

Arizona

2026 Year in Review

The Nature Conservancy

LETTER FROM THE STATE DIRECTOR

Rooted in Arizona—Advancing Conservation at Scale



As I reflect on 2026, I am reminded of the significance of this moment. We are approaching two remarkable milestones: 60 years of conservation in Arizona, and 75 years as a global conservation organization.

For six decades in Arizona, you have made this work possible. Every acre protected, every river restored, every tree planted and every challenge overcome reflects your commitment to a healthier, more resilient future for people and nature.

Together, we have achieved extraordinary progress. The Nature Conservancy has partnered with communities, Tribal Nations, businesses and public leaders to advance durable conservation solutions where they are needed most. Because of your support, we have protected treasured landscapes, strengthened vulnerable watersheds, restored critical wildlife habitat, advanced innovative forest management, built cooler and healthier cities, and accelerated climate and clean energy solutions across Arizona.

Yet the nature of our work is evolving. As we move toward our ambitious 2030 goals, we are confronting the two defining challenges of our time: climate change and biodiversity loss. These interconnected crises do not recognize political boundaries or geographic borders, and neither can the solutions required to address them.

Today, our work reaches beyond the places we protect to influence systems, policies and partnerships that can deliver lasting impact at the scale this moment demands. While our roots remain firmly planted in Arizona, our efforts increasingly contribute to conservation outcomes far beyond our state's borders.

We have much to celebrate and even more to build upon.

Thanks to your generosity, The Nature Conservancy in Arizona is helping shape a future where people and nature can thrive together. As we look ahead, I am filled with optimism and gratitude for all we have accomplished and all we will achieve together.

Thank you for your partnership and commitment.

With gratitude,



State Director
The Nature Conservancy in Arizona

Cover: © Jeff Maltzman Photography; This page : © Mark Skalny

The Nature Conservancy in Arizona

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The Nature Conservancy has been working in Arizona for 60 years. Together, we are making transformative progress, from accelerating forest resiliency, advancing freshwater sustainability, protecting critical lands, and working to mitigate climate change and urban heat.

By the numbers

5+ billion

gallons of water saved through innovative programs and partnerships on our rivers, lakes and watersheds

1.5+ million

acres of Arizona deserts, forests, grasslands and wetlands protected

1.4 million

acres* contributed to the restoration of wildfire-prone forest lands since 2010, working in collaboration with local, state and federal partners and industry groups

169,458

people helped in Phoenix adapt to climate change through increased tree canopy cover to mitigate extreme heat

** Based on numbers reported by the USDA Forest Service Four Forest Restoration (4FRI)*



Map: © Lisa McCauley/TNC

60 YEARS OF CONSERVING NATURE

The Nature Conservancy Arizona







Cottonwood Spring

A Rare Oasis Gains Permanent Protection

Tucked between the Patagonia and Santa Rita mountains is Cottonwood Spring, one of the few places in southern Arizona where water flows year-round. Tall cottonwoods line the spring, their leafy canopies providing shade that helps cool the area. The spring feeds wetlands and streams that serve as a refuge for wildlife, supporting everything from native fish and frogs to migratory birds and big cats.

Now, this oasis is permanently protected.

The Nature Conservancy recently acquired the 218-acre Cottonwood Spring property near the headwaters of Sonoita Creek, expanding the nearby Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve and protecting a critical water source and the habitat surrounding it.

"Cottonwood Spring is the latest chapter in a conservation effort that began almost 60 years ago," says Jody Norris, Protection Program director for TNC Arizona. "In 1966, The Nature Conservancy established the Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve to protect one of the region's most biologically rich places. Cottonwood Spring strengthens that legacy and helps protect the plants, wildlife and freshwater habitats that make this area so unique."

