

# FIELD NOTES

FOR MEMBERS OF THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN ARIZONA

SPRING/SUMMER  
2022

INSIDE

*Shield Ranch: Verde  
Conservation Hub*

*Protecting the Sonoita  
Creek Wildlife Corridor*

The Nature  
Conservancy   
Protecting nature. Preserving life.





## FIELD NOTES

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The Nature Conservancy  
in Arizona, for our members  
and friends.

*Field Notes* welcomes  
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COVER IMAGE Mexican gold  
poppies, lupine, purple  
scorpion weed and red  
chuparosa adorn the hills  
above Rattlesnake Cove near  
Bartlett Lake. © Paul Gill THIS  
PAGE The pond at the Shield  
Ranch © Tana Kappel/TNC  
INSET TOP TO BOTTOM Milk vetch  
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Stellar © bobcarmichael.com



## Dear Friends,



I'm hoping this message finds you well and that you're planning a wonderful summer in your favorite outdoor setting.

As we're all aware, the dark cloud of climate change looms every day. We are working hard in Arizona to help weather this storm, whether it's our healthy forest or healthy cities work, or our support for climate-friendly, low carbon-emitting solutions to our transportation and economic infrastructure. Big challenges, no doubt, but we're working to address them every single day.

I choose to be hopeful. As my favorite musician, Bruce Springsteen, says: "At the end of every hard day, people find some reason to believe."

In this issue of *Field Notes*, one story stands out for the hope it provides for lasting conservation: Our work with agricultural communities in the Verde Valley and the sale of the Shield Ranch. (See Shield Ranch story, page 4.) Over our 55 years of work in Arizona, we've observed that conservation sometimes takes a lot of twists and turns before the best solutions become apparent. During that time, we've learned a few lessons. (See page 3.)

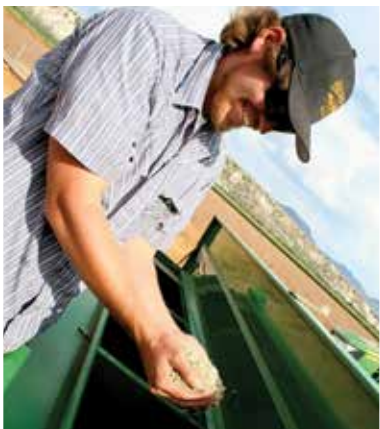
We're glad to work collaboratively with the Verde Valley community and all of whom who depend on Verde River water. In this work, we're all winners.

Bruce says it best: **"Nobody wins unless everybody wins."**

Have a wonderful summer and thank you for your amazing support of conservation in Arizona.

Best,

Dan Stellar, State Director



## Lesson one:

### People and their livelihoods matter.

People need to make a living and be productive members of their communities. Lasting conservation needs to accommodate people. It doesn't necessarily mean taking land out of productive uses or turning off the agricultural irrigation spigot. We need food production, and we all need to learn how to do it without overusing one of our most important resources: water.

## Lesson two:

### Be open to alternate solutions.

When one door closes, another one opens. When the Conservancy first purchased the 300-plus-acre Shield Ranch in 2010, we initially planned to turn that land over to the Forest Service, the adjoining property owner. When that option fell through, we wondered: What is our strategy with this land and its senior water rights?

We opted to lease the farmland to farmers: the Hauser family, who helped us learn a tremendous amount about farming in the Verde Valley. The remaining two-thirds of the land, including the uplands and the riverside cottonwoods, willows and mesquite bosques, would remain important protected habitats for birds and wildlife, increasingly important as wildlife move to adapt to a warming climate.

## Lesson three:

### Strive for incremental progress.

Incremental steps that demonstrate progress and that gain support along the way will often be better and longer lasting than making huge changes in one fell swoop. For more than a decade, Shield Ranch served as an opportunity to learn, adjust and move forward. We developed partnerships with agricultural users that have resulted in more water in the Verde River. The Shield Ranch served as a launching point for the Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition, which has now treated more than 13,000 acres of riparian lands for invasive species under the leadership of the nonprofit group called the Friends of the Verde River.

THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE Zach Hauser plants native grass seed at the Shield Ranch © Kimberly Schonek/TNC; Barley growing at the Shield Ranch © Andrew Kornylak; Great blue heron along the Verde River © Stephen Trimble; Americorps intern Kelly Rapacki doing stream measurements on West Clear Creek, a tributary of the Verde River. © Andrew Kornylak



# The Shield Ranch

## CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE IN THE VERDE VALLEY



THIS PAGE TOP TO BOTTOM  
Four generations of the  
Hauser family in a 2019  
photo: From left, Zach and his  
son Cy, Kevin, who passed  
away in 2019, and Kevin's  
dad Dick. © TNC; River  
otters abound in the Verde  
River © Matt Williams;  
Illustration © iStock

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP TO BOTTOM  
The White Cliffs area along  
the Verde River with the  
Shield Ranch farm fields at  
the top. © Andrew Kornylak

In 2009, Henry Shill and his nephew, Ed Shill, faced a tough choice: They felt unable to continue the hard work of operating their 306-acre Shield Ranch, but they didn't want the scenic property along the Verde River to be subdivided into home sites.

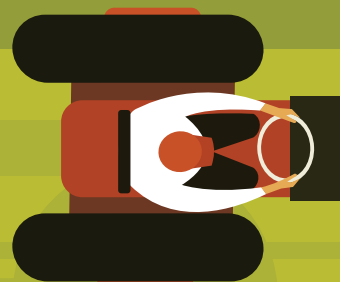
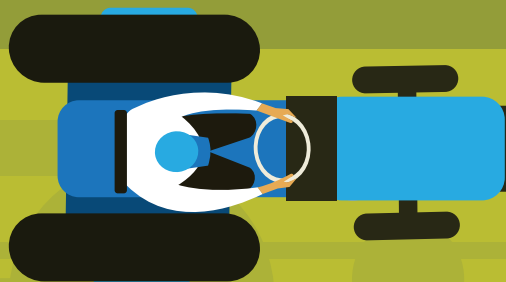
A chance meeting with The Nature Conservancy's Heather Reading led to another option that not only kept the land intact, but also made it an innovation hub for agricultural conservation in the Verde Valley.

The Nature Conservancy bought the land in 2010, and in April 2022, after more than a decade, it sold the property to its longtime conservation partner, the Hauser family. A Nature Conservancy conservation easement will keep the land intact and in agricultural use forever.

