



Friends of Verde River Greenway

2013 Annual Report



Mission Statement:

*to preserve, enhance
and promote the
scenic, natural, historic,
cultural and recreational
resources of the Verde
River Greenway*



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July 1, 2012 - June 30, 2013

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Key Programs

Habitat Improvement

Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition

Recreation

String of Pearls

Youth Engagement

Verde Valley Youth Pathways Initiative

A Message from the President

Dear Friends,

I was recently asked by a local landowner, “What exactly is it that Friends of Verde River Greenway (FVRG) does to conserve rivers?” “Well,” I replied, “we do projects.....with partners.” It’s not complicated; we work side by side with individuals, local communities and agencies to get things done in the field. As partners, we learn together how consistently river conservation serves local employment and economic development. Here are a few of my personal highlights from last year:



- The positive response of local landowners and communities to The Vetraplex, a conservation crew of local veterans that had been unemployed prior to their partnership with Friends of Verde River Greenway. Throughout Yavapai County, partners developed opportunities for these veterans to “continue to serve.” Some of our vets have been hired to full-time public works positions! It was an inspiring example of how communities can step up and take care of their own.
- The willingness of private landowners to improve riparian habitat on their properties. We are now working with more than 160 local landowners along the Verde River, Oak Creek, Beaver Creek, and West Clear Creek who sincerely care about the health of their rivers and creeks.
- The development of the individuals in Coconino Rural Environment Corps (CREC), the local youth conservation corps, as they gained skills and confidence during their tenure completing restoration projects in the Verde Valley. I sure don’t remember being that skilled or learned as a young man!
- The personal friendships that have resulted from planning and completing restoration projects together. Hard work seems to separate the workers from the talkers, and it’s a pleasure for me to spend time with folks that enjoy working to conserve.

We will continue working with our conservation partners this coming year, employing more local youth and veterans as we increase the number and size of our work crews. Additionally, FVRG has some exciting new projects slated for 2013/2014 that address wetland restoration, sustainable river recreation, and habitat conservation on agricultural lands. These projects will involve new partners and new FVRG friends. I hope to see you in the field, partner!

Regards,

Chip Norton

Friends of Verde River Greenway (FVRG)



FVRG continues to lead the efforts of the Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition (VWRC) to improve habitat, educate youth, engage private landowners and train and employ local veterans and young adults.

In 2012 VWRC was officially created by FVRG to implement the Verde River Cooperative Invasive Plant Management Plan. Participation has grown during the year, with over 20 representatives from public land agencies, non-profit organizations, local and regional corporations and private landowners working collaboratively toward a diverse, self-sustaining and resilient riparian ecosystem, on over 460 miles of the Verde River and

its tributaries. During Fiscal Year 2013 over \$345,000 was spent on restoration related projects.

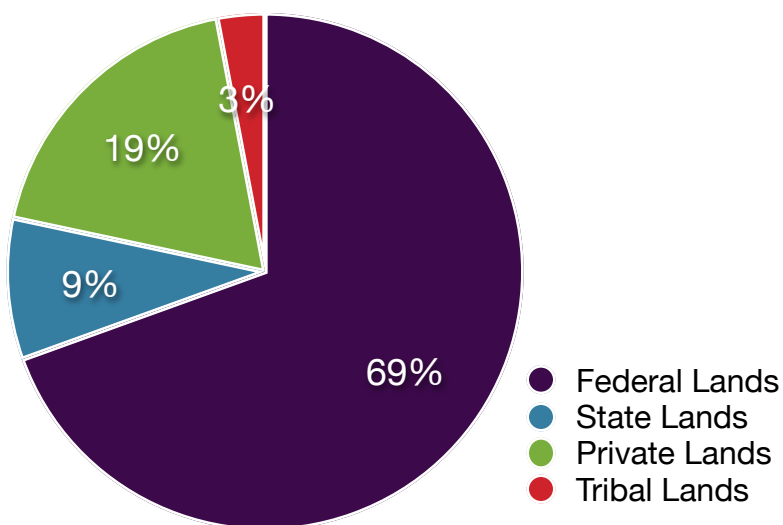
VWRC's vision statement encompasses ecological, social, economic and management components, to reflect our stakeholders' broader vision of this multi-use system.

