmental Agreement between Tucson and Pima County governing the allocation of treated wastewater (effluent) should be explicitly addressed.

### *Local Jurisdiction Managers*

The majority felt everything should be on the table, provided the focus is on water planning. Several managers were not supportive of a process that would interfere with local authority over land use decision making. The following specific issues were called out for special attention:

- Start by considering the growth plans of individual jurisdictions and use those plans to define what the region's needs are and what needs to be accomplished through the regional process;
- Development of common conservation standards for the region; and
- Identification of water to augment the regional supply.
- One stakeholder felt retail water operations should be off the table.

### *Elected Officials*

The majority felt everything should be on the table, although some thought change to oversight of retail water distribution systems should not be a priority consideration of the regional process. The following specific issues were called out for special attention:

- Consideration of the use of rainwater and wastewater as a means of augmenting supplies.

A few elected officials thought the process should be restricted by not considering the following:

- The formation of a regional authority; and
- The use of reclaimed water for potable supply.

## *Miscellaneous Stakeholders*

The majority felt everything should be on the table. The following specific issues were called out for special attention:

- Education of participants in the process and the public-at-large.

A minority thought that, at least initially, institutional structures and the formation of a regional authority should be off of the table.

### **3. People in the process: who should be involved and who should lead**

There was universal agreement from interviewed stakeholders that public comment will be critical to any regional process. Most participants acknowledged the complex and contentious nature of any discussion about water in the Tucson region and felt that success of a regional process was contingent on active involvement of all stakeholders. Opinions on the need for stakeholder and public comment were elicited in response to two survey questions, one asking who should be directly involved in the process and the other specifically addressing the incorporation of public comment. These questions yielded similar responses, though responses to the former were at a more general level, while responses to the latter were more specific.

Nearly all of the respondents indicated that everyone who has an interest in participating in the regional process should be given the opportunity to do so. Many felt in order to ensure the legitimacy of the process, all opinions and interests must be engaged throughout the process. Stakeholder groups identified include water utilities, both public and private (though at least one respondent felt public utilities should be explicitly excluded from the process in favor of participation by citizens served by the public utility); municipal and county government; the business community; the environmental and conservation community; citizen groups; and neighborhood organizations. Many respondents emphasized the importance of inviting the participation of the Indian Nations located within the region.

Virtually all participants acknowledged that providing the opportunity for public participation has to be part of the regional water planning process; however, opinions about scope and timing differed. Some felt that public participation should be limited through the initial stages of the process or, in some cases, throughout the entire process. Those adopting this view tend to focus on the technical aspects of regional water planning. For them, regional water planning should be focused at the utility level with participation by water managers from public and private water utilities and governments operating public utilities. Others felt that the technical process should proceed in parallel with a separate public participation process, with the two efforts being integrated after progress has been achieved by both working groups. Specific comments from each stakeholder group are provided below. Responses are reported in order of frequency.

#### *Water Managers*

- All interested stakeholders should be included in the process, including water managers, jurisdictional representatives, and representatives of stakeholder and interest groups from the community-at-large.

- The process should begin with water utilities and jurisdictions working together to establish trust and cooperation. A larger stakeholder process could function in parallel or be added after utilities and jurisdictions have made progress on cooperation and collaboration.

#### *Environmental Stakeholders*

- All interested stakeholders should be included in the process, including water managers, jurisdictional representatives, and representatives of stakeholder and interest groups from the community-at-large.

#### *Business Stakeholders*

- All interested stakeholders should be included in the process, including water managers, jurisdictional representatives, and representatives of stakeholder and interest groups from the community-at-large.
- Elected officials should represent the public instead for trying to include all interest groups.

#### *Local Jurisdiction Managers*

- All interested stakeholders should be included in the process, including water managers, jurisdictional representatives, and representatives of stakeholder and interest groups from the community-at-large.
- The process should include water utilities and jurisdictions. The public will be represented through a separate process like public meetings, town halls, etc.
- The approach of the current city/county infrastructure study is sound and a similar effort should be pursued by other jurisdictions as a first step. It will be important to have everyone at the table with an accurate base of facts from which to work.

