



## Prescott Creeks Preservation Association Restores Granite Creek Watershed

Not all rivers and streams flow year-round. During warmer months of the year, some waterways have reduced flow or dry up. Dry streams can appear and act as ditches, collecting trash and debris. Accumulating garbage can damage water quality and the surrounding environment. Prescott Creeks Preservation Association, a nonprofit organization located in Prescott, Arizona, is working with government and community partners to prevent trash and debris from entering the Granite Creek watershed.

**ABOVE:** Three Prescott College students pose with a retrieved tire during the 2012 Granite Creek Cleanup. Photo credit: West Howland

In June 2011, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) entered into an agreement with *Groundwork USA* and the *River Network* to provide technical assistance to *Prescott Creeks Preservation Association* (Prescott Creeks). The agreement is part of the *Urban Waters Learning Network* which will work with Prescott Creeks to redefine its goals, work more effectively with partners, and better engage community members in its work. Founded in 1990, Prescott Creeks maintains a mission “to achieve healthy watersheds and clean waters in central Arizona for the benefit of people and wildlife through protection, restoration, education and advocacy.”

### Project Highlights

- More than 500 community members participate in the Annual Granite Creek Cleanup Day.
- Approximately 35 tons of trash has been removed from the creek since 2007.
- Five and one half tons of material have been removed from the watershed and recycled into art to support the program.
- Prescott Creeks created a Watershed Improvement Council to promote regional partnerships. The partners collaborated to create a Watershed Improvement Plan to protect the Granite Creek Watershed.
- The Watson Woods Riparian Preserve in downtown Prescott was restored to include 126 acres of land, two miles of trails, and native plants to create wildlife habitats.

### Connecting the Community to the Watershed

Prescott Creeks believes that community education and engagement are necessary to restore waterways that experience low flows during dry seasons. The association works to communicate with different community members through tools such as printed and digital newsletters, social media, and their website. The various communication channels help to ensure that community residents have access to information on upcoming events and

involvement opportunities. The association has also produced materials such as the "*Creek Care Stewardship Guide*" to inform community members about ways they can help improve their local waterways.

Prescott Creeks has created programs especially focused on drawing young people to the watershed. The organization has partnered with Prescott College to offer internships and senior project opportunities to students. Another program pairs college students with elementary school students to encourage teaching and learning about the watershed. An additional project with *Northpoint Expeditionary Academy* taught high school students about water quality testing. The project concluded with students presenting at a City Council meeting where city and state officials were in attendance.

**BELOW:** Southwest Botanical Research and Prescott Creeks work together to assess streamside habitat throughout the watershed. Photo credit: Michael Byrd



## Partnerships: All Hands on Deck

The success of Prescott Creeks is largely due to partnerships between government and community stakeholders. For example, Prescott Creeks helped to form the Watershed Improvement Council (WIC) to develop and oversee watershed improvement efforts. Council members include representatives from state and local government, private foundations, and community and watershed organizations.

In 2009, the WIC introduced a Watershed Improvement Plan (WIP) for the Upper Granite Creek Watershed. The plan aimed to identify and analyze pollution sources in the watershed, and to guide efforts to reduce pollutants entering surface waters. Recently, the WIC revised the WIP to include continued support

for monitoring of pollutants as well as a list of best practices for use by community members to reduce pollution. With support from its partners, Prescott Creeks recently worked with the City of Prescott to develop a plan for a new bridge near Watson Woods that would ensure minimal impact on the environment.

## Volunteers Help Restore Watson Woods

One of the most visible successes of Prescott Creeks' efforts is the restoration of 126 acres of the Watson Woods Riparian Preserve. A former gravel pit and illegal dump site, Watson Woods now includes 25 acres of wetlands, two miles of interpretive trails, and more than 20,000 newly planted trees thanks to the work of Prescott Creeks. The evolution of Watson Woods from gravel pit to wetlands was made possible by an agreement between Prescott Creeks and the City of Prescott, and more than 13,000 volunteer hours.

Annual volunteer events, including the Creek Clean-up Day, bring out more than 500 volunteers to the creek. At least one ton of material removed from the creek has been recycled into art and auctioned to support the association. Other efforts of the organization include labeling drains that lead to the stream to discourage dumping, the removal of more than 35 tons of trash from the watershed, and increased visibility of streams through road signs and education.

Future plans include restoration of more than 50 additional acres in Watson Woods, expanding business involvement on the Watershed Improvement Council, and promoting long term protection of the watershed through the Watershed Improvement Plan.

## Measuring Progress

Prescott Creek and its partners measure their success in a variety of ways. Among the notable are:

- Water quality monitoring to determine chemical and bacteria levels
- Innovative bacteria source and type tracking
- Development of a map to show stream areas that lack forest protection
- Collection of residents' feedback from watershed surveys