

Fields: Save the Dells - Leaving a legacy of our own

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Since Save the Dells publicly launched its campaign in January 2018, the community has burst out in a passionate and timely conversation about open space, wildlife corridors, property rights and government accountability.

As our organization approaches its third birthday, I'd like to take credit for this, but really, we owe it to you. Thank you to the public for voicing your perspectives and to elected officials for paying attention.

Just like we planned, we've brought land conservation front and center into civic life and municipal governance. Teddy Roosevelt would be proud.

President Roosevelt's actions led to the creation of many of the beloved public lands where Americans go to hike, bike, camp, sightsee, hunt, and relax. He left us a legacy we can all appreciate.

Likewise, the people of Prescott — past councils, city staff, and passionate citizen activists — have built a legacy of open space surrounding the Granite Dells that we love and appreciate.

With more than 1,000 acres of undeveloped land in the Dells facing an imminent threat of development — including much of the scenic backdrops to Willow and Watson lakes — it is time our current City Council members consider their legacy too.

At the June 11 Republican Women of Prescott Forum, a sitting council member said, "Today we stand on the shoulders of giants that have done wonderful things in our community in regard to preserving wonderful land."

These remarks are just one of a number of recent examples of the City of Prescott promoting its past and current efforts to preserve valued open spaces, especially in the Granite Dells.

The city's promotion of past open space acquisitions made its debut on March 26 when city staff presented a detailed accounting to the City Council. An hour later, council members voted to reject a resolution endorsing Save the Dells' official position that the city should negotiate for 500 acres of preserved Dells land as part of Arizona Eco Development's annexation.

We appreciate the good work that has been done, but it seems apparent to me that the city is actively pushing a PR campaign to highlight past successes.

I hope this heightened interest in conserved land is sincere celebration and not intended to sooth the black eye that might come if they approve AED's proposal to cross the Iron King Trail and the Peavine National Recreation Trail and build an exclusive resort that could be gated off to the general public.

Reading between the lines, one takeaway is that we have enough open space already. In fact, Councilman Steve Blair has openly stated that. And Mayor Greg Mengarelli's recent Talk of the Town (May 29) celebrates how fortunate we are to have access to so many popular outdoor activities. The mayor's remarks at the Republican Women's Forum echo this, as he stated that we mustn't "give all this private property away, because that's important for our economic activity."

But how fortunate will we be when our city grows to our projected population of 80,000? And when the Quad Cities metro area hits a quarter-million? These are real numbers that our planners are striving for.

The time is now to pursue the open space that our future citizens will need if we are to stay such an attractive and livable community. If we are to double our population, why wouldn't we double our open space?

Creating a Granite Dells Regional Park and Preserve requires real money, real negotiations, and real commitment. But relying on others' legacies, and standing on others' shoulders, isn't enough to get us there.

Amber Fields, a Prescott native and Whiskey Row business owner, is chairperson of Save the Dells.