

Verde River Headwaters State Park

With additional acquisition opportunities for outdoor recreation, historic preservation & ecological benefits



In March, 2024, Trust for Public Land purchased and protected 734 acres, part of the historic Del Rio Springs Ranch, with funding for the acquisition coming from the Arizona Legislature, Yavapai County and the Nature Conservancy. That land is now owned by Arizona State Parks & Trails where it will become a new state park, “Verde River Headwaters State Park”. As part of that work, a conceptual master plan for the land was also completed in consultation with many stakeholder groups and the communities.

We have included here a short description of some of the ecological, historical and recreational benefits of the project. Still remaining are three additional (and important) land acquisition opportunities for adjacent parcels and those are briefly described as well.

Photo shows buildings on the land associated with the Fred Harvey Farm, which provided fresh poultry, ice & other supplies for Harvey hotels, restaurants and railroad dining cars from Santa Fe to Los Angeles in the first half of 1900's. These buildings are on a 23-acre parcel still left to be acquired.

Benefits of the Project

The recently completed Del Rio Springs Ranch project has many benefits associated with the acquisition and preservation of the 1,000-acre property:

New state park: Arizona State Parks & Trails plans to create a new state park – the Verde River Headwaters State Park - with day use, trails, and overnight camping in an area of the state with a shortage of state parks offering such amenities. This will benefit the economic development of Town of Chino Valley, and will build on existing and future recreational opportunities associated with the nearby Upper Verde River, Peavine National Recreation Trail, Upper Verde Wildlife Area and Prescott National Forest, including hiking, horse riding, mountain biking and hunting.

Extends the Peavine National Recreation Trail:

The Peavine Trail, one of the few rail-to-trail projects in Arizona, starts in Prescott where it runs north from Watson Lake & Granite Dells. An addition 8 miles of the trail up to and in Town of Chino Valley were recently completed. The Trail connects with Town of Prescott Valley by the Iron King Trail spur. The newly acquired property contains the same abandoned rail bed that will enable the completion of this Trail all the way to the start of the Verde River, a distance of 21 miles. It will result in a destination trail and complement the existing world-class recreational trail system in nearby Prescott.

Water Preservation for Verde River: The protection of this large area reduces the amount of housing built right over the Verde River aquifer and the sensitive Del Rio springs area, with an estimated 350 acre-ft of water savings per year in the Prescott AMA by reducing 1,400 homes planned for the property.



Sullivan Lake, on the new state park land

Preservation of Sullivan Lake and Del Rio Springs: Sullivan Lake, considered as mile-zero of the Verde River, is important for both ecological and symbolic reasons. With the exception of the Upper Sullies Canyon parcel (see next page), public ownership of the lake property results in the first 25 miles of the Verde River being entirely in public or nonprofit ownership (from Sullivan Lake to AZGFD Wildlife Area through the Prescott NF), thereby maximizing wildlife management opportunities for migratory birds, federally listed fish and other species of greatest conservation need. The partners anticipate restoring the cottonwood gallery that historically was at Sullivan Lake and creating a small nature preserve and community gathering place, in addition to trailhead and parking for the north end of the Peavine Trail. In parallel with this project, The Wilderness Society and Sierra Club, among others, is working with Congressional delegation to designate the Upper Verde River with Wild and Scenic River status.

Del Rio Springs is important for both ecological and historical reasons – it once provided all of the water supply for City of Prescott and the northern Arizona communities of Ash Fork, Williams and Seligman. The recent land acquisition places the core of the Springs area into public ownership and allows for restoration and integrated management for wildlife and nature preserve.

Historic Preservation & Interpretation: As evidenced by the state historic marker on the property next to State Highway 89, the ranch was the site of the first Arizona territorial capital as established by the U.S. Army in 1863 before it was moved to Prescott the following year. In 1913, the parcels comprising the ranch was acquired by the Santa Fe Pacific Railroad, which operated a spur line down to Prescott. In partnership with the Railroad, the Fred Harvey Company raised poultry & beef and produced dairy products, eggs, ice and other foods here to supply their premier chain of hotels along Route 66 and the rail line connecting St Louis to Los Angeles (including the well-known El Tovar Hotel at the Grand Canyon and La Posada Hotel in Winslow). One of the early farm-to-table models to increase railroad tourism to Arizona, three of the historic Fred Harvey buildings from 1924 are still standing and in relatively good condition. The partners propose preserving and interpreting these buildings and the territorial capital to commemorate this important history of Arizona and the Southwest. While much of this Farm is now protected on the new state park land, some key historic buildings still need to be acquired and preserved as described on the next page.

The project was supported by the following groups, with many working actively as partners on the success of this project.

