



5. OPEN SPACE & PARKS

A. INTRODUCTION

The focus of the Open Space and Parks Element is to highlight opportunities for preservation of open space and the further development of recreation in and around the City of Cottonwood. This element is intended to identify and provide appropriate policies for protecting open space resources, recreational areas, wildlife and natural habitat, riparian corridors, and major washes and floodplains within and surrounding the City of Cottonwood. Preservation of open areas and scenic views contribute to the community's rural character, unique community values, relief from urbanization, the quality of its public realm, pedestrian routes, parks, trails and historic amenities, its neighborhoods and home values, sense of place, small town qualities, and economic and tourism goals. Open space provides areas for beneficial use by residents and visitors, as well as a context for development that adds value to the entire community.

There are a number of areas within the city boundaries that are owned and managed by public agencies, including portions of Prescott National Forest, Coconino National Forest, Arizona State Parks and the Yavapai County Cliffrose Conservation Area. The City of Cottonwood has Riverfront Park, the Cottonwood Recreation Center and a number of smaller parks but otherwise controls very little undeveloped property or open space areas. Arizona Revised Statutes restricts the ability of the City to classify private property as open space, recreation, agricultural or conservation lands in the General Plan without written permission from the owner.

Methods to identify and protect public open space may be best accomplished through a multi-level approach that includes working cooperatively with various local, state and federal public land management agencies to ensure mutually beneficial conditions for their properties within and surrounding the city; and working with private property owners through the development process to effectively integrate local and regional open space networks into their development plans for mutual benefit. This element also describes key aspects of these issues and provides goals and objectives along with some recommended implementation strategies for achieving these goals.

B. LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

ARS § 9-461.05.D.1. General plans; authority; scope

- (a) A comprehensive inventory of open space areas, recreational resources and designations of access points to open space areas and resources.
- (b) An analysis of forecasted needs, policies for managing and protecting open space areas and resources and implementation strategies to acquire additional open space areas and further establish recreational resources.
- (c) Policies and implementation strategies designed to promote a regional system of integrated open space and recreational resources and a consideration of any existing regional open space plans.

ARS § 9-461.06.N. Adoption and amendment of general plan; expiration and readoption

- N. In applying an **open space element** or a **growth element** of a general plan a municipality shall not designate private land or state trust land as open space, recreation, conservation or agriculture unless the municipality receives the written consent of the landowner or provides an alternative, economically viable designation in the general plan or zoning ordinance, allowing at least one residential dwelling per acre. If the landowner is the prevailing party in any action brought to enforce this subsection, a court shall award fees and other expenses to the landowner.



C. KEY ISSUES

1. **Regional Coordination.**

Multi-agency coordination and collaboration is essential for achieving effective results with open space preservation and management. Whether it is the riparian corridors of the Verde River and its tributaries, or the foothills of the surrounding mountains or the various major washes that bisect the city, there are numerous agencies, organizations, jurisdictions and private land owners that are encouraged to work together to identify, protect and manage these critical lands for common benefit.

2. **Private Property Opportunities.**

Agencies need to work cooperatively with private land owners to identify and conserve open space areas that form critical links in open space networks. Where shown as an integrated component of the site design, open space preservation can add value to a property and directly serves the interest of the land owner. Various methods to promote private open space conservation should be considered where appropriate, including providing incentives, trade-offs and negotiable positions.

3. **Planned Development Strategies.**

Open space and trail amenities can be included with new development as part of the zoning and subdivision process. Related City codes should be used to identify open space areas and provide amenities associated with pedestrian use, streetscapes and landscaping. Parks and trails within master planned communities should be linked to similar systems within any surrounding public lands.

4. **Verde River Preservation.**

The Verde River and its tributaries have local, regional and state-wide significance. Any decisions that affect the Verde River corridor, including secondary effects from development proposals, need to be based on protecting the river, its tributaries and the surrounding lands. The Arizona State Parks Board is encouraged to increase their support for the Verde River Greenway State Natural Area program for its value as a state-wide resource.

5. **Open Space Preservation.**

Key issues include the impact of open space preservation on the developable land base; status of annexed National Forest areas and State Trust Lands; and development and management of access points. Consideration should be given to identification of funding sources and strategies for acquisition of property. Key focus areas are located along SR 260 and SR 89A, as well as the Verde River Greenway and the Verde Front area, including the foothills of the Black Mountain Range.

6. **Recreational Planning.**

A multi-level system of parks is proposed to meet the diverse needs and interests of the community. Regional, city-wide and neighborhood parks should all be included as part of a complete system. Local neighborhood park development should be emphasized with new planned development, as well as within existing neighborhoods where opportunities are presented.

7. **Environmental, Social and Economic Benefits of Open Space Preservation.**

Preservation of open space provides a context for development that adds value to that development. Open space networks with trail access are consistently indicated as among the most popular amenities within developments. Rather than seeing such open space preservation as taking away from development potential, it should be seen as a benefit that adds net value to the overall development context. Interconnected open space networks provide environmental, social and economic benefits from the local to the regional level.



D. INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

The various governmental entities in the Verde Valley region operate at different levels with different requirements and procedures: City, County, State, Federal, and Indian Nation. Support for multi-agency partnerships is necessary to achieve a regional system of integrated open space and recreational resources. Some of the key governmental agencies involved include the following:

Cities, Towns and Counties.

A little over half of the population in the Verde Valley region lives within the five incorporated cities and towns of Camp Verde, Clarkdale, Cottonwood, Jerome and Sedona. The other half lives mainly in unincorporated areas of Yavapai County, including Verde Village, Cornville and the Beaver Creek area.

Arizona State Land Department.

State Trust Land is not identified as “public land” in terms of open space or recreational opportunities although there may be opportunities in which these features may be integrated into future development plans. The City can work through the process with the state and the developers to determine mutually acceptable planning outcomes that preserve key open space resources and recreational features as a value-added amenity for the development and the broader community.

The Arizona State Land Department (ASLD) manages approximately 3% of the Verde Valley region. These lands are sold or leased to generate revenue for education and other public beneficiaries in the State. Although State Trust Lands comprise only a small portion of the Verde Valley’s total land area, a good portion of these lands are located adjacent to the major highway corridors and therefore have the potential to significantly impact open space within and between Verde Valley communities.

State Land intended for residential use is sold. Commercial uses may apply to lease property for up to 99 years. If the lease is more than 10 years, it must go to auction. Utilities, roads or other uses across State Land also must acquire rights for right-of-way. Permits are required for other commercial uses, such as cell towers and recreational uses. State Trust Land can be leased for grazing, which is the single largest use of all state trust lands. Land can also be leased for agricultural uses. Mining and extraction of minerals can be allowed by lease with requirements for royalties. Solar and wind energy projects are being processed with a 30 year lease with options. Restoration bonding is required for these types of uses.

There are two areas within Cottonwood that include State Trust Lands. The Lower SR 260 State Trust Land property includes 758 acres located west of SR 260 with potential access from an expanded intersection with Godard Rd at SR 260, as well as Del Rio Drive and Rio Mesa Trail. There are also several parcels of State Trust Land located around the intersection of SR 89A and Mingus Avenue Extension/Cornville Road. Three of the corners at the intersection include parts of the State Trust Land property with a combined 239 acres.

Approximately 10 square miles of State Trust Land located immediately to the northeast of Cottonwood has been proposed for annexation by the City of Cottonwood. This proposal takes a far-reaching and long-term approach to looking at the future growth of the Verde Valley over the next 25 to 50 years. Annexation of State Trust Lands requires ASLD approval of a “Conceptual Land Use Plan.” A conceptual land use plan and application were prepared by the City of Cottonwood in 2012. The Conceptual Land Use Plan must identify:

- a) Appropriate land uses, including commercial, industrial, residential and open space uses;
- b) Transportation corridors and infrastructure requirements; and
- c) All natural and artificial constraints and opportunities associated with the land.

Additional information regarding the proposed annexation is located in the **Growth Area Element**.



Arizona State Parks.

Dead Horse Ranch State Park (DHRSP), located within the City of Cottonwood, is one of the most popular state park facilities in the state-wide system. Dead Horse Ranch State Park has 897 acres, containing hiking and equestrian trails, ramadas, picnicking areas, three large lagoons suitable for bird watching, fishing and canoeing, and a stretch of the Verde River providing outstanding nature watching



opportunities, riverside trails, and kayaking and boating opportunities. There are over 100 large RV sites, a 46 unit group camping area, 8 cabins for rent, and 84 campsites, including some ADA accessible sites and 17 non-electric, tent-only sites. The Verde River Greenway State Natural Area (VRG-SNA) is also managed through DHRSP. The VRG-SNA now includes properties along 36 miles of the Verde River corridor. Support is necessary for ongoing management and continued acquisitions along the Verde River to extend the Verde Greenway and to create an interconnected land and water trail system along the river.

United States Forest Service.

