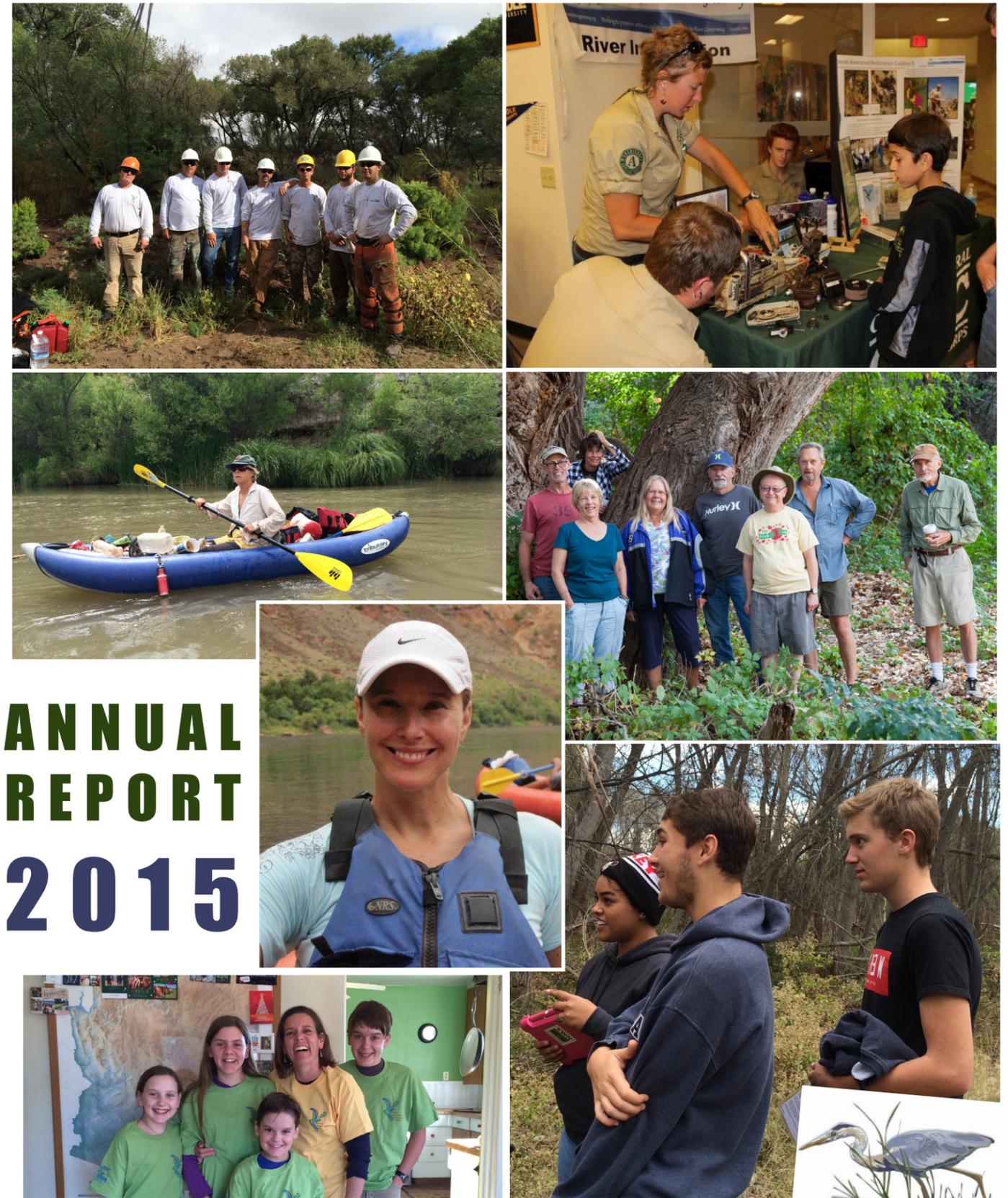
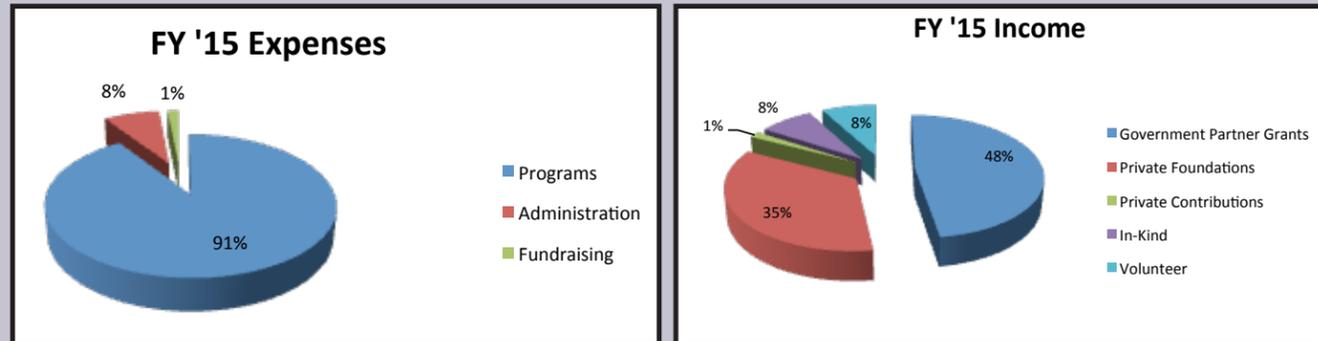


Program Support Exceeds National Average

Once again Friends of Verde River Greenway has exceeded the national average and efficiency expectations in the amount of funding committed to program support. During the 2015 fiscal year (July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015) FVRG spent 92 percent of its income on programs. This information has been consistently verified through its audited financial statements.



ANNUAL REPORT 2015



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Partners, Volunteers, Donors.
Working Collaboratively for a Healthy Verde River



Mission

Friends of Verde River Greenway restores, preserves, and promotes the natural, cultural, scenic, and recreational resources of the Verde River and its tributaries.

