

A River Reborn

The Restoration of Fossil Creek

The Merriam-Powell Center at Northern Arizona University is pleased to announce the release of the award-winning documentary, *A River Reborn: The Restoration of Fossil Creek*. Two years in the making, the public television production tells the remarkable story of the decommissioning of Arizona's oldest hydroelectric facility and the restoration of Fossil Creek, a critical watershed in central Arizona.

Fossil Creek is among the brightest jewels of Arizona's Rim Country. It stands out as one of the last free-flowing, year-around streams in Arizona, a magnificent ribbon of life in the high desert. The restoration of this critical watershed has drawn wide attention, not only in Arizona but across the U.S. "Vital lessons are being learned at Fossil Creek," says producer Paul Bockhorst, "lessons that can be applied to environmental restoration projects elsewhere. That makes Fossil Creek a case study of national and even international importance."

A River Reborn is narrated by Ted Danson. The well-known actor grew up in Flagstaff and has a deep interest in environmental issues in his native state. In the narration, Danson says that, "The Fossil Creek story provides a beacon of hope and an inspiring model for the restoration of degraded streams and waterways." Danson also tells viewers that, "Even now, as a work in progress, Fossil Creek stands out as one of the most important and promising environmental restoration projects in the history of the American Southwest."

As described in the documentary, the restoration of Fossil Creek is emblematic of a far-reaching change in the public attitude toward rivers and dams. Today, people in the Southwest and throughout the country are reassessing the use of precious water resources. They are seeking to balance the fulfillment of human needs with protection of the natural systems that support human life. This includes safeguarding rare, threatened, and endangered species of plants and animals. Fossil Creek is a focal point for this reassessment, and it reveals both the challenges and opportunities associated with riparian restoration.

A River Reborn chronicles both the natural and human history of the scenic waterway. It introduces scientists who have studied Fossil Creek's outstanding biological and geological features, environmental advocates who have fought for its restoration, federal and state resource managers who are working to establish it as a refuge for threatened native fish, and officials at Arizona Public Service, the utility that ran the hydroelectric facilities for a century.

One of the most surprising aspects of the story told in *A River Reborn* is that the decision to decommission was reached without litigation. A number of private environmental organizations, state and federal agencies, and Arizona Public Service reached a comprehensive agreement through constructive engagement and dialogue. The result is a notable "win-win" settlement that many see as a model for the cooperative resolution of environmental controversies. In explaining his decision to support decommissioning of the hydroelectric facilities, William Post, the Chairman of Arizona Public Service, says in the documentary that, "As we looked at the opportunity to give the residents of the state of Arizona a perennial stream in the desert, there is no option to that. We can find other ways to generate electricity. We cannot find other perennial streams in the desert."

Fossil Creek is also noteworthy for the important role that science has played in the restoration process. Jane Marks, a stream ecologist at Northern Arizona University, tells viewers that, "When I came on board, there was already one report on the table that was done by an environmental consulting firm that suggested that full flows would actually hurt native fish. And so I put together a team of scientists to evaluate what would be the effects of returning full flow on native fish, on the insects, on some of the threatened, endangered species."

Original research conducted by Marks and other scientists demonstrated the negative impact of the dam and water diversion on native fish populations. Their research also predicted recovery of those populations after decommissioning and resumption of full flow. Ongoing research also plays an important role in the adaptive management model being used by state and federal agencies with management responsibilities in the Fossil Creek watershed. Experience gained at Fossil Creek shows that good science is an indispensable ingredient in wise management.

A River Reborn is a joint project of Northern Arizona University, the Museum of Northern Arizona, and Paul Bockhorst Productions. The one-hour documentary was written and produced by Emmy Award-winning producer Paul Bockhorst. It was photographed by Emmy Award-winning videographer Douglas Crawford. The original music was composed by Paul Morehouse, and Russell Colby did the editing. Support for the production was provided by the National Science Foundation, the USDI Bureau of Reclamation, and the Heritage Program of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, with additional funding from the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, the Ecological Restoration Institute, and the Merriam-Powell Center for Environmental Research at Northern Arizona University.

A River Reborn will air on KAET Arizona Public Television at 9:00 p.m. on Wednesday, January 17, 2007, with a repeat broadcast at (time) on Sunday, January 21. It will be distributed to other public television stations across the country in February, 2007 via satellite by the National Educational Telecommunications association (NETA).

For further information about *A River Reborn* and related educational materials, please contact:

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(For Arizona Release)