

## **V. OPEN SPACE ELEMENT 1.0**

### **Introduction**

The Arizona Statutes of the late 1990's through mid-2002, known as the Growing Smarter legislation, mandate "planning for open space acquisition and preservation" for all counties with populations over 200,000. The Statutes add that Open Space planning is to include inventories of open space areas, recreational resources and designations of access points; analysis of forecasted needs; and policies for management and protection and for the promotion of a regional system of integrated open space and recreational resources.

Additionally, the Statutes direct that an Open Space Element "shall not designate private or State land as open space, recreation, conservation or agriculture unless the county receives the written consent of the landowner or provides an alternative, economically viable designation in the general comprehensive 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. Each county shall incorporate this subsection into its comprehensive plan and provide a process for a landowner to resolve discrepancies relating to this subsection."

The Yavapai County Open Space Element does not designate private or State land as open space, recreation, conservation or agriculture.

### **Federal and State Open Space and Recreation Lands**

Open Space is commonly defined as dedicated, reserved or conserved lands, generally held in the public domain for specific purposes, such as for recreational uses, and for unique historic, environmental or scenic quality protection. Yavapai County is richly endowed with hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands. Almost 75% of the County's area is owned and maintained by Federal or State agencies as shown in the accompanying chart.

#### **FEDERAL/STATE LANDS IN YAVAPAI COUNTY**

USDA, U.S. Forest Service Lands 38.0%  
Tribal Reservations <1.0%  
AZ State Lands 25.0%  
Bureau of Land Management <12%  
All Other Land Private Property 25.0%

State Trust Lands - Although the ASLD controls 25% of the County's area, most of it is held in trust for Arizona's educational and other institutions, and are not dedicated or reserved for public open space or recreation. Under State charter, ASLD has the responsibility on behalf of beneficiaries to assure the highest and best use of trust lands. The Federal enabling act and State constitution mandate that fair market value must be obtained from all trust land transactions that include sales and commercial leasing. All revenues derived from the sale of trust lands are placed in a fund that benefits fourteen (14) beneficiaries. Given this well-defined mission, development can and does occur on State-owned land.

U.S. Forest Service (USFS) - USFS manages lands for the sustained yield of goods and services from national forest lands to maximize long-term public benefits in an environmentally sound manner. The USFS has authority under a number of statutes, when it is in the public interest, to exchange lands with non-federal parties within the boundaries of national forests. Public interest considerations include: State and local needs; protection of habitats, cultural resources, watersheds, and wilderness and aesthetic values; enhancement of recreation opportunities and public access; consolidation of lands for efficient management; implementation or accommodation of existing or planned land uses or plans; and fulfillment of public needs.

Nearly two million acres of USFS lands occupy most of the eastern third of Yavapai County and large portions of the Central Region. The majority of the USFS properties are contained in Prescott National Forest's approximately 1.2 million acres which adjoins both the Central Yavapai Region and the Verde Valley area. East of the Verde Valley area is the Coconino National Forest. The Verde Valley cities, towns and unincorporated communities are almost entirely surrounded by the two National Forests. The Tonto National Forest, to the south of the Prescott and Coconino National Forests, occupies the southeast corner of Yavapai County. A small portion of the Kaibab National Forest is located north of the Prescott National Forest, east of Ash Fork and south of I-40.

The Prescott National Forest consists of three ranger districts: Bradshaw, Chino and Verde, that run diagonally north to south through central Yavapai County. This area includes eight wilderness areas totaling 104,000 acres, eleven campgrounds and approximately 450 miles of trails.

The Red Rock Ranger District in the Coconino National Forest covers the most northeastern portion of the County adjacent to Coconino County. This area includes six wilderness areas totaling 156,981 acres, six campgrounds, and many miles of trails.

National Park Service (NPS) - The NPS plans for one purpose--to ensure that the decisions it makes are as effective and efficient as possible in carrying out the NPS mission. Their 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. The NPS also helps administer dozens of affiliated sites, the National Register of Historic Places, National Heritage Areas, National Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Historic Landmarks and National Trails.

