

The Otter

NEWS YOU OTTER KNOW ABOUT VWRC

SPONSORED BY FRIENDS OF THE VERDE RIVER GREENWAY



VOLUME ONE
SUMMER
ISSUE

WHO IS VWRC?

VWRC (noun) Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition. Pronounced: Vee-work! VWRC is a multi-stakeholder group, representing both private and public lands interests, working collaboratively to improve watershed health in the Verde watershed.

Several years ago, a group of Forest Service land managers and non-profit organizers were sitting around a “campfire” on the Verde River talking about river health and the spread of invasive plants.

They realized that to tackle the weed issues on a watershed-scale, a holistic approach with multi-stakeholders participation was necessary. A seed was planted!

In 2010, the Verde Cooperative Invasive Plant Management Plan (CIPMP) was initiated to bring

together private landowners, non-profit organizations, local communities, local businesses and federal and state agencies. The purpose of this initiative is twofold:

- To develop a strategic approach for controlling invasive plants in the riparian corridors of the Verde River watershed that will enable stakeholders to prioritize, develop and implement restoration actions.
- To increase the level of collaboration and communication among stakeholders, thereby enhancing information transfer, adaptive management and basin-wide success.

Friends of the Verde River Greenway (FVRG), is the non-profit organization responsible for spearheading this initiative, and has tak-

en the role as the lead organization to administer and manage the implementation of CIPMP. FVRG has acquired substantial funding to build capacity within the organization as well as implement work on the ground. Hats off to Chip Norton and the FVRG Council for making this initiative happen!

VWRC’s steering committee is a multi-stakeholder group of people representing both public and private land interests. This is a dynamic group of individuals who are dedicated to improving the health of the Verde watershed by working collaboratively.

The committee meets monthly to coordinate between stakeholders, share information and to report on accomplishments. Everyone is welcome at VWRC Steering Committee meetings.

See **VWRC** on page 5

PROGRAM COORDINATOR LOG

It’s summertime in the Verde Valley and it’s gorgeous! The riparian forests that lace the valley are showing off the best shades of green and bursting with activity. I’ve had my first taste of Hauser Family sweet corn and the monsoons have started, life is good!

VWRC has had a productive year so far. Since the completion of the Plan in April 2011, VWRC has been busy fundraising, mapping, implementing demonstration projects and planning for the 2012/13 field season.

I hope you enjoy the first issue of The Otter. It should bring you up to date on VWRC’s recent activities and future plans. Enjoy your summer!

Anna Schrenk

news you otter know about
VWRC

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MEET VWRC STAFF

Yes, VWRC has staff! With funds from the Walton Family Foundation grant that Friends of the Verde River Greenway (FVRG) received in 2011, Friends was able to build institutional capacity and become the lead in implementing the Verde CIPMP.

CHIP NORTON VWRC PROGRAM MANAGER



Chip, a third generation Arizonan, lives next to the Verde River in Camp Verde. He retired from his project management career in 2008 and currently serves on several nonprofit, municipal and regional boards and commissions. Chip is an advocate for community-based solutions to conservation challenges, and he is excited about the prospect of working with a diverse group of partners to achieve conservation goals in the Verde watershed.

ANNA SCHRENK VWRC PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Aнна started as the VWRC Program Coordinator in February 2012. She comes to us with over fifteen years of experience working in the vegetation management field for the National Park Service and implementing Burned Area Emergency Response plans for several agencies within the Department of the Interior. In 1997

Anna received a degree in Environmental Studies with an emphasis in Plant Ecology from Prescott College.



Anna and her husband Phil were living on their sailboat in Mexico & California for the last three years before moving to Arizona to join VWRC. They are enjoying life on land amongst the landlubbers.

Anna is happy to be working with such a talented team of dedicated individuals.

MARGERY LAMBERT VWRC INTERIM-PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

Margery Lambert has served as FVRG/VWRC's interim administrator since January 2012. With a degree in Land Resources Planning from Stanford, she has held numerous planning



and environmental positions over the years. Since 2000, she has operated her own business, Skyline Information Services, specializing in business and industry research and writing/editing services. She has also served as the District Clerk (office manager) for the Verde Natural Resource Conservation District since Dec. 2009. In July Margery will be moving to Portland, OR, where she looks forward to connecting with conservation-oriented organizations while splashing in the rain.

LAURIE PARKER PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

Laurie Parker is the new Program Administrator. A native of Arizona, she grew up along the Gila River in Eastern Arizona.