The property also serves as an important link between protected areas, helping wildlife move across the region. Species like jaguars and ocelots, which travel through southern Arizona, depend on connected lands and reliable water sources during their journeys. The spring and surrounding wetland also provide habitat for a remarkable variety of species, like the endangered Gila topminnow, Chiricahua leopard frog, Huachuca water umbel, and Southwestern willow flycatcher. For some species, places like Cottonwood Spring are necessary for their survival, but they are becoming harder to find.

"The stream fed by the springs is one of the last reliable, year-round habitats for healthy Gila topminnow populations in Arizona," says Aaron Mrotek, manager of The Nature Conservancy's Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve. "Protecting this area is critical to the species' long-term survival."

The acquisition also creates new opportunities for restoration. Working alongside local partners, The Nature Conservancy plans to support efforts to recover springs and wet meadow habitats along upper Sonoita Creek.

In a region where water is scarce, conserving places like Cottonwood Spring helps keep these habitats healthy and resilient for generations to come.

The year-round flows of Cottonwood Spring enable wildlife to thrive in southern Arizona between the Patagonia and Santa Rita Mountains. All photos: © Kordeen Kor

Restoring Streams, Springs and Desert Wetlands





The Nature Conservancy in Arizona and its partners are accelerating restoration efforts across Arizona to help landscapes retain water and reduce erosion amid prolonged drought, wildfire and heat.

Many of the projects deploy restoration techniques that mimic natural features like beaver dams by installing materials like rocks, logs and vegetation in streams and drainages. These structures slow water, trap sediment and help water spread across the landscape and soak into the ground.

Pinaleño Sacred Springs

On Mount Graham, the Pinaleño Sacred Springs Restoration Project brought together Tribal, local, academic, federal and nonprofit partners, including TNC, to restore more than 100 acres impacted by drought, wildfire and erosion.

Crews have built 87 in-stream and upland structures across five sites to reduce erosion, slow runoff and support native vegetation recovery. The project is helping restore critical habitat for the endangered Mount Graham red squirrel and Mexican spotted owl while improving the health of springs and surrounding ecosystems.

Lower Babocomari

In southeastern Arizona's Lower Babocomari watershed, nature-based restoration techniques are being applied to slow water, reduce erosion and support native vegetation recovery.

Crews treated 8.6 acres, installed 61 structures and improved 1.36 miles of river habitat. Located upstream of existing beaver-based restoration features, the project helps to amplify freshwater benefits and protect an important wet stretch of the Babocomari River. By keeping more water and soil on the landscape, the effort is improving the health of streams, wetlands and wildlife habitat downstream, with ongoing monitoring and maintenance planned.

Spring Creek

In the Spring Creek watershed near Sedona, TNC, Coconino National Forest and a local rancher joined forces to combat severe erosion driven by road runoff, off-highway vehicle use and dispersed recreation. During a three-week effort in February 2026, crews installed 87 rock structures across 85 acres and applied revegetation treatments to slow runoff, stabilize soils and restore native grasslands. Partners are monitoring results and planning to expand restoration efforts onto adjacent public lands, pending Tribal consultation and approval.

McGrew Spring

McGrew Spring, located within Kartchner Caverns State Park in the Whetstone Mountains, is the area's only permanent water source and provides critical habitat for wildlife while also holding cultural significance.

Decades of cattle impacts, invasive species, drought and declining groundwater have degraded the spring and surrounding ecosystem. Despite these challenges, the spring continues to flow and remains a high conservation priority.

Sky Island Alliance, in partnership with TNC and Kartchner Caverns State Park, have led restoration efforts including replacing a cattle exclusion fence, removing invasive plants, improving access for restoration work, reseeding native vegetation, and training park staff in spring monitoring and invasive species detection. These actions are to helping protect and restore this important desert water source for wildlife and future generations.

"Arizona's watersheds are facing significant challenges, but we also have an incredible opportunity to restore them," says Kim Schonek, TNC Arizona Water Program director.