East Yavapai County enjoys four National Monuments. Tuzigoot National Monument, northeast of the Town of Clarkdale contains a 110-room prehistoric site on 42 acres. Montezuma's Castle and Montezuma's Well National Monuments, on 840 acres near Camp Verde, contain five-story, 20-room prehistoric cliff dwellings. The Agua Fria National Monument is spread over approximately 71,000 acres east of I-17 between Cordes Junction and Black Canyon City. It has some 450 prehistoric sites, historic ruins and diverse habitat areas. A summary chart of National Monuments in the County follows.

### **National Monuments in Yavapai County**

MONUMENT NAME	LOCATION	ACRES	AMENITIES
Agua Fria National Monument	East of I-17, Cordes Junction to Black Canyon City	71,000	450 prehistoric sites, historic ruins, diverse habitat
Montezuma Castle/Montezuma Well National Monuments	Southeast of I-17, north of Camp Verde	840	5-story, 20-room prehistoric cliff dwelling, visitor center/ museum, restrooms
Tuzigoot National Monument	Northeast of Clarkdale, from SR 89A/Main Street, Cottonwood	42	110 room prehistoric site, visitor center/exhibits, restrooms
Approximate Total Area of Monuments		71,882	

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) - BLM preserves open space by managing public lands for multiple uses including recreation, livestock grazing and mining, and by conserving natural, historic, cultural, scenic and other resources found on public lands. The disposal of public lands is authorized through sales and exchanges as directed by the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act. Pursuant to the Recreation and Public Purposes Act (R&PP), BLM lands may be entitled to a county or municipality to operate and manage as parks and recreational open space through a land patent.

The Department of Interior, BLM, governs almost one-half million acres of land in Yavapai County. There are five designated wilderness areas and the Agua Fria National Monument on BLM properties in western and central Yavapai County. Recreational uses include camping by permit in designated Long-Term Visitor Areas. The Lake Pleasant/Hieroglyphic Mountains Area in south Yavapai County, from the Prescott National Forest to Lake Pleasant and Wickenburg, contains numerous Off-Highway Vehicle trails on both BLM and State Trust lands. In April of 2010, the BLM approved the Bradshaw-Harquahala Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan. This plan provides guidance for future land use decisions and management of the mineral estate within the management area.

Arizona State Parks - Four Arizona State Parks totaling more than 600 acres are located in close proximity to the Verde Valley communities. Dead Horse Ranch State Park is a large park of 897 acres, containing hiking and equestrian trails, ramadas, picnicking areas, fishing, canoeing, 45 full-service campsites and other amenities. Red Rock State Park, located 5 miles west of the City of Sedona, is a sizeable park of 286 acres known for its beautiful red rock outcroppings and educational facilities, as well as for hiking and picnicking. Jerome State Historic Park within the Town of Jerome, and Ft. Verde State Historic Park in the Town of Camp Verde, each contain historic buildings relating to Arizona's Territorial and early Statehood days.

### **Yavapai County Parks**

In addition to the thousands of acres of Federal and State recreation lands, Yavapai County provides parks throughout the County, mostly in the unincorporated areas. There are thirteen (13) County parks primarily scattered through the Central Region. Most County

parks have been developed cooperatively with community and city/town residents. Some park properties are provided by subdivision developers or by the BLM, and often partial funding of park construction comes from Arizona State Parks Department grants.

The largest County Park, Pioneer Park, contains almost 300 acres. It is located central to the entire Central Yavapai Region and was acquired for use from the BLM. It has been partially developed through a partnering with the City of Prescott, recreation organizations and citizen volunteers. Pioneer Park contains various recreational uses including 4 baseball/softball fields, two soccer fields, hiking/equestrian and picnicking activities.

Three other County parks, Quail Ridge in Chino Valley, Tenderfoot Hills in Congress and High Desert Park in Black Canyon City, have ball fields, playground and picnic equipment. The remaining County parks primarily contain picnic and playground facilities.



