



# The Otter

Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition Newsletter  
VWRC is a program of Friends of Verde River Greenway



## VWRC Conservation Crew Update: Fall-Winter Season By Ben Kowalski

The beginning of Spring marks the end of the season for VWRC's Conservation Crews. During the past Fall-Winter season, VWRC engaged five "boots on the ground" field crews to work on riparian restoration on both public and private properties across the Verde River Watershed. This was a record-setting level of engagement for VWRC, given the number of crews working in coordination to restore more than 1,000 acres in all this field season.

The crews worked through an unpredictably wet winter, yet still treated 350 new acres of riparian areas along the Verde River and its tributary Oak Creek. Nearly 700 acres of riparian area were retreated, signaling the growth and development of VWRC's monitoring and maintenance programming. The Vetraplex, a local non-profit that serves veterans through professional training and job development



in the Verde Valley, led the retreatment of many properties: focusing especially on one of the most notorious weeds found locally: Giant Reed or *Arundo donax*.

Arizona Conservation Corps (AZCC) led four crews in treating the new acreage, mostly working along the Verde River near Camp Verde, down to Beasley Flat River Access Point (RAP), where the Wilderness stretch of the

Verde River begins. The crews also covered properties at the confluence of West Clear Creek and the Verde River, as well as along Oak Creek through Cornville. AZCC crews also completed restoration work in the Verde River headwaters, above Perkinsville, and along the stretch of the upper Verde River that is most well-known from the window of a seat on the Verde Valley Railroad.

These areas proved especially dense with all four target species: Giant Reed (*Arundo donax*); Salt Cedar (*Tamarix spp.*); Russian Olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*); and Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*).

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## Program Manager's Log

by Anna Schrenk

Hello Friends,

Another field season under our belt, our fifth to be exact! VWRC Field crews have completed the field season of invasive plant treatments in the Verde and despite the high river flows since the New Year, we were able to accomplish quite a bit. Thankyou to all VWRC partners, including private landowners, for your support and participation in this program. VWRC partners have been busy working on other concerns and opportunities including: developing a native plant material cooperative; planning a State of the Watershed Conference; participating in workshops to discuss erosion and streambank stabilization; and launching the Verde Outdoor Volunteer Network.

Want to learn more and get involved? Call us or stop by Friends office in Old Town, register to attend the Verde River: State of the Watershed Conference in May, and don't forget to GIVE during Arizona Gives Day on April 4.

Thanks, and have a beautiful Spring.

-Anna

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## Friends Community Calendar - Spring 2017

**March 3, Camp Verde** — VWRC Conservation Crew Graduation BBQ, Rockin' River Ranch, 12-1:30PM

**March 4, Clarkdale** — Clarkdale Kayak Co. Verde River Clean-up 11:30 - 3:30 PM. RSVP only, call Dan (800) 478-4711

**March 4, Jerome** — *A Night for the Verde*, a fundraiser for One for the Verde, hosted by Cellar 433, Jerome, 5-8PM

**March 7, Cottonwood** — *A Better Future for the Verde River*, a community presentation by Friends & Verde River Basin Partnership, Yavapai Co. Building, 10:30AM-12PM

**March 11, Cottonwood/Camp Verde** — REI-TNC Spring Volunteer Weekend, Cottonwood River Front Park, 9AM-1PM. Free camping and BBQ dinner at Rockin' River Ranch, Camp Verde, starting at 4PM. RSVP at <http://signup.com/go/kYfFXq>

**March 12, Camp Verde** — REI-TNC Spring Volunteer Weekend, Rezonico Park, Camp Verde, 8AM-12PM. RSVP at <http://signup.com/go/kYfFXq>

**March 18, Camp Verde** — VRVNO Verde River Runoff, White Bridge RAP start & Beasley Flats RAP finish, 7:30AM-3PM. Questions & more info: [events@vrvno.org](mailto:events@vrvno.org), (928) 300-3880

**March 18-19, Camp Verde** — *Spring Heritage Pecan & Wine Festival*, Camp Verde. Saturday, 3/18, 10AM-6PM; Sunday, 3/19, 10AM-4PM.

**March 28, Camp Verde** — VWRC Steering Committee Monthly Meeting, Camp Verde Public Library, 1-3PM.

**April 4, Cottonwood** — *Arizona Gives Day*, Friends of Verde River Greenway Headquarters at RIOT, Old Town Cottonwood, 11AM-9PM.