TNC and partners are restoring springs and wetlands across Arizona. Left: McGrew Spring © Sky Island Alliance; Right: Aerial view of Babacomari Ranch © Babacomari Ranch

Made for you and me

Working to keep public lands in public hands



"Beyond their natural wonder, public lands are core to our lifestyle and well-being. They provide fresh water, recreation opportunities, support local economies and contain living laboratories where TNC and partners advance critical research."

— Scott Deeny, Director of Conservation for TNC in Arizona

Hikers take a selfie above Horseshoe Bend near Page, Arizona, with the Colorado River below.
© Steele Burrow/Tandem Stock



The western United States contains approximately 90 percent of our national public lands, a core feature of American identity. They offer vast and unifying places for people from all walks of life to recreate and experience nature.

These forests, grasslands, mountains, coastlines and waterways are the backdrop for adventures, family vacations, hunting, fishing and harvesting. They are places of deep historic and cultural significance for Indigenous Nations and communities. They drive local economies and a $1 trillion outdoor recreation industry.

Across party lines and communities, voters in the western United States overwhelmingly agree:

83%
of Arizona voters oppose selling public lands to private interests.

80%
of voters across 12 western states oppose selling public lands, including 69% who strongly oppose the idea.

80%
oppose reducing staffing for agencies that manage public lands.

79%
oppose reducing funding for public-land management agencies.

77%
oppose reducing the size of national monuments.

Our public lands provide critical habitat for plants and animals and keep our air and water clean. In fact, continued protection and effective management of federal public lands is essential to achieving TNC's goals.

Despite most Americans agreeing that protecting public lands is critical, this environmental legacy is under growing threat. In the past year, there have been several proposals in Congress to sell or transfer public lands or reduce their funding. And we expect more on the horizon.

These actions would irreversibly remove access to the shared spaces we love in favor of private interests, like mining, drilling and development. Once public lands are sold or transferred, they're lost forever. So, too, are the conservation values we are counting on for the future.

Bipartisan polling data, commissioned by The Nature Conservancy in early 2026, shows western voters support keeping public lands in public hands. The survey polled voters across 12 western states and found that 80 percent of voters oppose the federal government selling or transferring public lands, reinforcing cultural values and the role these landscapes play in both local economies and long-term conservation.

TNC is working to defend America's natural treasures before short-sighted policies irreparably harm them. Join us in speaking up on behalf of public lands: **nature.org/actioncenter**.

An angler takes in a catch. The outdoor recreation economy contributes $14.1 billion to Arizona's economy, according to TNC's 2026 Nature's Dividends report. © Hamilton Wallace



Defending Arizona's public lands

Protecting over 30 million acres

Some of the world's most iconic natural wonders exist in Arizona, including the majestic Grand Canyon, Monument Valley's ancient stone cathedrals, Sedona's famous red rocks, the cactus-studded Saguaro National Park and the country's largest contiguous stand of Ponderosa Pine forest stretching across much of northern Arizona to the New Mexico border.

Millions of people and a wide array of wildlife rely on these expansive and biodiverse landscapes. Beyond their natural wonder, public lands in Arizona are central to our lifestyle and culture.

Learn how you can support public lands across the West at: **nature.org/publiclands**.

Living Laboratories

Discovering Nature's Secrets on TNC Preserves

What do fireflies, rare orchids, native fish, migratory bats and threatened frogs have in common? They are helping scientists unlock new discoveries on The Nature Conservancy's preserves across Arizona.

A new report, *Powered by Partners: Ecological Research on Nature Conservancy Preserves in Arizona*, highlights five years of research demonstrating how protected lands serve as living laboratories for conservation. From revealing how natural hot springs help lowland leopard frogs survive a deadly disease to documenting rare fireflies that depend on healthy streams and riparian forests, scientists are uncovering insights that guide real-world conservation action.

Research on TNC preserves is also to helping restore rare species and habitats. Studies are supporting efforts to bring back one of North America's rarest orchids, improve wildlife habitat along rivers, understand bat migration across international borders and safeguard vulnerable plant populations facing a changing climate.

