

Wild Wednesday 2 September 2020

There are folks who seem to think the only important thing about the Granite Dells is the rocks (a good strategy if you want to “develop” the valleys (“dells”) and plains all around the rocks). In fact, the Granite Dells is a complex ecosystem of rugged peaks, grasslands, chaparral, pinyon-juniper, oak woodlands, creeks, and riparian areas. That’s why our vision of a Granite Dells Regional Park and Preserve keeps these diverse ecosystems intact and connected.

Today I want to celebrate grasses and grasslands. A classic view from the Peavine Trail across the valley of No-Name Creek toward Granite Mountain shows the smooth blanket of grasses that glides up to the ridge where the very important Native American archeological site is. Our original proposal put the ridge with its “ruins” in the Natural Open Space Zoning, but Arizona Eco Development (AED) has moved the line down on the slope. If that line is accepted by the City, the ruins will be destroyed, along with this view, and the valley may be subject to erosion and pollution from the hardscape of the houses.

Housing is going to destroy more of our local grasslands and prime habitat for our beloved Pronghorns and other species. We feel good that we are saving the best of the Dells from this particular development, but it will up to Yavapai County residents to assure that ample grasslands, so vital to the recharge of our limited aquifer, become protected. Our predecessors saw the grasslands as cattle feed, and this land was not incorporated into national forests, refuges, and the like. It will take vision and action to change that.

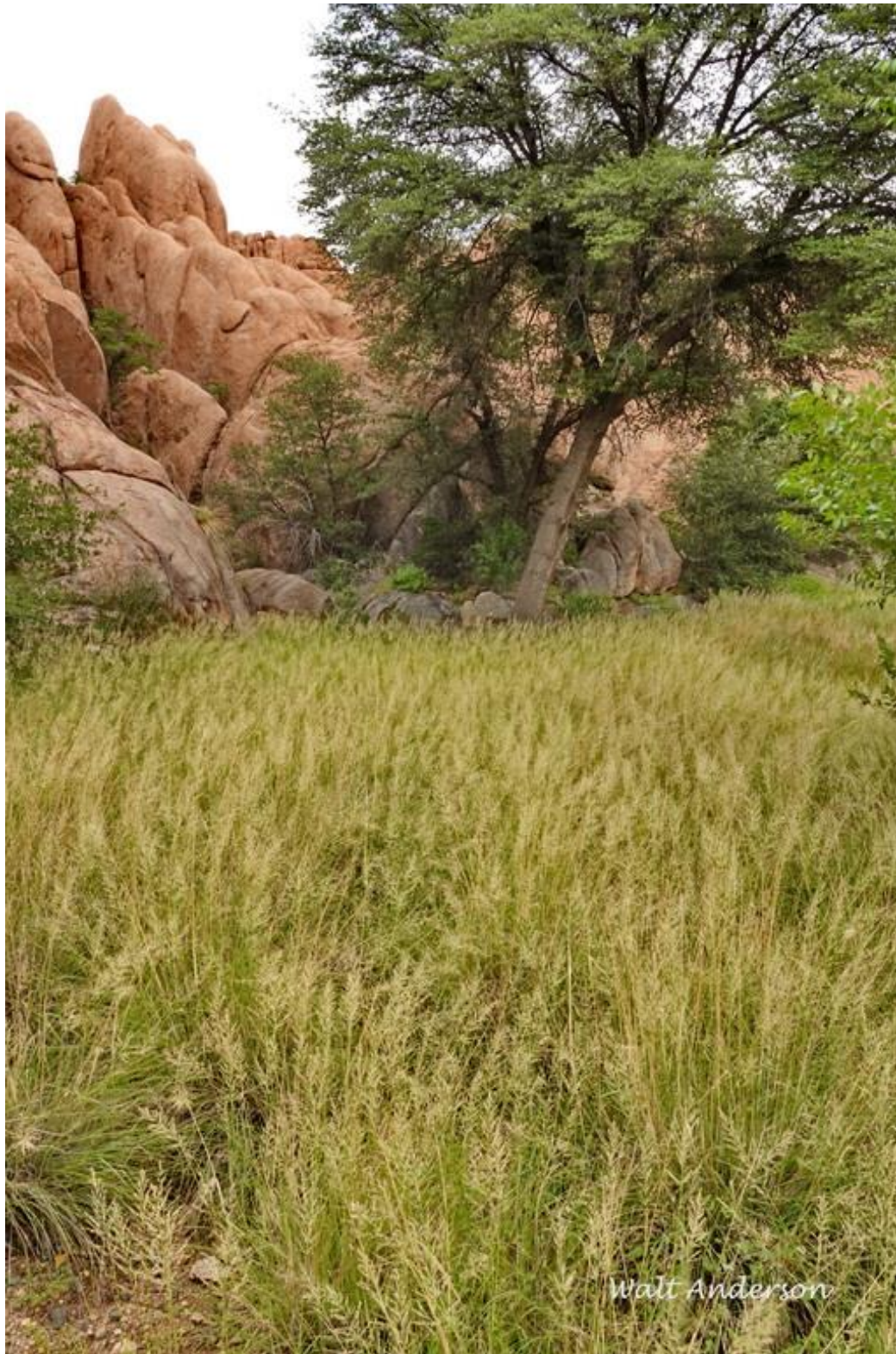
For now, I hope these images give you some additional appreciation for grasses and grasslands, part of what makes the Granite Dells ecosystem so unique, beautiful, and valuable. Please join us in our grassroots efforts to save this precious place!



