

Arizona

2024 Year in Review

ARIZONA LEADERSHIP STAFF

Daniel Stellar
State Director
Diana Bermudez
Director of Strategy
Scott Deeny
Director of Conservation
Rebecca Garrett
Director of Development
Christian Stumpf
Director of External Affairs
Sonja Stupel
Director of Finance and Operations

TRUSTEES

Jacob Tetlow
Chair
Karen L. Peters
Secretary
Tammy McLeod, PhD.
Treasurer
Erik B. Bakken
Shanna Bowman
William E. Cobb
Barton Faber
Lena Fowler
Anne Jones
Sarah King
David J. Larcher
Marco A. López, Jr.
Lisa Lovallo
W. Scott Robertson, MD
Anthony Sharett
Rob Taylor
Jennifer Holsman Tetreault
William G. Way
Maja Wessels
SENIOR ADVISORS TO THE BOARD
Honorable Jon L. Kyl
Bennett Dorrance
John W. Graham

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends

For nearly 60 years, The Nature Conservancy in Arizona has been a convener and collaborator, reaching across aisles, borders, and boundaries to achieve conservation success. By bringing in diverse perspectives from ranchers, municipalities, Tribal Nations, legislators, businesses and more, we are creating lasting solutions based on science that benefit both nature and people. I am proud that this approach has enabled TNC's Arizona chapter to become a powerful and enduring force for conservation statewide.

As you'll read in this report, we are taking climate action, protecting our most vulnerable watersheds and wildlife, restoring our forests, and building healthy cities. But our work isn't done.

The Nature Conservancy has ambitious 2030 goals and we know we are in the defining decade to put us on a more sustainable path and avoid the worst effects of climate change. We must work together to face unprecedented threats from crippling heat and drought, devastating wildfires, and the loss of native species.

There are many challenges ahead, but I am more inspired than ever. At The Nature Conservancy, I have seen how we can create the future we want to see when people come together and care enough to act.

Thank you for your generosity and your support that makes our work possible and ensures a brighter path for future generations.