In the eastern parts of Yavapai County, there are County parks in the communities of Cordes Junction, Mayer, Spring Valley and Black Canyon City. Windmill Park and five other County parks have been partially funded through grants received from Arizona State Parks Department. The following chart summarizes the Yavapai County Park locations, sizes and amenities.

<b>PARK NAME</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>ACRES</b>	<b>AMENITIES/DEVELOPMENT STATUS</b>
Castle Court Park	Prescott Valley	5.16	Playground equipment, ramada with picnic tables, restroom, barbeque grill
Flora Mae Ludden Park	Yarnell	2.98	Playground equipment, picnic tables, trail, restrooms, basketball court
Henry Cordes Park	Cordes Junction	59.89	Playground equipment, large ramada with 3 picnic tables, 3 small ramadas/picnic tables, trails, restrooms, basketball court
High Desert Park	Black Canyon City	89.71	Community meeting building, playground equipment, 1 baseball field, trails, sand volleyball court, ramadas, restrooms
Kyllo Park	Spring Valley	3.85	Playground equipment, ramadas/picnic tables, barbeques, 1/2 basketball court, nature/fitness trail, restrooms
Mayer Centennial Park	Mayer	4.25	Playground equipment, restrooms, ramadas with picnic tables, basketball court
Morgan Ranch Nature Park	Prescott	14	1 mile trail, picnic table, benches
Pioneer Park	Prescott	280	Baseball/softball fields, soccer fields, trails, food service, ramadas with tables, restrooms, in-line hockey court
Prescott Country Club Park	Prescott Valley	7	Undeveloped
Sycamore Community Park	Lake Montezuma	3	2 picnic tables, benches, walking trails, restrooms, next to Beaver Creek
Tenderfoot Hills Park	Congress	19.07	2 softball fields, playground equipment, 4 ramadas with picnic tables, restrooms, basketball court
Windmill Park	Cornville	4.59	Playground equipment, multipurpose playfield, horseshoe & volleyball pits, ramadas with picnic tables, pond, restrooms, trail, next to Oak Creek
	Parks Total:	493.5	
Courthouse Plaza	Prescott	4.5	Historic Gazebo, picnic tables, cultural activities
	Other Total	4.5	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>498</b>	

### **County and Regional Trail Networks**

With the abundance of natural environmental beauty in Yavapai County, there has been much desire expressed by residents for trails, especially for hiking and equestrian purposes. The hard work of numerous volunteers, supported by governmental officials has resulted in both County-wide and regional planning efforts for future interconnected trail systems. Many trails have been adopted and developed by various agencies in the on-going implementation of the County goal.

Regional Trail Networks - The Towns of Chino Valley, Prescott and Prescott Valley, as well as other volunteer groups, are working together to create a region-wide connecting trails and pathways system.

One of the tri-city regional trail networks is a rail-to-trails project known as the Peavine Trail. Currently, this is an approximate 5-mile trail system that runs along the former Santa Fe Railroad bed along Watson Lake and through the Granite Dells area. Extensions of the Peavine Trail on other former rail beds extend to the Iron King Mine trail in the Town of Prescott Valley and there are plans to connect to Chino Valley. Portions of the completed Peavine Trail will run through areas of unincorporated Yavapai County as well as the three municipalities in the region.

Additionally, alternative transportation policies have been adopted in the municipal areas, such as bicycle and multi-purpose lane installations on major streets or in separated pathways, for the purpose of interconnected routing within regions. Some of the municipal/regional trail systems, e.g., Prescott's Parks/Trails, Prescott Valley's Pedestrian/Bicycle System and Sedona's Trails/Urban Pathways. The Town of Chino Valley is currently working on a Master Trails Plan which they plan to link up to the surrounding communities' trail systems, including to the Verde Valley. Details are in each municipality's General Plan.

Regional Trail Partnerships - Other regional trails systems involve partnerships of Federal, State, County and municipalities. Three regional trail systems that exemplify these partnerships are the Prescott Circle Trail, Black Canyon Trail and the Dead Horse Trail System.

