

Towards an Understanding of Rural Water: Perceptions and Micro-Politics in Cottonwood, Arizona

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Cottonwood is a small but rapidly growing rural city with a social geography of water that connects it to the surrounding Verde Valley and beyond. It is ideal for study due to its economic and social diversity and proximity to areas currently undergoing major water controversies.

General Demographic Information

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

	Population 2004	Med. Household Income	Median age	Percent in Poverty	% Growth 1990 - 2004
Yavapai County	190,737	\$34,901	44.5	11.9%	77%
Cottonwood	10,424	\$27,444	41.0	13.5%	76%

This study represents a **preliminary look at issues of water and growth from the standpoint of Cottonwood City, with a focus on regional interconnectivity and diverse perspectives.**



Side of building in Cottonwood depicts community value of the Verde River.

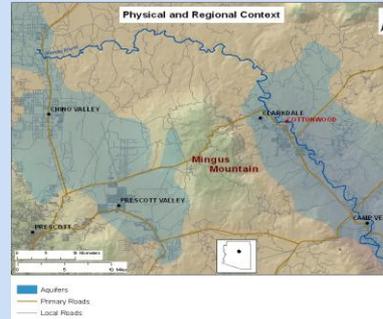
Through formal and informal interviews as well as observation at water related community meetings, several themes have emerged as central to understanding water on the community scale. The topics identified here will serve as a basis for further study in this area.

Regional context

- Big Chino project
- Verde River listed as one of "10 most endangered rivers"
- Laws that allow and promote unregulated growth
- Groundwater depletion
- Water as private property

Local responses

- Recent switch to municipal water with subsequent price increase
- Attempts to limit uncontrolled growth and subdivisions
- Active involvement of water groups in regional politics



Views on place based politics

"The Eastern counties won't let the rest of Arizona support more stringent development standards."

-Citizen addressing government official at Verde River Basin Partnership Forum

"Why are we at war between the two sides of the mountain? We are not at war."

-Government official, addressing a crowd at the Verde River partnership Forum

Views about the Verde River

"The future condition of the river represents how successful we are. A healthy economy and private property rights are useless if there's no water!"

-Cottonwood City Council member addressing audience at Verde River Basin Partnership Forum

"The reason this valley's so beautiful...that's the result of man's management for at least the last 150 years..."

-Local water manager in formal interview

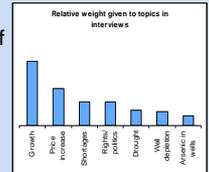
"Obviously there's water in the river, so it's not all used up!"

-Government official, Verde River Basin Partnership Forum

Local responses to informal interviews

"What are your thoughts on water issues?"

23 people were randomly approached at two different sites in Cottonwood, as part of a short, informal interview to see what topics were brought up first, indicating prominence. Growth was unequivocally connected with shortages, price, and well depletion.



Selected quotes on Growth

"Growth is good for the town but not good for the public"

- Cottonwood resident

"I'm glad they didn't lock the doors before I got here."

- Verde Village resident

Additional topics mentioned:

- Big Chino project
- Laws/golf courses
- Wasted water
- General groundwater depletion
- Dirty/bad taste



Mountain View development currently underway in nearby Clarkdale

Directions for future research

- What are the specific ideological frameworks of varying groups involved in water issues?
- How do different members of the community perceive "good growth" versus "bad growth"?
- Ground truthing vulnerability analysis: How is social vulnerability played out in this specific location?

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