

FORMATION OF THE ARIZONA RIPARIAN COUNCIL: AN EXAMPLE OF LASTING PUBLIC INTEREST IN RIPARIAN RESOURCES¹

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Abstract: The increasing responses to symposia devoted to riparian resources in the past decade have created a need to channel this enthusiasm into a permanent organization. The Arizona Riparian Council was formally organized in October 1986 to provide an annual forum for local coordination of management and research activities. In addition, the Council draws support from individuals representing management agencies, conservation groups, research institutions, and user groups. The importance of forming such local or regional groups is facilitating better communication on the local level, which may lead to greater advocacy of protecting riparian resources on a national level based on grass-roots support.

The 1970's and 1980's have been a time of dramatically increased interest in riparian resources. This interest can be attributed to a need for more information for proper management of these resources or an increase in public knowledge of an ecosystem that is becoming endangered throughout the United States as well as the world.

This desire for more information on riparian resources has resulted in a continuing flow of workshops, symposia and conferences on the topic (Johnson and Jones 1977, Warner and Hendrix 1984, Johnson and others 1985, Kusler and Riexinger 1986, Savannah River Ecology Lab. 1986, Patten 1987, Society of Wetland Scientists 1987). This conference, on California riparian systems, is just one example of such a meeting, but it is unusual in that it follows up a successful conference held in the early 1980's (Warner and Hendrix 1984). All of these conferences have one goal, in addition to that of information transfer or exchange of ideas, which is to bring together a cross section of those interested in riparian resources to work toward a common goal of preserving riparian systems.

Most of these conferences are attended by individuals from a broad geographical region. These conferences result in a short term exchange of ideas and a proceedings that is useful to those working on riparian systems, but which soon becomes outdated. Therefore, continual interaction of those interested in riparian resources

is needed, as well as integration of ideas, concerns, activities, research, and outreach and education programs. This need was the impetus behind the development of the Arizona Riparian Council, a group with a limited geographical scope and thus common goals.

Formation of the Council

The Arizona Riparian Council was conceived at the First North American Riparian Conference held in Tucson in April 1985. An informal meeting was held to determine the potential for creating a State-wide riparian advocacy group that would address the issues facing management, conservation, use, and research of riparian areas in Arizona. The meeting was attended primarily by resource managers and academic researchers; however, these individuals also represented, in part, some of the conservation organizations and riparian users within the State. That meeting demonstrated a great deal of interest in establishing a grass-roots organization within Arizona. The information presented at the conference (Johnson and others 1985) showed that riparian areas within Arizona and the Southwest were at a critical state, and either an effort was needed to protect them through basic management and legal means supported by information from research, or degradation of those riparian areas would increase. It is estimated that only 10 to 15 percent of the lower elevational riparian areas in Arizona remain, and only a small percentage of all riparian areas in the State are not drastically disturbed.

After the Tucson meeting, inquiries were sent to interested individuals within the State to determine their commitment to organizing a council and to identify critical issues and concerns. The issues that were identified were grouped into major categories that have been used as part of the organizational structure of the Council: water resources and instream flow, inventory and classification, protection and enhancement, land use, education, and institutional arrangements and policy.

In November 1985, the first organizational meeting of the Arizona Riparian Council was held in Phoenix. This meeting was used to select the first interim officers of the Council and to have initial meetings of the committees that would make up the working component of

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the Council. The committees were based on the categories identified above. Over 50 individuals attended this meeting. Again, they represented primarily management agencies and academia; however, conservation organizations such as the Audubon Society and Sierra Club were also present. These organizations were interested in getting involved in an organization that might help develop needed information on riparian resources, which could be used in an advocacy position for appropriate riparian management and developing legislation for riparian conservation.

The constitution and bylaws of the Council were developed before the first annual meeting of the Council in October 1986. This was the first official meeting of the Arizona Riparian Council. Riparian was generously defined in the constitution to encompass all areas of concern: "The term 'riparian' is intended to include vegetation, habitats, or ecosystems that are associated with bodies of water (streams or lakes) or are dependent on the existence of perennial or ephemeral surface or subsurface water drainage" (page 1, Constitution and Bylaws of the Arizona Riparian Council).