**April 8, Cottonwood** — *Taco Night with One for the Verde & The Red Rooster Café*, Old Town Cottonwood, 5-8PM.

**April 22, Cottonwood** — *AlterNative Plant Festival*, Verde River Growers, Cottonwood, 9AM-4PM.

**April 22, Camp Verde** — *Yavapai Apache Nation Earth Day Celebration*, Veteran's Memorial Park, Camp Verde. Join this family-friendly event, 10AM-2PM.

**April 27-30, Verde Valley** — VRVNO Verde Valley Nature & Birding Festival. This annual three-day festival will be held at various sites across the Verde Valley, visit [www.birdyverde.org](http://www.birdyverde.org)

**May 3, Page Springs** — *Wine down to the River*, a fundraiser for One for the Verde hosted by Page Springs Cellars, Page Springs. Join for winetasting, food, and games, 5-8PM.

**May 10-11, Verde Valley & Clarkdale** — *The Verde River: State of the Watershed Conference*. Verde Valley field trips Wednesday, 5/10; conference & keynote presentation Thursday, 5/11, 8AM-5PM. Meet & greet dinner 5/10, 6-9PM, at RIOT, Cottonwood. Registration \$35, more info at [www.verderivergreenway.org](http://www.verderivergreenway.org)



### Otters: Not from 'round here?

River otters once abounded on Southwestern rivers, including the Verde, Salt, Colorado, and Gila. Sadly though, early settlers hunted and killed these native otters to extinction by the early 1900s. Today, you will see many Verde River otters swimming and playing, but these are not native species, but an otter species from Louisiana, introduced by AZ Game & Fish in 1980.

### Donate to Friends on Arizona Gives Day, April 4! Join Friends of Verde River Greenway for Arizona Gives Day 2017, this April 4!



#AZGivesDay

This one-day fundraising event celebrates the work of non-profits across the state of Arizona by profiling them as causes worth giving to.

Give a donation to Friends of Verde River Greenway to support the health of the Verde River Watershed! Your gift makes a difference for conservation of our local water resources, and for the restoration work that Friends of the Verde River Greenway leads. **Donate today!**

[www.azgives.org/verderivergreenway-az](http://www.azgives.org/verderivergreenway-az)

There will be a **AZ Gives Day Fundraising Party at RIOT** in Old Town Cottonwood (777 N Main St, Cottonwood, AZ 86326) Tuesday, April 4, from 11AM-9PM. Join us for live music, drink specials, raffle prizes, and more!



## Crew Update, from page 1

VWRC's has staged goals for the removal of these species, with Salt Cedar and Russian Olive being zero-tolerance species, and 80% removal targets for Giant Reed and Tree of Heaven in the next 2 years.

The reason for targeting these two species rests with the reality that removal of both Giant Reed and Tree of Heaven is especially difficult, with consecutive years of retreatment, monitoring, and maintenance necessary for the successful eradication of both species. Also, both species are widely (and densely) spread throughout the Verde River Watershed, thus removal and restoration will have to be phased in a multi-year strategy for VWRC's

## A Woman in Her Field: Marking the Success of Sara Van Marel

You would know Sara by the respect she gives you, the way that she wears her Chaco sandals in the field, and by the great hound that she keeps by her side... She is a woman in her element by the river, leading corps-members on how to properly treat some of nastiest weeds in the West, whether with a chainsaw or by hand-pulling. VWRC and Friends of Verde River Greenway said goodbye to former VWRC Field Supervisor Sara Van Marel this past December 2016. Sara worked with Friends of Verde River Greenway from 2014-2016.

Sara first met the Verde River as an AmeriCorps member with Arizona Conservation Corps (AZCC) in 2013. After a season of restoration work on the Verde River, Sara was hooked: it took little persuasion to keep her onboard, and she was hired to lead the next season's field crews as the

**Sara has climbed our career ladder in the Verde, gaining valuable skills and experience that will enable her to be our next generation of conservationist. -Anna Schrenk**

Conservation Crews.

