



INTRODUCTION

Adopted in 1997, *Eye to the Future 2020*, the Maricopa County Comprehensive Plan, requires an update of all County area plans to help ensure consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. The *Rio Verde Foothills Area Plan* is an update of the 1979 *Desert Foothills Policy and Development Guide*. The *Rio Verde Foothills Area Plan* reflects updated information and citizen issues; new demographic information; Growing Smarter and Growing Smarter plus requirements; and land use, boundary, and annexation changes. While the 1979 plan encompassed 323 square miles in the northeast part of Maricopa County, the updated plan excludes communities that have incorporated since 1979, and focuses on 20 square miles of unincorporated Maricopa County lands remaining north of McDowell Mountain Park and east of the City of Scottsdale. The plan also includes an Issue Identification section, and an Agenda for Action that identifies specific measures to implement the plan.

Plan Organization

This document presents the results of the update process for the Rio Verde Foothills planning area. It is organized to follow the Maricopa County Comprehensive Plan guidelines, and includes the following seven sections:

Introduction: Describes how the plan is organized, how it should be used, a brief history of the planning area, and an overview of the area plan process in Maricopa County.

Inventory and Analysis: Analyzes existing conditions in the Rio Verde Foothills planning area. Plan elements are based in part on information contained in this section.

Issue Identification: Summarizes important land use and planning issues raised by planning area residents. Key issues were condensed from a survey that was distributed at a public workshop, through the Maricopa County website, and via community newsletters.

Plan Elements: Defines specific goals, objectives, and policies that guide growth and development in the Rio Verde Foothills planning area.

Action Plan: Outlines how the Rio Verde Foothills Area Plan will be implemented through specific strategies and programs.



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Amending the Plan: Specifies the process for changing this Plan. By design, plans are flexible documents that can adapt to changing conditions. The amendment process highlights this and will facilitate the plan's evolution.

Appendix: Contains a glossary of terms, a list of acronyms, and other supporting documents.

This area plan identifies goals, objectives, and policies for land use, transportation, environment, and economic development. In addition, per the state-enacted Growing Smarter and Growing Smarter Plus laws, the plan includes elements for open space, water resources, environmental impacts, growth areas, and cost of development.

Update Process

The Rio Verde Foothills Area Plan reflects current citizen issues; population increases; Growing Smarter requirements; and land use, boundary, and annexation changes. Maricopa County updates this and other area plans using the most recent Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) population projections, Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) projections, and U.S. Census data. Moreover, the boundaries of each Area Plan are evaluated to determine if changes are necessary. As each plan is completed, it is considered at public hearings before the Planning and Zoning Commission and Board of Supervisors.

How to Use the Plan

Each plan element contains a series of goals, objectives, and policies that define development standards, help formulate public policy, and guide public investment. In this way, this plan serves as a decision making guide for the Planning and Zoning Commission and Board of Supervisors concerning growth and development. In addition to assisting public policy makers, it also helps private individuals and businesses make informed resource and investment decisions.

History of the Rio Verde Foothills Region

The following history of the region is drawn largely from local historian Robert Mason^{1, 2}, Frances Carlson³, and several websites providing historical background on Indian tribes and the region.

¹ Mason, Robert, *Our Desert Oasis*, Schuster Co., Inc., Scottsdale, AZ, 1999 (4th ed.)

² Mason, Robert, *Verde Valley Lore*, published by author, Rio Verde, AZ, 1997

³ Carlson, Francis, *Cave Creek and Carefree, Arizona – A History of the Desert Foothills*, Encanto Press, Scottsdale, AZ, 1988



From about 400 to 1450 AD, it is believed that many Indian tribes, now collectively referred to as the Hohokam, populated the lower Verde River valley. The river valley and surrounding land provided fertile alluvial soil, water, many species of wildlife, and mountains and plateaus that were suitable for summer living. For centuries, the lower Verde valley remained a major thoroughfare of the Southwest. Evidence has been uncovered that indicates a large variety of encampments existed in the region. Most were located one-quarter mile or more from the river and generally on the west side, in the Tonto Verde / Rio Verde area. Pottery sherds, manos (hand-held grinders), metates (grinding stones), and artifacts (arrowheads, shell ornaments, and stone tools) have been found in the area. Based on the widespread occurrence of trash mounds, fire pits, irrigation ditches, and five ball courts, archaeologists believe that a significant city existed during the middle part of this period.