The Prescott Circle Trail, not yet completed, is a non-motorized public trail system around the Prescott basin. Segments are administered by the Prescott National Forest, Yavapai County, the City of Prescott and Embry Riddle Aeronautical University. The Prescott Circle Trail includes and connects too many trail networks throughout the Central Yavapai Region, such as the Peavine National Recreation Trail, other "Rails-to-Trails" projects and the Gheral Brownlow Trail System at Pioneer Park.

The Dead Horse Trail System, in the Verde Valley, is administered by the Arizona State Parks Department and Coconino National Forest. The trail system begins along the Verde River Greenway in Dead Horse State Park, a scenic, water-based park which offers access to the Verde River. The Park provides picnicking, full-service camping, canoeing, fishing, hiking and equestrian trails. The State Park trails connect to the Dead Horse Trail System in a 7.2 mile loop around Raptor Hill, Thumper and Lime Kiln Trails, as well as to other trails in the Coconino National Forest, providing a regional trails network. Currently, there are proposals with the Coconino National Forest to expand this trail system.

The Black Canyon Trail is a non-motorized trail approximately 78 miles long, stretching from the Carefree Highway (AZ SR 74), northward along the base of the Bradshaw Mountains, beyond SR 69 near the Town of Mayer to the Prescott National Forest. The development of this trail system is organized by the Black Canyon Trail Coalition in cooperation with the BLM, NPS and the USFS.

Dedicated public parks, trails, greenways and other conservation areas are primarily maintained by the Arizona State Parks Department, Yavapai County, cities and towns. Private individuals, organizations and homeowner associations also provide open spaces,

trails and parks. Participation by private property owners in trail networks is an important part of several municipal greenway programs. Greenway projects aim at preserving and enhancing areas along creeks and river beds, while providing trail connections to parks, schools and other community facilities.

The Prescott Greenways project encompasses approximately 10 acres which extends from the Downtown area to Yavapai College, following Miller and Granite Creeks. Currently, there is a 1.5 mile multi-use trail with plans to extend it up to 3 miles.

The Verde River Greenway State Natural Area encompasses nearly 480 acres along 6 miles of the Verde River between the Tuzigoot and Bridgeport bridges. This is a natural area adjacent to Dead Horse State Park that has been created to preserve the river in its natural state. There have been other land acquisitions along the Verde River to extend the Verde Greenway to preserve the Verde River and to create an interconnected trail system along the river.

There have also been efforts to preserve the Agua Fria as a Greenway to create a regional connection and for preservation.

In September of 2009, the PNF initiated a sustainable recreation planning process to serve as a catalyst for a landscape scale “all hands all lands” approach to address common recreation challenges and enhancing the joint capacity of land managers, communities and recreationalists to implement shared recreation goals. Goals and Strategies were developed through the collaborative process with input from a wide cross section of community members, recreation interests, as well as local government and State and Federal agencies.

Other Regional/State-Wide Trails - In addition to the rapidly expanding network of nonmotorized trails throughout Yavapai County, there is a growing interest in Off-Highway Motorized Vehicle (OHV) trail riding. As noted previously, there are OHV designated trails in the County on State Lands maintained by the Arizona State Parks Department. Many of these trails also run through BLM and USFS properties due to the checkerboard pattern of ownerships. An OHV trail network has been created in the “Great Western Trail”, (not to be confused with “The Arizona Trail”, a non-motorized trail network located in eastern Arizona, outside of Yavapai County). The Great Western Trail’s alignment covers five western States, including Arizona, from Mexico to Canada. It is a corridor of a series of existing back roads, for motorized and non-motorized leisure touring.