Over 70% of the land within the Verde Valley is shown as National Forest managed by the USFS. This includes over 200,000 acres managed by the Prescott National Forest, through the Verde Ranger District, and approximately 400,000 acres managed by the Coconino National Forest through the Red Rock Ranger District. These grand landscapes, towering mountains and dramatic formations define where we live to a large extent. The long-term protection and management of these lands in a healthy sustainable manner should be understood as a critical, permanent goal. The water cycle, rainfall and replenishment of ground and surface water sources are all tied to health and well-being of this landscape, as well as the health of plant life, soil quality, forests, grasslands, riparian corridors, and wildlife of all kinds.

With increasing population growth in the Verde Valley, as well as throughout Arizona, the demands on these lands for all types of uses will continue to grow, including ranching, commercial uses, private development, recreation and scenic values. While the Forest Service is mandated to manage National Forest for all of the people of the United States, they are also responsible for managing lands for “wild land” character. Part of the Forest Service mission is to protect “wild land” values, including wildlife habitat and corridors, riparian preservation, watershed stability, native vegetation, scenic vistas and various recreation opportunities.

National Park Service.

The NPS mission is to preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of this and future generations and to cooperate with partners to extend the benefits of resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout the country. Nationally, the NPS also helps administer a variety of affiliated sites and programs, including the National Register of Historic Places, National Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Historic Monuments and other valued programs. Tuzigoot National Monument is located a couple of miles north of Cottonwood and contains a 110-room prehistoric site on 112 acres with a visitor center and exhibits. The Tuzigoot site also includes a portion of Tavasci Marsh and a stretch of the Verde River connecting to Dead Horse Ranch State Park. The NPS also manages Montezuma’s Castle and Montezuma’s Well National Monuments on 840 acres located near Camp Verde.



INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION OF OPEN SPACE PLANNING

The City of Cottonwood has had ongoing involvement with various land management agencies for many years, including Arizona State Parks, Yavapai County, Coconino and Prescott National Forests. Collaborative activities have included ongoing participation with various planning efforts, as well as enactment of joint resolutions and intergovernmental agreements to accomplish specific goals.

Inter-agency coordination needs to be an ongoing process to properly manage shared resources. The “Growing Smarter” legislation as described in Arizona Revised Statutes requires that municipalities prepare general plan open space elements that are developed in a regional context.

Discussion, development and implementation of regional open space objectives in the Verde Valley are ongoing concerns. Such efforts could be expected to include broad-based community involvement, support and direction. Recommendations include support for the multi-agency coordinating council, neutral facilitation, on-going contact with key stakeholders and the financial and technical resources to ensure that such ongoing regional efforts are successful.

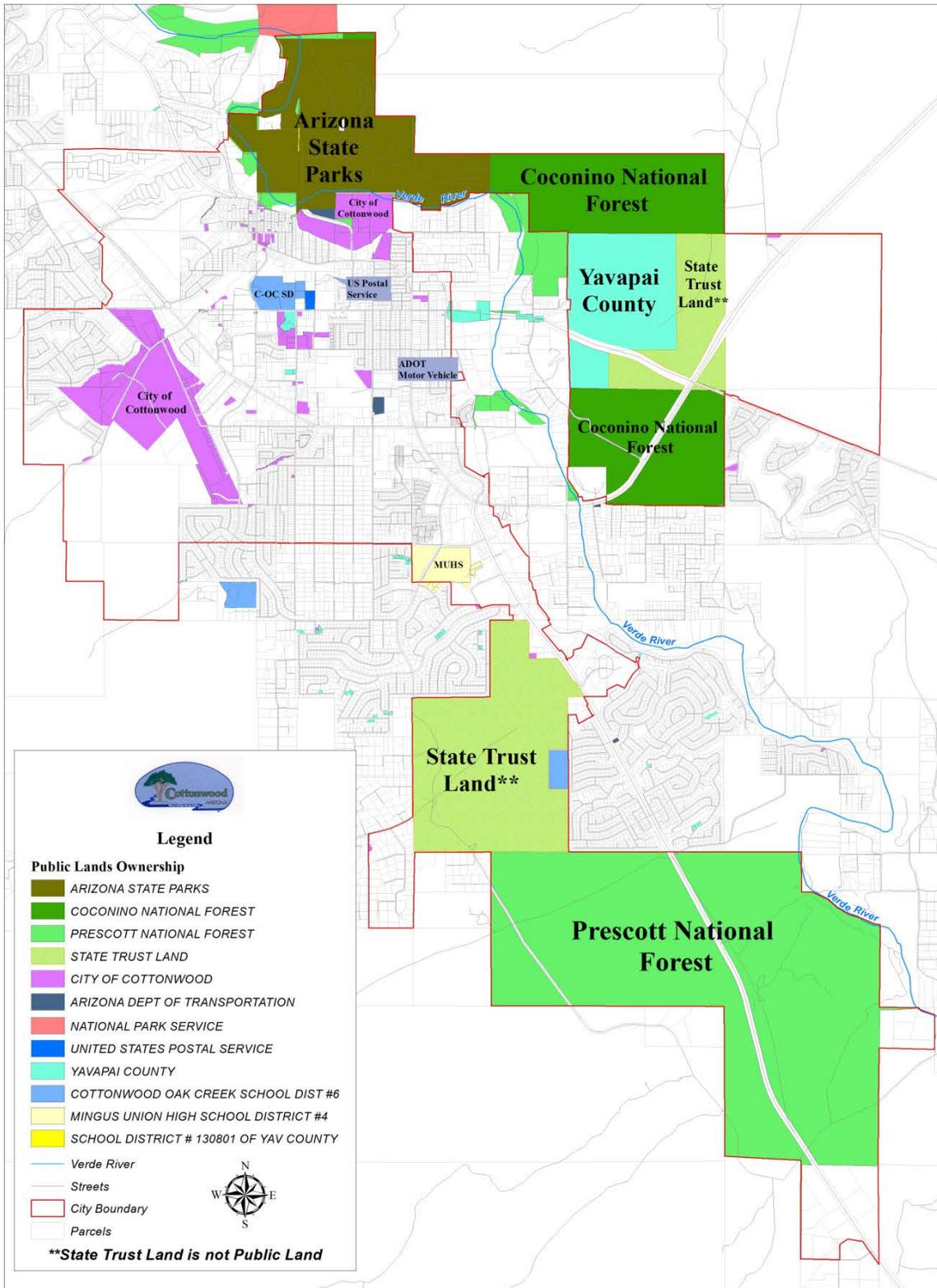
Procedures for designating and managing open space resources can be considerably different for the various local, state and federal agencies. Where local, county and state agencies may have a certain amount of flexibility when it comes to designating properties as natural areas, the federal government is subject to a wide range of laws and regulations, such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), to ensure the resource is well understood and the public has opportunity for comments before any action is taken.

Benefits of inter-agency coordination include:

- ◆ Multi-Agency Leadership Council: Improved communication among elected officials and decision makers will help ensure sustained efforts to accomplish goals. Collaboration and prioritization can result in mutually beneficial results.
- ◆ Regional Coordination: Improved and strengthened regional coordination among jurisdictions is essential to plan and manage natural resources.
- ◆ Communication: Continuing dialogue on open space issues is essential, including identification of general opportunities and constraints relative to open space preservation goals.
- ◆ Verde River Programs: Improved coordination and communication regarding the management and future use of the Verde River supports positive long-range outcomes for the communities, economy and natural resources.
- ◆ Implementation of regional trail and open space planning objectives: Trails and open space networks usually cross boundaries and connect to and through various jurisdictions. Regional coordination is essential for effective results.
- ◆ Mapping of Verde Valley-wide areas that may have special open space significance: Use of new technologies and sharing of information will help with planning and management objectives.
- ◆ Cooperative Marketing Program: The regional agencies have the opportunity to work together to promote and advertise the region’s natural resources, facilities and programs for tourism, local use and economic development benefits.
- ◆ Public Input: Provide opportunities to document public opinions and to allow involvement from all interested persons.
- ◆ Funding sources: Funding sources and opportunities change over time. Periodic review of funding and acquisition opportunities is necessary to stay current. Collaboration and partnerships can help provide greater leverage with funding opportunities.



Public Lands



Revised April 2014





E. RESOURCE PROTECTION

Open space resources are comprised of a number of components that can be understood in terms of their own unique attributes. In addition to the political, economic and cultural aspects of open space, there are scientific perspectives to understanding and managing open space areas as natural resource systems. The land forms, geology, drainage patterns, plants and wildlife are some of the parts that can be classified and studied as part of an integrated ecosystem.

1. Washes and Drainages.

The City of Cottonwood is located along the Verde River corridor to the east of the Black Hills Range, which includes Mingus Mountain as the most prominent local natural landmark. Six major washes cross through portions of Cottonwood, including Mescal Gulch, Del Monte Wash, Railroad Wash, Silver Spring Gulch, Oak Wash and Black Canyon Creek. These channels are usually dry but may carry storm water runoff annually. All of these large washes can potentially carry high levels of runoff and experience flash flood conditions at times. Although there has not been a major high-level event in recent years, the major washes all have potential for significant flash flooding as a result of extreme storm conditions. These washes need to be kept clear of development or obstructions.

