

AZ

Arizona Project WET Payson Water Festival Impact Report



2025-2026

*Developing Water Stewards Through
Student-centered Instruction and
Arizona-specific Content*



Cooperative Extension



ARIZONA
project WET
WATER EDUCATION TODAY



Contents

APW Statewide Program Summary	02
Arizona Water Festivals	03
Water Festivals Make A Splash.	04
Water Festivals Flow Into the Classroom	05
Sponsors & Partners	06
Your Impact	07
Results You Can See.	08
Educator Enrichment	09
Volunteer Victories	10
Extension of Gratitude	11
Back cover	12

"Yes, the students really enjoyed the Arizona Water Festival and found it both fun and educational. They especially liked the hands-on activities, with many saying they learned new things about where water comes from and why it's important to conserve it. Some shared that the event made them more interested in science and more aware of how water is used in daily life. Overall, it was a memorable and impactful experience for them."
- Participating Teacher

Arizona Project WET

Impact on Water Stewardship

Arizona Project WET's Mission

It is imperative that Arizonans understand the interconnectedness of water resources from a local, regional, and global perspective. Arizona Project WET (APW) brings to the surface water-use practices that affect availability, dependability, access, and sustainability. APW program objectives, centered in the unifying theme of water, engage teachers and students while bringing real-world relevancy to science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM) learning. APW supports water stewardship and STEAM literacy by authentically and meaningfully engaging educators, students, and community members. Arizona Project WET's mission is to meet the needs of our community by using relevant, research-based educational strategies and techniques in helping people develop knowledge and skills that equip them to act for water stewardship.



"Feel something. Learn something. Do something."
- Lisa Townsend, AZ Project WET Director

"I learned that here in Arizona, we live in a watershed and that water is really important. I also learned that runoff is when water goes to the ground and we can get that groundwater, which is really important for wells."

-Participating Student

"The games made it easy to understand why saving water matters."

-Participating Student

Community Water Stewardship

For nearly three decades, APW educates, engages, and connects community members (students, educators, administrators, residents, businesses, and municipal stakeholders) through educational outreach to raise awareness of current and future challenges to Arizona's water resources and sustainable solutions to help mitigate them.

The APW team delivers water-focused programming with exceptional skill: meaningfully connecting content to participant and participant to action.

APW's programming supports creative problem-solving across the K-12 continuum, diving into real-world learning scenarios. The flow of information also relates STEAM-based content to areas of study and the many careers "in water". Finally, APW programs empower educators to implement practices that highlight and model sustainable water use.

Arizona Water Festivals

SINCE 2000

213,990
STUDENTS

8,204
TEACHERS

13,660
VOLUNTEERS

Water Festival Station Layout On Day of Event

4th Grade Water Festival

2 to 4 rows of tents (dependent on festival size)
will be set up in groups of 4 by color area



How Water Festivals Work

Arizona Water Festivals instill a deeper understanding of water in the earth systems and Arizona's water resources. At the festival, students and teachers visit four learning stations led by trained volunteers, focusing on watersheds, groundwater, water sustainability, and the water cycle.

Water Cycle – students track the movement of water molecules through the Arizona landscape reflecting its changing states of matter. The form and function of water varies depending on the molecules' position in the cycle. Students (and adults) reflect on how they fit into the closed circuit and the implications of human impact.

Groundwater – students manipulate groundwater models to interpret the connection between groundwater recharge and discharge. Precipitation flowing through the watershed percolates into the ground, while groundwater well-pumped for surface use (agriculture, mining, manufacturing, utility, etc.) affects the levels of surface water. Students reflect on how they might use/misuse groundwater.

Watershed – students gather insights into the features of a watershed, exchanges between the elements, and the effects of human impact. Water flowing through our resident watershed(s) supports all life in the region. Students reflect on how their behaviors may help or hinder watershed health and heat exchange.

Water Sustainability – students synthesize their water cycle, groundwater, and watershed learning, by connecting opportunities to implement sustainable practices through household water technology and behavioral choices, fostering mindful water conservation action.

