



Staff Report

Agenda Item: **FORMATION OF A VERDE COUNTY** – Discussion of the recent proposal for the formation of a Verde County.

Sponsored By: Doug Von Gausig, Mayor

Staff Contact: Walt Good, Deputy Town Clerk

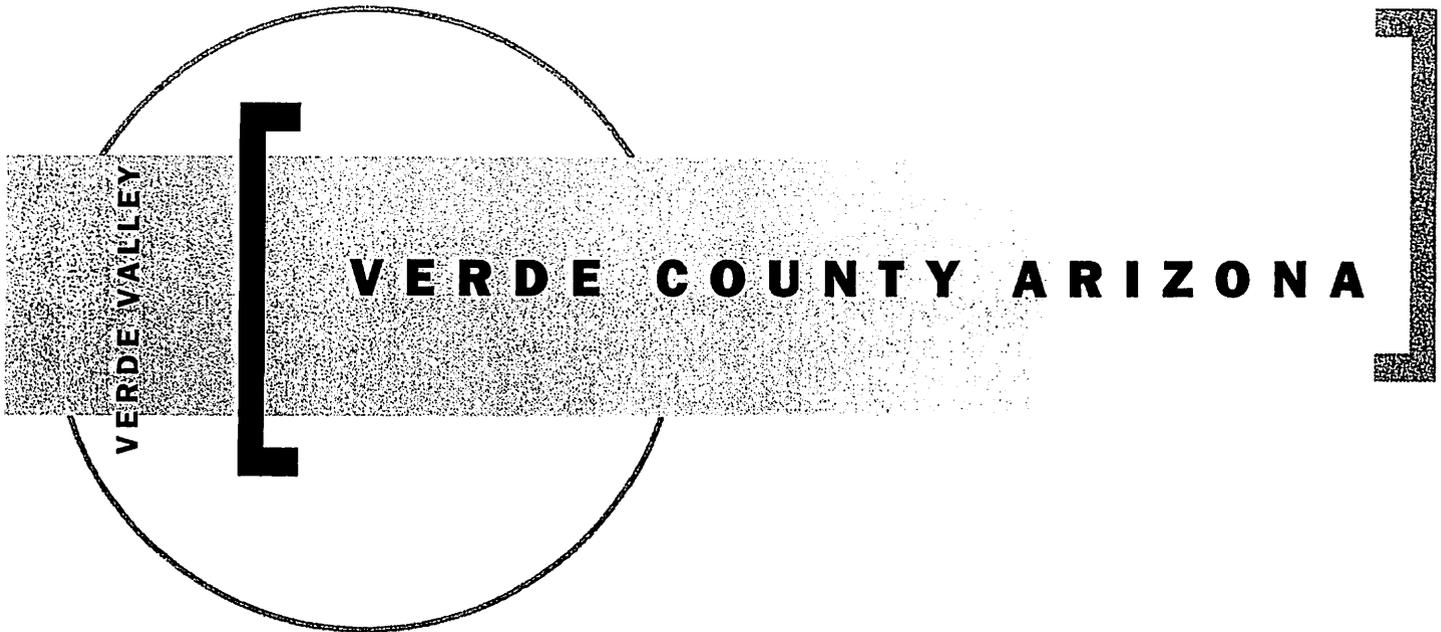
Meeting Date: December 9, 2008

Background: The “Verde County Organizing Group” recently drafted a document titled “Verde County, Arizona: Preliminary Proposal for the Formation of a New County”. Aside from references to the Verde County Organizing Group, no individuals have yet identified themselves as being associated with this effort.

Upon receipt of a copy of the Proposal, Yavapai County Supervisor Tom Thurman and Prescott Valley Mayor Harvey Skoog placed a discussion of the proposal on an early November RALG (Regional Area Local Government) Meeting agenda, which was attended by representatives from the City of Prescott, Town of Prescott Valley, Town of Chino Valley, Town of Dewey-Humboldt and Supervisors Thurman and Springer. Several Verde Valley elected officials, including Mayor Von Gausig attended that meeting as well.