"This is a happy outcome for us," said Ed Shill, whose grandparents, Wright and Lilly Shill, bought the ranch in 1944

and raised their family there. "I know my dad and grandparents would have been real happy about the ranch staying in agriculture."

For the Hauser family, the purchase is the third made possible by Conservancy conservation easements – which reduce the purchase price by the value of the foregone development.





Conservation easements helped the Hausers finance the purchase of two other properties where they have expanded their farm operations.

The Shield Ranch purchase “is what my dad would have wanted,” said Zach Hauser, whose father Kevin Hauser passed away in 2020 after a battle with cancer.

“When my parents started farming, they didn’t own their home or the land they farmed,” said Zach.

**“We didn’t know what conservation easements were, but they have been key to helping us own the land that we are farming.”**

When Kevin Hauser first began working with The Nature Conservancy,

land prices were escalating and the Verde River was facing a future of declining flows. Poorly planned growth and excessive irrigation were taking a toll on the river, posing a risk to wildlife and people who rely on the Verde for water.

The Conservancy’s initial plan in purchasing Shield Ranch with its senior water rights was to shut off the irrigation and eventually turn the property over to the U.S. Forest Service, which holds lands abutting the ranch.

Lucky for all, that option fell through. Instead, after a few years of leasing the ranch to a company that grew vegetables, the Conservancy leased the farm to Zach Hauser in 2014.

**“Working with agricultural water users is critical to protecting stream flows because agriculture is the largest water user,” said the Conservancy’s Verde River program director Kim Schonek, who is also serving as the chapter’s interim water program director.**



## Conservation Easements: A Two-Way Street

When landowners enter into a conservation easement, they give up the ability to develop the property in ways inconsistent with conservation. They also commit to certain conservation practices. In return, the landowner is either paid the value of the non-developable land covered by the easement, or the value is donated in exchange for a tax deduction. The specifics of the easement are negotiated by the landowner and the easement holder.





Owning the ranch and developing a partnership with the Hausers helped the Conservancy gain a foothold as a Verde Valley landowner and launch its work with agriculture.

“It’s a great conservation outcome because we’re supporting local agriculture and low-water tools without the expense and time of managing the farm,” said Jody Norris, the Conservancy’s land and water protection director, who facilitated the sale and easement.



One of the first farms settled in the Verde Valley, in the 1860s, the Shield Ranch has priority water rights for irrigation water from West Clear Creek, a tributary to the Verde.

Understanding water issues in the Verde Valley required the Conservancy to learn about the local irrigation system: a maze of irrigation ditches snaking through the valley. More than 30 irrigation ditches divert water from the mainstem of the Verde River and its tributaries Oak Creek, Beaver Creek and West Clear Creek.

Shield Ranch is the sole user on one of the three irrigation ditches in West Clear Creek. In learning to manage

water on the ranch and ensure water was delivered, there were many opportunities to partner with landowners to improve the overall irrigation system in West Clear Creek. Improvements included converting the Wingfield #1 dirt-lined ditch to an efficient pipeline that allows more water to stay in the creek while ensuring users get their water.

**“The lessons we learned in West Clear Creek have translated to so many great projects across the Verde Valley,” said Schonek.**

Learning how to reduce water use led us to consider whether farmers could grow crops in the Verde Valley that used less water.

That question led us to work with the Hausers to test barley at the Shield Ranch. Malt barley is a low-water-use crop that grows in the spring when more water is flowing in the river.

The crop grew well, but who would buy the barley? To provide a market, the Conservancy and entrepreneur Chip Norton created a public-benefit corporation called Sinagua Malt,



THIS PAGE LEFT TOPT TO BOTTOM Barley © Chris Chappell/TNC; Irrigation ditch by Hauser farm field © TNC; Black-necked stilt © Peter Warren/TNC; Canoeing on the Verde River © Andrew Kornylak  
RIGHT From left, Jeni O’Callaghan, former owner of the Park Central property; Claudia Hauser, current owner of the Hauser farm, Park Central farm and Shield Ranch; TNC’s Jody Norris; David Shill and brother Ed Shill, former owners of the Shield Ranch. © Kimberly Schonek/TNC



which would purchase the barley and turn it into malt for beer brewing. Arizona brewers are buying the malt and marketing the brew as river-friendly beer.

Now several agricultural producers, including the Hausers and the Yavapai-Apache Nation, are growing barley and selling it to Sinagua Malt.

For more than a decade, the Shield Ranch served as the Conservancy's home base for learning about conservation in the Verde Valley. "As ownership transitions from the Conservancy to the Hausers, we

know the conservation values of the ranch will continue to be protected," said Schonek.

Wildlife – including deer, elk, black bear, mountain lion and bighorn sheep – will continue to wander through the Shield Ranch, which is a critical link in the Black Hills-Munds Mountain wildlife corridor. The ranch's 80 acres of riparian lands will continue to provide habitat for birds, including endangered yellow-billed cuckoos and southwestern willow flycatchers. In addition, the ranch adjoins the conservation-easement protected Park Central Farm as well as public lands of Arizona State Parks and the U.S. Forest Service.

These protected areas provide important connecting routes for plants and animals to move to as they adapt to warming temperatures.

During the Shills' farming days, the area's plentiful water irrigated alfalfa, corn and the grass that fed their Angus cattle. Today, ag producers are growing

new crops while using less irrigation water. They know water is precious.

**To celebrate the Hausers' purchase of the Shield Ranch, Conservancy staff and several generations of Verde River farm families floated the Verde River past their properties.**

Ed Shill, speaking at the family gravesite on Shield Ranch, said: "I know someone who is extremely happy about this."

He was referring, of course, to his father who farmed the property during Ed's childhood and who taught him about the wildlife on the farm.

"There was a den of rattlesnakes, javelina, bald eagles and lots of elk and Canada geese," said Ed. "As kids we were going to hunt the geese, but Dad told us that they mate for life. That's when we put our guns away."

