

Agua Fria Open Space Alliance, Inc.

AFOSA History

Origin and Development

11/1/2011

“The wildlife and its habitat cannot speak. So we must and we will.”
— Theodore Roosevelt

About AFOSA

INTRODUCTION

The Agua Fria River Basin includes the area drained by the Agua Fria River from the River's beginning on the north slope of Glassford Hill to the Gila River west of Phoenix. Rain that falls on the crest and east slopes of the Bradshaw Mountains, the south and west slopes of Mingus Mountain and the Black Hills, and the west slopes of the New River Mountains drains into the Agua Fria. AFOSA focuses on the upper part of the Basin from Prescott Valley to Black Canyon City.

Open Space

Most people think of open space as an unobstructed landscape view or vista. This could be the view across a city, a lake, or a mountain range. Planners define open space as an area that is not occupied by buildings. In almost all instances open space contains plants, and is often completely covered by vegetation. In cities and towns open space includes backyards, plazas and parks. Outside town it includes farms, prairies, lakes and forests.

Dense urban development is just beginning in the Agua Fria River Basin, and throughout most of the Basin homes tend to be far apart. Many homes are on large lots set within a landscape that is mostly open space. Around our towns we have unoccupied valleys, foothills, and mountains. Much of our open space is not privately owned, and most of it has a natural covering of plants, soils and wildlife.

Many people care about plants, animals, rocks, soil, broad vistas, wild landscapes. Records of people's attempts to protect natural landscapes can be found in the artifacts and records of civilizations thousands of years old.

Americans have long been concerned for nature. As our nation grew, the harvest of the most conveniently accessible resources devastated the land in some areas. Around Prescott, for instance, excessive timber harvest during the 1800's resulted in soil erosion, flooding, and reduction of fresh-water supplies. As part of a national effort to prevent destruction and begin sustainable use of forest lands, the Prescott Forest Reserve was established May 10, 1898. One of the most influential spokesmen for conservation was Theodore Roosevelt a former resident of Prescott. Roosevelt felt that it was the responsibility of each generation to pass to the next a land that was healthy, fertile, and productive. Roosevelt also expressed many people's

underlying concern for nature when he said: “The wildlife and its habitat cannot speak. So we must and we will.”

Open space and its contents offer numerous benefits to people, plants, animals, and our physical environment. For instance, the amount and quality of water available is partially determined by the vegetation and soils covering the landscape. If vegetation is removed, rain runs off more rapidly and may wash away the soil. This can significantly reduce the amount of water soaking into the ground.

HISTORY

The Agua Fria Open Space Alliance, Inc. was founded in Dewey, Arizona in 2006. The organization incorporated in 2007, and in 2008 received I.R.S. recognition as a nonprofit corporation under section 501(c)(3) of the U. S. Tax Code. AFOSA is concerned with understanding the physical and biological components of open space, contributing to open-space education, and helping plan for sustainable use.

During the summer of 2006, Charles Pregler, a representative of the U. S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), contacted individuals and groups in the Upper Agua Fria River Basin to invite them to become involved with the BLM in the management of public lands in the Upper Aqua Fria River region. A recent dispute over a proposed exchange of BLM land in the region had been settled in favor of retention of the lands by BLM. Hundreds of local residents had become involved and, under the leadership of Peggy and Cliff Titus, had attended meetings to argue for retention of the land and continued management by BLM.

BLM’s goal was to create a relationship with local residents that would help anticipate and forestall future disagreements over BLM management decisions. This would encourage a better fit between BLM management planning and the needs, desires, and concerns of area residents. With encouragement from Mr. Pregler, Jim Buchanan of Prescott, Arizona and Garry F. Rogers of Humboldt, Arizona organized a steering committee composed of organization representatives and private citizens to plan a series of open space meetings concerning the future of the undeveloped lands in the Upper Agua Fria River Basin.



Figure 1. Ranking Issues at the first open space meeting, October 28, 2006.

The first public meeting was held in Dewey, Arizona at the Bradshaw Mountain Middle School on August 28, 2006. In early August the steering committee had decided to use the first meeting to gather opinions from private citizens and representatives of interested groups. The meeting was widely publicized and was attended by approximately 50 interested citizens and members of public and private organizations. The meeting was organized to determine public opinions concerning the uses and goals, problems, and management needs for open space in the Agua Fria River Basin. In all, 68 issues were identified as significant concerns. These were discussed and ranked in order of importance by the group. The most highly ranked general concern was for protection through the prevention of destructive uses of open

space. The participants agreed that it was most important for long-range planning to allow continued use of regional open space only in ways that would not lead to resource degradation.