Because these lands are protected for the long term, they provide an ideal setting for researchers to study ecosystems over time and test innovative conservation approaches. The result is a growing body of knowledge that helps land managers, partners and communities better protect Arizona's extraordinary natural heritage for future generations.



Southwest spring fireflies glow bright. Scientists are studying these rare insects at three TNC nature preserves in Arizona. © Julius Schlosburg; Illustration © Liz Burdick; Right: Canelo Hills ladies'-tresses orchid (*Spiranthes delitescens*) © Andrew Salywon/Desert Botanical Garden

From Ashes to Opportunity

Burn Creates New Hope for Endangered Orchid and Canelo Hills Wetland



Flames reaching 30-feet-tall at TNC's Canelo Hills Ciénega Preserve signaled a new chapter for one of Arizona's rarest ecosystems and the endangered Canelo Hills ladies'-tresses orchid.

Found only in spring-fed wetlands known as ciénegas, the elusive orchid can remain hidden for years until conditions are right. Recent research detected a mycorrhizal fungus essential to the orchid's survival, offering hope that dormant life remains underground. TNC and Desert Botanical Garden transplanted 20 lab-grown orchids to test future restoration efforts.

The 328-acre burn removed dense vegetation and decades of accumulated fuels at one of just five known orchid sites. Historically, fire played an important role in maintaining this habitat, but the area had not burned in 20 years.

Beyond benefiting the orchid, the project reduced wildfire risk, improved riparian habitat and protected regional water sources. Led through a partnership of federal agencies, TNC, and local landowners, the burn represents a science-based investment in a healthier, more resilient ciénega for years to come.







Finding Wonder in the World of Insects

World-Class Entomology Research at Hart Prairie Preserve



The morning of June 20, 2026, is one Gary Alpert will always remember. It's the day he and Bob Hoffa, Hart Prairie Preserve Manager for The Nature Conservancy in Arizona, made a rare discovery.

They found a single larva of a bird blowfly, something never documented at Hart Prairie Preserve. The species is known to affect mountain bluebirds, making the discovery both surprising and scientifically significant. Gary's excitement is palpable. These are the moments scientists live for.

Seeing the World Through a Different Lens

Insects are incredibly complex, playing a pivotal role in nature—from pollinating the food we eat to improving soil health. Without them, ecosystems and agriculture would collapse.

"I was blown away by all these large eyeballs looking back at me as I peered down the microscope," Gary recalls about his first time seeing specimens in a lab. "It was fascinating to see this hidden world of tiny creatures—one that few people ever notice."

Gary holds a Ph.D. from Harvard and has traveled around the world studying the small but essential organisms that form the foundation of life on Earth.

Connecting With TNC Arizona

Recently, he partnered with TNC on a two-year biodiversity study at Hart Prairie—work that is uncovering new insights and to helping answer long-standing ecological questions.

Nestled at the base of the San Francisco Peaks and surrounded by thousands of acres of cool forest and open meadow, the 245-acre Hart Prairie Preserve is a place of quiet complexity and ecological surprise.

The preserve is home to uncommon wildflowers, mixed conifer and aspen forests, a rare grove of Bebb willows, herds of elk and deer, porcupines, badgers, more than 120 species of birds and more than 280 plant species.

Key Takeaways

One of Gary's most important takeaways from his research at Hart Prairie is growing evidence that the area may be a refugium—a place where species were able to persist through dramatic environmental changes, such as the Ice Age.

Clues to this story are all around. Bebb willows, for example, are typically found much farther north, from the upper Midwest into Canada.

Until recently, scientists didn't know what pollinated these willows. Gary and his team discovered that small, often overlooked flies may be responsible, highlighting how even the most inconspicuous species can play an essential role in sustaining entire ecosystems.

His research is also beginning to reveal how the willows persist in an environment far outside their expected range, offering new insight into how species adapt to changing conditions over time.

