

CURRENTS & FLOWS

From Fossil Creek to the Future: A Year of Impact

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Winter 2025



Who are
Friends of the
VERDE RIVER

This magazine is lovingly created by Friends of the Verde River, a purpose-driven community benefit organization and 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Friends envisions a healthy, flowing Verde River and tributaries that support our natural environment, vibrant communities, and quality of life for future generations.

Learn more at
verderiver.org



Your Support Sustains the Verde River

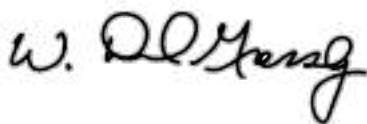
This year began with a flurry of activity for the Friends, many of which are highlighted in this Winter 2025 Newsletter. I would like to highlight the work just completed on the Wild and Scenic Fossil Creek where FVR work teams removed all invasive species along the length of the river. I think you will enjoy reading about this challenging project. FVR has also been named as an Arizona Forward Environmental Award finalist for this work. In addition, you will find inside further descriptions of where our restoration teams have been able to clear invasive species in other stretches of the Verde River. We also highlight the work being done to strengthen water quality monitoring all throughout the Verde River watershed and let you know how you can help as a Verde Water Watcher.

I hope you enjoy reading about the success of Martin Luther King Day of Service. We had over 100 volunteers work on invasive species removal, tree planting, erosion control and trash clean up. Volunteer opportunities are also described including for the BioBlitz and our Otter Spotter Program. We are particularly looking forward to the 25th anniversary of the Verde Valley Bird and Nature Festival to be held at the end of April.

Inside you will find tips on you on how at the household level you can conserve water and protect the river from contamination. Finally, please look at the wonderful story of how Kate Waters and Wild Heart Farms became River Champions. We can take inspiration from that work. Together through individual action and through partnerships we will be able to continue to protect and preserve the Verde River.

The Verde thrives because of you! Every effort we make is only possible with your continued support, and we are deeply grateful for your generosity and commitment. Your contributions help us protect and preserve this special place, ensuring its beauty and vitality for generations to come. From the heart of the Verde, we thank you.

