

Join Friends of the Verde River on Saturday, June 20, 2026, at Page Springs Cellars for the Tilted Earth Festival — a celebration of Arizona wine, live music, local food, art, and community in the heart of the Verde Valley. Enjoy tastings from Arizona wineries, live entertainment, and a silent auction, all while supporting two incredible organizations: Friends of the Verde River and Yavapai Big Brothers Big Sisters. Every ticket helps strengthen our community, our environment, and future generations. Go to [tilted-earth.com](https://tilted-earth.com) for more information or to get tickets.

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Join Rachel Laura, Deputy Executive Director of Friends of the Verde River, for “Spotlight on Fireflies” on Saturday, June 6, from 1–2 PM at Willow Bend Center in Flagstaff. Discover the fascinating world of Arizona’s fireflies, including their life cycle, habitats, and the growing threats they face from habitat loss, light pollution, and changing water availability. Learn how community science and conservation efforts can help these remarkable glowing beetles thrive. This free public workshop is ideal for adults and older kids. Please register in advance to reserve your spot.

Register at <https://www.willowbendcenter.org/events/fireflies>

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Join Friends of the Verde River September 15–17, 2026, in Camp Verde for the 2026 State of the Verde Watershed Conference. This year’s theme, “One Watershed, Many Voices: Science, Policy, and People,” will bring together researchers, land managers, advocates, and community members to share knowledge and advance solutions for the Verde River. We are currently accepting abstract proposals for short presentations on topics including water quality, habitat, river health, recreation, and community engagement. Abstract submissions are due June 15, 2026. We encourage diverse voices and perspectives from across the watershed to participate in this important conversation. Go to [stateoftheverde.com](https://stateoftheverde.com) for more info or to submit your abstract.





# SUBMIT YOUR ABSTRACT!

For the State of the Verde Watershed Conference

Sept. 15-17th at Cliff Castle Casino in Camp Verde, AZ

**DEADLINE**  
**June 15th**



Learn more at  
[stateoftheverde.com](http://stateoftheverde.com)

## TOPICS INCLUDE:

- Water Quality
- Water Quantity
- Aquatic Habitat
- Riparian Habitat
- Upland Habitat
- Recreation
- Community Vitality
- Community Engagement and Education

PRESENTED BY PAGE SPRINGS CELLARS

# TILTED EARTH

WINE AND MUSIC FESTIVAL



Willow Bend Environmental Education Center  
Presents

# SPOTLIGHT ON FIREFLIES

*Discover the Science Behind Nature's Glow!*

Did you know that fireflies live right here in Arizona? Join us for a fun, family-friendly talk all about these glowing insects and the fascinating ways they communicate.



## DISCOVER

- where fireflies live
- which species can be found in Arizona
- why healthy wetlands and rivers are critical for their survival
- simple ways you can help protect their habitat



**SATURDAY**

**JUNE 6TH, 1-2 PM**



**WILLOW BEND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER**

**703 E SAWMILL RD., FLAGSTAFF AZ 86001**

[willowbendcenter.org/events/fireflies](http://willowbendcenter.org/events/fireflies)



**Friends of the  
VERDE RIVER**

*Working Collaboratively for a Healthy Verde River*

[www.coconinonationalresourceconservationdistrict.org](http://www.coconinonationalresourceconservationdistrict.org)  
Photo by Julius Schlosburg



# We Tell the Stories of the Lower Verde River

Did you know?

The Lower Verde River  
Starts Here



# Old Ditch, Modern Ways: Linda Buchanan and Al Dupuy on Strengthening the Verde Ditch Company Amid Changing Circumstances