"Even the smallest discoveries can change the way we understand an entire ecosystem," Gary says, "and remind us why protecting places like Hart Prairie is so important."

Top to bottom: Aphid, Sawfly larvae, Egle fly larvae © Gary Alpert and Zane Holditch; Upper-right: © Gary Alpert

Rising to the Challenge

Building Resilient Forests in the Changing West

This past year, forests in Arizona and across the western United States felt the strain of a warm winter and record low snowpacks. In the summer, wildfires burned more than 8 million acres of the United States, far exceeding the annual average.

In recent decades, we've continued to reckon with the duality of roles fire plays in western forests. Many of these landscapes are adapted to thrive alongside fire, which clears excess dead wood, needles and small, cramped trees, making room for healthy vegetation and mature trees to flourish while benefiting people and wildlife. Yet, amid hotter, drier and less predictable conditions, wildfire has rapidly changed within our lifetimes. Fires are burning larger and at higher intensity—scorching forests, threatening communities and becoming more difficult for firefighters to control. Nevertheless, we continue to persevere.

The Nature Conservancy has been working to unite forest conservation and restoration efforts through its **Western Dry Forests Program**. The program is, among many things, enabling greater collaboration among experts in forestry, fire, Indigenous knowledge, ecology and policy across federal, state and organizational boundaries.

Through the program, overgrown forests across 11 western states are being treated with ecological thinning, controlled burning and other science-based forms of forest management, which is fortifying these landscapes with greater resilience to severe wildfire and climate change.

The program has improved more than **3.2 million acres** in a four-year span, an area equivalent to four Yosemite National Parks.

This year alone, the number of trained controlled burn practitioners in states like Wyoming and New Mexico have been expanding. Experts in Arizona have been sharing emerging forestry technologies with the USDA Forest Service. Policy leaders in Washington state have successfully restored millions in threatened wildfire mitigation funding. And scientists from numerous states are collaborating to study the effects of wildfire on drinking water sources.

While the impacts of this work can be found across the West, this year, the program has also begun to home in on select landscapes where targeted approaches will be most effective at improving the resilience of forests and surrounding communities. Known as Catalyst Landscapes, these are areas throughout the region where ecological need and strong partnerships are enabling the program to test novel approaches to forest restoration, the findings from which will support progress throughout the region.

Through TNC's Western Dry Forests Program, we continue to scale up forest restoration efforts, influencing impacts that extend far beyond TNC alone. Learn more about the program: **nature.org/WesternDryForests**.



A forest recently treated with controlled burning stands in contrast to a forest treated several years ago. © Mitch Maxson/TNC

Wild, Connected and Protected

Conservation Easement in San Rafael Valley Connects Protected Lands and Waters



The rolling grasslands of Arizona's San Rafael Valley is a biodiversity hotspot and important refuge for wildlife.
© Jeff Maltzman Photography

At the headwaters of the Santa Cruz River, where vast and rolling native grasslands are bordered by the Patagonia Mountains, the Canelo Hills and the Huachuca Mountains, the San Rafael Valley remains one of Arizona's most remarkable and remote landscapes.

Home to one of the state's finest remaining grassland ecosystems and connected to thousands of acres of protected lands, the San Rafael Valley is a refuge for wildlife, a mosaic of historic ranchlands and a biodiversity hotspot in the Sky Islands region of southern Arizona.

In March 2026, The Nature Conservancy completed a conservation easement on 277 acres within the valley, securing a key link in a larger network of conserved lands.

"The San Rafael Valley is one of the last places where you can truly experience the scale, beauty and ecological richness of Arizona's native grasslands," says Jody Norris, protection program director for TNC Arizona. "Protecting this land strengthens a connected landscape that will support wildlife, healthy rivers and resilient ecosystems long into the future."

The easement connects to more than 25,000 acres of protected land and waters, strengthening wildlife corridors and ecological resilience across this important landscape. With this 277-acre addition, the stretch of the Santa Cruz River from the property south to the Mexican border is now conserved.