- ✓ Arizona Legislature and Governor's Office
- ✓ Town of Chino Valley
- ✓ Yavapai County Board of Supervisors & Flood Control District
- ✓ City of Prescott Parks & Recreation
- ✓ Town of Prescott Valley
- ✓ Arizona State Parks & Trails
- ✓ Chino Valley Historical Society
- ✓ Nature Conservancy of Arizona
- ✓ Sierra Club
- ✓ Back Country Horsemen of Central Arizona
- ✓ Audubon Society
- ✓ Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG)
- ✓ American Rivers
- ✓ U.S. Forest Service (Prescott NF)
- ✓ Yavapai Trails Association
- ✓ International Mountain Biking Assoc. (IMBA)
- ✓ Prescott College
- ✓ Natural History Institute
- ✓ Prescott Creeks
- ✓ Friends of the Verde River
- ✓ The Trust for Public Land
- ✓ Save the Dells

Verde River Headwaters Additional Opportunities



Rock climber at Upper Sullies Canyon and historic Harvey milking barn on inholding parcel in state park land.

(More photos attached.)

Opportunities: Three important land protection opportunities remain adjacent to the new state park land:

Upper Sullies Canyon: A 10-acre private parcel lies between the Sullivan Lake parcel, acquired as part of the first project, to the west and the start of the Upper Verde Wildlife Management Area, owned by Arizona Game and Fish. Containing a section of the river canyon and a historic railroad bridge crossing the river, this parcel is strategic as being the only private parcel of land on the Upper Verde River until Perkinsville, about 25 miles east. Public ownership of this land would lay the foundation for a future non-motorized trail along the upper river.

With permission from the current owner, the property is used for rock climbing by many groups including Prescott College, Yavapai Climbers Coalition and Arizona Mountaineering Association. Its unique location and geology make it especially great for climbing instruction. Trust for Public Land has an option giving us the right to acquire the parcel for its appraised value of \$400,000.

Historic Building Inholding: There remains a 23-acre private inholding in the new state park land. This property was the heart of the Fred Harvey Farm, which provided fresh produce, ice and other supplies for the Western District of the Fred Harvey enterprising; rail dining cars and hotels & restaurants from Santa Fe to Los Angeles, including the El Tovar at the Grand Canyon.

This inholding parcel contains existing historic buildings from the 1920's include milking barn, milk bottling & ice making building, bunkhouse and the barn where the Grand Canyon mules where wintered. Public ownership of this parcel is critical for preservation and interpretation of this important history and for maintaining the integrity of the surrounding state park land. Trust for Public Land is able to acquire this parcel for \$250,000, much less than is appraised value.

