



the Gila River Cleanup Project

Project History

In the spring of 2005, Neil Karnes, the Graham County Health Department contacted us asking for assistance with a landowner who had a big problem. The landowner, Jay Colvin, a local farmer whose family has lived in the valley for many decades, had an ongoing illegal dumping problem.

The Colvins did not initiate or condone the dumping, but they were being held responsible for it. And they were facing pressure from ADEQ, EPA, and the Graham County Health Department to clean it up.

The dumping may have been initiated by people who did not want to pay for dumping at the landfill, or who just felt the Colvin farm was a more convenient place to dump their trash. The dumping may also have been encouraged by the sight of portions of the cabled – together vehicles that were placed on the river bank to control erosion. Studies have shown that any visible debris encourages more illegal dumping. Even

though the vehicles were not debris, it may have helped cause the dumping.

Some people have suggested that the vehicles should be removed or that they should never have been placed there in the first place. However, this was an accepted and approved practice for erosion control up until just a few years ago. In addition, the vehicles may not now be removed without an engineering study and a plan to remove the vehicles and restabilize the river bank. The cost for this could exceed over a million dollars, and there are an estimated 5,000 vehicles along the Gila River in the county. It is unrealistic to address the vehicles at this time.

The Colvin's do not have the ability to fence off all of their property, as their farm covers a large area. Fencing their

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property, while allowing free access to the county's roads, would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, and make their farming operation much more difficult.

The Grant Application

The Gila Watershed Partnership agreed with Graham County to assist the landowner by writing an ADEQ Water Quality Improvement Grant. The grant application included funding for the cleanup and funds for an education and outreach campaign to reduce additional illegal dumping in the community.



One of the "before" photos

Graham County agreed to an in-kind match by providing roll-off bins that would be delivered to the site, and taken to the Safford landfill to be emptied when full. The City of Safford agreed to provide reduced-rate landfill fees as an in-kind match. In addition, the landowner agreed to provide his labor and funds to a portion of his employees' salaries, as well as use of his heavy equipment, and fuel for the project. The grant funding we requested was \$110,500, with a match of \$82,100, totaling \$192,600.

The grant was awarded in the summer of 2005, and our work began. We found that we were not required to apply for a 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the

project, as the work would be done outside of the active channel of the river. If any debris needed to be removed from the river, it would be done by hand, so that no equipment would enter the river channel. ADEQ agreed that we could add that funding to expand our education and outreach efforts.

The Project Begins

The landowner was so eager to start the project, that he began the work before the grant contract was signed. Unfortunately, his costs for that portion of the work could not be reimbursed, nor could it be toward the required match. He was doing a great job of cleaning up the debris, but we told him to stop until the contract was signed.

Once the contract was signed, the work began in earnest. The tires were separated out for removal to the landfill. Any appliances that needed to have doors removed, or need special treatment at the landfill, were separated. A pile was made of the scrap metal that can be recycled.



One of the "after" photos. Notice the berm at left, concealing any part of the cable-together vehicles.

The first quarter of the clean up moved very fast, as the debris on the ground adjacent to the river could be removed with heavy equipment, and loaded on flat bed trucks or dumped into bins. The second phase took a very long time, as the trash had

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to be removed either by hand or by attaching cables to it in the river, and pulled out slowly.

As the project continued, all of the debris had to be removed by hand, which was very laborious. As the trash piles had been reduced, there was new debris underneath, with a few surprises. There were a lot more tires than we originally thought. The landowner removed more than 1,500 tires. The large tires took the longest time. They had to be moved with large equipment to a flat area, where the rims had to be removed manually. Apparently, it was a difficult and time-consuming job.

We asked ADEQ to allow us to create dirt berms next to the river along the road to hide the portions of the cabled-together vehicles. We wanted to do this, as many times during the clean-up process, the landowner found new dumping when he came back to the area in the morning. We felt that the sight of the vehicles was encouraging people to dump there.



Mel Taylor, our ADEQ community liaison reviewing the project progress with the landowner, Jay Colvin

The landowner placed the berms along the edge of the road. It was incredibly tedious, but Mr. Colvin and his employees and family removed all of the trash that it is possible to remove. In addition they removed all appliances, tires, and recyclable metal parts, and took them to the local recycling company.



The outdoor board that we created featured Safford Mayor Ron Green and County Supervisor Drew John

Let's Talk
Illegal dumping
community and
our water.