TNC has a long history in the San Rafael Valley, including helping acquire the San Rafael State Natural Area and transferring it to Arizona State Parks and Trails.



Today, conservation easements held by TNC and the Arizona Land and Water Trust on neighboring ranches help safeguard this connected landscape, ensuring that its grasslands, waterways and wildlife habitat remain intact for generations to come.







Leading the Change for Cooler, Greener Communities

Diana Apresa grew up playing in a lush tangle of zucchini vines and plump watermelons in her family's garden. There were flowers, too, and trees. But one tree, a weeping willow with a curtain of branches reaching to the ground, was her favorite. "Mi arbol," a young Diana called it, and her family knew that inside its shaded veil is where she could often be found.

"It would just embrace you," Diana says. "It was like my refuge."

Today, Diana is raising two sons in Phoenix, and in their home, trees are like family. A neighborhood community garden offers the same kind of lush paradise she knew as a girl. There are pomegranate and peach trees. Lemon trees, too—even the leaves have a fragrance, Diana says.

When Diana learned of an opportunity to sign up for a program to ease the heat in Phoenix neighborhoods with trees being part of the solution, it didn't take long for her to enroll. Known as TNC's Urban Heat Leadership Academy, it's designed to equip community members with skills to advocate for more trees, cool walkable corridors and finding ways to use rainwater for trees in their neighborhoods.

Phoenix is the hottest metropolitan area in the country—and getting hotter. On some days, there are neighborhoods that are as much as 13 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than others. The hottest neighborhoods have fewer trees and more pavement.

Beyond the technical skills learned along the way, the resulting network of new relationships—254 alumni-strong—is proving to be a force for helping Phoenix neighborhoods.

"Our focus has been from the beginning and will continue to be: How do we help get trees and nature into the places that need it most so we can best support people who are most vulnerable to rising extreme heat?" says Amy Scoville-Weaver, who leads TNC Arizona's Healthy Cities Program.

Participants like Diana are proving to be great ambassadors for trees in the city. After completing the Academy, she launched a volunteer tree planting project of her own in a neighborhood along her running route. Diana's volunteer crew planted 70 trees.

Academy Attracts Record Enrollment

TNC Arizona's Healthy Cities Program recently graduated its 6th cohort of the award-winning, bilingual Urban Heat Leadership Academy.

The 103 participants comprised the largest cohort to date, including the most Spanish-language participants in program history.

The growth signals an increased concern among residents involving climate change and extreme heat.

The Academy has now graduated 254 people equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to make a positive difference in their communities.

Left to right: Volunteers plant native and desert-adapted trees to help residents adapt to extreme heat. © Arizona Sustainability Alliance; Urban Heat Leadership Academy graduate Diana Apresa is a leading example of how graduates are making a difference in their communities. Photo illustration: © Erica Simek Sloniker/TNC; TNC's Healthy Cities Program and the City of Mesa were honored with the Award of Distinction for Heat Mitigation at the 2026 Arizona Forward Environmental Excellence Awards. © Bill Bertolino/TNC



Poll: Energy Costs, Climate and Clean Air Top Arizonans' Concerns

A new statewide poll shows energy affordability is a leading concern for Arizona families, with residents expressing overwhelming support for programs that help lower monthly utility bills.

Nearly 80 percent of Arizonans say their electric bill has increased in the past two years. More than 60 percent say their summer utility bills are difficult to afford, and six in 10 report that they have raised their thermostat to an uncomfortable temperature to save money.

The poll was commissioned by The Nature Conservancy in Arizona in partnership with Arizona PIRG Education Fund to better understand Arizonans' energy needs and concerns amid rising electricity demand driven in part by economic growth and extreme heat.

The poll, conducted by Noble Predictive Insights, surveyed 1,020 Arizonans, including a combination of registered voters and a broader sample of Arizona adults.