— Tana Kappel

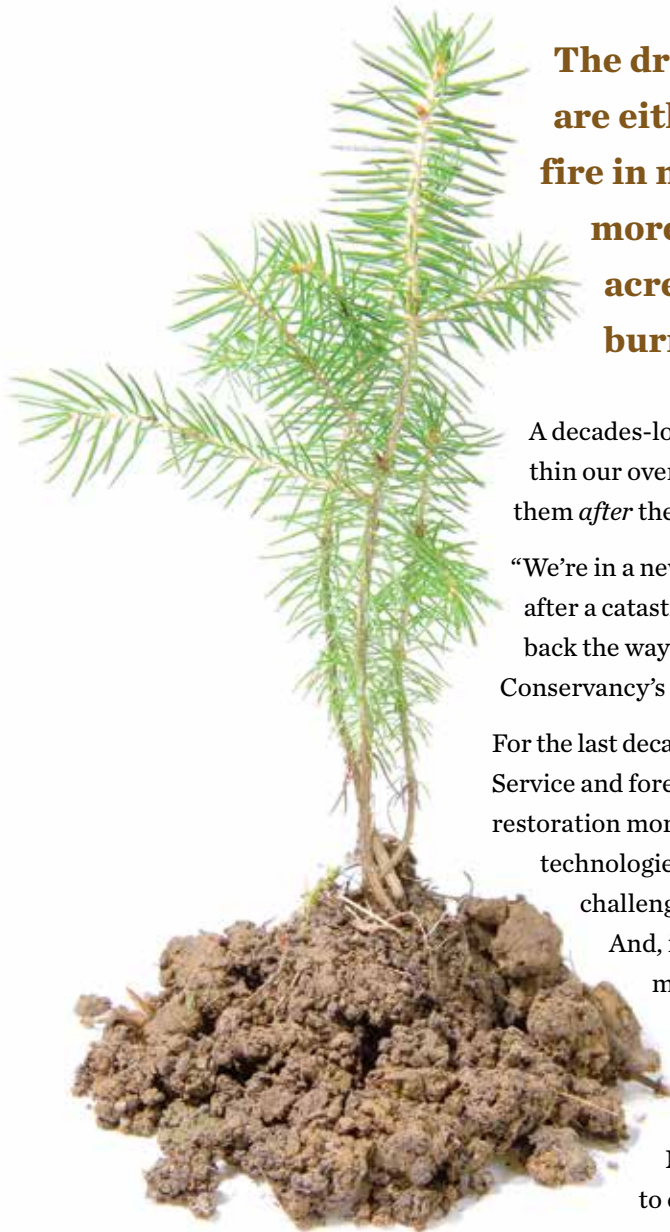






# Our Forests

## FROM BURN SCARS TO FORESTS OF THE FUTURE



**The drought-stricken lands of the Southwest are either burning or ready to burn, with one fire in northwestern New Mexico incinerating more than three dozen homes and 320,000 acres. A large fire near Flagstaff is still burning, and the fire season has just begun.**

A decades-long drought and a warming climate are amping up pressure to thin our overgrown forests to prevent severe fires. But how do we revive them *after* they've burned?

"We're in a new era that's hotter and drier, and evidence is showing that after a catastrophic wildfire, our ponderosa pine forests may not come back the way they were," said Joel Jurgens, interim director of The Nature Conservancy's forest program in Arizona.

For the last decade, the Conservancy in Arizona has worked with the U.S. Forest Service and forest professionals to prevent catastrophic wildfire, by making restoration more efficient and cost-effective through the use of new tablet technologies. Still, the low value of small diameter wood makes it challenging for private contractors to scale up and sustain business. And, it's costly to transport the low-value wood to some of the few mills left in Arizona.

The sheer size of our vulnerable forests makes restoration daunting. North America's largest ponderosa pine forest spans 2.4 million acres across portions of Arizona and New Mexico – and all of it is drought-stressed and susceptible to catastrophic wildfire.

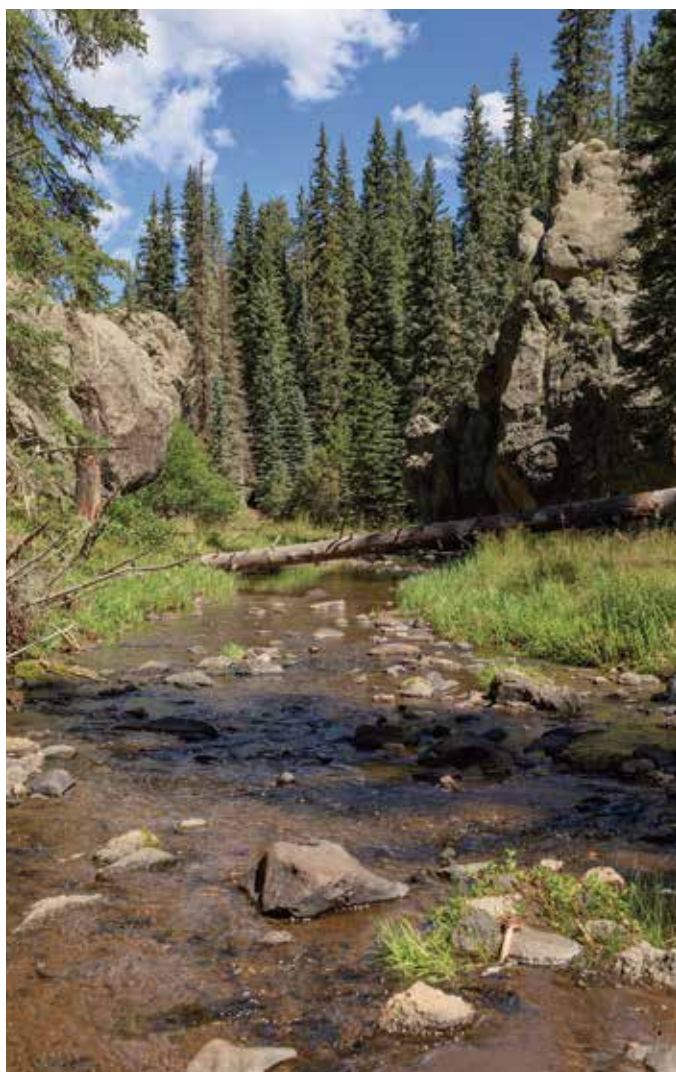
Because of these challenges, "we need to be smarter about where we put treatments on the landscape," said Travis Woolley, the Conservancy's forest ecologist.



The good news is that Congress has allocated \$189 million as part of its wildfire crisis plan to dramatically increase the pace of forest restoration in the Four Forest Restoration Initiative areas of Arizona. The funding was included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The national goal of the wildfire crisis strategy is to reduce tree densities across 50 million acres of forests in the next 10 years.