Funded by a grant from the United States Agency and the Arizona Department of

Education and Outreach Efforts

An important component of the project was our education and outreach campaign. We completed a newspaper campaign, which ran in two flights, one in the middle of the grant – in spring of 2007, and one near the end – in spring of 2009.

The outdoor board we placed ran from the spring of 2007 until spring of 2009. It featured Ron Green, the mayor of Safford, and Drew John, one of the Graham County Supervisors. It really helped the clean-up effort to have them publicly support stopping illegal dumping.

We included stuffers in the City of Safford utility bills in the fall of 2008, which was inserted by the City of Safford as an in-kind match for the grant.

Project Outcomes

One of the most troublesome aspects of the project is that we were not able to get accurate “before” and “after” photos. Because Mr. Colvin started his work before the contract was signed, part of the work was done before we took our “before” pictures. However, we took photos along

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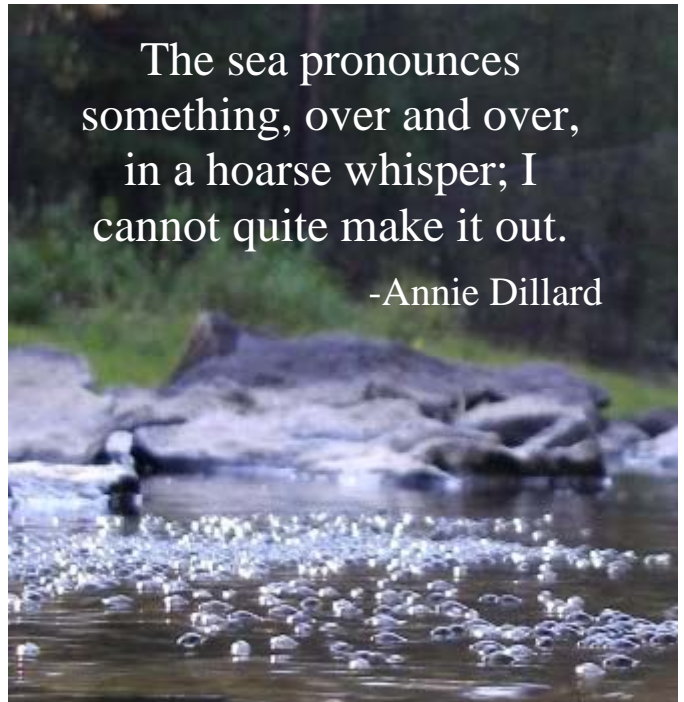
the entire stretch of the project, and it looks wonderful. The berms really help to ensure that no parts of the cabled-together vehicles are visible. The landowner hand cleaned up all vehicle parts that were visible that could possibly be removed.

The landowner did a commendable job and should be congratulated. Mr. Colvin donated tens of thousands of dollars of both in cash and in-kind match in the form of his labor, fuel, and his equipment. In addition, he had to fit all of the work in around his already-impossible farming operation schedule.

Our thanks also go out to the City of Safford and Graham County who supplied in-kind match for the project. We also want to thank Mel Taylor, the local ADEQ representative, who was an enormous help in getting the project completed.

The sea pronounces
something, over and over,
in a hoarse whisper; I
cannot quite make it out.

-Annie Dillard



Calendar of Events

Wednesday, May 13, 2009,
5:30 p.m.

May's meeting will be held at
the Graham County General
Services Building, 921
Thatcher Blvd., Safford,
Arizona

Our partners include:

Arizona Department of Agriculture	Discovery Park
Arizona Department of Environmental Quality	Farm Bureau
Arizona Department of Transportation	Graham County
Arizona Department of Water Resources	Greenlee County
Arizona Game and Fish Department	Gila Valley Irrigation District
Arizona Geological Survey	Natural Resource Conservation Service
Arizona State Land Department	Phelps Dodge Mining Company
Bureau of Land Management	University of Arizona
City of Safford	Cooperative Extension
Town of Thatcher	University of Arizona NEMO Project
Town of Pima	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Town of Duncan	U.S. Forest Service – Apache
The Coronado RC&D	Sitgreaves and Coronado Forests
Gila Valley NRCD	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
	And many community members

Get involved in your watershed

For more information, contact Jan Holder at the Gila Watershed Partnership,
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