Following the RALG meeting, the Verde Valley communities listed a discussion of the Verde County proposal on the agenda for their November 20th Intergovernmental Meeting. Supervisor Chip Davis and elected officials from all the Verde Valley cities and towns were in attendance. At the conclusion of the discussion, the elected officials in attendance agreed to place a discussion item on their upcoming agendas, in an effort to get more public input on the issues, and better identify what might be the advantages and disadvantages to forming a new county.

Recommendation: Discussion, no action is required.



**P R E L I M I N A R Y P R O P O S A L
F O R T H E F O R M A T I O N O F
A N E W C O U N T Y**

NOTE: This is a preliminary evaluation of an idea. A lot more information will be needed to take this to the next level. Your input, suggestions, corrections or related feedback would be appreciated. Moving this forward will require significant support and help from many people. If you are interested in supporting this project or getting involved on any level, please let us know.

VERDE COUNTY ORGANIZING GROUP

VCOG (Contact data to be determined)

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VERDE COUNTY ARIZONA

A Preliminary Proposal for the Formation of a New County

INTRODUCTION

Why Form a New County?

1. Local Control

One of the main reasons to consider forming a new county out of the Verde Valley region is to allow the people of this region to manage and control their own future. The Verde Valley has always had a unique position in relation to the rest of Yavapai County in terms of geography, history, culture and traditions. As the region continues to grow, allowing these communities to manage and administer their shared future from within their own region will only become more self-evident. At the same time, the rest of Yavapai County will have increasing challenges to meet the needs in those other growing areas. The idea of forming a new county must be seen as mutually beneficial for all of Yavapai County.

2. Economics

The population of the Verde Valley will continue to grow and there will be increasing demands to provide equal County facilities and services for the residents of this area. The inherent inefficiencies with Yavapai County having to provide duplicate facilities and services will only become more pronounced as that demand grows. The details concerning the cost of services in relation to the revenues generated in each part of the County still need to be closely evaluated; however, building and maintaining duplicate county facilities to serve a dispersed population is inherently not very efficient or cost-effective.

3. Respect

The Verde Valley is a separate region approaching a population base of almost 70,000 full-time residents. Like most places experiencing steady growth, the Verde Valley also faces many challenges for its future. This includes balancing development interests with conservation goals and protecting quality of life standards while ensuring economic opportunities for its people. If the interests of the of this region, including both the incorporated and unincorporated communities, can be better served within the framework of a locally managed county, then what reason would there be not to consider this approach? There is nothing easy about forming and establishing a new county; however, if the people of this region feel that they can take on these challenges and that this would be in the best long term interest of all involved, then what reason could there be to deny the people their right to govern their own future.

VERDE COUNTY ARIZONA

A Preliminary Proposal for the Formation of a New County

PROCESS OUTLINE

For years people in the Verde Valley have been talking informally about the idea of forming a new county. This proposal represents the next step in evaluating the possibilities. The following outline provides a possible approach to organizing the process of forming a new county.

- 1. Initial research and preliminary outline.**
 - a. Preliminary review and analysis of state statutes.
 - b. Outline scope of process.
 - c. Identify potential supporters.
- 2. Hold preliminary meeting of interested persons and establish Steering Committee.**
 - a. Identify and contact 20 to 30 people representing diverse interests and areas of Verde Valley/Yavapai County who may be interested in working on the necessary aspects of program development.
 - b. Hold meeting with preliminary Steering Committee. Regular meetings to follow.
- 3. Hold general public meeting.**
 - a. Call general public meeting to formally propose idea to the community and get feedback.
 - b. Ongoing public outreach and planning meetings would be expected to follow.
- 4. Organizational development.**
 - a. Development of a multi-level organization will be required to conduct a county-wide campaign, including the petition drive and related outreach program.
 - b. Fundraising, legal, media relations, administration, etc. will be required.
 - c. Extensive volunteer program will need to be created and managed.
- 5. Initiate petition process.**
 - a. Requires signatures from at least 20% of registered voters in county.
 - b. Volunteer coordination, media program, educational resources and ongoing outreach.
 - c. After certification, Governor appoints County Formation Commission to conduct detailed evaluation of financial and technical impacts on affected counties.
- 6. County-wide general election.**
 - a. Special election held on county-wide basis to approve or not approve new county.
- 7. New county elections for county officers and approval of county name and seat.**
 - a. After election of county officers, a distribution board is set up determine and accomplish the transfer of responsibilities.
 - b. The electors of the new county will consider and adopt the name and county seat of the new county.

