

Verde Valley Airwaves:
History of Radio in the Verde Valley Research
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A Definitive Timeline and Regulatory Analysis
of Radio Broadcast Stations Licensed to
Cottonwood and Sedona, Arizona

Verde Valley Airwaves - Outline

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I. Introduction to the Verde Valley Broadcast Market (1964–Present)

The broadcast infrastructure serving Cottonwood and Sedona, Arizona, constitutes a vital component of the broader Northern Arizona media landscape, specifically operating within the Flagstaff-Prescott Area of Dominant Influence (ADI).¹ The regulatory history of this region reflects the challenges and opportunities inherent in developing high-power signals across rugged, mountainous terrain, leading to distinct technical and ownership profiles when compared to metropolitan markets. All licensing, allocation, and oversight functions are managed exclusively by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).²

The historical analysis of these licenses requires an understanding of FCC data management transitions. Records concerning station transactions and facility changes prior to approximately 1980 were tracked via physical Radio History Cards, a system that was gradually discontinued as the Commission moved toward the computerized Broadcast Application Processing System (BAPS).⁵ For older licenses, tracing a complete history often requires consulting archived federal records.⁶ For all modern facilities, the history is maintained within the current Licensing and Management System (LMS).⁷

A. Geographical and Regulatory Context

While Cottonwood and Sedona are distinct municipalities within the Verde Valley, their commercial radio allocations operate as regional assets designed to reach the wider Northern Arizona population corridor. The high Effective Radiated Power (ERP) and Antenna Height Above Average Terrain (HAAT) measurements associated with the primary FM stations licensed to these cities confirm that the licenses function as regional signals, not purely hyper-local community services.¹ The city of license serves primarily as the regulatory anchor point for the frequency allocation.

B. The Dominant Entity: Yavapai Broadcasting Corporation (YBC)

A critical factor defining the modern broadcast landscape of the Verde Valley is the high degree of market consolidation achieved by the Yavapai Broadcasting Corporation (YBC), which operates under the brand "My Radio Place".⁸ YBC currently controls a substantial portfolio encompassing multiple FM and AM licenses anchored in Cottonwood and Sedona, including KKLD, KVRD-FM, KYBC, and KQST.⁸

This centralization has enabled YBC to deploy a standardized operational footprint. Although the main office was historically located in Cottonwood (3405 E. Ste Route 89A), YBC has consolidated its studio and production facilities into Prescott Valley, enabling streamlined management and shared personnel across its six Northern Arizona stations. This strategy optimizes profitability and maximizes coverage across distinct service areas.⁹ This corporate dominance allows YBC to manage diverse formats—ranging from Top 40 and Classic Hits to Country and Adult Standards—within a single advertising ecosystem, effectively controlling the major commercial bandwidths available to the regional audience.

II. The Foundation of Cottonwood Radio: The KYBC AM 1600 Lineage

The history of licensed commercial radio in Cottonwood begins with the establishment of an AM station, which faced significant technical limitations defined by early FCC regulations. This foundation dictated many of the subsequent strategic moves toward FM broadcasting in the region.

A. The Daytimer Era: KVIO (1964–1979)

The oldest commercial broadcast license in the immediate area traces back to December 20, 1964, when the station first signed on the air under the call sign KVIO.⁴ KVIO was licensed to Cottonwood, Arizona, and represented the initial federal allocation of broadcast spectrum to the community.

A crucial characteristic of KVIO's early regulatory structure was its designation as a daytimer.⁴ This classification meant the station was required to cease broadcasting at local sunset to protect other regional or distant stations operating on the same frequency (1600 kHz). This regulatory constraint severely limited the station's ability to compete for nighttime audience reach and consistent advertising revenue.

The difficulty inherent in building a viable business on a restricted daytime license acted as a strong catalyst, suggesting that future growth and full-time service would necessarily have to be found on the developing FM band.