Vision

A healthy, resilient Verde Watershed that sustains free flowing rivers and streams, robust local economies, and a rich quality of life for current and future generations.

Board of Directors

- **Chip Norton**, President
- **Tony Gioia**, Vice President
- **Harry Sweet**, Treasurer
- **Peggy Chaikin**, Secretary
- **Max Castillo**
- **Marsha Foutz**
- **Denise Lurette**
- **Bob Rothrock**
- **Kim Schonek**

Staff

- **Anna Schrenk**, Program Manager
- **Laura Jones**, Director, Community Outreach and Development
- **Laurie Parker**, Program Administrator
- **Sara Van Marel**, Field Supervisor/Program Assistant
- **Hannah Farrell**, Field Data Coordinator
- **Robby Bryson**, Field Data Coordinator

“Friends of Verde River Greenway is an example for all social groups and organizations to follow. They do not assemble or exist to merely talk about issues. They roll up their sleeves and actually do something! These are the most legitimate, passionate volunteers. They do not seek glory or the front page. They seek to move the needle on Verde River preservation. Sincerely, thank you!”

- Chip Davis, Supervisor, Yavapai County

Friends of Verde River Greenway gratefully acknowledges the public agencies, foundations, organizations, and individuals who generously contributed to the work of Friends during the 2015 fiscal year. **Your commitment to our work and programs is critical to the success of ensuring a healthy habitat for fish and wildlife, sustainable recreation, and free-flowing river.**

Government Grantors

Arizona Game and Fish Department
Arizona State Forestry
Coconino National Forest

Prescott National Forest
Yavapai County Rural Advisory Committee

Foundation, Individual, and Organization Donors

Desert Bald Eagle Circle \$10,000 +

Arizona Community Foundation
Environmental Defense Fund
Freeport McMoRan Foundation
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
Walton Family Foundation

Freemont's Cottonwood Circle \$5,000 - \$9,999

Arizona State Parks Foundation
Chip Norton

Desert Willow Circle \$1000 - \$2,499

Robert Kohnen
Anna Schrenk

Black Hawk Circle \$500 - \$999

Susanne Durling
Kevin & Claudia Hauser
Laura Jones
Gary Rideout
RIOT in Old Town
Sedona Verde Valley Association of Realtors

Beaver Circle \$100 - \$499

Elizabeth Akers
Wade Albrecht
Jodi Allen

Doug Bartosh
Brent Bitz
Will Blume
Steven Borruso
Terry Campbell
Tim Carlson
Mary Chicoine
Judith Coates
John Copenhauer
Jennifer Coules
Kathy Davis
Gary Field
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Tina Greenwalt
Steven Hahn
Dale Harvey
Dee Hodson
David Jones
Daniel Eric Kates
Jack Kriendler
Diane Knox
Gerald Knudsen
Lori Makarick
Alison Marino
James Mast
Elizabeth Mendez
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Laura Moser
Jamie Nielsen
Leann Norton
Lisa O'Neill
Bruce Orr
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Betty Powell
Robert Predmore
Marlena Renwyck
Jane Rodgers
Bob Rothrock

Carla Rueck
Beverly Sass
Nick & Kim Schonek
George Simkins
Melinda Szatlocky
Steve Van Marel
Larry Watkins
Duffie Westheimer
Marjorie Young

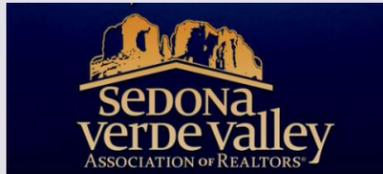
Dragonfly Circle Up to \$99

David Albert
Karen Albert
Nicole Armstrong
Jo Bain
Wes Balda
Patrick Basile
Shirlee Baxendell
Stacy Beaugh
Rachel Bennett
Mary Betcher
Carole Binswanger
Benjamin Bloodworth
Alexandra Boothe
Molly Boyter
Elaine Brett
Marsha Burger
Rob Burson
David Butler
Carianne Campbell
Rebecca Caum
Peggy Chaikin
Teresa Chism
Judith Clarke
Patsy Claus
Peggy Cole
Brenda Collins
Ron & Colette Condon
Randall L. Conlogue

George Cook
William Darrow
Curt Deuser
Marian Diamond
James Dickover
Deidre Dincesen
Molly Duke
Joel Edie
Jeri Edwards
Cindy Emmett
Alan Everett
Susan L. Fairbanks
Kennedy Fawcett
Katherine Ferris
Marsha Foutz
Kelly Foy
Peter Gallagher
Elizabeth George
Molly Golemo
Amy Graham
Douglas Gray
J.D. Greenberg
Kristin Heins
Karen Heuman
Anastasia Holmes
Scott Hudson
Jenna Janocha
Lousia Jaskula
Chris Jensen
Kristen Jespersen
Gregory Jiedi
Diane Joens
Nicholas Johnson
Charles Kahwajy
Chris Kelly
Kristine Koamr
Judy Lewis
Rusty Lloyd
Richard Lynch
Lenore Mattia

Tracey McConnell
David McKee
Linda Miller
Alta Musgrove
John Neville
Lyle Oberg
Jeni O'Callahan
Katie O'Connell
Lynne Ordean
Margaret Paddock
Rex Peters
Julian Peterson
James Quinn
Heather Reading
William Regner
Dennis Rhodes
Jeff Rindler
Tahnee Robertson
Saartje Ronan
Donna Ruhlman
Philip Savio
William Scales
Jeff Schalau
Debra Sims
Alyssa Spitz
Michael Steward
Harry Sweet
Haga Taylor
Deb Thomas
Nancy Van Allen
Sara Van Marel
Gloria Warner
Cole Watson
Pam Welch
Jane Whitmire
Mike Wight
Christine Willis
Ed Wolfe
Tina Yont

To donate and support Friends programs visit www.verderivergreenway.org



Realtors Support Watershed Awareness

A hallmark of the Sedona Verde Valley Association of Realtors (SVVAR) is to support humanitarian projects. Each President designates the recipient of SVVAR's generosity. As the SVVAR's Board President, Denise Lerette, a realtor with Russ Lyon Sotheby's International Realty, wanted to build awareness of watershed issues among her colleagues in the real estate community and financially support the work of Friends of Verde River Greenway. Monies raised from two events was donated to support Friends' work.