For a complete list of VWRC partners, visit our website at www.verdewrc.org

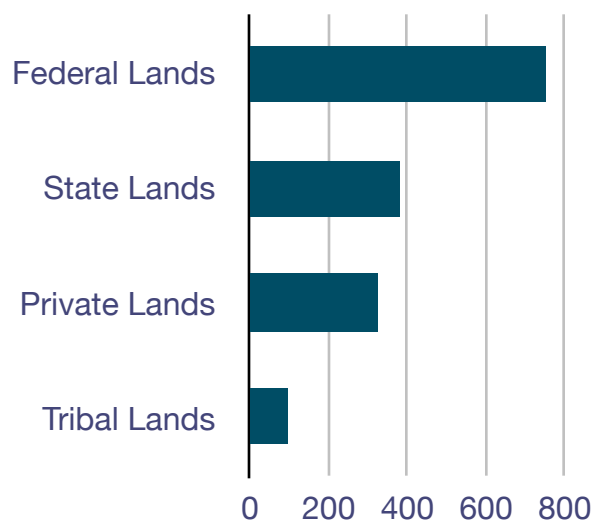
VWRC VISION

The Verde River and its tributaries comprise a diverse, self-sustaining and resilient riparian ecosystem in which invasive plant species are controlled through cooperative stakeholder participation.

Acres Mapped FY2013



Acres Treated FY2013



The Vetraplex and FVRG Team up to Serve Those Who Have Served



Local veterans, James Bruno and Mark German provide specialized skills necessary to combat large giant reed (*Arundo donax*) infestations on over 200 acres on Verde Valley streams.

Verde Valley veterans continue to serve our community by combating invasive non-native plants and improving access to river recreation sites. The Vetraplex, a local organization whose mission is to put “Thank You For Your Service” into action by serving those who have served our country, has partnered with Friends to put veterans to work.

The main goal of this partnership is to provide local veterans with job skills, training and work experience so that they may find year round employment. Several veterans from the Vets VWRC Crew have moved on to permanent jobs in the Verde Valley.

A crew of six local veterans worked for seven and a half months in Fiscal Year 2013 on habitat improvement and river access projects. The Vets River Crew treated over 200 acres of stream side habitat, removing woody invasive plants. Veterans also created a new river access point in the Town of Clarkdale. FVRG invested \$139,247 towards the training and employment of local veterans during the fiscal year while also improving habitat.

The Vetraplex started a program called “Hire a Vet” which has become very popular in the community. The work supported 12 local veterans for six months.

Both FVRG and The Vetraplex will continue to serve local veterans in return for the service they provided our county.

Private Landowner Champions

Friends has developed unique partnerships with private landowners throughout the Verde Watershed. Over 160 private landowners have agreed to participate as VWRG partners to improve habitat on their private lands by removing woody invasive plants and preventing future infestations from spreading.

FVRG Community Outreach Coordinator, Laura Jones says, “Although each individual property owner has a unique approach to managing their land, they all see the value of maintaining and enhancing the riparian corridors on a watershed scale.”

Several landowners have become “neighborhood champions” by encouraging their neighbors to participate and pitching in to help when crews arrive to treat their properties.

“This project with VWRG and FVRG has allowed me to accomplish restoration work that I had wanted to do for years and brought in a level of expertise that I needed to identify invasive species. I encourage others to get involved with the project to make it a success”

George Reeve, Private Landowner, Page Springs



“We thank from our hearts the most wonderful people who have made this program theirs and are promoting it in such a committed way. The crews, who did a great job as well as the organization that is funding this program. In the meantime we keep weeding the seedlings that keep coming up, but eventually there will be less and ultimately be gone.”

Amayra Hamilton, Private Landowner, Angel Valley



Verde Village's Nature Preserve



A new sign and gate were installed at the main entrance to Verde Village Nature Preserve

Unauthorized motorized access has made the dumping of mattresses, electronic gear, and major appliances a regular occurrence.

Last spring the Vets VWRC Crew, WVPOA homeowners, Friends and VVLP staff and volunteers spent weeks removing woody invasive plants, reducing biomass, installing gates and pedestrian pass-throughs, placing large boulders to block illegal vehicular access and removing trash from the site.

During the weeks that followed the completion of the project, visitors to the site learned that they could access their favorite recreation areas by foot just as easily as they did with their vehicles. Local residents are taking pride in their transformed preserve, turning away those trying to dump old mattresses and create new roads to the river.

Friends invested \$27,519 through grant funding towards this project.