“That’s at least two times more than current rates of restoration in Arizona,” said Woolley.

Through the 4FRI effort, hundreds of thousands of acres are approved for thinning in Arizona, and the U.S. Forest Service and partners are working to implement restoration in those project areas.



Forest thinning and prevention is also underway in New Mexico, with the added focus on resurrecting forests after they’ve burned.

“Since 2014 the 100-plus partners in the Rio Grande Water Fund have provided resources to improve forest resilience and reduce fire risk through thinning and managed fire,” said Anne Bradley, TNC’s recently retired forest program director in New Mexico. “We are also learning how to reforest large burn scars in a way that will be adapted to the warming and drying climate.”

The question is what to plant? What tree species will withstand the climate of the future?

**In New Mexico’s Jemez Mountains, the 2011 Las Conchas Fire scorched 156,000 acres and destroyed not only the trees, but the seeds of future trees. Without intervention, large burns could take many centuries to become forests again, if they do.**

The Nature Conservancy in New Mexico is working with the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, the state’s universities and area pueblos to study ways to re-forest the state’s burned forests. Promising research points to methods of preparing tree seedlings to face harsh conditions before they go in the ground.

Pine and fir seedlings grown from seeds taken from hot, south-facing slopes – are being “toughened up” in the lab to withstand the hotter and drier world they will face. Scientists from New Mexico’s state universities have discovered that if they withhold water until the seedlings almost begin to wilt, the seedlings develop a clever defense mechanism: they allocate more tissue to transporting water, which allows the trees to make the most of what water they do receive.

Once ready, the seedlings are planted in “tree islands” about an acre in size. “Scattering these around the burned area provides a better distribution of the future seed source and provides some protection from repeat fires. Planting the trees on a slope may also confer benefits, turning the tree islands into seed super spreaders, as gravity helps move seeds away from the mother trees,” said Bradley.





**Forest crews from the Santa Clara Pueblo have been hand-planting the “toughened” seedlings in burned areas. Research indicates that the new seedlings have about a 67-percent survival rate, compared to a 25-percent survival rate of “un-toughened” seedlings from a 2015 study.**

With funding from the public-private Rio Grande Water Fund, around 4,000 acres of burned-out forest near Los Alamos are being replanted to mimic tree islands that would naturally occur when pine and mixed conifer forests historically experienced more frequent low severity fire. Those forests had openings and groupings of trees instead of the solid mass of trees we see today.

“These approaches provide hope that with care and attention to the way we select and grow trees, we can continue to have forests in the future,” said Bradley.

To boost replanting, Congressional lawmakers have included legislation in the infrastructure bill that would help the U.S. Forest Service plant 1.2 billion trees on 4.1 million acres of national forests hit by fire, pests and disease over the next 10 years.

Fire doesn’t respect jurisdictional boundaries, and neither should reforestation efforts. Along with more money, more partners working across all lands will be needed to restore forests.

— Tana Kappel



# PROTECT YOUR PROPERTY FROM WILDFIRE

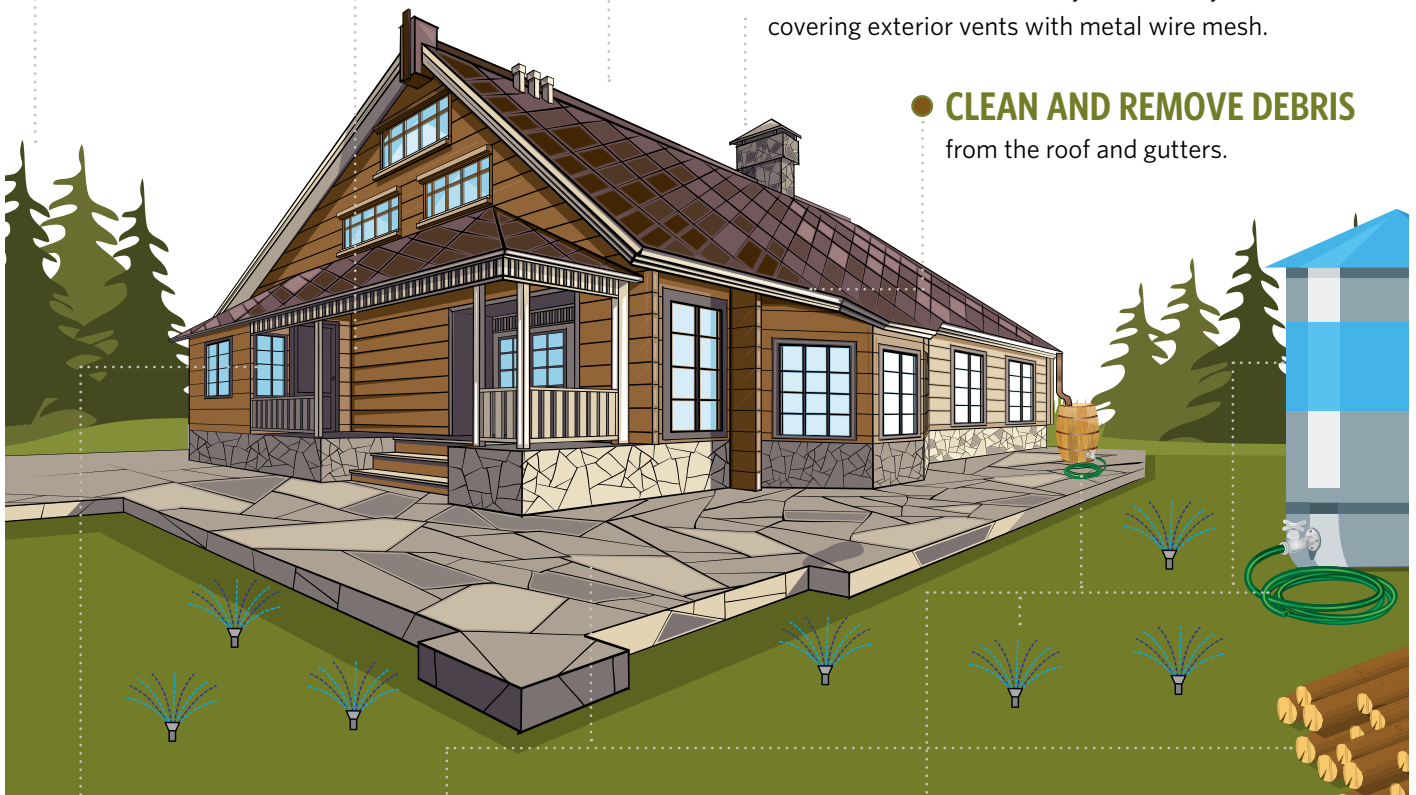
Fire season is now a year-round reality for many Arizonans. The good news is there are things you can do to minimize the risk of your property being engulfed by severe wildfire.