UPPER AGUA FRIA OPEN SPACE THE 21ST CENTURY

Place: Bradshaw Mountain Middle School
Time and Date: 6:30 pm - Monday, August 28, 2006
Purpose: Gather ideas on uses, problems, and management
Region: Upper Agua Fria River Watershed
Lands: BLM, Private, State, and US Forest Service

You are invited to attend a meeting concerning the open lands surrounding our communities. The time has come to decide how they will be used and managed. A major battle to retain BLM lands has been won. Now we need to agree on the best uses, the major problems, and the most effective management strategies for our open space. Can we use and benefit from our open lands without changing them? Will today's open spaces still be valuable in 2106?

You can make a lasting contribution to the future of our open lands. This meeting will establish the major goals and questions to be answered. So, bring your ideas and your imagination, and help establish the subjects for follow-up meetings aimed at resolving issues and developing plans.

Please join us at the Bradshaw Mountain Middle School at 6:30 pm on August 28.

<p>Garry F. Rogers Citizens for a Rural Community</p> <p>Peggy Titus Friends of the Agua Fria River Basin</p> <p>Skip Rains Dewey-Humboldt Community Org.</p>	<p>Jim Buchanan Yavapai Horsemen's Association</p> <p>Mary Hoadley Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership</p> <p>Sanford Cohen Prescott Open Trails Association</p>
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Call for more information or send us an e-mail at: AguaFriaOpenSpace@aol.com

Figure 1. Announcement for the first open-space meeting.

Strategy Formation

The first of a series of follow-up meetings was held September 11, 2006. The group reviewed the results of the first meeting and discussed their open-space visions, goals, and action strategies. The group considered ways to structure itself to respond to the dominant concern for open-space protection that was expressed in the first meeting.

One strategy that was suggested was for the group to form a Friends organization to serve in a general capacity as land stewards that would provide

auxiliary vigilance, maintenance and advisory assistance to the government agencies responsible for managing the land. In that capacity the group could participate in planning for land use and could support agency efforts to be more responsive to public desires and concerns.

Another suggestion was that the group form a nonprofit corporation that would act independently to evaluate regional land management policies and recommend alternative solutions. This strategy was supported by reports that the consensus among professional planners was that contemporary planning practices of the land management agencies responsible for most of the land in the Basin were generally too narrowly formulated and too short sighted to be effective. The strategy was further supported by the argument that insufficient funding coupled with political interference were limiting factors for most public agencies. Moreover, the constraining inertia of a century of accumulated land management policies and practices had created a situation where contemporary planning procedures within the BLM, the U. S. D. A. Forest Service and the Arizona State Land Department were performed based on information and performance standards too general to provide enduring protection for the land. Though recognized as idealistic and impractical considering the resources available, the ideals of the second approach were appealing, and no one came forward to refute its arguments. The strategy was adopted.

ACTIVITIES

Over the course of several bimonthly meetings the group formed a series of exploratory committees to begin the inventory of the Basin's resources. The flavor of the developing list of issues being addressed can be gained from the following excerpt from the agenda for the third meeting:

IV. Unfinished Business

A. Open Space Vision Statement

- 1. Preservation*
- 2. Recreation*

B. Nonprofit Organization Establishment

- 1. Determine Appropriate Name*
- 2. Establish Incorporation Committee*

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D. Establish Inventory Committees

- 1. Trails Committee*
- 2. Soils Committee*
- 3. Flora Committee*
- 4. Fauna Committee*
- 5. Minerals & Mines Committee*
- 6. Archeological Sites Committee*
- 7. Grazing & Ranching Committee*
- 8. Watershed Committee*

The list was expanded in subsequent meetings, and a procedure for giving priority attention to hazardous conditions and events throughout the Basin was added.

Resource inventories can be conducted at varying levels of detail. All begin with preliminary library research to assemble the existing information. In many cases land-use management plans are completed without adding new information. For broad land categories with modest requirements for protection this type of “reconnaissance-level” inventory is sufficient. In the Agua Fria Basin it was soon found that adequate existing information was available to complete reconnaissance-level plans for regulation and enforcement. Such plans provide a short-term basis for establishing general protection guidelines while new information is acquired to create long-range plans.