#### *Elected Officials*

- All interested stakeholders should be included in the process, including water managers, jurisdictional representatives, and representatives of stakeholder and interest groups from the community-at-large.
- The process should include water utilities and jurisdictions. The public will be represented through a separate process like public meetings, town halls, etc.
- All parties should be involved, but Tucson and Pima County must retain control of any regional process. Ultimately, decisions must be made by elected officials and the water utilities.
- There is a need to ensure that “change agents” and people with technical expertise are involved.

#### *Miscellaneous Stakeholders*

- All interested stakeholders should be included in the process, including water managers, jurisdictional representatives, and representatives of stakeholder and interest groups from the community-at-large.

- Education will be important to enabling a meaningful process.

Regarding leadership of the regional planning process, only a few specific suggestions were provided. Several mentioned the Pima Association of Governments (PAG) as an entity with a logical leadership role to play. Because the interviews were being conducted at the same time that communities were becoming familiar with the joint City of Tucson-Pima County study, some answered the leadership question in the context of the development of the Tucson-Pima County study. Many thought PAG has a leadership role to play, particularly with the smaller member jurisdictions but perhaps more broadly than that. However, in most cases, stakeholders suggesting PAG did not think it was the optimal organization to lead the overall process. Several commented explicitly that regional water planning differs considerably from regional transportation planning, which PAG, through the Regional Transportation Authority, leads. One noted difference is the involvement of the private sector in water provision. Other suggestions for sources of leadership include: the Arizona Department of Water Resources; the University of Arizona; allowing a leader to emerge for the process; seeking a leader from outside the state or region to avoid problems with bias; or rotating leadership among stakeholders at regular intervals.

In general, there was a strong feeling from all stakeholder groups that an independent facilitator will be needed to guide the process. While this person may not be considered the “leader” per se, his/her primary role will be to ensure the process, whatever it may be, proceeds in an orderly fashion and makes regular, demonstrable progress. Most interviewees felt the facilitator should not be a water expert, but rather a neutral third party to avoid any perception of bias.

#### **4. Roles for supra-regional entities: ADWR (Arizona Department of Water Resources) and CAWCD (Central Arizona Water Conservation District)**

Entities such as the Arizona Department of Water Resources and the Central Arizona Water Conservation District operate both within and beyond the Tucson region. While the policies of these and other entities such as the State Land Department certainly have an impact on the region, they do not have the same role in the community as Tucson Water and other water providers, elected officials serving jurisdictions in the region, or citizens of the region. It is clear, because of their regulatory and policy influence, that they will play some role in regional planning in the Tucson region.

Stakeholders from all categories strongly favored using entities such as ADWR and CAWCD as resources for information on existing policy, law, and water use and availability. The United States Geological Survey and the University of Arizona are also potential resources for scientific information. A minority of stakeholders felt ADWR should be an active participant in the process. However, the overall trend was support for a process guided by local regional players, with others providing information as needed.

#### **5. Region of focus: extent and boundaries**

There was near unanimous agreement that the Tucson AMA (pictured in Figure 1 at the end of the report) should be the region of focus for regional planning. Participants in the process should be drawn from within this region. While the Tucson AMA provides a convenient regional basis for water planning because of the availability of water resource data for the AMA, it also may complicate the effort. The Tucson AMA includes the southern portion of Pinal County and rural

areas of Pima County that are not part of what is typically considered the Tucson metropolitan area. This issue was acknowledged by a number of participants, but they reiterated their support for the AMA as the basis for regional planning.

A small number of interviewees felt the area of focus should be somewhat smaller and focused only on the Tucson metropolitan region. This area excludes the Pinal County portion of the AMA and the rural western parts of the AMA. One participant favored a much larger planning area encompassing the entire three-county Central Arizona Water Conservation District service area.