Imagine, a stunning 35 acres of Verde River habitat cleaned, repaired and preserved, with a revitalized sense of community pride. The Verde Village Property Owners' Association (VWPOA) in partnership with the FVRG, Verde Valley Land Preservation (VVLP) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service's "Partners for Fish & Wildlife" program did just that on VWPOA's riverfront property.

For years, this otherwise stunning urban open space amenity has been at the mercy of those who choose to ignore the no-motorized vehicle rule. The result was a seriously degraded riparian habitat. Worse, this



FVRG, Partners for Fish & Wildlife, VVLP, Yavapai County representatives and VWRC Partners participate in ribbon cutting ceremony and dedication of the revived Verde Village greenway

CREC Takes Proven Model to a New Level

Based on the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) model used successfully throughout the US for more than 75 years to address critical environmental and infrastructure needs. Coconino Rural Environment Corps (CREC) has been providing FVRG and

VWRC partners with youth and young adult work crews to address project needs for several years. CREC serves youth and young adults aged 15-30 who are interested in the environment, resource conservation and land management related careers.

During the 2012/2013 treatment season, CREC expanded their corps model by providing VWRC with a dedicated crew for the entire treatment season. Typically, crews are shared by multiple partners throughout the state or region, leaving partners to retrain



crews on the specifics of their project. By having a dedicated CREC Verde Crew, we were able to train one crew for the project which resulted in more time spent on-the-ground treating invasive plants. This expanded model has improved effectiveness in achieving VWRC goals. Friends invested \$136,00 in the training and employment of conservation crews in Fiscal Year 2013.

CREC stepped up again to meet FVRG and VWRC needs by creating an internship program. Three interns were hired in 2013 to help with inventory and mapping throughout the watershed. Two of these interns had served on the CREC Verde Crew during the previous season after expressing interest in expanding their skills and learning more about the riparian restoration process. By providing young adults with opportunities to learn new job skills and expand their knowledge of riparian restoration, we are enabling them to further their career pathway in the conservation and land management fields. FVRG is committed to supporting our local youth and young adults through our continued partnership with CREC.



above...CREC Interns and FVRG AmeriCorps Member survey for invasive in the West Fork of Oak Creek

photo to left...CREC Verde Crew enjoying a break on Sycamore Creek

XWN-an emerging cross-watershed network

The Cross Watershed Network (XWN) is an emerging network of watershed partnerships and practitioners across the Southwest. FVRG and VWRC have been very involved in this first year of XWN development, serving on the eight-person Core Team, and hosting the first annual peer-to-peer capacity building workshop focusing on riparian restoration (September 10-12, 2013). More than 70 practitioners from around the west participated in this workshop. XWN, with initial funding from the Walton Family Foundation, is helping to link VWRC with similar collaborative efforts in the Escalante (UT), Dolores (CO), Virgin (NV), Gila (AZ), among numerous other watersheds. Learning from peers is one of the most effective ways to learn and share methods, lessons and insights, as well as to identify and work together on common challenges. For more information visit the XWN Website: CrossWatershed.net



Core Team meeting in Cottonwood in September 2012



above...Chip Norton, FVRG President and Core Team Member, introduces field trip participants to the Verde River

left...2013 XWN-Riparian Restoration Workshop

FVRG and VWRC Host Successful Statewide Workshop

“Improving Riparian Areas on Private and Tribal Lands” was the focus of a June workshop held in Cottonwood. Over 65 participants from across the state, representing agencies, tribes, non-profits, landowners, service

providers and universities, learned about grant programs that support riparian restoration on private and tribal lands and discussed challenges and strategies for planning and implementing these types of projects. Presentations included:

- Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) - “Working Lands for Wildlife: Environmental Quality Incentives Pro-



gram”, and the conservation planning process.

- US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) - “Partners for Fish and Wildlife and Safe Harbor Agreements.”
- AZ Game & Fish Department (AGFD) - “Landowner Relations: Habitat Partnership and Heritage Grants.”
- AZ Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) - “Water Quality Improvement Grants.”
- VWRC and Gila Watershed Partnership – “How Partnerships are Working to Improve Riparian Habitat on Private and Tribal Lands.”

Workshop participants expressed significant interest in attending this type of workshop in the future, and identifying and expanding funding and technical support for Arizona’s landowners and tribes seeking to improve their riparian areas.

