



**ARIZONA ALLIANCE
FOR GOLF**

Mr. Abe Kwok
Editorial Page, Arizona Republic

Dear Mr. Kwok,

What a disappointment. The story “Arizona golf courses use way more water than they’re supposed to. Nothing is stopping them” by Balint Fabok published July 28th could have been an opportunity for an insightful and important discussion of water use by one of the state’s leading industries. Unfortunately, it was not. Rather, it reads as a biased commentary that lacks understanding of significant current industry and water conservation practices and uses incomplete data to reach half-truths and mischaracterizations.

The assertion Arizona golf courses “use way more water than they are supposed to,” is simply unfair and untrue. Our industry uses just 1.3% of Arizona’s CAP water. We make significant contributions to the state and courses strive to use our water allotment as efficiently as possible each year. The Arizona Department of Water Resources offers an excellent interactive dashboard of water use. A quick look at its charts shows (while a few courses may sometimes exceed their individual allotment) the industry as a whole has consistently used less water than the conservation allotments.

The article also states total water usage by all golf courses in Arizona has not significantly changed between 2002 and 2020. By itself this statement is accurate. However as presented, it is grossly misleading. The total number of golf courses in the state increased considerably between 2002 and 2020. Leaving out this critical context biases any discussion of total water-use. A per capita analysis of water use over time would have been more enlightening to your readers.

Besides, such assertions just don’t make sense. Water is expensive. Depending upon the size of the operation, water is either the biggest or second biggest expense to any golf course in Arizona. Not only that, but overwatering a golf course creates substantial problems, ranging from poor playing conditions to turf disease. All are costly and time consuming to remedy. There are zero incentives for golf courses to waste water and substantial benefits to using water as efficiently as possible. In fact, many courses are reducing turf annually, and 30 courses have recently taken advantage of a state-sponsored incentive program to reduce turf at their facilities to continue saving water.

We are willing to chalk these oversights up to Mr. Fabok's inexperience and his unfamiliarity with the subject matter. After all, he is, in his own words, "not an expert." Mr. Fabok didn't share in his article he had been asked to speak with some courses and was also invited to join a local podcast hosted by Arizona golf course superintendents to discuss water use in the state. The hosts had hoped to have an in-depth discussion with Mr. Fabok and provide comprehensive answers to his questions. Instead, Mr. Fabok declined the invitation, stating he is "not an expert" and that he already had determined the focus of his story. His reluctance to be on a podcast is understood if he was not wanting to air his conclusions prior to completing his story. However, how could he not have used the opportunity to at least ask his questions offline on this complicated issue with actual experts? Instead, he purposely avoided an opportunity to be educated and then led the reader to conclude the entire industry was unwilling to communicate with him. If he is not expert enough to discuss the topic, how is it exactly that he is qualified to write about it?

Another gross mischaracterization is the insistence Arizona's golf industry is unwilling to pull its weight in the state's water conservation efforts. Nothing could be further from the truth. For some perspective, ADWR allocates water resources using 10-year management plans. The Third Management Plan went into effect January 2000. The Fourth Management Plan was to go into effect in January 2010. However, that plan was not finalized until recently. Currently the Phoenix Active Management Area is still operating under the Third Management Plan. The Fourth will go into effect this coming January 2023. It will reduce the golf industry's water allotment by 2.7%. To help the state catch up, the Fifth Management Plan will be enacted in January 2025. It will reduce the golf industry's water allotment by an additional 1.3%. In total the golf industry's water allotment will be reduced by 4% over the course of two years.

The author also chides Scottsdale National Golf Club for appearing to exceed its allotment. He was using Scottsdale National's allotment number for the club's water allotment prior to 2016 when it operated only one 18-hole golf course. Since 2016, the club has opened 27 more holes. The fact it now uses "more than twice as much water" than it did in 2016 should come as no surprise. This same circumstance occurred at least one other time we know about.

It also is not accurate to say neither the Arizona Alliance for Golf (AAG) nor the Arizona Golf Association replied to the author's emails. The AAG sent him a statement and directed him to our website. The website has all the information he sought, information the author blithely discounted, as if \$4.6 billion in economic impact to the state and 51,000 jobs aren't worth considering. The article acknowledged the golf industry uses just 2% of the state's water but then the author wrote of golf's economic contribution, "though \$4.6 billion is a lot of money, it represented just 1.2% of the state's economy in 2019." By comparison, the agriculture industry uses 70% of the state's water and contributes roughly 6% to its

economy. Is agriculture an unworthy industry in The Arizona Republic's eyes as well? Is it not worth considering almost 10% of the state's population participates in golf, the millions of dollars in charitable contributions, the millions of tourists, or the hundreds of thousands of underprivileged kids being taught life lessons?

This article is better suited as an opinion piece. The Arizona Republic should have pursued a more complete data set, understood the evolution of ADWR management plans, and should have engaged, rather than avoided, industry experts to provide the reader accurate and balanced reporting.

Our industry provides Arizona considerable contributions to jobs, tourism, hotel occupancy and restaurant sales, enhances property taxes and sales taxes and offers significant social outreach programs. Up to 10%, and perhaps more, of Arizona residents play golf for their recreational, social and lifestyle needs. Golf deserves a deeper understanding of our positive impacts before any one writer falsely predetermines we aren't appropriate stewards.

Sincerely,

The Arizona Alliance for Golf
Arizona Golf Association
Visit Phoenix
Southwest Section PGA of America
Cactus & Pine Superintendents Association
National Golf Course Owners Association, Arizona Chapter
Greater Southwest Chapter, Club Management Association of America
Junior Golf Association of Arizona
First Tee of Phoenix
The Thunderbirds