

Water Services Employee Newsletter Winter 2025

From Sarah M. Jablon <sarah.jablon@flagstaffaz.gov>

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To Water Services DG - All <WaterServicesDG-All@flagstaffaz.gov>; Water Services DG - Management <WaterServicesDG-Management@flagstaffaz.gov>; Water Services DG - Admin <WaterServicesDG-Admin@flagstaffaz.gov>

Cc Shannon Anderson <SAnderson@flagstaffaz.gov>; Mayor and Council <council@flagstaffaz.gov>



Welcome to the Employee Newsletter!

Each quarter, we'll be sharing a newsletter to highlight important events, reminders, and help us connect to each other in the Water Services Division!

If you have ideas, questions, or would like to share anything in an upcoming newsletter, please email sarah.jablon@flagstaffaz.gov.

Manager Insights - Lee Williams, Acting Director

In this section, we highlight experiences, wisdom, and strategies from managers that inform their current leadership role. In this edition, we feature Acting Water Services Director Lee Williams.

How long have you been working in Water Services? What was your trajectory with the City?

I was hired in April of 2012. I had recently moved back to Flagstaff, and I was looking for full-time employment that was relevant to my job experience in chemistry, construction and education.

When a position opened up on the maintenance crew, I applied with the thought that I could expand my skillset and learn how the plant and well fields run, not just how to run them. Then in 2017, the Operation Supervisor position opened up and I jumped at it. That turned into quite the crash course in running a treatment plant, since the manager quit shortly after I was hired and we had to figure it out on our own.



What skills or knowledge have you relied on most in your career?

There are tons of unique skills in running and maintaining a treatment plant. I was fortunate to be hired by Steve Flood (now retired). He took the time to not only teach the needed skills, but to also teach how they applied to the bigger picture. He said, “This is the City water. People give it to their kids. How do your actions affect the security of the system?” That stuck with me, and I still use it to judge my decisions.

But really, the knowledge will come with daily operations. Every time you solve a problem, you gain that experience in your tool belt. I just try to keep an open mind. Smart people and solutions seem to present themselves when I remain curious and open minded.

What new challenges have you faced as Facilities Director/Interim Director?

The budget has been a challenge. At the plant, we were more concerned with the day-to-day, month-to-month, year-to-year. I’m now on a team that is looking (much) further out to ensure that the City has water and water treatment capacity for many years to come.

You used to be a schoolteacher, right? Have you noticed any transferrable skills to what you're doing now?

I have. I taught elementary grades in public schools for six years and there have been many transferrable skills. I’ve used what’s called scaffolding for training new employees. Many people, adults and kids alike, don’t like it when you throw a ton of information at them all at once. Take the time to see where they’re at and start building from there. Teaching also taught me that everyone has a unique skillset. Someone may not be great at [fill in the blank], but they didn’t grow up in a vacuum. They will likely have a way of looking at a problem from an angle that I didn’t consider.

Name one person who was influential to you in your life, education, or career. How did they impact you?

In addition to Steve Flood, there have been many. Ladd Steele taught me troubleshooting and how to fix just about anything, with the mindset that sometimes, you just push have to harder. Whether it's a sticky bolt, or a difference in opinions, take the time to do what's right. He also introduced me to the Public Works division, which has been instrumental in understanding how Water Services fits into the larger picture of City services.

Program Feature - Non-revenue Water

In this section, we talk about the programs run by different sections in Water Services. The Non-revenue Water Audit Program is run by Tamara Lawless in the Water Resources and Conservation Section.

The Flagstaff Water Resources and Conservation section has received a lot of acclaim lately for their award-winning conservation program. But there are many hats worn by the Resources and Conservation team, and for Conservation Program Manager Tamara Lawless, that includes running the city's grant-funded non-revenue water audit program.

The purpose of a non-revenue water audit program is to track and categorize all water in the system that is treated but not sold. Tamara puts it in simplified terms: "Imagine you have 100 gallons of water that is treated and put into the water pipes, but only 95 gallons gets paid for. What happens to those last 5 gallons? Some of it could be lost due to leaks, some of it might be due to errors with water meters, some of it could be theft—say, someone hooks up their RV to a fire hydrant."

Following a framework developed by the American Water Works Association, the Water Conservation team works to identify and then reduce those losses to a minimum.



Photos: Tamara Lawless (not pictured), Brian Huntzinger, and employees from contractor Cavanaugh went around the city, testing water production meters for accuracy.

Collecting and measuring data

Tamara is often accompanied by Water Production Manager Brian Huntzinger, as well as a contractor, to track water loss. This includes a number of variables, such as measuring how much water is in our clear wells (tanks affiliated with each well) over a period of time.

As Tamara explains, "Keeping track of the clear wells helps us ensure that our production meters are accurate. By comparing the volume that was physically measured (using the geometry of the tank) against the volume that the meter registered, we can assess accuracy over time. We will repeat these tests routinely to get a clearer picture of how the meters are performing."

