

# 2017 ANNUAL REPORT



*Friends of the Rio de Flag's mission is to promote the Rio de Flag's natural stream system as a unique and valuable natural resource, an asset, and amenity to the City of Flagstaff and the surrounding community.*



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR LETTER

In 2014 I was in the middle of working towards a Master's degree in Environmental Sciences & Policy at Northern Arizona University when I received funding to do an internship. I chose to intern locally as a way to become better connected to my community. Three years later, I continue my work with the Friends of the Rio de Flag, serving a second AmeriCorps VISTA term, a position that is shared with my dear colleagues at the City of Flagstaff Sustainability Section.

The Friends of the Rio de Flag (FoRio) Board of Directors has made enormous strides over the past three years. In early 2015, the Board determined one key focus for the coming years: watershed planning. This focus took flight when a subcommittee of Board members spent months working together to identify a list of goals for improving and maintaining watershed health.

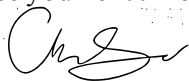
The Board then reached out to City of Flagstaff and Coconino County staff in an effort to make one organization's vision into a community-based watershed planning process. With funds from an Arizona Community Foundation grant, the Board has further built these relationships. We also released a survey with the City and County to gain input from Flagstaff area residents which will be used to inform watershed planning.

In July, we received an EPA Environmental Justice Small grant. These funds will allow us to work with the City of Flagstaff, Southside Community Association, and others to gather input on the Rio de Flag from residents in the Southside Neighborhood. This is a critical piece in watershed planning due to the issues of periodic flooding affecting these residents.

We also hope that the EPA EJ grant can strengthen our relationship with Southside Neighborhood residents. The Friends of the Rio de Flag formed in late 2007 in opposition to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Flood Control project which will underground some sections of the Rio de Flag (opposed by FoRio), but will remove Southside residents from the dangers of flooding. In opposing the Flood Control project, the Friends unintentionally became an adversary against our own neighbors who face the dangers and challenges of periodic flooding. The current Board, through broadening the organization's focus to encompass the entire watershed, hopes to work together with the City of Flagstaff, Southside residents, and others to ensure that environmental justice and human safety be key elements of watershed planning.

I would like to conclude by expressing my deep gratitude to every volunteer, teacher, student, colleague, and collaborator who has contributed to the progress of this organization. Without your spirit and will, we could not have made it to where we are today. Finally, I want to thank the Board of Directors who dedicate endless hours to this organization, and personally support me in my every needs, even sending me down the Colorado to better understand how our local Rio de Flag watershed fits within the larger Colorado River watershed.

See you next time along the Rio,



Chelsea Silva, Executive Director



Chelsea Silva, Executive Director  
(AmeriCorps VISTA)

Cover: Hikers gather around at the I-40 wetlands in August for Northern Arizona University's Dr. Paul Beier's presentation; p. 3 middle and bottom photos - *E.coli* sample under black light after processing and *E.coli* training attendees at Natural Channel Designs (NCD) [left to right: Chris Tressler, NCD; Mark Wirtanen, NCD; Oren Thomas, Prescott Creeks; Jake Fleishman, NCD; Chelsea Silva, Friends of the Rio de Flag; Meghan Smart, ADEQ; and Jake Breedlove, ADEQ], and; Frances Short Pond with San Francisco peaks behind; p. 4 top, clouds above Logan's Crossing; bottom left, *E.coli* processing mat and machine; Back cover: Hiking through Sinclair Canyon during August free hike.

## 2017 BY THE NUMBERS:

# 3,300+

## INDIVIDUALS

reached through our website,  
listserv, and social media



Hikers head towards Leroux Springs  
at the July 2017 Friends of the Rio  
free hike.



Funtown Summer Circus Camp  
celebrates a successful  
morning cleaning up Sinclair  
Canyon in July.

# 500+

## HOURS

spent by volunteers removing  
trash, eradicating invasive weeds,  
and collecting citizen science data

# 467

## PEOPLE

educated through tabling  
events, conferences, public  
meetings, and Rio cleanups

# 450+

## YOUTH

engaged through the  
Adopt-the-Rio de Flag  
Stewardship program



Chelsea Silva points out  
features within the  
Rio de Flag watershed  
at Earth Day 2017.



