The Nature Conservancy

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field notes news for members

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. I want it to stay as a river forever, long after I'm gone."

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.

"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.

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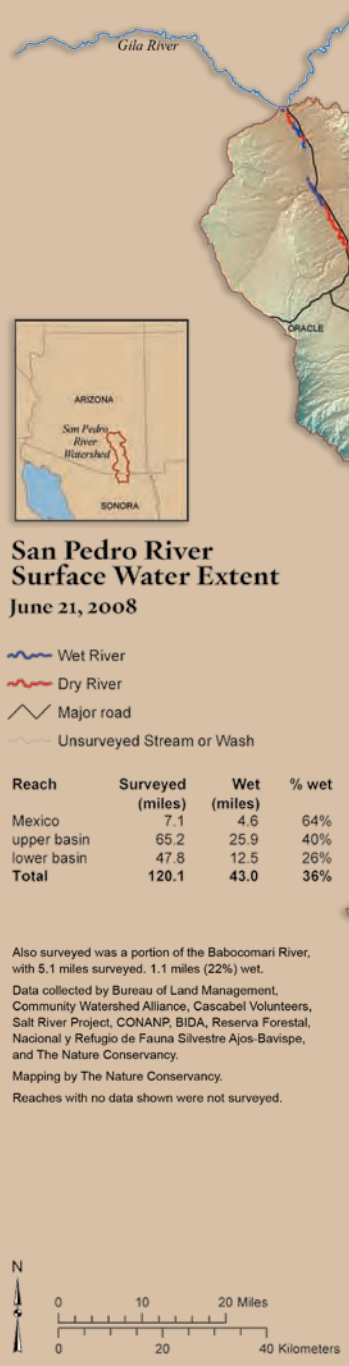
The volunteers were treated to lots of wildlife sightings, including coatimundis, Gila monsters, a gray hawk and the occasional rattlesnake. Nagle remembers seeing a group of snowy egrets, a great blue heron, a yellow-billed cuckoo and lots of deer during the four years he's helped with the mapping.

"Wildlife need 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.



Reach	Surveyed (miles)	Wet (miles)	% wet
Mexico	7.1	4.6	64%
upper basin	65.2	25.9	40%
lower basin	47.8	12.5	26%
Total	**120.1**	**43.0**	**36%**

Also surveyed was a portion of the Babocomari River, with 5.1 miles surveyed. 1.1 miles (22%) wet.

Data collected by Bureau of Land Management, Community Watershed Alliance, Cascabel Volunteers, Salt River Project, CONANP, BIDA, Reserva Forestal, Nacional y Refugio de Fauna Silvestre Ajos-Bavispe, and The Nature Conservancy.

Mapping by The Nature Conservancy.

Reaches with no data shown were not surveyed.

© Magill Weber Photography

Native Grasses Spring to Life

When Rob Burton looked up a hill at the San Pedro River Preserve, he saw miles of Sonoran scrub burgeoning with life. When he looked toward the San Pedro River, he saw lush, healthy cottonwoods and willows. In both directions, nature was thriving.

Trouble was, in between the two healthy systems laid the remnants of 50 acres of manmade ponds, built by the previous landowners to "grow" catfish for commercial markets. Though the ponds had long been drained of water, their clay liners remained and were preventing growth of native grasses and shrubs. The area was devoid of vegetation, except for non-native plants such as Russian thistle, amaranth and mustards.

"I just looked at the life surrounding where the ponds used to be and realized the opportunity to rejoin these two healthy native ecosystems by restoring native vegetation that was once disturbed by construction of the pond," said Burton, manager of the Conservancy's Lower San Pedro Program.

With support from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Conservancy is working to restore this area, along the San Pedro River, back to health. Last spring, the preserve staff broke up the cement-like pond basins and graded the 2-meter-high berms, restoring the historic contours. More than 1,000 pounds of seed, representing 55 species of native grasses and shrubs, were planted.

Just half a year later, the area is springing to life with 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.

Area ranchers are also watching closely to gauge the project's success. Burton said he plans to collect seeds from the field, and not only use them for future plantings on Conservancy lands, but to also share them with neighbors who can implement the same program.

"We're learning a lot here and that is also something we're sharing with our neighbors and our other conservation partners," said Burton. "We're all in this together for the health of the San Pedro River, for the land and for the birds and animals that need these plants to survive."

