



# AZ Water Future

## **Is It Time to Recognize Water in Nature as a "Beneficial Use" in Arizona?**

### **What is ecological water?**

Ecological water is “water sufficient to sustain freshwater ecosystems and the wildlife habitat and human livelihoods and well-being that depend on these ecosystems.” In other words, it is water that stays in rivers and streams and sustains plants and animals, as well as people, economies, and society.

### **Why is recognizing ecological water or water for nature needed?**

Arizona rivers are disappearing due to surface water diversions, groundwater pumping, climate change, and drought.

Since Arizona’s statehood, groundwater pumping and surface water diversions have severely impacted major groundwater basins and seriously degraded five of Arizona’s major perennial rivers: the Colorado, Gila, Salt, Santa Cruz, and much of the San Pedro. Additionally, future perennial flow in the upper Verde River is deeply threatened.

Arizona water allocation rights are structured around the term "beneficial use," which typically refers to humans consuming water for various immediate uses – irrigating crops, mining, households, etc.

Currently, unappropriated water is allowed to be appropriated for wildlife and fish, but the process is complicated, not often used, and may not allow for the severance and transfer of senior water rights to be used as ecological water. In other words, in-stream flow rights are generally low-priority water rights that may only be used for a limited purpose.

Water in the environment helps support a \$20 billion tourist industry in Arizona, as well as our growing local food economy, receiving global recognition for simultaneously

restoring our watersheds, creating meaningful work for those struggling to find employment, and forging new networks of small businesses across the state.

Increasingly, public health experts are documenting the effects of healthy rivers and watersheds on human health, including on mental health in a time of a global mental health crisis. Those communities connecting river conservation, green jobs creation, and therapies based on stewardship of land and water – a solidarity economy—are seen as fostering triple bottom line solutions (environment, economy, society) in a time of climate change.

A healthy human future depends on a healthy environment, including flowing rivers.

### **Is protecting ecological water possible in Arizona?**

Other countries in the world have taken steps to give rights to nature and multiple communities in the U.S. have taken steps to more fully recognize water for rivers or ecological water.

Many other western U.S. states allow ecological water as a beneficial use of water.

As envisioned currently, an ecological water law establishes ecological water use as a beneficial use. It requires the Arizona Department of Water Resources to survey Arizona surface waters to determine the needs of our rivers using best available science. This includes looking at the relationship between ground and surface water.

### **How can I help protect and promote flowing rivers in Arizona?**

Support the ecological water bill and help encourage a hearing for it in both the House and Senate. Help inform others about the ecological water needs of our state.

Thank you!

*For more information go to <http://azwaterfuture.org/about> or contact [AZWaterFuture@gmail.com](mailto:AZWaterFuture@gmail.com)*

