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Hundreds help clean Granite Creek in Prescott

By STAN BINDELL, For the Courier
Apr 18, 2026



Phil Taska, right puts his best foot forward for the cleanup at Granite Creek. (Stan Bindell/For the Courier)

About 500 community members turned out on Saturday to clean up 50 locations of Granite Creek.

Prescott Creeks sponsored the cleanup for its 19th year, but the cleanup has been going since the 1980s when it was created by Prescott Beautiful.

The difference this year is that Michael Byrd, executive director of Prescott Creeks, missed the cleanup for the first time in almost 20 years due to personal reasons..

Phil Taska, crew leader for Prescott Creeks, took over for the day. The average turnout for the past 19 years has been 475, but the good weather with mild wind made for a strong turnout this year.

Taska said Byrd created the process where the main volunteers know what to do. Taska also praised Yavapai Exceptional Industries for putting together the cleanup bags with gloves that all the volunteers were using.

Taska said it was a great day, with all the volunteers pitching together to cleanup the creeks. He said the weather was perfect, and the blowing pollen made it look like It was snowing.

“This benefits the entire community,” he said. “It allows the environment to function better.”

Tasca noted that over the last 19 years that the cleanup has picked up more than 55 tons of trash. He estimated that they would pick up about one and a half tons this year.

Taska said there were about 40 sponsors this year with Findlay Subaru Auto and Unisoruce as the premier sponsors.

Chelsea Rousseau, representing Subaru, said it was her first year attending the cleanup She said it was good to see people of all ages coming out for the cleanup from children to seniors.

Taska said the obvious goal is to clean up the trash from the creeks which the city will pickup on Monday. The trash is buttoned up and closed with bungee cords so the trash doesn’t fall out.

“This does not happen without city support,” he said.

Matt Killeen, environmental program manager for the City of Prescott, was on site to help coordinate the work. He has been helping for about 10 years.

“I support the Granite Creeks cleanup because it connects people to the creeks. It gives people more of a sense of ownership of the creeks. There are a lot of enthusiastic participants,” he said.

The volunteers are putting trash in bags so if there is something in the creek like a mattress, that is too big to fit into a trash bag, Killeen will note where it is so the city can pick it up.

This is a great service for the community,” he said.

Killeen said Prescott has 13 creeks that feed into the two lakes, and it helps to hear what people are saying about the water since either ADEQ or EPA has found that the water is below standards in 14 locations in Prescott Creeks.

“By cleaning up the trash, people are improving the water quality,” he said.

Dave Bremsen, one of the volunteers, said it was good that the cleanup was cleaning up the streams.

“It makes for a healthy environment,” he said.

Colin Rhode, a 14 year old volunteer, said he came out for the cleanup because he loves nature. Rhode, a student at Tri City Prep, said it was good to see the water running.

Prescott Councilman Ted Gambogi was serving as a volunteer and picking up trash while he walked his dog Max.

“I come from back East where there is so much more trash. Prescott is so clean, but there have been some mistakes. I like to get out and cleanup what I can,” he said.

Connecting with people is important

Taska said another goal that is equally important is connecting with the people in the community in a meaningful way. He said there are 13 creeks or tributaries in Prescott, and people come out to clean them up so they can make the community better.

“We’ve been seeing the trash decreasing over the years. Less trash is making its way into the creeks,” he said.

All ages help out

The event brought out people of all ages.

Aside from praising the sponsors, Taska said the city of Prescott and Yavapai County played important roles. He said the city picks up the trash from the receptacles Monday morning before its normal trash runs. Yavapai County’s Geographic Information Science Department supplied maps so people knew where to go and where to park at the 50 cleanup locations along the creek.

The home base for the event was Granite Creek Park.

Prescott Creeks’ mission is to protect healthy watersheds for people and wildlife.

The cleanup also gives Prescott Creeks a chance to tell the volunteers about their other activities protecting the creeks, especially the Watson Woods riparian area.

During the past year, Prescott Creeks has been focusing most of its work on the Watson Wood Riparian Preserve as they are clearing out non native species.

“Watson Woods is a special place with cottonwoods, willows and spring flow,” he said.

Watson Woods is current 126 acres but Prescott Creeks is working on obtaining a conservation easement from the city that would expand it and protect it forever. Improvements may include repairing riparian areas and planting more milkweed since Watson Woods is a monarch way station.

Byrd is available to speak to groups about Prescott Creeks. For more information, telephone Byrd at 928-445-5669 or email info@prescottcreeks.org.