2. Geology and Soils.

The Verde Valley was formed by faulting, subsidence, uplifting and subsequent filling of the valley with lacustrine (related to lakes) sediments which include hard limestone strata with sandstone layers of variable hardness. The most prominent lacustrine deposit is called the Verde Formation. The Verde Formation is composed of layer upon layer of impure limestone and mudstone, along with some conglomerates, sandstones, evaporites and interbedded layers of volcanics. On the western side of the valley, the Verde Formation has been buried by alluvium coming from the Black Hills. Stream terraces formed by the Verde River cross the area and include fan terraces formed by alluvial sediments coming from the Black Hills and outcrops of the Verde Formation.

Between 2.5 to 9 million years ago, the central part of the Verde Valley was covered by a lake which at times covered as much as 300 square miles. Lake Verde, as the ancient inland sea has been called, was a relatively shallow lake throughout most of the 6 million years it was contained within the basin. It was primarily fed by the same drainages that flow into the Verde River today. It was generally in a state of flux, expanding or shrinking, which left intermittent deposits of limestone and mudstone. After it dried up, it left deposits of gypsum and salt around Camp Verde, as well as major deposits of sand and gravel throughout the area.

3. Flora and Fauna.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has given the Verde River protected status as critical habitat for several species of flora and fauna (plants and animals.) Additionally, the Department of the Interior has listed portions of the lower Verde River as one of the most significant rivers in the nation through the Wild and Scenic River designation.

There are two primary “plant communities” identified in the Cottonwood area: a grassland/shrub highland plant community and the riparian (river) plant community along the Verde River. The riparian plant corridor, which provides habitat for the largest faunal diversity, consists of mature stands of Fremont cottonwood, Gooding willow, alder and box elder. Over two hundred species of birds have been recorded in this reach of the Verde, including the bald eagle, endangered southwestern willow fly catcher, and common black hawk (Sullivan & Richardson, 1993). The Arizona Cliffrose (c. *subtinegra*), a federally listed endangered plant, occurs in part of Cottonwood near the Verde River. A large stand of Arizona Cliffrose is located off Rocking Chair Road and the Mingus Avenue extension and a management plan to protect this species has been developed. Further, the Verde River is critical habitat for several federally endangered fish, including the razorback sucker, the spikedace and the loach minnow.



4. Invasive Species.

An invasive species is a non-native plant, animal or other organism whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm, or harm to human health. Many invasive species can rapidly displace native species when introduced into new habitats where they have not evolved as part of a functionally organized community and where their natural enemies are not present to keep them in check. Invasive species can out-compete native species resulting in crowding of habitat, loss of diversity, changes to ecosystems and related economic losses.

There are numerous non-native plants that are well-suited to the local environment and climate and do not cause harm. There are other non-native plants that can cause a variety of problems. Some of these invasive-type plants have been popular landscape selections in the Verde Valley for years; however, many of these plants have long term negative effects on the local environment and economy and their removal and discontinuation should be considered by homeowners and property owners.

The Cottonwood Zoning Ordinance, Section 407 “Landscaping Requirements” applies primarily to landscaping plans required for new commercial developments. For other uses that are exempt from the landscaping requirements, such as individual residential uses, the voluntary avoidance of these invasive plants is highly recommended. The following plants are not approved for use with required commercial and multi-unit landscape plans due to their invasive, fire-prone, and/or high-pollen producing characteristics. Plants with these characteristics should generally be avoided for landscape plantings in the Cottonwood area and homeowners and others not subject to the requirements for landscape plans are asked to voluntarily avoid or remove such plants. A partial list of plants found in this area that are considered invasive and potentially harmful includes the following:

- | | |
|---|--|
| a. Common Bermuda Grass (<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>). | Invasive weed grass. |
| b. Desert Broom (<i>Baccharis sarothroides</i>). | Invasive weed plant. Common along local highways. |
| c. Red Brome (<i>Bromus rubens</i>). | Non-native invasive winter grass. |
| d. Fountain Grass (<i>Pennisetum setaceum</i>). | Self-seeding perennial bunchgrass, spreads to wildlands and is prone to wildfires. |
| e. Mulberry Tree (Male) (<i>Morus, male var.</i>) | Noxious pollen producers. Female varieties okay. |
| f. Oleander (<i>Nerium oleander</i>) | Large, invasive and toxic shrub. |
| g. Olive Tree (<i>Olea europaea</i>) | Noxious allergy-producing pollen. “Swan Hill,” “Wilson Hill” and similar non-flowering varieties that produce no pollen may be considered. |
| h. Russian Olive (<i>Elaeagnus angustifolia</i>) | Non-native invasive tree. Planted along highways. |
| i. Pampas Grass (<i>Cortaderia selloana</i>). | Invasive clump grass chokes out native species and spreads to wildlands, drainages and river corridor. |
| j. Paradise Tree (<i>Ailanthus altissima</i>). | Also known as “Tree-of-Heaven,” non-native, highly invasive and destructive weed tree. |
| k. Giant Reed (<i>Arundo donax</i>). | Large, fast-growing invasive non-native grass looks like bamboo but is destructive plant that chokes riparian areas with negative impact on watershed. |
| l. Russian Thistle (<i>Salsola tragus & Salsola iberica</i>). | Small highly invasive shrub, also known as “Common Tumbleweed.” |
| m. Tamarisk (<i>Tamarix chinensi</i>) | Aggressive invasive tree or large shrub, also known as “Salt cedar.” Has spread to river areas throughout the west. |



F. MAJOR OPEN SPACE AREAS FOR COTTONWOOD

There are several major areas that have been identified as desirable for open space preservation. This section identifies a larger framework of open space components for consideration. Additional open space areas are also found at the local level throughout the area. A comprehensive program for open space protection should consider how all of these resources function as an integrated system.

I. STATE ROUTE 260 CORRIDOR – SOUTH GATEWAY AREA:

- a. **Maintain significant open space along the highway corridor.** SR 260 provides an important gateway to Cottonwood. Open space along the highway corridor provides a separation between the developing communities, which helps to define the unique identity of each community. Protect contiguous open space on each side of the highway with connections to nearby National Forest lands.
- b. **Maintain wash corridors through this area linking the Mingus foothills to the Verde River.** The washes through this area serve as important wildlife corridors connecting the foothills to the Verde River. Acquisition of private lands and/or protected conservation easements within this area, particularly along Black Canyon and larger washes, would enhance their future management potential and provide effective preservation of critical wildlife corridors.
- c. **Ensure any future development of the State Trust Land section west of SR 260 incorporates open space protection.** The 758 acres of State Trust Land is mostly surrounded by developed residential areas. Any future development should be carefully planned to protect natural drainages as integrated open space corridors. These areas provide excellent locations for community trail access and wildlife corridor linkages.

2. STATE ROUTE 89A / MINGUS EXTENSION – EAST GATEWAY AREA:

- a. **Ensure development in this area maintains the wide open vistas and views of the surrounding landscape.** The area around the State Route 89A and Mingus Extension/Cornville Road intersection is mostly undeveloped. Future development of the Verde Santa Fe North (Phase II) property is approved for commercial development along the highway frontage and there are over 2,000 residential units approved for the master planned community. The surrounding area also includes Coconino National Forest Lands, State Trust Lands and conservation lands owned by Yavapai County. Future development in this area will need to be carefully considered so as to maintain the benefits of the natural open character and grand vistas.

3. VERDE RIVER GREENWAY STATE NATURAL AREA:

- a. **Verde River Riparian Corridor.** The Verde River riparian corridor is a dense source of biodiversity that forms a critical interrelationship with life throughout the region, including habitat and plant communities in the dry upper elevations of the surrounding mountains. Over the years many individuals and groups have studied the science of the river and debated the best management decisions and long-term policies. The river corridor needs permanent protection and stewardship.
- b. **Support efforts to expand and link together properties that are part of the Verde River Greenway State Natural Area and the riparian corridor.** The Verde River through Cottonwood travels across City property, State Parks lands and private parcels. Most of the property is in a portion of the Flood Plain that is not developable. It would be advantageous to obtain long terms protection of the interconnected greenway through acquisition and/or easements.



- c. **Ensure development in proximity to the Verde River is designed in a manner that is sensitive to environmental concerns.** Larger washes and major drainages often function as key wildlife corridors that connect the Verde River to higher elevation habitat. Ensure development in those areas does not interrupt the wildlife corridors.



4. MAJOR WASHES AND DRAINAGES:

- a. **Protect major washes in their natural state.** Major washes create important physical links between the river and the surrounding landscape. The washes are a key part of the larger ecosystem providing interconnections that enhance the overall health and biodiversity of the system. There are portions of six major named washed that cross parts of Cottonwood west of the Verde River, including Mescal Gulch, Del Monte Wash, Railroad Wash, Silver Spring Gulch, Oak Wash and Black Canyon Creek.
- b. **Minor local drainages.** Smaller unnamed washes play an important part in the overall drainage patterns throughout an area. The water flow for small washes also needs to be protected. Surface water includes, “Waters of all sources, flowing in streams, canyons, ravines or other natural channels, or in definite underground channels, whether perennial or intermittent, floodwaters, wastewaters, or surplus water, and of lakes, ponds and springs on the surface.” (ARS § 45-101)

5. VERDE FRONT PLANNING AREA:

- a. **Support appropriate Land Exchange on the upslope side of Mingus Mountain.** The eastern face of Mingus Mountain to the west of the City of Cottonwood includes several large, visually prominent sections of private, undeveloped land with very high scenic value. Visible throughout much of the Verde Valley, future development on these steep slopes could have significant visual and environmental impacts. The land exchange process should be considered as a potentially beneficial approach for long term protection of these lands.
- b. **Protect open space resources and improve multiple use opportunities in the Verde Front Planning Area.** Continue support for various multi-agency planning efforts working to improve the management and long-term use of the lands immediately west of Cottonwood, including the Verde Front planning effort, which supports comprehensive land use and management issues.



G. PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

The Cottonwood Parks and Recreation Department manages a number parks and facilities in the City. The City maintains seven primary parks and recreation facilities, some with multiple uses, and several smaller specialized sites and facilities. Various recreational programs are also administered through this department, including softball leagues, volleyball leagues, recreational classes, summer youth programs, tennis clinics, swimming programs, and basketball leagues.

The Cottonwood Recreation Center and Riverfront Park facilities are major regional draws that provide a range of opportunities. The city also has an outdoor pool, tennis courts, a civic center with a stage and a large space suitable for dance classes, etc. The historic river rock Cottonwood Civic Center located in Old Town is also managed by the City providing a location for various dance and performance groups and classes to meet and practice. In addition, three schools, Mingus Union High School, Cottonwood Middle School and Cottonwood Elementary provide additional recreation facilities.

A Multi-Level City Parks System.

The National Recreation and Park Association previously recommended having at least 6.2 acres of park facilities per 1,000 population. Rather than using a percentage formula, park planners now recommend looking at what's available in your community and then comparing that with the needs of the population. It may be that more neighborhood parks are needed, or more places for organized sports or other special needs facilities. Every community is different so set standards or formulas are less useful than looking at specific needs and interests.

A comprehensive park plan should serve the interests of all segments of the population and include both active recreational opportunities, such as play grounds, ball courts and athletic facilities, and passive recreational facilities, such as walking paths, picnic areas and sitting areas. A tiered system of parks for Cottonwood would include neighborhood, city-wide and regional type parks:

1. Neighborhood Parks.

The opportunity to walk to a neighborhood park facility from your home is a highly desirable amenity that addresses a range of quality of life issues, as well as economic development concerns. Existing neighborhood areas should be evaluated to consider opportunities and interest for locating small local parks. Neighborhood parks are usually from one-half to 5 acres in size and serve an area up to one-half mile in radius, or a convenient walking distance from surrounding homes. Each park should respond to the prevailing interests of the residents in that area. Such areas may have minimal facilities, such as walking paths, benches or a tot lot playground area. But they could also include features such as, children's play areas, picnic tables, ball courts, ball fields, pet areas, trails and open space areas. A city-wide program to identify opportunities, needs and interests for development of neighborhood parks is recommended.

2. City Parks.

City parks and facilities serve the interests of the entire city. Such city-wide or community-scale parks serve a wider range of interests than neighborhood parks and may include multi-purpose sports fields, play courts, tot lots, ramadas, restrooms, and parking lots.

3. Regional Parks.

Regional parks and recreational facilities can include both indoor and outdoor facilities. Outdoor recreational facilities include baseball, softball and soccer fields, basketball and tennis courts, children play areas, walking trails, pet areas, covered picnic areas and quiet areas for sitting. This type of park should have adequate off-street parking with activity areas separated from less intensive uses by open space or landscaped areas. Riverfront Park and the Cottonwood Recreation Center provide facilities that serve the interests of the wider region.



COTTONWOOD PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS.

1. **Cottonwood Recreation Center and Swimming Center.** (105 S. 6th Street) 65,000 square feet multi-use facility opened in 2010.
2. **Riverfront Park and Ballfields.** (N. 10th Street off of N. Main Street) 4-Field Little League complex, 4-Adult Softball Fields, 5-Picnic Ramadas, Skate Park, 1.3 Acre Dog Park, Community Garden, 18-tee Disc Golf Course, Horseshoe Pits, Sand Volleyball Courts, Verde River access, Fishing, Bird Watching, Walking, Hiking.
3. **Cottonwood Kid's Park.** (S. 12th Street at Cherry St.) Adjacent to Fairgrounds. Soccer fields, Picnic tables and Parking.
4. **Garrison Park.** (Brian Mickelson Parkway south of Mingus Avenue) Includes picnic ramada and children's play equipment.
5. **Lions Park.** (Willard and N. Main St.) Picnic tables and open space along Del Monte Wash.
6. **Old Town Park.** (Pima St behind City Hall) Open field, event space.
7. **Elm and Viejo Park.** (Verde Village Unit 8) Small neighborhood park includes shade Ramada.
8. **Cottonwood Community Orchard.** (Willard St Extension north of Mesquite) Started in 2011. Planned for up to 15 trees with irrigation from Class A+ reclaimed water. Located near Airport South Clear Zone.
9. **Cottonwood Youth Advisory Commission.** Appointed 15-member commission comprised of volunteer young people who work on youth-oriented programs.
10. **Cottonwood Equestrian and Animal Event Center.** Located at the Verde Valley Fairgrounds, the facility includes a new state of the art Priefert Rodeo Arena, warm up arena and supporting areas for rodeos and equestrian events. The facility is also available to rent.



Fitness/Strength Training/Cardio: 36 Free Weight and Pulley machines by Hammer Strength. 30 pieces of cardio equipment by Life Fitness. Dumbbells and free weights for toning and strengthening. Walking Track with pace clock.

Large Exercise/Dance Studio: Mirrors, ballet bar, sound system and cushioned floor for aerobics, spinning and more. Yoga, Zumba, Ballet Classes, Modern dance, Hula dance, Square dance.

Indoor Leisure Pool: Children's indoor play pool feature, Lazy River, large spa, 2 lap lanes, zero depth entry, 160- foot flume slide, interactive bucket play features.

Outdoor Pool: Large outdoor pool accommodates, swim teams, aerobics classes, lanes. Summer Dive-In Movie Nights.



Cottonwood General Plan 2025

Community Events Hall: Total capacity of 260 people, catering kitchen, may be separated into three smaller rooms each with a sink and preparation area, rooms available to rent or for classes.

Gymnasium: Official high school size basketball/volleyball court, skylights and high windows for natural lighting, may be used for large events and trade shows.

Game Room: Interactive gaming for teens and the whole family.

Baby Sitting: Drop off for toddlers at a \$2/hour while you are using the facility.

Climbing Wall: 20 feet of challenging climbing for novices to moderates.

Summer Sports Camps: Basketball Camp, Volleyball Camp, Soccer Camp.

COTTONWOOD RECREATION CENTER





COTTONWOOD COMMUNITY GARDEN

The Cottonwood Community Garden is located at Riverfront Park next to the Verde River. The City of Cottonwood has assumed management of the Cottonwood Community Garden, and the City Clerk has been appointed as garden manager.

Community gardens not only provide opportunities for local residents to produce fresh, healthy food but also provide opportunities for residents and neighbors to work together in a positive social setting. For \$25 a family or individual can grow their own fruits or vegetables in a 16 x 16 garden plot. Plots are available for restaurants or other business ventures (growing vegetables to be sold at farmers markets, etc.) for \$75 a year. There is no additional charge for water. Gardeners get a growing area, use of water and the opportunity to learn from each other and share information on how to successfully grow vegetables, herbs and flowers in this area.

The garden has been designated as an organic garden. Any fertilizers, soil amendments, pest, weed, and disease control products used in the garden must be listed under the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) products list. In addition, a section of the Community Garden has been set aside specifically for Square Foot Gardens (SFG.) (more information at: squarefootgardening.org.)

School Gardens

School garden programs could also be developed at local schools if there was interest. School gardens have proven to be very successful in other communities by providing opportunities for young children and teenagers to learn about growing food from a practical, hands-on, science-based approach. Such programs can benefit by forging a relationship with local community gardens and learning from experienced local gardeners. Local gardening experts should be encouraged to assist in the development and management of a school garden program through a partnership between the city, school districts and community.

COTTONWOOD COMMUNITY ORCHARD

The first donated fruit tree was planted in 2011, on a small piece of City property located near the Airport South Clear Zone off of Willard Street north of Mesquite. It is anticipated that the property could be developed with up to 15 orchard trees. When the system becomes fully operational, irrigation from Class A+ reclaimed water will be delivered to the site. This project will use recycled water to provide a productive use of a small area of unused open space next to the Airport. Although it is a relatively small scale operation, this project will serve as a model for others to learn from and could lead to additional orchard facilities located in under-utilized areas.



