State water initiative celebrates a legacy of solutions in action

Gov. Katie Hobbs joined researchers, community partners and water leaders to mark 4 years of statewide collaboration and progress

By Marshall Terrill , ASU News
October 16, 2026

Story highlights

- In the last four years, the Arizona Water Innovation Initiative has made advances in mapping and understanding water use, recycling and reuse technologies, PFAS treatment solutions and more.
- The initiative has positioned the university and its partners to help Arizona meet the next 50 to 100 years of water challenges.
- While its formal program is ending, its centers, expertise, infrastructure and partnerships will continue through their own funding and programs.

Arizona's water future will be shaped not only by policies and infrastructure, but also by the people willing to bring science, technology and community knowledge together.

That was the message at Arizona State University's culminating celebration of the Arizona Water Innovation Initiative on Oct. 14 at ASU SkySong.

Gov. Katie Hobbs joined university leaders, researchers, students, state officials, industry representatives and community partners for "Celebrating Arizona Water Innovation: Solutions in Action," an event recognizing the statewide initiative's work since 2022.

“Today is both a celebration and a showcase,” said Dave White, professor and director of the Global Institute of Sustainability and Innovation within the Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory. “We are here to recognize solutions, partnerships, impact and momentum built through the Arizona Water Innovation Initiative.”

White added the state’s investment came with a clear expectation: Bring the full capacity of ASU together with communities, agencies, industry, agriculture, tribal partners, municipalities and water leaders to accelerate practical, evidence-based solutions.

“This is exactly what (the initiative) has done,” he said.

The Arizona Water Innovation Initiative was launched with a $40 million investment from the state of Arizona and is led by the Global Futures Laboratory in collaboration with the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering. It has drawn on ASU’s expertise in hydrology, engineering, policy, management and community engagement to advance water conservation, augmentation, desalination, efficiency, infrastructure and reuse.

Hobbs described that work as essential to the state’s economic and environmental future.

“Water fuels our state’s economic growth. It sustains our communities, it nourishes our crops and supports our one-of-a-kind environment,” Hobbs said. “Our state’s success absolutely depends on how we approach and respond to Arizona’s current water challenges.”

Why this research matters

Research is the invisible hand that powers America’s progress. It unlocks discoveries and creates opportunity. It develops new technologies and new ways of doing things.

Learn more about ASU discoveries that are contributing to changing the world and making America the world’s leading economic power at researchmatters.asu.edu.

Hobbs pointed to the initiative's advances in mapping and understanding water use, recycling and reuse technologies, PFAS treatment solutions and public-facing water-policy information. She said the initiative is helping transform Arizona into a global water innovation hub, where researchers and entrepreneurs can develop scalable, job-creating solutions.

“This investment will have long-lasting generational impact,” Hobbs said. More than 2,000 students have participated in inititave projects, she added, alongside more than 150 researchers and staff members, 75 professors and more than 25 state agencies.

Peter Schlosser, university vice president and director general of the Global Futures Laboratory, placed Arizona’s work in the context of a growing global water crisis. But he emphasized that research must ultimately become action.

“The challenge is now to translate that knowledge that we have accumulated into solutions that can make a measurable difference,” Schlosser said. “And that is where ... the Arizona Water Innovation Initiative comes in.”

In its first several years, the Arizona Water Innovation Initiative built a statewide network focused on water security while improving how Arizona measures and forecasts water availability, advancing treatment and reuse technologies, and strengthening the evidence used in water policy and management. In 2025 alone, Schlosser said, the initiative launched six technology test beds, advanced six patents, supported 10 startup companies and trained nearly 300 water professionals.

Sally Morton, executive vice president of ASU Knowledge Enterprise and the university's chief research and innovation officer, said the initiative illustrates what a public research university can accomplish when it works in partnership with the people most affected by complex challenges.

"At ASU, we believe research must do more than deepen our understanding of complex problems," Morton said. "It must help people make better decisions, strengthen communities and create practical solutions."