VWRC will celebrate the hard work and service of the 2016-2017 Conservation Crews on March 3rd, for a Crew Graduation Party and Barbeque. This is the fourth successful crew season for VWRC, and we couldn't be more appreciative of the progress we are making towards our vision of the Verde River and its tributaries to comprise a diverse, self-sustaining, and resilient riparian ecosystem in which invasive plant species are controlled through cooperative stakeholder participation. We are looking forward to continuing on our path towards this vision with our next Conservation

VWRC Field Supervisor.

Friends of the Verde River already misses Sara and her



faithful canine, Pondo, but we know that she is off to great things! Sara has been hired by AZCC to lead their Youth Conservation Corps program, a program that employs youth aged 17 to 18 in community service and resource conservation with hands-on projects amongst a variety of land-management and community partners, including some in the Verde Valley.

We wish you the best Sara, and hope to keep seeing you and Pondo around the Verde Valley!

## Welcome, Ben, VWRC's New Field Supervisor!



You may have recognized a new face—literally our one and only “new guy” around the office—to join our Friends of Verde River Greenway staff... Ben Kowalski! Since December 2016, Ben has been leading in the role of VWRC Field Supervisor, managing the five different VWRC Conservation Crews on the ground throughout the remainder of the 2016-2017 field season.

Ben is a recent graduate of Mercyhurst University in Erie, PA and earned a degree in Political Science with a concentration in Environmental Studies. During his time in college, he spent a summer in Colorado with the Southwest Conservation Corps. After school, he joined Arizona Conservation Corps in Flagstaff, working with the trail crew in Sedona. After that, he joined AZCC's Mentor Development Program and became a Youth Conservation Corps crew leader on the North Kaibab National Forest. After the summer, he became a crew leader on one of the restoration crews in the Verde Valley.

If you see Ben around, be sure to thank him for all his hard work! We are excited to have him as part of our team!

## Verde River Basin Partnership Merges with Friends of Verde River Greenway

Since 2015, Friends of Verde River Greenway and Verde River Basin Partnership, two community-based watershed groups, have worked diligently on how, in a thoughtful and strategic way, to coordinate their efforts to better serve the communities in the Verde watershed. Ultimately, we have decided to leverage the best of each of our organizations and merge into a single entity. Through this merger, the Partnership and Friends will combine our institutional knowledge and success to make the greatest impact.

Friends of Verde River Greenway is a nonprofit corporation that envisions a healthy, free-flowing Verde River and tributaries that support the environment, a thriving economy, and quality of life for current and future generations. Friends programs and projects include the Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition (riparian restoration), Verde River Exchange (voluntary water offsets), One for the Verde (business support for river projects), and Toolboxes for Land and Water Management

(integration of land use planning decision making with water management goals). Friends is a key partner with The Nature Conservancy, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and local farmers in the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (flow and habitat restoration). Additionally, Friends provides active support to the Verde Front and

Sedona Verde Valley Tourism Council for river recreation and sustainable tourism efforts.

Since its inception ten years ago, the Verde River Basin Partnership, with the goal to support and preserve the long-term health of the Verde River and its watershed, has been a constantly evolving organization, fostering an increased awareness of significant challenges facing everyone in regard to preserving limited water resources. The Partnership produces and distributes free factual, science-based educational materials at various levels of detail ranging from simple FAQ sheets to an in-depth Primer on Water Resources. It also promotes scientific studies that are germane to regional water issues, provides outreach to the community by hosting presentations and field trips, and exhibits at local events.

The Verde River Basin Partnership merged into Friends of Verde River Greenway on January 1, 2017. Moving forward, community members, stakeholders, and interested individuals will continue to benefit from similar programs and activities previously offered by the Partnership, as well as the existing programs of Friends. Both organizations are enthusiastic and ready to work together as one organization, Friends of Verde River Greenway.



## Registration Open! The Verde River: State of the Watershed Conference 2017

This year marks the first year for The Verde River State of the Watershed Conference, to be held May 10-11th, 2017, hosted by the Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition. This event is held to bring together the broad network of partners, community members, local leadership, scientists, restoration practitioners, business owners, and all other river enthusiasts who have a vested interest in the health of the Verde River Watershed.

This two-day event will include 13 field trips that invite conference attendees to explore and learn about the Verde Valley; as well as include conference session discussions led by local leaders and changemakers on sustaining flows, restoring habitat, and promoting community.



To headline this first-time event, Sara Porter, Director of the Kyl Center for Water Policy at Arizona State University, will give a keynote presentation on water security and sustainability for the Verde River Watershed, as it fits

into the larger vision of water planning for all of Arizona's watersheds, and the cities, industries and ecosystems that depends on our watersheds' health.

