

## Table of Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>VERDE RIVER RECREATION GOALS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>REGIONAL CONTEXT – VERDE RIVER THROUGH TOWN OF CAMP VERDE</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>THE HEART OF ARIZONA</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>NATURAL RESOURCES</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>CULTURAL RESOURCES</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>THE VERDE FRONT</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC GEOTOURISM PROGRAM</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>A FOCUS ON THE VERDE RIVER CORRIDOR</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>RECREATION MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>RECREATION IMPACTS &amp; CONCERNS</b>	<b>11</b>
TRASH DUMPING & LITTER	11
PRIVATE PROPERTY & TRESPASSING	11
TRAFFIC, PARKING & MOTORIZED USES	11
PUBLIC SAFETY	12
PROTECTION OF RIVER RESOURCES	12
ENFORCEMENT	13
<b>OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECREATIONAL AMENITY ENHANCEMENTS IN CAMP VERDE</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>EDUCATION &amp; INTERPRETATION</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>ENGINEERING &amp; SITE DESIGN</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>ENFORCEMENT</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>POTENTIAL RECREATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS ON THE VERDE RIVER</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>TRAILS</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>BOATING/FLOATING</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>WATCHABLE WILDLIFE</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL LANDOWNERS</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>SPECIFIC PROJECTS &amp; SITE ENHANCEMENTS</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>I-17 PROPERTY</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>HOMESTEAD PARK</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>REZZONICO PARK/BLACK BRIDGE RIVER ACCESS</b>	<b>22</b>

<b>ROCKIN' RIVER RANCH</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS – PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR RECREATIONAL MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>HOMESTEAD PARK</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>DESIGNATION OF AN IBA FOR THE TOWN OF CAMP VERDE</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>I-17 PROPERTY</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>28</b>

## Acknowledgements

The Town of Camp Verde would like to express its gratitude and appreciation for the generous support provided by the Walton Family Foundation to undertake the *Verde River Recreation Master Plan* process.

The Town would also like to recognize the National Park Service’s RTCA (River Trails and Conservation Assistance) grant program for providing important support in community engagement and public input.

Additionally, the Town would like to acknowledge and thank the hosts and participants in the neighborhood listening sessions, as well as the state and federal agency officials from Arizona State Parks, the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Arizona Game and Fish, and others who participated in stakeholder sessions in the planning process.

Lastly, the Town would like to thank Friends of Verde River Greenway and American Rivers for their support and work to assist in completion of the *Verde River Recreation Master Plan*.

## Executive Summary

### QUOTE:

"I don't want to get to the age when I have to tell my great grandchildren, you should have seen the Verde River when it was pretty." --Barry Goldwater, 1990

The *Verde River Recreation Master Plan* identifies priorities for developing and improving recreational amenities along the 17-mile stretch of the Verde River and its tributaries flowing through the Town of Camp Verde’s corporate boundaries. It will inform investments that the Town may make, in partnership with state and federal agencies, to improve the quality of life for community residents, as well as manage current recreational use more sustainably.

### ***Vision***

*A clean and healthy Verde River that is a source of pride in our community, and a world-class resource for those who enjoy fishing, paddling, hiking, wildlife viewing, cultural resources and history.*

Chairman Thomas Beauty of the Yavapai Apache Nation said it very eloquently: “The Verde River defines who we are, it is the basis of our economic future. A healthy river is a healthy economy. It is a unifying force for all the people of the Verde Valley.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “As Long as the River Flows, Life will be Good.” Video produced by the Yavapai Apache Nation. 2015.

## Verde River Recreation Goals

- Connect the residents of Camp Verde with the Verde River, and increase awareness and appreciation of the river as a natural treasure;
- Respond to concerns of riverfront property owners, since those landowners are currently experiencing the highest impacts due to unmanaged recreational use;
- Provide safe, healthy, quality river recreation experiences for community residents and visitors;
- Provide for family-friendly outdoor activities along the river corridor;
- Manage recreational use appropriately to ensure that sensitive riparian habitat is protected;
- Support economic development through tourism amenities.

In late 2014, the Town of Camp Verde received two grants, from the Walton Family Foundation and the National Park Service's River Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, to carry out the development of the *Verde River Recreation Master Plan* to guide the community in its efforts to manage and expand recreational opportunities along the Verde River and its tributaries through the Town's corporate boundaries. McLaughlin Whitewater, an engineering firm, was retained to conduct the mapping, inventory, and assessment of recreational resources in Camp Verde.

The Town also conducted extensive community engagement to investigate current recreational use, identified problems and concerns with unmanaged recreation, and established community-driven priorities for expanding recreational amenities in the area. Particular attention was paid to riverfront property owners as they are the community members that experience the highest impact from recreational use. Town leaders and project partners also sought the input of community members on potential solutions to management challenges for river access points, parks, and recreational activities.

Throughout the summer of 2015, the Town convened neighborhood listening sessions in residential areas experiencing problems or issues connected with unmanaged recreational use. In July 2015 Town staff hosted a public open house for riverfront property owners to voice concerns and offer solutions. A public open house was later held for residents of Camp Verde to express their views about recreational improvement needs, site design on priority parcels, and sustainable recreation management. The Town distributed public surveys to riverfront property owners to share their perspectives, as well as for the general public.

The Town of Camp Verde also held listening sessions with state and federal land managers, and others managing large parcels along the Verde River.

The recreational needs, concerns about unmanaged use, and potential solutions for sustainably managing recreation amenities in the Town were taken into consideration in the preliminary planning concepts developed for specific park and river access improvements. Lastly, the public assessed these priorities, and the most promising potential developments to improve river recreation in keeping with the goals of the Town planning process were identified in this plan.

The priorities for the Town of Camp Verde in recreational planning as reflected from public input are listed below:

#1 – Implement strategies to better manage recreational use at existing and proposed sites, safeguard private property rights, and discourage damaging activities to riparian habitat and wildlife resources.

#2 – Development of Homestead Park as a day-use watchable wildlife amenity, with a viewing deck, nature trails, light development, interpretive and educational elements, and fishing access.

#3 – Designation of an Important Bird Area (IBA) designation to support watchable wildlife programming within the Town of Camp Verde.

#4 – Development of limited, day-use recreational amenities at the I-17 property.

#5 – Continue to explore the potential for developing riverside trails, as well as upland trails to Montezuma Castle National Monument, the Beaver Creek Communities, and the Town of Camp Verde’s 118-acre community park property and the White Hills located north of the Verde Ranger Station.

#6 – Continue to work with Arizona State Parks and Prescott National Forest to develop recreational amenities and park resources at Homestead Park and Rockin’ River Ranch.

#7 – Development of the riverfront amenities for Rezzonico Park just below Black Bridge.

## Regional Context – Verde River through Town of Camp Verde

### QUOTE:

“Throughout time the Verde River has been the backbone of the Verde Valley. The first settlers were drawn to our valley for its agricultural, ranching and mining opportunities. Today the Verde Valley has become a mecca for ecotourism. We have the responsibility to conserve one of Arizona’s remaining crown jewels by striving to create safe, environmentally sustainable outdoor recreational opportunities along the Verde River such as hiking, swimming, camping, horseback riding, hunting, and wildlife viewing providing a significant economic impact for our communities. The economic impact can be felt by direct and in-direct business dollars along with an increase in property values.” ---Chip Davis, Yavapai County Board of Supervisors

### The Heart of Arizona

The Town of Camp Verde is located in the geographic center, and many believe the historical, cultural and spiritual heart, of the state of Arizona. Nestled on the Verde River, one of Arizona’s last free-flowing streams, Camp Verde is blessed with significant natural, cultural, historic, and quality of life resources. The Verde River flows through the center of the Town’s boundaries, and is a vital life line for communities in central Arizona.