- **THIN OUT TREES:** The number one thing you can do is to thin dense stands of trees within a buffer of one-third of a mile around your home. If you're worried about how that will affect your property values, don't be: Studies in Flagstaff show a properly thinned buffer increases the market value of your home.

- **FORTIFY YOUR ROOF:** Install noncombustible coverings on your roof and use metal flashing where wood decking meets the siding.

- **KEEP EMBERS OUT** of your home by covering exterior vents with metal wire mesh.

- **CLEAN AND REMOVE DEBRIS** from the roof and gutters.



- **REPLACE DAMAGED SEALS** around garage doors, pet doors, sky lights or windows.

- **CREATE 30 FEET OF DEFENSIBLE SPACE** by removing flammable vegetation, moving your wood pile, and replacing bark mulch with rock, brick or concrete.

- **PLAN FOR ACCESS TO WATER:** Install external sprinkler systems or a water tank. Connect garden hoses long enough to reach any area of the home and fill large containers with water.

Sources: Flagstaff Fire Department, U.S. FEMA, Fire-Adapted Communities



# Death By Drought

## Forest Restoration Alleviates Tree Death from Drought

If we needed more science to confirm the benefits of forest restoration, we now have it: Thinning and prescribed fire in Arizona's ponderosa pine forests would reduce drought-related tree death by 25 percent, according to a new study by Arizona Nature Conservancy scientists.

These findings were true across all future climate scenarios, according to the Conservancy's lead author Lisa McCauley. "And the more thinning, the greater the reduction in tree death," she said.

The results are consistent with regional findings. A companion study examining pine forests across the West found that reducing tree densities could reduce their vulnerability to drought.

Additional research by Nature Conservancy scientists in Arizona shows multiple ways that restoration can make our forests resilient to climate change. Collectively, these studies found that restoration planned as part of Arizona's Four Forest Restoration Initiative could increase carbon stored in our forests by 15 percent, increase tree growth by 30 percent and increase streamflow by 20 percent – even given a changing climate.

"We're on the right track," said Travis Woolley, Nature Conservancy forest ecologist in Arizona. "In 2021, more than 21,000 acres were thinned in the 4FRI area, the highest annual rate since the beginning in 2009."

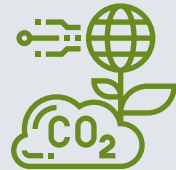
Around 80 percent of the fire-adapted forests in the West are overly dense due to a century of fire

### FOREST RESTORATION BENEFITS



**25%** reduction in drought-related tree mortality

**15%** increase in carbon



**20%** increase in stream flow

**30%** increase in tree growth



suppression. High tree density and drought makes these forests – and neighboring communities – highly susceptible to catastrophic fire.

"Our science is clear about the many co-benefits of forest restoration," said Marcos Robles, lead scientist for TNC in Arizona.

"We're hopeful that 4FRI and other large-scale forest restoration projects across the West will be considered priority areas for federal forest restoration funding which could truly make a difference," said Robles.





# Making a Stand for Nature in Southern Arizona

In the southern Arizona border county of Santa Cruz sits a figurative “gold mine” of scenic byways, natural amenities and wildlife.

There are historic ranches and cowboys, public lands, hiking and biking trails, wineries, soaring eagles and pronghorn. There are the scenic Sky Islands, grasslands of Las Cienegas National Conservation Area and the San Rafael Valley, the cinnamon-colored Canelo Hills and several internationally significant natural areas.

**Santa Cruz County is one area where the Nature Conservancy plans to ramp up its conservation efforts in the coming years, as part of a global effort to protect 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030.**

The wild heart of the county, Sonoita Creek near the town of Patagonia, is where the Conservancy’s Arizona conservation work began in the late ‘60s with the purchase of 873 acres. The land became the Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve, internationally recognized as a birding hot spot, home of lush vegetation, endangered cienegas and some of the oldest, tallest streamside cottonwood trees in the Southwest.

“It was a great investment then, and an even more important one to build on as we try to preserve one of the best wildlife corridors in the state,” said Dan Stellar, director of the Arizona chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

Sonoita Creek, home to endangered fish and some of the most unique wildlife on the North American continent, is one of only a handful of perennial streams that still exist in Arizona. Its waters cut through the Santa Rita Mountains to the north and the Patagonia Mountains to the south.





Freshwater in this area is threatened by prolonged drought, rising temperatures and increasing human demand. Mining for copper and other minerals also pose threats to water and wildlife habitat in this region, and demand for certain minerals is increasing in the drive for the future low-carbon economy.

Threats elevate the need for renewed collaborative conservation efforts. The Conservancy has stepped up its monitoring of Sonoita Creek flows, fish and macroinvertebrates. Baseline measurements of stream health are needed to determine if the stream



will suffer any negative impacts from the proposed Hermosa copper mine in the Patagonia Mountains. The proposed mine is along Harshaw Creek, a key tributary of Sonoita Creek upstream of Patagonia.

The Conservancy is also investigating opportunities for protecting land along a seven-mile stretch of the creek north of Patagonia. “We have some significant opportunities to work with partners to re-connect springs and restore key stretches of the creek,” said Damian Rawoot, the Conservancy’s southern Arizona protection manager. These efforts would help revitalize the natural creek system, restore populations of native Gila topminnow fish and

reduce the potential for severe flooding in the local community.

The healthy flows and connected floodplains of Sonoita Creek are also critical to maintaining landscape corridors for the area’s wildlife.

One project involves supporting the Borderlands Restoration Network to protect a roughly four-square-mile area along Sonoita Creek north of Patagonia. This area lies in a vital wildlife corridor that originates in the Sierra Madre range of northern Mexico and stretches between the Canelo Hills and Santa Rita foothills.



### Recent jaguar sightings have occurred in the Santa Rita Mountains, and most experts agree that these creatures would have passed through the Sonoita Creek area.

