Morning all,

I’ve been researching what other communities, when Safe Yield is reached (or exceeded), have responded. Many communities are decades ahead of the Valley’s current condition. It would be good to avoid some of their missteps.

First a definition- The Valley - this will include everyone using the aquifer, Moab City, Grand County, and San Juan County. We are all sucking out of the same straw.

Safe Yield means a balanced aquifer, the water in equals water out. Well water rights must be below recharge. In all the communities I’ve studied, a common problem is too many wells. As the Valley approaches Safe Yield there are steps, we can take now to lessen the impact later.

1) During the Division of Water Rights (DWR) well permit review (adjudication), the Valley should ask to be involved. Why? Many, if not all, well rights are under-utilized. Under state law, water rights are “use it or loss it”. For example- many well owners have 1 AF/Y for household use, but they are hooked to city water. Same with the 5 AF/Y to “irrigate one acre of alfalfa”. I don’t see many alfalfa fields in folk’s yards. The Division of Water Rights (DWR), in their current review, doesn’t appear to be reducing the right by the unused amount. This is what the Valley should check. Changing the “paper” rights to “wet water” rights is a big step toward Safe Yield.

Adjusting the well rights to current use is important to do two things: 1) get an accurate list of the actual, current water use in the Valley, 2) after the aquifer is closed, folks needing to drill a new well will buy an existing right from someone. If sellers can sell “paper rights vs wet water”, the new wells could increase the actual amount of water withdrawn from the aquifer.

I’m not sure how to do this. It would probably be good to have the city/county attorneys look at this. Probably good to look at the 2019 adjudication also.

2) New water right applications. The DWR is still accepting well applications. Even after the aquifer is closed, new wells can be drilled using existing rights. A property owner, with one acre, can apply for 6.33 AF/Y. 1 AF for household use, 5 AF for irrigation, and 0.33 AF to water ten animals.

The Valley should formally request that new well applications reflect the Valley’s water conservation policies and the usage goals (GPD/dwelling) for homes in 2030(?). New homes need to be built to meet these goals. Example- household use- in 2015 Moab’s average household use was 0.54 AF/Y.

New well applications for residential units should also conform to the land use regulations for outdoor watering and allowable numbers of livestock.

These are steps we can take now.

Steve