The Verde River is a precious resource for communities within the watershed. The river supplies water to thousands of people, including the citizens of the Town of Camp Verde, other Verde Valley communities, the Yavapai Apache Nation, as well as the state's largest urban center, Phoenix. The Verde River's headwaters start near Paulden, Arizona, emerging out of Sullivan Lake. The river's base flows through its first 22-mile stretch are sustained by aquifer-fed springs in the Big Chino Basin. From there, near the confluence of Sycamore Creek in the Sycamore Canyon Wilderness Area, it flows nearly 140 miles, merging with the Salt River just outside of the Phoenix metro area. On its southward journey through the Verde Valley, it passes through the communities of Clarkdale, Cottonwood, and Camp Verde before it enters its Wild & Scenic stretch, which extends 40-miles through the Mazatzal Wilderness Area before emptying into Horseshoe Reservoir and Bartlett Lake.

The Verde River runs through the Town of Camp Verde's boundaries for a 17-mile stretch, beginning at the The Nature Conservancy's Otter Water property in the Middle Verde and leaving at Arizona State Park's Rockin' River Ranch State Park property, just downstream of the of the West Clear Creek confluence. Land ownership along the Verde River is a mix of public and private, as well as tribal ownership. The Yavapai Apache Nation owns several miles of riverfront property along the Verde below the Town's upstream boundary. The remainder of the Verde River flows through a mix of U.S. Forest Service land, parcels owned by Arizona State Parks, the Town of Camp Verde, private conservation property, and residential neighborhoods before leaving Town corporate boundaries.

There are six currently available river access points that are publicly accessible along the Verde River on the reach that flows through Camp Verde, and these areas vary in their level of development and improvement. Two of these properties are currently owned by the Town of Camp Verde – Rezzonico Park/Black Bridge river access point, and a cluster of parcels totaling 27 acres near the I-17 overpass on the Verde River. Sites managed by the USFS Prescott National Forest include Newton Lane (and unimproved access point), White Bridge river access point, Clear Creek river access point and, just outside the corporate boundaries of the Town, the Beasley Flat river access point. The area along the Verde River known as Homestead Park, an area largely undeveloped, is comprised of three parcels totaling 80 acres owned by the Prescott National Forest and Arizona State Parks. Arizona State Parks also owns Rockin' River Ranch, a 209-acre parcel that has not yet been developed for public access and recreational amenities.

## Demographics

The Town of Camp Verde jurisdictional boundaries encompass 42.6 square miles. According to the 2014 U.S. Census Bureau estimate, the population is 11,097, with a growth rate estimated at 2.1% as of the 2010 Census. Of the 4,200 households reported in Camp Verde, nearly 30% are families with children under the age of 18 living in the home. The median income of Camp Verde residents is lower than the Arizona average, however the unemployment rate is slightly lower than the state average. The public access to the Verde River is a valuable opportunity that the Town of Camp Verde can provide in terms of low-cost recreational activities available to families.

QUOTE:

“The importance of the Verde River to the people, businesses, plants, animals and culture of the Verde Valley can't be overstated. The River is why the Sinagua people were here a thousand years ago, and it's why we're here today. It is clear that conserving this treasure depends to a great extent upon bringing people out to experience it personally -- in kayaks and canoes, along its trails, and sitting under one of its thousands of giant cottonwoods to relax. When we know the Verde River, we love the Verde River, and we'll do what's necessary to save it for our children and their children. It's that simple.”

--Mayor Doug Von Gausig, Town of Clarkdale

## Natural Resources

Camp Verde has an arid high desert climate, and is well known for its scenic amenities. Rich in wildlife, the Town boasts the longest reach of the Verde River running through a Verde Valley community. The Town of Camp Verde is bordered on the south by the Black Hills, on the north by the White Hills, and is surrounded largely by USFS land. Interstate 17 (I-17) bisects the Town, with the Camp Verde downtown area located one mile to the east of I-17.

The Town of Camp Verde is home to countless natural treasures. The Verde River, one of the last free-flowing perennial rivers in Arizona, is a unique resource, with a riparian corridor that supports rare vegetation and rich wildlife diversity. In a region that receives an annual average rainfall of 12 inches, these water resources are especially notable. The Verde River and its tributaries feature over 400 miles of interconnected riparian habitat along a flowing river.<sup>2</sup> One of the rarest forest types in North America, the Fremont Cottonwood-Goodding's Willow gallery forest, can be found along the Verde River, and the river is home to threatened and endangered species, native fish populations, as well as supporting migratory bird populations as one of the major flyway stopover areas. Many other wildlife species use the riparian corridor of the Verde, as well, from beaver and river otters, to whitetail deer, elk, bobcat, and mountain lions. All told, there are 94 species of mammals, and 76 native amphibian and reptile species that rely on the riparian corridor of the Verde River.<sup>3</sup>

The Verde River in Camp Verde is also a significant recreational resource for a variety of activities, from kayaking and canoeing, to hunting and fishing, picnicking and hiking, equestrian trail riding, birdwatching, and much more. It provides a host of healthy outdoor activities that contribute to the quality of life for residents, as well as drawing outdoor adventure enthusiasts from across the state and beyond, bringing economic development activity with increased tourism. The annual Verde River Runoff kayak and canoe race regularly draws over 100 participants from all over the region for a 10-mile paddle from White Bridge to Beasley Flat. The outstanding wildlife values of the area also make it ideal for pursuing watchable wildlife programs that tap into a popular and growing recreational pastime.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ecological Implications of Verde River Flows*. Verde River Basin Partnership, Arizona Water Institute and The Nature Conservancy. <http://vrbp.org/interesting-reads/ecological-implications-verde-river-flows/>

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

## Cultural Resources

The Town of Camp Verde and surrounding region has a rich heritage and history. Native American communities made the Verde Valley their home thousands of years ago. Archaeologists consider the nomadic Clovis people as the earliest inhabitants. Later, the Sinagua people settled in the area along the Verde River around 600 A.D.<sup>4</sup> The Sinagua (from the Spanish words for “without water”) built pit houses, and later impressive pueblos and cliff dwellings, and engaged in agriculture along the fertile river valley. The legacy of their presence is preserved in national parks and monuments such as Montezuma Well, Montezuma Castle, and Tuzigoot National Monument.

After European-American settlement began, Camp Verde was one of the earliest communities established, although the Town itself was not incorporated until 1986, one of the last Verde Valley communities to become formalized. The first military outpost was located near the farms of West Clear Creek, and later, in 1865, Camp Lincoln – eventually renamed and relocated to its current site – became Camp Verde. In 1878, the outpost became permanent and was renamed Fort Verde, and was a base of operations for General Crook and his U.S. Army scouts and soldiers. It is now a State Historic Park, and a place of local celebration of the Town’s early origins during Fort Verde Days, as well as events honoring veterans.

Camp Verde grew up around the military post, building a thriving agricultural community. Settlers established a 200-acre agricultural area near the confluence the Verde River and West Clear Creek. Early in the community’s history, the majority of settlers were farmers and ranchers, but later settlers were drawn to the region to participate in the growing mining industry. Agriculture remains an important economic activity in Camp Verde today, with an annual Pecan and Wine Festival and Corn Fest to celebrate the production of local agricultural products.