While energy affordability is affecting many Arizona households, residents also cite climate change and air pollution as major concerns, with climate change ranking as the second most-pressing concern, and air pollution ranking third.

Notably, only 13 percent of the respondents favored increasing fossil fuel production like coal and gas as a statewide energy policy, while 42 percent said expanding renewable energy should be the priority.

"Even as rising energy costs remain a top concern, climate change and air pollution are also important issues for Arizona residents," says Nicole Hill, Climate and Energy Program director for TNC Arizona. "That's why it's important to pursue solutions that can keep energy affordable while addressing environmental challenges."

The survey found overwhelming support for utility energy-efficiency programs, with 88 percent of respondents in favor.

Despite that support, awareness remains limited. Most Arizonans are unfamiliar with energy-efficiency programs that could reduce energy costs, and even fewer have used available rebates and incentives.

Workers clean solar panels. A new, TNC-commissioned poll shows Arizonans support more renewable energy, such as solar energy.
© Dave Lauridsen



Powering a Responsible Energy Future

Across the western United Statesand Canada, The Nature Conservancy is working to accelerate a responsible clean energy transition that advances climate goals while safeguarding nature and supporting communities.

Through our Climate Action and Renewable Energy (CARE) program, we use science, partnerships and innovative planning approaches to help ensure renewable energy, transmission infrastructure and other emerging energy investments are developed in the right places and in ways that benefit both people and nature.

Guided by our 3C (climate, conservation and communities) approach, CARE collaborates with Tribes, local communities, industry and decision-makers to navigate complex land-use and energy demand challenges, improve planning and policy, and maximize positive outcomes for nature and people. Together, we are advancing clean energy pathways while protecting the lands, waters and wildlife that sustain the West.

Finding Solutions in the Colorado River Basin

The Colorado River Basin is facing a defining moment. This year's hot, dry conditions arrived in the third decade of ongoing drought, taxing water supplies and putting additional stress on nature and communities. Meeting this challenge will require policy changes and investments in the natural systems that help keep water flowing across the basin.

This year, the operating guidelines for the Colorado River Basin expire. Although the seven basin states worked to negotiate how to share water cuts, they were unable to reach a consensus. As a result, the Bureau of Reclamation put forth a new 10-year framework with operating guidelines that will be reevaluated every two years.

The new guidelines are an important step forward but will not resolve every challenge facing the basin. Smart implementation will be key to protecting natural systems, elevating Tribal leadership and removing barriers to action. TNC is focused on practical solutions that work alongside the guidelines to put the basin on a path to resilience.



"We're working to protect and restore that natural infrastructure and looking at how we can be smart and thoughtful in moving water around the system so we keep it healthy," says Celene Hawkins, TNC's Colorado River Program director.

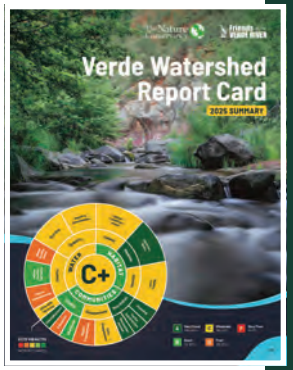
TNC is also working with partners, Tribes and communities to develop flexible management tools like voluntary water agreements that help keep water in rivers while supporting the people who depend on it.

To expand this work, new public funding is critical. We're looking to innovative approaches TNC has deployed around the world, including project finance for permanence, water funds and watershed investment funds. These models bring together public and private partners to invest in projects that improve water management.

In a system as large and complex as the Colorado River Basin—spanning seven states, two countries and 30 Tribal Nations—meeting this challenge will require many hands working together to care for the diverse landscapes we all depend on.

"We're figuring out how to have thriving communities in a basin that's drier," says Hawkins. "I see so many people committed to building that future together.

Learn more at **nature.org/CORiver**.