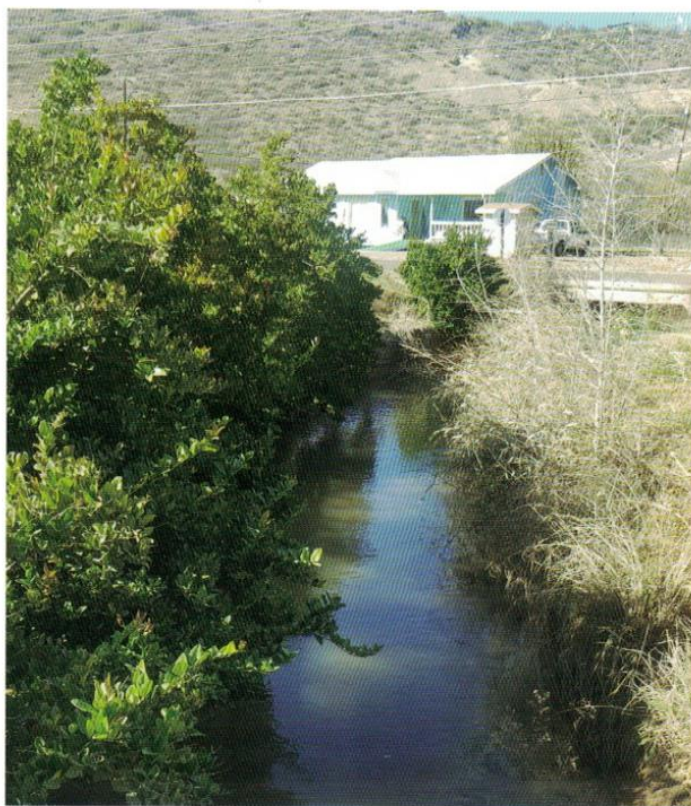
**T**he beautiful Verde River flows year-round through the heart of Arizona. Against a backdrop of changing climate conditions, water scarcity, urbanization, and growing demand, the Verde Ditch Company manages water allocation for 1,400 acres northwest of Phoenix. In addition to its namesake ditch, the company inspects, maintains, repairs, and improves the infrastructure that accompanies it, including pipes, laterals, headgates, pumps, and storm water ponds, to serve its approximately 750 customers. In this interview, Commissioners Al Dupuy and Linda Buchanan fill us in on how the more-than-150-year-old institution keeps up with changing circumstances, serving the needs of the landowning shareholders in their historic service area.

**Irrigation Leader:** Would each of you tell us about your background and how you came to be in your current position?

**Al Dupuy:** Around 2004, the ditch boss who ran the Verde Ditch Company came to my house and said, “You’re going to get a letter from the judge.” I had no idea what was going on, but I think my background in business and heavy equipment operating were factors in the Yavapai County Superior Court appointing me a commissioner and the chairman of the Verde Ditch Company about 22 years ago.

**Linda Buchanan:** I am a newcomer in the commissioner role. That said, I do have a long history in the Verde Valley. I’ve been a resident of Yavapai County since 1974. My background includes both private and public work in the nonprofit and nongovernmental organization sectors. I live on an irrigated property near the confluence of West Clear Creek and the Verde River. I also own some agricultural and residential parcels irrigated by systems other than the Verde Ditch.

As a community education coordinator at the community college over the past 25 years, I became increasingly aware of our water systems. Through that



Along its meandering 18-mile route, the Verde Ditch crosses under Interstate 17, Camp Verde’s Main Street, State Highway 260, and numerous town and Yavapai County roads, sustaining a neighborly greenbelt of historic agricultural land and today’s residential ranchettes.

work, I had the chance to meet and collaborate with different water users and administrators. When I attended the annual meeting of the Verde Ditch Company in October 2025 as a shareholder, I became aware of a vacancy on the commission.

Al, the commission chairman, encouraged me to apply for it, and I was appointed after submitting a letter of interest to the court. My initial term, which runs through 2026, is to fulfill the remainder of a vacancy.

**Irrigation Leader:** Please introduce the Verde Ditch and its history.

**Al Dupuy:** The Verde Ditch is approximately 18 miles long. About 80–85 percent of its length was built in the mid-1860s. My understanding is that when the Verde Ditch was first constructed, there were only four large farming and ranching properties being serviced. Over time, urbanization changed things. Larger farms and ranches are disappearing fast. Now, the ditch serves many more individual properties. Where I live, some people still have cattle or larger gardens. Many shareholders simply irrigate grass, trees, and ornamental plants. I’d estimate that roughly 60 percent of

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE VERDE DITCH COMPANY

the acreage comprises smaller residential lots. If a property has a cow or two or a small garden of a quarter-acre or less, it's still considered residential use.

