



AMAs 101

➔ What is an AMA?

Active Management Areas, or AMAs, are groundwater basins within the state that are subject to certain statutory and administrative regulations regarding the withdrawal and use of groundwater, or in the case of the Santa Cruz AMA, the withdrawal and use of any water, other than stored water, withdrawn from a well. Currently, there are six AMAs in Arizona – Prescott, Phoenix, Pinal, Tucson, Santa Cruz, and Douglas.

What Water Management Requirements Are Applicable In An AMA?

Each AMA has a management goal that guides water management in the AMA. If an AMA is designated in the Gila Bend groundwater basin, the management goal will be established by the director of ADWR after a public comment and a hearing. The director of ADWR is also required to adopt a management plan for each AMA. Each management plan is updated periodically and designed to assist the AMA in reaching or maintaining its management goal. Management plans for the five initial AMAs can be viewed on ADWR's website.

AMAs are also subject to assured water supply requirements for new subdivisions. Within an AMA, a developer of a proposed subdivision (six lots or more) must have a 100-year assured water supply in order to obtain plat approval and offer lots for sale. A developer may demonstrate an assured water supply by either (1) obtaining a commitment of water service from a water provider that has been designated by ADWR as having an assured water supply, or (2) obtaining a certificate of assured water supply from ADWR by demonstrating that the subdivision will have a 100-year assured water supply.

What Land May Be Irrigated In An AMA?

In a subsequent AMA, only acres of land that were legally irrigated at any time during the five years preceding the formal initiation of proceedings to establish the AMA may be irrigated with any water, except that acres of land that were not irrigated during the relevant five-year time period may be irrigated:

- With a surface water right, if established before the date of the formal initiation of the proceeding.
- With groundwater, if ADWR determines that substantial capital investment (SCI) has been made to bring the land into irrigation within a particular window of time.

Individuals and entities are required to apply for a certificate of grandfathered right no later than fifteen months after the designation of an AMA, per A.R.S. § 45-476.

Who Is Allowed To Withdraw Groundwater In An AMA?

Within an AMA, a person must have a right or permit to withdraw groundwater from a well having a pump with a maximum capacity greater than 35 gallons per minute (“non-exempt well”).

Generally, a person may withdraw groundwater for non-irrigation use from a well having a pump with a maximum pump capacity of 35 gallons per minute or less (“exempt well”) without a right or permit. However, there are some limitations on the use of exempt wells within AMAs, including:

- Only one exempt well may serve the same use at the same location.
- Withdrawals from an exempt well for a commercial purpose are limited to 10 acre-feet per year.

Are Groundwater Users Required To Meter And Report Groundwater Withdrawals?

Within AMAs, with a few narrow exceptions, persons withdrawing groundwater from non-exempt wells (wells having a maximum pump capacity greater than 35 gallons per minute) are required to measure their groundwater withdrawals with a measuring device and method that is approved by ADWR and must report the groundwater withdrawals to ADWR.

Persons withdrawing groundwater from exempt wells (wells having a pump with a maximum pump capacity of 35 gallons per minute or less that are used for non-irrigation use) are generally not required to measure and report groundwater withdrawals.

How Does Someone Obtain A Right Or Permit To Withdraw Groundwater In An AMA?

A right or permit is required to withdraw and use groundwater in an AMA. Depending on the history of use and the type of use, a water user may be eligible for a grandfathered right, a service area right, or a groundwater withdrawal permit.

Individuals and entities seeking to claim a grandfathered right (rights based on historic pumping) are required to apply for a certificate of grandfathered right no later than fifteen months after the designation of an AMA, per A.R.S. § 45-476.

The three types of grandfathered rights are:

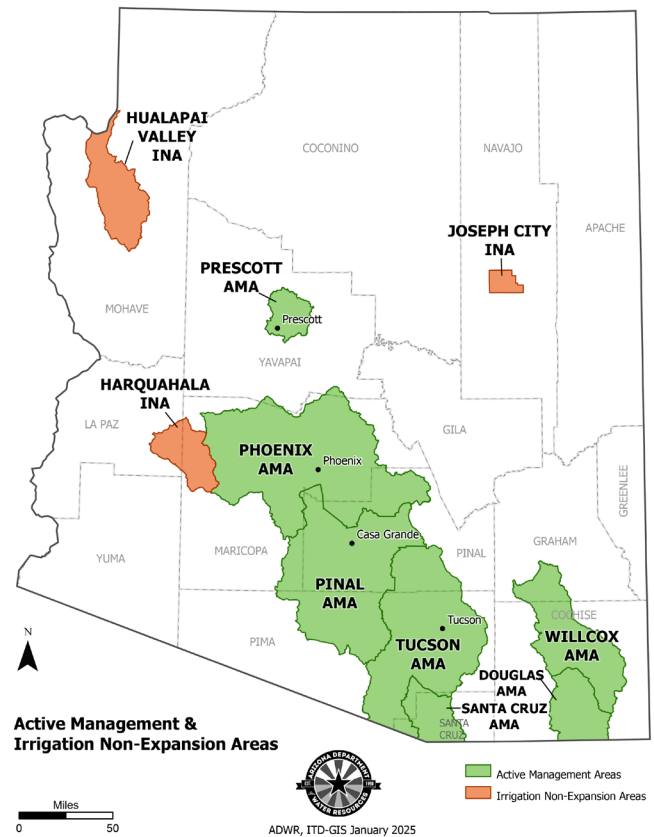
- Irrigation grandfathered rights, or IGFRs, allow the holder to irrigate acres of land that had been irrigated within the five-year period preceding the call for the election. Land without an IGFR may not be irrigated with groundwater. An IGFR may not be sold apart from the associated land.
- Type 1 non-irrigation grandfathered rights are associated with land permanently retired from farming and converted to a non-irrigation use (e.g., building a new industrial plant). Like an IGFR, this right may be conveyed only with the land. The maximum amount of groundwater that may be pumped each year using a Type 1 right is three acre-feet per acre, though it may be less.
- Type 2 non-irrigation grandfathered rights can only be used for non-irrigation purposes. The right is based on historical groundwater pumping for non-irrigation use and equals the maximum amount pumped in any year in the five-year period preceding the designation of the AMA. Examples of non-irrigation uses include industry, livestock watering, and golf courses. Type 2 rights are the most flexible because they may be sold separately from the land or well. In addition, the owner of a Type 2 right may, with ADWR approval, withdraw groundwater from a new location within the same AMA. It is possible to lease a portion of a Type 2 right, but if the right is sold, it cannot be divided; instead, the entire right must be sold.

Service area rights authorize cities, towns, private water companies, and irrigation districts to withdraw groundwater for delivery to customers within their service area for municipal and industrial uses.

Groundwater withdrawal permits allow pumping in specific circumstances, usually for non-irrigation uses, set forth in statute, for a limited period of time.

Examples include the following:

- Hydrologic testing permits
- Mineral extraction and metallurgical processing permits
- Poor-quality groundwater withdrawal permits
- Drainage and dewatering permits
- Temporary permits for electrical energy generation in emergency situations
- General industrial use permits



FOR MORE INFORMATION: azwater.gov/ama

Please Contact Us with any Questions at 602-771-8585 or via Email at Earp@Azwater.gov