EDUCATION

An important theme running through the responses gathered in the first meeting was the need for public education. Education was viewed as a means to reduce detrimental impacts resulting from ignorance of resource values or the consequences of activities. Concerns for protection and education can be answered simultaneously by using inventory progress reports as the resource for producing educational materials. As an example a road-trip field guide for an automobile tour through a section of the Basin was drafted by members of the group. The guide was illustrated with maps and photographs and was intended for use for natural history field trips for students and interested adults.

CONTRIBUTIONS: 2007 to 2011

During 2007, AFOSA incorporated, organized a clean-up on public land, and held its first Open Space Convention on May 5 at Coldwater Farm in Humboldt, AZ. Presentations were made by Sally Hess-Samuels, Prescott National Forest; Lanie Levick, University of Arizona NEMO group; Norman Perry, Bureau of Land Management Resource Advisory Committee; Spike Hicks, Yavapai County Trails Committee; and Scott Jones, Friends of the Agua Fria National Monument. Monthly meetings served to refine the organization’s goals and plans.

In 2008, AFOSA applied for and received IRS approval of full tax-exempt status as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. The second Open Space Conference, “The Agua Fria River: Conservation of a Precious Resource,” was held at Arcosanti on May 3. It included a morning birding tour, a full day of presentations, and an afternoon hike along the Agua Fria River.

Members of the group made appearances on National Public Radio, Public Television and local radio. They also made presentations at the meetings of the Arizona Riparian Council, the Open Space Alliance of Central Arizona, Mortimer’s

Nursery Exhibition, Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership, and a special Open-Space presentation in the community of in Mayer, Arizona. Software grants were applied for and received from Adobe Corporation and Microsoft, Inc. As part of AFOSA's desire to encourage a detailed inventory of the Basin's open space, a vegetation-mapping and monitoring training course and a demonstration project were conducted along the Agua Fria River.

The 2009 open space conference, "Best of the Basin" was held at Arcosanti on May 2. Presentations were made by Chuck Richards of the Audubon Society, Mary Hoadley of Arcosanti, Sally Hess-Samuels of Prescott National Forest, Walt Anderson, Prescott College, Andrew Salywon of the Desert Botanical Garden, Tice Supplee of the Audubon Society, and Cliff Hersted of Arcosanti.

AFOSA participated in the USDI Bureau of Land Management Wet-Dry Project run by Water Resources Research Center scientists from the University of Arizona. AFOSA members provided presentations and field demonstrations for the West Yavapai Weed Management Area Committee, and received a contract to produce a weed management plan funded by the U. S. Bureau of Land Management through the Friends of the Agua Fria National Monument. The final plan disclosed needs for management changes that exceeded the BLM's ability to respond. The plan was not implemented.

Members published an 'op-ed' article in the Prescott Daily Courier, and an article in the news magazine, Earth Odyssey. Members contributed technical presentations to the Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership, and to an international group of scientists participating in the conference: "Dynamic Deserts: Resource Uncertainty in Arid Environments; Frontiers in Life Sciences," sponsored by Arizona State University.

The Board of Directors proposed formation of a Wildlife Interest Group that would encourage local participation.

"For all definable species groups there is a serious lack of detailed information. We really do not know how well the living creatures of the basin most are faring in the Basin. Some partial surveys have been completed in the past, but detailed inventories have never been conducted. For instance, we learned that there are no vegetation inventories for the Basin that are detailed enough to allow classification and mapping of plant species associations. This information is critical to understanding the distribution and health of animal populations. Needless to say, there are no plans in place to provide the public education and create the political will that is needed to prevent invasive weeds from replacing native species within the Basin, protect sensitive species and habitats, prevent soil erosion, etc. All of these problems have been caused by or at least influenced by human activities. Even without natural stresses from the current drought, resource values within the Basin are in a state of decline. More effort must be made to obtain basic information."

In 2010 organization members contributed to chapters in books published by Island Press, and Yavapai County Water Resources; published a series of four articles on weed management; and wrote letters to the Prescott Courier, and to state and national politicians. Other commitments by the Directors prevented organization of the annual open space conference.

In 2011 the organization wrote more letters to newspapers and politicians and participated in local meetings involving open space. A call for participants in a wildlife interest group resulted in the decision to redesign the AFOSA website using a blog format, and begin posting wildlife information.