In 1966, relatively early in its operational history, KVIO underwent its first ownership transition when it was acquired by K-M Broadcasting.

B. Regulatory Transition and YBC Branding (KVRD and KYBC)

The station maintained the KVIO call letters for fifteen years until 1979, when the Federal Communications Commission approved a call sign change to KVRD.⁴ This call sign remained in place for seventeen years, during which time the ownership dynamics shifted to align with the emerging regional broadcast power.

The definitive branding change occurred on May 24, 1996, when the FCC assigned the station the current call letters KYBC.⁴

This change was significant because the call letters directly reflected the identity of the current ownership, Yavapai Broadcasting Corporation, formalizing the acquisition of the legacy AM facility into the rapidly consolidating corporate portfolio.⁹ This move symbolized the shift from localized, independent call signs (KVIO, KVRD) to a vertically integrated corporate brand (YBC), signaling the corporation's strategy to dominate the local advertising ecosystem under a unified corporate structure.

KYBC Today

KYBC currently operates on 1600 kHz, classified as a Class D facility (Facility ID 35866).⁴ This technical classification underscores the persistent regulatory limitations established in the daytimer era. While the station broadcasts with 1,000 watts during the day, its licensed nighttime power is drastically reduced to only 46 watts.⁴

Due to these constraints, modern broadcast strategy dictates the use of an FM translator, K242BZ on 96.3 FM, also licensed to Cottonwood, to mitigate the poor 24-hour urban coverage and terrain shadowing that plague the low-power AM signal in the Verde Valley.⁴

III. The Development of Cottonwood's FM Spectrum (KKLD and KVRD-FM)

The realization that AM broadcasting was inherently limited in the Northern Arizona terrain due to propagation constraints and low nighttime power propelled the development of powerful FM allocations in Cottonwood. These FM facilities became the primary commercial revenue drivers for the market.

A. The KZGL/KKLD Lineage (95.9 MHz)

The regulatory history for this prominent FM frequency began well before its official sign-on date. The earliest regulatory activity is traced through the Construction Permit (CP) granted under the call sign KCRJ-FM between 1980 and 1983.² This CP phase, preceding the launch by several years, establishes the true regulatory commencement of commercial FM efforts in the region.

Historical documentation suggests the KCRJ-FM call letters were a tribute, linking the new FM development to an old KCRJ-AM station that had operated in nearby Jerome.¹¹

The station formally signed on the air in August 1983 as KSMK-FM (Facility ID 51642), launching with a Top 40/Contemporary Hit Radio (CHR) format branded as KISS-FM.² This initial launch marked the start of full-time, high-fidelity broadcasting from Cottonwood.

A. The KZGL/KKLD Lineage (95.9 MHz)

The station's early history was characterized by significant format volatility:

- 1991: The call sign was changed to KZGL, accompanied by a format shift to Adult Contemporary.²
- 1996: KZGL adopted a classic rock format, retaining its call letters.
- 1998: The format shifted again to modern rock, branded as "The Z," illustrating a high degree of programmatic adaptation ("churn") in response to early market competition.²

The current iteration began in 2006, when the station adopted the KKLD call sign ("The Cloud") and settled into a Classic Hits format. This event involved a critical technical change: the station moved its operational frequency from 98.3 FM to its current allocation at 95.9 MHz.²

Despite the frequent changes in call signs and formats over two decades, the underlying license asset and Facility ID (51642) remained stable. This juxtaposition confirms that the physical asset—the spectrum allocation and technical capacity—was highly valued, regardless of the constantly adapting commercial programming strategy employed to find market viability.

A. The KZGL/KKLD Lineage (95.9 MHz)

KKLD operates as a powerful Class C0 station, equipped with 21,000 watts of Effective Radiated Power (ERP) and benefiting from a highly advantageous Antenna Height Above Average Terrain (HAAT) of 799 meters (2,621 ft).²

This robust technical profile is engineered specifically to provide superior coverage across the entire Flagstaff-Prescott regional market, affirming its status as a key regional delivery mechanism for YBC.