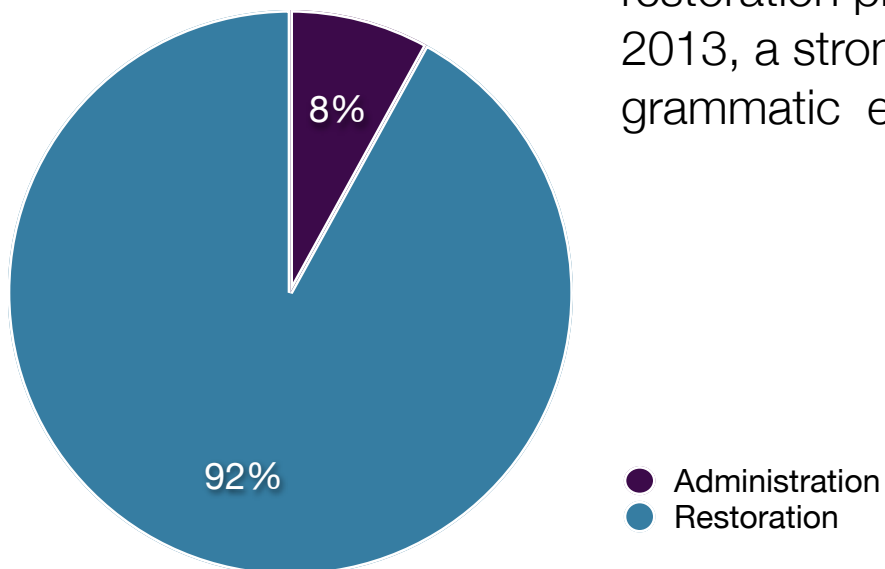


above... Workshop participants learning of funding opportunities and have opportunities for networking

left...An optional field trip was offered to teach conservation planning protocols to workshop participants.

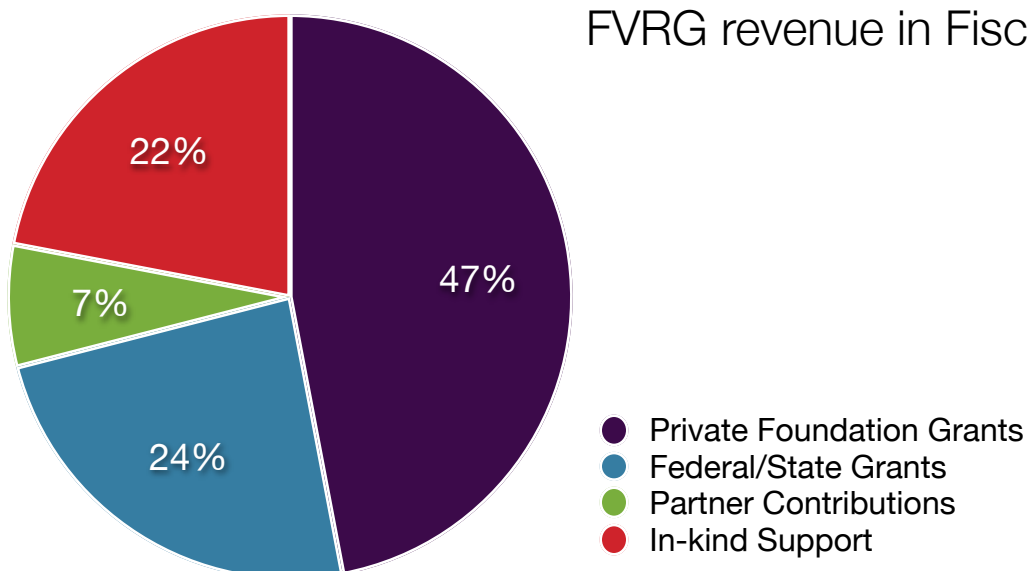
Financial Summary

FY2013 Expenses



FVRG spent 92% of revenue on restoration projects in Fiscal Year 2013, a strong indicator of programmatic efficiency.

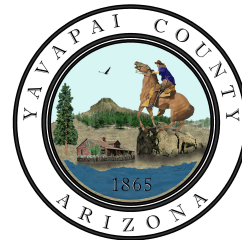
FY2013 Income



Private foundation and government grant awards accounted for 100% of FVRG revenue in Fiscal Year 2013.

Grantors

Thank you to our grantors whose financial and in-kind support has enabled Friends of Verde River Greenway to accomplish our mission.



To learn more about the FVRG's work
in the Verde Watershed visit
verderivergreenway.org