Three segments of the Great Western Trail within Arizona have been dedicated, comprising some 700 miles of the approximate 850 total miles. This includes 80 miles through the Prescott National Forest in Yavapai County. The Great Western Trail enters the County at its south boundary, east of Black Canyon City and I-17 in the Tonto National Forest. It then meanders northerly through the Prescott National Forest, crossing I-17 at



its junction with SR 169. The Trail then meanders northwesterly, around Mingus Mountain; then northerly through Perkinsville to the Kaibab National Forest at the Coconino County boundary. Segments of the Trail utilize existing Yavapai County and USFS primitive roads. A goal of the volunteer organization, the Arizona Great Western Trail Association, Inc., is to have all segments of the trail “adopted” by clubs, organizations and individuals for stewardship.

A publication of leisure tours for conventional motorized vehicles in the Central Yavapai Region was recently prepared by the Yavapai Heritage Foundation, Prescott. “Forest & Grasslands: A History of Living with the Land” describes four road trips designed for the average motor vehicle with some conditions requiring 4-wheel drive, utilizing existing State, County, municipal and USFS roads. The Forest and Grasslands Tours allow for appreciation of Yavapai County’s history, as well as its grasslands and forests.

### **Regional Open Space Preservation and Acquisition**

The Arizona Preserve Initiative - The Arizona Preserve Initiative legislation and amendments were passed by the State legislature and approved by voters during the late 1990’s. The Preserve Initiative provides a process for the conservation of State Trust Lands within cities and towns, or within 1 mile of cities under 10,000 population, or within 3 miles of cities over 10,000 population which are nominated and reclassified for conservation. Two State Trust areas in Yavapai County have been petitioned and reclassified as suitable for conservation. The 1,893 acres on Glassford Hill was considered eligible for conservation based on its role in early Arizona military history, its grassland habitat for Pronghorn and other wildlife, and its scenic vistas located between two fast growing urban areas. Petitions for Glassford Hill Preserve were jointly filed by the City of Prescott and the Town of Prescott Valley. The 1,560 acres of the Badger Mountain area, located immediately southeast of the City of Prescott, is abutting the Prescott National Forest. Petitions for Badger Mountain Preserve - based on eligibilities similar to those of Glassford Hill - were filed by the Open Space Alliance of Central Yavapai County.

Other Preservation/Acquisition Methods - For the past several years, regional open space efforts in the Verde Valley have been on-going. Through the efforts of community leaders and planners studies and forums have been conducted. In November of 2006, the Yavapai County Board of Supervisors adopted the Verde Valley Regional Land Use Plan which expressed the desire for protection of open spaces. This Plan referred to the Sedona Academy’s “Implementing a Verde Valley Open Space Plan, 2002 Forum” document which discussed potential methods for acquiring regional Open Space with representatives of the Prescott and Coconino National Forests, Yavapai County and Verde Valley area community leaders. Strategies included partnering with State and Federal agencies or non-profit organizations such as the Nature Conservancy, Heritage Fund and the Arizona Land Trust. The use of conservation easements which prohibit development of private properties through the purchase of development rights is another implementation tactic.

Other methods include grass roots and governmental leadership, volunteer organization efforts, citizen participation and voter approvals of special taxes, among others. Intense grass roots efforts by volunteers and strong citizen participation is a method that has accomplished the creation of the Watson Woods Riparian Preserve and the acquisition of Watson and Willow Lakes in Prescott. These open space acquisition areas were the result



of Prescott voters approving financing through bonds and sales taxes. Other open space parcels in the Granite Dells and Thumb Butte areas have also been procured similarly.

The Nature Conservancy and its partners have conserved nearly 6,000 acres along the Verde River's headwaters and the Verde River Greenway Natural Area in the Verde Valley. This has been a collaborative effort to conserve the Verde River; one of the Southwest's few remaining free-flowing rivers. The Verde River is an important water source for people and wildlife along its 189-mile course, including communities in the Verde Valley and in the Phoenix metro area. Three of the most recent purchases are: the Verde Springs property in conjunction with Arizona Game and Fish consisting of 293 acres that was combined with the Upper Verde River Wildlife Area; the Shield Ranch consisting of 306 acres at the confluence of the Verde and West Clear Creek and will possibly be transferred to the USFS; and the Rockin' River Ranch consisting of 209 acres across from the Shield Ranch along the Verde River that was transferred to State Parks.