Protecting critical wildlife corridors such as Sonoita Creek is key to achieving an international goal of governments and businesses to protect 30 percent of global lands and waters by 2030. (Visit [nature.org/30X30](https://www.nature.org/30X30) – “Eight Steps to Protect the Best on Earth”)

The hope is that protecting this amount of habitat will help wildlife species be more resilient to climate change and other human disturbances.

In addition to providing fish and wildlife the freshwater they need to survive, Sonoita Creek and the surrounding watershed is important for the local economy.

Santa Cruz County, whose economy fluctuated throughout its history as mining efforts boomed and busted, has seen the rise of a significant nature-based economy. A recent University of Arizona study, funded by a consortium of partners, including the Conservancy, found that nature contributes almost \$54 million in GDP to the county’s economy, and almost 800 jobs.



Nature-based tourism — including bird and wildlife watching, hiking, hunting, camping in the area’s public and private nature areas — directly contributes **\$14 million to the county’s GDP, almost \$23 million in sales and 320 jobs**, according to the study.

An additional \$18 million in GDP comes from nature-based industries, including wineries and ag industries, and conservation and restoration activities.

“Nature is a key driver of all that makes this place special. We plan to keep working to support freshwater and important lands in this watershed,” said the Conservancy’s Dan Stellar.

— Tana Kappel



# A Legacy of Leadership

# John Graham

## HELPED PAVE THE WAY



During the last two decades,  
The Nature Conservancy made  
major strides protecting Arizona  
land and water, enhancing wildlife  
habitat, restoring forest health,  
and addressing urban heat while  
supporting nature conservation  
in Mexico and around the world.



Achieving conservation results at this scale requires visionary leadership. That's what The Nature Conservancy in Arizona got when John Graham, a successful Phoenix businessman, joined its Board of Trustees in 2001.

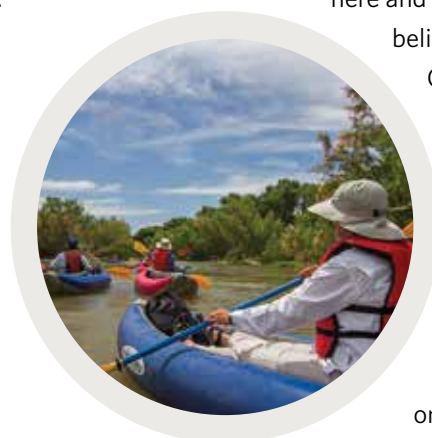
Pat Graham had just become the state director and was facing "a mountain of debt." He knew he needed to rebuild the board by recruiting respected leaders like John who shared the Conservancy's vision.

"We had challenges saving the best of Arizona and I knew I needed help," said Pat, who retired from the Conservancy in November 2020. "John was the right person at the right time."

John — the CEO of Sunbelt Holdings, a real estate firm based in Paradise Valley, and co-founder of Valley Partnership — brought business savvy and many connections through his affiliations with the Greater Phoenix Leadership, Valley of the Sun United Way, ASU Foundation, Urban Land Institute, and other organizations.

As a TNC board member, John, who resides in Paradise Valley along with his wife Kathleen, immediately got to work. He became board chair and then co-chaired Arizona's largest fundraising campaign for nature at the time, "Nature Matters: A Campaign for a Sustainable Arizona." TNC trustees Bennett Dorrance and Craig Weatherup also were campaign co-chairs.

The campaign raised \$39 million and led to \$350 million in positive impact for nature: a nine-to-one return on investment in Arizona. The campaign expanded protection



along the Verde and San Pedro rivers, created the Center for Science and Public Policy, developed innovations in forest restoration and helped establish Growing by Design, a program to guide siting of development and renewable energy.

In a *Field Notes* article in 2009, John explained why he, one of the West's leading developers, was so passionate about the environment: "I'm an Arizonan. I'm raising a family here and plan to live here for the rest of my life. I truly believe that well-planned development and the Conservancy can work together to preserve our rich Arizona quality of life."

During John's two decades on the board, the Conservancy took on many bold initiatives including creation of the Colorado River program, the Future Forests program, and a water summit that led to much of the Arizona program's work on the Verde River. For his service to Arizona conservation, John received the Arizona chapter's highest honor, the Oak Leaf Award.

To address the current environmental challenges, John believes "business leaders and conservation organizations need to work together."

While his TNC board service ended in 2021, he'll continue as a special advisor to the board.

"John was a catalyst to get this chapter to where we are today. We are thrilled he agreed to stay involved as a special advisor.

With his support, we know we can build off the strong foundation John worked so hard to create so that we can have an even greater impact going forward," said Dan Stellar, state director of the Arizona Conservancy.





# REMEMBERING Bob Jensen

.....1944-2022.....

**“Bob was a true mountain man who lived mostly off the land. He was, and is, as much a part of Hart Prairie as are the trees and animals that reside there.”**

Wade Gibson,  
former TNC  
AmeriCorps member

Bob Jensen, The Nature Conservancy’s first Hart Prairie preserve manager, passed away February 4th, 2022, at his home adjacent to the preserve where he lived for more than 40 years.

Bob was a long-time friend of the Conservancy in Arizona, and an unwavering supporter of the preserve. Bob worked closely with the Wilson family, who in 1994 donated the Hart Prairie property to the Conservancy. Bob, also a leader in the Flagstaff conservation community and a Colorado River rafting guide, helped upgrade the historic cabins at the preserve.

As Hart Prairie’s preserve manager, Bob led many activities for Conservancy donors, members and their families, including guided hikes, cross country ski trips, and plant and mushroom workshops. Bob also managed some of the first restoration projects at the preserve, including forest thinning and bebb willow wetland restoration.

Even after Bob left the preserve manager role, he remained a neighbor and partner of TNC. He often showed up at the lodge to share a laugh, tell one of his many stories, or help with whatever was needed. Bob could talk to anybody





about nature, and he loved showing kids around the preserve and making Hart Prairie a special place for them.

He also befriended many an AmeriCorps volunteer during their stints at Hart Prairie.

‘I know for many of us who worked or volunteered at Hart Prairie, the preserve is inseparable from the memory of Bob. He took us on moonlit walks into the prairie to spot a passing comet, and shared Anasazi legends...I’ll think of him every time I see a sunset, or as he put it, the ‘alpin glow’ at Hart Prairie,’ said former TNC AmeriCorps member Matt Ruggirello.

Bob felt invested in the preserve. He felt like he was a part of the mountain and the prairie.