## **6. Basic assumptions for the process: where to start**

Answers to the question about what assumptions should inform the process can be clustered into three groups. Clusters are listed in order of frequency of response:

- Basic information on population, water use, infrastructure, growth plans and projections, etc. needs to be compiled and used to develop scenarios of future conditions and enable planning based on these scenarios.
- Assumptions and decisions about what information is needed should be generated by participants in the project.
- All utilities should develop infrastructure data and information consistent with the current city/county water planning process to provide a common baseline of data as the basis for ongoing cooperation.

While these three clusters generally capture the tenor of responses, specific opinions and priorities varied across stakeholder category. Responses are summarized below by stakeholder category. They are organized according to frequency of response.

### *Water Managers*

- Assumptions and decisions about what information is needed going into the process and what should be generated by participants.
- All utilities should develop infrastructure data and information consistent with the current city/county water planning process to provide a common baseline of data as the basis for ongoing cooperation.
- The Arizona Department of Water Resources should be used as a source of data on water use, groundwater supplies, etc.
- Collected data should be used to formulate scenarios to help conceptualize future conditions and the impacts of different planning decisions.

### *Environmental Stakeholders*

- Planning should proceed with the assumption that the environment and natural habitat are a water user and must be allocated a portion of the regional water supply.
- Scenarios should be developed based on the limitation imposed by water supplies, not desired future growth.
- State Land Department must be involved and forthright about what its plans are for the use of its Central Arizona Project allocation.

- The process should begin by defining the shared values of the participants. These values can then inform the process as it develops.
- All data underlying assumptions should be subject to peer review by objective experts from outside the community.

#### *Business Stakeholders*

- Basic information on population, water use, infrastructure, growth plans and projections, etc. needs to be compiled and used to develop scenarios of future conditions and enable planning based on these scenarios.
- The process should begin by developing an agreed-upon vision of what the region wants to be in the future. Planning can then focus on what is needed to achieve the regional vision.

#### *Local Jurisdiction Managers*

- Basic information on population, water use, infrastructure, growth plans and projections, etc. needs to be compiled and used to develop scenarios of future conditions and enable planning based on these scenarios.
- Infrastructure plans and comprehensive plans for each jurisdiction should be the basis for the process. These plans contain information on which jurisdictions plan to grow and where they plan to grow, enabling discussions about water supplies.

#### *Elected Officials*

- Basic information on population, water use, infrastructure, growth plans and projections, etc. needs to be compiled and used to develop scenarios of future conditions and enable planning based on these scenarios.
- Education of all participants and the general public will be required to inform the process.
- Cost of service projections will be needed.
- Scenarios should be developed based on the limitation imposed by water supplies, not desired future growth.
- The overall goal of the process is sustainability.

#### *Miscellaneous Stakeholders*

- Basic information on population, water use, infrastructure, growth plans and projections, etc. needs to be compiled and used to develop scenarios of future conditions and enable planning based on these scenarios.
- Assumptions and decisions about what information is needed should be generated by participants in the project.
- Scenarios should be developed based on the limitation imposed by water supplies, not desired future growth.
- Primary assumption is that the region needs to augment existing water supplies.

## 7. Public involvement: incorporating stakeholder/public comment

Interviewees felt that effectively incorporating public comment into a regional water planning process is a significant challenge. Some participants were unsure of what approach to take but offered suggestions, while a few stated simply that public comment is critical to the process but did not offer specifics regarding how to incorporate comment into the process. When the comments are taken as a whole, however, three preferred models for public participation emerge: the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP); the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA); and traditional town halls, public meetings, and public comment periods.

Many stakeholders suggested the SDCP and RTA processes without a strong preference for either approach, seeing benefits and drawbacks to each, while others preferred one to the other. There was no strong majority of opinion favoring one process over the other within any of the stakeholder groups. The SDCP process is admired for its inclusiveness; at the beginning of the development of the plan, all citizens were invited to participate. Ultimately, over 80 stakeholders participated in the process that led to the development of the plan. The RTA process limits the committee size to a fixed number of individuals representing different groups, while also providing other opportunities for public comment, thereby reducing potential problems with managing a very large steering committee.