**Linda Buchanan:** As Al mentioned, the Verde Ditch originally serviced homesteaded properties—sometimes entire sections of land. Over time, the parcels were divided into subdivisions created out of what were once ranches or farms. Water rights run appurtenant with the land, even if no crops or livestock are cared for. Formerly farmed land can be converted to residential use with an irrigation share attached to the land.

When the ditch was first established, it also served the indigenous Yavapai and Apache people with treaty status here in Camp Verde. The sovereign Yavapai–Apache Nation continues to receive Verde Ditch service today on the historically irrigated reservation within the Township of Camp Verde.

**Irrigation Leader:** What is the source of your water?

**Al Dupuy:** A dam on the Verde River diverts water into our primary ditch. From there, it's conveyed to spillway gates and an electronically controlled headgate. Typically, we take about 35–40 cubic feet per second when the ditch is running, assuming that the river can provide that.

**Irrigation Leader:** What are commonly grown crops within your service area, and what forms of irrigation are typically practiced?

**Al Dupuy:** The main crops are alfalfa and corn. There's also a commercial tree farm. For the most part, the systems used are still gravity-fed flood irrigation. Recently, the Nature Conservancy has been working with farmers to implement pressurized sprinkler or drip systems.

**Linda Buchanan:** Pecans are increasingly important here. They have a long history in the region, but some large parcels today are being converted from row or field crops to pecan orchards. Apples, apricots, onions, peppers, plums, potatoes, tomatoes, watermelon, and other popular fruits and vegetables are sold directly by small farm-to-fork producers at onsite roadside stands or local farmers' markets. As agritourism increases in Camp Verde, some production shareholders choose greenhouses, hoop houses, or hothouses for reasons of water conservation or crop protection. We also have a growing wine grape industry, with the Verde Valley recently receiving recognition as an American Viticultural Area. The water for wine grapes is almost exclusively delivered by drip systems, which use much less water than alternatives.

**Irrigation Leader:** What infrastructure does the Verde Ditch Company own and operate, and what maintenance does that require?

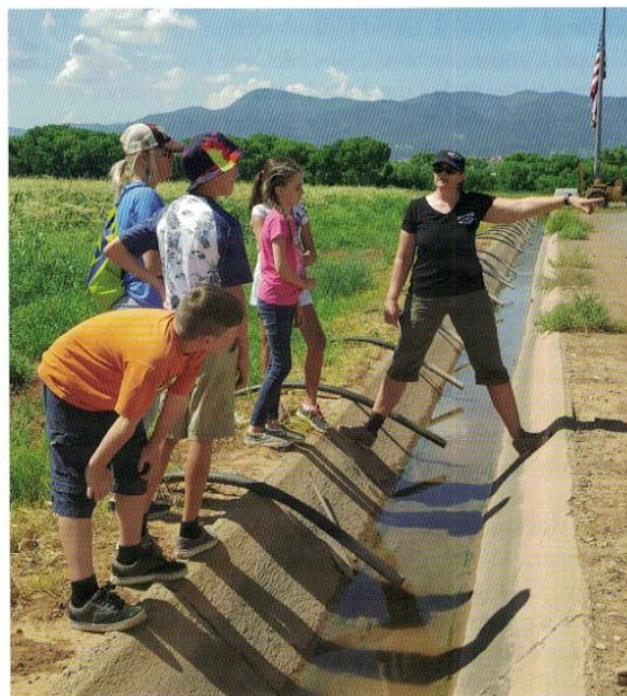
**Al Dupuy:** The first part of our ditch is the diversion dam, built decades ago. Parts of that dam are sometimes washed away or otherwise compromised. Repairing it is expensive, because we need contractors with large equipment to safely work in the river and install structures capable of diverting water effectively.

From there, water flows into the primary ditch. Floods can affect this section as well, particularly in the dry part of the river, known as *meander land*. When blowouts occur, we have to dry the ditch and repair the damage.