"Realtors are a key point of contact with home buyers and clients. It is important that we know and understand conservation issues and how to keep our natural resources healthy and alive. I appreciate that Friends was willing to come to our meetings and provide information. Now other realtors are becoming more involved in getting the word out about the importance of preserving our waterways and natural resources."

"Serving on the Friends' Board, I continue to learn more about what it takes to have a healthy Verde River and riparian habitat. We all need to embrace the natural wonders of the community we live in and preserve them for future generations."

"With the ever increasing population in the Verde Valley and tourism skyrocketing the Friends have played and will play an integral role in keeping our way of life and ensuring we enjoy the Verde River while keeping it flowing. My hat is off to them and their vision! It is my aim for the future that I can emulate the progress they have made and strive to help to keep them strong."

- Tom Thurman, Supervisor, Yavapai County

Walton Family Foundation



In 2010 the Walton Family Foundation (WFF) was introduced to Friends of Verde River Greenway (FVRG). The WFF was seeking organizations and people who were already engaged in preserving the Colorado River Basin which includes the Verde River. They noticed that the Verde River was recognized by the community as an asset and that steps

were already being taken to preserve its wildlife habitat and flow. The Verde Valley had all of the right components in place for success, and the WFF wanted to invest in a place where their support could make a difference.

"One of the components that is vital to our willingness to invest is organizations that are already leading, with a clear vision and the ability to identify really good people. Friends of Verde River Greenway is one of those organizations. We were impressed with FVRG's work ethic, commitment to solutions oriented work, and ability to develop working relationships in the community," stated Morgan Snyder.

"The Foundation is pleased and proud of the work accomplished. Friends of Verde River Greenway not only knows how to do the work, they are doing it, and great strides have been made toward a healthy Verde River and riparian habitat. The Foundation cannot be successful without strong local partners who are committed to the same goals we are. FVRG is a no nonsense operation that wants to solve problems and the quality of work is excellent."

As of June 2015, the Walton Family Foundation has invested \$2,217,767 in the Verde Valley through Friends of Verde River Greenway.



Arizona Gives Day Success
Donor increase from 45 to **130**
Giving Increase from \$2,811 to **\$8,970**
Ranked **10th** Arizona rural non-profit in dollars raised



Message from the Board President



Dear Friends,

Reading the news these days, it's hard to miss the importance of healthy, flowing rivers to rural communities in the West. Drought, over allocation of surface water, groundwater depletion, and degradation of wildlife habitat pose serious challenges for responsible community leaders. We all are seeking the path forward that provides food security, water security, and lasting economic and quality of life benefits for our children.

Reflecting on this past year, I'm mindful of two things that are consistently demonstrated in the Verde Valley:

- Projects that provide conservation benefits for fish and wildlife also provide long-term economic benefits to local communities; and
- Rural communities achieve goals faster and cheaper when they work with partners to get things done.

Friends of Verde River Greenway is privileged to play a strong role in local partnerships and proud of the work that has been accomplished during the past year. The Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition had another strong year of working with public land managers and private landowners to improve riparian habitat. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program is now moving from planning to implementation of projects that improve streamflow and farm productivity. The Verde Front has developed a shared leadership/shared funding model that has attracted important funding to our region. All of these efforts demonstrate how conservation supports sustainable economic development and are good examples of how we can work together to ensure a better future for family and friends.

As you read through our 2015 Annual Report, I believe that you will see how, by working as a team, we are improving both the natural and economic landscapes for the betterment of our communities.

I am sincerely grateful to the individuals, organizations, and governmental entities that contribute to Friends of Verde River Greenway's ongoing success by sharing their time, talent, and financial resources.

Sincere regards,

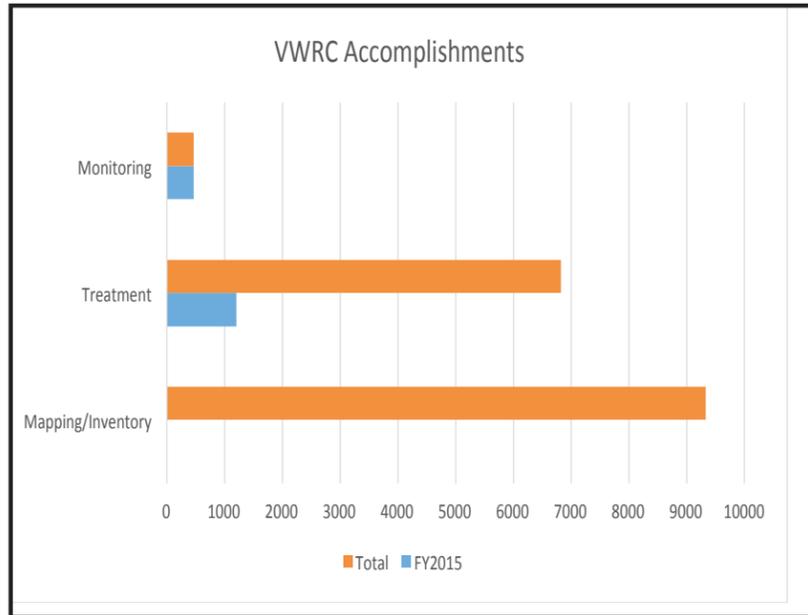
Chip Norton
President, Friends of Verde River Greenway

Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition - Moving Beyond the Weeds



In 2012 the Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition (VWRC) embarked on an ambitious five-year plan, the Cooperative Invasive Plant Management Plan (CIPMP) to improve riparian habitat in the Verde Valley waterways, with an emphasis on invasive plant management. The process began with mapping riparian areas located on private, state, and federal lands followed by treatment of identified invasive plants. Today much of the mapping is complete and crews are moving from treatment to monitoring of treated sites.