## The Verde Front

The Verde Front is a collaborative initiative, bringing together local municipal and county representatives, public land managers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civic leaders to craft a landscape-scale sustainable recreation plan for the region using an “all lands, all hands” approach to identify and implement shared recreation management goals. The Town of Camp Verde is one of the jurisdictions participating in the Verde Front effort, including the working group on economic development, and the working group that developed the concept of the “String of Pearls.” The String of Pearls is a regional recreational framework focused around “pearls” or areas with significant natural values such as parks, river access points, and other recreational amenities, connected by the “string” of the Verde River.

The *Verde River Recreation Master Plan* process began in part through conversations with the broader Verde Front communities on development of recreational amenities in the region within each of the participating jurisdictions in the Verde Valley. The collaborative efforts of the Verde Front are aimed at supporting locally driven recreational amenity projects, and part of the Town

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<sup>4</sup> *Arizona’s First People: Native Americans of Northern and Central Arizona.*  
<http://www.gatewaytosedona.com/popular-articles/item/50-indians-sedona-arizona>

of Camp Verde’s River Recreation Master Plan process has been to identify sites that are widely supported by community members as potential “pearls” to add to the Verde River string.

### National Geographic Geotourism Program

Another effort sprouting from the Town of Camp Verde’s participation in the Verde Front’s Economic Development working group is the geotourism initiative currently underway, and overseen and managed by the Sedona Verde Valley Tourism Council. National Geographic recognized the Verde Valley as one of only 22 geotourism destinations worldwide. With this prestigious accolade, the region received help from National Geographic and Solimar International, a high profile ecotourism marketing firm, to develop a web site that features the remarkable natural resources, recreational, cultural, and amenity values of the region.

**Sidebar:**

National Geographic defines “geotourism” as “tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents.” The Sedona Verde Valley geotourism web site can be found at [sedonaverdevalley.natgeotourism.com](http://sedonaverdevalley.natgeotourism.com).

The recognition of the Verde Valley by National Geographic as a globally significant tourism destination for affluent, highly educated travelers interested in authentic experiences in nature, culture, outdoor adventure and local wine and cuisine has the potential to be a significant boon to the economic development potential of the region.

### A Focus on the Verde River Corridor

The first step for the Town of Camp Verde in evaluating the potential for river recreation management improvements and amenity enhancements was the retention of a consulting firm, McLaughlin Whitewater Design Group, to conduct an inventory of resources and engineering assessment of the Verde River as it flows through Camp Verde. The community directed the McLaughlin Group to develop baseline data for the Verde River’s current recreational amenities, and identify areas for potential recreational improvements for river-based activities.

Base mapping was obtained through Yavapai County, and state and federal land management agencies, and includes information about the landscape contours, hydrology of the river, property ownership, major and minor roads, location of irrigation ditches, and aerial photography of the river corridor. These mapping resources can be found in Appendix I of this report.

An examination of the flow hydrology and river hydraulics of the Verde River demonstrated that low flows through much of the irrigation season make supporting in-river, water-based recreation through most of the Town difficult. The report, however, noted that current efforts to increase flows through restoration efforts, and efficiency projects to lower water needs for sustaining agriculture and increase return flows, could potentially assist efforts to support river recreation activities.

The assessment of river hydraulics noted that the average slope through the Town of Camp Verde is approximately 0.18% with typical flow depths of 2 to 5 feet, increasing up to 20-30 feet during flood events. Localized gradients much higher than 0.18% would be necessary to contribute to in-river recreational whitewater features. The report determined that it would be unlikely to create “new” drops in the river without exacerbating flooding concerns. A small “drop” was found at Black Bridge/Rezzonico Park that could lend itself to creation of a whitewater feature.

Flood flows in the Verde River were also examined in the context of recreational improvements. Historic flooding events ranging from annual floods to 100-year and 500-year events were summarized in the report provided by McLaughlin Whitewater. The significant levels of variation between base flows and high flood events will have an impact on design and planning for recreational improvements within and near the Verde River through Camp Verde.

Overall, the assessment found that the Verde River, as a low-gradient, alluvial river with fine substrate, would not provide significant opportunities for development of on-river recreational amenities, such as whitewater features or a continuous paddle trail, without increasing base flows in the river. In its current state, diversions and other man-made features that lower base flow and create steep, unstable, and non-navigable drops in the river, would need to be modified in order for a paddle trail to be developed through the full length of the Town’s boundaries.

A full version of the McLaughlin Whitewater technical memorandum to the Town of Camp Verde summarizing their engineering assessment of recreational opportunities along the Verde River is available as a PDF at [\[insert web address or other location for obtaining copy of full report\]](#).

## Recreation Management Challenges

The Verde River is a tremendous natural and recreational treasure for Camp Verde, but unmanaged and inappropriate recreational use can have significant negative impacts to the health of the river corridor, riparian vegetation, wildlife, and the other natural assets of the Verde. It can also impact the quality of life for residents. There was strong interest on the part of the Town and its residents to ensure that recreational planning would not result in a river “loved to death,” and learning from the experience of Fossil Creek, where recreational activities have degraded the resource, was a high priority in the planning process.

As part of the *Verde River Recreation Plan* efforts, the Town of Camp Verde felt it was critical to identify and address the concerns that community residents had with current recreational use and management. Before examining opportunities for recreational improvements or increasing access, outreach was conducted to residents, particularly riverfront property owners, about the current impacts of recreational use on and near the Verde River. Public surveys requesting that residents share their concerns or discuss problems experienced around current river use were also distributed to reach as many community members as possible.

A series of landowner listening sessions were convened by the Town to identify challenges with managing river recreation, understand concerns from residents about the impacts they experience, and explore potential solutions to addressing management issues prior to any expansion or development of new recreational amenities. The results of the public survey process are summarized in Appendix III, and the results of public open houses and listening sessions can be reviewed in Appendix IV. Grappling with these challenges to lessen the impacts on the natural resource values of the Verde River, as well as the impact to Town residents, is a central element of the management recommendations in the Plan.

## Recreation Impacts & Concerns

### Trash Dumping & Litter

The presence of pollution, dumping of trash, and abandonment of domestic animals and strays, were widely noted as one of the most significant problems along the Verde River. A need for enforcement to prevent littering, and to clean up areas along the river that have been impacted by the dumping of trash, furniture, and other large, unwieldy items along the river corridor was expressed resoundingly by Town residents.

### Private Property & Trespassing

The Verde River runs through the heart of the Town and its neighborhoods, with significant areas along the river held by private landowners. The other, most common concern expressed by residents was trespass on private property and safety concerns for riverside neighborhoods. Many residents shared stories of problems resulting from trespass, from the theft of personal property and property damage, to noisy, rowdy, and unsafe behavior. Unleashed animals attacking livestock was also noted as a problem, as well as late night intrusions by stranded boaters seeking help after an unsuccessful float.

Many of the solutions proposed by residents included increased and consistent enforcement, improved signage that shows where private property is located, and better educational materials and information for recreational users about boating safety, preparedness, and where paddling and tubing activities are appropriate. A majority of riverfront residents also recommended that river access for on-river activities, such as boating, be directed to areas that are publicly owned and specifically managed to support those uses, or that buffers be created between recreational areas and residential areas to preserve the quiet, peaceful character of the neighborhoods.

