

TRUSTED LOCAL NEWS LEADER FOR PRESCOTT
AREA COMMUNITIES SINCE 1882

FRI,
OCT.
23

WEATHER
56.0 

SUBSCRIBER
SERVICES

CONTACT NEWS
US TIPS



New Miller Creek-area restrooms aim to improve water quality, human dignity

E. coli pollution at Miller Creek could subside



Prescott Creeks Executive Director Michael Byrd, left, and Arizona Department of Environmental Quality Project Manager Elizabeth Boettcher, right, talk about the results of a public restroom that was installed near Miller Creek in 2019 in an effort to improve water quality in the creek. The two met on Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2020, to close out the grant process that helped to pay for the project. (Cindy Barks/Courier)



By Cindy Barks |  Cindy_Barks

Originally Published: October 22, 2020 7:48 p.m.

Share

Tweet



Located not far from the banks of Miller Creek in the middle of Prescott, a new grant-funded restroom has provided not just an environmental benefit, but a human-dignity aspect as well.

That point was emphasized this week during a meeting between representatives of the parties involved in the 2019 installation of the restroom at the Coalition for Compassion and Justice (CCJ) shelter on Miller Valley Road.

It has now been more than a year since the Prescott Creeks organization partnered with CCJ, the City of Prescott, and the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality to install a new precast concrete public bathroom on CCJ land, just steps from Miller Creek and the Greenways Trail that runs along it.

The grant contract is set to end on Oct. 31, and this week's meeting was intended to close out the process.



A new public restroom located along Miller Creek at the Coalition for Compassion and Justice facility on Miller Valley Road has been used regularly over the past year or so by users of the Greenways Trail along the creek. The goal of the restroom was to improve water quality in the creek by providing restroom option in the area. (Cindy Barks/Courier)

Elizabeth Boettcher, Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) project manager of the Water Quality Improvement Grant, was on hand on Tuesday, Oct. 20, as was Prescott Creeks Executive Director Michael Byrd, CCJ Executive Director Jessi Hans, Prescott Environmental Coordinator Matt Killeen, and Butte Creek Restoration Council President Nick Balik.

IMPROVED WATER QUALITY

With Prescott's creeks and lakes largely exceeding acceptable and safe levels for E. coli pollution, a primary goal of the restroom project was to improve the water quality Miller Creek.

And early results indicate that that is occurring, say the organizers.

Every day, the restrooms are used an average of 35 times.

Byrd pointed out that the overall concept of the restroom was that "we know that that section of the creek was being used by people who didn't have access to a restroom."

The creek has suffered because of it. For years, Miller Creek has been among the area waterways listed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and ADEQ as “impaired” or polluted.

The main identified pollutant: E.coli, a fecal coliform bacteria that indicates the presence of sewage or human/animal waste contamination.

The restroom project aimed to provide a convenient, clean option.

Although water-quality sampling has been somewhat hampered this year because of the drought, and resulting lack of water in the creek, Balik said early results showed that “exceedances” of the E.coli levels were down.

HUMAN DIGNITY

Hans noted that along with the water-quality benefits, the restroom had improved the human aspect in the area as well.

Among the goals of CCJ, she said, “Making sure people had a dignified place to use the bathroom.”

Since the opening of the restroom in the spring of 2019, the facility has been used nearly 14,000 times – for an average of about 35 times a day.

CCJ maintains the restroom, cleaning it every morning. Hans said the facility is used often by residents of the CCJ shelter, as well as by users of the recreational trail and by delivery people who pass by on Miller Valley Road.

It became especially important during the COVID-19 shutdown in the spring of 2020, when city parks restrooms were mostly shut down. Hans said CCJ opted to keep its restroom open, disinfecting it regularly. “We saw this as an absolute need,” she said.

‘STEPPING STONE’ TOWARD CREEK IMPROVEMENTS

As the restroom planning was underway, Killeen said it helped to highlight the need for more improvements along Prescott’s waterways.

Since then, he said, “There has been a big focus on the downtown corridor (of Granite and Miller creeks).”

“It was a natural stepping stone,” Killeen said of the ongoing process that included the Miller Creek restroom.

In addition, the city plans to begin a project soon to replace aging sewer lines in the area. Killeen said the project is a part of the city's larger wastewater centralization project.

"It is all part of the comprehensive vision and plan," he said.

STATEWIDE EFFORT

Boettcher said the Miller Creek restroom is one of a number of similar projects that ADEQ has helped to fund in the state.

Three such restrooms have been installed in Clifton, Arizona, in recreational area along the San Francisco River, as well as along Oak Creek in the Sedona area.

The objective is to reduce or mitigate "nonpoint source pollution," Boettcher said.

The ADEQ grant for the Miller Creek project totaled \$126,000. It required a 40% local match, and Byrd said the entire project came in at about \$200,000. The match included a \$10,000 contribution from the City of Prescott, as well as volunteer in-kind contributions.

Follow Cindy Barks on Twitter @Cindy_Barks. Reach her at 928-445-3333, ext. 2034, or cbarks@prescottaz.com.

Sign up for our e-News Alerts