“Bob was a true mountain man who lived mostly off the land. He was, and is, as much a part of Hart Prairie as are the trees and animals that reside there,” said Wade Gibson, also a former TNC AmeriCorps member.

Bob raised his own kids on the prairie. His daughter, Rae Banasihan said, “Life on the mountain was magical with Dad! I am so thankful for the childhood he gave me and for the part the preserve played.”

Bob left this world seated in his chair by the fire with the meadows and the mountains in his view. His presence will forever be felt on the landscape. In many ways, he was Hart Prairie personified.

— Caity Varian

# Conservancy Preserve Access

## Hart Prairie Preserve

Access to the preserve is by reservation only. Please contact preserve manager Bob Hoffa at 928-699-1310.

## Ramsey Canyon Preserve

While the trails have been open for a while, the Ramsey visitor center opened to visitors June 16th. Going forward the preserve is open except for Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

## Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve

The trails are open.

## Muleshoe Ranch Cooperative Management Area

The visitor center and casitas are closed for the foreseeable future. Trails are open.

## Aravaipa Canyon Preserve

Access to the preserve and wilderness area is open. BLM permits are required for hiking in the wilderness area.

## More information is available at [nature.org/arizona](https://www.nature.org/arizona)

in the “Places We Protect” section.



# Nature at its Finest

## STUDENT PHOTO CONTEST

Students from across Arizona impressed professional photographers in the 9th “Adventures in Nature” Photo Contest. This year, around 900 photos were entered by students—ages 13-18.

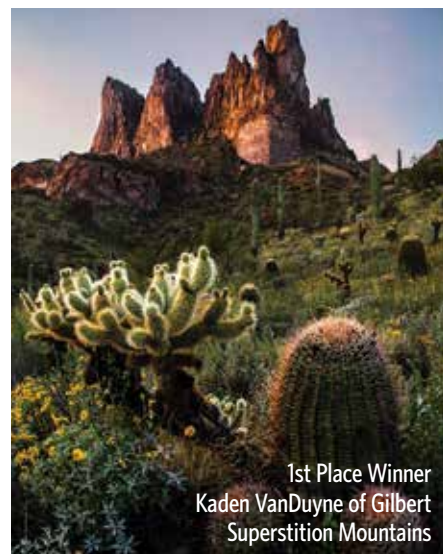
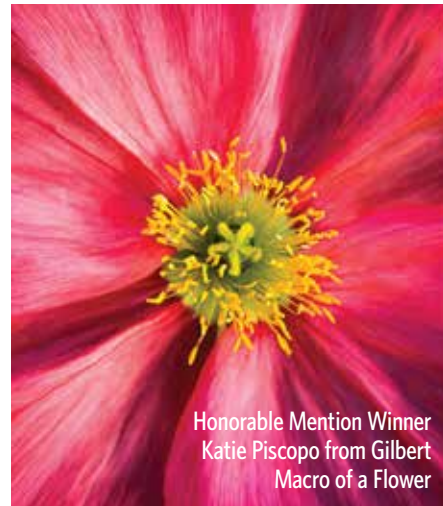
The esteemed panel of judges included photography editor at *Arizona Highways* magazine, Jeff Kida, professional photographer and photography instructor Suzanne Mathia, director of photography at *Tucson Daily Star*, Rick Wiley, and corporate and architectural photographer Mark Skalny.

Kaden VanDuyne of Gilbert took first place for “Superstition Mountains at Sunset.” During the awards ceremony, Kaden shared that he does photography with his dad and that his family has a “hurry up and wait mentality,” traveling across the state to Arizona’s most iconic landscapes and patiently waiting for the right moment to capture the best photos.

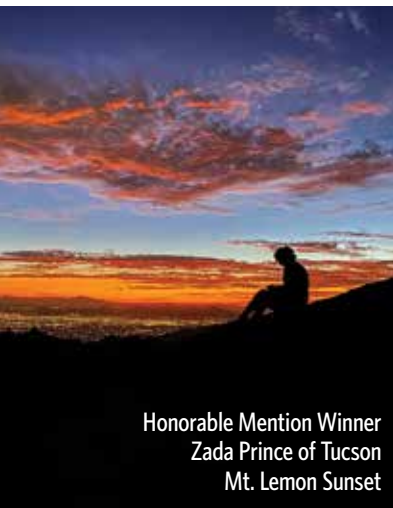
Adrian Hanna of Scottsdale received honorable mention for “A Snowy Afternoon in Boynton Canyon.” “We went out on a very cold day and I remember my hands were very cold but there were so many amazing things to take pictures of so I just kept taking pictures,” said Hanna.

While backpacking in Sycamore Canyon, Corbin Rouette of Prescott was keeping his eye out for wildlife on the trail. A butterfly was perched on some gnarly bark, enabling him to seize a beautiful moment. Rouette received honorable mention for “Green Comma Butterfly.” Corbin said he learned how to take photos using film, which required him to be patient and disciplined.

“Young people are the future of conservation and their future depends on their understanding and ability to advocate on behalf of nature and our environment,” said Dan Stellar, state director for The Nature Conservancy in Arizona.







Honorable Mention Winner  
Zada Prince of Tucson  
Mt. Lemon Sunset



Honorable Mention Winner  
Corbin Rouette of Prescott  
Green Comma Butterfly



3rd Place Winner  
Kaden VanDuyne of Gilbert  
Sunset at Horseshoe Bend



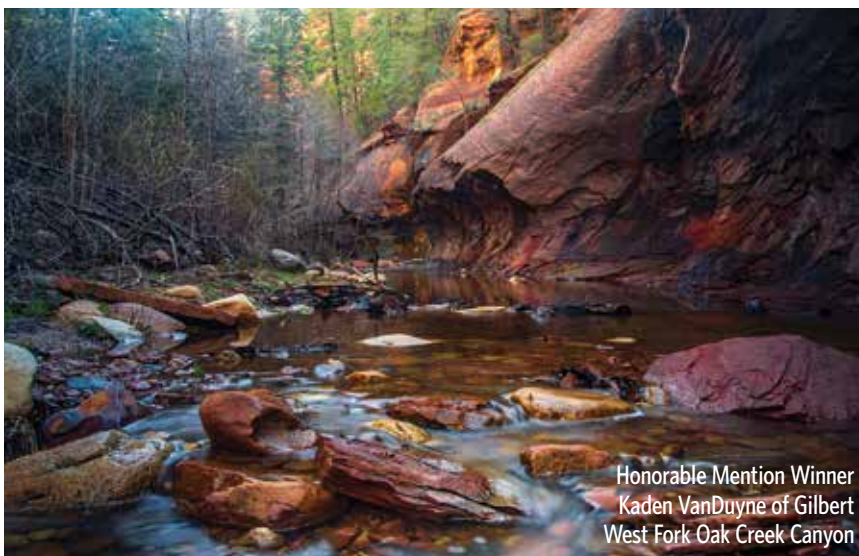
2nd Place Winner  
Kaden VanDuyne  
Salt River panorama