Water Festivals Make a Splash

**IN 2025-26, ACROSS ARIZONA,
WATER FESTIVALS BROUGHT TOGETHER:**

16,703
STUDENTS

668
TEACHERS

226
SCHOOLS

1,280
VOLUNTEERS



Water festivals foster a deeper understanding of water systems and sustainability while receiving positive feedback for their hands-on educational fun and community impact.



AWF's success is only possible due to the support of community sponsors and partnerships, who contribute resources and funding so that this program can reach over 35 communities across the state.



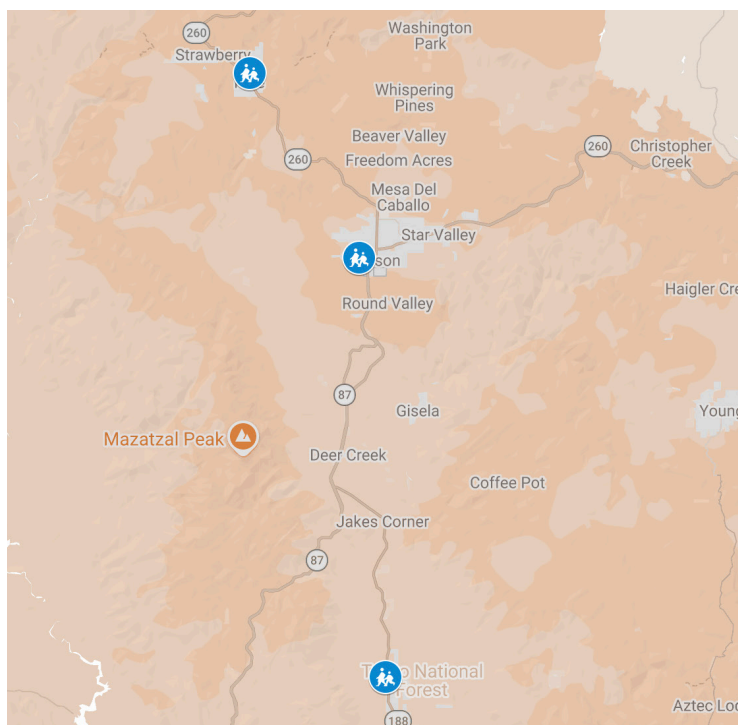
APW looks forward to continuing this success in the 2026-2027 school year with nearly three dozen projected festivals, enhancing water stewardship across Arizona!

Water Festivals Flow Into the Classroom

The Payson Water Festival Brings the Community Together

Summary:

During the Arizona Project WET – Water Festival Unit of Study, 4th grade students explore the Arizona water cycle, map our regional watersheds, unearth the connection between groundwater and surface water, and learn how their behaviors impact water availability in Arizona. Students use this knowledge to develop accessible, community-focused solutions that simultaneously conserve water and promote sustainable decision-making. The guiding questions for this unit are, 1. Where is Arizona's water? and 2. What are the connections between people, water, and heat in the environment?



By the end of this Unit of Study students will:

- **Track** the movement of water molecules through the Arizona water cycle
- **Demonstrate** understanding of how water moves through a watershed and the human impact of changes to that natural system; city surfaces affect the movement of water, and those changes can be **observed/measured**.
- **Model** aquifer recharge and discharge connecting water availability to human behavior
- **Act** as environmental stewards, conserving water through both behaviors and available technologies, supporting resilient solutions that benefit our bio-diverse community.

Sponsors & Partners

Thank You to Our Dedicated Sponsors!



“Thank you so much for providing this festival for our 4th grade students. It is important for them to experience activities that relate to our content by doing hands-on projects. Thank you so much for allowing my class to attend free of charge. It has and will continue to impact our lives!” - Participating Teacher



**PAYSON UNIFIED
SCHOOL DISTRICT**

“The Water Festival has a positive educational and environmental impact, especially in a drought-prone state like Arizona. It helps students understand why water conservation is critical for their community's future.” - Participating Teacher



YOUR IMPACT

Payson Water Festival



16 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP!