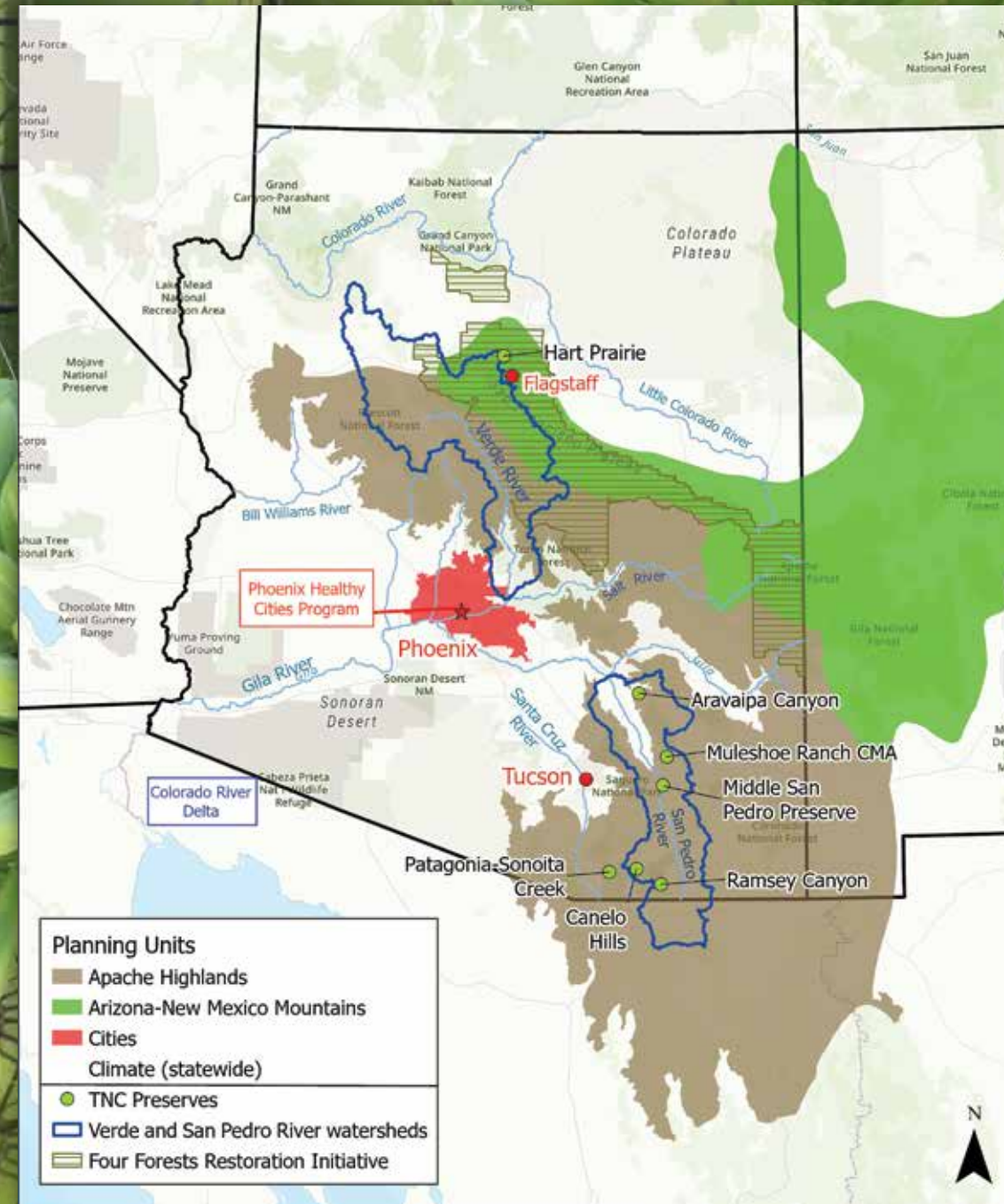
Best regards,



Dan Stellar
Arizona State Director, The Nature Conservancy



WHERE WE WORK



At TNC, all of our work is focused on addressing the two interconnected crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. We address those crises through our three global priorities: Protect, Provide and Tackle.

The Nature Conservancy in Arizona aligns our work with these priorities to help ensure a livable climate, healthy communities, and thriving nature. For nearly 60 years, our science-based strategies have focused on protecting land and water, restoring our iconic forests, and bringing nature to cities. Learn more about our work at nature.org/Arizona.

PROTECT

lands, freshwater and oceans

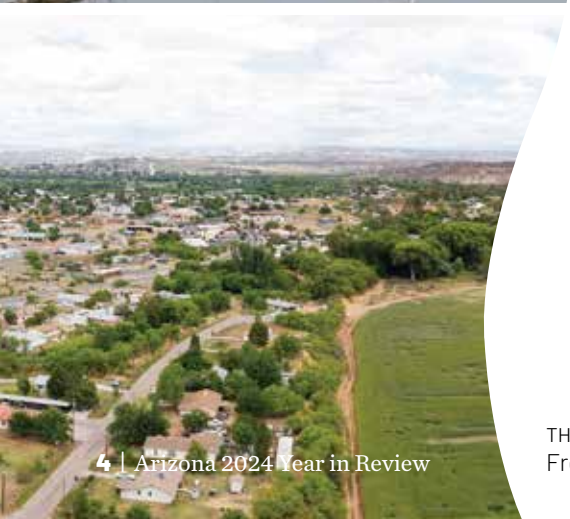
PROVIDE

food and water sustainably

TACKLE

climate change

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.



CONSERVING OUR WATERSHEDS AND WILDLIFE

Building Resilience on the Verde River

Imagine what the bald eagle sees as she skims the surface of the Verde River and lands, talons flexing, near the top of a towering cottonwood. Her view is not so different from ours. For nature and people, the Verde means one thing: a precious oasis that sustains life itself.

For more than 50 years, TNC has prioritized protection work in the Apache Highlands around the Verde River in north-central Arizona. The desert-nesting bald eagles that breed along the Verde are just one of hundreds of native species tied to a river system that also sustains agriculture and recreation and supplies water for communities from Prescott to Phoenix. Yet as climate change impacts intensify and unregulated groundwater pumping persists, this river and its connected aquifers, are increasingly vulnerable. It's a pivotal moment for Arizona—and it's a chance for TNC to build on our legacy, deepen our partnerships and scale up.