Honorable Mention Winner  
Kaden VanDuyne of Gilbert  
Western Screech Owls



Honorable Mention Winner  
Adrian Hanna of Scottsdale  
A Snowy Afternoon in Boynton Canyon



Honorable Mention Winner  
Kaden VanDuyne of Gilbert  
West Fork Oak Creek Canyon



## Cherie Wescott

### Legacy Club member of Oklahoma City

In this space, we've invited members of the Legacy Club to share their stories about experiences with nature. Legacy Club members are those who have included The Nature Conservancy in their estate plans.



I expect to live the remainder of my life here in Oklahoma City, enjoying my small acreage near the shores of Lake Eufaula which will be passed on to TNC. I expect to be buried in a cemetery overlooking the lake, all reminiscent of the area in which I grew up.

I previously lived in Arizona for 25 years and continue my ownership of a larger acreage in the mountains north of Douglas in Cochise County, which will also be passed on to TNC.

My parents used an antique whistle to call me home from far down the beach on the shores of Lake Charlevoix, Michigan. We lived on a dead-end

road with state park land across the road. There was no place I would rather be than tramping through the woods, along the creek, and down the beach, finding shells, frogs, toads, dead fish, clam shells and driftwood. My father had been a junior high science teacher who kept a collection of 'stuff'. My classmates loved to come to our house to play with all the interesting 'stuff'.

There is nothing like the smell of a lake on the breeze.

— Cherie Wescott

### WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

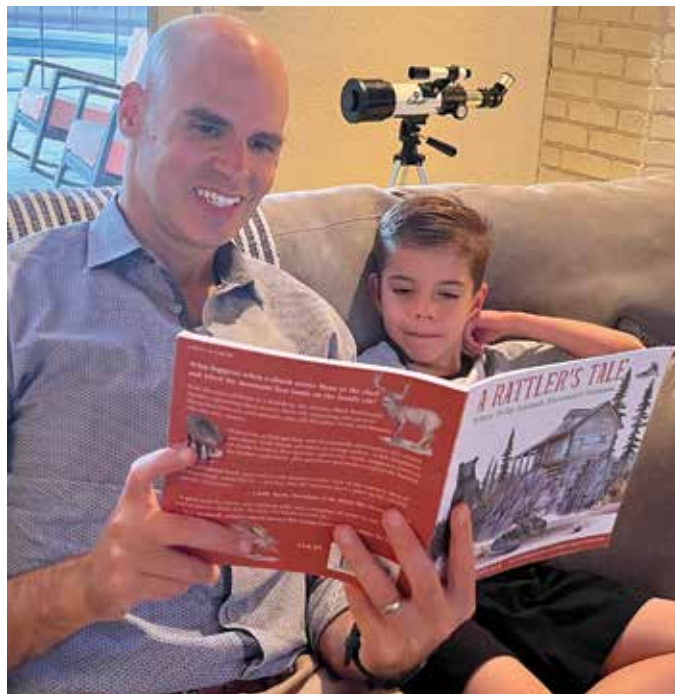
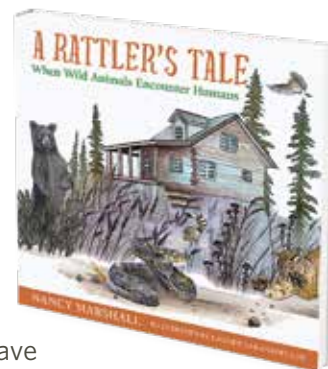
We'd love to hear from Legacy Club members about why they are passionate about nature and why they decided to include the Conservancy in their estate giving plans. Please send your story to **Mark Ryan at [mdryan@tnc.org](mailto:mdryan@tnc.org)**



TOP TO BOTTOM Cherie Wescott © *Courtesy of Cherie Wescott*;  
Common tree frog in Michigan © *Raymond Coleman*

# A RATTLER'S TALE

## All He Wants is a Little Respect



## AS A KID

who grew up on a northeastern Montana ranch I thought the only good rattlesnake was a dead rattlesnake. I was afraid of them. When I went to gather

eggs in the chicken coop, would there be a rattler? My Mom, using a shovel, killed plenty of them in our yard to protect me, my two younger brothers, our dogs and cats, and the ranch animals.

Now whenever I hear about someone killing a snake, I'm saddened. I've come to admire snakes, even the venomous ones. They are part of the amazing

biodiversity of Earth and have a unique role to play in the predator/prey dynamic.

In Arizona, which has more snake species than most other states, it's important to respect them. That was Nancy Marshall's goal in writing "A Rattler's Tale: When Wild Animals Encounter Humans."

The book, intended for kids, but entertaining for adults too, includes delightful illustrations by Arizona Game and Fish biologist Lauren Sarantopoulos. The book is told



from the point of view of an Arizona black rattlesnake. It gives readers glimpses of interactions between a human family and the Arizona wildlife that inhabit the environs of their mountain cabin.

The stories were based on Nancy's many years exploring in the Prescott National Forest. A longtime member of The Nature Conservancy, Nancy lives in Phoenix and spends summers in Flagstaff.

I wanted to know how kids would react to this book, so I shared it with our state director, Dan Stellar, to read to his son Eli, age six. Eli's verdict: "It was really good. I liked learning about snakes and all the other animals!"

My hope is that kids who read this and other books will learn to respect all creatures, and maybe see snakes as beautiful rather than as something to kill.

— Tana Kappel

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To learn more about this book or to order, please visit [www.nuggetpress.com](http://www.nuggetpress.com). The book is also available on Amazon.

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CLOCKWISE Golden Crown near Sedona © Dan Mitler/TNC Photo Contest; Gulf fritillary on yellow flower © Aaron Mrotek/TNC; Male Lazuli bunting at TNC's Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve © Nick Viani; Pronghorn antelope at Las Cienegas National Conservation Area © Peter Warren/TNC

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