

Chino Valley council supports conservation easement from Yavapai Ranch

By STAN BINDELL, For the Review

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Heather Reading, conservation advisor for the Land Advisors Organization, talks with the Town Council about the Yavapai Ranch. (Stan Bindell/For the Review)

The Chino Valley Town Council voted unanimously to send a letter of support for the Upper Verde River Watershed Yavapai Ranch Phase IV Land and Water Fund Request by Prescott National Forest.

The fund would purchase a conservation easement from Yavapai Ranch and would result in minimizing development and groundwater pumping from the Big Chino aquifer and the Upper Verde River.

The vote was 6-0 with Councilman John McCafferty absent during the Tuesday, Aug. 13, meeting at Town Hall. The vote came after a presentation by Heather Reading, conservation advisor for the Land Advisors Organization.

Reading said the Yavapai Ranch project is Arizona's premier conservation project as it is the largest inholding in the Southwest with 41,000 acres in a checkerboard area. Prescott National Forest and the landowners have been working to consolidate this for 40 years.

Benefits

Upon completion, the Upper Verde River – Yavapai Ranch LWCF project would:

- Enhance recreational access and consolidate resource protection for more than 92,000 acres.
- Contribute to protecting Big Chino Aquifer, the Upper Verde River, and state water supplies.
- Contribute to ongoing downstream conservation efforts on the Verde River.
- Protect the upper watershed of the Bill Williams River, an important tributary to the Colorado River that supports native fish, wildlife, and the largest native woodlands on the lower Colorado River.
- Protect critically important habitat within the Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America for one of the largest remaining herds of pronghorn antelope as well as elk, mule deer, grassland dependent birds and wildlife, and numerous other native terrestrial species.

Council supports

conservation project Tom Armstrong, who was formally announced as the winner of the mayoral race later in the meeting, said his top two issues are water and roads.

“This is another good way to conserve water. We should be doing everything we can to conserve water and this is one of many ways,” he said.

The three council winners, who were also formally announced later in the meeting, also praised the action.

Bob Switzer, Larry Holt and Eric Granillo all won council seats in the Primary Election. Switzer and Holt are newcomers while Granillo was re-elected.

Switzer said it was fantastic that the conservation easement would stop development and minimize groundwater pumping.

“I appreciate all the organizations behind this and the rancher who was willing to work with them,” Switzer said. “The Verde Watershed is critical for the state and I will support this whenever it comes before council. It was an interesting presentation.”

Thirty-two environmental or ranching organizations support the conservation project.

Granillo said he always supports land and water conservation. “This will help the county and the town,” he said. “I 100% support minimizing development and groundwater pumping.”

Yavapai County Supervisor Craig Brown said the county has supported this through the first three phases and he continues to support it.

He recalled that in 2016 that there were nearly 1,200 homes to be built on the land, but the developer handed in the paperwork late and then the county squashed it.

“This is a good deal for the rancher because it gives them more options than they had,” he said. “There will be no houses built because it has to stay agricultural.”

Other business - Chino Valley Mayor Jack Miller returned for his first meeting since a major vehicle accident. He thanked the community for all they have done for him and his wife during the past month. He said that goes for the county as well as the town.

“It just shows why this town is an awesome place to live,” he said.

- Town Manager Cindy Blackmore announced that Territorial Days will be held Aug. 30 through Sept. 2 with a movie in the park Friday, parade and corn dinner Saturday, and car show and fireworks on Sunday.

- The council members adopted the results of the July 30 Primary Election. The new mayor and council will take their seats Dec. 10.

Armstrong thanked the community for its support and he looks forward to working with the new council to make good things happen this year.

Holt said he is in hurry-up-and-wait mode as he has a lot to learn about the Town Council and he is looking forward to working together with all council members. His major focus will be on improving communication with the public because he doesn't think that is very good right now.

Switzer said he is humbled and honored to be elected.

“I thank the people who put their trust in me,” he said. “It’s exciting and I’m anxious to get started and there is a lot to learn because they cover a lot more subjects than Planning and Zoning.”

Granillo said he is grateful for the citizens who re-elected him and he is looking forward to serving four more years.

- Council voted unanimously to approve \$344,700 to Fann Contracting for the new Public Works building remodel.

- Council voted unanimously to approve \$248,400 to Fann Contracting for the new Human Resources Building remodel.

- Council voted unanimously to rescind Bill Burns’ appointment to the Public Safety Retirement Board.

https://www.dcourier.com/news/chino-valley-council-supports-conservation-easement-from-yavapai-ranch/article_5ba8e82a-5e3a-11ef-9822-77e2e99bb4ff.html