



By Benjamin H. Grumbles

Blue Ribbons & Transitions

Arizona water sustainability
initiative leads by example

January rings in a new year, a new job and a new venue for me, happily with water policy continuing to flow through and connect all. I'm back in Washington, D.C., after a good "run" in a grand state heading up Arizona's Department of Environmental Quality. My new assignment, directing the educational, nonprofit Clean Water America Alliance (www.cleanwateramericaalliance.org) gives me an unprecedented opportunity to build on the foundation laid by outgoing President Ken Kirk and continuing Chairman Dick Champion. This is also a chance to put lessons learned in the arid Western, energy-focused world to work in regional and national water collaborations throughout the country.

Blue-Ribbon Panel

I'm particularly proud of an Arizona initiative to collaborate and plan for the state's water future, as I believe such a process is the wave of the future for other states and regions. No doubt several states, bays and basins, spanning the country's four corners and coasts, have tinkered with, toiled through and succeeded at various watershed-based collaborations. Every state, however, should look at the type of public-private, silo-searching (and eventual busting) process Arizona just completed, although I'll be the first to tell you it wasn't perfect and not a single drop of water has been cleaned or conserved based on the process alone.

Gov. Brewer started the effort in 2009 by directing her agency heads to establish a blue-ribbon panel on water sustainability. The panel's composition, scope and mission set it apart from most other efforts in other places. It had three co-chairs: two Senate-confirmed appointees of the Water and Environment agencies and an elected member and chair of the state's Corporation Commission, which regulates electric utilities and private water companies. It also included 40 experts from a mix of water, wastewater, energy, agriculture, development, government and academic interests around the state.

The final report, issued Nov. 30, 2010, analyzes 26 priority issues and makes 63 practical recommendations on how to improve and promote water recycling and conservation in Arizona. It's available at www.azwater.gov/azdwr/watermanagement/blueribbonpanel.htm. The materials, based on countless meetings, presentations and conversations, detail the legal, policy and technical issues and opportunities ahead. A student of process alone could marvel at, or at least learn from, the collaborative effort, an infusion of hydrology, ecology and democracy.

Some key recommendations: The environmental agency, which has one of the top reuse programs in the

country, needs to update its once cutting-edge wastewater and graywater recycling regulations to reflect new developments, match specific standards with specific end uses and also embrace innovative, flexible concepts in its permitting programs (e.g., "net ecological benefits"). The panel also recommends significant education and outreach to garner public understanding of water reuse and recycling, including concerns about groundwater recharge, the parameters and complexities of indirect potable reuse, the need for more science and context on pharmaceuticals and personal care products, the nexus between energy and water, and the need for sustainable financing strategies.

Uniting for Water Sustainability

Other blue-ribbon efforts are rolling out across the country—most recently, the Johnson Foundation at Wingspread's freshwater collaborative "Charting New Waters," but also the Aspen Institute's Dialogue on Sustainable Water Infrastructure and the Western Governors Assn.'s ongoing work on water sustainability and climate change. Of course, these efforts add to a range of collaborations on celebrated, threatened ecosystems such as the Gulf of Mexico, Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes and San Francisco Bay/Delta.

Talk is cheap. (So is water when you consider its true worth, but that's another column for another day.) The cost of not talking and working together is getting more expensive each day, watershed by watershed. Collaborations that unite, rather than divide, and strive for "fuller" cost pricing are at the heart of any serious effort toward sustainability.

That's what the Clean Water America Alliance is all about. As its new president, I look forward to raising awareness on the worth of water and helping people and organizations to align, rather than collide, over future directions and more integrated policies. The three Rs of water sustainability—reducing waste and inefficiency, reusing water and wastewater and restoring watersheds—all figure prominently in the report of Arizona's blue-ribbon panel, and I know the same will be true for the actual work of the alliance. **www**

Benjamin H. Grumbles is the president of the 501(c)(3) nonprofit Clean Water America Alliance. Views expressed in this column may not necessarily reflect those of the Alliance or its members. Grumbles can be reached at bhgrumbles@gmail.com.

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