VERDE COUNTY ARIZONA

A Preliminary Proposal for the Formation of a New County

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

1. Non-profit Incorporation.

Non-profit incorporation has pros and cons. It takes a lot of work and expense to set up and manage a nonprofit 501.c.3 corporation but there are benefits in terms of fundraising and legal liabilities. It may be essential to have a nonprofit organization in order to facilitate forming a new county.

2. Organizational Structure.

There is more than one way to structure an organization. There are choices to be made. As a diverse grassroots community-based group, consideration should be given to ensuring an open, interactive approach to the form of the organization. Decentralized and bottom-up decision making should be considered. Top down, strong-force leadership models are more likely to be counter-productive and unnecessary. Open and adaptive sub-committees or working groups offering volunteers opportunities to plug in and get involved are vital to building broad-based support. Training in open process decision making should be considered to ensure respectful discussions and decision making are maintained.

3. Decision Making Process.

Again, there is more than one way to make decisions in a group. The principles of democracy should be respected. Meetings should be open to all. Simple majority is a standard approach which people understand; however, in the interest of ensuring broad based support, it would be advised to consider the importance of respecting the collective interests through collaboration and compromise.

4. Working Groups / Subcommittees.

All organizational sub-groups need to include program emphasis on both county-wide and Verde Valley issues.

a. Central Steering Committee.

Membership in a Steering Committee would include the Chairs/Co-chairs of the primary working groups, including Administration, Outreach, Strategic Planning, Media and Other to be determined, as well as Legal Counsel, Finance, and key liaisons to political entities or other key Persons of Influence).

b. Administration.

- 1) Administrative functions: Record keeping, general correspondence, meeting coordination
- 2) Legal Counsel
- 3) Finance: Accounting / Bookkeeping
- 4) Mail / Phone / Database Management
- 5) Computers / IT
- 6) Strategic Planning Team
 - a) Countywide Issues
 - b) Verde Valley Issues

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

- c. Outreach Coordination
 - 1) Event Management
 - 2) Political & Community Group Outreach
 - 3) Volunteer Coordination: Recruitment, Training
 - 4) Fundraising Team

- d. Media Relations
 - 1) Advertising / Publicity
 - 2) Website Development / Management
 - 3) Print Development

- e. Other

STUDY PROPOSAL: Formation of a new Verde Valley County

Population: Current population estimates show at least 65,000 in the Verde Valley region. Even considering projected estimates for the 2010 Census, this will meet the minimum requirements under state statutes for forming a new county. Based on current estimates, a new Verde County would have a population greater than six of the fifteen other Arizona counties.

Economic Analysis: Economic concerns for both the proposed new county and the remaining existing county need to be evaluated in detail. There will need to be a clear understanding of both the projected revenue levels and the various costs for providing various government services. The economic impacts on both the existing "affected" county and the proposed new county need to be weighed and compared.

Arizona Revised Statutes. ARS Title 11. Counties. includes requirements for the formation of new counties. You need a minimum of 100 square miles of private land and the new county must have common boundaries with at least three other counties. A petition for forming a new county must have valid signatures from at least 20% of the registered voters from the last general election. If this percentage is based on the upcoming November 2008 election, there may need to be more than 25,000 valid signatures from registered voters in Yavapai County. This proposal cannot succeed without support from throughout Yavapai County, including the Prescott area. It needs to make sense for everybody affected. It needs to be seen as a win-win situation for everybody.

Election. If the minimum number of qualified signatures are collected and approved, then the proposal goes to a vote of all the voters in the entire affected county. That means the majority of voters from throughout Yavapai County would have to approve the proposal to form a new county. Again, education, outreach and coalition building would be essential.

Boundaries. Defining the boundaries for a proposed new Verde County could start by looking at current Yavapai County District 3. There are likely to be plenty of questions regarding any proposed boundaries, so there should be openness on this matter. At a minimum the proposed new county needs to have boundaries with three other counties. District 3 includes boundaries with both Coconino and Gila Counties, so that is probably a good place to start the evaluation.