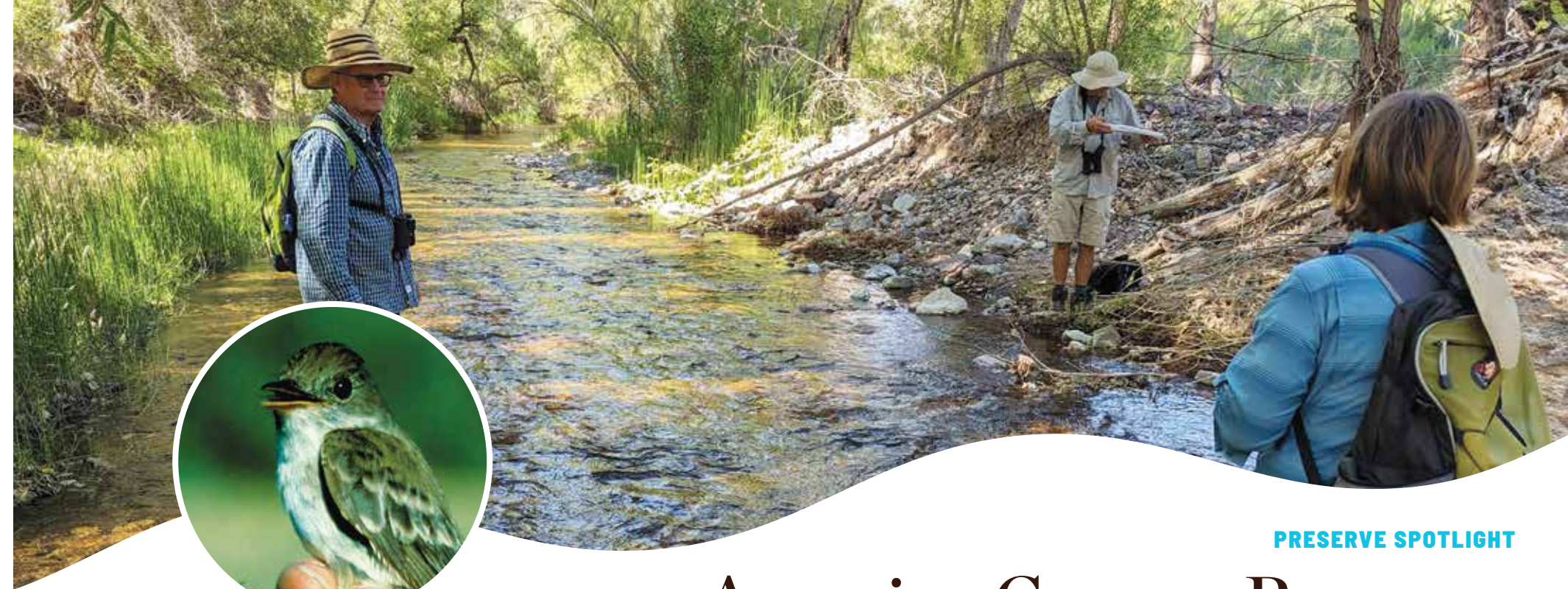
In the Upper Verde, we're blazing a new path in rural groundwater management. TNC has secured a landmark conservation easement that protects 1,889 acres while limiting groundwater withdrawals and preserving sustainable agriculture. Made possible by a partnership with the Yavapai Ranch and the Natural Resources Conservation

Service (NRCS), the project provides a model for the region's landowners—and it's just the beginning. The NRCS has awarded TNC an \$11.5 million grant to lead conservation in the Upper Verde River and Big Chino Grasslands. The grant requires a 50% nonfederal match that TNC Arizona and partners will provide, for a total of \$23 million in project funding.

We're also helping to protect the Verde at its source with the creation of a new state park. TNC worked with The Trust for Public Land, Arizona State Parks and Trails, Yavapai County and the Town of Chino Valley to acquire 734 acres of ecologically important lands at the river's headwaters surrounding Del Rio Springs. The new state park protects Sullivan Lake, enables the extension of the Peavine National Recreation Trail, and preserves valuable local history as well as the cultural connections of the Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe and the Yavapai-Apache Nation.

Historic Win for Water Rights

TNC is proud to support the Yavapai-Apache Nation Water Rights Settlement, which will protect the Verde River on the tribe's ancestral homelands and keep the river flowing. The settlement paves the way for Congress to enact legislation to permanently resolve the Nation's water rights claims in the Verde River Watershed and to bring a renewable water resource to the Verde Valley.



PRESERVE SPOTLIGHT

Aravaipa Canyon Preserve

The Nature Conservancy's hard work and risk taking are paying off in the San Pedro River Basin, a water system in the grip of megadrought conditions. This summer, more than 125 "community scientists" took part in TNC's Wet/Dry Mapping program, walking and monitoring 150 river miles.

Since 1999, this volunteer-driven effort has created a valuable uninterrupted dataset that helps to inform better management of the river's riparian and aquatic habitats. The health of the San Pedro matters—and not just to people. At TNC's Aravaipa Canyon Preserve, located in the lower San Pedro River Basin, scientists were cheering this spring when they found several nests of southwestern

willow flycatchers—an endangered neotropical migratory bird. This proof of successful breeding is a big deal for a species struggling to survive in the rapidly shrinking riparian areas of the Colorado River Basin. It's also a testament to TNC's long-term efforts to protect and restore habitat for vulnerable species throughout the San Pedro River Basin.

But scientists (and tiny birds) weren't the only ones excited at TNC's Aravaipa Canyon Preserve this year. The Cobra Ranch, which TNC runs as a working ranch in the preserve, produced over 200 bales of native grass hay this summer. The experimental project is a form of permaculture

that improves the soil, provides native habitat for wildlife, and uses a fraction of the water necessary for traditional crops. In this agricultural region, the Cobra Ranch's successful foray into sustainable crops is turning heads. The new perennial grasses are thriving, they provide good feed for cattle—and they are enhancing the health of Aravaipa's creek and canyon habitat.

