



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

**WATER RESOURCES
RESEARCH CENTER**

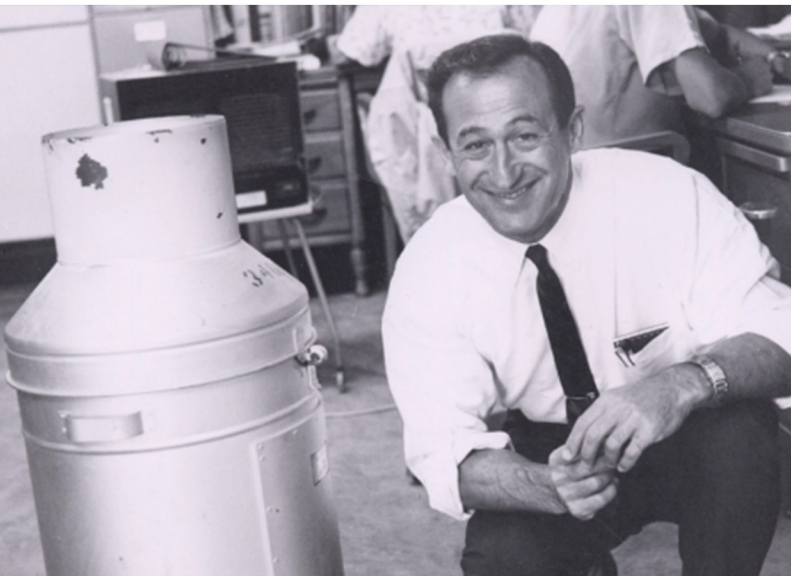
Water Resources Research Center History 1964–2024

Celebrating 60 years



350

Water Resources
Research Center



The Center

A Cooperative Extension center and research unit in the College of Agriculture, Life & Environmental Sciences, the University of Arizona Water Resources Research Center (WRRC) is the designated state water resources research



Photo: James Bowman - Whitewater Draw, AZ

center established under the 1964 Federal Water Resources Research Act (WRRRA). Our mission statement reads: We tackle key water policy and management issues, empower informed decision-making, and enrich understanding through engagement, education, and applied research.

In Spring 2014, to commemorate the 50th anniversary, the WRRC produced a history that can be accessed at [wrrc awr spring 2014 insert - 50 year history.pdf](#) or by using the QR code. In addition to a description and highlights of past accomplishments, it contains a chronology of former WRRC directors and a timeline relating major events in Arizona's water history to WRRC activities.

Water Resources Research Center History, 1964-2014

North of the Water Resources Research Center
A chronology and history of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the University of Arizona Water Resources Research Center (WRRC) 50th Anniversary. This document is the 50th anniversary history of the 1964 Federal Water Resources Research Act (WRRRA).

1964
The WRRRA was signed into law by the President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, on July 16, 1964. The WRRRA was the first federal law to establish a research center in the U.S. to study water resources. The WRRRA was signed into law by the President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, on July 16, 1964. The WRRRA was the first federal law to establish a research center in the U.S. to study water resources.

1964 Grants
The Water Resources Research Center Program authorized by the WRRRA in 1964 was a landmark event in the history of water resources research in the United States. The program was authorized by the WRRRA in 1964 and was the first federal law to establish a research center in the U.S. to study water resources.

60th Anniversary

In 2024, the WRRC celebrates its 60th anniversary, although the origins of the center go back to 1957, when Sol Resnick established the Institute of Water Utilization in the College of Agriculture. The 1964 WRRRA designation led to a change in name and administrative home within the university. The new name stuck, although the unit has relocated several times and reported administratively to various campus units. The WRRC returned to the College of Agriculture in 1991.

Update on Accomplishments

Much has happened in the ten years since the WRRC's 50th anniversary history was written. The WRRC continues to advance projects and programs relevant to state and regional water policy and management issues critical to

Update on Programs and Resources

The **Transboundary Aquifer Assessment Program (TAAP)** is a binational collaboration between Mexico and the US. Since 2009, the WRRC has worked with the US Geological Survey, the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), and partners in Mexico to improve understanding of priority transboundary aquifers. In 2016, the **Binational Study of the Transboundary San Pedro Aquifer** was approved by the US and Mexican sections of IBWC and published simultaneously in English and Spanish.

