

2025

ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES

FOR THE ARIZONA LEGISLATURE AND GOVERNOR

We must actively address the important issues that affect our state, including acting on the climate crisis and providing clean affordable energy, ensuring more sustainable water policies that protect groundwater and rivers, maximizing the health of all Arizonans, addressing the environmental injustice that burdens those most vulnerable in our communities, especially Black people, Indigenous people, and People of Color, and ensuring easy access to our democratic processes. We must also hear those who have no voices in our current processes, including those of future generations, imperiled plants and animals, the air we breathe, the water that is our life, and the soil that nourishes us. We urge Arizonans, and in particular our elected officials, to promote these priorities during the 2025 Legislative Session and the coming years.



ACT ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS—NOW!



We are in a climate crisis that affects every sector of our economy and every aspect of our lives, and we have less time to address it than we previously thought in order to avoid the most severe impacts of climate change. According to the most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, the changes we are seeing are unlike anything we have seen in thousands of years and they are intensifying. We cannot talk about the long list of environmental issues and economic concerns—water scarcity, pollution, unhealthy air, environmental racism, rising healthcare costs, extreme weather, and climate-caused international migration, among others—and ignore the rapidly warming climate that makes all these problems exponentially worse. Arizona is one of the fastest warming states in the country and both Phoenix and Tucson are among the fastest warming cities in the country. In 2023, Phoenix experienced 31 days in a row of temperatures of 110 degrees F or higher and in 2024 had 113 consecutive days of temperatures of 100 degrees F or higher and a total of 70 days of 110 degrees F or higher, breaking another record. Tucson also experienced extreme heat this summer, which tied for its hottest summer on record. Tucsonans experienced an average daily temperature of 90 degrees F.

Climate change is having serious public health impacts via extreme heat and poor air quality, both of which are expected to increase in the region. According to the Fifth National Climate Assessment, “These changes are expected to increase heat and air-pollution exposure, illness, and premature death.”

The most vulnerable members of our communities suffer the greatest from this extreme heat, which also has resulted in more and more heat-related deaths – a new record was set in Maricopa County for 2023, quite sadly, with 645 heat-related deaths. For 2024, there are 466 preliminary confirmed heat-related deaths and 191 deaths under investigation. The rising temperatures associated with the climate crisis exacerbate our prolonged extreme drought, expand wildfire season and contribute to larger fires, and contribute to increasingly unpredictable and more severe weather patterns. These impacts threaten our personal, community, and economic health.

Climate change is also threatening plants and animals, including our native forests and the iconic saguaro cactus which needs specific conditions to thrive. In recent years, there have been fewer young saguaros in Saguaro National Park due to ongoing drought and extreme weather. Drought, wildfire, and changes in the range of species, among other impacts, threaten forests, including piñon pines.

- **We ask the Arizona Legislature to support Governor Hobbs’s Office of Resiliency and its work to develop a climate action plan to help ensure that Arizona is better prepared for the continued impacts of climate change and to remove barriers to climate action, including the provisions in law that prohibit the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality from doing anything to assess or limit greenhouse gas emissions.**
- **We request that the Arizona Legislature repeal laws that preempt local action to regulate fossil fuels and reduce waste. The Legislature should pass bills to promote investment in transportation electrification by fully utilizing the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding, including to promote electric school and transit buses along with a more robust electric-vehicle charging infrastructure; and help to promote greater energy efficiency—our cheapest, cleanest resource—emphasizing access to efficiency for low-income communities and renters. State agencies must be directed to work collaboratively to develop a Climate Action Plan for Arizona to reduce our state’s greenhouse gas emissions and to effectively implement provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act and the Justice 40 Initiative that requires more resources be directed into communities that have disproportionately suffered the impacts of climate change.**
- **Finally, we ask that the Legislature and the Governor reject any bills to hinder clean renewable solar and wind energy and any bills that erect impediments to pollution free transportation.**

As Arizonans, we understand that water is central to our life and community survival. Water is absolutely essential for our communities' health and our state's economic viability. It is also inextricably interconnected with other primary determinants of health and prosperity about which we are deeply concerned, including addressing the climate crisis, advancing environmental justice, protecting and promoting democracy, protecting lands and wildlife, and more. If we fail to plan for long-term sustainable water use, adaptation to and mitigation of the impacts of climate change, and ensuring that environmental injustice is addressed, all of Arizona's communities will suffer, both now and for many years into the future.

Arizona urgently needs sustainable water policies that include groundwater and river protections so that all Arizonans have clean and healthy water today and in the future. Every law, rule, and other supporting policies must be considered through a lens regarding their impacts on the immediate community and on communities that have historically been disproportionately affected by harmful water policies.