Several people suggested that the approach taken with regional water planning should ultimately be something in between the RTA and SDCP processes. Such a model would limit participation on a steering committee, but be informed by any number of technical committees and stakeholder committees with broader participation. This hybrid allows participation from all stakeholders while keeping the number of participants on the steering committee to a manageable size.

Those suggesting a more traditional, town hall style public comment process typically saw it operating as an input to the regional planning effort, not as the structure of the effort itself as is the case with those favoring the RTA or SDCP models. About an equal number of interview participants preferred this approach as preferred the RTA or SDCP models. Those favoring this approach emphasized the importance of frequent opportunities for comment in forums that are accessible to the general public both in terms of location and time of day. Town halls and public meetings should not be held during regular working hours on week days. There should also be opportunities for written public comment. Potential forums for public comment range from neighborhood meetings to regional town halls. One interviewee offered the Grant Road visioning process as a model.

Regardless of the public participation model preferred by a given interviewee, the one common thread through virtually all of the comments is the importance education will play in any regional planning effort. Water policy is complex; many participants saw this complexity as the primary impediment to effective public participation. Nearly all of the interviewees saw education of the public-at-large, as well as participants in the process, as critical to the success of a regional effort. Specific comments from each stakeholder group are provided below. Responses are reported in order of frequency.

### *Water Managers*

- A process must be developed that gives all members of the community the opportunity to contribute to the outcome.
- The RTA should be used as a model. There should be a small group of stakeholders with membership representing the wider community. Members of the committee would report back to and receive comment from the segments of the public they represent on a regular basis.
- Education will be important to enabling a meaningful process.
- The approach of the current city/county infrastructure study is sound and should be pursued by other jurisdictions as a first step. It will be important to have everyone at the table with an accurate base of facts to work from.

### *Environmental Stakeholders*

- The SDCP should be considered as a model stakeholder process for this effort.
- There must be ample opportunity throughout the process for comment from the public-at-large. Traditional methods such as town halls, neighborhood meetings, and council meetings should be used. Nontraditional, grassroots efforts will be needed to reach citizens who normally do not become involved. All meetings related to the regional process must be public, open, and held at accessible locations and times.
- Education will be important to enabling a meaningful process.
- The approach of the current city/county infrastructure study is sound and should be pursued by other jurisdictions as a first step. It will be important to have everyone at the table with an accurate base of facts to work from.

### *Business Stakeholders*

- The RTA and SDCP should be looked to as models for the stakeholder process. The eventual process used for regional water planning may be something between the RTA and SDCP.
- Education will be important to enabling a meaningful process.
- There must be ample opportunity throughout the process for comment from the public-at-large. Traditional methods such as town halls, neighborhood meetings, and council meetings should be used. All meetings related to the regional process must be public, open, and held at accessible locations and times.
- Separate technical groups working in parallel with the stakeholder process will be necessary because of the complex nature of water issues.
- The results of all existing public outreach efforts related to water should be consolidated into a single report and made available to the public.

### *Local Jurisdiction Managers*

- Education will be important to enabling a meaningful process.
- There must be ample opportunity throughout the process for comment from the public-at-large. Traditional methods such as town halls, neighborhood meetings, and council meetings should be used. All meetings related to the regional process must be public, open, and held at accessible locations and times.



- The SDCP should be considered as a model stakeholder process for this effort.
- The RTA should be considered as a model stakeholder process for this effort.