Fifteen Arizona Counties

	Name	2007 pop. est.	Area (sq. miles)
1.	Maricopa	3,880,181	9,224
2.	Pima	967,089	9,189
3.	Pinal	299,246	5,374
4.	Yavapai	212,635	8,128
5.	Mohave	194,944	13,470
6.	Yuma	190,557	5,519
7.	Cochise	127,866	6,219
8.	Coconino	127,450	18,661
9.	Navajo	111,273	9,959
10.	Apache	69,980	11,218
11.	Gila	51,994	4,796
12.	Santa Cruz	42,845	1,238
13.	Graham	34,769	4,641
14.	La Paz	20,172	4,513
15.	Greenlee	7,754	1,848

History of Formation of Arizona Counties

Yavapai County was one of the four original counties created by the Arizona Territorial Legislature in 1864. Since then, there have been eleven additional counties created resulting in the fifteen existing counties, as follows:

1864	Yavapai, Pima, Mohave, Yuma
1871	Maricopa from Yavapai and Pima
1875	Pinal from Maricopa and Pima
1879	Apache from Yavapai
1881	Cochise from Pima
1881	Gila from Maricopa and Pinal
1881	Graham from Apache and Pima
1891	Coconino from Yavapai
1899	Santa Cruz from Cochise and Pima
1895	Navajo from Apache
1909	Greenlee from Graham
1983	La Paz from Yuma

2006 Verde Valley Incorporated Estimates (Arizona Dept of Economic Security)

Cottonwood	10,860
Clarkdale	3,680
Camp Verde	10,730
Sedona	7,835
Jerome	330 (450)

2000 Census Estimates for Unincorporated Communities of the Verde Valley

Cornville	3,335
Lake Montezuma	3,344
Big Park	5,245
Verde Village	10,610
Misc.	10-15,000 +

2006 Incorporated Verde Valley	33,435
Unincorporated adjusted for 15% growth	<u>35,000 +</u>

2007 Verde Valley Population Estimate: 68,500 - 70,000 +

Summary of State Statute Requirements for Formation of a New County (as applies to proposed Verde County)

- The new county must have common boundaries with at least three other counties. (Yavapai, Coconino and Gila)
- It must have at least 100 square miles of private land. There must be a minimum number of residents of the new county based on a formula related to the total state population.
- A petition for formation of a new county must be signed by at least 20% of registered voters from Yavapai County based on the most previous general election. (November 2008)
- After the petition is certified, the proposal must be approved by a majority of voters from all affected parts of the existing and proposed county areas. That means all of Yavapai County gets to vote on whether to allow a new county to be formed from a portion of Yavapai County.
- If the new county is approved, there will be another election to elect the county officers and approve the county name and county seat.

Verde County Study Needs

We need to develop good statistical data regarding the following:

- Total land area.
- Public land ownership and private
- College district, School district and special taxing district boundaries.
- Population Trends.
- Income Levels.
- Assessed Valuations.
- Revenue and Tax Base.
- Service Costs.
- Existing County facilities inventory for Verde Valley & County-wide.
- Existing County staffing for Verde Valley & County-wide.

Organizational Needs.

Planning

- Campaign Outline / Strategic Plan.
- Organizational Plan.
- Nonprofit Incorporation.