The VWRC partnership is now looking to capitalize on the increased levels of cooperative stakeholder participation and create a more comprehensive riparian restoration plan that tackles other issues affecting the long-term health and sustainability of the Verde Watershed. Stakeholders have been convened to begin a strategic planning process that will define the role of VWRC beyond the completion of the CIPMP in 2017.



“The support and hard work of Friends volunteers is amazing. It is so rewarding to work alongside the dedicated individuals who so willingly offer their time to ensure the Verde River is preserved and that people have access to our natural wonders.”

- Marsha Foutz, Volunteer Coordinator and FVRG Board Member



Programs Funded for 2016

Pollinator Gardens Save the Monarch

In May 2015 FVRG received \$40,000 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife-Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to develop pollinator gardens in the Verde Valley. FVRG is partnering with the Southwest Monarch Study, The Nature Conservancy, and a few local elementary schools to develop several Monarch Waystations and Pollinator Gardens in the Verde Valley. These “gardens” will provide breeding habitat and fueling stations for Monarch Butterflies and nectar plants for other pollinators, like bees.

Native Grass Production Pilot Project

In partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), FVRG started developing plans for a pilot project that will provide Verde Valley farmers with an alternative crop that conserves water and produces steady yields. Planting will start in January 2016 at TNC's Shield Ranch and at another demonstration site in Camp Verde. Fourteen acres of farmland will be converted to native grass. We invite local farmers to participate in this program.

“The support of Friends of Verde River Greenway and the Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition has enabled the Prescott National Forest to restore important wildlife riparian habitat and habitat for federally listed species so that we can leverage a much greater impact in our work.”

- Todd Willard, District Ranger U.S. Forest Service, Prescott National Forest, Verde District

Volunteer Commitment

4,118.3 HOURS DONATED valued at \$117,643.23 during fiscal year 2015
 Since 2012 volunteers have contributed 14,526.3 hours valued at \$343,939.72.

- Martin Ball
- Joel Barnes
- Christopher Bertrand
- Will Blume
- Nora Bolles
- Linda Brigham
- Max Castillo
- Peggy Chaikin
- Bob Coates
- Felicia Coates
- Colette Condon
- Ron Condon
- Justin Corbell
- Kathy Davis
- Ben Dawson
- Hank Dingemans
- Hannah Farrell
- Marsha Foutz
- Tony Gioia
- Wendy Harford
- Charlie Hawken
- Sam Hightower
- Joseph Holway
- Chris Jensen
- Diane Joens
- Mikey Joneas
- Laura Jones
- Patrick Kohnen
- Leadership in Environmental Action Interns
- Linda Lee
- Denise Lerette
- Courtney Lozenich
- Gayle Mabery
- Kumara MacLeod
- Mackenzie Macner
- James Mast
- Keith Monahan
- Jamie Nielsen
- Chip Norton
- Kim Poucher
- Robert Predmore
- James Quinn
- George Reeve
- Alix Rogstad
- Elaine Rothrock
- Kristin Rothrock
- Bob Rothrock
- Kim Schonek
- Maaike Schotborgh
- Anna Schrenk
- John Sherman
- Kat Sorenson
- Harry Sweet
- Hugh Taylor
- Rune Tellefsen
- Lucky Thomas
- Oren Thomas
- Sydney Van Northwick



Grabbing Garbage on the Verde River

A few times a year you can find a group of people on the bank of the Verde River getting ready to put their kayaks in the water. It may look like a group of folks going for a recreational float, however, these volunteers are launching for another purpose. It is garbage day on the Verde River.

As the volunteers float they also fill many bags of trash. Their presence is a reminder to the public of how daily actions impact our river and streams. Pictures of events like this are posted on social media outlets like Facebook in order to get the word out about the impact of our actions on the Verde Valley's natural resources. The effectiveness of this awareness is evidenced by the 800 "hits" on these pictures.

Embodying the Spirit of Volunteerism

Ron Condon and Jim Quinn

Ron Condon and Jim Quinn were named Volunteers of the Year by the Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition. "Ron and Jim were selected for this honor because of their dedication and excitement about the work," stated Sara Van Marel, Field Supervisor. "They take initiative and are willing to do everything. They are also two of our greatest advocates, getting others involved."

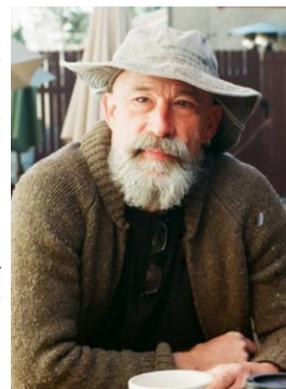
Ron and Jim began volunteering for Friends in 2013 helping to pull young tamarisk trees at Dead Horse Ranch State Park. Since that time, they have expanded their volunteer activities to include trail building and maintenance and recently joined the team monitoring the Big Spring Natural Area in Clarkdale. Trained by the Springs Stewardship Institute at the Museum of Northern Arizona, Condon and Quinn are helping to monitor water quality, water quantity, macroinvertebrates populations, and plant regeneration at Big Spring.

When they aren't volunteering, they are recreating. Depending on the weather, they can be seen kayaking the Verde River, hiking Sycamore Canyon or skiing on the San Francisco Peaks. Condon, a retired engineer, and Quinn, a semi-retired archeologist, both live in Clarkdale.



"I live by the river and spend time on it. I want to take care of it so that it stays around. Volunteering is a way for me to give back. I want to look back and know that I made a difference. That is important to me."

- Ron Condon



"I was first introduced to river recreational activities by friend Laura Jones, Director of Community Outreach and Development at Friends, who took me on river outings. I have lived in the area for years and never spent much time exploring the river. For me, volunteering provides an opportunity to do good things for the environment, be a part of the community, and socialize."

