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## Prescott Creeks group works to improve water quality

**By Cindy Barks**

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PRESCOTT - With two of its major bodies of water appearing on a list of "impaired waters," the Prescott area has some water-quality issues to deal with.

That was apparent during a presentation to the [Prescott City Council](#) Tuesday by Michael Byrd, executive director of the Prescott Creeks Preservation Association.

Byrd, who was updating the council on the organization's 2008 creeks agenda, pointed out that Watson Lake and Granite Creek both made it on a recent U.S. Environmental Protection Agency list of impaired waters.

The 2004 list for Arizona, which includes dozens of lakes, rivers and creeks all over the state, notes that Watson Lake made the list because of elevated levels of nitrogen, dissolved oxygen, and pH. Granite Creek, which feeds Watson Lake, is on the list because of dissolved oxygen.

Byrd emphasized that a number of issues likely contribute to the problem.

"It's not a site-specific issue; it's happening all over the watershed," Byrd said.

In fact, when Councilman Jim Lamerson questioned him about the specific causes of the problem, Byrd responded: "There are too many potential sources to list today."

Everything from overflowing manholes, failing septic systems, and storm runoff could be contributing to the existing conditions, Byrd said.

For that reason, he maintained that solving the problems would require a "broad coordinated effort."

That is where organizations such as Prescott Creeks come in. Byrd said the organization recently received state grants totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars to - among other things - help restore Watson Woods.

"Because Granite Creek is the main waterway running through Watson Woods, any restoration work we do (on the woods) will ultimately benefit water quality," Byrd said.

For years, the Prescott Creeks organization has managed the Watson Woods Riparian Preserve, the forested area that runs along Granite Creek just south of Watson Lake, between Highway 89 and the Peavine Trail.

Byrd and the Prescott Creeks staff and board members have undertaken a number of projects to restore and re-vegetate the once-pristine woods area. The group also works on general water-quality issues in other local creeks.

For instance, on Wednesday, Prescott Creeks' Watershed Program Coordinator Ann-Marie Benz was touring the area with Susan Fitch, lakes program coordinator for the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, to test the water in the local creeks.

Fitch explained that while the "nutrient issues" in Watson Lake date back to about the 1980s, the lake more

recently made it on the 2004 list of impaired waters. An updated 2006 list is still in draft form, Fitch said, but she believes the two Prescott-area waters will remain on the new list.

"I've been monitoring Watson Lake since 2001, and I don't see any difference (in water quality)," she said.

The high levels of nitrogen, dissolved oxygen and pH can cause problems for the aquatic life in the lake, Fitch said.

Part of the work by the ADEQ and groups such as Prescott Creeks will be to determine how to reverse the impairment of the water.

"We will try to figure out how to ratchet back to where we need to be," Fitch said.

Along with the state grant money, Byrd noted that Prescott Creeks also received \$12,500 from the [City of Prescott](#) in the current fiscal year.

On Tuesday, Mayor [Jack Wilson](#) expressed support for the work at Watson Woods. "It's bucolic; it's unbelievable," he said of the woods, which are open to the public.

Contact the reporter at [cbarks@prescottaz.com](mailto:cbarks@prescottaz.com)

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