

Chapter 6
Next Steps -
Using this Atlas for
Watershed Planning



Chapter 6 - Next Steps: Using this Atlas for Watershed Planning

This Atlas is a baseline watershed assessment, or an accounting of the existing conditions, in the Upper Gila River Watershed. This Atlas is not intended to be a watershed plan. Rather, it is a starting point for a planning effort and provides a foundation for common understanding of the current status of the Upper Gila River Watershed so all stakeholders interested in pursuing a watershed plan are able to participate.

Management and planning for water resources is a difficult task. The unpredictable weather patterns of southeastern Arizona make this task especially challenging. One day it is hot and dry and the next day fields are flooded and roads are washed away. The uses for our water are almost endless, and each drop in some way fuels our economy. Without water there are no fields, no copper, no cattle, no restaurants, no fishing, and no trees. While use by one does not necessarily mean the water is unavailable to another, water at the price we are used to paying for it and the quality we are accustomed to is increasingly scarce. In the face of increasing scarcity and overlapping demands, how does a community decide how they will use their water? Can they rely on their existing water sources or how much of it they will have in the future?

Planning for the future of your watershed requires many things. Important issues include: what resources you have now; how water law and policy impact your use of these resources; how those resources have changed over time; what those resources might look like in the future; and how you want to use those resources to shape your community.

This Atlas documents the importance of the area's rich cultural history; the abundance of natural resources including timber, ore and grasslands; and the variety of environments ranging from riparian areas in the valleys to montane forests in the mountains. Major issues identified in this Atlas include:

- The increase in areas impacted by fire
- A need for planning to secure water supplies to meet future demands
- The impacts from changing precipitation regimes and ongoing drought
- The growth of urban areas and increase in groundwater wells
- A paucity of data for many key resources including groundwater and springs

Next Steps

In addition to the many smaller projects that the Gila Watershed Partnership (GWP) is currently implementing, there are three projects that will help the GWP both understand and plan for the future of the watershed. These projects include the Participatory Watershed Assessment project led by the WRRRC that created this Atlas, the Upper Gila Watershed Riparian Restoration project, and an Appraisal Level study of the area's water resources being conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. In 2014 and beyond, the GWP will coordinate work on these projects through the Watershed Planning and Restoration Steering Committee.

In 2014 the Participatory Watershed Assessment project will use discussion of the current conditions shown on these Atlas maps, and the challenges associated with them, to develop a set of scenarios describing the potential future condition of the Upper Gila River Watershed. Key to this next phase is building a shared understanding of what drives change in the watershed. The WRRRC will work with the GWP and the Watershed Planning and Restoration Steering Committee through workshops and the committee's monthly meeting to guide the group through the scenario building process.