- Jim Quinn



Monitoring for Success

High School Students Play a Key Role

A highlight of the monitoring program is the relationship that is developing with Mingus Union High School. "Monitoring has provided the perfect opportunity to educate young people about a healthy watershed," stated Anna Schrenk, FVRG Program Manager. "It is so great going into the classroom and watching these young people become so excited about the Verde River and how we can protect it. Fieldwork is a special favorite of the students. The students are playing an important role in the health of our watershed."

During the 2014/2015 field season, VWRC supported a four-person monitoring crew of AmeriCorp members through Arizona Conservation Corps. As more initial treatment is completed, the need for dedicated monitoring crews both paid and volunteer will increase. "We are indebted to our partners, volunteers, and donors for their support of VWRC and look forward to increased support so that we can continue monitoring to ensure that our native riparian plant communities are sustainable and resilient and that fish and wildlife have a healthy place to grow and live."

Volunteer Activities 2015

- Benatz Trail Maintenance, Clarkdale
- Big Spring Natural Area, Clarkdale
- Jail Trail Maintenance for Dead Horse Ranch State Park, Clarkdale and Cottonwood
- Verde River Garbage Grabs, Cottonwood
- Invasive Plant Maintenance and Retreatment, Clarkdale and Cottonwood



"What a great place to protect and discover! Everyone involved with this project should be proud and commended for their work that will last for generations. Friends of Verde River Greenway's roots are based in the support of the Arizona State Parks and Verde River Greenway, and we still greatly value this relationship. Your expressed support of this partnership will help others in the recreation and conservation community know this as well."

- Sue Black, Executive Director, Arizona State Parks

VWRC's Tri-Forest Verde Watershed Riparian Forest Restoration Project Proposal Ranked Fourth in Nation

In collaboration with Arizona State Forestry, Friends of Verde River Greenway successfully prepared a grant proposal to the Landscape Scale Restoration Competitive Grant Program from State and Private Forestry funding through the U.S. Forest Service. The grant spans three years and will bring \$300,000 to FVRG and partners to continue riparian habitat improvements along the river. The project will focus on implementing riparian restoration projects on state and/or private lands where critical habitat is severely impacted by tamarisk and improving habitat for multiple species in preparation for the tamarisk leaf beetles arrival to the Verde River system.

Kohnen Family Named Landowner of the Year



Each year VWRC recognizes a landowner who embodies the spirit and vision of VWRC. The Kohnen family is such a landowner and partner. The Kohnens, who live on Oak Creek, welcomed the crews onto their property with enthusiasm and interest. They were engaged with every stage of the riparian habitat restoration, from clearing paths to improve creek access, learning restoration techniques, and disposing of bio-mass. Sean Borruso, Vetraplex Crew Leader, commented, "They were a crew favorite because they showed genuine gratitude for the work the crew was doing."

Like many private lands along Oak Creek, the Kohnen land had a sizable amount of giant reed and tamarisk trees. Giant reed is one of the invasive plant species that VWRC plans to eradicate completely. "Having a healthy, free-flowing waterway is really important to our family, so we made this project a family affair and educational experience. I want my children to understand the importance of the water that flows through our property and how they can play a part in preserving our natural beauty," commented Stephanie Kohnen. "It was so inspiring to see the young

people and vets so committed to the environment and working so hard. The commitment of the crews to the community was so inspirational."

The whole family pitched in to make the task of removing the invasives from their property possible. Together they met with Sara Van Marel to coordinate the work of three VWRC crews on their property. Patrick provided access to the riparian area. Stephanie and the kids provided cool drinks and fresh baked goods to the crews. Now that significant effort has been invested in clearing their land, the Kohnen's have embraced the task of monitoring. They pull new growth and invasive plants as necessary to restore native vegetation.

The project was undertaken by one crew of veterans from the Vetraplex and two crews from the Arizona Conservation Corp (AZCC). The Vetraplex crew removed large stands of giant reed. One AZCC crew removed tamarisk while the other removed more giant reed.

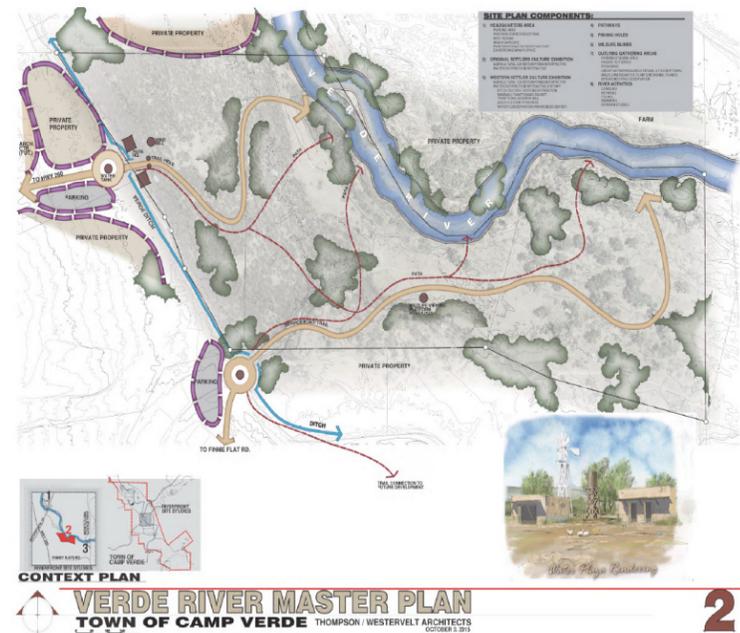
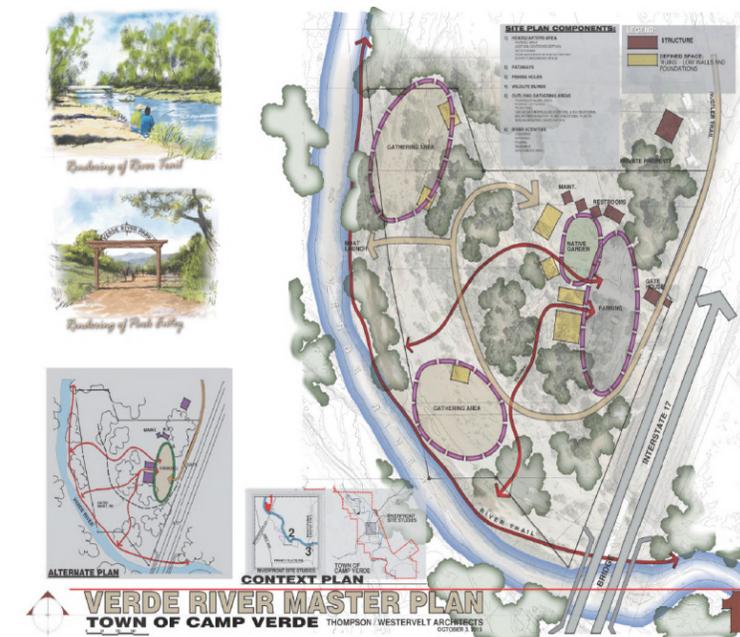
A Partnership for Success: The Vetraplex and Friends