Sometime after 1450, the Hohokam people left this area for undetermined reasons. Sometime later, Yavapai and Apache Indians, two distinct tribes, began moving into central and western Arizona. These native peoples hunted deer, mountain sheep, and pronghorn antelope. They gathered seasonal berries, seeds, and fruit; cultivated corn, squash, and beans; and harvested wild tobacco.⁴ It wasn't until the end of the 1500s that they encountered the first Anglo Spanish explorers. In the 1820s, a few American mountain men, such as Kit Carson and Bill Williams, came to trap beaver on the Salt and Verde rivers. They did not stay long, because they were driven out by the hostile Apaches.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, the U.S. Army established Camp (later Fort) McDowell, the first Anglo settlement in the Salt River Valley. In 1872 and 1873, military campaigns vanquished the Apaches in central Arizona. In 1875, it was decided to move the Yavapai and Apache to the San Carlos Reservation, east of Globe. Ninety people died during this two-week trek. By 1900, the tribe that once numbered about 6,000 people, had diminished to about 1,000. In the early 1900s, they were moved to Fort McDowell, which was given the designation of an Indian reservation. This site is now known as the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation and is governed by a Tribal Council that is elected by tribal members.

A military trail, often referred to as the "Stoneman Route" or "Whiskey Bottle Trail," connected Fort McDowell with Fort Whipple in Prescott. Still evident, this old trail crosses the southwest corner of the planning area.

In the early 1880s and again in the mid-1890s, a severe drought occurred in the region which was already being over-grazed. During this period, wells went dry, springs slowed to a trickle, creeks dried up, and cattle died. Cattle owners leased

⁴ www.yavapai-apache-nation.com



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thousands of acres from the government for grazing purposes, as there was no privately owned land in this area through the early 1900s. The Tonto National Forest was established in 1908, which established new government rules and changed the region's cattle business forever. Grazing allotments were issued by authorities, and for the first time cattlemen began to fence their ranges. Ranchers without well-watered ranges for their cattle began to leave in the early 1900s. When the rains finally came in torrents near the turn of the century, severe erosion resulted. In 1880, it took only five acres to sustain one brood cow.⁵ By 1900, the rangeland could carry only one per 20 acres. Today, the required acreage per brood cow in rangeland is 64, and in certain areas grazing rights are limited to 120 acres per animal.

In 1903, E.O. Brown and his family began purchasing land at the base of the McDowell Mountains, and started shipping cattle to California in 1910.⁶ The amount of land he and his son, E.E. "Brownie", owned or leased eventually grew to 43,000 acres. In 1916, he moved his cattle to a ranch in the McDowell Mountain area and continued to drive cattle through Scottsdale south and west to the railroad in Phoenix, where they were shipped to Midwest terminal markets. Brownie took over ranch operations after the death of his father in 1937. At that time, the ranch extended from Bell Road to north of Dynamite and from Pima Road east to the McDowells (at one point, to the Verde River). Brownie and Kemper Marley, a wealthy rancher and liquor distributor, became partners in the ranch operation. By piping water from the spring in the McDowells, they were able to run over 4,000 head of cattle. During this time, several wells were dug and windmills were built to pump the water, while pipes were installed to transport this water to holding tanks. With the advent of automobiles and trucks, most cattle drives ended. Land that Brownie owned was split up between his heirs and eventually purchased by Kemper Marley, and later sold to developers.

Pemberton Ranch (P-Bar ranch) was another sizable ranch in this area. The P-Bar had its early headquarters near the center of what is now McDowell Mountain Regional Park, approximately four miles south of the Jomax Road alignment. Geological survey maps dated as early as 1919 name the ranch site. A park trail passing near the site is designated as the Pemberton Trail. In 1985, a cowboy who began working on the Box Bar Ranch in 1917 told local historian Robert Mason that Box Bar had the nicest ranch house location but the Pemberton Ranch had the best water. He said the Pemberton Ranch well was artesian, with water forced nearly to the surface by underground pressure. In the 1930s a new owner acquired the P-Bar ranch. At this time the ranch included a three-room house, a 600-gallon water tank for domestic use, and a 24,000-gallon steel tank for livestock watering. The

⁵ Brood cow is a female cow used for breeding and raising young.