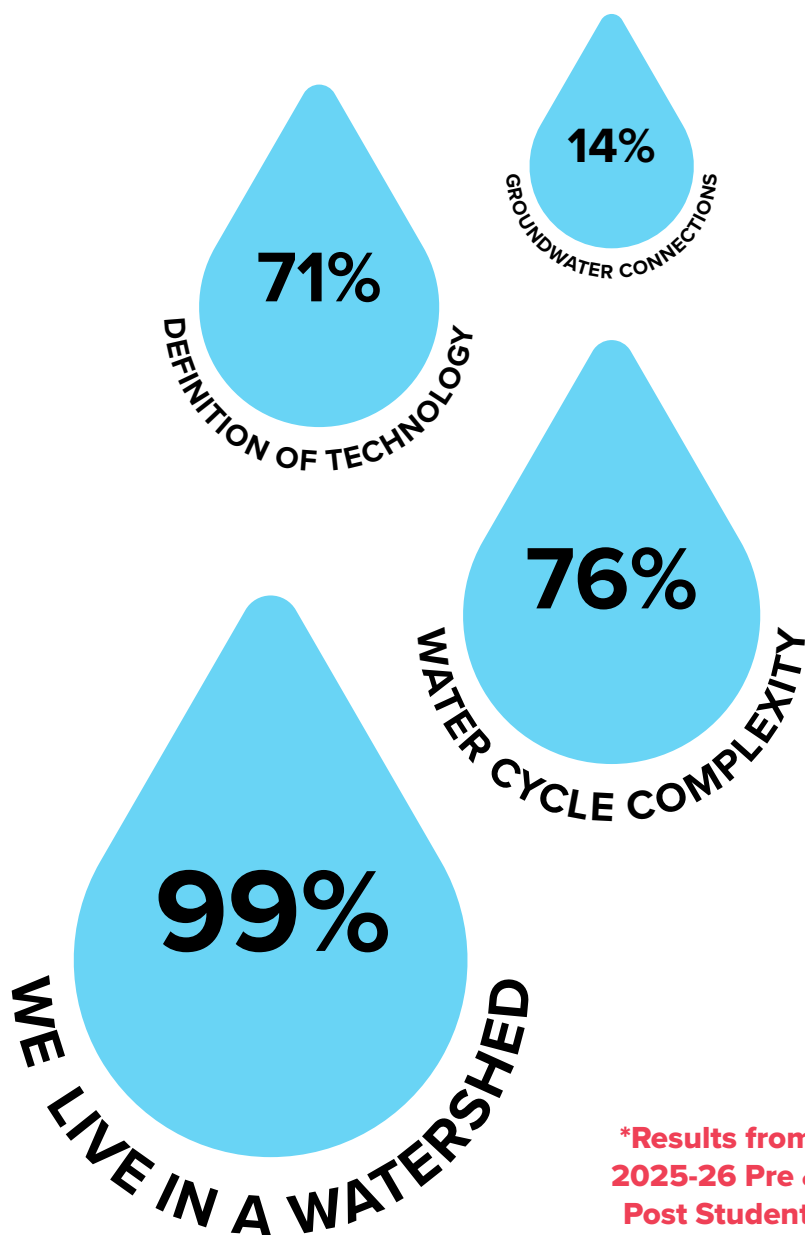
The 16th Annual Payson Water Festival, held on September 25th, 2025, was a resounding success, highlighting the importance of water sustainability in Arizona.

176	8
STUDENTS	TEACHERS
20	3
VOLUNTEERS	SCHOOLS

This event was a collaborative effort between Arizona Project WET, Tonto Basin Elementary School, Pine Strawberry School District, Payson Unified School District, The Abbott Fund and the Town of Payson. It engaged 176 students and 8 teachers from 3 schools with the help of 20 community volunteers.