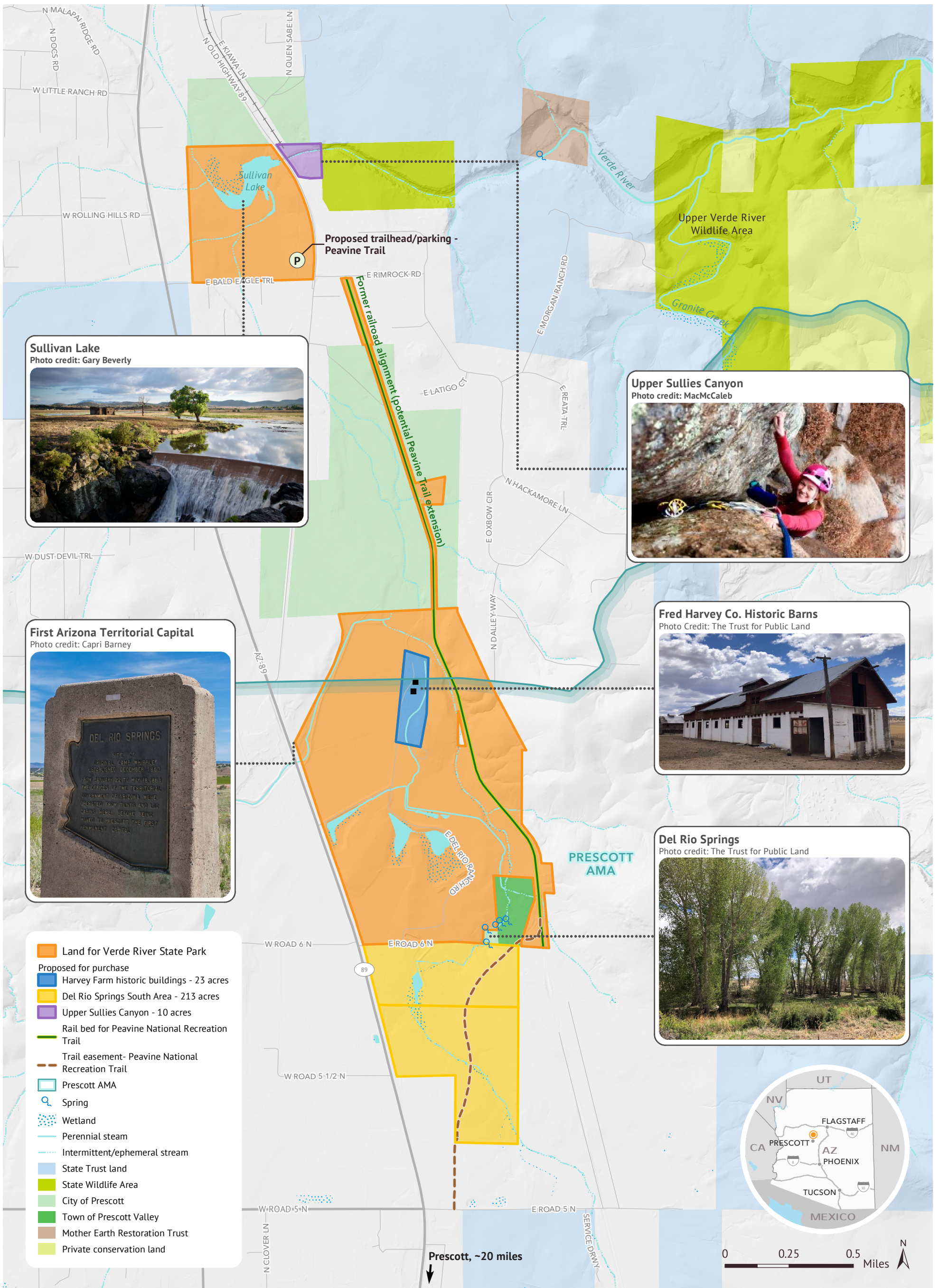
Ecological Land Associated with Del Rio Springs: A property of 224 acres lies just to the south of the land now owned by Arizona State Parks and the core of the Del Rio Springs area. It includes a wet marshy area that is the first manifestation of the underground Cienega Creek that flows north and is pushed up by the near surface geology to form the Springs. Therefore, protection of some or all of this area will prevent residential housing right up next to the Springs area. The property also contains a cottonwood grove and an active bald eagle nest. The conceptual master plan for this area includes a place for primitive camping, including exclusively for use by hikers and bikers using the adjacent Peavine National Recreation Trail.

The most important 90 acres of this 224-acre area, lying just south of the state park land and containing cottonwood grove and bald eagle nest, can be acquired by Trust for Public Land for \$980,000. This is substantially less than its appraised value.



*Connecting Everyone
to the Outdoors*

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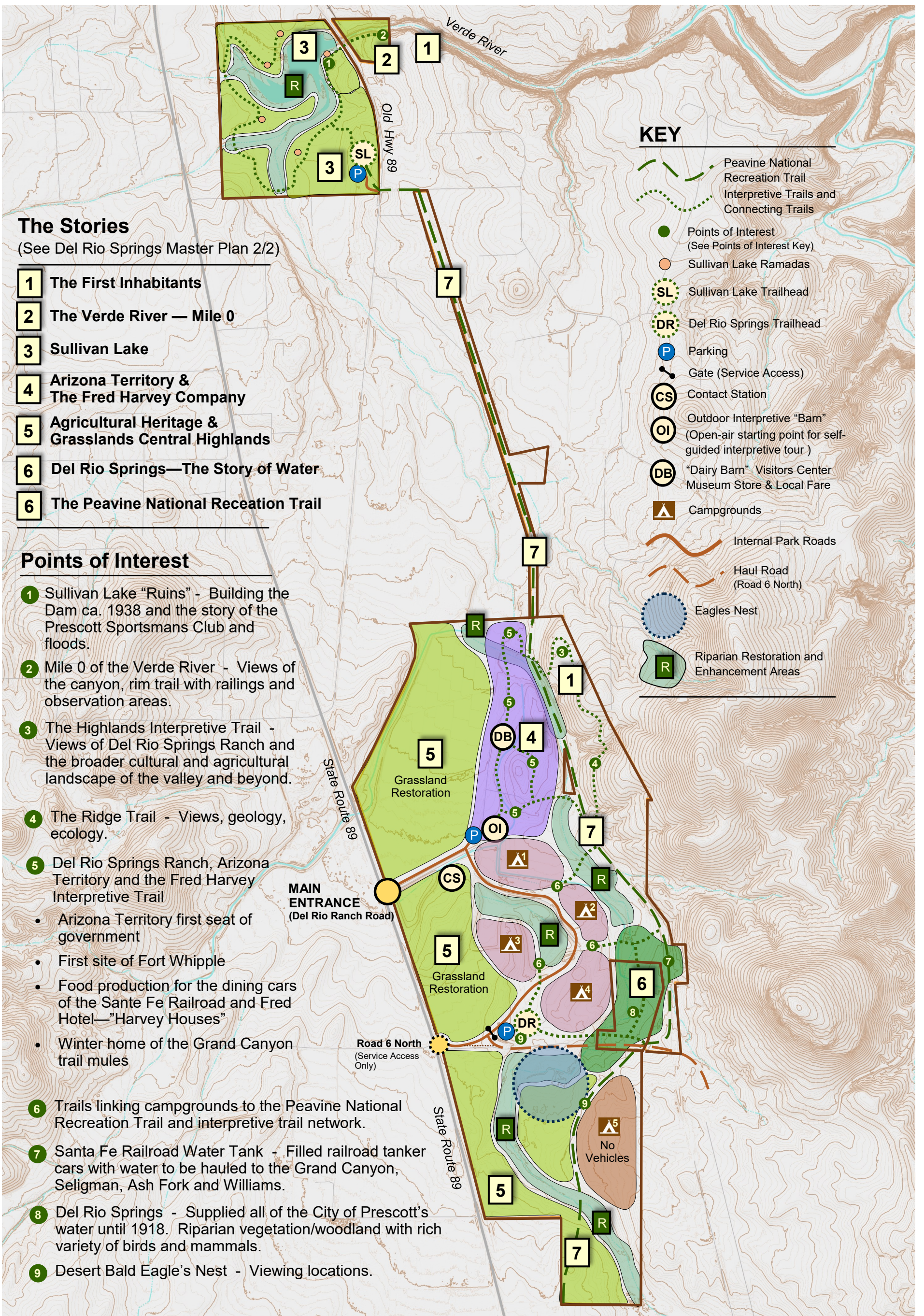