### Traffic, Parking & Motorized Uses

Concerns, particularly among riverfront property owners, were raised about the level of traffic occurring on quiet neighborhood streets by those seeking to access the Verde River. Rustler Trail residents expressed the most concern and experienced the most significant impacts from traffic along the road as well as parking in neighborhoods by non-residents.

Irresponsible ATV use was also noted as an issue for residents, particularly those near areas where current ATV use is common, including near the I-17 parcel. Many residents complained about the noise, impact to the river and riparian habitat for wildlife, and damage caused by ATV use near the river. A number of survey respondents from both the riverfront property owners and general public indicated a desire to limit or bar ATV traffic near the river, and instead direct it to appropriate areas designated for ATV use.

### Public Safety

Another common theme that emerged from community engagement efforts was the concern of residents about public safety in connection with recreational use. Fire risk was a serious concern raised by many, and residents shared experiences with campers and transients setting fires in the river corridor near their property, and concerns that those could spread within the riparian area and affect private property values.

Other residents noted that they had often seen drug deals take place on public lands near the river, and yet others complained about firearms and shooting near residential neighborhoods that left them concerned about their safety and that of their property. Transient camps were also noted as a problem along the river corridor.

Others commented that boating safety information needed to be more widely distributed to those using the river. Inexperienced or ill-informed recreational boaters trying to float the Verde River through the Town can often run into trouble, particularly during low flows or in trying to navigate stretches where diversions present significant obstacles. Educating recreational users, and providing information on where it is best to boat on the Verde River at river access points, was noted as a potential solution to address this issue.

### Protection of River Resources

Almost universally through the public engagement process, the people of Camp Verde expressed their love and value for the Verde River. Among the highest values expressed by survey respondents and public open house participants in the planning process were the scenic beauty, peace and quiet, and access to recreational opportunities that the Verde River provides to the community. Wildlife habitat supported by the Verde River also ranked among the top attributes that residents supported.

Concerns were voiced by a majority of participants in the planning process that any recreational planning efforts should be done in a manner that preserves those natural values, and protects the wildlife that depends on the river. Watchable wildlife activities, including birdwatching, were noted as the most broadly supported river recreation pastimes. There is great interest among the public to develop recreational amenities that support and preserve wildlife habitat, and people's access to wildlife viewing.

In considering recreational development to improve access to the Verde River in Camp Verde, public land managers, NGO's and other landowners shared concerns about protecting wildlife and natural resources along the Verde. Protection of the ecology of the river and wildlife, restoration of natural habitat ranked high for land managers, and security for nearby property emerged as the top priorities for land managers in recreation planning.

Quote from USFWS Brenda Smith:

“The main issue we have heard about from the public is the amount of use the river is getting and potential disturbance to wildlife... If you have designated access points for the public to use and discourage people from landing anywhere along the river, that should help to limit disturbance to wildlife habitats.”

### Enforcement

A need for consistent and sustained enforcement of activities along the river corridor was also one of the solutions to managing recreational use most often cited by Town residents. This was particularly the case for riverfront property owners, who are experiencing the brunt of the impacts from recreational use of the Verde River.

Increased patrols of recreational access points and activities were often suggested in the public process to prevent trespass, littering, educate users about safe practices for on-river education, and enforce against illegal activity or uses that would degrade the resource.

Public land managers in the area also shared their interest in ensuring that agency law enforcement personnel collaborate with local law enforcement in dealing with recreation challenges along the river corridor.

## Opportunities for Recreational Amenity Enhancements in Camp Verde

Even with limited recreational management of current sites, the Town of Camp Verde offers significant amenities for river-lovers of all persuasions – from boaters and anglers, to birdwatchers, equestrians, and those who simply wish to enjoy nature in a relaxed, scenic setting. Kayaking and canoeing, wildlife watching, walking, hiking and bicycling, and picnicking and outdoor gatherings are popular pastimes for Town residents. The Town is also the location for an annual kayak and canoe race, the Verde River Runoff, which draws boaters from across the state and beyond to test their paddling prowess on a 10-mile stretch of the Verde River from White Bridge to Beasley Flat.

The comments reflected in the previous section will inform the Town of Camp Verde's recreational planning efforts moving forward. In order to manage and maintain recreational sites and improvements to ensure that people can safely enjoy river recreation, while minimizing conflict with property owners along the river, the Town will work to incorporate the three “E’s”

of recreational management into the Plan's implementation – engineering, education, and enforcement.

**Engineering** refers to the thoughtful design of river access, signage, and other recreational infrastructure in a manner that encourages ethical and responsible river use, and lends itself to self-regulation of recreational capacity and behavior in desired patterns.

**Education** focuses on the elements of recreational planning that provide public information, awareness building around safe river recreation practices, ethical and sustainable river use, and so forth. Educational measures are important in providing information such as where public access is located, the amenities available at different sites, particularly restrooms, trash disposal sites, and where boaters can put in or take out. Useful education tools can also assist in helping the public understand the length of time to float or boat between river access points, and the equipment and supplies needed for a safe boating experience. Such efforts can help reduce conflict between recreational use and private property owners, as well as reduce problematic recreational practices, such as littering and unsafe boating.

Lastly, **enforcement** is critical to ensure accountability for those recreating on or alongside the river. Given that the most common problems around river recreation expressed by residents were by far trash dumping and littering, as well as issues with trespass, noise and disturbance to riverfront property owners, enforcement measures to reduce those incidents is key. In planning for river recreation in Camp Verde, the engagement of local law enforcement has been identified as a critical need going forward.

## Education & Interpretation

The Town of Camp Verde is exploring the development of an educational and interpretive program with the National Park Service's RTCA (Rivers Trails and Conservation Assistance) program and in collaboration with the partners of the Verde Front. Interpretive signage and other materials can share information about natural or cultural resource values, provide orientation information (e.g. maps), give critical public safety tips, and increase public knowledge and appreciation of the values of the Verde River.

Education and interpretation can take many forms – from directional signage to informational brochures, maps, web sites and social media. Along the Verde River, informing boaters of appropriate put-ins and take-outs, length of time between trips, and safe boating practices, as well as information about wildlife and cultural resources of the area, the best birding spots, and posting of private property and quiet zones are among the many needs that have emerged in the planning process.

Working with the Verde Front partners, the Town of Camp Verde has an opportunity to design signage that is consistent throughout the Verde Valley, and easily recognizable by recreational users from Clarkdale to Camp Verde. RTCA staff are working closely with the Town to identify interpretive needs for the community. Through community engagement efforts, several signage and information needs were recommended:

- Signage demarcating private property with no river access or stopping
- Safe boating information, including equipment and supplies recommended for an excursion, the time it takes to float from one river access point to another, and warnings about diversions and other hazards to discourage novice boaters from attempting stretches with long portage
- Information about appropriate recreational activities at particular sites

The Town of Camp Verde will continue to be engaged with the Verde Front and RTCA staff to develop interpretive resources for implementation in the Town. This process will continue through August of 2016.

### Engineering & Site Design

In considering appropriate river recreation activities at particular sites, the role of site design in facilitating the desired recreational uses must be considered. Site design elements can serve to direct recreational users to appropriate activities on the site. They may also assist in managing recreational users in a way that will improve the recreational experience while also easing the impact on natural resources and on private property owners.

Concerns raised by residents about motorized recreation in sensitive wildlife habitat and riparian zones can be managed through site design that limits access to motorized traffic to those areas. Most survey respondents indicated that they access the river by automobile. In neighborhoods where parking by non-residents has been noted as a problem, providing parking at river access points while posting nearby neighborhoods with signs designating parking for residents only could alleviate these issues.