Prior to moving to Verde Valley in 1994, Laurie worked in an administrative capacity with general contractors

whose clients included the Department of Veterans Affairs, Corps of Engineers and Arizona Department of Transportation.

As an educator for the last twelve years,

See **STAFF** on next page

STAFF

Laurie focused on teaching students about groundwater through Project WET, which provided opportunities for students to participate in science-based activities in a natural environment. Along with her husband and two children, she spends much of her time playing outdoors in our valley and gardening in her back yard.

GREG GOODWIN GIS SPECIALIST

Greg was hired in March as VWRC's GIS Specialist. After completing his Graduate Certificate in Geographic Information Systems in 2009 at Northern Arizona University, he continued with an M.S in Applied Geographic Information Science



and graduated in May of 2012. Currently, he is collecting existing GIS data from multiple partner organizations to develop an interactive watershed map and database. When Greg is not performing his daily GIS functions, he enjoys hiking, camping, swimming and cycling.

STEVE ESTES COMMUNITY OUTREACH DIRECTOR

Prior to his present position as Community Outreach Director for both the Friends of the Verde River Greenway and Verde Valley Land Preservation,

Steve's career had been focused in the human services.

At the bachelor's level (ASU) Steve's social work career includes 12 years in juvenile corrections, assignments in addiction counseling, child protective services, and community mental health. In 1995, he took time to pur-



sue a master's degree in public administration (NAU). Choosing a concentration in environmental policy, water issues in the arid west became his focus.

Upon graduation, the inertia of Steve's resume drew him back into the human services, resulting in chief executive assignments in community mental health organizations in Oregon, Iowa, and Arizona. Steve remained abreast of environmental matters, particularly those pertaining to the viability of the Verde River watershed, and served for 2 years on the

Yavapai County Water Advisory Committee.

Steve and his wife Erin live in Cornville.

LAURA JONES COMMUNITY OUTREACH COORDINATOR & FIELD SUPERVISOR

Laura Jones joins us with a back-



ground in an extensive experience in non-profit, human resources and volunteer management. She has lived in Clarkdale for the last six years where she was co-owner of a local deli and has become an active member of the community through volunteer work with Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Verde Valley Land Preservation Institute and Friends of the Verde River Greenway.

Laura loves living the small time life in her historic Clarkdale bungalow with her sweet cat Henry. ~

Goodbye and Good Luck!

VWRC and the Verde Valley community have lost two dedicated individuals to northern frontiers. We wish them luck in their new adventures and careers paths.

Sharon Kim was a dynamic member of the VWRC Steering Committee, she always provided refreshing ideas and great guidance to the planning process. Sharon and her family have moved to Alaska, where she works for Kenai Fjords National Park.

Margery Lambert is missed by VWRC staff. Margery was a HUGE help in setting up the FVRG and VWRC offices and helping out whenever she could. Margery and her kitties have moved to Portland, OR.

Quarterly Spotlight

COMMUNITY OUTREACH, EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

One of the Guiding Principles in the Verde River CIPMP for executing VWRC's Vision is to:

Provide education and outreach for the local community and public. Use education and outreach to help involve the local community and public. These programs should explain the need to remove invasive species, to restore ecological function, to limit invasive weed introductions (including ornamental plants), and to limit human disturbances to project areas.

This 5-Year Goal will help guide our education and outreach efforts.

Social Goal — *Over the next 5 years, provide education and*

outreach to the local community and public. Provide information on the prevention and removal of invasive species, their detrimental effects, and the services and funding available for removing invasive species on their land.

To accomplish this goal the Verde CIPMP suggests the following actions:

- *Develop effective educational and outreach materials (pamphlets, school programs, invasive species informational cards, field trips, workshops, local television, etc.) to distribute to the local community and public.*
- *Contact local community leaders and private landowners to initiate management strategies for controlling invasive ornamental plants that are providing a seed source for areas downstream.*
- *Include community members and stakeholders in educational events to promote the health of the Verde River system.*
- *Educate and train local conservation crews, agencies, and contractors in technical skills to promote their professional growth.*

See **OUTREACH** on Pg. 5

VERDE NRCD TAKES THE LEAD ON EDUCATING VERDE VALLEY YOUTH

The Verde Natural Resource Conservation District (NRCD) Education Center has increased both youth and adult education and outreach by increasing the hours of the Education Center instructors. Funding to increase instructor hours by 10 hours per week has resulted in a significant increase in classroom and field time devoted to river health and invasive species.