Arizona's water policy has never been complete. Even our state's premiere Ground Water Management Act left out parts of the state and failed to acknowledge the scientific context that all water is ultimately part of an integrated whole, whether flowing above or below ground. Policies related to the Colorado River were created based on an insufficient and incorrect understanding of past water patterns and with no recognition of the Tribes and their needs, creating overallocations. The Colorado River system has been overallocated since the signing of the 1922 Colorado River Compact and is unable to meet future demand. In 2021, for the first time, the federal government declared shortages on the Colorado River and additional shortages are headed our way. These shortages will disproportionately affect Arizona. The reduced runoff and the operation of Glen Canyon Dam also threaten Colorado River flows through Grand Canyon and the survival of endangered fish, such as the humpback chub.

Climate change is affecting precipitation and the amount and timing of river flows. Runoff in the Colorado and other river systems on which a significant amount of Arizona's water supply depends, for direct use and for groundwater recharge, will decline by 20-40 percent by mid-century. Water supply shortages that already exist will be further exacerbated. Reduced precipitation, increasing temperatures, increased evapotranspiration from soils and plants, and changes in the timing of runoff to rivers are making droughts more frequent, longer lasting, and more severe. Both groundwater and surface water resources are already over-committed, and climate change is exacerbating that situation, too.

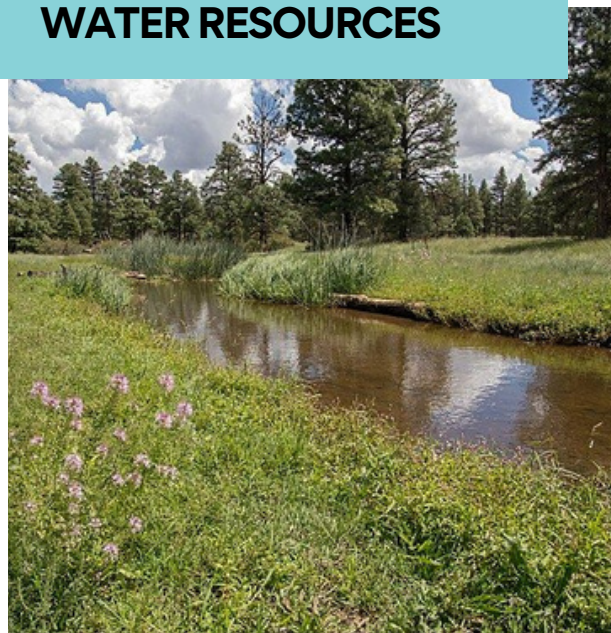
Arizona's water policies do not consider that our future water supplies will not match our past water supplies, and thus will require far more care and attention to planning. Perhaps some areas will receive more and others less, but in all cases, increased temperatures and decreased soil moisture will mean less water resources across the state, and recognition of limits.

Agriculture uses about 72 percent of the water in Arizona, with a significant portion allocated to irrigated crops like alfalfa. Additionally, Arizona is actively working to attract other industries that require substantial water resources, such as data centers.

The bulk of the Water Infrastructure Finance Authority (WIFA) funding is for projects to import water from outside of Arizona, such as harmful desalination projects in the Gulf of California, when those dollars could be used to promote water sustainability in our communities.

A 2023 U.S. Supreme Court decision severely curtails Clean Water Act protections for most of Arizona's surface waters by eliminating protections for ephemeral (waters that do not flow year-round) waters. Arizona passed a bill to set up a program for "Protected Surface Waters," but unfortunately, it too excludes nearly all ephemeral waters, leaving those critical desert washes unprotected.

PROTECT PRECIOUS WATER RESOURCES



Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances or PFAs, often referred to as forever chemicals, contaminate water in a number of Arizona communities, particularly those around military bases, posing significant health risks. Among those affected are several Indigenous communities, which continue to struggle with inadequate access to clean, safe drinking water. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has established a drinking water standard for some PFAs, so it is crucial that Arizona implements this standard effectively. This will help ensure that all Arizonans, including those in marginalized communities, have safe and adequate drinking water.



- **We ask the Arizona Legislature and Governor to recognize how precious our water is and to do everything possible to conserve, protect, and mitigate harm to our state's waters. The Legislature must enact, and the Governor must sign, laws and rules that enable measuring and limiting groundwater pumping throughout Arizona, including in rural areas where unfettered groundwater pumping has contributed to land subsidence and earth fissures, and in some areas depleted flows in rivers, streams, and springs. Sustainable water policies cannot focus on importing water from outside the state, but must consider changes to the state's current agricultural practices and growth and development patterns, and identify and take full advantage of opportunities for deeper conservation such as water reclamation and treatment of wastewater flows.**

- **We also ask the Legislature and Governor to amend Arizona law to provide protection for ecological flows in Arizona's watercourses to support biological diversity, which currently is gravely threatened both by climate change and by existing laws that ignore the needs of riparian ecosystems. The Legislature should modify the surface water quality program to require that ephemeral waters be included in order to ensure protection of desert washes, continue to provide funding to address the backlog of impaired waters at the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and put them on a path to meeting water quality standards, and invest in funding to ensure safe drinking water for all, including to monitor and limit PFAs contamination.**

"Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies."