# 2017 HIGHLIGHTS

## WATERSHED PLANNING

Degraded riparian areas, channel instability, wildfire, flood control, and other human and naturally-related watershed issues threaten the health of the Rio de Flag. Climate change and increasing water demands are expected to put further pressure on water resources provided by the Rio de Flag watershed. With the goal of addressing these challenges, Friends of the Rio de Flag proposed the formation of a core team for watershed planning of the Rio de Flag in early 2017. This team is comprised of City of Flagstaff and Coconino County staff as well as Board members with the Friends of the Rio.

After many meetings, the team came together in September 2017 to begin formal steps towards watershed planning. Recognizing the need for public input on the Rio de Flag, the team created an online watershed survey to better understand people's experiences the Rio de Flag. The team also determined a need for additional funds to support more public input and coordination of watershed planning. As a result, Friends of the Rio has identified and will apply for several sources of funding available in the 2018 fiscal year.

A watershed plan for the Rio de Flag will give City and County leadership a tool for taking action to address watershed issues in the



**City of Flagstaff Listening Session on the composite channel design for the Rio de Flag Flood Control Project with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**

Flagstaff area. A plan will also help bridge communication across organizations and entities in order to strengthen our collective capacity to ensure the health of the Rio de Flag watershed for the benefit of future generations.

Stay tuned in 2018 as we seek further input from the community on your priorities related to watershed planning.





## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND THE SOUTHSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD

In the early 1900s, the Rio de Flag was rerouted through the Southside Neighborhood to make way for business and development, mostly north of the tracks. This diversion of flow from the natural channel into a manmade, undersized channel led to the removal of natural stream meanders and the narrowing of riparian areas along the main Rio de Flag river stem. Periodic flooding has since affected the quality of life and property values for residents in the Southside Neighborhood.

Due to the historic evolution of communities in Flagstaff, and the practice of segregating people of color in certain parts of town, the history of floodplain management and diversion takes on a racialized element with residents living in the Southside Neighborhood being disproportionately impacted by flooding and the economic, environmental, and health challenges that flooding poses for the community.

Recognizing the environmental justice issue faced by Southside residents due to flooding of the Rio de Flag, Friends of the Rio applied for an EPA



### DID YOU KNOW?

The Friends of the Rio de Flag was formed in 2007 (incorporated in 2010) in response to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and City of Flagstaff (COF) Rio de Flag Flood Control Project.

The purpose of the project is to reduce damages and economic losses of a major flood event by containing the 100-year flood within the proposed improvements. FoRio opposed components of the project design which included undergrounding sections of the Rio de Flag.

FoRio has spent the ten years since its formation broadening its focus to the entire watershed with an emphasis on restoration and preservation for the benefit of people and nature. As part of this, the Board of Directors will seek input from membership on an updated position statement for the Flood Control Project that includes a pledge to support the project for its flood control benefits. The statement will be available on our website in Jan. 2018.



June 2016 Rio de Flag flood in Southside

Environmental Justice Small grant in early 2017 and was subsequently awarded a grant in July. This grant will allow Friends of the Rio to engage the Southside Neighborhood through listening forums, field trips, and public meetings with the intent of gathering input from residents in order to plan for the future of the Rio de Flag flowing through the neighborhood.

We are thankful to the EPA for providing this opportunity to learn from our neighbors and together plan for the future of our waterways.

### ADOPT-THE-RIO AND CITIZEN SCIENCE

Strong runoff events push trash, debris, and polluted runoff into our local waterways. Making matters worse, invasive weeds choke out native plants in the Rio de Flag thereby diminishing habitat critical to local wildlife.

The Adopt-the-Rio de Flag Stewardship program aims to give school children the opportunity to give back to their community while learning about their watershed. Still in the pilot phase, this program includes lessons on the Rio de Flag and supplies for doing Rio cleanups.

This year, we partnered with the Department of Environmental Quality through their Arizona Water Watch program to bring citizen science to the Adopt program. In November, 140 biology students from Flagstaff High measured water properties and took *E.coli* samples at Frances Short Pond.

