

## **HISTORY OF THE FOUNDING OF CWAG**

by Kay Lauster

On May 19, 2002 the Verde River Citizens Alliance (VRCA) led a trip to the Verde River headwaters. Laurie Wirt was there. I had helped her collect water samples for her research on the upper Verde River springs. She often bemoaned that people in the area showed no interest in preserving the river. VRCA existed on the east side of Mingus Mountain but there was no citizen involvement on the west side, the headwaters side. On this day we sat on the bank of the river under a tall tree for lunch. As we talked about the river, and since no one had shown any interest in starting a group here, I asked if VRCA would help me start a VRCA West. They expressed great enthusiasm and were interested in helping me. They suggested I come to the next VRCA meeting to present my ideas and get an official OK.

On June 15, 2002 Mindy Schlimgen, Edessa Carr and I went to the monthly VRCA meeting. I presented my idea about starting a similar group in the Prescott area and asked if they would help me. They voted that they would. After the meeting, over lunch, we began to strategize.

I met again with Mindy S. on July 19, 2002 to talk about the citizens water group meeting the next week. Mindy, VRCA and I gathered email lists from several environmental and citizens groups in the area. Chris Hulse from VRCA and I sent out invitations expressing our concerns and intentions to form a citizens' water group in the Prescott area.

On July 24, 2002 a VRCA West organizational meeting was held at the Prescott College Library. About 20 people attended including Tom Petit, Bill Cherry, Tom Gilmore, George Price, ..., and Walt Anderson. Unbeknownst to me there was a faction leading the meeting that wanted to start a Political Action Group to work against the pending Mert Davis development in the Big Chino valley. We discussed our concern about current and future water issues and the various options we could follow. Since there was interest in following both courses two groups were established, one that would form a PAC and one that would pursue a citizens group.

On Aug. 1, 2002 the first meeting was held of the group that wanted to establish a citizens group to educate and advocate for sustainable water use in our area. We formed a Steering Committee to develop a water forum in Oct. to inform the public about our water issues and concerns. We continued to meet every 2 weeks to plan the forum. Along the way we changed our working name from VRCA West to Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG). Marie Price designed out logo which features

native peoples, the environment, water, and mankind. The core of the group was Tom Petit, George Price, Bill Cherry, Tom Gilmore, Lyn Chenier, Mindy Schlimgen, and Kay Lauster

On Oct. 12, 2002 "A Citizens Workshop: Local Water Trends, the Past, Present and Future of Water" was held at the Watson Lake Pavilion in Prescott, AZ for citizens interested in the responsible use of our scarce water resources. Speakers were George Howard, Warning Coordinator Meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Flagstaff; Jim Holt, Director of the Prescott office of the Arizona Department of Water Resources; Laurie Wirt, Hydrologist with the USGS Denver office; and Tom O'Halleran, State Representative for District 2. Nearly 100 people attended according to the article in the Oct. 15 Daily Courier. Members of the Verde River Citizens Alliance helped with the sound system, setting up, registration, directing traffic, refreshments and encouragement. At the end of the forum, we invited those interested to a follow up meeting.

That meeting was held the next Saturday, Oct 19, 2002 at the Granite Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation (GPUU) in Prescott. It was a bit of a free-for-all with people throwing out ideas and issues. It showed great interest and enthusiasm among Prescott area citizens. We did come together with a list of priorities:

1. Long-term sustainability of our water supply for vegetation, wildlife, and people who are already here.
2. To educate ourselves thru research, including learning what others have done,
3. In order to educate and mobilize the public on all relevant issues.
4. So as to achieve sustainability
5. By means of political action, directing our political representatives
6. Who may utilize whatever measures prove necessary, e.g., conservation, incentives, etc.?

The first meeting of CWAG was held on Nov. 9, 2002 at the GPUU. We continued to discuss possible organizational strategies. Jim Storelli chaired a group that included Kat Avina and Mary Clurman that was working on a mission statement. A Legal Committee chaired by Marilyn Petrich was set up to arrange possible agendas for future meetings and an Education Committee was set up chaired by Tom Petit.

At the Dec. 14, 2002 meeting CWAG's Vision Statement, Mission Statement and Goals and Objectives were finalized and passed unanimously.