Visit Verde River State of the Watershed Conference website at <http://www.verderivergreenway.org/the-verde-river-state-of-the-watershed-conference/> to find out more about the event's schedule, registration, and event sponsorship. Registration is open for the public, and only \$35.

**[Register today!](#)**



## ASTROMECHS & Animal Allies: Finding Friends at Mountain View Prep School

Robotics is the future: or so they say... And those who say that are not who you think: Meet the surprising students of Mountain View Preparatory School in Cottonwood, AZ, who truly believe that they have some hope to offer the future. Led by their teacher, Ms. Theresa Rose, these 10 students have banded together to form their school's Robotics Club for two years in a row. "I started the club last year," said Ms. Rose, "I had no idea that the students would be this enthusiastic about it. Even in two years, we've come a long way."

Ms. Rose started the club on her own, applying to an Arizona First grant program that would bring the Arizona LEGO League to Mountain View Prep School, where she teaches math and science to elementary and middle-school age students. The Arizona LEGO League asks students

to compete in three categories: Community, Robotics and Teamwork.

Earlier this fall, Ms. Rose's Robotics Club, called the "ASTROMECHS", completed their Community exercise by creating a magnetized-system for collecting fishing trash and other metal debris from the lagoons at Dead Horse State Park.

One of the students on the team was inspired to clean up the lagoons with her peers after she saw a bird caught in fishing line debris, and saw it suffer and die. She led her teammates in creating large magnet "lures" that would pull out metal fishing hooks and lures, and the fishing line attached.

While developing their magnet technology for trash clean-up, the students learned just how much trash is left on the banks of the lagoons at Dead Horse State Park, and the unknown large quantities of fishing trash that settles to the

bottom of lagoons. The students presented their Community Project to VWRC in November, and asked that VWRC speak to them more about what makes a riparian area healthy, and what are the risks to the health of the Verde River.

"The students really engaged in the process of trying to solve one of the most intransigent problems on the river: dumping and trash. VWRC works at a large scale to create a healthy Verde River Watershed by managing invasive plants as well as trash clean-up. The river looks a lot better now than it did ten years ago, but there is still a lot of work to be done," said Anna Schrenk, VWRC Program Director.

The Robotics competition is a team-exercise that asks students to build, program, and then successfully complete an obstacle-like course using their LEGO® robots on a game-board table. Teams are graded not just on their successful completion of tasks throughout the obstacle-course, but also on their teamwork and professionalism.

The Robotics Club competes annually in Arizona's State Robotics Competition. Students in the club travel to regional, then state-wide competitions. The students competed this past December in the regional competition in Flagstaff, placing in the top seven percent. The Mountain View Prep Team also won a "Core Value Award" at the regional competition.

The students will continue to the Arizona First State Finals in Phoenix this Spring. Beyond the State Finals, there is a national LEGO® Robotics competition for elementary, middle school and high school level teams.



## VWRC at The Tamarisk Coalition 2017 Conference, Ft. Collins, CO

This past February 7-9th VWRC staff, Friends board members, and partners with U.S. Forest Service-Prescott National Forest, Arizona Conservation Corps, and The Nature Conservancy attended the Tamarisk Coalition's 2017 Annual Conference in Ft. Collins, Colorado.

VWRC presented their poster during the poster session, "VWRC: A Collaborative Approach to Restoration in the Verde River Watershed." This poster was developed to highlight the past five years of implementation of the Verde River Cooperative Invasive Plant Management Plan, and to credit the Plan's success with much thanks to Conservation

Crew models developed with The Vetrplex and Arizona Conservation Corps. The Plan is a five-year plan led by VWRC since 2010. This plan set the defining ecological goals that

direct VWRC's boots-on-the-ground restoration work, and engage in cross-watershed partner collaboration for the



Continued, "Tamarisk," page 6

## Mizzou Alternative Break: January 9th–12th, By Ben Kowalksi



Students from the University of Missouri-Columbus (Mizzou) spent 4 days in early January volunteering in the Verde Valley with Friends of Verde River Greenway.

These students are part of “Alternative Spring Break,” a program of the University that encourages young adults to step outside their comfort-zone, and travel around the work for volunteer projects during the last week of their winter break.