B. KVRD-FM (105.7 MHz)

The development of KVRD-FM further cemented Cottonwood as a major FM licensing hub. This station operates at 105.7 MHz and is also owned by Yavapai Broadcasting Corporation.¹² The license history shows a rapid assignment phase:

- October 18, 1989: The initial call letters assigned were KURD-FM.¹²
- November 20, 1989: Barely a month later, the call sign was officially changed to the current KVRD-FM.¹² This name choice explicitly tied the new FM asset to the established heritage of the older KVRD AM license.

B. KVRD-FM (105.7 MHz)

KVRD-FM broadcasts a Country music format and is affiliated with CNN Radio and Westwood One.¹²

Technically, it is classified as a Class C3 facility (Facility ID 35865).¹² Although its ERP is relatively modest at 300 watts, its operational effectiveness is dramatically amplified by its high HAAT of 779.0 meters (2,555.8 ft).¹²

The simultaneous, high-altitude operation of both KKLD (95.9 MHz, Class C0) and KVRD-FM (105.7 MHz, Class C3), both licensed to Cottonwood and controlled by YBC, represents a strategic maximization of the limited available Class C and C0 spectrum allocations in mountainous Northern Arizona. YBC effectively secured control over the primary commercial FM bandwidths originating from the Verde Valley.

IV. Sedona's Airwave Infrastructure: Stability and Targeted Niche

Radio stations licensed to Sedona, Arizona, demonstrate a mixture of profound ownership stability in the AM sector and aggressive regional reach in the powerful FM sector.

A. The KAZM Story (AM 780): A History of Stability

KAZM (AM 780 kHz, Facility ID 64494) is the pioneer broadcast station licensed to Sedona, first airing on November 1, 1974.³ It currently operates a full-service format branded as "Mellow Mountain Radio," carrying affiliations with major national networks like Premiere Networks and Westwood One, alongside regional sports content.³

For nearly fifty years, the station was owned and operated by Tabback Broadcasting Co..³ This half-century tenure under a single ownership group is highly unusual in the volatile broadcast industry, confirming that hyper-local, full-service AM radio was able to thrive in the specialized Sedona market, prioritizing community integration and programming stability.

In September 2023, this long period of ownership stability concluded with the transition of ownership to Cutter Grind Broadcasting LLC.³ KAZM is a Class D station, operating with 5,000 watts of daytime power, but restricted to 95 watts at night.³

Similar to Cottonwood's KYBC, KAZM relies on an accompanying FM translator, K293DA on 106.5 FM, to ensure robust, 24-hour service to the local Sedona community, mitigating its inherent AM limitations.³

B. Sedona's Key FM Assets (KQST and KSED)

Sedona is the city of license for two powerful FM facilities designed for extensive regional coverage.

KQST (102.9 FM) KQST (Facility ID 57293) first aired on May 1, 1984.¹ This station, broadcasting a Top 40 format under the branding "Q102.9," is a key component of the Yavapai Broadcasting Corporation portfolio.¹

The strategic importance of KQST was confirmed in August 2004, when YBC acquired the station for a reported \$3 million.¹

This substantial investment underscored the high commercial value placed on high-power Class C FM allocations capable of covering the Flagstaff-Prescott Area of Dominant Influence. By acquiring this key Sedona asset, YBC solidified its position as the dominant broadcaster across Northern Arizona.¹ KQST operates as a high-power Class C facility, utilizing 100,000 watts ERP and a 451-meter HAAT.