The partnership between the Vetraplex and Friends of Verde River Greenway has been forged over three and a half years. "Friends helped me to build the foundation of my business," stated Gary Rideout, Vetraplex owner. "Since we began working together more than forty veterans have been a part of the field crews removing invasive plants in the Verde Watershed. My business has grown and Friends is flourishing. Friends really cares about our veterans. We share a common vision and commitment."

One of the success stories for the Vetraplex is Matt Wilcox. Matt knew that he wanted to work in the watershed when he approached Gary Rideout for a job on the VWRC field crew. He knew that the training and certifications he would receive would provide him with the skills he needed. As a result of his participation and work ethic his leadership was recognized by Arizona State Parks. Today he is a Park Ranger. Matt credits the Vetraplex and Friends for playing a key role in allowing him to secure the job he wanted.



River Recreation Planning in Camp Verde



"Private landowners, public land managers, and the local community have helped to shape the landscape of river recreation in Camp Verde," stated Steve Ayers, Director of Economic Development for the Town of Camp Verde. "We felt it was very important that we had a transparent, fluid, flexible, and open process to gain insights from all of the stakeholders. We also provided education on what was feasible and realistic for the preservation of our river as we developed the plan."

To ensure the plan was feasible and realistic, the Town hired an engineering firm to perform a hydrological study of the river and its flows. "We can have lots of great ideas, but if the river and land can't support them we have wasted our time and established unrealistic expectations."

Through public forums, surveys, and group discussions the Camp Verde River Recreation Master Plan began to unfold. More than 200 individuals provided specific input, including over 100 landowners on the river corridor who would be directly impacted by the plan. Other key participants included the Coconino National Forest, Prescott National Forest, Arizona Game and Fish Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Arizona State Parks, Salt River Project, The Nature Conservancy, and Friends of Verde River Greenway. All are key stakeholders in the decision making process.

The planning process has identified four anchor points on public lands for river recreation: Homestead Park, Rezzonico Park, Rocking River Ranch, and I-17 access point. "What many people don't realize is that all activities on public lands impact local landowners and that impact has not always been positive. We want to change that."

The planning process was made possible through Friends of Verde River Greenway securing a \$50,000 grant from The Walton Family Foundation. Their generosity was matched by American Rivers and the National Park Service. American Rivers provided planning assistance from Susan Culp (NextWest Consulting LLC). The National Park Service provided a River, Trails, and Conservation Assistance grant for the public engagement process.

The Camp Verde River Recreation Master Plan will be presented for final approval in early 2016.

"It is extremely important to elected officials to be able to work with organizations who have consistently demonstrated their interest and commitment to the Verde River and its importance to us all here in the Verde Valley. Friend's leadership role in the Verde Front, the Camp Verde River Recreation Master Plan, and the Verde Valley Geotourism program is exemplary. I look forward to working with this valuable group in the future."

- Charlie German, Mayor, Town of Camp Verde

Verde Front Identifies Programs

The Verde Front, a collaborative effort among local government, public land management agencies, conservation non-governmental organizations, businesses, and many other stakeholders, has truly come into its own this year. 2015 was an exciting year for the coalition, seeing growing interest and increased investment by all the participants in achieving a cooperative, regional-scale vision and action teams for sustainable recreation in the Verde Valley.

The 2014 cross visit to Colorado's Grand Valley was the inspiration for the Verde River "String of Pearls" organizing framework, which defines the Verde River as a vibrant, natural "string" connecting the Verde Valley's parks and natural resources "pearls." The initiative is designed to develop a series of premier riverfront recreational assets for local residents and visitors, enhanced river conservation, improved quality of life, and robust outdoor recreation based economic development.

As a part of the program's design and implementation, the Verde Front coalition developed a formal structure, charter, and shared funding model creating a strong foundation for future collaboration on mutual goals. It was a momentous year in seeing the fruition of two milestone projects connected to the Verde "String of Pearls" vision - the Camp Verde River Recreation Master Plan and the Sedona Verde Valley National Geographic Geotourism Website.

These projects will contribute vital elements to the overall vision of the Verde Front. In the new year, re-energized working groups within the Verde Front will continue to build support and enthusiasm for this important regional effort ensuring a healthy river corridor as well as sustainable recreational opportunities that will enhance our quality of life and economy.

The Verde Front is a unique collaboration, which includes Yavapai County supervisors, mayors, public land agencies (US Forest Service, Arizona State Parks, National Park Service), the Yavapai-Apache Nation, business owners, and non-governmental organizations. Each partner affiliated with the Verde Front has committed financial resources to ensure shared leadership and the ongoing sustainability of the collaborative effort. Friends of Verde River Greenway is the organization's fiscal agent and serves on the Coordinating Team.