Space Needs

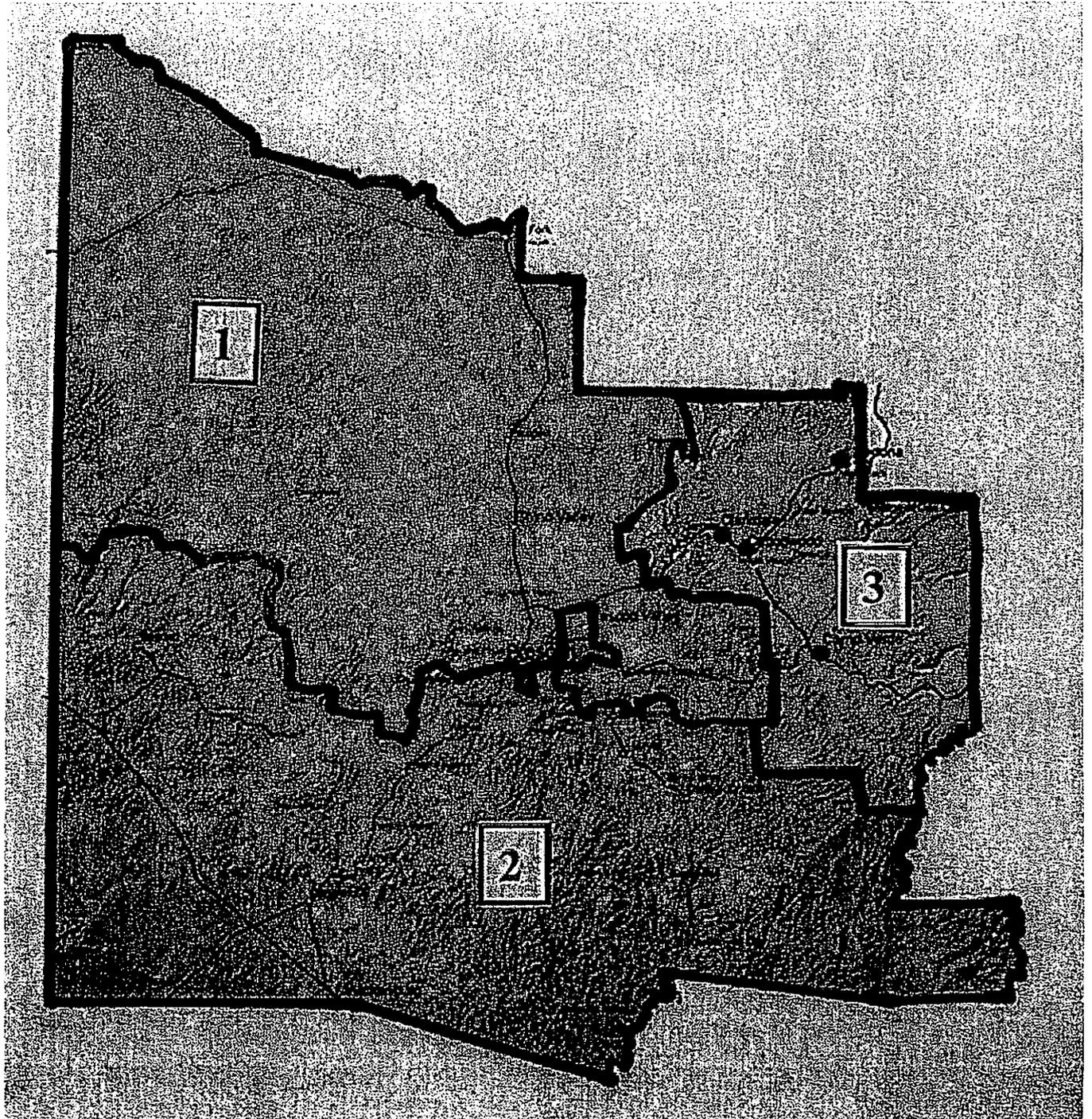
- Meeting Space for 10-25 people, or more, on regular basis (weekly, monthly)
- Location/s for larger public meetings.
- Storefront Office. – *Ideal situation would provide office space for administrative staff, volunteer coordination, general information, staff meetings, etc.*

Management

- Outreach Program.
- Media Relations.
- Fundraising and Financial Management.
- Volunteer Recruitment and Coordination.
- Administrative Staff: general office duties, filing, correspondence, phones.

Technical

- Surveys regarding Public Support Levels / Interest
- Publicity and Education Materials
- Mapping skills and resources.
- Website Development and Management.
- PO Box Management / Phone contact





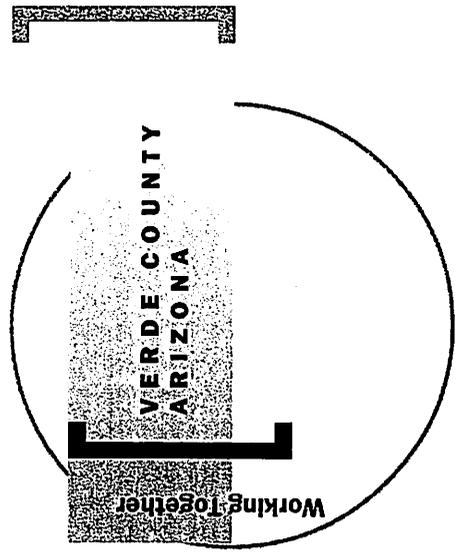
VERDE COUNTY ORGANIZING GROUP

Forming a new county in Arizona requires a number of challenging steps to be followed. The level of work necessary to accomplish this ambitious goal will require significant help and support from a diverse coalition of county-wide interests. A non-profit committee will serve as the main organizing group for the effort.

