Section 5: Important Resources

The Verde Watershed has extensive and important natural resources with national, regional and local significance. The Verde Watershed contains critical riparian habitat for several rare and endangered species, including the Mexican Spotted Owl (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2004). It also contains important recreational resources such as extensive wilderness areas with hiking, bird watching and fishing opportunities.

Based on our analysis of the combination of natural resource values, five Natural Resources Areas (NRAs) have been identified for protection. Factors that were considered in delineating these Natural Resource Areas include: legal status (Unique Waters, critical habitat for threatened and endangered species, and wilderness), the presence of perennial waters and riparian areas, recreational resources, and local values.

The five identified Natural Resource Areas (Figure 5-1) are:

- Lower Verde River NRA
- Upper Verde River
- Mesquite Wash-Sycamore Creek
- Lower Big Chino Wash
- Camp Creek-Lower Verde River

The NRA's have been categorized within the 10-digit HUC watershed area where they are located, and the significance of each area is discussed below.

Lower Verde River NRA

The Lower Verde River NRA (LVR-NRA) includes five 10-digit HUC watersheds: West Clear Creek, East Verde River, Fossil Creek-Lower Verde River, Tangle Creek-Lower Verde River, and Lower Verde River-Horseshoe. The NRA is one of the most significant natural resource areas in Arizona, containing a designated Wild and Scenic River, five wilderness areas, extensive riparian forests, important recreation areas, and critical wildlife habitat. Many of the important resource values in the LVR-NRA are water dependent.

The segment of the Verde River classified as a Wild & Scenic River runs for 40 miles from T13N, R5E, Sections 26 and 27, to the confluence of the Verde River with Red Creek. Most of this length falls within the Mazatzal Wilderness Area. This section of the Verde was designated a Wild and Scenic River under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (P.L. 90-542) in 1981 after an Environmental Impact Statement found that it contained outstandingly remarkable scenic, fish and wildlife, and historic and cultural values. It is Arizona's only Wild & Scenic River and covers 12,500 acres. This area has some of Arizona's most important riparian forests. These riparian vegetation communities serve as a haven to many types of birds. Eight native fish species are found here including the threatened and endangered Razorback Sucker. This section of the Verde also provides excellent boating opportunities.

All but the eastern tip of the 252,500 acre Mazatzal Wilderness falls inside
the LVR-NRA. This wilderness area is part of both the Tonto and Coconino National Forests. The eastern side of Mazatzal is mainly brush and pine covered mountains with vertical walled canyons. The west side is comprised of steep brush covered foothills and the Verde River Valley.
Figure 5-1: Natural Resource Areas in the Verde River Watershed.
The West Clear Creek Wilderness is located 52 miles south of Flagstaff and 12 miles east of Camp Verde and is quite remote. It is 15,000 acres in size and falls within the Coconino National Forest. This area provides excellent swimming opportunities in the many pools along West Clear Creek. Fishing and hiking opportunities are also abundant.

The Cedar Bench Wilderness is located along the Verde Rim on the dividing line of the Verde and Agua Fria Watersheds. It covers 16,000 acres and is within the Prescott National Forest. The Verde Wild and Scenic River forms part of the eastern boundary of this wilderness. The primary vegetation types are chaparral, pinyon pine and Utah Juniper. This area offers many hiking options.

The Fossil Creek Wilderness is within the Prescott National Forest and covers 10,400 acres. This wilderness area offers significant hiking and fishing opportunities.

The Pine Mountain Wilderness rests on the western border of the watershed, with half of its 20,000 acres in the LVR-NRA. It is managed by the Tonto and Prescott National Forests. The portion in the Verde Watershed consists of steep chaparral covered slopes leading down to the Verde River.

In addition to wilderness areas, the LVR-NRA contains much important riparian vegetation and critical habitat for the threatened and endangered Razorback Sucker, Sonoran Chub, and Mexican Spotted Owl.

Lower Verde River NRA Protection Needs

Based on Arizona's 303(d) List of Impaired Waters (ADEQ, 2005), much of the LVR-NRA is at high risk for metals and sediment. Livestock grazing, an important land use in the LVR-NRA, can result in impacts to riparian areas where livestock graze. Increasing development in the cities of Camp Verde and Payson can also result in water quality impacts.

Most of the resource values in the Lower Verde River NRA depend on the protection and restoration of the Lower Verde River riparian forest. The riparian forest provides critical habitat for several protected wildlife species, as well as recreation opportunities, as discussed above. It is important to note that five Forest Service wildernesses contain a portion of the Lower Verde River and that the riparian forest and river are important components of the wilderness experience.

Water quality monitoring should be expanded, especially where perennial water occurs, and appropriate Best Management Practices should be implemented to maintain water quality. Special attention should be given to protecting the riparian areas and critical habitat.

Based on the watershed classification results, this area should be monitored especially for sediment, metals, selenium and organics constituents (See section 6). To address the protection needs of the LVR-NRA, nonpoint source pollutant management measures should be taken to control all the constituents.
Upper Verde River NRA

The Upper Verde River NRA (UVR-NRA) is made up of seven 10-digit HUC watersheds: Beaver Creek, Cherry Creek-Upper Verde River, Grindstone Wash-Upper Verde River, Hell Canyon, Oak Creek, Granite Creek-Upper Verde River, and Sycamore Creek. The UVR contains Oak Creek, a Unique Water. It also has five wilderness areas and critical habitat for three threatened and endangered species: Gila Chub, Razorback Sucker, and the Mexican Spotted Owl.