The City of Prescott Planning and Zoning Commission is encouraging public participation through attending hearings in person or Zoom (next on Sept. 10). Their recommendations will then go to City Council for final decisions on the developer's plans. Your concerns expressed clearly and respectfully can make a difference.



Late-day light bathes the grassy ridge on which the archeological site exists. Saving this ridge and the Native American site would show respect for and recognition of the cultural and ecological values of this spot. It would enhance the values of the houses to be built just behind the ridge and would serve our community and our visiting tourists forever. Lost once, lost forever.



Bullgrass fills a dell near Watson Lake, where cows have been absent for quite some time. This area is of national park quality, and it is about time that we fully recognized that and took steps to create the best possible regional park and preserve.



So few areas in Arizona today show this kind of grass diversity as here in the Granite Dells.



More grass diversity amidst the 1.4 billion-year-old rocks of the Granite Dells. This beauty inspires and refreshes me.



A close relative of barley waves in the breezes. Grasses (corn, rice, wheat, barley, millet, oats, even bamboo) provide much of the plant food supporting millions of humans today, and the services of grasslands in storing carbon, feeding wildlife, preventing erosion, and filtering rain water are of inestimable value. And then there are the esthetic values. Those count too!



Squirreltail. The mature heads break off and go tumbling across the landscape, an amazing strategy for seed dispersal.



Rabbitfoot Grass is appropriately named. It often grows in wet areas, and I have seen plants tipped over by mild flooding bursting forth with hundreds of germinating seeds still in the heads.



Another wetland grass that can be super-abundant at Willow Lake as the water recedes in summer is Swamp Pricklegrass. You can see it better if you get down to the level of Killdeer or Mallard.



This Swamp Pricklegrass through pure luck germinated by itself instead of in a dense neighborhood, so it has sprawled out to extend its reach before the seeds go off to new pastures.



Deergrass thrives along creeks and in drainages with good soil. Cows chew it back to the ground, so it is such a treat to see it reach its full glory.



Cane Beardgrass is both distinctive and lovely. The seeds have parachutes to help dispersal by wind.



Three-awn (*Aristida*) backlit. If you wanted, I could go awn and awn and awn about this grass.



Autumn patterns where wind and rain have done their artistic magic with the grasses. Grasses have grace, and I'm grateful.



Tall grasses flanking Granite Creek (this would make a good painting). Too many vibrant streams in our country have been turned into drainage ditches, concrete-lined canals, sites for dumping our unwanted trash. Protection of Granite Creek, Willow Creek, and No-Name Creek will provide a legacy that future

generations can be inspired by, thereby motivated to do their part. But if this is gone, what kind of example can they follow?



Sunlight strikes the grassland as storm clouds advance during monsoon season. We don't want these views all lost to urban and suburban sprawl. Mass-grading for houses defiles an amazing, sometimes under-appreciated landscape. We should be able to do better. Lift up your voices for our wild places and wildlife. We must not sacrifice all the natural values that currently make Prescott special.