

# SHOWING PROMISE

*New channel,  
vegetation  
faring well at  
Watson Woods  
Preserve*

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Prescott Creeks Preservation Association has made significant progress since it began work four months ago to restore the city-owned Watson Woods Riparian Preserve and Granite Creek watershed.

On Tuesday, Prescott Creeks Executive Director Michael Byrd conducted a field trip through the Watson Woods Restoration project to show commissioners and staffers with the Arizona Water Protection Fund Commission how his group is reviving the watershed's wetlands and a portion of the forest off Highway 89 and Prescott Lakes Parkway.

Byrd said he thought it was important for the commission to receive an on-site update since it has supported Prescott Creeks' effort with more than \$1 million in contributions over the past 14 years.

Prescott Creeks is using the money to relocate four reaches of the creek, create six temporary wetlands and 2,700 feet of channel with culverts. Since it completed the channel earlier this year, it has had two major flows, including one in May and another two weeks ago.

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ), the City of Prescott, the protection fund and Prescott Creeks have teamed up to complete the project, which will purify the preserve's water while reducing



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Prescott Creeks Preservation Association Executive Director Michael Byrd, right, shows commissioners and staff from the Arizona Water Protection Fund, among others, an updated aerial map of the Watson Woods Restoration project Tuesday in Prescott.

erosion and flooding.

In late March, volunteer crews with American Conservation Experience started putting in an estimated 15,000 harvested cottonwoods, red willows and shrubs along a preserve creek bed northeast of the Prescott Lakes Parkway and Highway 89 intersection off Sundog Ranch Road.

Those plantings remain healthy and are growing all along the streambed, which was dry this week but should pick up once the monsoon rains hit. The city has agreed to provide fresh, potable water for irrigation to boost the vegetation. Shrub willows line the

creek's banks, while cottonwoods and red willows stand above it.

"Our approach has been to irrigate 50 percent of the entire project," Byrd said. "The intent is not to water these trees forever, but to help them get established in the groundwater."

Byrd added that some noxious weeds have cropped up on the preserve, but Prescott Creeks has plans to plant a native grass seed mix to combat the problem.

"We've done some manual removal of the weeds, and our hope is that the community volunteer labor will be able to

get ahead of that and continue to stay with it," he said.

In addition, Prescott Creeks has partnered with the Prescott Audubon Society for habitat surveys and monitoring of reptiles and amphibians on the preserve.

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Byrd opened Tuesday's tour at the preserve's kiosk, which stands at its entrance near the Peavine Trailhead. The display greets visitors with a map and background information about the project as well as a brief history of the protection fund.

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"For the time being, this is our primary entrance," Byrd said. "And as we get the restoration work completed and move into construction of walking trails on the preserve, we'll move the primary entrance to the west side of the creek on Highway 89."

Byrd added that the new entryway will provide better, more direct access for visitors. However, Prescott Creeks will keep the current entrance because it is coupled with the Peavine Trailhead, which Byrd said gets an estimated 36,000 to 50,000 visitors each year.

Byrd later showed the field trip's 15 participants an updated aerial photograph of the restoration site that was taken in April.

"This is probably one of the bigger projects and main sites we've talked about over the years that

highlights what the Water Protection Fund has actually accomplished," said Steve Olson, executive director of the Arizona Municipal Water Users Association. "We want to use the state's resources to preserve some of these riparian areas." \*\*\*

Biologists say today's Watson Woods Preserve comprises only 126 acres of what they believe was once a sprawling 1,000-acre forest stretching from Granite Dells and upstream toward downtown Prescott.

Environmental Protection Agency and ADEQ officials have listed Granite Creek and Watson Lake as "impaired" waters. They say Granite Creek and Watson Lake have low dissolved oxygen as well as high levels of E. coli bacteria, which harm wildlife.

The recent plantings are designed to combat the oxygen issue. Once



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Michael Byrd, executive director of the Prescott Creeks Preservation Association, shows off the progress Tuesday afternoon that the organization has made over the past four months on the Watson Woods Restoration project in Prescott.

the preserve is refurbished, it will offer several public recreational opportunities, such as hiking and wildlife viewing of birds, lynx,

bobcats, coyotes, elk and deer.

"It's a combination of restoring water quality and water quantity, so part of the restoration

process is to re-establish the natural flow system," said Marie Light, a hydrologist and chair of the Arizona Water Protection Fund.

"When you have the natural flow system, then you have the water source that supplies water to the vegetation," Light said. "Once we have all the vegetation, then all the plants and animals can be re-established."

Prescott-based Fann Environmental, a separate division from its sister company, Fann Contracting, cleared and re-

channeled the creek so it can develop a wooded wetland area.

Meanwhile, Natural Channel Design of Flagstaff, an environmental engineering firm specializing in river and stream restoration, is still conducting the engineering and job-site supervision.

The firm designed the Watson Woods project and completed the underground surveys. It will continue to monitor the restoration through to its completion and ensure that the watershed is functioning properly.