Issues around dumping and litter could also be improved by providing trash receptacles at recreational sites. Recreational activities that the community wishes to promote should be encouraged by the availability of amenities that facilitate those uses – such as trails, picnic tables, ramadas, or BBQ grills in areas identified for near-river recreation activities, or boat launches and boating safety information for areas identified as appropriate for boating access.

Given that the Verde River is a “flashy,” flood-prone waterway, design of recreational improvements should be done in a manner that ensures that such investments will not be wiped out in the next flood event. The durability of site improvements will need to be considered, as well as placement. Signage and other recreation management tools that would need be placed near the river to be placed on structures unlikely to be impacted by floods, or composed of inexpensive materials easily (and cheaply) replaceable. Expensive improvements should be located as far out of the flood zone as possible.

In designing recreational improvements, the Town may also consider community character and history in developing such resources. Thompson/Westervelt Architects, the local architectural firm retained by the Town to develop design characteristics for recreational and interpretive amenities utilized this information in drafting their “vernacular” design guidelines for

recreational improvements. These included making use of local materials for construction, minimizing site impacts, and traditional architectural stylings in keeping with the Town's history.

## Enforcement

As noted by many Camp Verde residents, the participation and support of law enforcement to assist in managing recreational use will be important for the long-term maintenance of recreational amenities and in reducing conflict between recreational use and property owners. Monitoring of recreational activities has been widely viewed as an important part of balancing recreational use with the interests of the community in preserving the Verde River as a resource, keeping residential neighborhoods quiet and serene, and reducing the deleterious impacts that unmanaged and unmonitored recreational use can cause.

Other communities in the Verde Valley have made successful use of ambassador programs, as well as volunteers, to assist in managing recreation. Clarkdale has a robust program for ambassadors located at the river access points to provide information, monitoring, and prevent trespass issues. The Oak Creek Watershed Council has also successfully implemented a volunteer ambassador program at recreational sites along Oak Creek, a major tributary to the Verde, to reduce trash dumping and improve water quality issues resulting from recreational impacts. Both of these programs could serve as useful, cost-effective models for the Town to examine in the context of recreational management.

## Potential Recreational Improvements on the Verde River

The most common recreational pastimes that Camp Verde residents reported in the public survey results were kayaking and canoeing, walking/hiking/running, and wildlife watching. There is also a significant constituency for equestrian trail riding activities. Community members responded through the survey and public open house process about their interest in expanded recreational opportunities, with the strongest support being for increased opportunities for these four most popular recreational activities. A significant majority of residents agreed or strongly agreed that development of enhanced river access should be a priority for Camp Verde. In evaluating potential projects for the *Verde River Recreation Master Plan*, particular attention to these recreational uses will be taken into account in development of new or improved recreational amenities.

Public sentiment in the Town expressed through public open houses and survey responses shows that community members want to ensure that improving access to enjoy river-related recreational activities does not damage the natural resource values of a flowing Verde River. When considering and implementing recreational improvements, the incorporation of riparian restoration to improve watershed health would be useful in protecting the wildlife, scenic values, and watershed functions that the people of Camp Verde value.

Friends of Verde River Greenway is a nonprofit organization that supports restoration activities along the Verde River. Through the Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition (VWRC), teams of restoration specialists engage in on-the-ground projects and partnerships with local landowners, state and federal agencies to remove invasive species, such as giant reed, tamarisk, Russian olive, and tree of heaven, and restore native vegetation in the river corridor. The program works with over 200 landowners in the area to treat invasive plants and improve watershed health.

Continued partnerships with Friends of Verde River Greenway in sustainable recreation planning, building restoration components into the development of recreational amenities, will ensure that the Town of Camp Verde will be successful in striking the right balance between enabling people to enjoy the river and the natural values that community members treasure.

## Trails

The number-one recreational activity that Camp Verde residents reported interest in expanding opportunities for are trail related recreational activities, such as walking, hiking, running, biking, and horseback riding. A large majority of survey respondents felt that development of a network of trails along public lands should be a priority, indicating that trails connecting the Town to parks, and trails connecting the Town to the Verde River were most broadly supported.

The Town of Camp Verde is in discussion with state and federal agency partners to explore opportunities to create trails that provide those connections for the community. Some of the trail options being examined currently include a foot trail between the Town of Camp Verde and Montezuma Castle across Jackson Flat, and uplands trails near Copper Canyon waterfall and Hidden Canyon. There are also site-specific trail loops under consideration at the Homestead parcel for wildlife watching, and at Rockin' River Ranch.

In addition to these trails, the Town is also discussing the potential development of trails in the White Hills area, originating out of the 118-acre community park property owned by the Town of Camp Verde, and may run through portions of the 160-acre water treatment facility property. Connector trails may be established between this trail network and Rezzonico Park, Jackson Flat, Montezuma Castle National Monument, and Beaver Creek communities.

## Boating/Floating

The second most popular recreational use noted by residents is canoeing and kayaking in the Verde River, and residents expressed strong interest in improving boating opportunities through the Town. In managing this recreational use through the planning process, the Town is working to balance the interests of boaters and the concerns of private property owners. The Verde River through the central part of Camp Verde flows through many residential neighborhoods, and also runs through several irrigation diversions, which can present hazards to boaters as well as limiting the flows to sustain boating. In the interests of mitigating the impacts to riverfront residents, it was determined that the best reach of the Verde River in Camp Verde to direct on-river recreation to is the stretch that begins at White Bridge river access point, and flows downstream to Rockin' River Ranch and Beasley Flat.

Expansion of river access for boating, and construction/improvement of boat launches for kayakers and canoeists, is being directed to that particular reach of the river, with new boating access to be included as part of the development at Rockin' River Ranch. The Verde River between White Bridge river access point through to Rockin' River Ranch, and beyond to Beasley Flat, could hold promise as a designated paddle trail in the future. Conversations on designating the Verde River Heart Line paddle trail in this area could move forward in conjunction with development of Rockin' River Ranch.

#### Sidebar: John Parsons

Public recognition of the Verde River as a recreational amenity, an economic driver, and a place of scenic beauty and natural wonder has strengthened over the past decade. Recreational paddling along the Verde River corridor is on the rise, along with the attendant economic activity that comes with increased tourism. In large part, this is a tribute to the work of John Parsons. In the early 1980's, the Verde River was widely known as the "Dirty Verde" – if anyone knew where it was at all.

After a decade of work to protect the Verde River's incredible resources, and directing grant funding from the State Lakes Improvement Fund (SLIF) to develop improved access for people to enjoy river recreation activities, the Verde River made it onto the map for river-runners, bird-watchers, nature enthusiasts, and countless others who come each year to appreciate its beauty and diversity. Parsons also organized the Northern Arizona Paddlers Club as an organization of boaters who loved to spend time on rivers. In 2010, John Parsons and Josh Wheeler paddled the Verde River from Bridgeport to Beasley Flat to map river access points and develop a paddle guide for the river that boaters from across the state have come to rely upon.

In a 2011 article, Parsons is quoted as saying, "I always viewed myself as a middleman, helping people get introduced to the river so the river could speak to them and tell its story in its own way, in its own time, straight to their hearts."<sup>5</sup>

Without John Parsons, it is a very real possibility that the Verde River would have remained tragically degraded, largely unknown, undiscovered, and unappreciated by the public. Thanks to his efforts, the Verde is now a vibrant green corridor through the communities of the Verde Valley, bringing prosperity, scenic beauty, and a rich quality of life to the people who reside here.