B. Sedona's Key FM Assets (KQST and KSED)

KSED (107.5 FM) KSED (Facility ID 55402) is licensed to Sedona and first signed on the air around **1994**.¹⁴ The call sign is intentionally mnemonic, derived directly from "SEDona".¹⁴

KSED broadcasts a Country format, branded as Kolt Country 107.5, and is owned by **Stone Canyon Media Group** (Stone Canyon of Flagstaff, LLC).¹⁴

The presence of KSED, a powerful asset owned by a major regional operator outside of the YBC conglomerate, suggests that despite YBC's market consolidation, the Sedona licensing market retains high-value FM allocations that attract external broadcasters. This fosters significant inter-group competition for the critical Flagstaff/Prescott regional audience.¹

KSED operates as a Class C station with 96,000 watts ERP and a high 446-meter HAAT, ensuring a broad signal footprint that reinforces the regional utility of the Sedona license.¹⁴

V. Ownership Dynamics and Regulatory Strategy in the Verde Valley

The evolution of radio licensing in Cottonwood and Sedona demonstrates consistent patterns of strategic accumulation and technical necessity driven by geographical constraints and market centralization.

A. The Consolidation Strategy of Yavapai Broadcasting Corporation (YBC)

Yavapai Broadcasting Corporation's acquisition strategy has been the defining feature of the Verde Valley market since the mid-1990s.

YBC controls the four primary licenses originating from Cottonwood and Sedona (KYBC, KKLD, KVRD-FM, KQST).⁸ The corporation maximizes operational efficiency by centralizing studio, production, and administrative functions in Prescott Valley, managing multiple formats (including Top 40, Classic Hits, Country, and Soft Oldies) under the single "My Radio Place" banner.⁸

Regulatory filings indicate ongoing corporate activity within YBC. On March 17, 2025, YBC filed an application with the FCC for a "Transfer of Control" for its key Verde Valley licenses, including KKLD (95.9 MHz, Cottonwood), KQST (102.9 MHz, Sedona), KVRD-FM, and KYBC.¹⁰

This action signals a potential restructuring of the ownership hierarchy or corporate management, even if the licenses remain within the YBC corporate umbrella.

B. Technical Classifications and Signal Enhancement

A systematic analysis of the technical specifications reveals the dominance of the FM band and the regulatory need to support legacy AM assets.

AM Service Constraints (Class D)

The AM facilities, KYBC (1600 kHz, Cottonwood) and KAZM (780 kHz, Sedona), are both classified as Class D stations.³ This regulatory designation mandates low-power nighttime operation (46W for KYBC, 95W for KAZM).³ These limitations effectively restrict the utility of the AM facilities primarily to local, daytime communication within the immediate Verde Valley, severely limiting their capacity for regional coverage after sunset.

FM Supremacy and Mitigation Strategy

In sharp contrast, the FM stations (KKLD, KQST, KSED, KVRD-FM) are classified as powerful Class C facilities.¹

These licenses operate with high ERP (up to 100,000 watts) from high HAATs (779 meters for KVRD-FM, 799 meters for KKLD), confirming that the FM band is the superior and primary mechanism for regional, high-fidelity commercial broadcast delivery across Northern Arizona.²

The necessity of extending coverage for the constrained AM licenses led to the strategic use of FM translators. The regulatory system allows legacy AM licenses, which are limited by Class D restrictions and poor terrain performance, to effectively transition their service identity and coverage to the technically superior FM band. This process mitigates the financial obsolescence of the original AM asset, ensuring the continuity of its Facility ID and local presence. This is evident in the operation of:

- KYBC (AM 1600) utilizing FM translator K242BZ on 96.3 FM.⁴
- KAZM (AM 780) utilizing FM translator K293DA on 106.5 FM.³

C. Construction Permits (CPs) and Regulatory Start Dates

A full timeline requires distinguishing between the granting of a Construction Permit (CP) and the actual first air date. The CP defines the regulatory beginning of a station, often years before operational authorization is granted.

For instance, the FM station now known as KKLD began its regulatory life as the KCRJ-FM CP (1980–1983) ² before signing on as KSMK-FM in 1983. Understanding these distinct phases is essential for accurately dating the allocation of spectrum and the subsequent commencement of service.