Through the **Middle East Water** program, initiated in 2009, the WRRC has been working to develop partnerships between Arizona and regions of the Middle East facing similar water challenges. In November 2016, WRRC Director Megdal accompanied the two International Boundary and Water Commissioners (US and Mexico) for five days in the Middle East where they focused on the transboundary Jordan River. In 2019, Megdal organized a panel of experts from the US, Mexico, and Israel to discuss desalination technology in a binational setting at the biennial Water Technology and Environmental Control conference.

The annual **WRRC Photo Contest**, initiated in 2009, has led to a collection of prize-winning photographs depicting water in Arizona and beyond. Images from this collection are used in many ways by the WRRC and, with permission, by others. In 2024, Dear Body of Water, a global poetry campaign on the theme of rivers and other bodies of water began using our contest photos on their postcards.

In 2014, the WRRC initiated a project to create an interactive online repository of informational video clips about water in the West. The **Beyond the Mirage** project won The New Arizona Prize: Water Consciousness Challenge in 2015 with an award of \$100,000. WRRC funding from TRIF and CALS-CCT staff support enabled full project development. The online platform has been used in multiple educational and public information settings. In 2016, the project won the top Environmental Education/Communication Award from Arizona Forward. Later that year, the companion documentary, *Beyond the Mirage: The Future of Water in the West*, was distributed by American Public Television and aired in 33 states nationwide. It has won several prizes, including a Rocky Mountain Emmy in 2018.

Arizona and applicable to other water-stressed regions. The WRRC continues to play a role in WRRR research grant programs, including major national competitive grants and small research grants that address state and regional water problems and support the training of students and new research scientists.



Although the WRRC continues to receive support from Arizona's Technology and Research Initiative Fund (TRIF), the TRIF funding structure changed, ending the independent Water Sustainability Program/Water, Environmental, and Energy Solutions (WSP/WEES) initiatives. A growing interest in water issues statewide underpins continuing TRIF support.

WRRC signature programs have evolved, including our annual conference, public seminar series, and *Arroyo*. Since 2015, the annual conference has been recorded and posted on the website. The seminar series morphed into a Water Webinar series. The AWR newsletter was supplemented and later replaced by our current *Weekly Wave* e-News digest. The WRRC has established a social media presence and adopted new platforms and designs for our website and our communications with a growing subscription list. In addition, the WRRC has sustained and augmented research and engagement programs that provide services to communities throughout Arizona.

WRRC Director Sharon B. Megdal



Sharon B. Megdal has been the WRRC's director since 2004. After 20 years at the helm, she has made her mark on water resource scholarship regionally, nationally, and internationally, elevating the Center's visibility and impact. In addition to leading the WRRC,

she is a Professor and Specialist in the Department of Environmental Science, the C.W. & Modene Neely Endowed Professor, and a Distinguished Outreach Professor. Megdal conducts a program of research, education, and engagement on water management, policy, and governance in water-scarce regions, with a focus on groundwater, and teaches the graduate course, Water Policy in Arizona and Semi-arid Regions.

The **Groundwater Governance and Management Program** investigates how groundwater is governed and extracts lessons on best practices. In 2015, a survey of management and governance in the US to capture institutions, activities, and challenges on a national scale resulted in a report, **State-level Groundwater Governance and Management in the US: Summary of Survey Results of Groundwater Quality Strategies and Practices**, which found a broad audience in 2017 through an AWRA webinar and articles in the journal *Water* and in *npj Clean Water* in 2018.

Water Research and Planning Innovations for Dryland Systems (Water RAPIDS) works at regional, state, watershed, and local scales to build water resources and watershed planning capacity within communities. In 2015, as part of this program, the WRRC partnered with Northern Arizona University to create the **Desert Flows Database**, a geospatial database of environmental flow needs and responses for the deserts of the US and Mexico. The Water RAPIDS program has grown through consistent engagement with communities, including a series of **Community Forums** from 2017 to 2024 around local water resources issues in Safford, Globe, Patagonia, and Superior, Arizona.

In 2016, the **Arizona Water Map Poster** was redesigned and republished. This fourth edition is the product of a design and review process that included engaged stakeholders from across regions and sectors. The water map reflects the 2016 state of water resources in Arizona, as well as a culture of management and planning unique to the state.

In 2018, the WRRC's annual **Arroyo** publication was linked with our annual conference. The production of the *Arroyo* is enabled through conference sponsorships. A noteworthy conference-linked *Arroyo* include *Arizona Groundwater Management: Past, Present and Future* (2021), commended by former Arizona Governor and US Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. A Special Edition *Arroyo* released in 2022 summarized the contributions to ecological sustainability of the International Arid Lands Consortium.