Government leadership for open space and recreation acquisition is exemplified by the Yavapai County Board of Supervisors' role enabling the use of almost 1000 acres for Pioneer Park from undeveloped property of the BLM. Commitment to recreational development for County residents has been on-going in keeping with BLM guidelines at Pioneer Park.

Another method of preserving properties for open space is through the use of the Yavapai County's Planned Area Development Overlay Zoning District (PAD). The PAD encourages developers to set aside and dedicate a minimum of 25% of the development property for open space. The PAD Ordinance offers the incentive of allowing smaller home site areas than are traditionally permitted in the underlying zoning classification in return for the permanently dedicated open space areas. Many master planned communities have been approved throughout the County as PAD's, providing as much as 50% reserved open space and recreation areas.

### **Goals, Objectives and Recommendations**

#### **Goal 1: Enhance open space and recreational opportunities.**

Objective a: Continue participating in Sustainable Recreation Planning in conjunction with the Prescott National Forest to reserve desirable public lands for recreation, open space protection of wildlife habitats and buffering of residential areas.

Objective b: Use open space buffers to separate communities and preserve their identities.

Objective c: Encourage the preservation and connectivity of existing trails in new developments for multi-use and motorized trails.

Objective d: Promote wildlife corridor connectivity between open spaces in new and existing developments, in support of the 2011 Yavapai County Wildlife Connectivity Assessment and 2006 Arizona Wildlife Linkages Assessment.

Objective e: Work utilizing tools and incentives through the Open Space and Development option.

#### **Goal 2: Preserve the open space character of the county.**

Objective a: Protect scenic views and mountain vistas by encouraging new development to adapt sensitively to natural areas and by protecting wildlife corridors.

Objective b: Encourage the protection of riparian areas, watercourses and associated floodplains in new developments.

Objective c: Support and encourage the retention of agricultural operations (e.g. ranches, farms, vineyards and wineries).

Objective d: Encourage property owners to maintain and protect historic access to public lands through their property.

### **Goal 3: Growth techniques for sustaining preservation**

Objective a: With property rights considered, protect open space from the intrusion of urban uses by encouraging clustered development or conservation subdivisions.

Objective b: Update subdivision codes to maintain a minimum percentage of a property as open space or conservation area shows the recognition of agricultural lands, open space, and scenic view sheds, providing economic, social, and environmental benefits.

Objective c: To accommodate growth areas with higher density transfer development rights to preserve open space, ranching and agricultural resources in underdeveloped rural areas.

Objective d: Employ development standards and guidelines that equitably balance conservation and development objectives

### **Goal 4: Provide continuation of traditional rural ways of life**

Objective a: Conservation easements on both private and public lands cover a wide scope of objectives, including the protection and enhancement of farmland, wildlife habitat, watershed areas, riparian corridors, water quality, flood control, and habitat for sensitive plant and animal species.

Objective b: Open spaces serve beyond recreation, including habitat conservation, minimizing disturbance of soils, stormwater management, and conserving significant environmental and historical resources.

Objective c: Encourage open space to be designated as a contiguous tract and not divided into unconnected, small parcels.

Objective d: Look to provide an alternative to the creation of parcel splits (“Lot” Splits) that are exempt from County Subdivision Regulations and an alternative to conventional subdivisions in an effort to retain the County’s rural character

### **Recommendations**

- Update zoning and development code standards to favor developments with more open space, recreation opportunities and preservation of a site’s natural features.
- Identify techniques for easements on open lands, including farmland, riparian areas and wildlife corridors (e.g. transfer development rights, conservation easements, etc.).
- Discourage development in environmentally sensitive locations such as floodplains, view sheds and wildlife corridors.
- Encourage developments to use cluster development or the conservation subdivision alternative to minimize development footprints.
- Look for better ways to ensure public or private open space is protected in perpetuity by legal arrangements sufficient to assure its maintenance and preservation for whatever purpose it is intended.