Meet Taylor Hawes

Director of the Colorado River Program

© Geneva Bailey/TNC

The Colorado River and its basin, which includes most of Arizona, are a top global priority for The Nature Conservancy. Taylor Hawes, a lawyer specializing in water and the environment, recently joined the Conservancy to lead its Colorado River Program. We recently sat down with Taylor to learn more about her and plans for the river.

What led you to a career focused on the environment?

Growing up in Georgia, I spent a lot of time walking in the woods with my grandfather. 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 laws worked, or didn't work, to protect our rivers, lakes and oceans.

What is the focus for the Colorado River Program?

A lot of tremendous things are being done by the Conservancy's state chapters within the Colorado's basin, including Arizona's work on the Verde and San Pedro rivers. However, we must work at a scale like 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.

© Bill Grindle/TNC

You came to the Conservancy from the Colorado River Water Conservation District, a group that represents water users. How will this experience help you in conservation efforts for the river?

Water users want certainty. They want to be sure that when their customer turns on the faucet, water will flow out. 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 our interests align and that we can work together.

You mentioned conservation at a "grand scale." This sounds like collaboration at a grand scale.

Yes, it's the only way to accomplish what the river needs within a timeframe that will have an impact. We must move beyond state-specific goals and bring together conservation organizations, water users, state and federal agencies and others from every state within the basin to work together. Fortunately, collaboration is a hallmark of the Conservancy and it's how we work every day.

An American First Comes to Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve

You won't find a photo of the Sinaloa wren in any Arizona field guide. This secretive species is a regular in central Sonora, Mexico, and is reported to be expanding its range northward toward the United States. However, until August 29 no one had ever seen the wren in the U.S. That day, visitors spotted it in the Conservancy's Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve. Distinguished from the familiar Bewick's wren and house wren by its pale eyeline, rusty tail and melodic song, this shy visitor created quite a stir. According to preserve steward JB Miller, hundreds of bird enthusiasts from across the country and around the world came in the hopes of catching a glimpse of this rare Mexican visitor. While not all the visitors were lucky enough to see the Sinaloa wren, according to Miller the increased number of keen birding eyes led to sightings of other rare birds such as the dickcissel, northern water thrush and the yellow-throated vireo.

To learn more about the Conservancy preserves, visit nature.org/arizona.

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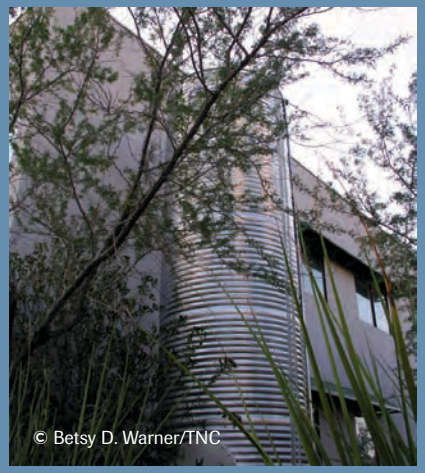

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You Can Help Our Fresh Water Systems – Harvest Rainwater!

Visit the Conservancy's Tucson Conservation Center and tour the rainwater harvesting system. A self-led tour is available daily, while docent-led tours are held throughout the week. To learn more and for docent tour schedules, visit nature.org/arizona or call 520-622-3861.

Discover Ways to Give and Save

You can help protect the lands and waters you love while achieving your financial objectives. Giving options include funding your gift with cash, stock or real estate, making a bequest or giving a gift that pays you income for life.

Contact The Nature Conservancy today to learn more about your gift-planning options.

Call Fran Moskovitz toll free at 1-866-521-6574 or email fmoskovitz@tnc.org

Before making an estate gift, please consult a qualified financial advisor

Thank You

to Our Volunteers!

Nature provides services to people, and in Arizona, 475 people are providing services to nature. For free! These are volunteers who have given more than 32,000 hours in service to the Conservancy in Arizona this year.

Growing By Design

© Judy Crawford/TNC

In Arizona, it's not a question of if we'll grow, but how we'll grow. It's projected that Arizona's popluation could double by the year 2050.

Where will all these homes and businesses be located? If they go where current growth patterns suggest, Arizona stands to lose approximately 2.4 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 native desert plants and animals, and offer people the solace 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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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 stoic saguaro 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.

Pat Graham
State Director

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The Plaza at Squaw Peak III
7600 N. 15th St., Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85020-4330
Phoenix (602) 712-0048
Tucson (520) 622-3861
nature.org/arizona

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