Verde River Headwaters State Park

TOWN OF CHINO VALLEY, ARIZONA

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The Stories

(See Del Rio Springs Master Plan 2/2)

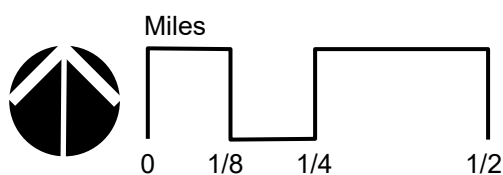
- 1** The First Inhabitants
- 2** The Verde River — Mile 0
- 3** Sullivan Lake
- 4** Arizona Territory & The Fred Harvey Company
- 5** Agricultural Heritage & Grasslands Central Highlands
- 6** Del Rio Springs—The Story of Water
- 6** The Peavine National Reception Trail

Points of Interest

- 1** Sullivan Lake “Ruins” - Building the Dam ca. 1938 and the story of the Prescott Sportsmans Club and floods.
- 2** Mile 0 of the Verde River - Views of the canyon, rim trail with railings and observation areas.
- 3** The Highlands Interpretive Trail - Views of Del Rio Springs Ranch and the broader cultural and agricultural landscape of the valley and beyond.
- 4** The Ridge Trail - Views, geology, ecology.
- 5** Del Rio Springs Ranch, Arizona Territory and the Fred Harvey Interpretive Trail
 - Arizona Territory first seat of government
 - First site of Fort Whipple
 - Food production for the dining cars of the Sante Fe Railroad and Fred Hotel—“Harvey Houses”
 - Winter home of the Grand Canyon trail mules
- 6** Trails linking campgrounds to the Peavine National Recreation Trail and interpretive trail network.
- 7** Santa Fe Railroad Water Tank - Filled railroad tanker cars with water to be hauled to the Grand Canyon, Seligman, Ash Fork and Williams.
- 8** Del Rio Springs - Supplied all of the City of Prescott’s water until 1918. Riparian vegetation/woodland with rich variety of birds and mammals.
- 9** Desert Bald Eagle’s Nest - Viewing locations.

KEY

- Peavine National Recreation Trail Interpretive Trails and Connecting Trails
- Points of Interest (See Points of Interest Key)
- Sullivan Lake Ramadas
- Sullivan Lake Trailhead
- Del Rio Springs Trailhead
- Parking
- Gate (Service Access)
- Contact Station
- Outdoor Interpretive “Barn” (Open-air starting point for self-guided interpretive tour)
- “Dairy Barn” Visitors Center Museum Store & Local Fare
- Campgrounds
- Internal Park Roads
- Haul Road (Road 6 North)
- Eagles Nest
- Riparian Restoration and Enhancement Areas



Del Rio Springs Ranch DRAFT MASTER PLAN