During the Spring of 2012 the Lynda Zanolli and her assistant Katie Reeves contacted 4,540 youth in the Verde Valley, double the number of youth

VWRC was required to contact. Keep up the great work!



The Verde NRDC hosted an Alternative Plant Expo where they provide information about native alternatives for landscaping. Over 300 contacts were made with the public during this event.

In July, VWRC is collaborating with NRCD, Salt River Project, Montezuma Castle National Monument, University of Arizona-Cooperative Extension and USFS to

provide a teacher training workshop for 25 local teachers. The focus of the workshop is: **Verde River: Then, Now and Tomorrow.** ~

A RIVER OF RELATIONSHIPS

Improving or enhancing the health of a watershed the size of the one with which we are blessed is a tall order by anyone's estimation. Throughout the west, streams and rivers typically run through very large parcels of either public or private land. When they become degraded (in our focus via invasive plant species) efforts toward improvements begin with conversations involving usually just a handful of stakeholders. Among these might be a few ranchers holding thousands of acres each and perhaps a National Forest or two.

Though no small chore, reaching cooperation among 5 or 10 players in the arid west regarding flowing waters pales in comparison to the task ahead in the Verde River watershed. Here there are over 1700 individual conversations waiting to happen. With some demonstration-level



funding in hand and the will to make an impact sufficient to meet the scale of the task ahead, the Friends of the Verde River Greenway (FVRG) launched its project.

With funding in place (June, 2010), the Community Outreach project began in earnest 4 months later with the hiring of the Community Outreach Director. The prime objective is to engage private landowners whose properties involve a perennial stream within the Verde River watershed. First year goals of the funding agree-

ment called for 3 miles of privately held riverside habitat to be under agreement to map for the presence of invasive plant species. First year totals came in at 7 miles. Second year expectations are to total 6 miles. It appears these will settle near 20 miles.

See **RIVER OF RELATIONSHIPS** on Page 6

OUTREACH

- *Improve aesthetic enjoyment for the public; promote their involvement and interaction with project sites by holding volunteer invasive species removal events in sites that are frequented by the public.*

The Community Outreach and Education Sub-Committee has been formed and is working together to develop a implement a strategy that will accomplish the 5-Year goal.

Private Landowner Outreach
VWRC has held several events where staff have demonstrated the technical assistance we can

provide private landowners. These events have been an effective way of reaching landowners living along the same stretch of river or creek.

VWRC has a goal to secure agreements with 100 private landowners in 2012; this is a large endeavor. This summer we will step up our efforts by hosting several events along Oak Creek for private landowners to learn how we can work together to improve riparian health.

For private landowner assistance please call Laura Jones at 928-451-6860 or email her at: laura@verdewrc.org ~

VWRC

Please contact Laurie Parker VWRC Program Administrator by email at:

admin@verderivergreenway.org or call her at 928-301-4934 to be informed of future meetings.

This summer the VWRC Steering Committee and Staff was busy planning for the fall/winter field season, writing grants and agreements, finalizing MOU's, educating youth and teachers, engaging private landowners, mapping invasive plants and taking a bit of a summer vacation! ~

VWRC PARTNERS WITH LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS TO PROVIDE WORKFORCE

Three goals outlined in the Verde River CIPMP are: (1) to provide employment opportunities for Verde Valley residents; (2) to educate and train youth conservation corps and contractors in technical skills that will promote their professional growth; and (3) control invasive plants in the Verde watershed. To accomplish these goals VWRC has partnered with two local organizations: Coconino Rural Environment Corps (CREC) and The Vetraplex; they will provide field crews in the fall when we start removing invasive plants.

Both Vetraplex and CREC are currently recruiting locally for both crew leader, assistant crew leader and crew members for VWRC's fall field season removing invasive plants along the Verde River, Oak Creek and West Clear Creek. VWRC is committed to providing skill training and job opportunities to young adults and Veterans in the Verde River watershed.

**COCONINO RURAL
CREC
ENVIRONMENT CORPS**

CREC will provide the youth component of VWRC's Field Crew. CREC serves youth, aged 15-18 and young adults 18-30, who are interested in

the environment, resource conservation and land management related careers. CREC is currently taking ap-

plications for 1 crew leader, 1 assistant crew leader and 6 Corpsmembers who are Verde watershed residents and between the age of 18-30. For more info go to: www.crecweb.org/jobdetail.phpcategory=corps&id=000000053

The Vetraplex, is a local business helping Veterans get back on their feet after serving this country. Their slogan is "Putting the words "Thank you for your service" into action!" The Vetraplex provides affordable housing to Veterans, easy access to local and Veteran resources, and job opportunities and career skills. Vetraplex is recruiting for 1 Crew Leader and 5 Veterans for 6 month fall/winter field season. Veterans may apply by contacting Gary Rideout at:

gary@vetraplex.org or call him at: 928-284-2022.



Both CREC and Vetraplex are expanding their programs to partner with VWRC to provide this important work force. VWRC anticipates a productive field season working with both Vetraplex and CREC. ~

A RIVER OF RELATIONSHIPS

Knowing that identifying invasive occurrences on private land would raise expectations for mitigation plans, FVRG set out to leverage these successes toward funding to undertake removal, treatment, and monitoring on presently (and yet to be) mapped lands. That effort came into realization late 2011, resulting in boots hitting the ground to remove, treat, and monitor re-growth of our 4 most wanted invaders – Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), Saltcedar (*Tamarix spp.*), Giant Reed (*Arundo donax*), and Russian Olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*).

Presentations, events, media submissions, news arti-

cles, radio coverage, and TV appearances all have served to support the up-tick in community awareness of the threat to river health that these invaders present. Continuing efforts in these realms will, over time, result in a notably healthier and vibrant Verde River watershed. Nothing, however, can replace the invaluable face-to-face interactions and ongoing bonds they yield.

In the end it is indeed – a river of relationships. ~

By Steve Estes

VWRC DEMONSTRATES INVASIVE PLANT REMOVAL

During the month of March, VWRC partnered with Coconino Rural Environment Corps (CREC) to demonstrate the invasive species removal process at select sites along the Verde River as suggested in the Verde River CIPMP. VWRC's newly hired staff hit the ground running preparing for CREC crews, who arrived on leap day (February 29). The Nature Conservancy, VWRC, and Tamarisk Coalition staff and FVRG volunteers installed permanent monitoring transects and collected base line data at sites prior to removal and treatment. VWRC will monitor these treatment sites



every 6-12 months depending on the land ownership. Both qualitative (photos) and quantitative (vegetation measurements) data will be collected; these will help guide future land management decisions.

Crews worked for a total of two spikes (eight day work week) removing invasive plants from these selected Demonstration sites in the watershed. Corpsmembers practiced their sawyer skill by cutting several large diameter trees and a very dense stand of Tamarisk. Corpsmembers compare Tamarisk to cutting into steel whereas the Tree of Heaven is like cutting butter. The Verde Valley had two big storms this spring; these dropped at least an inch of rain, snow, sleet and hail, through all of which these hardy CREC Crews continued to remove invasive species. Crews camped at TNC's Shield Ranch, where they enjoyed the shelter from pelting rain and sleet in the evenings.



During the first spike one crew worked at Arizona State Parks- Rock-in' River Ranch off of Salt Mine Road south of Camp Verde. A wide alluvial fan dominates most of this site, where dense stands of Tamarisk dominate the understory. During floods, debris tends to build up behind thickets of young tamarisk, encouraging their growth and sometimes creating land

forms that alter the course of the river. CREC crews cut and removed nearly two acres of tamarisk and one large Russian olive tree. The last day of this spike crews stopped cutting and treating due to thunder and lightning and snow flurries.

The second spike brought two eight-person crews down to the Verde Valley. We spread these two crews out and worked on several sites on both public and private lands. One crew spent two and half days at Alcantara Vineyards, removing Giant Reed and Tamarisk from about two miles of the river's riparian area. The crew, with help from Alcantara staff, piled the debris up at several accessible sites, that was later chipped by VWRC volunteers. The other crew worked on the Prescott National Forest site known as the Truswell Property, which is also along Salt Mine Road.

See **DEMO** on page 9

CROSS-WATERSHED COLLABORATION AND BEYOND

In February, seven representatives of VWRC traveled to Grand Junction, Colorado for the Tamarisk Coalition (TC) Symposium. VWRC presented a poster describing the collaborative work being done to control weeds in the Verde Valley. We walked away from the symposium with increased knowledge about techniques and methods for controlling and monitoring invasive plants; we obtained a better idea of how the TC can support VWRC, and how the watershed partnerships in the Colorado River Basin and beyond can increase collaboration, communication and information sharing.

Every year the TC presents the First President's Award, in honor of Pete Larson, the first TC President. The award pays tribute to Pete's dedication to restoring natural resources through education, science and volunteerism. The award includes a \$500 cash prize. Steve Estes walked

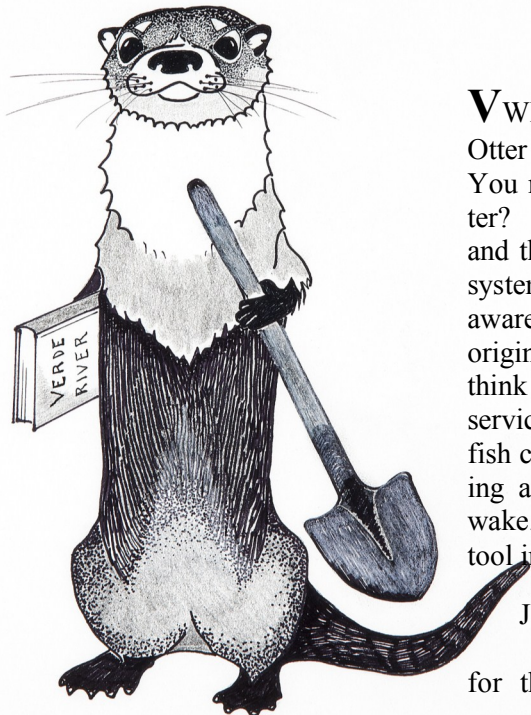
away with several other raffle giveaways. Both Chip and Steve donated their prizes to VWRC.



This year Chip Norton, VWRC Program Manager and FVRG President was presented with this award. Chip was described by those who nominated him as... "the driving force, visionary, a dedicated volunteer, invaluable to the future of the watershed, passionate about working and learning, a tireless advocate

and inspirational." Congratulations Chip!

In April, Anna Schrenk and Laurie Parker traveled to Safford, Arizona for the Arizona Riparian Council's Annual meeting. During this conference VWRC staff were able to connect with Gila Watershed Partnership (GWP) staff, which has developed into increased communication and information sharing between the two Arizona partnerships.



VWRC has adopted the River Otter as our official mascot. You may ask why the River Otter? Well, they are super cute and they demand a healthy river system to survive. Yes, we are aware that their species was not originally from the Verde, but think of otter as doing the river a service by eating crayfish. Crayfish can decimate a stream, leaving a path of destruction in its wake. The otter is an important tool in the restoration tool box.

Jamie Nielson, a Restoration Ecologist for the Tamarisk Coalition, is

not only a vibrant member of the VWRC Steering Committee, she is the artist behind the VWRC mascot river otter.

VWRC would like to purchase an Otter costume to use at events and with schools groups, of course we'll be looking for volunteers to wear this costume. We are also taking name ideas for VWRC's new mascot.

Nice work Jamie!

DEMO PROJECTS

The crews removed several large patches of Arundo, a hill of Tamarisk and at least 15 acres of Tree of Heaven. The large stand of Tree of Heaven was visible to passersby from Salt Mine Road, some of whom stopped see our progress. We experimented with several different treatment methods and herbicide combinations on the Tree of Heaven. We will monitor the effectiveness of these treatments closely and use adaptive management to guide future treatments. Crews also worked the east side of the river at Park Central, private farmland. Crews removed several large diameter tamarisk trees in the upper sections of this site. With bad weather in the forecast, we moved the crews to level terrain. During the rain, crews continued to cut the invasive plants without treating with herbicide. Crews will come back to these sites in the fall and make a second cut and treat with herbicide to complete the treatment. CREC crews cleared over two acres of invasive plants for this private landowner.



**Before tamarisk removal at
Rockin' River Ranch**



**After tamarisk removal at
Rockin' River Ranch**

These Demonstration Projects were funded by grants received by FVRG from the Walton Family Foundation (WFF) and Resource Advisory Committee (RAC). Numerous VWRC partners assisted VWRC staff with these projects and contributed over 100 hours of in-kind volunteer labor.

These demonstration projects provided an opportunity for VWRC to test out a number of treatment methods on dense stands of Tree of Heaven. We have expanded the inventory and mapping data collection; this will include more site characteristics and access information, which will help during project planning. Some other lessons learned were: (1) choosing a site compatible to the crew for best success; (2) start in the upper reaches of the watershed, (3) identify herbicide support needs and hire a VWRC Field Crew Leader.