The initiative connected researchers with state agencies, tribal communities, municipalities, industry, agriculture and water leaders across Arizona. That collaboration has helped strengthen groundwater resilience, develop planning tools and create durable capacity that will continue after the current grant concludes, Morton said.

While the initiative's formal program is ending, its centers, expertise, infrastructure and partnerships will continue through their own funding and programs.

For Ed Curry, a fourth-generation southern Arizona farmer, founder of Curry Seed & Chile Co. and member of the Governor's Water Policy Council, the initiative's impact is most visible in rural communities grappling with difficult, emotional water decisions.

"ASU is a beautiful partner for what we're doing," Curry said. "You guys give us heart."

Curry credited the initiative with helping bring people together across disagreements about groundwater and growth. He particularly highlighted the work of Susan Craig and her team in communities where residents, farmers, local leaders and newcomers have had to confront water concerns together.

Craig, director of Impact Water – Arizona, said the initiative's rural engagement work has built relationships and helped communities gain the information and agency needed to participate in decisions about their water futures. Her team worked in six groundwater basins across the state, supporting locally shaped solutions and alliances.

"The relationships that we've built are going to be lasting relationships," Craig said. "They're going to be a foundation for years to come, way beyond the funding of this initiative."

That foundation is already visible in projects and resources across the state. AWII partners have supported rural groundwater resilience workshops and a peer-to-peer Rural Groundwater Resilience Exchange; released research on capturing precipitation, runoff and urban stormwater to replenish aquifers; and developed the AZ Water Blueprint's "About My Water" app, which brings public water-provider, groundwater and water-source data together in one place.

Work with rural Arizona

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Following the remarks, Hobbs toured the activations and displays set up next door, stopping to hear quick presentations from ASU professors and staff members involved in the initiative. The demonstrations brought the initiative's work into view, from data-driven decision tools and water technology to community partnerships and policy innovation.

Sarah Porter, director of ASU's Kyl Center for Water Policy, said the initiative's greatest contribution may be the way it united people who might not otherwise have worked side by side.

"The Arizona Water Innovation Initiative is super important for me personally because it has opened the door to working with all these creative, smart, problem-solving people at ASU that I wouldn't have been thrown together with otherwise," she said.

The initiative, Porter said, has positioned the university and its partners to help Arizona meet the next 50 to 100 years of water challenges with the collaboration, knowledge and resolve that the moment demands.

"We are at an inflection point on water in Arizona, and ASU needs to be providing solutions."

Read more about the initiative's work

ASU works with industry to unlock next generation of water savings

Growing Arizona's next generation of water leaders

ASU-led study sharpens Colorado River forecasts as Arizona faces deepening water cuts

ASU partnership helps ADOT optimize water use across urban freeways

ASU, SRP project takes flight to improve water supply forecasting

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This story originally appeared on ASU News.

Main image



Regents Professor Paul Westerhoff (far left) speaks about the Global Center for Water Technology to Dave White (center), director of the Global Institute of Sustainability and Innovation, Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs (third from right), southern Arizona farmer and founder of Curry Seed & Chile Co. Ed Curry (second from right) and the governor's senior water advisor Patrick Adams (far right) at the Arizona Water Innovation Initiative on Wednesday, Oct. 14, at SkySong in Scottsdale. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

Text image(s)



Dave White, director of the Global Institute of Sustainability and Innovation, serves as emcee at the Arizona Water Innovation Initiative on Wednesday, Oct. 14, at SkySong in Scottsdale. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News



Peter Schlosser, director general of the Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory, speaks about work toward solutions to the state’s water issues at the Arizona Water Innovation Initiative. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News



Sally Morton, ASU's chief research and innovation officer, speaks at the Oct. 14 Arizona Water Innovation Initiative culminating celebration. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News



Southern Arizona farmer and founder of Curry Seed & Chile Co. Ed Curry speaks at the Arizona Water Innovation Initiative. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News