⁶ www.scenicdrive.org/dcranch.htm, *The Story of the Original DC Ranch* by Don Schoenau



early ranch utilized about 32,000 acres. In the 1940s a new well was drilled on the present Fountain Hills High School grounds and later became the P-Bar Ranch headquarters. In the late 1960s McCulloch Oil Corporation (MCO) bought the P-Bar Ranch to develop Fountain Hills.

Doc Cavalliere, owner of Reata Pass Steakhouse and Greasewood Flats, related some history of the area in the May 1998 issue of *A Peek at the Peak*, the newsletter of the Greater Pinnacle Peak Homeowners' Association:

“In the early days the entire area was ranch land. The largest ranch was owned by Brownie and his sons. Their grandfather had homesteaded some 27 sections of land or over 17,000 acres. This was possible because Brownie ran a water line from a spring in the McDowells . . . After the Second World War, several families homesteaded along Pinnacle Peak Road, but eventually left because of lack of water. Nothing really developed in the North area, until Jerry Nelson hit water at his well on Pinnacle Peak [Road]...”⁷

Although much of the rangeland has been fenced since 1900, the “open range” practice still exists today. Residents and visitors in Rio Verde and the planning area must always be cautious when driving on Rio Verde Drive and McDowell Mountain Road, both for livestock and deer.

The construction of Bartlett Dam and Horseshoe Dam on the Verde River brought busy times to the region. In 1946, electricity and telephones were brought into the Cave Creek area. On May 11, 1965, the 1,000 acres constituting the original Rio Verde property officially passed from national forest land to private ownership. In return, the federal government obtained privately owned land deep within the Coconino and Sitgreaves National Forest. In 1971, the original land plan for Rio Verde was completed for 869 acres. In 1972, Rio Verde Development Inc. paid for a large part of grading and paving Rio Verde Drive and Forest Road.

All of the land within the study area was once part of the Tonto National Forest. Beginning in 1960 and continuing through 1971, land exchanges resulted in the planning area passing into private ownership. However, development in the area remained confined to the Rio Verde development master plan until the 1980s. In the planning area west of Rio Verde, an average of one home per year appeared from 1980 to 1989. Between 1990 and 1995, a total of 26 homes were built; and by the end of 2000, there were a total of 330 homes. While it took 20 years to reach 330 homes, the last three years (2001-2003) added approximately 400 additional homes to the growing unincorporated Rio Verde Foothills area.

⁷ www.scenicdrive.org/docstory.htm



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Despite the rapid pace of growth, the Rio Verde Foothills planning area, illustrated in **Figure 1: Planning Area**, remains primarily a rural residential, equestrian, and ranching community. Since there is no farmland in this area, new homes are being built on undeveloped desert land. With rapid growth outside of the urban area comes certain benefits, such as an opportunity to buy large parcels of undeveloped land, and to build a home in a quiet, rural area. However, growth and development also create potential problems, including the urbanization of rural and Sonoran desert areas, increasing cost of servicing scattered development, and increasing air pollution. The Rio Verde Foothills Area Plan helps address these problems by enhancing cooperation between government agencies, citizens, and other affected interests, and by considering regional implications.

Planning History

Desert Foothills Policy and Development Guide (1979)

