Dear Friend,

The journalist Charles Kuralt, renowned for his experiences travelling throughout the United States, once said, “America is a great story and there is a river on every page.”

What an apt description, even for a desert state like Arizona. While the iconic red rocks and stately saguaros are often used to tell Arizona’s story, it’s our rivers that truly give life to the state’s natural diversity and beauty, as well as to our growing communities. Can you imagine a tougher job than to be a river in our arid land? Yet, rivers like the Colorado, Verde, and San Pedro battle drought, climate and human demands to quench the needs of hundreds of species, millions of migrating birds, communities, farms, and families. They are teeming with life, providing lush homes for southwestern willow flycatchers and otter, and even a respite for migrating jaguar.

However, these persistent, hard-working rivers face challenges like never before. The August issue of Arizona Highways identified 12 of the state’s most endangered natural wonders and the Verde and San Pedro rivers, Lake Mead and Fossil Creek made the list.

A question for all of us is whether our fresh water supplies are adequate to support the quality of life we want for our children and their children. It is for this very reason that The Nature Conservancy is working at a scale like never before, employing a basin-wide strategy for the Colorado River and its tributaries. Since nearly all the rivers in Arizona are part of the Colorado’s basin, this strategy is vital to their future. Simultaneously, the work we do to protect the Verde and San Pedro rivers is critical to the success of the overall Colorado River system.

Inside, you can read more about the Colorado River Program. You can also learn about our work to sustain Arizona’s rivers at nature.org/arizona. Better yet, visit one of our state’s rivers or streams, including those on the Conservancy’s preserves. Nature matters in Arizona and there is no greater proof of this than our rivers.

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State Director

San Pedro River Mapping
A Bi-National Effort to Learn More About This Important Water Source

Long-time Conservancy volunteer Dutch Nagle joined nearly 100 other volunteers June 21 to collect data for mapping where the San Pedro River has water and where it doesn’t. The volunteers spread along more than 120 miles of the river, including six miles in Mexico. Simple clicks on handheld GPS devices recorded the data which the Conservancy has compiled into maps. These maps provide important insights for scientists, planners and decision makers regarding the river’s flow.

Nagle, a Sierra Vista resident, doesn’t mind braving the hottest time of year to hike and map the river. “This work has to be done,” says Nagle. “I do this for the river.”

The Conservancy and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management began the mapping project 10 years ago, focusing on the driest time of year. This year’s mapping was organized by the Conservancy, BLM, Community Watershed Alliance and partner organizations in Mexico.

“It’s exciting to see this project grow every year,” said Holly Richter, director of the Conservancy’s Upper San Pedro program. “It’s a real testament to people’s commitment to the health of this river.”

This year, the river was drier than last year; only 36 percent of the river was flowing, as opposed to 39 percent last year.

The San Pedro River is vitally important to people and nature. The river sustains growing communities, farming, ranching and mining in Mexico and Arizona. It supports nearly two-thirds of the U.S. bird diversity, with more than 4 million birds using the river as a respite during their annual migration. More than 80 species of mammals and reptiles call the San Pedro home.

The volunteers were treated to lots of wildlife sightings, including collared peccaries, Gila monsters, a gray hawk and the occasional cinnamon-bellied Nangle remembers seeing a group of noisy egrets, a great blue heron, a yellow-billed cuckoo and lots of deer during the four years he’s helped with the mapping. “Wildlife used this river,” says Nagle. “And, so do we.”

To view the San Pedro wet/dry maps, visit the Conservancy’s science web site azconservation.org.

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When Rob Burton looked up a hill at the San Pedro River, he saw miles of Sonoran scrub vegetation that was once disturbed by construction of the San Pedro River Preserve. He saw lush, healthy cottonwoods and willows, a wide diversity of native grasses along with perennial shrubs common to the Sonoran desert. As these native plants take root, Burton expects birds, tortoise and other species that forage on these grasses to follow. He instilled this stewardship ethic in me at an early age.

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The Colorado River and its basin, which includes most of Arizona, are a top global priority for The Nature Conservancy. Taylor, a lawyer specializing in water and the environment, recently joined the Conservancy to lead its Colorado River Program.

To be successful, we must help water users find solutions that are environmentally sound and provide reliable water supplies for the future. We need to show them that

We recently sat down with Taylor to learn more about her and plans for the river.

**What is the focus for the Colorado River Program?**

A lot of tremendous things are being done by the Conservancy’s sister chapters within the Colorado’s basin, including Arizona, to protect the health of the Colorado’s basin, including Arizona, to protect the health of the Colorado River. We work at a scale never before by expanding our strategy to be about a basin-wide approach, from its headwaters in the mountains of Colorado to its delta in the Sea of Cortez in Mexico. I would characterize it as watershed planning on a grand scale.

**You mentioned conservation at a “grand scale.” This includes collaboration with other organizations, water users, state and federal agencies and others from every state within the basin to work together.**

Yes, it’s the only way to accomplish what the river needs to be successful. We must work across the basin to work together. However, our new report “Growing By Design” identifies alternative areas that could be preserved, visit nature.org/arizona.

**Where did you come to the Conservancy from the Colorado River Program?**

You came to the Conservancy from the Colorado River Program, which includes most of Arizona, are a top global priority for The Nature Conservancy. Taylor, a lawyer specializing in water and the environment, recently joined the Conservancy to lead its Colorado River Program.

**What led you to a career focused on the environment?**

He believed that society had an innate responsibility to take care of the land and its creatures. He instilled this stewardship ethic in me at an early age. In the late 1980s, just a few months after the Exxon oil spill, I kayaked in Prince William Sound. I was shocked at the devastation. At that point, I became extremely interested in water and how important it was to be successful. We must help water users find solutions that are environmentally sound and provide reliable water supplies for the future. We need to show them that we are here to help.

**How will your expertise help you in conserv...**

Growing By Design

In Arizona, it’s just a question of if we’ll grow, but how we’ll grow. It’s been projected that Arizona’s population could double by the year 2050. Where will all these homes and businesses be located? I’d love to see how current growth patterns match with water needs for the future. A recent report by the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 67% of our state’s population will live in Maricopa County, which includes Phoenix. Arizona’s growth patterns mirror the global condition — a 4.4 million acres of critically important lands and waters. However, our new report “Growing By Design” identifies alternative areas that could be developed without direct impact on important natural infrastructure — the lands that provide our drinking water, harbor an amazing assortment of habitats, support desert plants and animals, and offer people the solitude of scenic open spaces.

Visit nature.org/arizona to view this report and to learn more about sustainable choices for Arizona’s future.

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When Rob Burton looked up a hill near the Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve, he saw miles of Sonoran scrub vegetation. For him, it was a testament to the work that he had done to help restore the area. “We’re all in this together,” he said, speaking about the conservation efforts for the river.

The Colorado River and its basin, which includes most of Arizona, is a top global priority for The Nature Conservancy. Taylor, a lawyer specializing in water and natural resources, has worked on the Colorado River Program. “We’re learning a lot here and that is also something that I didn’t expect,” she said.

Meet Taylor Hawes
Director of the Colorado River Program

Taylor Hawes came to the Conservancy from the Colorado River Conservation District, a group that represents water users. How will this experience help you in conserving the Colorado River?

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The Conservancy and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management began the mapping 10 years ago, focusing on the driest time of year. This year’s mapping was organized by the Conservancy, BLM, Community Watershed Alliance and partner organizations in Mexico.

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