We look forward to expanding this program to give local students real world experience in the STEM fields.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS

Richard Miller, *President*

Deb Noel, *Vice President*

Tom Bean, *Treasurer*

Malcolm Alter, *Director*

Bryan Bates, *Director*

Mayor Coral Evans, *Ex-officio Director*

Kathy Flaccus, *Director*

Hannah Griscom, *Director*

Allen Haden, *Director*

*Board Members and Officers serve for three-year terms in these volunteer positions.*



Chelsea Silva, Coral Evans, and Kathy Flaccus catch up after the Mayor's presentation to membership.

## STAFF

Chelsea Silva, *Executive Director*  
(AmeriCorps VISTA)

Matthew Muchna, *Environmental Justice*  
*Outreach and Education Project Manager*

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## VOLUNTEERS AND GUEST SPEAKERS

We are grateful for the many hours of service to our organization and the community provided by the following groups and individuals. Your dedication to the Rio de Flag is very much appreciated.

### **VOLUNTEERS**

Brittain Davis, filmmaker

FunTown Summer Camp 2017 youth

Geoff Kie, NAU Master's student

Ian Harrison

Jack Welch, Walk the Walk Lead

Loren and Joyce Cunningham, CPA

Shannon Knudsen, Opportunity123

Tom Bean Photography

### **SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING IN ADOPT-THE-RIO**

Flagstaff High School (Mrs. Lenz' Biology Students)

Flagstaff Junior Academy

Kinsey Inquiry & Discovery School

Knoles Elementary School

Sinagua Middle School (Service Club)

### **GUEST SPEAKERS (by month)**

Coral Evans, City of Flagstaff Mayor (Jan)

Hannah Griscom, AZ Game and Fish (Feb)

Charles Hammersley, NAU (Mar)

Neil Cobb, NAU (May)

James Guidotti, Coconino County Public Works (June)

Shannon Clark, retired Forest Service (July)

Paul Beier, NAU (Aug)

Kieran Sikdar, Watershed Management Group (Sept)

James Duval, City of Flagstaff (Nov)

Rick Tadder, City of Flagstaff (Nov)

# FINANCIAL REPORT

Friends of the Rio de Flag Treasurers Report - January 1, 2017 to December 1, 2017

<b>Bank Balance Jan. 1, 2017</b>	5,347.42
Dedicated grant funds	<u>-3,000.00</u>
Available operating funds	<b>\$ 2,347.42</b>

<b>Bank Balance Dec. 1, 2017</b>	6,730.60
Dedicated grant funds	<u>-4297.45</u>
Available operating funds	<b>\$ 2,433.15</b>

## General Operating Expenses

Meeting room rental	-65.10
Website	-299.40
PO Box	-86.00
Banking fees	-27.76
Special event expenses	-74.00
Printing & copying	<u>-462.71</u>
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>-\$ 1,014.97</b>

## General Operating Donations

Individual membership donations	719.70
BioBlitz 2016 funds	<u>+ 300.00</u>
<b>Total Operating Donations</b>	<b>\$ 1,100.70</b>

## Grants, VISTA member and STEM Program

Arizona Community Foundation Grant 2016	3,000.00
Total expenditures 2017	<u>- 0.00</u>
Remaining funds	\$3,000.00
Coconino Master Gardeners Association Grant	487.00
Total expenditures	<u>- 377.99</u>
Remaining funds	\$109.01
EPA: Environmental Justice Grant 2017 funding	2,408.11
Total expenditures	<u>2,408.11</u>
Remaining funds	\$ 0.00

## VISTA Member and STEM program support

Direct individual donations for VISTA	1,671.50
GoFundMe Campaign donations for VISTA	<u>2,823.45</u>
Total VISTA Donations	4,494.95
Total Expenses for VISTA member	<u>-3,306.51</u>
Remaining funds for VISTA STEM support	<b>\$ 1,188.44</b>





## FRIENDS OF THE RIO DE FLAG

P.O. Box 151

Flagstaff, AZ 86002



[deflagrio@gmail.com](mailto:deflagrio@gmail.com)



[facebook.com/Friends-of-the-Rio-de-Flag-209983621989/](https://facebook.com/Friends-of-the-Rio-de-Flag-209983621989/)

*The Friends of the Rio de Flag is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose goal is to protect, restore, clean up and improve the Rio de Flag and its tributaries to maximize their beauty, educational, recreational, and natural resource values, including the riparian habitats they provide.*



[www.friendsoftheriodeflag.org](http://www.friendsoftheriodeflag.org)