

Save the Dells Position on Proposed Sundog Connector

Save the Dells started as the grassroots effort of Prescott area residents committed to preserving the iconic Granite Dells landscape as permanently protected public open space for the benefit of wildlife, for our quality of life, and for a sustainable economy.

The Sundog Connector is a proposed highway on the southwest shoulder of Glassford Hill, connecting Highway 89 in Prescott to Highway 69 in Prescott Valley. Its alleged purpose is to relieve traffic congestion on Highway 69 and provide faster travel between Prescott and Prescott Valley. Central Yavapai Metropolitan Planning Organization (CYMPO) acknowledged in the 2013 Sundog Connector Corridor Study Report that responses from the public “suggested strong support for a ‘no-build’ alternative.” Why is this project still moving forward in the face of past and current public opposition?

This is no place for a road. A full regional solution should be sought instead. We understand that a no-build alternative does not eliminate planning the Sundog Connector for a later date. **Therefore, we oppose any plans for building any roads within the proposed Sundog Corridor now or in the future.**

Save the Dells opposes the building of the Sundog Connector for the following reasons:

1. The 2013 Sundog Connector Corridor Study benchmarks have not been met.

- The 2013 study recommends a population increase to 232,700, State Route 69 widening, traffic studies, and other improvements before the next steps toward the Sundog Corridor would advance. These benchmarks have not been met.
- From this study, the recommended projected year to re-examine the route is 2032.

2. The Sundog Connector would be a major barrier to safe wildlife movement.

- History suggests that the Sundog Connector would not be constructed any more wisely with respect to wildlife corridors than previous projects. For example, State Route 69 has absolutely zero intentional wildlife-corridor crossings; this has led to many serious deer-car collisions. We think potential funding for protecting wildlife should be channeled to State Route 69 widening and improvement instead of building yet another barrier.
- Grassland bird, mammal, reptile, and plant species already under stress from other mass-grading and road building will decline if the Sundog Connector is constructed.

3. The impact of building and presence of the Sundog Connector would negatively affect the Granite Dells Regional Park and Preserve.

- Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Yavapai County have signed an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) to purchase Arizona State Trust Lands located on Glassford Hill for the Granite Dells Regional Park and Preserve. The Sundog Connector would make those lands much easier to develop, creating the potential for developers to outbid the IGA entities.
- Grading, scarring, destruction of habitat, disruption of wildlife movements, and negative visual and noise effects are unacceptable in this area of the park and preserve.
- Ecotourism is a growth industry that brings economic benefit to the area. The proposed connector is incompatible with ecotourism in that part of the park and preserve.
- Any aspect of the Regional Park and Preserve, such as trailhead access, should not be used as a pretext for putting in a new highway.

4. The building of the Sundog Connector would exacerbate the already serious situation of growth and development endangering our water security.

Water

- Building the Connector would introduce the potential for the construction of an estimated 4000 homes with associated water needs.
- Water usage needs to be carefully managed with respect to contamination and the protection of water resources and our aquifers for the future as outlined in the 2022 Prescott Water Resources Policy.
- Due to the massive amounts of excavation and grading, water drainage will be very difficult to manage in a way that does not impact the adjacent landscape.

Growth and development

- Growth beyond resource capacity is unacceptable.
- We oppose the use of taxpayer funds (local, state, and/or federal) to promote private development made possible through building the Sundog Connector.
- We oppose the damage to ecosystems and viewscape resulting from scarring and grading because of building the Connector and any related potential development.
- The identified area of population expansion is in North Prescott. That's where transportation enhancements should be prioritized, as it would benefit Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley.

5. The benefits of the connector related to reduced traffic congestion are inflated.

- Any potential improvement in travel time between Prescott and Prescott Valley would be temporary, negated soon by higher traffic on the Connector, because of the possible development of lands on Glassford Hill.
- Building the Connector would do nothing to relieve traffic on the most congested part of State Route 69, which is farther toward Prescott Valley.
- State Route 69 problems cited as justification for the Connector can be addressed by improved signal-management, lane expansion, and revised traffic management with a throughway and frontage road crossings.

6. Businesses on the State Route 69 corridor will experience reduced traffic.

- The Sundog Connector would bypass an important City of Prescott and Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe economic corridor on State Route 69.

7. Funding and taxation will fall upon the citizens of Prescott.

- The proposed 1.5 miles of two-lane road through the South Storm subdivision is outside of CYMPO's responsibility. However, the Sundog Connector is predicted to be expanded to four lanes plus a median and turning lanes. Prescott taxpayers would be responsible to pay for the widening and maintenance of the new four-lane section.
- We support fiscal responsibility; seeking government grants for unreasonable, unpopular projects is a bad idea.
- Taxpayers will bear the impact of any road expansion and maintenance.

8. The Sundog Connector would negatively impact our quality of life and economic development.

- It would be another blemish on our attractive urban area and give yet another bad first impression to visitors.
- Presence of the Sundog Connector with its lighting would further sabotage our potential for achieving “Dark Sky City” status as aspired to in the current (2015) City of Prescott General Plan.
- We support healing of hillside and hilltop construction scars, not the creation of more.

Bottom line: The negative impacts of the Sundog Connector far outweigh its speculated benefits. Rather than building the Sundog Connector, Save the Dells supports completing State Route 69 widening and improvements and developing mass transit and other creative options that better suit the community and more sustainably address long-term traffic and safety issues. Access to the regional park and preserve can be better managed with a local, non-commercial, limited-access road that does not destroy the very land intended to be preserved.

THIS IS NO PLACE FOR A ROAD

Not everything that *can* be built *should* be built.