Sycamore Canyon Wilderness covers 56,000 acres and is part of the Prescott National Forest. This canyon environment cuts through the Mogollon Rim where wind and water have exposed seven geological associations. This area has many hiking and camping opportunities.

The Red Rock - Secret Mountain Wilderness is located 12 miles south of Flagstaff and covers 44,000 acres of the Coconino National Forest. Red rock pinnacles, windows, arches, and slot canyons are plentiful, as is rock art and abandoned dwellings. Hiking opportunities abound in this area. Red Rock - Secret Mountain Wilderness is adjacent to Oak Creek and Slide Rock State Park, where many people come to swim and enjoy the natural slides of rock.

Munds Mountain Wilderness is located 30 miles south of Flagstaff and covers 18,150 acres of the Coconino National Forest. It stretches from the Munds and Lee Mountains to the bottom of Jacks, Woods, and Rattlesnake Canyons. Munds Mountain Wilderness offers ample hiking, wildlife watching and horseback riding.

Woodchute Wilderness covers 5,500 acres of the Coconino National Forest and offers hiking opportunities through red rock formations.

Wet Beaver Creek Wilderness is located 43 miles south of Flagstaff and covers 6,200 acres of the Coconino National Forest. This wilderness affords hiking, fishing, camping and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Upper Verde River NRA Protection Needs

Most of the resource values in the UVR-NRA depend on the protection and restoration of the riparian forest. The riparian forest provides critical habitat for several protected wildlife species, as well as recreation opportunities, as discussed above. Five Forest Service wilderness areas contain a portion of the Upper Verde River and it is important to note that the riparian forests and rivers are important components of the wilderness experience. Nonpoint source pollutant management measures should be taken to protect and restore the channel and riparian systems.

Based on current water quality assessment results (ADEQ, 2005), the Verde River from Oak Creek to Beaver Creek and the Verde River from Beaver Creek to HUC 15060202-001 are classified as “not attaining” for sediment. Whitehorse Lake, Peck’s Lake, Watson Lake, and Granite Creek from headwaters to Willow Creek are classified as “not attaining” for dissolved oxygen. Oak Creek at Slide...
Rock State Park is classified as “not attaining” for E. coli. Stoneman Lake was impaired due to pH exceedances (Appendix, A).

To address the protection needs of the UVR-NRA, nonpoint source pollutant management measures should be taken to control metals, sediment, organics and selenium (See Section 6). Human use of Slide Rock State Park should continue to be monitored for E. coli contamination to Oak Creek.

Livestock grazing is an important land use in the UVR-NRA and special attention should be given to protecting and restoring the riparian areas where livestock graze. Many communities in the NRA, including Prescott, Camp Verde, and Sedona are experiencing increasing development. Potential impacts to water quality should be monitored and mitigation actions should be taken, as discussed in Section 7, Watershed Management.

Mesquite Wash – Sycamore Creek NRA Protection Needs

Most of the resource values in the MWSC-NRA depend on the protection and restoration of the Mesquite Wash-Sycamore Creek riparian forest. The riparian forest provides critical habitat for several protected wildlife species, as well as recreation opportunities.

Based on watershed classification results, this area is classified as high risk for sediment and selenium (See section 6). To address the protection needs of the MWSC-NRA, nonpoint source pollutant management measures should be taken to control sediment and selenium.

Lower Big Chino Wash NRA

The Lower Big Chino Wash NRA (LBCW-NRA) consists of two 10-digit HUC watershed: Lower Big Chino Wash and Williamson Valley Wash. The LBCW-NRA has a reach of critical habitat for the endangered Gila Chub and three Wilderness areas within its boundaries.

Apache Creek Wilderness covers 5,600 acres of the Prescott National Forest. Rolling hills of juniper and pinyon interspersed with granite outcrops characterize this small and remote wilderness. It provides excellent habitat for mountain lion and many species of birds.

Granite Mountain Wilderness, located near Prescott, covers 10,000 acres of the Prescott Nation Forest. Stacks of large granite boulders characterize the wilderness. Hiking and rock climbing opportunities are plentiful.
Juniper Mesa Wilderness covers 7,500 acres of the Prescott National Forest. The wilderness is characterized by the flat topped mesa from which it draws its name. Wildlife is abundant, including black bear, elk, mule deer, bobcat and squirrel.

Lower Big Chino Wash NRA Protection Needs

Based on the watershed classification results, this area is classified as high risk for organics (see section 6). To address the protection needs of the LBCW-NRA, nonpoint source pollutant management measures should be taken to control organics.

Livestock grazing is an important land use in the LBCW-NRA and special attention should be given to protecting and restoring the riparian areas where livestock graze.

Camp Creek - Lower Verde River NRA

The Camp Creek - Lower Verde River NRA (CCLVR-NRA) consists of one 10-digit HUC watershed, Camp Creek - Lower Verde. The CCLVR-NRA was designated as an NRA due to local concern regarding the riparian and stream environments. This area has a rapidly growing population due to development pressures from Phoenix to the south.

The portion of the Verde River running through this HUC has miles of perennial stream and is an important local resource for recreation and aesthetics.

Camp Creek-Lower Verde River NRA Protection Needs

Water quality and quantity are concerns within the CCLVR-NRA. Based on current water quality assessment results (ADEQ, 2005), the Verde River from Bartlett Dam to Camp Creek is listed as “impaired” for copper, and selenium. Grande Wash from the headwaters to Ashbrook Wash is listed as “impaired” for E. coli.

This NRA is classified as high risk for metals, sediment, organics and selenium. To address the protection needs of the NRA, nonpoint source pollutant management measures should be taken to control metals, sediment, organics and selenium.

References:
