

# **Almost \$3 Million Awarded to Benefit Verde River**

*Project is a Top National Priority within the Colorado River Basin*

The Verde River Flow and Riparian Restoration Initiative was awarded \$2.8M in funding from the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), a new program under the 2014 Farm Bill administered by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, made this historical announcement in Phoenix, where he awarded The Nature Conservancy, Friends of Verde River Greenway, Verde Natural Resource Conservation District, Arizona Game and Fish Department and Tamarisk Coalition funding to continue to restore river flows and riverside habitat while supporting the irrigation needs of farmers in the Verde Valley.

“This grant will allow us to realize our vision to protect, restore and conserve the Verde, one of our state’s important rivers,” said Kim Schonek, Verde River project manager for The Nature Conservancy in Arizona. “This award will build on investments and collaborative efforts of conservation, community and agricultural interests along the river.”

In the past five years, The Nature Conservancy and its partners have worked with irrigators to improve irrigation water management by using automated gates, ditch liners to reduce water loss, and improved infrastructure. These efforts, combined with financial incentives for conservation, means less water is being diverted from the river. The result has been increased flows along 20 miles of the river in the Verde Valley and improved flows in the Wild and Scenic area between Camp Verde and Phoenix.

“We in the agricultural community are pleased with how the community is coming together to support the Verde. We’re conserving water, leaving more for the river, while still using the water we need to make a living in agriculture. This new funding will help us continue to use our water efficiently while supporting our rural economy,” said Zach Hauser, a Verde area farmer and supervisor of the Verde Natural Resource Conservation District.

The new initiative will continue to support efficiency in irrigation and water management to restore river flow, and enable long-term protection of farming operations in the valley. A key component will be converting from flood irrigation to more efficient systems such as drip irrigation. The initiative will also focus on improving riverside wildlife habitat by removing invasive plants and stemming erosion.

“With this funding, we can broaden the scale of our conservation work on the Verde while accelerating the pace at which we do it. This investment in the Verde River is critical to our conservation outcomes and the community we live in – preserving the river and the agricultural community that makes the Verde Valley a unique and special place,” said Chip Norton of Friends of Verde River Greenway.

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