

Trust for Public Land credits town, county for progress on Verde state park

By STAN BINDELL, For the Review

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Yavapai County Supervisors Chairman Craig Brown, left, and Yavapai County Development Services Assistant Director Mark Lusson talk about an affordable housing project. (Stan Bindell/For the Review)

Michael Patrick, senior project manager for Trust for Public Land (TPL), gave an update on the pending Verde Rivers Headwaters State Park during a May 7 town hall at Chino Valley Town Hall with about a dozen people attending.

Several county department heads also gave updates on county projects. Yavapai County Supervisor Craig Brown chaired the gathering.

Patrick recounted how in early 2022 Del Rio Springs Ranch, which is more than 3,050 acres, put the land up for sale. Patrick said TPL felt that a lot of the land on the east side of Highway 89 was full of important elements and TPL negotiated with the owners to purchase 780 acres for the state park. That land was acquired this past March.

Patrick said the land is particularly valuable for four reasons:

- Ecological protection of the Verde River and Del Rio Springs;
- Historical preservation because of Fred Harvey farm houses and significance of this location as the first Arizona Territory seat;
- Outdoor recreation that can be provided in the state park and the Peavine National Recreation Trail can be extended by five miles to the headwaters of the Verde River; and,
- Economic benefits as it would bring more tourists to the Chino Valley and Paulden areas.

Patrick credited Chino Valley town officials with lobbying the state legislature for money for the state park.

He noted that the Sullivan Lake dam was built in the 1930s and the Fred Harvey farm houses sent poultry, milk and ice to their hotel system.

“This land was an important part of the history of the west,” he said.

Peter Bourgois, a landscape architect, has developed a master plan for the park after more than 30 meetings with the public, town and county officials.

The funding for the park came from the state legislature, Yavapai County, Nature Conservancy and the Nina Pulliam Charitable Trust.

Current work that is underway for the state park includes:

- Enhancement to the land owned by the state park. One house that was filled with mold was removed;
- Work on extending the Peavine Trail; and,
- Acquiring three additional properties that are adjacent to the state park land.

“A lot of work has been done in partnership and there is a lot more left to do,” he said.

Patrick thanked Brown for his leadership in gaining the land for the state park.

Brown said one of the three pieces of property they are seeking to obtain is the climbing area below the dam. He added that one of the issues of the state park is going to be taking care of the historical old buildings as the help of volunteers could be needed.

“This is just on the drawing board,” he said.

Some of the land in the area is owned by Prescott and Prescott Valley. He said it will be exciting to see how all the municipalities involved can work together to make the park the best it can be.

Patrick said he has worked for 23 years at TPL and this is the most exciting project.

Vinnie Gallegos, executive director of the Central Yavapai Metropolitan Planning Organization, said federally funded grants are available to pay for some of the park projects.

He said that in the years to come, CYMPO will be looking toward more extensive conservation plans that will include working with Arizona Game and Fish, especially to consider wildlife corridors. He added that there is an understanding of what roads can do to wildlife.

Highway project not in state budget

CYMPO has been seeking \$13 million from the state legislature for adding lanes in each direction from Road 3 North to 5 North along Highway 89 in Chino Valley. Gallegos said the transportation bill did not pass the state legislature. He said it could return during the budget process, but is more likely to be revisited next year.

“This is a regionally significant road,” he said.

Brown said this section of highway is among the most dangerous roads in Yavapai County.

“It’s surprising we don’t have more accidents there,” he said. “We know it, but getting the money is difficult.”

Gallegos said CYMPO is taking opinions on how walking paths and biking lanes can be improved. He said the Chino Valley Unified School District’s superintendent is interested in seeing how walking and biking from the high school could be improved.

Highway 69 carries 45,000 motorists every day. CYMPO is working on its 25-year plan, which is updated every five years. He praised Brown for championing transit that could eventually include Chino Valley, Prescott, Prescott Valley and the Verde Valley connecting with each other.

Affordable housing project

Mark Lusson, assistant director of Yavapai County Development Services, spoke about a county housing program as the county has one-, two- and three-bedroom designs. If someone chooses one of these designs it speeds up the permit process and makes the homes more affordable.

It would cost \$65,000 to build the one bedroom, \$100,000 for a two bedroom and \$150,000 for a three bedroom. However, this would not include the land, water and/or septic. Still, it would cost less than the current cost of building a house. These homes would have to be in county and not in any municipality.

“This is aimed for teachers and police officers,” he said.

Since the program started in 2020, 63 permits have been obtained and 19 homes have been completed.

Dark skies and solar ordinances

Matt Blake, planning manager with Development Services, spoke about two ordinances that are in the works.

The first is regarding the county’s dark sky ordinance that has not been updated in 20 years. He said public hearings will be held on this and officials want to hear from the public and what they want.

“A lot of times members of the public bring up a lot of ideas that the board may not have thought of,” he said.

The second ordinance would address massive solar projects. Blake said this would set parameters and avoid bad projects where in past developers have walked away and left a mess.

“We don’t want to see that here,” he continued. “These projects have the potential for regional impacts. We want to be protective of our national forests and wildlife corridors.”

Blake said the large scale solar projects would also bring in a lot of money for schools and roads.

Public hearings will also be held on this issue.

Brown closed the meeting by saying everyone should be proud to live in Yavapai County because the county is far ahead of most places in most issues.

“That’s why I’m so proud to work with these people,” he said.

https://www.dcourier.com/news/trust-for-public-land-credits-town-county-for-progress-on-verde-state-park/article_92347aac-1138-11ef-808a-87f73ab6a045.html

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