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## **Wilcox: Unfinished business with the Dells**

**Jean Wilcox, Special to the Courier**

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My last day on the Prescott City Council was Nov. 28, 2017. It was a day of mixed emotions, having to leave important decisions about Prescott's future in the hands of others.

One of the happiest moments occurred when the City Council voted unanimously to approve the purchase of 160 acres of the Sundog Ranch using Open Space sales tax money. Today, volunteers from the Over the Hill Gang are busy clearing brush and constructing a new trail system allowing public access into a remote part of the Granite Dells and connecting to trails on State Land and Glassford Hill. After years of putting acquisition of open space on the back burner, the council had finally come to understand the economic value of undeveloped land for recreation.

We are not done yet. There are still hundreds more acres in the Granite Dells that could be kept in their natural state or developed with houses, walls, gates, roads and power lines. Hundreds of acres are proposed for development ranging from commercial to varying densities of housing. The very idea of this proposal by Arizona Eco Development is alarming.

Few people have been able to venture into the heart of the Granite Dells because it is private property. It is very hard to explain why this "bunch of rocks" is worth preserving. From a distance, the Dells seem to blend into the mass of Glassford Hill. You would hardly know that deep within this area of rocks is an amazing, truly unique natural area. The Dells are the only place where this billion-year-old formation surfaces. Hidden in these canyons are wild creatures large and small, clear water and lush green growth. What lies beyond the existing roads and the Peavine Trail remains to be discovered and experienced.

If this land is developed, there will be no public access, no opportunity for future generations to discover the hidden natural wonders, and no way to see how these rocks shaped Yavapai history. Archaeological treasures will be disturbed or destroyed, obliterating yet another part of the early Pai people's history. The children of our future will never get to experience this wilderness in the middle of their growing cities. They will lose that place of quiet solitude so close to home that gives them perspective in the frenzy of the modern world.

Today, the Peavine Trail is the one access into a sense of wilderness that everyone who can walk or ride on wheels can enjoy, whether on a bicycle, in a baby stroller or a wheelchair. For a brief few miles, mothers pushing their strollers and holding the hand of their toddlers can see nothing but granite rocks, trees, and sky. What a tragedy it would be if all that were obscured by block walls built by the housing developments on both sides of the Peavine Trail.

We cannot be done yet. We must Save the Dells! For our children, and their children, and their children...

Jean Wilcox is a former Prescott City Councilwoman and candidate for mayor last year