VI. Comprehensive Chronological Timeline and Conclusion

Date	City of License	Call Sign	Frequency	Type	Event/ <u>Mile stone</u>
Dec 20, 1964	Cottonwood	KVIO	1600 kHz	AM	First Air Date (Licensed as a <u>daytimer</u>) ⁴
1966	Cottonwood	KVIO	1600 kHz	AM	Acquired by K-M Broadcasting ⁴

Date	City of License	Call Sign	Frequency	Type	Event/ <u>Mile</u> <u>stone</u>
Nov 1, 1974	Sedona	KAZM	780 kHz	AM	First Air Date (Initial Licensee: <u>Tabback</u> Broadcasting Co.) ³
1979	Cottonwood	KVRD	1600 kHz	AM	Call sign change from KVIO ⁴

Date	City of License	Call Sign	Frequency	Type	Event/<u>Mile</u> <u>stone</u>
1980–1983	Cottonwood	KCRJ-FM	Unknown	FM	Construction Permit (CP) granted ²
Aug 1983	Cottonwood	KSMK-FM	95.9 MHz	FM	First Air Date (Licensed from KCRJ-FM CP) ²

Date	City of License	Call Sign	Frequency	Type	Event/<u>Mile</u> <u>stone</u>
May 1, 1984	Sedona	KQST	102.9 MHz	FM	First Air Date ¹
Oct 18, 1989	Cottonwood	KURD-FM	105.7 MHz	FM	Initial Call Sign Assigned ¹²
Nov 20, 1989	Cottonwood	KVRD-FM	105.7 MHz	FM	Call sign changed from KURD-FM ¹²

Date	City of License	Call Sign	Frequency	Type	Event/ <u>Mile stone</u>
1991	Cottonwood	KZGL	95.9 MHz	FM	Call sign changed from KSMK-FM ²
1994	Sedona	KSED	107.5 MHz	FM	First Air Date (Call sign meaning " <u>SEDona</u> ") ¹⁴

Date	City of License	Call Sign	Frequency	Type	Event/ <u>Mile stone</u>
May 24, 1996	Cottonwood	KYBC	1600 kHz	AM	Call sign changed from KVRD (Reflecting YBC ownership) ⁴
2004 (Aug)	Sedona	KQST	102.9 MHz	FM	Acquired by Yavapai Broadcasting Corporation for \$3 million ¹

Date	City of License	Call Sign	Frequency	Type	Event/ <u>Mile stone</u>
2006	Cottonwood	KKLD	95.9 MHz	FM	Call sign changed from KZGL; moved frequency from 98.3 MHz ²
Sept 2023	Sedona	KAZM	780 kHz	AM	Ownership transition to Cutter Grind Broadcasting LLC ³

Date	City of License	Call Sign	Frequency	Type	Event/ <u>Mile stone</u>
March 17, 2025	Cottonwood / Sedona	YBC Stations	Various	AM/FM	Filed application for Transfer of Control 10

Call Sign and Ownership History Matrix (Cottonwood and Sedona)

Call Sign (Current)	City of License	Frequency	First Air Date	Call Sign History (Chronological)	Current Owner	Facility ID
KYBC	Cottonwood	1600 AM	Dec 20, 1964	KVIO (1964–79), KVRD (1979–96), 4	Yavapai Broadcasting Corp. ⁴	35866 ⁴
KKLD	Cottonwood	95.9 FM	Aug 1983	KCRJ-FM (CP 1980–83), KSMK-FM (1983–91), KZGL (1991–06), 2	Yavapai Broadcasting Corp. ²	51642 ²
KVRD-FM	Cottonwood	105.7 FM	1989	KURD-F M (1989) 12	Yavapai Broadcasting Corp. ¹²	35865 ¹²