Many volunteers will be needed to help bring this proposal to the residents of Yavapai County. The requirement to obtain valid signatures from at least 20% of the registered voters in Yavapai County will require a substantial effort: including:

- Administrative activities
- Outreach Liaisons
- Volunteer Coordination
- Media Relations and Publicity
- Fundraising
- Finance and accounting
- Legal assistance
- all the other needs of an active community organization.

Verde County organizing Group
PO Box 000
Cottonwood, AZ 86324



Verde County Organizing Group

Get Involved

V C O G
P O B O X 0 0 0
C O T T O N W O O D , A Z 8 6 3 2 6
W W W . V E R D E C O U N T Y . C O M
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VERDE COUNTY ARIZONA

HISTORIC FRAMEWORK

Yavapai County was created in 1864 as one of the original 4 counties of the Arizona Territory. Over the years, as the population grew and interests changed, Yavapai and the other counties were split to create 11 more counties resulting in the current 15 Arizona counties.

ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

A new Verde County generally following the area of District 3 would be larger in population than six other Arizona counties. We need to carefully consider the potential economic base to ensure that a new county could provide the necessary level of services that are expected from county government.

In addition, if a portion of existing Yavapai County is split off, we need to ensure that the remaining portion of Yavapai County meets all their economic needs. This proposal has to meet everyone's needs and provide a win-win situation for all concerned.

WHY CONSIDER FORMING A NEW COUNTY?

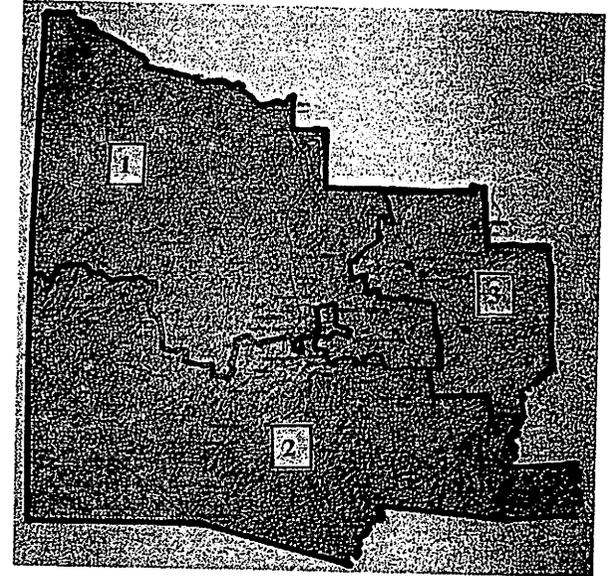
Local control and self-governance are basic American values embedded in our history, traditions and legal framework. The Verde Valley region has unique historic, geographic, cultural, and economic conditions that describe a natural political boundary. As the population and economic base of the area has grown, it has become possible to consider forming a new county for this unique area.

STATE REGULATIONS

The State of Arizona provides a series of specific requirements for the consideration of forming a new county. Arizona Revised Statutes § § 11-131 through 11-144 governs formation of a new county.

- The new county must have common boundaries with at least three other existing or proposed counties: (i.e., Yavapai, Coconino and Gila)
- It must have at least 100 square miles of privately owned land.
- Petition for formation must be signed by at least 20% of registered voters in Yavapai County from previous general election. Over 25,000 valid signatures may be required on a petition.

Existing Yavapai County Supervisors Districts



WHERE WOULD THE NEW COUNTY BE LOCATED?

District 3 provides the main outline for the proposal. The area generally covers the Verde Valley Region but also includes the mountain range along the Verde River over to Gila County. The region includes the five incorporated communities of Camp Verde, Clarkdale, Cottonwood, Jerome and Sedona, as well as a number of unincorporated areas, including Beaver Creek, Rim Rock, Cornville, Verde Village, Verde Lakes, and Big Park/Village of Oak Creek. This region currently has an estimated population of at least 65,000.