Cottonwood General Plan 2025

OPEN SPACES AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES			
AREA / FACILITY	TYPE	JURISDICTION	ACRES
Cottonwood Recreation Center	Opened in 2010, the Cottonwood Recreation Center is a 53,000 square feet multi-generational facility including two Aquatics facilities, exercise equipment, fitness classes and community meeting rooms.	City Of Ctwd	
Ctwd-Oak Creek School Dist.	Includes Clemenceau Museum as well as full size baseball, softball, soccer fields, basketball courts, shaded picnic, open area and parking.	School Dist	17
Cottonwood Ranch Park	Public park facility developed in association with the Cottonwood Ranch development. Includes developed and undeveloped open area.	City Of Ctwd	11
Cottonwood Kids Park	Adjacent to Fairgrounds. Soccer fields, picnic and parking.	City Of Ctwd	5
Community Garden	Facility located at Riverfront Park provides residents garden plot and water access for annual fee.	City Of Ctwd	1
Dead Horse State Park	State park facility located along the Verde River Greenway. Includes day use and overnight camping facilities, full service R.V. areas, riverside fishing and lagoon. Added two 20-acre lagoons in 2003 and 100 additional campsites.	State Of AZ	600+
Elm and Viejo Park	Small neighborhood park in Verde Village Unit 8 includes shade ramada.	City Of Ctwd	0.25
Verde Valley Fair Grounds	Nonprofit association operates open air event facility with exhibit enclosures and parking.	V.V. Fair Assoc.	26
Fair Grounds Slag Pile	Planned commercial reclamation and processing operation.	V.V. Fair Assoc.	16
Garrison Park	Includes children's park, picnic ramadas, open area and parking.	City Of Ctwd	5.5
Lions Park	Neighborhood park in Old Town with picnic tables. Also includes a portion of the Del Monte stream channel.	City Of Ctwd	0.3
Mingus Union High School	Sports facility with two full size baseball fields, softball field and football field.	School Dist.	22.5
Old Jail Trailhead	Includes historic old jail building, new parking lot, outdoor area and trailhead. Jail trail proceeds north across state land to join Verde River Greenway.	State Of Az., City Of Ctwd	0.25
Old Town Activity Park	Former Little League field now used for Farmers Market, Boys and Girls Club and general use. Includes adjacent basketball courts and outdoor picnic area.	City Of Ctwd	1.5
Riverfront Park	Multi-use city park located along the Verde River Greenway and Dead Horse Ranch State Park. Includes Little League complex, skate park, disc golf course, picnic areas, hiking trails, and river access.	City Of Ctwd	90
Verde River Greenway State Natural Area VRG-SNA	Riverside areas shown as part of the Verde River Greenway Plan, managed cooperatively between Arizona State Parks, other agencies and private holdings. Currently there are about 200 acres of the greenway located inside the city limits, overlapping Dead Horse State Park, Riverfront Park and a few private parcels north of Old Town.	State Of AZ, City Of Ctwd & Private	200



H. RECREATIONAL TRAILS AND ACCESS

Within the City of Cottonwood there is limited City property available for trails. The City has property in Riverfront Park and there is city property along Del Monte Wash between the Airport and Mesquite Hills but in general, undeveloped City property is limited. One of the most important strategies for developing trails within the City of Cottonwood involves working with private property owners to include public access trails with development proposals and to work with state and federal public land agencies to develop trail access to surrounding areas.

Proposed development projects, including zoning changes, subdivisions, and master planned communities, are always evaluated for inclusion of trails, open space and access to surrounding public lands. Most of the major washes bisecting the city are through private property. Interior washes that form the natural drainage system create some of the best opportunities for locating trails and interpretive areas. Such trails are typically located on the side slopes of the wash and along the edge of the corridor and not directly in the wash bottom, floodway or areas prone to regular flooding or washouts. The preferred approach is to encourage inclusion of trail easements within appropriate open space and wash corridors as part of the development process where feasible.

Opportunities for locating trails on public lands, include Dead Horse Ranch State Park and the Verde River Greenway, Prescott National Forest lands located within the city along lower SR 260, and the Coconino National Forest along SR 89A near the Mingus Extension and Cornville Road.

As the City grows there will be more pressure on the surrounding public land resources for all types of uses. Cottonwood supports multi-agency coordination and partnerships to develop and manage trails and recreational opportunities throughout the region.



TRAIL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

1. Trail Design Issues.

There are different types of trails that are used in different locations for different types and levels of use. The landscape almost always presents a wide range of conditions with the terrain and soil type, so flexibility is the key to developing quality trails. It is often considered more enjoyable and interesting to travel on trails that have some degree of variation and unique natural characteristics. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to designing and building trails. Trails in heavily used developed areas will be considerably different than trails in remote backcountry locations in terms of width, surfacing and general level of development. With the design and construction of trails it is more important to be aware of the principles of good trail design rather than specific hard and fast engineering standards.

Trail design and construction techniques in arid land conditions can be significantly different than those in temperate climates. Desert soil types have a number of different characteristics in terms of compaction and displacement. Long dry periods punctuated by heavy rainfall events create a unique condition for design and construction. Controlling drainage and erosion is a key factor in the layout and design of natural surface trails. Design criteria includes:

- a. The development and maintenance of trails should encourage logical, safe and comfortable usage, serve a wide variety of recreation and transportation modes and impact the environment as little as possible.
- b. The design of the trail should be appropriate to the specific environment, surrounding development, anticipated level of use and needs of the trail users.
- c. Non-motorized trails suitable for use by hikers, bicyclists, equestrians and wheelchairs are appropriate within and near neighborhoods. Motorized trails tend to be located away from developed residential areas and with longer looped routes covering varied terrain and for different skill levels.
- d. Trails and trailheads should be designed at the earliest possible stage of planning in the site development process for new and expanded development projects to ensure such facilities are well-integrated with the overall site plan, open space system, landscaping plans and preliminary grading plans.

2. Trail Type Based on Location.

Trail standards generally vary for different locations, such as highly-developed areas, master planned communities, existing neighborhoods or natural open space areas. The following descriptions provide a summary of some considerations for various types of trails; however, the standards for each trail should be considered on a case-by-case basis. Examples include:

- a. **Developed Areas:** Trails which are located in more developed or urbanized areas should anticipate a higher level of use and they should be developed accordingly. This may include a higher level of overall development, including a wider trail tread, engineered, compacted or paved surfaces, fencing, lighting, signage, drainage structures and bridges, and close coordination with applicable agencies for any road or highway crossings.
- b. **Master Planned Communities and Traditional Subdivisions:** Trails in new development projects should generally have a somewhat wider tread with an engineered (graded and compacted) natural surface. Such trails should be integrated with the natural environment, such as next to wash corridors, where possible and include adequate drainage structures, bridges, lighting and safe street crossing design.
- c. **Public Lands and Natural Open Space Areas:** Trails through larger undeveloped open space and natural areas should be designed and developed to achieve the best practices for trail development in that location. This may include natural surface trails developed with minimal



improvements or there may be a higher level of improvements depending on anticipated level and type of use. In some areas, trails may incorporate more challenging design elements, such as steeper grades and leaving some natural protrusions, such as smooth rocks and similar objects in the trail tread (which is the traveling surface.)

3. Comprehensive Trail System Planning.

Planning efforts for trails often focus on separate individual trail projects rather than looking at the bigger picture of sub-area or regional trail planning, interconnectivity between trail systems and efforts to protect access from encroaching development.

- a. Collaborate with neighboring agencies to interconnect trail systems and share resources.
- b. Develop regional trail system plans (emphasize multi-jurisdictional planning—involve adjacent communities, landowners and governments, as well as trail users.)
- c. Identify major trail access points in developing areas and secure use for future trails.

4. Interagency Coordination.

Interagency coordination is necessary to achieve a coherent, interconnected system in an area that has numerous incorporated jurisdictions, unincorporated county areas, state agencies, federal agencies and large private land holdings all mixed together. Better communication between agencies is important to ensure a clear understanding of agency plans and policies. Include relevant agencies, organizations and users in planning efforts.

5. Maintenance of Existing Trails.

Many older trails end up eroded and deteriorated. This can be due to natural causes, overuse, improper design or lack of regular maintenance. Often badly eroded trails cause users to develop unauthorized alternate routes. Other trails are in need of tread maintenance and brush clearing. Land managers always face a lack of financial resources and limits to agency-funded crews. Trash and litter has been identified as one of the public's largest concerns.

- a. Identify and prioritize maintenance needs of trails.
- b. Incorporate sustainable trail design when maintaining or rebuilding trails.
- c. Employ grants, partnerships and volunteers to supplement trail budgets.
- d. Provide trash receptacles or other litter control means at trailheads and provide education about the litter problem.

TRAIL PLANNING ISSUES

1. New Trail Development.

There are very few non-motorized recreation trails existing near Cottonwood. Having a variety of different types of trails for different skill levels and interests is the preferred situation. This should include easy neighborhood trails, more challenging trails in the surrounding landscape and other trails to meet the needs of different types of trails users. Continued work on developing system trails, connector trails, loop trails and other specialized trails would provide benefits for the entire community.

- a. Prioritize trail projects based on identifying areas with fewer existing trails.
- b. Develop more neighborhood and close-to-home trail opportunities.
- c. Develop trail opportunities to include specific activities (i.e., single-track trails for mountain bicycles, equestrians and hikers, accessible trails for wheelchairs, and motorized trails.)

2. Types of Trails Based on Design.

Develop and promote trail networks, loop trails and long distance trail opportunities.

- a. Loop Trail Systems: Loops and stacked networks of loop trails are popular.
- b. Circle Trails: Trails around cities, towns, neighborhoods or identified features.
- c. Connector Trails: Sections that tie together other trails and help create networks.
- d. Long-Distance Trails: Trails between cities and major features.