Call Sign (Current)	City of License	Frequency	First Air Date	Call Sign History (Chronological)	Current Owner	Facility ID
KAZM	Sedona	780 AM	Nov 1, 1974	KAZM (Initial) ³	Cutter Grind Broadcasting LLC. ³	64494 ³
KQST	Sedona	102.9 FM	May 1, 1984	KQST (Initial) ¹	Yavapai Broadcasting Corp. ¹	57293 ¹
KSED	Sedona	107.5 FM	1994	KSED (Initial) ¹⁴	Stone Canyon Media Group ¹⁴	55402 ¹⁴

VII. Jerome's Free-Form Radio

KZRJ Gulch Radio is the only commercial-free station broadcasting live in the Verde Valley. The founders describe it as “free form” radio—free from the bonds of playing corporate-prescribed, listener tested-to-death songs. Free from having to push current and potential ‘hits’ from major record labels. Free from advertising and corporate sponsors to answer to. No begging for bucks either.

“Gulch Radio is a haven from over-amped and over-repeated news that is available over so many other radio and television stations,” Richard Martin said. The station’s only news is a daily weather report and hazardous weather reports. The station will also provide news that affects the local population, such as fire or smoke pollution, emergency highway conditions and Emergency Alerts.

Gulch Radio's Slow Build to Success

A station that started small is now the Verde Valley's newest giant. It can be heard live over 100.5 FM KZRJ-LP and all over the world on Gulchradio.com.

In 2002, Gulch Radio started up with a very low power AM radio signal that only could be heard in Deception Gulch. The deep canyon blocks most other radio signals. The little transmitter provided music for the artisans that lived and worked there.

But as avid music lovers, Richard and Chuck dreamed for a 'real' radio station that could play high fidelity stereo. An AM or FM license was the only way to accomplish that.

In 2004, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) opened applications for AM licenses. Richard and Chuck filed an application, but because they weren't radio pros, fatal mistakes were made in filings and the application was denied.

Gulch Radio's Slow Build to Success

Instead, Gulch Radio became Gulchradio.com, an Internet station that an avid following from Brazil to Japan. More importantly it provided a great learning experience for acquiring technical and production skills and the opportunity to build a vast music library. Today the station has 24,000— most of them purchased from i-Tunes.

In October 2013, Gulch Radio applied to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for a license for a low power FM radio station that had become available for Northern Arizona. The owners hired an engineer and lawyer to make sure the station would be compliance with all the legalities the FCC required and that the complex application was filled out correctly. In early 2014, The FCC awarded Gulch Radio one of its coveted FM licenses. 16

VIII. Conclusion: Resilience and Consolidation in the Verde Valley Airwaves

The history of radio licensing in Cottonwood and Sedona, spanning six decades, confirms a decisive evolution from constrained local service to centralized regional dominance. The market originated with the technically limited AM daytimer, KVIO (1964), and the hyper-local KAZM (1974). However, the market structure has been fundamentally redefined by the strategic development of high-power FM assets starting in the 1980s.

The analysis demonstrates that the primary commercial viability of these licenses stems from their ability to serve the broader Flagstaff-Prescott market via powerful, high-altitude FM transmissions (Class C/C0). The \$3 million acquisition of KQST by Yavapai Broadcasting Corporation in 2004 established the high valuation placed on this regional reach.¹ This commercial trend contrasts with the remarkable, decades-long local stability achieved by KAZM under Tabback Broadcasting, confirming the niche resilience of localized AM service in specialized markets.³

Conclusion: Resilience and Consolidation in the Verde Valley Airwaves

In the modern regulatory environment, the continued existence of the legacy AM licenses (KYBC and KAZM) is commercially dependent on the FCC's allowance for FM translators, which overcome the severe Class D nighttime power restrictions and the physical limitations imposed by the Verde Valley's mountainous topography.³

The recent ownership transition of KAZM (2023) and the comprehensive YBC "Transfer of Control" filing (2025) indicate that while the core spectrum allocations are stable, the ownership and corporate structure of the Verde Valley broadcast sector remain subject to active market transactions and regulatory oversight.

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