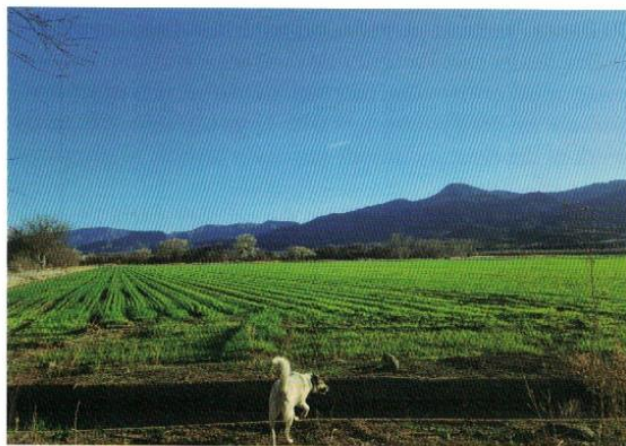
Our main headgate also requires regular maintenance. We now have a telemetry system, funded by the Nature Conservancy, which allows us to control water flow remotely using a computer or smartphone and even shut the system down in emergencies.

Downstream from the headgate, we have drop gates that are used to adjust water levels upstream to ensure shareholders get the water they need. The company is responsible for any gates in the middle of the ditch, both ditch banks, and the ditch bottom, though we do not own the surrounding property.

**Linda Buchanan:** We maintain an office in the town of Camp Verde. This is part of the court order. Shareholders may stop in to make payments, while commissioners use the office to maintain historical records and otherwise fulfill their responsibilities to shareholders. The office is also where the company payroll is managed and where much of the commission's day-to-day work is coordinated.



Camp Verde farm matriarch Claudia Hauser demonstrates irrigation techniques to schoolchildren.



Winter barley, a low-water crop, replaces high-water-use spring/summer crops such as alfalfa and corn in experimental and transitional Verde Valley ag lands.



Children in the A to Z Agriculture summer program pick sweet corn from a flood-irrigated field.

**Irrigation Leader:** How is the ditch governed?

**Al Dupuy:** We operate under rules and regulations ordered by the Yavapai County Superior Court. There are five commissioners, all court appointed, with staggered terms. Two commissioners are at large, and three are assigned to individual geographic sections. The authority of the at-large commissioners under the rules and regulations is identical to that of the commissioners who represent sections; they're just not assigned to specific sections of the ditch.

Section 1, my section, starts at the headgate—not at the river diversion—and runs to Interstate 17 (I-17), heading east-southeast. Section 2, David Hilber's section, runs from I-17 to Copper Canyon. Section 3, Jake McCune's, runs from Copper Canyon to the end of the ditch, beyond the confluence of the Verde River with West Clear Creek. Linda Buchanan and Dale DeVries serve as at-large members. If other commissioners don't align, Linda and Dale can intervene. We all strive to reconcile conflicts harmoniously.

**Linda Buchanan:** The formality of the court structure gives us a strong foundation to move substantial initiatives forward. It's a structure that is different from those of other irrigation ditches operating in the Camp Verde area.

**Irrigation Leader:** What other partners does the ditch company work with?

**Linda Buchanan:** We're fortunate to have the University of Arizona Water Resources and Research Center and the Yavapai County Cooperative Extension Office available. There's a great deal of research happening. Sometimes it's as simple as helping people understand their soil composition, which can be incredibly sandy in one part of the Verde Valley and almost clay or bentonite in another. We also work with the Verde Natural Resource

Conservation District, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Yavapai-Apache Nation.

**Irrigation Leader:** How is the company funded?

**Al Dupuy:** The Verde Ditch Company collects annual fees from shareholders. Those funds go into a general account to cover all necessary costs. Our obligation is to ensure a seasonally constant flow of water to shareholders' properties, to maintain and repair the ditch, and to carry out inspections. Our shareholders have their obligations outlined in the court-ordered rules and regulations, too.

**Linda Buchanan:** On the shareholder side, 1 acre equals 1 share. Residential parcels smaller than 1 acre still pay a full 1-acre assessment. For larger properties, shareholders pay based only on the irrigated portion of their land. Also, as Al mentioned, the Nature Conservancy covered part of the cost of efficiency conversions.

**Irrigation Leader:** What are some previous projects and infrastructure upgrades you have carried out?

**Al Dupuy:** The first pipe project we completed was Windy Point at the bottom of Chalk Hill, funded by the Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Forest Service. Heavy rains would wash material into the ditch and plug it up, requiring us to dig it all out. We converted that section from an open ditch to a pipe.

The next project was the Salt Mine Road section. The ditch was used to capture storm water runoff, which caused blowouts and flooding on Salt Mine Road and nearby properties. Piping this section eliminated that problem entirely.