3. Protect Access to Trails / Acquire Land for Public Access.

Access refers to the ability of the user to get to the trail. If not planned properly, new development can block access to adjacent public lands and any existing or future trails.

- a. Work with private property owners to obtain trail easements.
- b. Coordinate trail access needs with users/stakeholders.
- c. Permanently secure public access to public trails, trailheads and other access points.
- d. Provide incentives to developers to preserve public access to trails.

4. Develop Signage and Support Facilities.

In addition to the trail corridor development, good trails also include a range of support facilities. Well-designed support facilities increase the user's experience and satisfaction along with protecting the resource.

- a. Develop route marking and directional signs.
- b. Develop trailheads with adequate parking, restrooms, drinking water and litter control.

5. Trail Information and Maps.

Trail users need information and accurate maps that inform them where trails exist. Yavapai County has developed an interactive recreational map that includes many existing trails and trailheads.

- a. Use the Internet to post maps and information so it is widely accessible.
- b. Provide accurate information on how to get to trailheads and the condition of trails.
- c. Provide GPS coordinates and other location information.

6. Education and Trail Etiquette.

Trail users who lack proper trail etiquette and environmental ethics can diminish other trail users' recreation experience and negatively impact the environment. Littering, excessive speed, not staying on trails, vandalism and an inability of managers to enforce regulations leads to continued user conflicts and environmental impacts.

- a. Increase education resources for trail etiquette and environmental education.
- b. Incorporate trail etiquette and environmental ethics material into school and youth programs.
- c. Have agencies collaborate on education materials and programs to provide consistent messages.
- d. Educational messages should emphasize responsible behavior, such as: *Pack it in - Pack it out.*
- e. Post rules and regulations at trailheads for users.
- f. Make allowable trail uses known to users through signage. Promote "share the trail" etiquette for different user types. Install trail etiquette signage with graphic symbols indicating hierarchy of right-of-way for hikers, mountain bikers and horses.

7. Support Volunteer-Based Stewardship Programs.

Volunteers can be a valuable supplement to an agency's labor force. Volunteers can be trained to help build and maintain trails along with monitoring or educating users. Land managers may have limited time, staff and resources so it can be difficult for them to complete all the projects that people want.

- a. Enlist the support of state-wide and national groups to provide training and program development for trail volunteers.
- b. Provide opportunities for land managers and agency personnel to receive trail and volunteer management training.
- c. Establish programs to train volunteers for trail maintenance and construction techniques.
- d. Use trained and experienced volunteers as liaisons between agencies and volunteers and to coordinate trail projects.
- e. Recognize and support the need to allocate staff time to volunteer coordination.
- f. Seek grants and partnerships to support volunteers.
- g. Emphasize leadership training programs and culture for volunteers.



8. Enforcement of Existing Rules and Regulations/Monitoring.

Trail rules and regulations are often unknown or ignored by users. Land managers do not have the staff or time to constantly monitor trails or manage a vast number of trails over large areas and cannot effectively monitor all trails. The enforcement of existing rules and regulations gives weight and importance to the rules.

- a. Establish volunteer trail patrol programs with clubs and individuals for monitoring trail use and conditions and for educating users about regulations.
- b. Identify primary enforcement agencies and personnel for specific trails.
- c. Provide opportunities to report trail conditions or violations through web-based reporting or telephone hotlines.
- d. Impose progressively heavier fines for repeat offenders.

9. Provide Accessible Trails for Individuals with Physical Disabilities.

People of differing physical abilities need to have opportunities to get out and enjoy trails and experience natural areas. Trails should be available to all users including people with various levels of mobility impairments, including wheelchairs users.

- a. Develop trails for wheelchairs that feature the natural setting and outdoor experience.
- b. Incorporate standards for barrier-free access to trails as specified in the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Architectural Barriers Act.
- c. Evaluate trails regarding their standards and conditions to accommodate various abilities (i.e., the Universal Trail Assessment Process.)

10. Identify and Seek Funding Opportunities.

Funding is always needed for staff time, planning, trail construction and maintenance, support facilities and volunteer programs. Funding opportunities tend to change over time with new programs developed and existing ones cut. It is advisable to periodically check available opportunities.

- a. Work with nearby land management agencies to collaborate on seeking funding for projects.
- b. Research and apply for grants and other funding sources.
- c. Provide opportunities for volunteers to get involved.
- d. Provide relevant information regarding the importance and benefits of trails to decision-makers and elected officials.

TRAILS AND OPEN SPACE ACCESS POINTS

Inventory of access points to trails, river access areas, and open space resources within and nearby Cottonwood:

- **Riverfront Park** – trails, facilities, views, river access.
- **Dead Horse Ranch State Park** – trails, facilities, views, river access.
- **Bill Gray Road / Lime Kiln Trail** – access to Coconino National Forest.
- **Old Jail Trail** – trail along Verde River from Old Town Cottonwood.
- **Tavasci Marsh Trail** – trail to wildlife viewing platform from Dead Horse Ranch SP.
- **West Mingus Avenue** – access to undeveloped Prescott NF west of city boundary.
- **Black Canyon Trailhead** – access to PNF from Forest Road 359 (Ogden Ranch Road)
- **Yavapai County Cliffrose Preservation Area** – Walking trail and parking, Mingus Extension.
- **Prairie Lane Fishing Area** – Verde River access from Verde Village.
- **Skidmore Day Use Area** – Verde River access from Verde Village.
- **Black Canyon Fishing Area** – Verde River access east of SR 260.
- **Bignotti Picnic Area** – Verde River access from Thousand Trails Road.
- **Sheep's Crossing Fishing Area** – Verde River access from Thousand Trails Road.



I. ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF OPEN SPACE, TRAILS & PARKS

Real Property Values.

Open space and parks are desirable amenities that contribute to increased resale values and increased property values for properties located in proximity to such facilities. Extensive before and after studies done in rural, suburban and urban areas across the country have consistently confirmed that trails, open space and recreational facilities provide measurable economic benefits to surrounding properties.

Tax Benefits.

Increased property values result in increased sales values, increased assessments and increased property tax revenue. Although Cottonwood does not have a local property tax, however, there are other revenue streams that are generated by improved property values.

Multiplier Effect.

Economic models indicate that both personal and institutional recreational expenditures generate 1 ½ to 3 times more to the local economy than the actual amount of direct expenses. There are direct and indirect benefits of spending on recreation uses which contribute in a chain reaction to the local economy. Management and maintenance expenditures contribute to salaries, equipment costs and material expenses.

Resident Expenditures.

National studies indicate that local residents typically spend from one to a few extra dollars per day in relation to use of local parks, trails and recreation facilities, which looked at over time, adds up to measurable benefits.

Tourism Revenues.

Open space areas, trail systems, parks and recreation sites can attract visitors who spend on food, lodging, fuel and various hard goods. Tourists may be encouraged to spend extra days in the area to use popular trails and recreation facilities.

Sporting and Community Events.

Organized sporting events, such as running and cycling races, triathlons and similar sanctioned events can generate significant economic levels to the local economy from a single event. Popular well-organized birding events, such as the Verde Birding Festival, also provide tourism revenue to the region from participants who travel, stay at hotels, eat at restaurants and shop at local stores.

Business Expansion and Relocation.

Quality of life considerations have always been important in competitive retention and relocation of desirable businesses. Parks and recreation facilities are considered among the most important amenities in national surveys concerning quality of life indicators. Employers look at housing, schools, recreation and similar quality of life factors when considering relocation to a community. Trails and open space are among the most valued amenities and can contribute to an overall positive impression of a community as a place to live and work. Also, there is competition for quality job development with other communities that have already invested in these amenities.

Public Health and Other Benefits.

Open space and park development has a direct relationship with clean air, clean water and public health benefits. Healthy residents contribute to a range of personal and community benefits, including lower medical expenses and higher worker productivity. Trails and recreational facilities provide outstanding opportunities for healthy, family-oriented activities, which ultimately contributes to a range of positive social and economic benefits.



J. OPEN SPACE FUNDING AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Funding sources and strategies typically change over time so it is necessary to periodically review opportunities for consideration. Successful programs generally include multi-level strategies that take advantage of more than one approach. Coordination and management is essential for sustainable long-term programs.

STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS

1. **Open Space Planning.** A considerable amount of effort has gone into regional open space planning and advocacy in the Verde Valley over the years. A great many resources are available on the topic. Maintaining a local open space master plan for Cottonwood would provide a number of benefits. An open space plan would identify various types of open space resources and prioritize key areas for preservation. A comprehensive plan with priorities developed through a public planning process would provide a valuable foundation for seeking grants and developing programs.
2. **Preservation.** Preservation of existing resources needs to be one of the first priorities for an open space program. Identify and monitor existing open space resources and establish appropriate policies and programs to protect and preserve such areas.
3. **Maintenance, Repair and Restoration.** Maintenance of existing recreation facilities and restoration of natural areas that have experienced deterioration should be a high priority. Environmental restoration should follow accepted practices to evaluate conditions, mitigate any ongoing problems and take actions to restore lands to a healthy condition. Local programs to remove invasive species are part of this approach.
4. **Acquire New Open Space Resources.** New open spaces areas may be acquired through a wide range of strategies including donation, purchase and trade. For some properties it may be necessary to incorporate a number of strategies to obtain a complete interconnected area.
5. **Inter-agency Partnerships and Collaboration.** Support inter-agency partnerships, volunteer organizations and other groups that would assist in management activities and preservation for local, state and federal public lands. Support Inter-Governmental Agreements (IGA's) between Cottonwood, other jurisdictions and the United States Forest Service (USFS) to establish collaborative partnerships regarding certain management activities for nearby National Forest lands.
 - ◆ Work with the Forest Service to coordinate trail access points from abutting private developments. Ensure private lands do not develop unofficial access routes known as “social trails.”
6. **Public-Private Partnerships.** A wide range of partnership opportunities exist between public agencies and private individuals, organizations and businesses. Individuals and organizations may assist with various management activities on public lands. Where private lands provide easements and agreements for conservation or recreational use, government agencies, including the City may enter into long-term agreements to manage the property.
7. **Grants.** Grants are typically competitive and cannot be expected as a guaranteed source from year to year. Grant funding is sometimes available for planning, acquisition or management of open space resources but is more likely for related construction and development projects. Grant sources may be available from government programs, corporate support programs and non-profit foundations. Grants vary widely in their scope, associated requirements and expectations. Grants sometimes require matching funds and sometimes provide complete project funding. Private sources often provide funds through a partnership type approach with an emphasis on projects that provide multiple benefits.



- 8. Volunteerism.** Citizen advocates and agency partners are needed to provide the energy and creativity necessary to identify and protect valued open space, parks and recreation resources for the benefit of the community. There are many different levels of volunteerism that can help achieve these goals, including various innovative programs such as:
- ◆ **Adopt-A-Park.** Adopt-A-Park and Adopt-A-Trail programs allow individuals, organizations or businesses to assist with maintenance, clean-up and general oversight of specific parks or trail facilities. There needs to be adequate staff capacity to assist with coordinating such programs. Participants typically agree to adopt a park for a period of time in return for recognition and support from the City or managing agency.
 - ◆ **Agency Sharing Strategies.** Inter-agency volunteer programs can provide greater opportunities for the volunteer and improved efficiencies with program coordination.
 - ◆ **Leadership Training Programs.** Sustainable outdoor volunteer programs need ongoing leadership training programs.
- 9. New Development Projects.** Incorporating open space into the planning for new development should be considered at the earliest stage of review. One of the most important tools for protecting open space involves working with the private development sector to include open space networks within private development projects. Open space areas, especially with related trail facilities, are extremely popular amenities that add value to a development. It is best to plan trail facilities with new development projects at the earliest phase of project planning; however, existing development projects can also be evaluated for opportunities to designate trails and open space, such as within wash corridors.
- ◆ Open space can be preserved through rezoning and subdivision with some of the best opportunities through the planned area development zoning process.
 - ◆ Development standards included in the zoning ordinance, grading ordinance and engineering requirements can be used to ensure open space areas, natural drainage areas, flood areas, steep slopes and other critical resources are preserved as part of a development plan. Protect natural wash corridors and similar features as open space separation and buffer zones between different types of uses and development sub-areas.
 - ◆ Require land survey and marked boundaries for private development along US Forest Service boundaries prior to construction so as to ensure proper buffering and setbacks.
- 10. Voter-Approved Special Bond or Tax Measures.** Revenue bonds are one example of a type of funding mechanism that uses borrowed funds to finance public service expansion. Funds are paid back over time through future revenues from a designated source that is pledged to the bond issuer. Capacity is always going to be limited and competitive; however, trails, pathways, pedestrian facilities and recreation facilities can potentially be developed through revenue bonds.
- 11. General Funds.** General fund revenue sources, consisting of local sales tax, state-shared revenues, and various grant sources, can potentially be used for purchase and/or management of property for open space purposes; however, there are typically many uses competing for limited general funds. General funds can also be used where a cash match is required for grant requests.
- 12. User Fees.** User fees are assessed for the specific use of a service or activity. A user fee can be used to defray the cost or a portion of that service. Local jurisdictions typically do not charge park entrance or use fees but they often charge for specific recreation programs or specialized activities. One advantage of the user fee is that it is incurred directly by the person or group using the specific service. The disadvantage of user fees is that they can result in the exclusion of many lower income residents from enjoying the public domain and beneficial facilities.



- 13. Right-of-Way Projects.** All right-of-way projects and similar capital improvement projects, such as new street development, existing street upgrade projects, and utility corridor projects, should be evaluated for opportunities to include bicycle, pedestrian and trail facilities. Communities can benefit by having local bicycle, pedestrian and trail plans and related policies already in place to guide the evaluation of proposed right-of-way projects for inclusion such facilities.
- 14. Land Trusts.** A private, nonprofit organization that, as all or part of its mission, actively works to conserve land by undertaking or assisting in land or conservation easement acquisition, or by its stewardship of such land or easements. Many different strategies are used to provide this protection, including outright acquisition of the land by the trust. In other cases, the land will remain in private hands, but the trust will purchase a conservation easement on the property to prevent development, or purchase any development rights on the land.
- ◆ A regional nonprofit land trust type organization could receive private donations such as land, financial contributions, appreciated stock, proceeds from fund-raisers and volunteer work, and other valuable considerations. A land trust could also provide management staff for regional planning, grant writing, and seeking assistance from federal, state and private organizations.
- 15. Conservation Easements.** When a landowner designates a conservation easement they typically give up some of the rights associated with the land in exchange for other benefits. For example, the landowner might preserve open space in one area in exchange for the right to build more units of clustered housing in another. Future owners also will be bound by the conservation easement's terms. Conservation easements can be designed to offer flexibility. An easement on property containing rare wildlife habitat might prohibit any development, for example, while an easement on a working farm might allow the addition of agricultural structures. An easement may apply to all or a portion of the property, and need not require public access. Each conservation easement is carefully crafted to meet the needs of the landowner while not jeopardizing the conservation values of the land.
- ◆ Provide development incentives for the use of Conservation Easements as an option in the land development process.
 - ◆ In return for the conservation easement, a community may provide greater flexibility with zoning regulations, for example, to allow a net increase in the number of residential units that may be constructed by allowing, smaller lots, town homes or clustered design format for a portion of the property.
 - ◆ Conservation easements may be managed by a land trust or a property owners association. Responsibility for the long-term management of the land needs to be included in the recorded documents.
- 16. Land Exchange Opportunities.** The Land Exchange process allows the release of USFS lands in a less advantageous condition in exchange for private lands in another area that may have important open space or natural value. Good candidates for land exchange include small remnant National Forest parcels located near developed areas and highways that are difficult to manage as wild lands but have value for infill development. Land is exchanged on a value basis, so the public lands with high value, such as those located near a highway or urbanized area, may be exchanged for relatively larger areas of private lands in more remote areas. For example, through the land exchange process, the existing private lands on the upper face of Mingus Mountain could be protected as public lands that could then be integrated into the overall management of the steep and wild mountain area.

In addition to the potential acquisition of private lands through the Federal land exchange process, private lands with open space or park site values may in some cases be exchanged for Local, County or State lands that have more value as private development sites.



- 17. Bicycle Registration Fees.** Bicycle registration programs are usually administered by a police department but could be managed through other methods. If the fee level is too low, it may not cover administrative costs; however, if the fees are considered too high, an unfair burden is placed on low income residents. Registration fees may help support bicycle education and safety programs but are not likely to support construction projects. Another benefit can be to help identify bicycles in theft recovery. Grant programs and waivers should be considered for low-income residents and children so as to encourage wider voluntary participation in such programs. Costs and benefits of such programs need to be weighed.
- 18. Gifts and Donations.** Cash donations or in-kind services from individuals or companies should be accepted for land, park and trail projects. Charitable giving programs to secure private funds should clearly define the objectives and any incentives offered, such as tax benefits or donor recognition opportunities. Voluntary right-of-way dedications and donations of access easements should always be sought when applicable to approved plans, as these facilities almost always add value to the related properties and can be seen as a partnership relationship. Government agencies need to be careful not to request private donations as a general policy without some form of clearly defined standard benefit for the property owner.
- 19. Program Management.** Support for program coordination, including designated professional staff, can greatly improve the potential for achieving measurable success with open space goals. Whether such professional coordination is provided by government agencies, nonprofit groups, or a combination of efforts, the program development can greatly benefit from having experienced staff with adequate support and resources.

STATE AND FEDERAL PROGRAMS

- 20. Arizona Preserve Initiative.** The Arizona Preserve Initiative (API) was passed by the Arizona State Legislature as HB 2555 and signed into law by the Governor in the spring of 1996. It is designed to encourage the preservation of select parcels of State Trust land. State Trust land in and around Cottonwood is listed as eligible for consideration through the API program.

Conservation is defined in the law as “protection of the natural assets of State Trust land for the long-term benefit of the land, the beneficiaries, lessees, the public, and unique resources such as open space, scenic beauty, protected plants, wildlife, archaeology, and multiple use values.”