The objectives of the Arizona Riparian Council, as stated in its constitution and bylaws, are:

1. To stimulate and support studies in all phases of ecology, management and protection, and related intrinsic values of riparian systems;
2. To provide a clearinghouse of information among all agencies, organizations, and individuals engaged in work on riparian systems through appointment of work committees, preparation of bibliographies and abstracts, and related methods;
3. To function in an advisory capacity on questions involving management, conservation, and protection of riparian systems, and to adopt such measures as shall tend to ensure the continued survival and maintenance of riparian systems;
4. To establish programs whereby the public is made aware of the importance or proper management and protection of riparian systems; and
5. To publish symposium proceedings and transactions of meetings in order to present current information on problems relating to the preservation of riparian systems and to commend outstanding action by the public and professionally engaged individuals supporting the purposes of the Council."

The themes of these objectives were taken, in part, from the Constitution of the Desert Fishes Council, a much older organization with similar conservation goals.

Activities of the Council

The Arizona Riparian Council is functioning through three different levels of its organization: Executive Committee, Steering Committee and Standing Committees. The Steering Committee, composed of the volunteer chairs of the standing committees, has become the guiding group for the Council as a whole. This committee develops directions for the Council, plans themes and programs for the Council's annual meetings and addresses letters of concern on riparian management decisions and policies to appropriate State or Federal agencies. Input to the Executive and Steering Committees, which together function as the administrative body of the Council, comes from the activities of the Standing Committees. Some of the activities of the standing committees are presented as examples of the importance of these committees toward achievement of the goals of the Council.

The *Classification and Inventory Committee* has developed a hierarchical, open-ended, and digitized riparian classification system which gives users the flexibility to aggregate or disaggregate information, add new elements as knowledge is refined, and organize riparian information into computerized databases. Representatives of this committee have met with Federal and State agency personnel to attempt to create a uniform riparian classification system for Arizona, that might be used throughout the Southwest and perhaps North America.

The *Water Resources Committee* has been working with the Arizona Department of Water Resources to help develop methodologies for evaluating requests for instream flow rights by land management agencies and private landowners.

The *Education Committee* produces the Council's quarterly newsletter. It is also preparing a slide show on the importance of riparian areas for use in the Arizona school systems and at other public gatherings. The Education Committee, with State and Federal agencies and other conservation education organizations, has cosponsored successful riparian workshops for teachers.

The *Land Use Committee* is compiling a list of wildlife or livestock related research projects in the State and is soliciting information on wildlife and livestock riparian management practices to share with riparian managers.

The *Protection and Enhancement Committee* is developing an annotated bibliography of papers and publications dealing primarily with riparian protection, reestablishment and mitigation. This bibliography should be available in early 1989.

The *Policy and Issues Committee* has taken the position that it should work toward advocacy of positions

developed by other committees. It has asked the other committees to develop brief policy statements for it to work from.

Annual meetings of the Arizona Riparian Council are based on a general theme, which is covered in the plenary sessions, and also offer a day of technical papers covering new information developed from management and scientific research within the State. In this way, both lay people and scientists learn and share at the meetings.

The first annual meeting held in Flagstaff reviewed some of the riparian issues within the State, including legal aspects of instream flow and directions of riparian management of the National Forests within Arizona. The emphasis of the second meeting held in Wickenburg, Arizona was to bring together organizations with similar goals of riparian conservation. These included The Arizona Nature Conservancy and the Commission on Arizona Environment. Future meetings will bring together users of riparian systems to develop a dialogue between them and the Council.

Membership

Membership in the Arizona Riparian Council is open to all those interested in the objectives of the Council. In spring 1988, membership was nearly 400. Individuals are from backgrounds as diverse as ecology, wildlife management, hydrology, botany, education, conservation, water development, range management, and environmental law. Although the general public is represented in the membership, to strengthen the grass-roots support of the Council membership is encouraged from user groups such as ORV clubs, rafting clubs, ranchers, and the sand and gravel industry. Without these user groups, the Council represents only those who either study, manage or wish to preserve riparian habitat. Interaction, although vastly improved since formation of the council, still can be better.

Outlook

The Arizona Riparian Council should continue to grow and develop new programs as its committees and education program become more successful in their outreach efforts. As issues are identified and positions taken by the Council, a greater advocacy effort is planned towards developing legislation and management policies

that will ensure wise use or protection of the limited riparian areas in Arizona. An all-out effort will be made to work with riparian management agencies, legislators, and user groups to develop policies and activities that will offer long-term appreciation for healthy and vigorous riparian habitats in the State. When this is achieved, the Arizona Riparian Council will have fulfilled its objectives. Meanwhile, the improved communication due to the Arizona Riparian Council may lead to greater grass-roots advocacy of riparian protection on a national level.

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