Overall, the festival strengthened community commitment to water conservation, setting a foundation for ongoing collaboration and future successes.

*Average Increase in Student Understanding:



***Results from 2025-26 Pre & Post Student Survey**

Results You Can See



"The Water Festival has a positive educational and environmental impact, especially in a drought-prone state like Arizona. It helps students understand why water conservation is critical for their community's future." - Participating Teacher

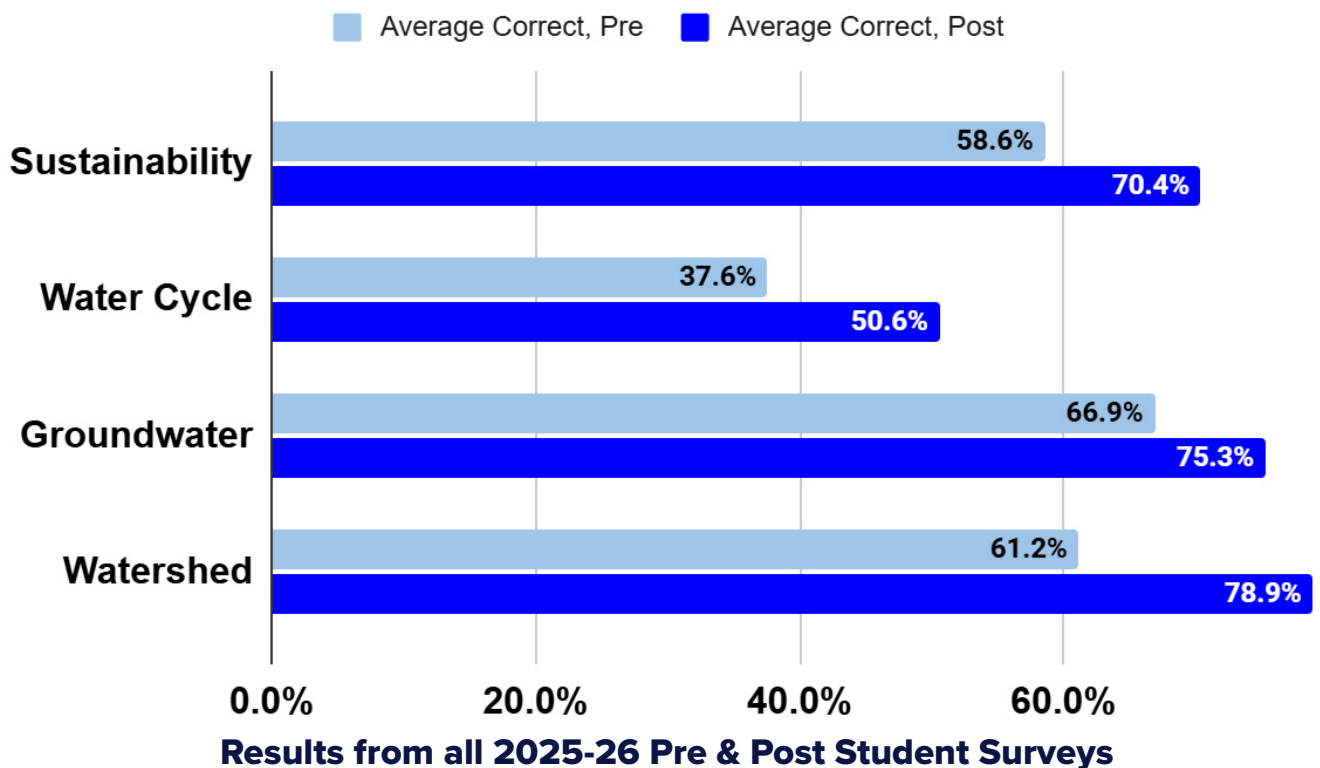
"The water festival was a great learning experience for students. It helped them understand the importance of water conservation and how we can use water wisely in our daily lives. The activities made learning fun and meaningful." - Participating Teacher



MAKING WAVES

Teachers were asked to have students take a pre and post festival survey as part of the water festival program. The graph below displays the difference between the average correct answers before the unit of study and festival event, versus the average correct answers after the unit of study was completed.