The most recent project ran from Gaddis Wash to townhouses behind the Bashas' shopping center. This involved over 6,000 linear feet of 48-inch pipe. After

completing this project, I noticed a significant decrease in the amount of water required from the main headgate to service shareholder properties.

We've also completed numerous small, in-house projects. We take sections of ditch that are 20 feet wide or wider, and then use large concrete blocks, each weighing around 3,000 pounds, to narrow them down to 8–10 feet. We lay the blocks in the ditch and fill around them. This method contains water, reducing saturation and evaporation, and increases flow velocity, which provides enough head pressure to get the water to the 18th mile of the ditch.

**Irrigation Leader:** What are your priorities for 2026?

**Al Dupuy:** We recently ran into permitting issues with a pipe project, which was disappointing, but we continue to work through those challenges. Overall, our focus is on demonstrating to the Arizona Department of Water Resources that the Verde Ditch commissioners take water delivery and conservation very seriously.

Education is a top priority. Another major focus is providing help, support, and direction to users as we move into the adjudication process. Those are two key areas where Linda's extensive knowledge will be especially valuable. We have a great team now. Each of us brings our own strengths and perspectives to the work.

**Irrigation Leader:** How does the ditch company engage with the public?

**Linda Buchanan:** Part of this work involves community engagement and education. The Verde River is such a precious resource in northern Arizona, with a wild and scenic section that is truly the lifeblood of our communities. With increased residential development, invasive species have been introduced that are detrimental to the health of the river and, in turn, the health of the ditch. It's important for people to understand the connection between what they do and how that affects the river and the irrigation system.

We often hear about people's water rights. However, another part of being a stakeholder is understanding responsibilities. Over the years, I've seen real growth in that awareness. We hold an annual shareholders' meeting where topics of interest and special projects are discussed, and it's encouraging to see a shift in mindset. More people want to be a positive part of what keeps the system running and doing what's good for everyone, rather than being narrowly focused on what is theirs or getting their water first. We commissioners have a role and a responsibility in fostering a shared understanding of stewardship.

When people understand what constitutes a beneficial use of water rather than simply seeking as much water as possible at any given time, it leads to better outcomes for everyone. Communicating the practical aspects of making the best use

of land and water and how that serves the broader community represents a real niche for the Verde Ditch Company. We have an open-door, community-based approach.

**Irrigation Leader:** Is there anything you would like to add?

**Linda Buchanan:** I still have a lot to learn, but that's part of the joy of being a new commissioner—bringing a fresh perspective and welcoming others. Many people move to this area without any background in irrigation, so there's a learning curve. The history of irrigation here is fascinating, and the practical application today is just as compelling. I'm honored that *Irrigation Leader* chose to take a closer look at our work.

**Irrigation Leader:** What is your vision for the future?

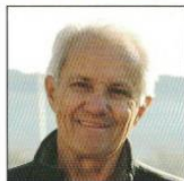
**Al Dupuy:** First, to elaborate on what Linda said, user education is one of the most effective ways to increase efficiency in water use. Second, we want to continue improving the ditch so that water flows better, evaporates less, and saturates less. Third, there are legal issues affecting all water users in Arizona. The Verde Valley is apparently next on the Maricopa County Superior Court's docket for adjudication.

**Linda Buchanan:** Camp Verde is a wonderful place to live, learn, work, play, visit, and stay. I hope that as we continue to grow and improve our own systems at the Verde Ditch Company, we can also gain recognition as a model of good practices. We already have many best practices in place. Unfortunately, there is more water allocated on paper than is actually available under current environmental conditions. There's a difference between the "dry water" written about on paper and the available volume of "wet water" that actually flows in the river and through the irrigation ditches.

To address this, we need to increase our understanding and implement the most efficient and effective practices possible. Our community must work together to adapt to this new reality. That's a big part of the work we do, and I'm excited about the future. 



*Linda Buchanan is an at-large member of the Verde Ditch Company commission. She can be reached at [verdeconfluenceconsulting@gmail.com](mailto:verdeconfluenceconsulting@gmail.com).*



*Al Dupuy is the commissioner for section 1 of the Verde Ditch Company service area. He can be reached at [verdeditch@yahoo.com](mailto:verdeditch@yahoo.com).*