- Environmental Protection Agency

"Whether by conscious design or institutional neglect, communities of color in urban ghettos, in rural 'poverty pockets,' or on economically impoverished Native-American reservations face some of the worst environmental devastation in the nation."

- Dr. Robert Bullard

Communities of color have especially high asthma rates. African-American and Latinx children visit emergency departments for asthma care more often than white children. Black Americans are 2 to 3 times more likely to die from asthma than any other racial or ethnic group. One in five Latinx adults can't afford their asthma medicines, and adults who didn't finish high school are more likely to have asthma than adults who graduated high school or college.

ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE AND RACISM



Water is life. Native American communities disproportionately lack access to safe water and wastewater disposal. Water contamination occurs more often in Native American water systems. Overall, Tribal public-water systems are twice as likely to violate health-based water quality regulations as non-tribal systems.

There are more than 500 abandoned uranium mines throughout the Navajo Nation (most operational from 1940s through the 1980s and many left without proper clean up or regulation). An analysis of water supplies in the Navajo Nation found disproportionately high levels of arsenic and uranium; 15 percent of unregulated water supplies had high levels of arsenic and more than 12 percent had high levels of uranium.

Dangerous neurotoxins in lead pipes contaminate drinking water and cause health problems for communities of color at a disproportionate rate. Black children are three times more likely than white children to have elevated blood-lead levels.

We frequently hear about the disparate impacts of climate change on people in “poor” nations, but not as much is said about the impacts closer to home. Researchers at the University of Arizona “found that the southwestern region is a hotspot both for physical climate change and for social vulnerability with a clear ‘climate gap’ between rich and poor. The Southwest is projected to become hotter and drier under future climate change, creating the potential for heightened vulnerability and increasing challenges to achieve environmental justice. The Southwest exhibits high social vulnerability, with rankings among the worst in the USA on a range of indicators, including poverty, health insurance, energy and food security, and childhood well-being.”

An EPA report found that Black people are 40 percent more likely to live in an area with the highest heat-related deaths with increased temperatures of 2 degrees.



- **We ask the Arizona Legislature and Governor to consider an Arizona law or executive order similar to the federal Justice40 Initiative to promote a goal that 40 percent of the benefits from certain investments go to underserved communities that bear a disproportionate burden from climate change and pollution (See Executive Order 14008.) We ask that Legislature require the Arizona Department of Administration, in consultation with the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ), to ensure that all state agencies, boards, commissions, and other public bodies involved in decisions that may affect environmental quality adopt and implement environmental-justice policies that provide meaningful opportunities for involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, ethnicity, religion, income, or education level. We ask that the Legislature and Governor also require that ADEQ review environmental and public-health information to identify existing and proposed industrial and commercial facilities in communities of color and in low-income communities and to minimize and mitigate the impact on communities of color and low-income areas. It should also require the establishment of an environmental justice task force.**

- **We further ask for additional legislation that defines “overburdened communities” as those with significant non-white, non-English-speaking, or low-income populations; requires major polluters seeking air quality, waste, and water quality permits in overburdened communities to develop “Environmental Justice Impact Statements” with substantive detail, meaningful public input, and real ADEQ oversight including technical assistance to impacted communities; and empowers ADEQ to deny or condition permits due to disproportionate impacts on overburdened communities.**

RESTORE AND PROTECT LAND, HABITAT, AND WILDLIFE



Arizona is blessed with roughly 28 million acres of federal public lands, including wildland gems such as Grand Canyon, Petrified Forest, and Saguaro National Parks, the Superstition Wilderness Area, Kaibab National Forest, and Kofa National Wildlife Refuge. In 2023, President Biden established the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni-Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument to protect nearly a million acres of public land after 12 Tribal nations requested it. These places provide extensive recreational opportunities as well as key habitat and corridors for numerous animals and plants, some found no place else. These public lands were all Indigenous lands and are significant to the 22 Tribal nations recognized in Arizona, in addition to containing a rich history of human occupation of the region. Public lands provide us with clean air and clean water. From the San Francisco Peaks to the San Pedro River, Arizonans love and enjoy our public lands.

Public lands also contribute significantly to Arizona's \$20-billion-plus tourism industry as well as to our outdoor recreation industry.

