

PRESS RELEASE

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Verde Front Leadership Council Tours Colorado Riverfront Project

Verde Valley, AZ (April 21, 2014) – Representatives from across the Verde Valley travelled to Colorado’s Grand Valley in April to learn first-hand how the City of Grand Junction, City of Fruita and Town of Palisade worked together with Mesa County, the Colorado Riverfront Commission, and many other stakeholder groups to restore and protect 35 miles of the Colorado River that runs through their communities. The result of their efforts, which has been referred to as the “String of Pearls,” has been the development of a series of premier riverfront recreational assets (“pearls”) for their citizens and visitors, enhanced river conservation, improved quality of life, and robust economic development across the region. The river is the “string” that connects the “pearls.” Leading into the trip, Yavapai County Supervisor Tom Thurman reported, “Our group is especially interested to learn how the Grand Valley’s Riverfront Project has contributed to local job creation and become an economic asset, how it has enhanced the tourism benefit for the region, and how a community-based approach has changed the hearts and minds of the public to support the continued life of the river.”

The trip, supported by the Walton Family Foundation and the Cross Watershed Network, included representatives from City of Cottonwood, Town of Clarkdale, Town of Camp Verde, Yavapai College Foundation, Yavapai County, Cottonwood Economic Development Council, Verde Valley Regional Economic Organization, Out of Africa Wildlife Park, The Nature Conservancy, Friends of Verde River Greenway, AZ State Parks, Prescott National Forest. A small team from the Gila Watershed near Safford, AZ also participated. In addition to meetings that allowed the Verde Valley and Grand Valley participants to share information about their projects, participants toured numerous riverfront sites, including parks, trails, wildlife areas, and commercial projects, revitalized downtown Grand Junction, and

Colorado Mesa University. Throughout the trip, it was apparent that the success in the Grand Valley came as a result of an agreed upon shared vision and a commitment to regional cooperation. The region's development of the Colorado Riverfront Commission assures that a broad cross section of community representation is involved in the planning and advocacy for riverfront projects. Camp Verde Mayor Charlie German noted, "The planning among the various agencies and citizens was evident from what has already been accomplished and was very impressive!"

Many of the Verde Valley representatives have been working together as part of the Verde Front process, which has been engaged in the creation of sustainable recreation strategies and projects since 2009. Recreational access to the Verde River has been part of the discussion for many years and was listed by citizens in the Verde Valley as a priority in a 2008 visioning process. A resurgence of interest in the Verde River as a sustainable recreation opportunity spurred the Verde Front Leadership Council, a regional collaborative of local leaders and land management agencies, to visit the Grand Valley in hopes of learning how they have promoted and protected their river through inter-agency planning and community collaboration.

Cottonwood Mayor Diane Joens reported after the trip, "There are many similarities between Verde Valley in Arizona and Grand Valley in Colorado, including equivalent populations, emerging wine industries, number of river miles, national monuments, and state parks. While people in the Verde Valley have been working on trails and river issues for decades, we now have an opportunity to focus on a collaborative plan to create our own String of Pearls with trails and river access points that will promote economic development and protection of the Verde River and its tributaries." Clarkdale Mayor Doug Von Gausig further reports, "The clear lesson from this trip is that with a strong and committed collaboration of communities, agencies, and businesses, the sky is the limit! Time and time again we heard that effective and enthusiastic partnerships among all of the stakeholders provide the best path to success, and we have those strong relationships in the Verde Valley. I'm certain that we can make our community a premium regional destination for sustainable recreation!"

Next steps for the Verde Front Leadership Council are to begin regional public participation processes relating to restoration and recreation projects on the Verde River and the development of a resource management and master plan/vision for the Verde River corridor. Continued exploration of the examples and strategies employed by the Grand Valley region will also be topics of discussion.

The enthusiasm for continued collaboration is evident among the group, and was echoed by Arizona State Parks Director Bryan Martyn, who participated in the visit - “I’m excited to work together with all the communities of the Verde Valley in an effort to both protect and promote the treasures of the area.”



The Arizona group with the Riverfront Commission at Riverbend Park in Palisade, CO.