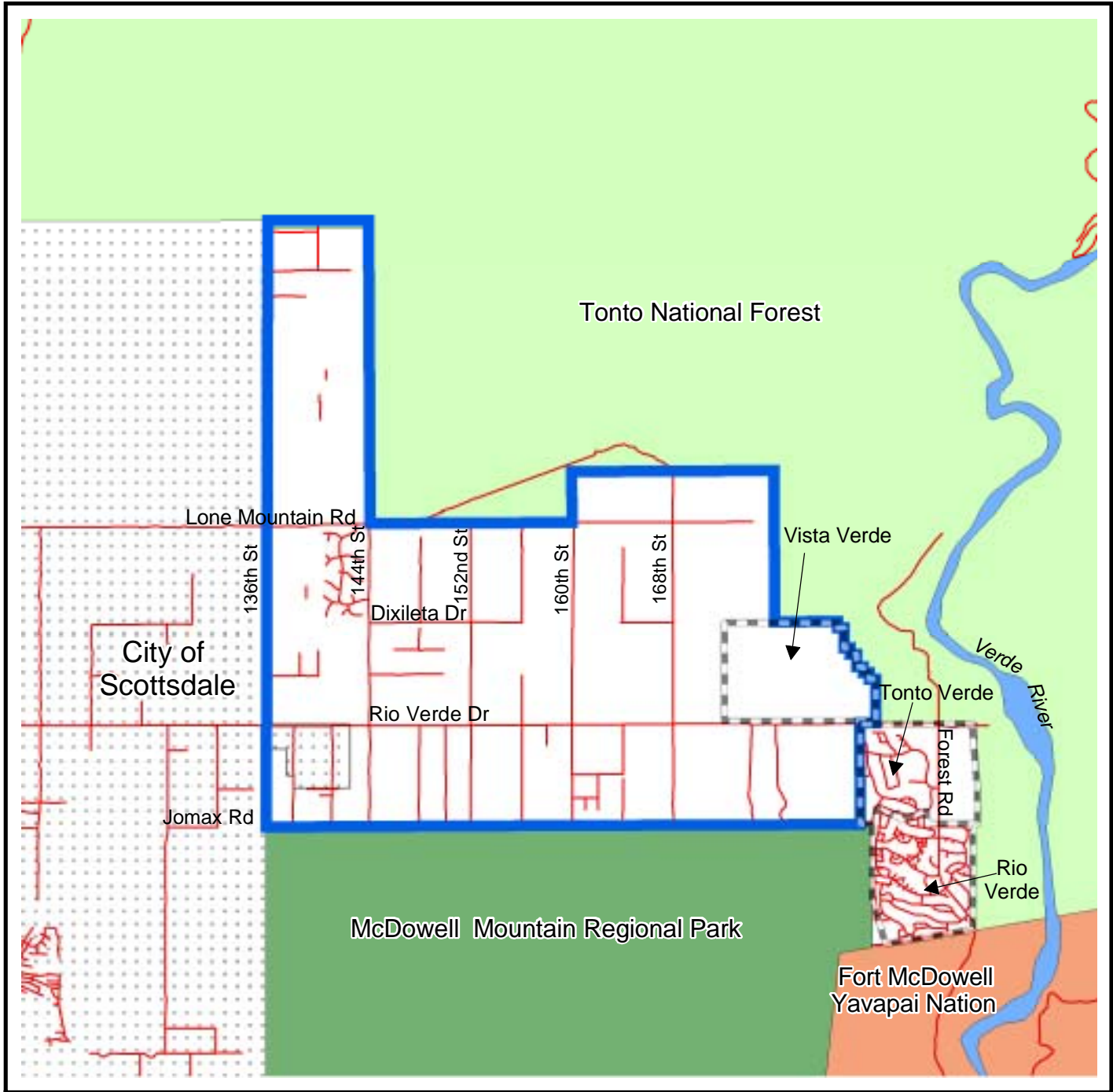
The current Desert Foothills Area Plan is comprised of two documents: the *Desert Foothills Policy and Development Guide* and the *Desert Foothills Technical Guide*. The Desert Foothills Area Plan replaced the *Desert Foothills General Land Use Plan* (1973), which covered only the Carefree and Cave Creek areas. The *Desert Foothills Policy and Development Guide*, adopted by the Board of Supervisors in May 1979, is a statement of goals, objectives, and policies that were developed to direct the growth of the area to the year 2000.

The 1979 plan enlarged the planning area to include Fountain Hills, Rio Verde, and Pinnacle Peak. The 1979 Desert Foothills planning area covers 323 square miles in the northeast part of Maricopa County. It includes areas that were unincorporated in 1979, including the communities of Cave Creek, Carefree, Pinnacle Peak, Rio Verde, and Fountain Hills. To maintain continuity with adjacent areas, portions of the cities of Scottsdale and Phoenix were included in the 1979 planning area.

The *Desert Foothills Technical Guide* (1982) was produced as a supplement to the policy and development guide. The technical guide provides specific background information about the Desert Foothills area, such as geology, water resources, and wildlife as well as social and economic information.