Verde Valley Becomes National Geographic's 22nd Worldwide Geotourism Website

The Sedona Verde Valley Geotourism Program is one of only 22 geotourism programs worldwide developed by National Geographic. The initiative is being led by the Sedona Verde Valley Tourism Council with the help of a lead grant from the Walton Family Foundation (WFF) through the Friends of the Verde River Greenway. Jennifer Wesselhoff, President/CEO of the Sedona Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau and the cofounder of the Sedona Verde Valley Tourism Bureau, explains why this is such an important program. "We can't tell you how excited we are to join forces with the National Geographic Maps Division to highlight the world-class natural and cultural attractions of our region. Working in collaboration with this iconic brand will help develop the Verde Valley's authentic and sustainable assets and address how to market them using innovative tools."

Geotourism is defined as tourism that sustains or enhances the distinctive geographical character of places – the environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and well-being of its residents. Geotourism encourages visitors and residents alike to work for the long-term sustainability of a place, bringing economic benefits, and creating incentives to conserve natural assets and cultural heritage. The Verde Valley Geotourism Program will create a National Geographic Society co-branded online interactive website of the Verde Valley that identifies natural, cultural, and historic attractions that define what makes the region unique. The plan for the website was developed through community-wide meetings where stakeholders representing public agencies, historic sites, natural resources, businesses, and organizations came together.

To support the Geotourism Program the Verde Valley is working with Solimar International, an international tourism marketing firm, to develop a marketing and branding plan for the Sedona Verde Valley Tourism Council. As Wesselhoff explains, "We need more than the website. Tourism is a key economic engine for the Verde Valley. It is really important that we market all of our assets in the most appropriate and effective way – and most importantly – in a sustainable way. We are all concerned that our natural and cultural resources, including the Verde River and streams, are appreciated and not exploited."

"We are grateful to the Walton Family Foundation, the lead funder, and the City of Cottonwood, Cottonwood Chamber of Commerce, Jerome Chamber of Commerce, Sedona Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau, Town of Camp Verde, Town of Clarkdale, and Verde Valley Regional Economic Organization for funding this important program, and to Friends of Verde River Greenway for securing the grant that afforded us this opportunity. This project is only the beginning of developing a sustainable tourism industry that thrives on collaborations and partnerships. There are great things to come by working together."

Experience the website and its interactive tools which include destination identification, trip planning, map guides and much more at <http://sedonaverdevalley.natgeotourism.com/>.

Big Spring Natural Area: Uncovering a Sacred Site



Just upstream of the Tuzigoot Bridge in Clarkdale lies a lush riparian area along the Verde River owned by the Town of Clarkdale. FVRG forged a partnership with the town to restore the area in 2013. The site is home to Big Spring (Tu Cho Ha Li'l in Apache language), a series of four springs that have been flowing for decades from the earth. According to Apache Nation elder Vincent Randall, his people tell stories of the high pressure "shower" of water the main spring once produced. Today, the main spring is not the shower that it is once was, but it still flows along with three other smaller springs.

Restoration of the area began with a deep spring cleaning by a team of Vetraplex veterans, hired by the town and FVRG. The team spent six weeks cleaning up trash and clearing dead vegetation along an area that would later become a loop trail built by FVRG volunteers along with students from Oak Creek Ranch School and Mingus Union High School.

In 2014, Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition field crews worked for months removing dense patches of invasive plants including tamarisk, tree of heaven, and giant reed. After the trash and plants were removed the springs were uncovered and in March of 2015 the first formal spring survey was conducted.

In order to conduct a scientific survey FVRG staff and volunteers and Clarkdale staff attended Spring Stewardship Training hosted by the Spring Stewardship Institute (SSI) a global initiative of the Museum of Northern Arizona, that works to improve communication among land managers to survey, rehabilitate, and steward spring systems across the United States. Larry Stevens, Director of the SSI, assisted our newly trained local team in the first survey. The spring will be monitored quarterly for at least three years. Data collected from the surveys will be entered into the SSI database and can be used by town managers and others to monitor the spring's health.

SSI, FVRG, and the town are excited to see the Big Spring Natural Area managed to support its sustainable ecological functions. The area has been transformed from an overgrown, invasive-prone jungle into a lush riparian trail and natural area with abundant native vegetation and clean healthy water. It is being used by hikers, birding enthusiasts, and local schools and colleges as an outdoor classroom. The site is open to the public, and the Town of Clarkdale encourages everyone to enjoy Big Spring's natural beauty. Funding for the Big Springs Natural Area was provided by a Yavapai County Resource Advisory Committee grant.



"The Big Spring Natural Area is a wonderful extension of the Town of Clarkdale's vision to provide community access to a healthy, flowing Verde River. Big Springs adds a unique diversity to outdoor experiences available on the Verde River @ Clarkdale, and we are very proud of the hard work of our many partners who have been instrumental in helping us open this area to the public. We believe strongly that public knowledge and understanding is vital to the protection and preservation of the Verde River. Big Spring had an important role with the native people in the Verde Valley, and we know that our efforts to open the Big Spring Natural Area to the public will once again provide a place for people to form personal connections with the river and its beautiful riparian environment."

- Gayle Mabery, Town Manager, Town of Clarkdale

"Protecting the longest free-flowing stream in Arizona is critical to the economy of the Verde Valley and its environment. The Friends of Verde River Greenway are an integral part of this, both in education and outreach and in the hands-on work of restoration and habitat improvement of the Verde River and its tributaries and its programs to provide sustainable river recreation. All of the communities in the Verde Valley are indebted to them for their dedication to this mission."

- Sandy Moriarty, Mayor, City of Sedona

Sara Van Marel – A Success Story



Together Friends and Arizona Conservation Corps have paved career pathways for young adults in the Verde Valley as part of VWRC. Sara Van Marel is one who embraced that career opportunity and ran with it.