On the first day of their week in the Valley, Mizzou students worked with one of VWRC’s Arizona Conservation Corps crews at Black Canyon Day Use Area, near Camp Verde, AZ. Despite rainy wather, students dug out flood debris and assisted AZCC in the treatment and removal of Salt Cedar (*Tamarix* sp.) on-site. The next day the students were up bright and early to head out to Rockin’ River Ranch, owned by Arizona State Parks. There, students worked alongside AZ Parks staff, assisting with landscaping and trail maintenance.

Day 3 brought the students to one of the best places on the Verde River, the Jail Trail in downtown Cottonwood. Work there focused on treating Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus*

*elagantus*) by hand-pulling small diameter trees from the floodplain and trail-ways. Students also assisted by removing trash and flood debris along the Verde River. Dusty Humphreys from Arizona State Parks also stopped by for a visit to educate the students more about the watershed.

The final day of the Mizzou student’s trip in the Verde Valley was spent with the National Park Service at Montezuma’s Well and Montezuma’s Castle National Monuments. NPS staff led the students in tours of both monuments, then in landscaping work remove invasive grass and restoring treated areas with native seed balls at Montezuma’s Well National Monument.

The students had expected to have one last day of volunteering on Friday but were called back to Missouri to beat a nasty winter storm that was moving across the Mid-West.

This was the second year that VWRC has hosted the Mizzou Alternative Spring Break students, and it proved to be part of a successfully growing inter-state and cross-institutional collaboration to benefit the health of the Verde River Watershed.



### Tamarisk, from page 5

benefit of the following goals:

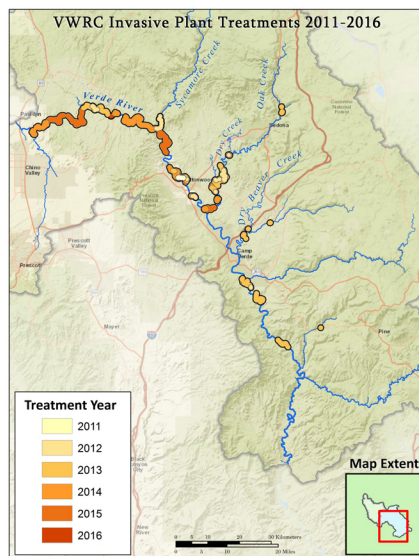
**Ecological:** Reduce invasive woody and herbaceous plant species through various control methods within the Coconino, Maricopa, and Yavapai County FEMA floodplain.

**Social:** Educate the local community and public about the economic and social value of a healthy river system, and the prevention and removal of invasive species, their detrimental effects, and the services and funding that are available to remove invasive species on their land.

**Economic:** Give the local community economic incentives and employment opportunities for removing invasive plant species on their own property.

**Management:** Establish a multi-stakeholder group to accomplish the ecological, social, and economic goals and to monitor the project’s success over the long term.

Friends of Verde River Greenway (Friends) Board President



Chip Norton presented with Kim Schonek of The Nature Conservancy to explain the collaborative effort that has brought Many Rivers Brewing to fruition as a B-Corporation that sets to donate 100% of its profits from its beer products to benefit the health of the Verde River Watershed.

The Tamarisk Coalition Conference highlighted the growing realm of a Restoration Economy for the West, as a multitude of non-profit, government, public and private partners have joined together to create services and goods that restore, protect and promote the health of our Western Watersheds. VWRC has been a partner of the Tamarisk Coalition for the past five years, and seeks to develop new

programming with the Coalition as part of their “Restore Our Rivers Campaign” in 2017.



## Verde River Watershed Coalition Celebrates Stakeholders at 4th Annual Meeting

The Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition (VWRC) hosted its 4th Annual Stakeholder Meeting on December 12, 2016, at the Clark Memorial Clubhouse, in Clarkdale, Arizona. This event is held to recognize and celebrate the successes of the partnerships and collaborative projects of VWRC over the past year. 2016 marked a big year for VWRC, as the program hosted more boots-on-the-ground Restoration Crews than any year before, 6 in total. The impact of the crews' work, and the partnerships that supported and led their work has been profoundly positive for the Verde Watershed.