### *Elected Officials*

- The RTA and SDCP should be looked to as models for the stakeholder process. The eventual process used for regional water planning may be something between the RTA and SDCP.
- There must be ample opportunity throughout the process for comment from the public-at-large. Traditional methods such as town halls, neighborhood meetings, and council meetings should be used. Nontraditional, grassroots efforts will be needed to reach citizens who normally do not become involved. All meetings related to the regional process must be public, open, and held at accessible locations and times.
- Stakeholders should be divided into working groups based on interests and expertise. This will create smaller working groups so more voices can be heard.
- Education will be important to enabling a meaningful process.
- The SDCP should be considered as a model stakeholder process for this effort.\*
- The RTA should be considered as a model stakeholder process for this effort.\*  
(\*The SDCP and RTA are preferred by an equal number of respondents.)

### *Miscellaneous Stakeholders*

- The RTA, SDCP, and other regional planning models should be considered to determine what stakeholder process is most effective. The eventual process used for regional water planning may be something between the RTA and SDCP.
- Education will be important to enabling a meaningful process.
- There must be ample opportunity throughout the process for comment from the public-at-large. Traditional methods such as town halls, neighborhood meetings, and council meetings should be used. Consider using the Grant Road stakeholder process as a model for public input.

## **8. Expected outcomes: a regional water authority or other outputs**

Stakeholders were asked two questions about the outcomes of the process, one general and one specific. The general question was open ended – what should be the outcomes of the process? The second question asked people specifically if they thought a regional water authority of some kind should be formed and, if so, what its structure and powers would be. The second question was asked for a number of reasons. First, both recently and in the past there has been discussion in the community about forming a regional water authority. The question sought to gauge whether there is support at this time for formation of a regional water authority and to learn people’s thoughts regarding what the role, scope, governance, and powers of an authority would be. By asking people to define their vision of an authority, it becomes clear where there are differences and commonalities in viewpoints.

The majority of respondents did not favor the formation of a regional authority at this time. However, most left the possibility of an authority on the table. Most stakeholders felt that the decision to form an authority is something that should result from the process. There should be no presumption that a regional authority is needed to achieve the goals developed by the

participatory process. However, if through the process the need for an authority becomes clear, most participants were comfortable with the exploring the concept.

### *Water Managers*

The group that gave the strongest support for an authority was the water managers. Support for an authority may be a reflection of the goals they defined for the process – the development of new water supplies for the region. Such an effort would require an entity to serve as the acquisition agent; this entity could take the form of a regional authority. If formed, the authority would work only on the supply side, while participating municipal providers would retain control over their retail systems. Most water managers thought participation should be optional. A minority of the water managers interviewed felt it was premature to come out for or against a regional authority. Rather, they felt that the goals and priorities of the regional process need to be determined prior to deciding if a regional authority is needed.

### *Environmental Stakeholders*

Responses from the environmental community were mixed, but generally did not support the formation of a regional authority. Opinions are clustered in four categories, each with roughly equal support from respondents:

- The outcomes of the regional process should be decided by the participants in the process, there should not be a predetermined outcome, and the outcome should fit the needs of the community as determined by the process.
- If a regional authority of some sort is required to accomplish regional goals as determined by a stakeholder process, it would be preferable that an existing entity play this role rather than creation of another layer of bureaucracy. Prior to the formation of an authority, efforts should be made to improve current institutions to meet the goals articulated by the regional process.
- Concern that residents of the City of Tucson may lose out to the surrounding communities if a regional authority is formed and that the authority may be less accountable and accessible to the voters.
- There is a need to plan regional growth patterns based on water allocations and availability, not the other way around.
- If new water sources are proposed, before these sources are developed, they should be evaluated to determine the social, economic, and environmental costs and benefits associated with their development.

### *Business Stakeholders*

Business stakeholders favored regional cooperation over a regional authority. They think cooperation between regional stakeholders in general and regional water providers specifically is needed to accomplish meaningful regional water planning. A regional authority was not rejected out of hand, however. Like other stakeholder categories, about half of the business stakeholders interviewed thought a regional authority should not be a predetermined outcome of a regional process, but would be acceptable if a need for one was determined as a result of the process. One stakeholder focused on the need for tangible results to maintain community confidence in its leaders, regardless of the outcome of the process.