Statewide Water Festival Program Efficacy



EDUCATOR ENRICHMENT

Teacher Trainings

The water festival unit of study kicks off with the teacher professional development workshop, which all teachers new to the program attend. During this workshop, APW instructors connect teachers with tangible reference points and supporting resources in physical science, engineering, and environmental science through exploration, inquiry, and technology.

Educators receive:

- Examples of how to lead activities and lessons
- Relevant background knowledge and content
- The Project WET Water Festival Curriculum and other resources

These materials are designed to enhance and extend student learning before and after the festival.

Results from 2025-26 Teacher Survey

Statement	Agree Strongly/ Agree
The Water Festival Program is very valuable/valuable in terms of student learning.	100%
My students are more likely to engage in water conserving habits as a result of participating in the Water Festival program.	100%
My students can describe what a watershed is and identify parts of a watershed.	100%
My students can model what groundwater looks like and how it moves.	100%
My students can identify the places that water can go within the water cycle.	100%
My students can identify multiple ways to conserve and protect water in their everyday lives.	100%

"We can teach students to care about saving water, turning what they learn into a lifelong habit of protecting the environment."

-Participating Teacher



"I enjoyed the variety of activities available to the students. I also like that community members and high school students lead the activities."

-Participating Teacher

VOLUNTEER VICTORIES

Volunteers are the cornerstone of the program. At a Water Festival event, volunteers trained by APW contribute to their community and celebrate science and water stewardship by guiding hands-on learning activities that activate deeper understanding of key water ideas in Arizona fourth-graders. We are so grateful to our diverse pool of volunteers, from high school students and Master Gardeners to corporate and municipality employees who show up to share their unique water knowledge and introduce students to the many ways to be a water steward. With a minimum need of 36 volunteers per each full festival, it is truly this support that allows APW to reach so many students across the state.

Results from 2025-26 Volunteer Survey

Statement	Agree Strongly/ Agree
After participation in this program, children will better understand Arizona's interconnected water resources.	100%
After participation in this program, children are more aware of how their water use decisions affect our water supply.	100%
After participation in the program, volunteers and other adults are more aware of water science and how their decisions affect our water supply.	100%
I believe the Water Festival program is important for student learning.	100%
I believe Arizona Water Festivals have a positive impact on the community.	100%

"The Arizona Water Festival Program is a fantastic way to teach students about water conservation and its importance to our community. Volunteering was rewarding because it allowed me to engage with students and help inspire lifelong water-saving habits."

- Participating Volunteer

2025-2026
1,280
VOLUNTEERS

"I truly believe the Arizona Water Festival Program is one of the most important festivals for the state of Arizona as a whole because we live in the desert. Water conservation is a big deal with our growing communities statewide, and I'm glad to be a part of bringing awareness and knowledge to our growing children and future of how we are all interconnected through water."

- Participating Volunteer





Thank you!

The 2025-2026 Arizona Water Festival season was an outstanding success! Throughout the festival season, Arizona Project WET, with the help of numerous sponsors and partners, organized 34 water festivals, engaging 16,703 students, 668 teachers, 226 schools, and 1,280 volunteers through interactive water conservation education.

As we look ahead to the 2026-2027 school year, we are excited to announce two new water festivals as we continue to expand our reach across Arizona!

We sincerely thank you for your ongoing support and assistance, which make this meaningful and important work possible.

Our programs are made possible through the generous support of sponsors, municipalities, and dedicated community members who collaborate to increase water stewardship across Arizona. We deeply appreciate your commitment to APW's programming!

AZ



Arizona Project WET AWF Impact Report

Contact your Outreach Coordinator

Name: Michael Spaeth

Email: mkspaeth@arizona.edu



Cooperative Extension



ARIZONA
project WET
WATER EDUCATION TODAY