Partners recognized as part of VWRC's success include Arizona Conservation Corps (AZCC); The Vetraplex; Arizona State Parks; U.S. Forest Service (Coconino and Prescott National Forests); Arizona Game & Fish; National Park Service; Town of Clarkdale; City of Cottonwood; Town of Camp Verde; Yavapai County; and dozens of passionate landowners and volunteers who have given their time and resources to benefit the health of the Verde River Watershed.

Presentations were given by AZCC and the Vetraplex highlighting VWRC Restoration Crews' work in 2016, as well as gave personal testimony to the value and impact of crew members' time spent on the Verde River and its tributaries.

what a difference...

67,172 + hours	13 public partners	221 private landowners	total acres
\$301,049 in-kind	100+ jobs	40 river miles	7,800
2283 riparian acres			

...Four years of VRWC makes.

Photo: Linda Brigman and Laura Jones



### Volunteer of the Year

Linda Brigman

### Landowner of the Year

Wally Coats & Margaret Thede



Photo: George Christianson and Anna Schrenk



### Partner of the Year

Arizona State Parks

### President's Award

Laura Moser, USFS



Eammon Stewart, a Jerome-native, gave a moving story of his experience being a Veteran, father of two young kids, and crew member. He quoted Sidhartha, expressing how he has lived his entire life by the Verde River, and now that he spends his work days on the river, he feels eternally connected to the river, and that nothing could be more rewarding and fulfilling.

"I considered my life, and it too was a river, and the boy Sidhartha was separated from the man Siddhartha and the graybeard Siddhartha only by shadows, not by real things. ... Nothing was, nothing will be; everything is, everything has being and presence."

-- Herman Hesse, Sidhartha

Awards were given to VWRC's most valued partners and volunteers, and included Linda Brigman as "Volunteer of the Year;" Wally Coats & Margaret Thede as "Landowner of the Year;" and Arizona State Parks as "Partner of the Year." Laura Moser, of the U.S. Forest Service Southwest District Office (Albuquerque) was given the "President's Award" for her career's dedication and service to serve the Verde River Watershed both locally and regionally.

VWRC thanks all of our partners, volunteers, consultants and staff for a very successful 2016. We look forward to continuing our collaboration for the health of the Verde River Watershed!

## Plant of the Season: Creosote (*Larrea tridentate*)

By Chris Jensen, Verde Natural Resource Conservation District (NRCD)



Homeowners when deciding on what to landscape with can make good ecological decisions by looking around at what grows naturally in the area. For many, cactus comes to mind, but there are many other native plants that would do well in your yard. Consider the creosote plant (*Larrea tridentate*), which can increase pollinators, as well as be a nurse plant for native cacti. Creosote offers many advantages to the environmentally conscious homeowner.

Creosote, also known commonly as chapparal, is native to the Southwest and grows at altitudes of 5,000 feet and below. It is found in the well drained slopes of the Sonoran, Mohave, Chihuahuan deserts as well as the Verde Valley. This low water, native plant that can to be several centuries old, and thrives in wet periods and times of drought.

This normally grows to be about 4 feet high, but can get as tall as 12 feet. Its small, waxy leaves are a quarter to a half inch long. In dry times the leaves will fold in half to

limit exposure to the sun. In times of extreme drought it will drop some leaves. When wet, rain will volatilize the leaves' oils, producing a unique, camphor-like odor that many associate with the scent of "desert rain."

Creosote flowers are small and yellow, and ripen into rounded seeds that are coated in a fine white fuzz. It reproduces via seeds and root cloning: old branches will die off and fall to the ground, while new branches continue to grow from the historic roots of the plant. Seeds are genetic clones of the original parent plant, so most often creosote bushes that are located in a local cluster are all genetically related. Due to its unique genetic regeneration process, there are some legacy creosotes that have been carbon-dated as more than 11,000 years old.

Creosote supports the food web by providing habitat for over 22 bee species that thrive off its yellow flowers, and the leaves serve as well as food for jackrabbits, the only animal known to eat the leaves. The leaves have a bitter taste, yet still have always had medicinal value; Native Americans used this plant to treat a number of illnesses; including fever, influenza, colds, upset stomach, gas, gout, arthritis, sinusitis, anemia, and fungus infections.

More information about this attractive low water, low maintenance native plant can be found at the Arizona Cooperative Extension, Yavapai County at: <https://cals.arizona.edu/yavapai/anr/hort/byg/archive/creosote.html>

### Friends Board

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