W. David Gressly
Executive Director



Donate Today!
verderiver.org/donate



Restoration Updates

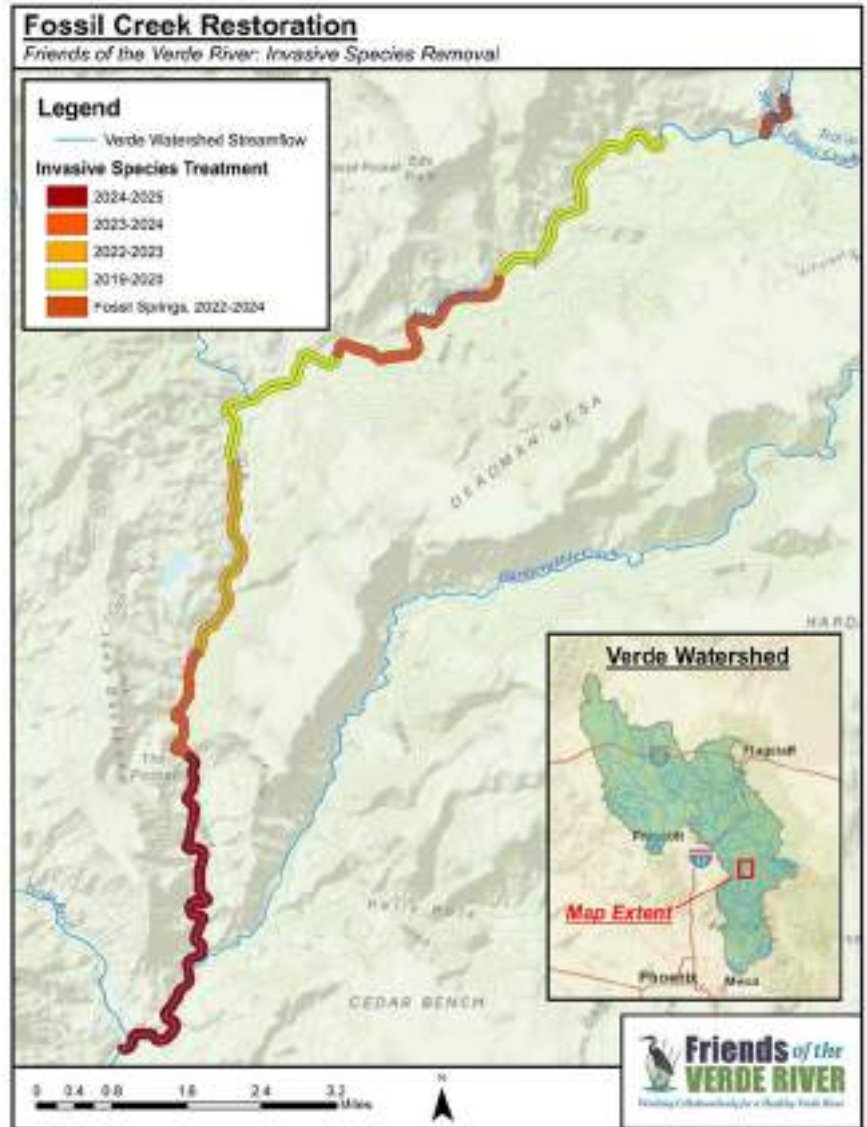
Fossil Creek

Friends of the Verde River, with its partners, has worked over the last five years to remove high priority invasive plant species from the riparian area along the entire 17 mile length of Fossil Creek. For nearly 100 years, Fossil Creek was diverted and used for power generation and the creek ran dry for much of its reach. A large effort to decommission the dam took place in the early 2000s and Fossil Creek was designated Wild and Scenic in 2009. By bringing the water back, the creek healed.

This revived the unique and diverse Fremont cottonwood-Goodding's willow riparian forests. These rare riparian areas sustain a diversity of wildlife, providing habitat for migratory birds and serving as a centrally important economic and recreational resource to local communities. Invasive plants - particularly tamarisk and giant reed - threaten the health and sustainability of these communities on the Verde River and Fossil Creek.

To first understand the status of the invasive plants throughout the river corridor, FVR worked to take inventory of the priority invasive plants. Once the inventory had taken place, crews began to remove the invasive species starting in the upper Fossil Creek area and working downstream. The crews spent 30 weeks working from Fossil Springs through the 17 miles of Fossil Creek to the confluence

with the Verde River. FVR leads a collaborative effort to remove these invasive species from riparian corridors throughout the Verde Watershed and we will continue to monitor and maintain this effort along Fossil Creek and throughout the Verde Watershed.



Treatment Season Highlights:

Arizona Conservation Corps, Verde Earth Tech, and Wild AZ completed invasive species removal of Tamarisk, Giant Reed, Russian Olive, Siberian elm and Tree of Heaven on 209 Acres of private and public land including the wild & scenic Fossil Creek, Wild & Scenic Verde river, and Proposed Wild and Scenic Upper Verde River.

This included the removal of over 15,000 stems of primary invasive species!

Worked from October - the end of January

Water Quality

Friends and Verde Watershed Restoration partners developed a plan to monitor and assess water quality conditions throughout the Verde Watershed. We currently sample quarterly for turbidity, E.coli, pH, dissolved oxygen, air and water temperature, among others. In addition to those sampling protocols, the plan calls for the collection of water samples for dissolved metals, and nutrients annually.

Friends have not collected metals and nutrients in the past, so we began to work to figure out how best to collect these samples. In December, Friends staff worked with ADEQ staff to test out syringe and geo pump filtering for dissolved metals collection to determine the best sampling method for our project.

Dissolved metals can cause harm to aquatic life or any life that uses the river for drinking water. These metals can bioaccumulate in body tissues and can cause serious impacts on the overall health and function of organisms. Some of the metals we monitor for are mercury, lead, cadmium, copper, aluminum, and arsenic (metalloid).

Nitrogen and phosphorus are great for plants but need to be in balance otherwise they can cause "nutrient pollution". High levels of nutrients can cause eutrophic conditions where plants and algae become abundant and then die off, creating a bacteria-rich environment. These bacteria then use and deplete dissolved oxygen from the water as they break down the decaying plant matter. The resulting low oxygen levels tend to harm or kill aquatic life.

We are excited to begin sampling for these parameters to improve our understanding of water quality in the watershed and help us better understand where improvement projects are needed.



10 EASY WAYS to reduce water use and limit your impact on water quality from home:

- Use environmentally friendly cleaning products and use fewer chemicals overall
- Do not dispose of any hazardous chemicals down the toilet or sink, including pharmaceuticals
- Pick up dog waste
- Don't litter and pick up trash
- Don't use pesticides or inorganic fertilizers
- Get your septic tank inspected and emptied
- Maintain your vehicle to prevent leaks and air pollutants
- Install water efficient fixtures
- Minimize soil loss from your property by installing a groundcover and keep the native vegetation or rock cover when possible
- Inspire others

Stormwater Control Through Permaculture

Wild Heart Farms is a River Friendly Business that has taken great strides in water conservation. The main goal was to protect their business from flood damage. As a result of innovative thinking, the project helps to capture 13,000 gallons of water per year, protects their business, and contributes to a healthy habitat.

“Through permaculture thinking and design, we’ve transformed our farm into a thriving ecosystem where humans actively benefit the land. When we combine our diverse skills, native plants, and collaborative spirit, we create a resilient ecosystem, enhance biodiversity, and foster community. Together we transformed a once problematic and marginal area of our farm into an intimate gathering and rest space, demonstrating the power of vision and collaboration. Now, it serves as a sanctuary for connection, reflection, and inspiration,”

**- Kate Waters,
Wild Heart Farms**



Volunteer Opportunities

Bioblitz Trip Leaders:

Do you have experience working with children and want to get involved with the Bioblitz? We need help leading field trips of 5th graders from April 16 - May 3! Please contact Elaine Nichols at elainen@verderiver.org if you are interested.