### *Local Jurisdiction Managers*

Like other stakeholder groups, the majority of local jurisdiction managers felt a regional authority should not be a predetermined outcome of the process. A limited number thought a supply-side authority similar to what was proposed by water managers was an acceptable outcome, but most felt the process should be allowed to play out and determine its own outcomes. Other opinions expressed by a small number of participants about the outcomes of the process include:

- An authority is not needed because the same results could be achieved through inter-governmental agreements
- An authority should be formed only as a last resort.
- A regional authority is a threat to local sovereignty and an unacceptable outcome.

### *Elected Officials*

The elected officials interviewed were perhaps more divided than any other group. There were four clusters of responses, listed in order of most to least common:

- The decision should emerge for the process. It is too early to determine if a regional authority is needed and currently unclear what problem an authority would solve. The community should be given the opportunity to decide what it wants.
- A regional authority should not be formed. An authority raises questions about local sovereignty and accountability. Jurisdictions must be allowed to maintain control over their retail operations. Regional cooperation and priorities need to be established, but the method of implementation should be something other than a regional authority.
- A regional authority should be established only as a last resort. The current trend seems to be moving in the direction of an authority, but more facts are needed before a decision can be made. A strategic plan for achieving the goals formulated by the regional process should be developed. The strategic plan will determine the method of implementation needed to achieve the stated goals.
- An authority is needed on the supply side to take the lead for the region on augmentation of currently available potable supplies. One goal of such an authority would be to determine an equitable way to allocate new supplies.

### *Miscellaneous Stakeholders*

Participants falling into the miscellaneous category followed the same trend as the other stakeholder groups: a regional authority should not be a predetermine outcome of the process. In addition, a minority of stakeholders felt that, if an authority is formed, it should only operate on the supply-side, as suggested by water managers.

## **9. Concerns about engaging in a regional process**

Stakeholders were asked if they had any concerns about engaging in a regional process. The question was left open ended; concerns could relate to the process itself, the outcomes or goals of the process, structure of the process, or anything else. Responses ranged widely, though there

were some general trends. There is concern from many about loss of autonomy at the jurisdictional level. This concern was expressed by at least one respondent in every category except business stakeholders. People were also concerned about political wrangling that could go along with the process, ranging from “backroom deals” to dominance of the process by particular interests or by big players such as Tucson Water. This concern was noted by stakeholders from every category. There were also a number of people (at least one from each category except business stakeholders) who had no concerns about the process. These people feel regional planning is important and needs to be done regardless of the perceived risks. The final common concern was that the process will not result in much because stakeholders are not able to achieve real cooperation. If a meaningful outcome is not achieved, public trust may be lost. A summary of stakeholder concerns by category, listed in order of frequency is included below.

### *Water Managers*

- The process will be dominated by political agendas. People will come into the process with inflexible pre-formulated outcomes in mind.
- Decisions will be made by backroom deals instead of through the public process. Jurisdictions must be willing to come to the table and truly participate, even if it means giving something up.
- Loss of autonomous control by local jurisdictions over existing water supplies and allocations.
- No stated concerns
- The public will not understand and become frustrated with the process. It is likely to take a very long time because of the complexity of water issues; the public needs to be made aware of this.

### *Environmental Stakeholders*

- No stated concerns
- Land use issues will not be incorporated into the process, allowing the region to continue to grow without reference to water supply concerns.
- Lack of trust between stakeholders in the community will not be resolved and the process will be unsuccessful.
- The process will be dominated by one jurisdiction or stakeholder group, specifically the City of Tucson and/or the growth industry.
- Tucson residents will lose self-determination as a result of ceding control to a regional authority.

### *Business Stakeholders*

- Politics will make cooperation difficult. Smaller entities will be marginalized and squeezed out of the process by the biggest players. Too many stakeholders will be focused on protecting their own turf at the expense of collaboration.
- Public support for the process will wane because of its complexity and the amount of time required to achieve results. Education will be important.
- Inability to control or influence the outcomes of the process.

