

Researchers seek input on Upper Verde River

By STAN BINDELL For the Chino Valley Review
Mar 22, 2025



Matt Halldorson and Jamie McEvoy hosted the meeting about gathering research on the Upper Verde River from area residents. (Stan Bindell/For the Review)

CHINO VALLEY — Researchers want your input on the Upper Verde River whether you know about the current river’s flow or its history. Your favorite story about having fun on the Upper Verde River also is welcome.

Matt Halldorson, director of the University of Arizona Extension in Yavapai County, gave an interactive presentation about a research project that Yavapai County Extension is working on along with Water Resources Research Center and the Nature Conservancy to compile information about the Upper Verde River. Halderson gave the presentation March 13 at the Chino Valley Senior Center as they took comments from the audience about the Upper Verde River.

The researchers hoped to have a crowd of about 50, but on this stormy night they had to settle for about 20.

Jamie McEvoy, associate director of Water Resources Research Center (WRRC), University of Arizona, also attended.

The idea is to produce a water history timeline for the Upper Verde Watershed. The purpose of this participatory workshop was for the public, the community members, to share their stories, memories and historical events related to the watershed. The information collected will be incorporated into a multimedia website highlighting key water-related historical events in the Upper Verde.

Halldorson said they weren't there to take positions on anything controversial such as whether the river is at a good level. They were compiling information so others could make informed decisions. However, he noted that water research in the past helped with healing the Lower Gila River. Halldorson urged the audience that if they knew anyone with knowledge about the Upper Verde River to have them contact the research team.

"If you know an elder with a story about the Upper Verde River, we would love to hear from them," he said. "I will go to them and interview them."

The Upper Verde River flows from an area north of Chino Valley to Clarkdale.

McEvoy said this could help set priorities as people think about water quality and quantity.

Gary Beverly, who has been lobbying to have the Upper Verde River designated as Wild and Scenic River to give it more protection, praised the work of the research team.

"The Upper Verde River is unappreciated. It is one of the jewels of the Southwest and a major resource for the state," he said. "But it's tucked away in the forest and many don't know about it."

The Verde River passes through Clarkdale, Cottonwood and Camp Verde before reaching Horseshoe Reservoir. The Verde River supplies approximately 40% of the water that the Salt River Project delivers annually to Phoenix-area residents for irrigation as well as the cities and towns for municipal uses.

Halldorson said the next step is archival research and creating a story-map by September. Halldorson, Beverly and audience members shared interesting facts about the Upper Verde River. For example, the Fred Harvey farm moved from Peach Springs to Del Rio Springs because the water at Peach Springs was considered unreliable.

Beverly noted that 85% of otters' diet is crayfish, but added that fish counts are important to the management of the river.

Halldorson joked that he could make a career about this project because there are mountains of information.

"I've learned more about the Upper Verde River in the past six months than my entire life," he said.

An Arizona Water Fact-sheet, produced by Water Resources Research Center, informs Yavapai County water facts and situations. The Verde River is the longest stretch of continuous riparian habitat in the state at more than 150 miles.

The fact sheet states that Clarkdale in 2008 became a mandatory adequacy jurisdiction, the only one in Yavapai County. This means that if the Arizona Department of Water Resources determines that a developer's available water resources is not enough, the town can deny approval of a new subdivision.

One way that Yavapai County conserves water, and helps keep more water in the Verde, is by using reclaimed water for residential landscapes, parks and golf courses. Reclaimed water is highly treated wastewater. Water in Yavapai County is used for tourism, mining, irrigation and aquaculture. Most of the aquaculture is used for public and private hatcheries in Oak Creek.

Water quantity challenges that Yavapai County faces, according to the fact sheet, include climate change, groundwater overdraft, exempt wells and the Gila River adjudication that has been going on for five decades. Water quality challenges include Superfund sites, groundwater contamination, surface water pollution and emerging contaminants such as PFAS.

The fact sheet summarizes that that Yavapai County's future water situation, thanks to more than 20 years of drought, carries significant risks due to unpredictable weather patterns, more severe storms and flooding; little forage available to wildlife and increased fire risk; and declining water tables and long term impacts on groundwater supply and declining water flow on streams, lakes and rivers.

For input into the project, email mmhalldorson@arizona.edu.

The Chino Valley Review is a sister publication to The Verde Independent.