



# Flood Control District of Maricopa County

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## Gila River Environmental Research Project Open to the Public

GOODYEAR, Ariz. (Sept. 20, 2007) – During a ceremony on Sept. 20, 2007, the Flood Control District of Maricopa County (District) dedicated the new El Rio Educational Research and Development Project (El Rio), located on the banks of the Gila River at the northeast corner of Vineyard Avenue and Bullard Avenue in Goodyear near Estrella Mountain Regional Park. The Gila River offers a rare desert riparian environment with the potential to be a one-of-a-kind watercourse amenity for the Phoenix metropolitan area.

The El Rio project site is an environmental flood control study that also serves as an educational venue for the public. An educational kiosk adjacent to the parking lot explains to visitors how environmental improvements at El Rio, such as the replacement of salt cedar vegetation with native plants like velvet mesquite, can restore the Gila River's natural flood control function while rejuvenating the river for wildlife and recreational activities, including hiking, non-motorized boating and fishing. The public can tour the site on an easy, interpretive quarter-mile trail to view experimental vegetation plots along with a variety of bird, mammal and reptile species native to the Gila River. A [trail guide pamphlet](#) is available at the educational kiosk.

Mary Rose Wilcox, Maricopa County Supervisor, District 5, led the dedication ceremony for a gathering of District staff, project partners and the public. Speakers included Goodyear Mayor Jim Cavanaugh, Avondale City Councilmember Frank Scott, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department Director RJ Cardin and Bureau of Reclamation Area Manager Carol Erwin.

Wilcox has championed the project since its inception and was enthusiastic to see it come to fruition. "The Gila is the premier desert river in the county and I've always loved its beauty," she said. "Today marks a significant stage in advancing the [El Rio Watercourse Master Plan](#), a project which will ensure a quality economic future for residents in the West Valley. The project will also serve as the benchmark for how towns can work together to put plans into action."

The Bureau of Reclamation played a major role in the development and funding of the El Rio research project. "This is the blueprint for a responsible future," said Erwin. "The project proves we can do more in the management of water through a partnership, especially in light of current budget constraints. The hard work has now become a reality."

The El Rio research project is an initial component of the District's El Rio Watercourse Master Plan (WCMP), a comprehensive flood control, river rejuvenation, habitat enhancement and multi-use recreation plan for a 17.5-mile stretch of the Gila River situated in the communities of Avondale, Buckeye and Goodyear. The plan was implemented by an unprecedented cooperation agreement signed in July 2007 between the District, City of Avondale, Town of Buckeye, City of Goodyear, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation, and Maricopa County Planning and Development.

*The Flood Control District of Maricopa County is tasked to provide regional flood hazard identification, regulation, remediation and education to Maricopa County residents so they can reduce their risk of injury, death and property damage from flooding, while still enjoying the natural and beneficial values served by floodplains.*