### *Local Jurisdiction Managers*

- No stated concerns.
- Lack of trust between stakeholders in the community will not be resolved and the process will be unsuccessful.
- The process will require a large commitment of resources and yield little in the way of results. Participants need to be committed to implementing the outcomes.
- Loss of autonomous control over water supplies.

### *Elected Officials*

- No stated concerns
- The process will be dominated by political agendas. People will come into the process with inflexible pre-formulated outcomes in mind.
- The process will require a large commitment of resources and yield little in the way of results. Participants need to be committed to implementing the outcomes.
- Jurisdictions will not be forthright in sharing information, compromising cooperation and collaboration.
- It will be important to ensure the accountability of a regional authority to the voters, if one is created. A regional authority must be elected.
- Loss of autonomous control by local jurisdictions over existing water supplies and allocations and growth.

### *Miscellaneous Stakeholders*

- Public support for the process will wane because of its complexity and the amount of time required to achieve results. Need to ensure an open and accessible process that produces results at regular intervals. Education will be important.
- The process will require a large commitment of resources and yield little in the way of results. Participants must make a commitment to devote the necessary resources to the process and implement the outcomes.
- Loss of autonomous control by local jurisdictions over existing water supplies and allocations and growth.

## **10. Comments not captured elsewhere**

There were also a number of comments that do not fit into the clustered categories above. Interestingly, most of these outliers are actually statements of things that should be off the table. While most of these opinions were previously expressed when the question of what is on and off the table was specifically asked, they were reiterated by some as basic assumptions of the process. This serves to emphasize the strongly held opinions of some that certain issues should absolutely not be considered during a regional process. Responses include:

- One local jurisdiction manager stated privatization of water in the hands of new, non-governmental entities should not be considered, though this opinion was not expressed in reference to issues on and off the table; and
- Several elected officials stated that reallocation of existing water allocations and redistribution of infrastructure between jurisdictions or providers is off the table.

#### **IV. Concluding Observations**

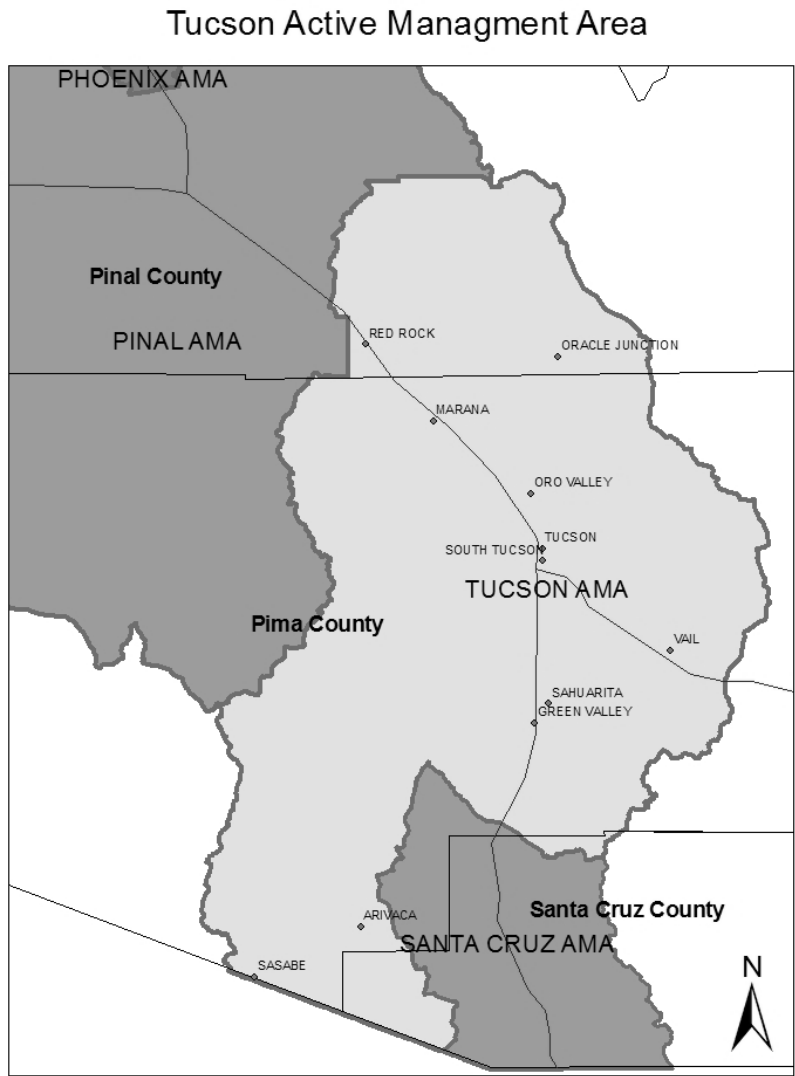
This interview study was undertaken to gain insight into the perspectives of numerous Tucson area stakeholders regarding regional water planning. When conceptualizing the study, we did not know that our research would coincide with the beginning of an important joint study process by the City of Tucson and Pima County. It is only natural, however, that our interview results reflect perspectives shaped in part by the current Tucson-Pima County effort, as well as the Upper Santa Cruz Water Providers and Users Group water planning effort in the Sahuarita-Green Valley area.