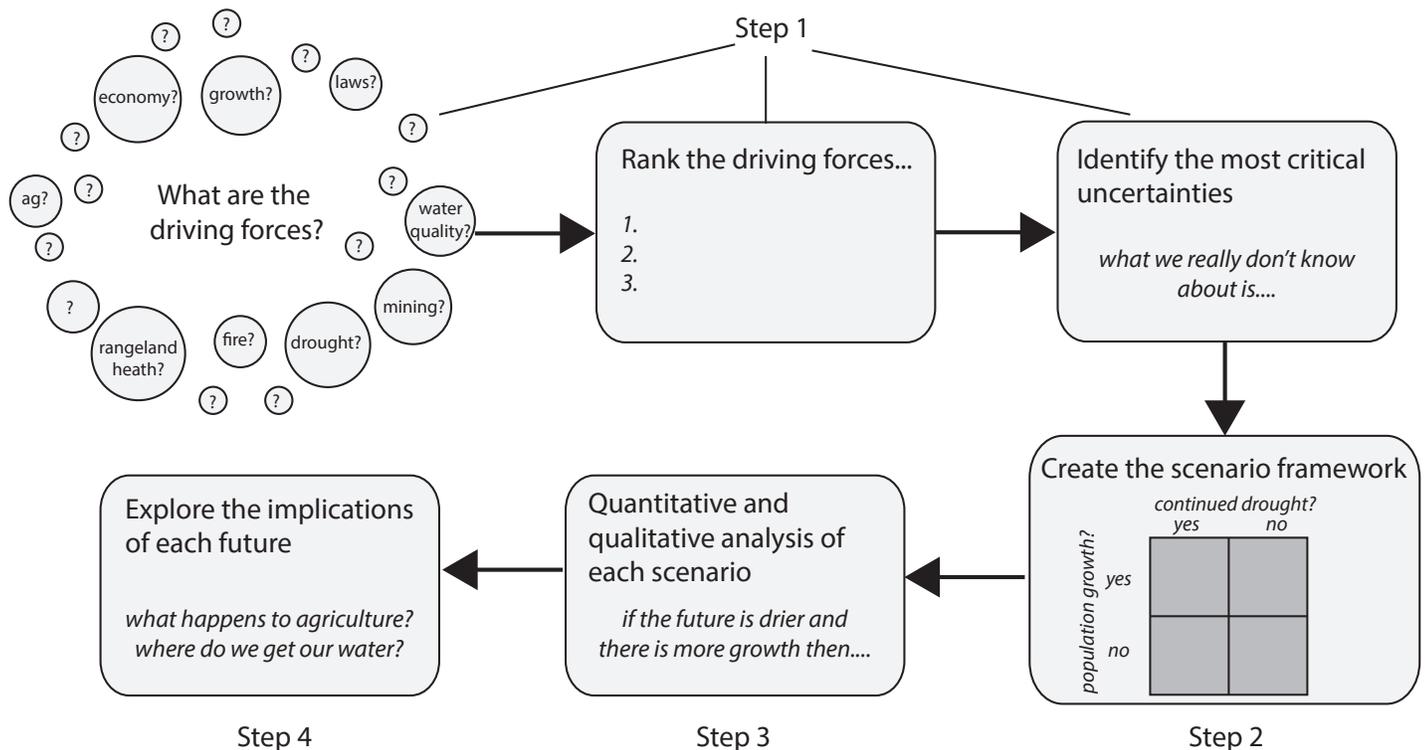


Figure 6-1 Scenario Planning Process

A general outline of the process for building scenarios is as follows:

- Step 1. Identify and rank the most important scenario elements, or determinants of change. These include:
- Elements that will occur in all scenarios
 - Forces that steer long range changes, or driving forces
 - Major actors or agents that have the power to shape the future of the system, or prime movers
 - Unknowns that could determine which futures are realized, or major uncertainties
- Step 2. Develop scenario framework using major uncertainties.
- Step 3. Quantitative analysis, where possible, of the scenarios and their impact to the watershed.
- Step 4. Explore the implications of each scenario

Taken together with the other ongoing projects in the watershed, these scenarios will be an important tool to help the GWP develop a watershed plan that fully considers the potential impacts of continuing drought, changes in water uses, priorities for natural resources, and other community concerns and desires for the watershed.

Watershed planning offers the opportunity to consider a wide range of resources and issues in a comprehensive way. One limitation of traditional approaches to land use planning and natural resources planning is that these approaches are often limited to political boundaries and a limited set of issues. For example, traditional land use planning typically will address growth, economic development, land use, and natural resources within a give town, city, or county. A land use plan will not typically consider issues beyond the political boundaries of the planning area even though management of these peripheral lands can impact the town or county.

Water resources, including supply and demand balances riparian resources and habitats are impacted by varying land uses, and the long-term impacts of drought and changes in climate may alter natural and water resources. Despite these connections land use plans generally do not take these elements into consideration. When the focus broadens from political boundaries alone to a watershed system, water resources and the broader impacts of land use are considered, enabling more meaningful conversation and informed decisions across political boundaries.