#### Watchable Wildlife

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<sup>5</sup> "John Parsons and the 'Dirty Verde.'" Steve Ayers, Staff Reporter. Camp Verde Bugle. December 13, 2011.

There is a high level of interest among the public for increased opportunities to view and appreciate the region’s diverse wildlife as part of the recreational planning process. The concerns of the public and the public land and wildlife management agencies in controlling disturbance for wildlife within the river corridor should be considered in recreational amenity design. Education and interpretative resources will also be helpful in informing the public about wildlife resources, responsible wildlife viewing, and directing public recreation to areas appropriate for low-impact wildlife viewing.

The Town of Camp Verde is exploring partnerships with the Arizona Game and Fish Department and its watchable wildlife program and with US Fish and Wildlife Service on identifying sensitive habitats for endangered and threatened species. The Verde Front regional sustainable recreation planning collaborative is also exploring a region-wide watchable wildlife program similar to the Arizona Watchable Wildlife Experience (AWWE) in Flagstaff. AWWE’s success in Northern Arizona may serve as a model for developing a similar program in Camp Verde, and the broader Verde Valley region.

#### Sidebar: Important Bird Areas (IBAs)

The Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program in Arizona is an effort led by Audubon Arizona and Tucson Audubon to recognize the most important areas for birds in the state, with a purpose of identifying a “network of sites that maintain the long term viability of wild bird populations.”<sup>6</sup> The program also works to engage citizen scientists and bird-lovers in field activities, bird counts and surveys, and conservation projects to benefits Arizona’s birds and their habitats.

Arizona’s IBA program has been in operation since 2002, and has identified and designated 45 IBAs throughout the state. The greater Verde Valley has been recognized as home to several noteworthy IBAs, including the Tuzigoot IBA, which extends along the Verde River corridor from Tuzigoot National Monument to near the intersection of the river and Mingus Avenue in Cottonwood, and the Lower Oak Creek IBA that is located near the Page Springs Fish Hatchery north of Cornville.

According to the Audubon IBA web site, IBAs can be designated at three levels – state, continental and global. To qualify as a state IBA, an inventory of bird species is conducted by researchers and public land managers to determine whether or not a site supports significant numbers of species of conservation concern and restricted ranges. Once designated, a site may qualify for support to protect and maintain the conservation values of habitat within the IBA.

The Town of Camp Verde is examining whether a designation of an IBA within the Town’s boundaries along the Verde River near Homestead Park would benefit watchable wildlife programming within the community. In order to begin the process, the Town working with Audubon Arizona to organize a bird inventory and survey at the sites would be the first step.

#### Sidebar: Camp Verde Riparian Preserve

The Camp Verde Riparian Preserve (CVRP) is a 124-acre parcel along approximately 1-mile of the Verde River, and is owned by Salt River Project as part of their mitigation obligations for an

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<sup>6</sup> Global IBA Program in Arizona. [http://aziba.org/?page\\_id=32](http://aziba.org/?page_id=32)

Incidental Take Permit pursuant to the Endangered Species Act for impacts to federally listed species resulting from the continued operation of Roosevelt Dam and Lake. SRP's primary goal for management of the Preserve is to provide ecological and conservation benefits to the Southwestern willow flycatcher, Western yellow-billed cuckoo, and bald eagle. This is accomplished by promoting a dynamic floodplain and river ecosystem, and by protecting riparian habitat from outside threats.<sup>7</sup> Due to the management objectives (protecting the riparian community for sensitive species) human and vehicular traffic is restricted within the Preserve.

In developing river-related amenities it will be important to ensure the CVRP parcel is adequately marked and that potentially destructive recreational activities are directed to appropriate areas and that enforcement actions are put in place to monitor activities in the area.

### Partnerships with Local Landowners

Riverfront property owners requested that the Town of Camp Verde consider their concerns related to the impacts on peace and quiet, privacy, and safety of riverfront neighborhoods by directing recreational use toward public land sites and designated river access areas. While access by the public will not be encouraged in local residential neighborhoods, there is an important role for local landowners in improving the health of the Verde River corridor through restoration projects. Partnerships with Friends of Verde River Greenway and VWRC with local landowners can continue to improve watershed functions, wildlife habitat, and support the natural values of the Verde River. In the meantime, recreational resources can be located on the many public land sites available in the Town of Camp Verde, and minimize conflict between residents and recreational users.

### Specific Projects & Site Enhancements

Through the recreational planning process, the Town of Camp Verde engaged with public land management agencies, riverfront property owners, and the public to identify specific project priorities for implementation of recreational enhancements. Discussions with the public and with the U.S. Forest Service, Arizona State Parks, and local landowners over the spring, summer and fall of 2015 revealed four specific on-the-ground priorities for improvement projects that could meet increased recreational access and demand for the community. These four priorities include:

- I-17 Property – owned by the Town of Camp Verde
- Homestead Park – owned by Prescott National Forest and Arizona State Parks
- Rezzonico Park/Black Bridge river access – owned by the Town of Camp Verde
- Rockin' River Ranch – owned by Arizona State Parks

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<sup>7</sup> *Management Plan for Camp Verde Riparian Preserve*. Salt River Project. March 2005; updated 2015.

## I-17 Property

The I-17 property is located beneath and to the north and west of the Interstate 17 overpass as it runs through Camp Verde. It is formerly FEMA land that was quitclaimed to the Town of Camp Verde, and is currently an undeveloped parcel. Current uses are largely unmanaged and in some cases problematic. Neighboring landowners have complained about unchecked ATV use. In some cases, vehicles were running through the river itself and onto adjacent private property causing damage to the property. In addition, neighbors have noted the area as a location of frequent drug deals and other illicit behavior.

At the October 2015 public open house, renderings for potential site improvements were shared with the public and comments were solicited on recreational needs and priorities for the site. It was identified as the second highest priority among the four sites discussed as a day-use area. The potential improvements conceptualized in the renderings include a parking area to direct traffic away from neighborhoods, small road to access a boat launch and fishing areas, with paths from the parking area to the river, gathering areas, restrooms and a native garden. Wildlife blinds and birding/nesting observation sites were also incorporated. The design included the planting of native shade trees and potential ramadas. An alternative plan included only the paths to the river and parking for site users.

Public comments on the site design indicated interest in the nearness to potential boat launch sites, and the availability of shade trees, ramadas, and picnic areas. Respondents indicated that they would prefer to see fewer roads, but maintain good pathways to a boat launch. It was also suggested that, rather than routing park traffic down Rustler Trail, to use alternate routes to access the I-17 property through Long Rifle Road or Rawhide.

## Homestead Park

Homestead Park is located at the end of a dirt road originating from Finnie Flat Road through the Simonton property. It is a combination of USFS land and Arizona State Parks land, and the two agencies have been discussing joint management of recreational resources and access as part of the development of the Park. The two agencies and the Town are in the midst of discussing strategies for joint management of Homestead Park. The Town of Camp Verde is working to develop a mutually beneficial joint development agreement with the Arizona State Parks and Prescott National Forest for the site. Current uses have been somewhat problematic, as it is the site for a number of transient camps, unregulated uses, and the site of significant dumping, including large items such as old sofas, mattresses, and other trash.

The Town has already negotiated with the Simonton family and the Archaeology Center to include a parking area and trailhead to access Homestead Park as a condition for paving and improving the road. This property was identified as the number one priority through public engagement on recreational priorities.