The Verde River

Protecting a Verdant Lifeline for People and Nature

To be successful in conservation, TNC understands that our work must meet people where they live, work and recreate.

Those insights many years ago led us to the Verde River, one of the last free-flowing rivers in the Southwest that supplies drinking water to more than 3 million people in Arizona.

Ecologically rich and remarkably accessible, the Verde is a lifeline for millions of people, a recreational hotspot, a verdant agricultural region and a refuge for wildlife in an otherwise arid landscape.

As pressure on the Colorado River intensifies, rivers like the Verde become even more important.

As this report card reflects, we have focused our conservation work for many years on the Verde because real, local solutions are possible. Protecting the Verde River secures Arizona's future, and this report serves as a critical planning tool.

Strong partnerships with farmers, tribal nations, and communities who depend on its flows are the keys to our success.

By improving irrigation efficiency, supporting crop transitions, and investing in water reuse and recharge, we're proving that it's possible to protect a river that sustains both people and nature.

Photo: © Jeff Maltzman Photography



Ann Hitchcock Legacy Accelerates Climate Action in Arizona

Largest Realized Bequest in Chapter History Will Benefit Arizonans for Generations

The Nature Conservancy celebrates the life and legacy of Ann Hitchcock, whose extraordinary generosity has resulted in the largest estate bequest in the history of TNC's Arizona Chapter.

Guided by her father's advice to "live modestly and invest consistently in growth stocks," Hitchcock's landmark bequest will advance climate mitigation and adaptation at a time of unprecedented environmental challenge in Arizona and across the globe.

(Frances) Ann Hitchcock—styled by family, friends and colleagues as "Ann Hitchcock"—was a museum professional who began her career at the Museum of Northern Arizona and went on to a 44-year career in the National Park Service (NPS), principally as the first Chief Curator.

In that position, Ann oversaw the development of a first-class curatorial- and collection-management system; well-funded computerized cataloguing; expanded storage and research access at park sites; and professional development of curators.

During Ann's tenure, the NPS discovered that its collections numbered more than 125 million objects, archives, and natural specimens—far exceeding earlier estimates of 10 million items. The finding established the NPS as steward of the world's second-largest museum collection after the Smithsonian. Ann received numerous academic appointments, honors and publishing credits and, for a time, was the highest-ranking woman in the NPS. She continued working until her death at age 78.

Ann's life and values reflected her love of the outdoors and the National Parks from adolescence, and recreationally she maintained an intimate relationship with park lands—hiking, canoeing, backpacking and cross-country skiing. Her friendships and collegial relationships also reflected her commitment to nature.

Ann's concerns about the impact of climate change, and desire to create a legacy of conservation, led her to the bequest that is already making a difference in Arizona. A longtime member and supporter of TNC, she valued its unique qualifications for large-scale conservation through a pragmatic, nonpartisan approach that unites diverse partners and stakeholders, including—for her most especially—Indigenous communities.

TNC Arizona is honored to accept from Ann Hitchcock this landmark estate gift, which will be directed toward climate change mitigation across the state for generations to come. Her gift will conserve and safeguard Arizona's lands and waters at a time of unprecedented environmental challenge.

"This extraordinary bequest is both a tribute to a remarkable life well-lived and a powerful investment in Arizona's natural heritage," says Dan Stellar, State Director of TNC in Arizona. "Legacy gifts like this allow us to plan boldly and act decisively to protect rivers, forests, grasslands and wildlife habitat that are essential to people and nature alike. Estate gifts are among the most meaningful expressions of support we receive. They reflect a lifetime of values and a desire to leave the world better than we found it. I am humbled by this donor's trust and deeply committed to honoring her legacy."

This historic bequest underscores the growing importance of planned giving to conservation in Arizona and beyond. By including The Nature Conservancy in estate plans, individuals can create a legacy that protects land and waters, supports scientific research, and helps communities thrive in a changing climate.

Ann Hitchcock at Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve in Colorado © Nancy Merrill

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