According to the National Park Service, more than 4.7 million people visited Grand Canyon National Park in 2023, who collectively spent \$768 million in communities near the park, supporting 10,100 jobs and a cumulative billion dollar benefit to the local economy.

A majority of Arizonans participate in outdoor recreation, approximately 59% according to the Outdoor Industry Association and that recreation generates about \$21.2 billion in consumer spending annually.

According to the Arizona Office of Tourism, "Arizona's warm weather and magnificent natural beauty made tourism the number one export industry in Arizona in 2023." Our public lands are key to that natural beauty. The more than 42 million people who visited our state helped generate \$4.2 billion in tax revenues in 2023 and supported 187,000 jobs.

In addition to a climate crisis, we also have an extinction crisis. Habitat loss and climate change mean that about one-third to one-half of all species on the planet will face extinction. Loss of these species will disrupt ecosystems affecting other plants, animals, and people. In October 2023, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delisted 21 species due to extinction. Climate change is increasingly a factor, but many of these species were lost due to development. In Arizona, we have approximately 75 plants and animals included on the federal endangered-species list. Many of these species are threatened or endangered due to loss of habitat, including the dewatering of streams, rivers, and riparian areas.

- **We ask the Arizona Legislature and Governor to support strong protections for federal, state, and local public lands, including the provisions of the America the Beautiful initiative from the Biden administration, and begin working with Tribal nations, other relevant Arizona State entities and bodies, and the federal government to prioritize restoring Tribal homelands. We also ask the state to establish a state-level endangered species program that will actively protect species not covered by the federal Endangered Species Act.**
- **In addition, we ask the Legislature to establish a state environmental policy act requiring state, local, and other government entities to assess the impacts of proposed state or local government actions on the environment before committing to a course of action, to make these impacts known to the public, to allow public input into the process, to propose means to reduce or eliminate adverse environmental impacts resulting from state or local government actions, and to provide robust consultation with Native American Tribes. We ask that the state work more closely and collaboratively to develop and fund wildlife connectivity and corridors, including with federal land management agencies.**

ENSURE ACCESS TO DEMOCRACY FOR ALL



The freedom to vote for all citizens of voting age must be protected. The democratic process must reflect and empower our diverse electorate. Unreasonable barriers to voting must be removed.

Free and fair elections are a cornerstone of democracy. Election workers and those seeking to vote should be encouraged, not discouraged or intimidated.

The State of Arizona must provide comprehensive education about democracy, governance, and civic responsibilities to empower individuals to make informed decisions and actively participate in the democratic process. The State of Arizona must ensure the process encourages community involvement, dialogue, and collaboration to address local issues and ensure that all voices are heard in the decision-making process.

First Amendment rights are a cornerstone of our democracy and must be protected for all. Everyone (regardless of color, race, gender, etc.) must feel safe and welcome as they peacefully protest actions by our government and should not be targeted by law enforcement or other government entities, including by imposition of unreasonably high penalties for minor infractions.

- **We ask the Arizona Legislature and Governor to enact an automatic voter-registration program, expand early voting opportunities, and ensure that formerly incarcerated individuals are allowed to vote. Access to direct democracy must also be part of this work, including allowing those pursuing ballot measures to collect signatures electronically, and without unreasonable requirements, such as the passage by the legislature of laws intended to make it harder for the public to exercise their right to initiative, referendum, and recall as guaranteed by the state constitution. Moreover, we ask that the First Amendment right to protest is not infringed upon by law enforcement or government, including those that disproportionately impact people of color.**

ORGANIZATIONS THAT HAVE SIGNED ON:

Arizona Alliance for Retired Americans
Arizona Climate Action Coalition
Arizona Faith Network
Arizona Heritage Alliance
Arizona Interfaith Power and Light
Arizona Youth Climate Coalition
AZ AANHPI For Equity
Brophy Student Climate Coalition
Chispa Arizona
Climate Cabinet Action
Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection
Community Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Earth Justice Ministry of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Phoenix Elders Climate Action - AZ
Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy Environmental Coalition Grace St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Great Old Broads for Wilderness - Northern Arizona Wild Broadband Great Old Broads for Wilderness - Sonoran Broadband
Great Old Broads for Wilderness - Tucson Broadband
Great Old Broads for Wilderness - Yavapai-Prescott Broadband Mi Familia Vota
Moms Clean Air Force - Arizona
Mountain Mamas
Our Voice Our Vote Arizona
Physicians for Social Responsibility, AZ Chapter
Rural Arizona Action
Rural Arizona Engagement
Sierra Club - Grand Canyon Chapter
Sustainable Tucson
Sustainable Water Network
Third Act Arizona
Tó Nizhóní Ání
Valley Unitarian Universalist-Environmental Action Team
Vets Forward
Vote Solar
Western Watersheds Project
Yuma Audubon Society