With access to Homestead Park secured and a joint management MOU in place, planning for recreational improvements in partnership with the Prescott National Forest and Arizona State Parks may be able to proceed. It is envisioned that the Homestead Park will be kept in a relatively natural state, featuring nature trails, fishing access, and watchable wildlife resources and programming, including a wildlife viewing platform. Other programming explored in the renderings included a western settler cultural exhibition, with interpretive exhibits for ditch systems, windmills, a traditional mill, and educational materials about historic agricultural practices.

Participants in the October 2015 open house indicated enthusiasm for the plan offered for Homestead Park, and interest in particular in the wildlife viewing platform and resources. Suggestions made by the public ranged from including formal campsites to picnic areas, grills and ramadas near the water. Most community members indicated that they would like access to the site to enjoy kayaking, wading, and in-river activities such as swimming and wading.

### Rezzonico Park/Black Bridge River Access

Rezzonico Park is currently a lightly developed park within the Town of Camp Verde near the public library. A new library is under construction nearby, and the opportunity to improve Rezzonico Park as a community gathering place and area for connection with the Verde River near the Town's center exists. However, improvements to this site ranked lowest on the list of priorities for Town residents in light of other potential projects.

The sketches and renderings for improvements to Rezzonico Park shared at the public open house included improvements that build upon the current site features. A parking area is located near the library, with walking paths through the park. The marker for the geographic center of Arizona is located in the heart of Rezzonico Park, and conceptual drawings for enhancements include a stargazing element near the geographic center feature to take advantage of the Town of Camp Verde's dazzling night sky. Other improvement ideas include a pedestrian bridge across the Verde River from Rezzonico Park to a walkway on the other side of the river. Terraced picnic areas and ramadas, a native garden, and a small beach area for riverside recreation were also shown.

Public comments on the conceptual drawings for Rezzonico Park indicated support for a system of interconnected trails between Rezzonico Park, the I-17 property, and Homestead. However, it should be noted that any connector trails would have to be developed in partnership with private landowners along the corridor. Others expressed interest in development of a large, grassy area at Rezzonico for playing Frisbee or other outdoor sports. The need for restrooms, shade trees and shade structures, as well as parking areas and riparian ecosystem interpretation were also comments shared by community members.

### Rockin' River Ranch

Rockin' River Ranch is a 209-acre historic ranch at the southern boundary of the Town of Camp Verde, and which was purchased by Arizona State Parks in 2008 as an extension of the Verde

River Greenway through the Verde Valley. It is the site of several houses, barns, sheds, and other outbuildings connected with the past ranching operation. While the site has gone largely undeveloped and inaccessible by the public for the past seven years, Arizona State Parks has identified the parcel as a top priority for development as a recreational amenity.

At the October 2015 public open house, Arizona State Parks shared preliminary draft plans for development of Rockin' River Ranch. The site plan included a river access and boat launch, with campsites for passing paddlers and other users, as well as RV hook-ups, walking trails, restrooms, parking areas, and an amphitheater. To support equestrian activities, campsites and stabling facilities for horses were included in the site plan.

Public response was positive to these initial plans put forward by Arizona State Parks, particular the camping amenities, river access for boating, and the equestrian facilities. Rockin' River Ranch is also near the Truswell property, owned by Prescott National Forest. There have been discussions in the past about the opportunity to jointly manage Rockin' River Ranch and the Truswell property for recreational use. Some interest exists in transferring the river access point currently at Clear Creek river access point to Rockin' River Ranch or another parcel owned by the U.S. Forest Service, giving boaters a more convenient put in/take out launch area that does not involve hiking up a steep incline with their gear. Should legislative appropriations be secured for development of Rockin' River Ranch, such joint agreements for management could be explored more fully.

## Recommendations – Priorities for Implementation

Camp Verde offers a wide range of recreational pursuits, for both residents and visitors alike, and through the river recreation planning process, additional sites for new assets to enhance quality of life have been identified. Demand for recreation on the Verde River is already significant, and growing, and recreationists have brought much needed awareness and appreciation to the river. As noted in the Camp Verde Bugle story on John Parson, “Parsons, more than anyone, is responsible for transforming the Verde from a gravel-pitted, land-filled, orphaned waif to the thing of charm and beauty that it is today.”

However, much of the current use is unmanaged, and most river access areas are primitive in their development with limited enforcement available to ensure that recreation occurs sustainably and responsibly on these sites. Without a plan; without implementation of sensible recreation management that respects and protects both the natural resources of the river as well as the property rights of neighboring homeowners; and without well designed river access amenities and adequate public education on responsible recreational practices, recreational use could threaten to degrade the natural values, wildlife habitat, and health of the watershed.

The *Verde River Recreation Master Plan* represents an opportunity for the Town of Camp Verde to balance these needs, allowing people to enjoy the wonderful opportunities that the Verde River offers. It is also an opportunity to better connect our community with the river and its tremendous values, all while protecting the sensitive areas along the river corridor, and

preserving the quiet peacefulness of riverfront neighborhoods. In the end, both river recreationists and water users, community members and visitors, all want the same thing – a healthy, flowing Verde River that will continue to support the superb quality of life that Camp Verde offers.

While this plan provides a vision for managing river recreation in Camp Verde sustainably and well, and for enhancing opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy the Verde River, the *Verde River Recreation Plan* represents the beginning of what we hope will be a constructive, collaborative process of continuing to work with community residents, property owners, public land managers, and other stakeholders to advance this vision. The Town of Camp Verde welcomes and encourages the participation of community stakeholders in taking the next step toward developing detailed implementation plans for recreation management and improvements.

QUOTE:

“All the Casandras’ predictions about the Verde going dry may become all wet once more as more people realize and appreciate the economic and ecological values of the river and become responsible custodians.”

--James Bishop, Jr.

Managing recreation well in the community will involve continuing to monitor and evaluate recreation demand and assess carrying capacity issues. Overcrowding in some areas of the Verde has already been noted as an issue, and for recreational use to be appropriately balanced with protection of the river corridor and wildlife values, understanding and planning for management of capacity constraints will need to be a part of implementation of the plan. A key element of the success in managing recreation, particularly as access is improved and expanded in the priority areas identified, will be development of a long term strategy and framework to support ongoing education, parks and facility maintenance, and ongoing monitoring and enforcement activities to prevent damage or degradation to resources or conflict with local landowners.

In evaluating the public feedback gained through the community engagement process, stakeholder discussions with state and federal land management agencies and other partners, and conversations with riverfront property owners about their concerns with recreational use, the Town of Camp Verde has identified the following priorities for implementation through community and stakeholder engagement, mapping, inventory, and analysis that has occurred over the course of the planning process.

#1 – Implement strategies to better manage recreational use at existing and proposed sites, safeguard private property rights, and discourage damaging activities to riparian habitat and wildlife resources.

#2 – Development of Homestead Park as a day-use watchable wildlife amenity, with a viewing deck, nature trails, light development, and fishing access.

#3 – Designation of an Important Bird Area (IBA) designation to support watchable wildlife programming within the Town of Camp Verde.

#4 – Development of limited, day-use recreational amenities at the I-17 property.

#5 – Continue to explore the potential for developing riverside trails, as well as upland trails to Montezuma Castle National Monument, the Beaver Creek Communities, and the Town of Camp Verde’s 118-acre community park property and the White Hills located north of the Verde Ranger Station.

#6 – Continue to work with Arizona State Parks and Prescott National Forest to develop recreational amenities and park resources at Homestead Park and Rockin’ River Ranch.