Sara spent five years working for the conservation corps, including AZCC and Coconino Rural Environmental Corps, in the southwest. Sara began as a corps member, and moved up the ranks into a leadership role, and came to work for VWRC as a crew leader during the 2013/2014 field season.

Schrenk approached Van Marel and asked if she would like to work for Friends of Verde River Greenway as field supervisor and her program assistant. She accepted! Sara has held that position since September of 2014. In this new position she has learned new job skills that will enable her to excel in life. "The added capacity she has brought to Friends has been invaluable." Anna Schrenk, Friends Program Manager, commented, "I noticed Sara's keen ability to lead, exceptional work ethic, project experience, and growing love for the Verde Valley and working in the river restoration field."

She is also recognized as an asset to Friends' work by George Christianson, Dead Horse Ranch State Park Manager, who commented, "Sara is a delight to work with. She has great rapport with the partners and crews. She is helpful, responsive, great at coordinating, and through her hard work, keeps crew members on task."

Arizona Conservation Corps Changing Lives

"The Arizona Conservation Corps' work in the Verde Watershed with the Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition has changed the lives of countless young adults through training, education, and job opportunities. Our partnership has resulted in the expansion of our work throughout the southwest and helped us to redefine how our work crews are trained and the education they receive," stated Allison Laramée, Regional Director of Arizona Conservation Corps Flagstaff Office. "Our goal is to develop leaders through training and on-the-job work experience which leads to future employment." To date at least 19 of the 33 young adults who have graduated from the VWRC program have found jobs in the conservation field. AZCC expects to see similar success among the 16 members currently working on VWRC projects.

VWRC and AZCC joined forces in 2012 when VWRC needed field labor for their work in removing and treating invasive plants along the Verde River and its tributaries. Crews are provided specialized training that prepares them for their work and gives them valuable job skills that they can apply in future jobs. The training has also expanded through the expertise of Friends and their partners. Corps members learn to operate and maintain chainsaws, identify native and invasive species as well as threatened and endangered species, use tablet-based GIS software to monitor and map their progress, practice Leave No Trace, and perform Wilderness First Aid. The young adults are introduced to the many aspects of a watershed and its importance to riparian habitat and local communities.

"I appreciate that VWRC and their partners are willing to think outside the box," stated Laramée. "This has provided us with the opportunity to test best practices, expand our programs, and assess how we can most effectively prepare our young adult crews for the work and their future. The model that we have developed with VWRC and their partners is now being implemented across the Southwest by other AZCC offices. In addition, other regions are sending crews to the Verde Valley for training



because of the quality of the program."

VWRC is the first partnership where AZCC has developed dedicated crews to do the work. The work has been so successful that AZCC now has a full time staff member in the Verde Valley. An AZCC success story to come out of the VWRC crew work is Sara Van Marel who has been hired as Assistant Program Manager/Field Supervisor for Friends of Verde River Greenway.

Arizona Conservation Corps operates service programs across Arizona that empower individuals to positively impact their communities and their environment. The programs promote personal growth, experiential learning, and an ethic of natural resource stewardship while incorporating the guiding principles of community, dedication, challenge, integrity, and FUN.

\$2.8M Grant for Flow and Habitat Restoration in the Verde Valley



The Verde River will be the recipient of \$2.8 million in federal funding from the USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCCP). This award is part of \$370 million nationwide commitment announced by Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture, on a visit to Phoenix in January 2015. "This is an entirely new approach to conservation efforts," said Vilsack. "These partnerships empower communities to set priorities and lead the way on conservation efforts important to their region. These efforts keep our land resilient and water clean, and promote economic growth in agriculture, construction, tourism, outdoor recreation, and other industries."

The Verde Regional Conservation Partnership Program has identified four key objectives to address insufficient water supply with a focus on inefficient use of irrigation water and to improve habitat for fish and wildlife. These objectives are: (1) Restore and protect flows in the Verde River with an emphasis on the Verde Valley. (2) Improve riparian habitat primarily through invasive plant removal, erosion control, and native plant revegetation. (3) Equip farmers and ranchers with the tools and resources needed to be sustainable into the future. (4) Enable long-term farming operations to preserve the rural landscape and open space, and protect the investment in conservation projects.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) secured the funding and is lead on the project. TNC's partners in the project include Friends of Verde River Greenway, Natural Resource Conservation District, Verde Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Arizona Game and Fish Department. The proposed outcomes for the project are to enhance 6,000 acres of riparian habitat and improve irrigation on 1,000 acres of farmland during the next five years.

"The partners were carefully selected," stated Kim Schonek, Verde River Water Transactions Director for The Nature Conservancy, who will lead the project. "We chose organizations that had a successful track record of planning and implementation with significant on-the-ground work. We wanted partners that didn't just talk about what needed to be done, but did it. Friends of Verde River Greenway is such an organization. Friends collaborative work and landowner relationships, riparian restoration work removing invasive plants to improve watershed conditions, capacity and crews, five year strategic plan, and their success engaging and educating the public made them an ideal partner."



Sharing Experiences, Wisdom, and Expertise

Cross Watershed Network

Watershed management is complex and requires integrating various forms of knowledge, coordinating with many people and institutions to work together. The Cross Watershed Network (XWN) initiative strives to connect practitioners through information sharing, collective capacity building, and collaboration across watersheds in the Southwest. "This is such a valuable resource to the Verde Watershed," stated Chip Norton. "We need each other and empower each other."

Since XWN's inception VWRC and FVRG have played an important role in supporting the collaborative efforts. As a founder and steering committee member, FVRG takes a lead in the annual conference, interactive website, and cross watershed visits.

"FVRG supports the National Geographic Sedona Verde Valley Geotourism project that increases the value and importance of the Verde River as an economic asset. Restoring habitat and flow to ensure a healthy watershed is a commendable activity of Friends. This is a remarkable group of people including a great number of volunteers."

- Diane Joens, Mayor, City of Cottonwood