Rio Verde Foothills Area Plan (2005)

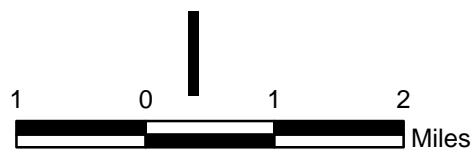
Maricopa County adopted its first comprehensive plan in October 1997. Titled *Eye to the Future 2020*, the comprehensive plan promotes healthy communities by encouraging growth in suitable areas, development of an efficient transportation system, maintaining a healthy environment, and creating a diverse economy. To effectively implement the Comprehensive Plan, the County's area plans will continuously be updated so they are consistent with *Eye to the Future 2020*.



Planning Area

Figure 1

-  Planning Area Boundary
-  Tonto National Forest
-  McDowell Mountain Regional Park
-  Verde River
-  City of Scottsdale
-  Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation
-  Development Master Planned Communities
-  Streets





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Due to public interest in updating the original Desert Foothills Area Plan, Maricopa County initiated an area plan update for a portion of the Desert Foothills planning area. After initial review and discussion with community members, it was decided to focus the update on approximately 20 square miles of unincorporated Maricopa County lands remaining north of McDowell Mountain Park and east of the City of Scottsdale. The master-planned communities of Rio Verde and Tonto Verde, which are included in the Goldfield Area Plan (1995), are not included in this update. The recently approved Vista Verde Development Master Plan (DMP) is not part of the Goldfield plan, and thus is included in this update. However, since the Vista Verde DMP will serve as its own land use plan, it is considered in this plan update only for population projections and potential for future development.

The Maricopa County Planning and Development Department hosted a public workshop in September 2003 to inform residents of the Desert Foothills Area Plan update, explain the planning process, and to encourage participation in formulating the updated plan. Public participation and survey results indicated a preferred new name for the updated area plan: *The Rio Verde Foothills Area Plan*. This name more accurately reflects the smaller planning area, located near the community of Rio Verde.

Public Participation

During preparation of the Rio Verde Foothills Area Plan, community participation was emphasized through various techniques. This participation allowed stakeholders to identify planning issues and concerns, and provide recommendations, comments and suggestions. Two public workshops were held to gather input from residents, property owners, interest groups, and government agencies. Informational letters announcing the workshops were prepared and distributed prior to each workshop. A workshop summary was sent out in October 2003 and a progress report was mailed to local community associations in November 2003. A website was established to disseminate basic information on the area plan update, announce public meeting dates, and to enable citizens to download a citizen survey. Project staff also worked with the Rio Verde Horsemen's Association and Rio Verde Foothills Alliance to disseminate plan information to their members through their respective newsletters.

Public Meetings

The Maricopa County Planning and Development Department held the first public workshop in Tonto Verde in September 2003. Once the draft area plan was completed, a second public workshop was held in September 2004 at Fountain Hills Middle School. These "open house" style meetings provided an opportunity for staff to present project information and allowed citizens to ask questions of



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project staff and make comments and recommendations on the draft plan. A citizen survey was distributed at both public meetings to identify and gauge citizen attitudes.

Community Mailing

To encourage public participation, in August 2003, approximately 500 plan notifications were sent to property owners and stakeholders in the region. These notifications explained the significance of County area plans, the plan update process, and how citizens could be included on an active mailing list. Over time, an active mailing list of nearly 200 addresses was developed based on public meeting sign-in sheets and those requesting to be added to the mailing list. Additionally, a mailing list of 36 agencies and interest groups was compiled. These included various community associations; municipal, state and federal agencies; local land trusts (e.g. McDowell Sonoran Land Trust); a regional planning agency; service providers (e.g. Rural/Metro Fire Department); and interest groups (e.g. Mountain Bike Association of Arizona).

Other Input

Input was also obtained through meetings, telephone calls, letters, facsimile, and email messages from citizens, potentially affected interests, and public agencies. Project staff met with representatives of the Rio Verde Foothills Alliance, Rio Verde Horsemen's Association, Cave Creek Ranger District, and Tonto National Forest. In addition, Planning & Development staff met with the following County agencies to ensure interagency coordination and planning: Maricopa County Environmental Services Department, Flood Control District of Maricopa County, Maricopa County Parks Department, and Maricopa County Department of Transportation.