#7 – Development of the riverfront amenities for Rezzonico Park just below Black Bridge.

By far the highest priority that emerged from community discussions is the need for the Town of Camp Verde to effectively and sustainably manage current recreational uses to preserve the natural values of the Verde River corridor and the rights of private property owners. There was a strong sense from the public that before consideration and development of new sites or recreational resources can occur, it will be important for a structure or strategy in place to ensure that current uses are well managed. Under the principle, “if you build it, they will come,” the first order of business, and the highest priority for the *Verde River Recreation Master Plan* is to develop a program for managing recreation in the Town.

### Implementation Plan for Recreational Management

- Work toward increased collaboration between law enforcement personnel for the Town and agency law enforcement personnel for state and federal agencies in managing recreational activity with the Town, particularly in managing the most problematic challenges, such as trash and trespass issues.
- Develop an ambassador program similar to the program implemented by Town of Clarkdale to provide resources and information to recreationists as well as ongoing site monitoring for capacity issues and evaluate recreational demand for various activities.
- Implement signage demarcating private property, as well as educational and safety interpretive signage about safe and appropriate recreation and how to minimize impacts to wildlife and natural values. Through the public comment process, the incorporation of “Leave No Trace” recreational ethics in educational materials and signage was recommended.

For each of the site-specific priorities, a set of next steps has been identified along with potential approaches to support construction of the recreational amenities as well as a plan for their long term management. In developing any implementation plan for developing recreational amenities for any of these priorities, it will be important for the Town to plan for not only the funding and activities to construct the actual recreational resources, but to also plan for the long term management and maintenance of those sites.

## Homestead Park

The development of recreational amenities, particularly watchable wildlife and nature trails, at Homestead Park emerged as the highest priority recreational project for the Town of Camp Verde to undertake in the near term. The park is composed of two parcels managed by the Prescott National Forest and one managed by Arizona State Parks. Town of Camp Verde could enter into a joint management agreement for management of the recreational assets of the park, as well as seek funding for constructions of the site improvements.

- Enter into a joint management and development agreement for the Homestead Park site in partnership with USFS and Arizona State Parks.
- Complete the road improvements, including the development of a trailhead and parking area at the end of Homestead Parkway.
- Seek funding for construction of a watchable wildlife/nature trail loop and wildlife viewing deck in Homestead Park. Develop educational/interpretive signage for wildlife as a part of the park.
- Seek funding for development of riverside fishing areas in Homestead Park.
- Implement an ambassadors program for recreational management.

## Designation of an IBA for the Town of Camp Verde

Perhaps the lowest cost recreational opportunity before the Town of Camp Verde is the designation of an Important Bird Area (IBA) through the Verde River corridor. The first step in recognizing an IBA through the river corridor would involve partnering with Audubon Arizona to conduct a survey of the species richness and diversity through the Verde River. If the area is determined to host habitat resources that can support a sufficient number of avian species of interest, with limited habitat range, and in otherwise meeting the criteria under the global program managed by Audubon and Birdlife International, and IBA designation can move forward.

Once the area qualifies as an IBA, the Town could pass a resolution recognizing the resource, the contribution it makes to the biological diversity of the region, and endorse a stewardship program for maintaining those values. The IBA Program provides some support to designated sites, including educational and interpretive signage about the ecological values and bird species of the region. Ongoing partnerships with the Town and Friends of Verde River Greenway on stewardship elements, and in on-the-ground activities to improve wildlife and bird habitat along the Verde River corridor would also benefit the long term maintenance of wildlife values.

- Partner with Audubon Arizona to conduct field surveys and assessments of the Verde River through Camp Verde and its capacity for supporting important wild bird populations.
- Town of Camp Verde may then craft a resolution in recognition of the IBA as a quality of life and ecological resource for the town.
- Construct educational and interpretive signage, with support from Audubon and Birdlife International, to inform the public and promote stewardship of the wildlife habitat values.

- Participate in ongoing partnerships with Friends of Verde River Greenway and VWRC to continue habitat improvements along the Verde River to steward birding and wildlife resources in the river corridor.

## I-17 Property

The I-17 property was noted as the second highest site-specific project for Town investment to support recreation. This site was identified as a good opportunity for development of a day-use area to support riverside activities such as picnicking, family gatherings, and fishing. Boating access was also supported by the public input. Given concerns voiced by neighboring residents relative to the I-17 parcel, it will important to balance recreational access with impacts to the nearby property owners, particularly along Rustler Trail. Site design should incorporate some alternative access routes to reach the parcel, and also provide parking for those wishing to recreate at the site. The public expressed concern about current illicit uses as well, so site plans moving forward should incorporate an enforcement element to ensure that recreational use is appropriate and sensitive to the nearby habitat for the Camp Verde Riparian Preserve as well as the river corridor.

- Develop a detailed site plan for development at the I-17 property, including a name for the park, and measure to mitigate impacts to nearby neighborhood.
- Seek funding for construction of improvements, including road improvements and a parking area to access the site in a manner that minimizes traffic and parking concerns for residents; walking paths, restrooms, picnic tables and ramadas for day use recreational activities.
- Construct interpretive signage that incorporates Leave No Trace ethics and promotes sustainable recreational use of amenities at the site.
- Implement ambassadors program at the I-17 parcel to manage recreational use and make interpretive resources available to the public.

## Rezzonico Park

Development of riverside recreational amenities along the Verde River at Rezzonico Park, while supported by the public, ranked last amongst the priorities put forward for consideration. Given downstream residential neighborhoods as well as diversions and obstacles, it may not be the most appropriate place to site a boat launch for paddling,, but public support was strong for a system of riverside trails and walking paths along the river, as well as picnic areas and a grassy, outdoor space for sports.

- Develop a detailed site plan for recreational improvements and amenities to support riverside recreational activities at Rezzonico Park.
- Seek funding for construction of improvements, such as a parking area and restrooms. Also secure funding for new recreational amenities such as terraced picnic areas, walking paths, interpretive/educational signage about the Verde River riparian corridor, and perhaps a pedestrian bridge across the river.

The project priorities reflected in the *Verde River Recreation Master Plan* were developed to meet the goals of the Town of Camp Verde in providing safe, healthy, and enjoyable recreational opportunities to connect residents and visitors alike with the significant amenity and natural resource values of the Verde River. The Town is grateful for the members of the public, riverfront property owners, state and federal agency staff, and others who participated in the planning process, offered comments and shared concerns with the Town, and contributed to developing the priorities expressed in this plan.

In implementing the *River Recreation Master Plan*, the Town will work diligently to continue to balance its management and site development activities, the need to meet demand for river recreation, and to support activities that promote economic development and tourism. The Town will also work to manage recreational use to lessen the impact on riverfront land owners, and protect the ecological integrity of the Verde River and riparian habitats.

Through the recreational planning and implementation process, the Town will seek to incorporate a restoration element to not only enhance recreational access, but improve the health of the watershed as well. Through the projects outlined above, the Town hopes to move forward with implementation in a manner that will address the concerns raised by the public and property owners for well managed recreation that does not degrade the natural values of the Verde, all while providing for increased recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

A well-managed resource is one that will support a range of needs for the Town – from recreation, to economic development, to preserving the peace, scenic beauty, and natural values of the area for generations to come.

## Appendices

Appendix I – Budget

Appendix II – Maps & Resources

Appendix III – Public Survey Results

Appendix IV – Results of Public Open Houses/Neighborhood Listening Sessions

Appendix V – Public Land Management Agency Stakeholder Discussion Notes