The responses universally reveal a sincere desire to cooperate in regional water planning. For an area that has had historical difficulties in regional collaboration on water matters, this is an encouraging finding. All players are not yet on the same page regarding the approach to regional planning, but they appear to be interested in getting on the same page. While respondents may have been guarded in their responses, they seem open to a long-term undertaking. Water concerns have been heightened by the debate surrounding the November 2007 ballot proposition, the long-term drought, uncertainty associated with climate change, and our region's continued growth. Perhaps the stakes are finally high enough to warrant serious and broad efforts to collaborate on water resource planning.

It is clear from the responses that the region wants to go through a process that we will call "water self-determination." Like other areas in Arizona, the region is not depending on others to figure out its water future. Agencies, such as ADWR and CAWCD, are seen as providers of information and expertise regarding the framework for water management and water resources data, but they are not seen by most of the respondents as playing a significant role in regional decision making.

People appear to be leaving the door open regarding options to pursue, and they also appear to recognize the long-term nature of this effort. Yet, the answers to the questions posed also suggest that the optimism associated with cooperation and collaboration could easily disappear should the good faith efforts underway fail to provide – to use the words of many of those interviewed – a transparent, regional and inclusive process.

**Figure 1: Tucson Active Management Area**



## Appendix 1: Interview Questions

1. What should be the goals of a regional process?
  - a. What issues/topics should be on the table? Off the table?
2. Who should be involved in the process – the public, water managers, other stakeholders, etc? Who should lead the process? Be specific.
  - a. What should be role of agencies like ADWR, CAWCD, etc?
3. What should be the region of focus? The entire Tucson Active Management Area? The Tucson Metro Area? Only eastern Pima County (east of the Tohono O’odham Nation)?
4. What assumptions should be used to inform the process, e.g. growth projections, infrastructure capacities, carrying capacity, etc?
5. What should be the outcomes of the process?
  - a. How would the process incorporate stakeholder/public comment?
6. Would you favor the creation of a regional water authority/water district with the power to establish regional water priorities and set policy (e.g. a body similar to the proposed Upper San Pedro Water District)? If so, what should be the powers of the water authority and how should it be governed? Should it have taxing authority?
  - a. If you do not support the creation of a governing body, what would you propose instead? Should implementation of the results of an alternative process be mandatory or voluntary? If mandatory, what governance structure should be used for the implementation of the results?
7. What are your concerns about engaging in a regional process?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?