Brian puts it another way: "To figure out water loss, you have to have confidence in your meters. Testing them gives us that confidence."

Like Sherlock Holmes, sometimes it takes a detective

Figuring out where the system is losing water is a bit like detective work, with plenty of mysteries to solve. Tamara points to a recent discovery, which came from a deeper dive into customer use trends.

"Sometimes," Tamara says, "we see sudden spikes or drops in water consumption and have to verify whether or not they are true to real life use. In one case, a meter at an apartment complex showed a large drop in consumption. Through investigation, we learned that one building was being renovated."

"In another case, a landscape meter showed no consumption over time, followed by a very large spike. It turned out the device that sends data to our billing system failed, and it had stopped sending the consumption properly. So, that large spike was actually many months of consumption combined."

System Input Volume	Authorized Consumption	Billed Authorized Consumption	Billed Metered Consumption (including water exported)	Revenue Water
			Billed Unmetered Consumption	
		Unbilled Authorized Consumption	Unbilled Metered Consumption	Non-Revenue Water (NRW)
			Unbilled Unmetered Consumption	
	Water Losses	Apparent Losses	Unauthorized Consumption	
			Customer Metering Inaccuracies	
			Systematic Data Handling Errors	
		Real Losses	Leakage on Transmission and Distribution Mains	
			Leakage and Overflows at Utility's Storage Tanks	
			Leakage on Service Connections up to point of Customer metering	

Pictured: A chart showing how water in the system is categorized as non-revenue water.

Next steps for the program

Right now, Tamara's team is working on creating an overall average of non-revenue water losses. To this end, Tamara exports Water Services billing data to try to come up with a standard value which will be used to estimate what non-revenue water is costing the utility.

"This can be tricky to calculate," Tamara says, " because different customer classes pay different amounts per 1,000 gallons of water."

Employee Spotlight - Andrea Armstrong

In this section, we highlight employees in the division. Get to know your coworkers! This edition's spotlight is Administrative Specialist Andrea Armstrong.

How long have you been working for Water Services and/or the City of Flagstaff?

Since October 28, 2024.

Where were you working before you joined the city?

I was at ADOT! I worked out of the admin building (Northcentral District) on Woodlands. I also worked in the entertainment department at Disneyland from 1992 to 1995, but my work there is top secret!

What drew you to Flagstaff?

I moved for family, to be closer to my in-laws.

What is your favorite hobby, activity, or creative outlet?

Dancing, Running, and working on puzzles.



Name one person who was influential to you in your life, education, or career. How did they impact you?

Actually, nobody comes to mind. I have always been independent, and took care of myself, my siblings growing up, and my son. I've always had to fend for myself in life, school, and work. I am a social person, so I have met many people throughout my life that haven't given me advice and mentored me. But no one specific that was influential to me.

What's the best food/drink spot in Flagstaff? What are you ordering?

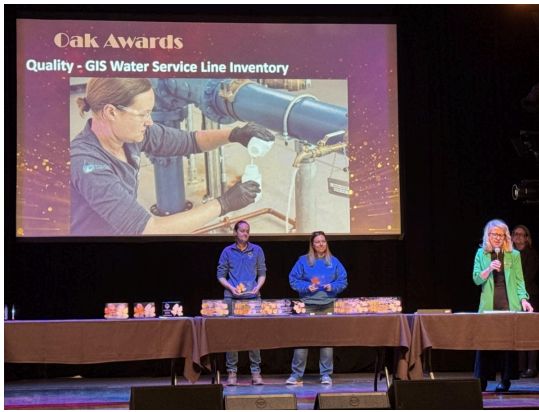
Mama B's - Mama Burger, sweet potato fries, and an orange creme shake!

Tell us about the yearly race you participate in. How many times have you done it?

It is called Hell of Half Marathon. It's held in Exeter, CA on the 1st Saturday of August. I started doing this race in 2019, and running in the heat is so exciting. It is actually a fun race because it is small, less than 1,000 runners. It is in a small farm town in Northern California, with tons of course support along the way and the aid stations are fantastic. I even met Forrest Gump!

City Manager's Awards Recognizes Water Services

Congratulations to the employees and teams who were awarded in this year's City Manager's Awards!



Oak Award for Quality

Regulatory Compliance Supervisor Krista Snow and IS Administrator Corryn Smith received an Oak Award for Quality for their work on the GIS Water Service Line Inventory, as mandated by the EPA's 2021 Lead and Copper Rule Revisions. The team recruited AmeriCorps interns to inventory more than 60 percent of the city's 22,000 water service lines, ensuring compliance with the new regulations.