Verde Water Watchers:

Come out and volunteer with Friends to sample water quality along the Verde River and its tributaries. You can sign up using our online volunteer form and add a comment about your interest in water quality monitoring.

We need volunteers willing to attend trainings and commit to sampling approximately once a month.

We have three sites in Camp Verde that need regular volunteers and have a working lab with the City of Camp Verde. This lab is great for local volunteers and can sample during the week Monday-Thursday.



MLK Day Accomplishments

Munds Draw

Work completed: Hand sawing over 100 juniper posts and tapering their base, post pounding, moving and laying out rock
3 juniper rock baffles or "sticky wickets"

Staged rock and juniper post material down channel for upcoming work



9 Volunteers	4 Staff	72 Volunteer Hours
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Other Notes: We had great support from the Dine-led nonprofit, To Nizhoni Ani located in the Black Mesa area. They are working on similar projects and came to learn and support our project.

Watson Woods Riparian Preserve

Work completed: 3 Flatbed Trailers of Tamarisk debris

15 Volunteers	1 Staff	45 Volunteer Hours
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Clear Creek RAP

Work completed: 300 willow cuttings planted

12 Volunteers	1 Staff	24 Volunteer Hours
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Rockin River Ranch State Park

Work completed: Manually took out 1 large stand of Tree of Heaven (equaling 3 truck loads) along the Verde on Shady Acres Trail, and then put a large dent into the Tamarisk population along the Verde on White Cliffs Trail, removing 5 Kubota UTV beds full (I have no idea how much that really is).

18 Volunteers	2 Kids	60 Volunteer Hours
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Youth Engagement:

BioBlitz

Bioblitz: Help discover the incredible biodiversity throughout the Verde River Watershed by joining Friends of the Verde River and Science Vortex for the Fifth Annual Verde BioBlitz! The event will take place April 16 - May 3. Community scientists will again use the free iNaturalist app to upload photos of plants, bugs, and birds to the Verde BioBlitz 2025 project. Anyone can participate using a smartphone or tablet! You don't have to identify the species you photograph, that can be done through the app as long as you submit high-quality photos. The BioBlitz is a great opportunity for all ages to participate in science!

As part of the Bioblitz staff and volunteers from FVR and Science Vortex will be hosting field trips for 5th graders in the Verde Valley. We will guide students on nature walks where they will record observations and participate in the bioblitz. Then after the bioblitz we will visit their classrooms to teach follow up lessons on what can be learned during a bioblitz.



Want to participate in the BioBlitz and need help getting started?

Come see Friends at the Family Nature Fair at Dead Horse Ranch State Park on April 26. We will help you set up your iNaturalist app, join the project, and get started as a community scientist to help us learn more about the plants and animals in the Verde River system!



Are you already an experienced iNaturalist user?

We could use your help identifying observations or leading field trips! Please contact us at volunteer@verderiver.org.



To learn more, visit verderiver.org/get-involved/bioblitz

River Friendly Living

Friends of the Verde River (FVR) is proud to announce the award of 33 River Friendly Living Grants this year, providing a record-breaking \$96,000 in funding to support water conservation and habitat improvement projects for River Friendly Homes and Businesses. These homes and businesses have committed to voluntary river conservation through the River Friendly Living program.

We are currently accepting proposals for projects in Camp Verde, AZ. The deadline is Mar 31, 2025.

FVR will be hosting an awareness event at Verde Brewing Company in Camp Verde on Mar 14, 2025 from 5-8pm. FVR will also be hosting water conservation workshops to support community members in project identification and design. For additional support, businesses can participate in the Green Business Bootcamp hosted by Local First Arizona and facilitated by FVR.

33

River Friendly Living Grants

\$96,000

In Funding



Fundraising Updates

AZ Gives Day

Exciting things are happening for the Verde River! This Arizona Gives Day, we're focusing on protecting our precious water source with fun and impactful ways to get involved. Whether you're ready to take on an eco-challenge, use your voice to advocate, join a cleanup adventure, or become involved with a new children's book, there's a way for everyone to make a difference. Remember, your donations can be made year-round - Everyday is AZ Gives Day! You can support the Verde River efforts whenever the time is right for you. Visit our AZ Gives Day page to explore ways to give and take action - your donation makes a difference! Thank you - from the heart of the Verde!



SAVE —THE— DATE!

April 24-27, 2025

Join us for a treat for birders, photographers, and nature enthusiasts alike. We invite participants to embark on quality guided birding experiences and workshops across the stunning landscapes of Northern Arizona.

Mark your calendar for the 25th Verde Valley Nature and Birding Festival and we will see you there!



verderiver.org/birding-festival