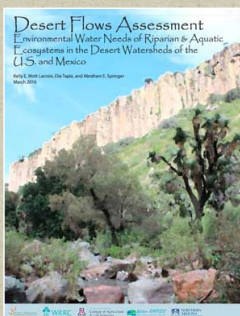
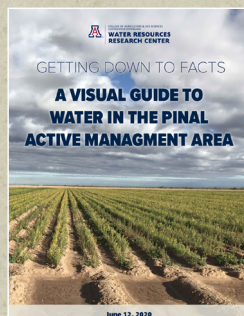
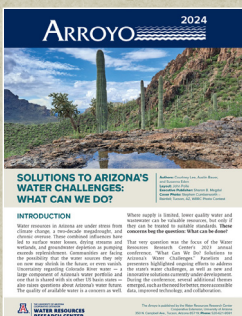
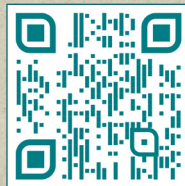
Director Megdal's service within and outside the University of Arizona includes memberships, leadership, and numerous awards. From 2014 through 2016, she served as President and Immediate Past President of the National Institutes of Water Resources (NIWR), the organization composed of the 54 WRRAs Institutes or Centers. Megdal served as President of the Board for the International Arid Lands Consortium (2018–2022) and as a board member for the American Water Resources Association (2017–2022). In 2024, she was named an AWRA Fellow. Other awards received include the Warren A. Hall Medal for lifetime achievement from the Universities Council on Water Resources, the University of Arizona 2023 Women of Impact award, and the "Salt of the Earth" award from the Multi-State Salinity Coalition. In December 2020, Megdal ended 12 years of service as an elected board member of the Central Arizona Water Conservation District. Since May 2023, she has represented the University of Arizona WRRC on the Governor's Water Policy Council.

Reauthorization

In September 2024, the University of Arizona (U of A) officially reauthorized the WRRC for the 7-year period through Fiscal Year 2032. All U of A units must undergo periodic reviews, and the previous review of WRRC was in 2018. The WRRC is also reviewed periodically by the US Geological Survey as one of the 54 WRRAs Water Resources Institutes/Centers and received an "Outstanding" rating in March 2024. Based on the comprehensive documentation from the in-depth federal review, including the outstanding commendation from the USGS, the U of A administration waived its usual extensive reauthorization review process. The reauthorization noted the WRRC's important role and positive impact at the university and beyond.

WRRC Publications

Between 2015 and 2024, the WRRC published stand-alone documents intended to serve as references on important water issues. Available via the WRRC website, these publications represent the Center's diligent efforts to provide useful, timely, accurate, and understandable information. WRRC publications can be found here: <https://wrrc.arizona.edu/publications>.



The **Arizona Water Factsheet** series was initiated in 2018 to provide place-based water information for each Arizona county. Working with Arizona Cooperative Extension and local stakeholders, the factsheet team assembled key facts and concepts into an easily accessible format. In 2024, the WRRC completed factsheets for all 15 Arizona counties. Updates are planned to keep the factsheets relevant.

In the wake of 2020 COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, WRRC's conferences and seminars went virtual, greatly expanding its audiences. With the easing of restrictions, in-person events resumed, augmented by virtual access and participation. The **WRRC's Annual Conference** attendance increased, reflecting the value of hybrid platforms. **Water Webinars** have replaced the in-person seminar series, reserving the use of the Center's Sol Resnick Conference Room for special occasions such as past book signing events with authors Melissa L. Sevigny and Dave Showalter, and our annual **Chocolate Fest**.

In 2020, the **Diversifying Voices in Water Resources (DViWR)** project and the **Indigenous Water Dialogues (IWD)** initiative undertook efforts to amplify the voices of underrepresented groups. A major IWD achievement was the groundbreaking WRRC 2021 Annual Conference, *Tribal Water Resilience in a Changing Environment*. Research for DViWR produced the 2024 outstanding paper of the year, published by the *Journal of Contemporary Water Research and Education*. The WRRC also sponsored the 2022 film screening of *INHABITANTS: Indigenous Perspectives on Restoring Our World* and facilitated the diverse opening panel of the US Water Alliance's 2023 One Water Summit.

WEEKLY WAVE

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