Oak Award for Leadership

The Wastewater Dehumidifier Installation at Wildcat Hill earned the Oak Award for Leadership. Many people in Water Services, including Wastewater Treatment Manager Troy Dagenhart, Wildcat Hill Supervisor Cory Mueller, and other Wildcat Hill employees were involved in this successful pilot project, which if installed at the Rio WRP would address solids handling nearing capacity at both water reclamation facilities.



Aspen Award for Teamwork

Engineering Section Director Mac McNamara, Stormwater Section Director Ed Schenk, and Senior Project Manager Chase McLeod were part of a team awarded for their work on the Schultz Creek Suite of Projects, which were substantially completed by the construction of the culvert at Highway 180. The efforts significantly reduced the flood risk of the Stevanna and Coconino Estates neighborhoods, earning the team a coveted Aspen Award.

New Employees and Work Anniversaries

Help us welcome to the team the following employees who joined in Winter 2024-25:

John Hickey, Utility Locator
Jennifer Davis, Water Conservation Enforcement Aide
Alexander Watkins, Water Services Operator Trainee
Daelen Ritts, Water Services Operator
Jeffrey Vincent, Water Conservation Enforcement Aide
Christopher Soto, Water Services Operator Trainee
Tairi Shabala-Wagner, Water Services Operator

And congratulations on the following Work Anniversaries:

December:

Joe Almandarez, 29 years
Troy Dagenhart, 24 years
Josh Walter, 1 year
Michael Gouhin, 1 year

January:

Patrick O'Connor, 25 years
Adam Nelson, 20 years
Mac McNamara, 10 years
Monique Belanger, 3 years
Robert Achten, 1 year
Josh Guy, 1 year

February:

Justin Emerick, 18 years
Jackson Salazar, 6 years
Brandon Prieto, 2 years

Upcoming Training Opportunity

*Please check with your supervisor if you'd like to attend the following free training event.
Lunch will be provided.*

Lunch and Learn - Rio Atrium - Pollution Prevention Permit Training

Tuesday, Mar. 18 from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Want to know why we do some of the things we do in wastewater or reclaimed water? Permits with ADEQ/EPA direct our operations, maintenance, and reporting. This presentation will cover the Pollution Discharge Elimination System (AZPDES) and Aquifer Pollution Prevention (APP) permits for wastewater and reclaimed water.

One Professional Development Hour (PDH) will be awarded for attendance. Certificates will be delivered by email after the training.

Walk-In Wednesdays - Recruitment Events

*Please check with your supervisor if you'd like to attend any of the following free tour events.
These events are open to the public as well as Water Services employees.*

WALK-IN WEDNESDAYS

Explore Career Opportunities with the City of Flagstaff!

DRINKING WATER

Wednesday, March 5th

Lake Mary Water Treatment Plant
4500 Lake Mary Rd
Flagstaff, AZ 86005

10-11am

FREE Behind-the-Scenes Tour

11am-12pm

Meet & Greet with Hiring Team

Roles: Water Distribution Operators, Wastewater Plant Operators & more!

WASTEWATER

Wednesday, March 19th

Rio de Flag Water Reclamation Plant
600 S Babbitt Dr
Flagstaff, AZ 86001

12-1pm

FREE Behind-the-Scenes Tour

1-2pm

Meet & Greet with Hiring Team

Questions? Contact:
careers@flagstaffaz.gov



CITY OF
FLAGSTAFF



Walk-In Wednesday - Lake Mary WTP - Tour of Lake Mary WRP

Wednesday, Mar. 5 from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Walk-In Wednesday - Rio Atrium - Tour of Rio WRP

Wednesday, Mar. 19 from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.

We are looking for folks to join our We Are Water Services event planning committee! Email sarah.jablon@flagstaffaz.gov to sign up.

Featured Poem

If you have a favorite poem or artwork that you would like to see featured in an upcoming newsletter, please email it to sarah.jablon@flagstaffaz.gov!

Blessing the Boats

By Lucille Clifton

may the tide
that is entering even now
the lip of our understanding
carry you out
beyond the face of fear
may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will
love your back may you
open your eyes to water
water waving forever
and may you in your innocence
sail through this to that

Copyright Credit: Lucille Clifton, "blessing the boats" from Blessing the Boats: New and Selected Poems 1988-2000. Lucille Clifton was twice a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for poetry and the Poet Laureate of Maryland from 1979 to 1985.

Current Job Opportunities

If you know anyone who might be a good fit for any of these available positions at Water Services, please share this information with them!

Water Services Operator - Wastewater Treatment
Flagstaff, AZ

Full-Time; Non-Exempt; Tenure & Benefit Eligible - \$21.00 - \$35.84 Hourly

Section: Water Treatment

Water Services Operator - Wastewater Collections
Flagstaff, AZ

Full-Time; Non-Exempt; Tenure & Benefit Eligible - \$21.00 - \$35.84 Hourly

Water Services Administration Building
2323 N. Walgreens St., Suite 1
Flagstaff, AZ 86004
Flagwater@flagstaffaz.gov

- We are Water -

