

## Verde Partnership gets grant from Water Institute

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*AP Photo/Tom Hood*

The Verde River riparian area is shown in this August 2005 file photo.

The Verde River Basin Partnership has reached a new milestone with the news of its first grant.

The relatively new Arizona Water Institute, a consortium of water experts from the state's three universities, awarded the partnership nearly \$50,000. It's one of 70 applicants that received one of the institute's first set of grants.

The partnership is using the grant to hire a team of scientists to analyze how natural and man-made changes in the Verde River's flow would affect its riparian habitat and the animals that live there. It also will determine what kind of flows are necessary to sustain the habitat and animals, said Abe Springer, who coordinates the Water Institute activities at Northern Arizona University. He also leads the Verde habitat study team.

The team will compile existing knowledge in a white paper and conduct a public workshop late next spring, Springer said.

The institute "recognizes that issues surrounding the Verde River are extremely important to the state of Arizona," said Jim Holway, Springer's counterpart at Arizona State University. He was involved in Verde issues when he oversaw the state's active management areas for the Arizona Department of Water Resources.

"It's a very valuable habitat," Holway said of the Verde. "There are not that many remaining free-flowing rivers in the state, and it's also an area under an extreme amount of growth pressure."

Because the institute's mission is to foster cooperation between some of the world's best water experts, the institute's grants board also liked how the Verde research team includes experts from all three of Arizona's universities, Holway said.

The habitat information will be part of the water budget that the partnership's contractors will create for the Verde Valley. Congressional land exchange legislation last year called for the creation of the partnership to oversee Verde River studies that include the water budget.

The partnership plans to seek \$1.5 million from the U.S. Geological Survey so that agency can conduct hydrological research for the water budget, explained Dan Campbell, who chairs the partnership's habitat committee and works for The Nature Conservancy, which supports habitat research in the region.

Springer also represents NAU on the partnership.

"The people in the partnership are some of the nicest, well-meaning people, and they donated so much time it's unbelievable," Springer said.

Academics on the partnership are staying out of its politics and will not be voting members, Springer added.

Springer and NAU already are involved in a variety of Verde studies.

For example, Springer will talk to the Citizens Water Advocacy Group in Prescott today about an NAU grad student's new Big Chino Sub-basin geology computer modeling work. It will help the U.S. Geological Survey's work on a computer model of the Verde Basin.

NAU also is conducting research in the Fossil Creek area, where Arizona Public Service recently decommissioned its electrical generation plant that was diverting much of the creek's flow above its Verde River confluence.

Arizona's universities just might have more water expertise than any other state or country, Holway said. The institute estimates that approximately 400 university scientists in Arizona have conducted some kind of water research. A Web site at [www.arizonawater.org](http://www.arizonawater.org) highlights this extensive expertise.

Recognizing the economic and water management benefits of this expertise, Gov. Janet Napolitano followed up on an NAU scientist's idea and encouraged the creation of the institute to foster collaboration, Holway said.

The Institute's Web site is at [www.azwaterinstitute.org](http://www.azwaterinstitute.org).