

## Southern Nevada Water Authority Youth Advisory Council

*Hilarie Hicks Robison – Southern Nevada Water Authority*

Looking for innovative solutions to water challenges? Do you need enthusiastic champions for environmental issues? In Las Vegas, high school students have played these roles and helped shape workable solutions to complex challenges associated with water resource issues.

In 1999, the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) formed a Youth Advisory Council (YAC) to help engage young people in critical water resource issues. Every year, SNWA invites local high school principals to appoint student representatives to serve on the council for a year. SNWA's education coordinator supports the council, composed of approximately 30 students, as they meet twice each month to learn about and take action on local and regional water issues.

SNWA provides orientation for new youth representatives through a series of educational tours, presentations, and discussions with experts. The students subsequently determine their own area of focus and the format their project

will take, which may range from rewriting policy, to developing outreach materials, to planning and implementing community projects. Recent topics included identifying long-term water resource solutions and developing water conservation strategies. YAC has tackled issues of nonpoint source pollution, water quality, even water taste. At the conclusion of their tenure on the council, the students present a report of their project and/or policy recommendations to SNWA's elected Board of Directors.

The 2003-2004 YAC developed a concept for a water-smart model home to help homeowners conserve water by identifying good choices for indoor appliances and fixtures, as well as outdoor landscaping. For this and other projects, the students cultivated partnerships with local businesses and professionals to fund and carry out their plans.



*The 2003 Youth Advisory Council.*

Through effective planning and facilitation of the YAC, the participants, sponsoring organization, and broader community all benefit. The students essentially become lay ambassadors for local water issues. They become stewards of the environment and feel empowered to make a difference.

SNWA evaluates both the processes and impacts of the YAC program. One finding of note is that participants' knowledge about water issues increases an average of 47 percent. The students convey their new learning and passion for water issues to friends, family, and teachers.

The resulting potential for helping to educate the public and to influence decision-making on water issues is difficult to measure, but nonetheless real. This influence increases as new members join the council each year and former students move into their adult careers.

On another level, YAC student projects and policy recommendations have both immediate and long-term impacts on local and regional water challenges. To date, student recommendations have been accepted and implemented in several areas. For example, major changes were made to SNWA's annual water conservation advertising campaign based on YAC input. YAC also attracted community attention to the need for water-efficient landscaping through their design and construction of a desert garden for public and school use. SNWA has asked young people to help direct Southern Nevada's water future, and they are accepting that responsibility with enthusiasm and vigor.

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Selected recent USGS hydrology publications from around the Southwest:

*Simulated effects of ground-water management scenarios on the Santa Fe Group aquifer system, Middle Rio Grande Basin, New Mexico, 2001-40*, by Laura M. Bexfield and Douglas P. McAda. <http://water.usgs.gov/pubs/wri/wri034040>

*Ground-water quality beneath irrigated agriculture in the Central High Plains Aquifer, 1999-2000*, by Breton W. Bruce, Mark F. Becker, Larry M. Pope, and Jason J. Gurdak. <http://water.usgs.gov/pubs/wri/wri034219>

*Application of tracer-injection techniques to demonstrate surface-water and ground-water interactions between an alpine stream and the North Star Mine, upper Animas River watershed, southwestern Colorado*, by Winfield G. Wright and Bryan Moore. <http://water.usgs.gov/pubs/wri/wri034172>

*Movement and age of ground water in the western part of the Mojave Desert, southern California, USA*, by John A. Izbicki and Robert L. Michel. <http://water.usgs.gov/pubs/wri/wri034314>

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