These lessons learned will be used in the adaptive management process and to develop better management practices. Overall these Demonstration Projects were a success! ~

SAVE THE DATE
VWRC Annual Stakeholders Meeting
September 13, 2012

~TIME AND LOCATION TO BE ANNOUNCED~

Thank you, VWRC Stakeholders, for being a watershed steward & improving habitat in the Verde

- ◆ Friends of the Verde River Greenway
- ◆ The Nature Conservancy
- ◆ Natural Resource Conservation Service
- ◆ Arizona Game and Fish
- ◆ U.S. Fish and Wildlife
- ◆ Coconino National Forest
- ◆ Prescott National Forest
- ◆ Tonto National Forest
- ◆ Verde Natural Resource Conservation District
- ◆ Fred Phillips Consulting LLC
- ◆ Walton Family Foundation
- ◆ U of A, Yavapai County Extension Services
- ◆ National Park Service
- ◆ Arizona Wildlife Federation
- ◆ Arizona State Park Foundation
- ◆ Yavapai-Apache Nation
- ◆ Arizona State Parks
- ◆ Freeport McMoran Copper and Gold
- ◆ Northern Arizona University
- ◆ Community Forest Trust
- ◆ City of Cottonwood,
- ◆ Tamarisk Coalition
- ◆ Arizona State land Department
- ◆ Sierra Club
- ◆ Salt River Project
- ◆ Verde Village Property Owners Assn.
- ◆ Oak Creek Valley Property Owners Assn.
- ◆ Town of Clarkdale
- ◆ Cemex
- ◆ Vetraplex
- ◆ Coconino Rural Environment Corps
- ◆ Oak Creek Watershed Council
- ◆ Alcantara Vineyard
- ◆ Grady Tate Family
- ◆ Todd Robinson
- ◆ Steve and Erin Estes

VWRC Steering Committee Members

Friends of the Verde River Greenway-**Chip Norton**
 The Nature Conservancy- **Kim Schonek**
 Coconino National Forest- **Laura Moser**
 Arizona State Parks-**Steven “Max” Castillo**
 Arizona Game and Fish-**Wade Albrecht**
 Salt River Project-**Ruth Valencia**
 National Park Service-**Matt Guebard**
 Natural Resource Conservation District-**Jodi Allen**
 USFWS (Partners for Wildlife)-**Kris Randall**
 Tamarisk Coalition-**Jamie Nielson**
 Yavapai-Apache Nation-**Billie Garner**
 Prescott National Forest-**Albert Sillas**

Volunteer with VWRC!

Please contact Anna at 951-236-6652 or anna.schrenk@verdewrc.org to help VWRC map

VWRC Sub-Committees

Education and Outreach

Co-coordinators: Steve Estes and Lynda Zanolli
Members: Max Castillo, Chip Norton, Anna Schrenk, Jaime Nielsen, Tahnee Robertson

Research and Monitoring

Co-coordinators: Kim Schonek and Ruth Valencia
Members: Laura Moser, Chip Norton, Jaime Nielsen, Max Castillo, Anna Schrenk, Selena Pao, Greg Goodwin

Planning and Implementation

Co-coordinators: Anna Schrenk and Laura Moser
Members: Jodi Allen, Kim Schonek, Chip Norton, Selena Pao, Ruth Valencia

Sustainable Funding

Co-coordinators: Jamie Nielson and Chip Norton
Members: Anna Schrenk, Wade Albrecht, Kristin Jespersen
Facilitators: Tahnee Robertson and Larry Fisher

Working together to restore the Verde watershed

VWRC & FVRG

P.O. Box 2535
Cottonwood, AZ 86326

**Check out our website:
www.verdewrc.org**



**You otter know
about this plant, it's
called Giant Reed
or Arundo donax
and it's invading
the Verde river
watershed**

Arundo invades streambanks, can accelerate erosion, destabilizes banks and threatens nearby structures.



FVRG Governing Council

Chip Norton — President
Tony Gioia — Vice President
Diane Joens — Treasurer
Marsha Foutz — Co-Secretary
Peggy Chaikin — Co-Secretary

Councilors

Jan Moore, Yavapai County Water Advisory Committee
Bob Rothrock, Verde Valley Land Preservation Institute
Steven "Max" Castillo-Arizona State Parks

FVRG and VWRC

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Visit us at:
www.verdewrc.org