A state or local government, business, state land lessee or a group of citizens may petition the State Land Commissioner to have certain Trust land nominated and reclassified for conservation purposes. After all appropriate notifications, public hearings, consideration of physical and economic impacts to lessees and the Trust, the Commissioner may reclassify the subject land as suitable for conservation purposes. The Commissioner must consider recommendations from a five-member Conservation Advisory Committee that was established by law, as well as consult with local and regional planning authorities. Existing leases on any land reclassified for conservation purposes may not be canceled or impaired in any way. Once the land is reclassified, the Commissioner may adopt a coordination plan, prepared by the interested parties, for the property to protect conservation values. The Commissioner may also withdraw land from sale or lease for three to five years (with a possible extension of up to three years) to allow prospective lessees or purchasers time to prepare the plan for the property and to raise funds.

- 21. State Grant Program.** Reinstatement of the Heritage Fund and other State Parks Grant Programs would provide a significant source of funding for acquisition of open space, critical habitat, riparian areas and recreational trail corridors without any tax burden imposed.



- 22. Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) – Federal Side.** In the past, this program had been a major source of funding in Arizona to acquire important land and open space resources that support recreational and community-based objectives. The program includes a Federal side and State-side, each with unique program requirements and emphasis. The availability of funding through either the Federal or State programs has varied greatly over the years and needs to be closely monitored to determine availability. Federal side funding is provided directly to the Federal land management agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service or National Park Service, based on program need and unique qualifications after a competitive review process that requires support of the President and Congress.
- 23. Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) – State Side.** The State-side portion of the LWCF grant program comes through Arizona State Parks. Annual funding amounts have varied widely over the years. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Grant Program for Arizona provides funding assistance to cities, towns, counties and tribal governments for outdoor recreation and open space projects. Governmental entities are eligible to apply for State LWCF grants. Grants are awarded on a matching basis, where the applicant must provide at least 50% of the total project cost and the grant provides the remainder. Eligible project activities include park development (for example, playground equipment, lighting, picnic facilities, ball fields, restrooms) to serve outdoor recreation needs, and land acquisition for outdoor recreation and/or open space.
- The availability of funds through this program should be monitored. Having a publicly supported and developed comprehensive open space plan with priorities identified will assist with efforts to secure these types major funding sources to protect critical resources.

LOCAL OBJECTIVES FOR FACILITY DEVELOPMENT

- 24. Serve All Populations.** Parks and open space programs need to be designed to accommodate the broad range of people in the community, including elderly residents, youth, families, persons with disabilities, healthy people, sports enthusiasts, nature watchers, tourists and everyone else.
- 25. Access Improvements.** In general there is a need in the Cottonwood area to provide additional opportunities for people to be able to access their public lands in officially designated, convenient and no cost locations. Several proposals to develop improved parking and trailhead locations are in the process of being considered but additional access points could also be considered.
- 26. Watershed Values.** In an arid region, the watershed benefits from having a large-scale, healthy vegetated landscape to serve and support the natural water cycle of evaporation, condensation, precipitation, infiltration, aquifer recharge, runoff, and subsurface flow.
- 27. River Access.** In the past, access to the Verde River was generally found at undeveloped and unmanaged locations. With increasing population and greater impacts on these limited and fragile resources, there is a need to identify and develop well-planned river access areas. A comprehensive river access plan should be considered to include local, state, federal and private opportunities. Such river planning should include boating and fishing opportunities, as well as comprehensive facility analysis looking at parking, restrooms, picnic ramadas, trails and similar support facilities.
- 28. Neighborhood Parks.** Smaller local neighborhood parks provide a range of benefits for residents, including improved social opportunities for children and adults. Opportunities for developing local neighborhood parks should be considered.
- 29. Community Gardens.** An expanded community garden concept could include facilities for training and research, municipal composting and alternative energy programs. School gardens could be located at elementary, middle and high schools. Community gardens could be included with new neighborhood parks if there was interest.



K. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES – Open Space / Parks

GOAL 5-1 IDENTIFY, PRIORITIZE AND PROTECT OPEN SPACE RESOURCES.

Objective 5-1. A Support establishment of open space buffers between Cottonwood and neighboring communities in the Verde Valley, including between Camp Verde to the south along SR 260 and toward Cornville and Sedona along SR 89A.

Objective 5-1. B Ensure development projects do not negatively affect key wildlife migration corridors as identified by the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

Objective 5-1. C Support the primary goals and objectives of the Verde River Greenway State Natural Area to secure and manage lands along the Verde River system.

Objective 5-1. D Ensure that any areas proposed for annexation, including the 10 square mile State Trust Land block northeast of the city, protect critical open space resources, with attention to protecting wildlife corridors, sensitive riparian areas, buffering between uses and important visual assets.

Objective 5-1. E Preserve major open space connections between the Verde River and the Mingus foothills and Black Hills mountain range. Major washes and drainages linking these areas should be preserved as continuous open corridors for wildlife migration and watershed values.

GOAL 5-2 SUPPORT MULTI-AGENCY EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY AND PROTECT KEY OPEN SPACE RESOURCES WITHIN THE CITY AND IN SURROUNDING AREAS.

Objective 5-2. A Support cooperative regional planning efforts for an integrated system of open space and recreation development with adjacent communities, the U.S. Forest Service, State Land Department, Arizona State Parks, ADOT, Yavapai County, private land owners, the general public and others.

Objective 5-2. B Support partnership agreements for cooperative management of certain National Forest lands within and adjacent to the City of Cottonwood where there is mutual commitment to manage such lands for the public good for recreation, open space and appropriate uses. Cooperative activities could include public safety activities, trash removal and clean up, facility maintenance, and funding partnerships.

GOAL 5-3 DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE FUNDING AND ACQUISITION STRATEGY FOR KEY OPEN SPACE RESOURCES AND PARKS DEVELOPMENT.

Objective 5-3. A Participate with various organizations, agencies and jurisdictions to identify and acquire properties which have significance as regional open space; evaluate the impact of open space acquisitions on the developable land base.

Objective 5-3. B Consider neighborhood park acquisition and development as part of the Capital Improvement Program, as well as through other sources of funding.

Objective 5-3. C Ensure new master planned communities, planned area developments and residential subdivisions provide land for neighborhood park sites as part of the rezoning and subdivision process.



Objective 5-3. D Evaluate the status of National Forest lands within the City that may be suitable for inclusion in base and exchange programs and consider support for programs that provide acceptable net benefits.

Objective 5-3. E Support volunteer programs that provide opportunities for citizens to assist with various parks and recreation activities. Such programs should include leadership training, established standards and recognition programs.

GOAL 5-4 ESTABLISH A TIERED SYSTEM OF PARK FACILITIES TO BE DISTRIBUTED THROUGH THE COMMUNITY.

Objective 5-4. A Establish a tiered system of regional, city-wide and neighborhood types of park facilities throughout the city to meet the needs of people with different interests and skill levels.

Objective 5-4. B Identify potential locations for neighborhood park sites as part of a city-wide neighborhood revitalization program. Include various types of facilities, such as playgrounds, picnic areas and seating areas in neighborhood parks.

Objective 5-4. C Include neighborhood parks as part of new planned development and master planned communities.

GOAL 5-5 ESTABLISH DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS FOR OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION FACILITIES.

Objective 5-5. A Encourage methods to protect the wild land character of National Forest and other public lands adjacent to private development, including design standards that provide effective buffering between uses and a method to step down residential densities adjacent to public lands.

Objective 5-5. B Amend codes and subdivision regulations to address specific standards for public areas, parks, trails and other open space and recreational development.

Objective 5-5. C Encourage the development of open space and recreational amenities as part of new development. Require new development to provide public parks and connective trails.

Objective 5-5. D Create standards for development on steep hillsides, washes and flood areas that ensure the preservation of key natural resources while allowing comparable levels of development opportunity on such properties.

Objective 5-5. E Development or redevelopment of park facilities shall use reclaimed water for irrigation where available, preserve natural areas and washes to the greatest extent possible, use native plants and drought-tolerant varieties for any installed landscaping, and employ rainwater harvesting techniques where feasible.

GOAL 5-6 SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT OF RECREATIONAL TRAILS IN COTTONWOOD AND ON NEARBY PUBLIC LANDS.

Objective 5-6. A Work with private developers to incorporate trails and open space networks within new planned developments and subdivisions.

Objective 5-6. B Encourage the use of easements, particularly in washes and near the Verde River, to obtain public use and access over private property.

Objective 5-6. C Continue to work collaboratively with public lands agencies in and around Cottonwood to encourage development of new trailheads and trail facilities.



GOAL 5-7 PROVIDE LEADERSHIP FOR REGIONAL COORDINATION OF OPEN SPACE, TRAILS, RIVER ACCESS AND RELATED TOURISM AND ECONOMIC GOALS.

Objective 5-7. A Support opportunities for City of Cottonwood elected officials, residents and staff to be involved with regional open space, trails and river access programs.

Objective 5-7. B Identify, prioritize and promote opportunities to coordinate regional open space, trails and recreational planning efforts.

Objective 5-7. C Continue to support the regional, multi-agency Verde Front planning process concerning lands between Cottonwood to below Camp Verde and from the Verde River Greenway to the Black Hills with emphasis on implementing the goals of the Sustainable Recreation Strategy for Central Arizona.