"Native grass hay is a great alternative for any farm stressed with limits on irrigation," says Aravaipa Canyon Preserve Manager Mark Haberstich. "When combined with sustainable ranching, the hay provides a feed source, along with viable native seed that can be spread by cattle, improving rangelands."



POLICY

Leading the Way

The Nature Conservancy in Arizona has a long history of working with USFS on innovative pathways to increase the pace, scale and cost effectiveness of forest restoration.

Our work to find market solutions and reduce barriers to harvesting is being recognized as a best practice at the highest levels of the agency. As an example, the practice of digitally marking trees – opposed to the time-and labor-intensive process of using paint – was pioneered by our Arizona Chapter.

Our partnership was strengthened by a visit with USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack following the signing of a 20-year Master Stewardship Agreement to advance forest resiliency in Arizona.



Harvesting Hope

A story of hope is unfolding along the banks of the Verde River in central Arizona. In a captivating video, Claudia Hauser shares her journey to protect her family’s farmland, build a legacy for her children and enhance her community—all while safeguarding the future of the river that sustains everything. In the fast-growing Verde Valley, Claudia and her late husband, Kevin, formed a pivotal partnership with TNC, which—together with crucial funding from the U.S. Farm Bill—has helped to ensure

that their lands remain intact and in production while reducing their operation’s impact on the Verde. Claudia’s tale reminds us: every conservation win is personal. Watch her short video at: nature.org/harvestinghope

RESTORING OUR FORESTS

Innovation, Industry and the Future of Our Forests

Arizona has vast forests in need of restoration and urgent biomass removal to improve their health and reduce the risk of severe wildfires. A strong forest industry—and the development of a viable, local biomass supply chain—hold enormous promise.

For decades, TNC has sought to improve the health of northern Arizona’s most vulnerable and overgrown forests. Through the Four Forest Restoration Initiative, we work with partners to target the restoration of 2.4 million federally managed acres. Using tactics like strategic thinning and prescribed burns, this large-scale effort will greatly increase forest health and

resilience—and it will also generate a lot of biomass. Woody biomass, the small trees and limbs removed during mechanical thinning, can be used for many purposes. The challenge? We haven’t found a cost-effective way to process and sell these forest restoration byproducts—yet.

In an exciting new project, TNC is working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Campbell Global to research the case for establishing infrastructure in western Arizona to convert local biomass. The 685-acre Sawmill Spring Biomass project in the Kaibab National Forest will generate data on the true cost and operational efficiencies needed for

woody biomass removal. This insight will inform USFS decisions, legislative policies and private investment for biomass utilization. Facilitating local biomass conversion would create jobs and lower transportation costs—and make forest restoration more financially viable.

The Sawmill pilot project is part of our larger vision for Forest restoration throughout the Southwest. This is exemplified by TNC’s Arizona and New Mexico chapters signing a landmark 20-year Master Stewardship Agreement with the USFS in June to accelerate the pace and scale of our collaborative work to safeguard communities and restore forest health.



BUILDING HEALTHY CITIES

Beating the Heat—One Street at a Time

This summer, Phoenix marked an ominous milestone: the longest stretch of days over 100 degrees in the city’s history (a staggering 113 days in a row). It’s hard to overstate the health risks and economic impact of this type of heat. The good news is that there are simple changes we can make right now to protect our most vulnerable communities.

In the midst of the summer heat, 35 Phoenix residents became the newest graduates of the Urban Heat Leadership Academy, a free, 8-week training program run by TNC and the Phoenix Revitalization Corporation. By October, these community volunteers left the Academy armed with practical heat-relief strategies to bring back to their own neighborhoods.

“A very big change is happening here in Phoenix,” says Minerva Velarde, a past Academy graduate. “The Leadership Academy is a fabulous opportunity for you to learn so you can know what you can do to leave a better world for our children, which is in the end, what we all want.”

Launched in 2021, the bilingual Academy aims to give residents the knowledge and resources to combat urban heat through projects with immediate impact, such as community tree plantings, neighborhood plant giveaways, and the opening of cooling centers. To date, more than 130 Maricopa County residents have graduated from the Academy—all residents from the Phoenix metro area, who feel the urgency of this crisis on their doorsteps.

“The reality is that the dangerous impacts of heat waves are most often borne by lower-income neighborhoods simply because of where they live,” says Amy Scoville-Weaver, director of TNC Arizona’s Healthy Cities Program. “The hottest places also have the lowest tree canopy cover and are often underserved communities. By providing resources and training on heat-reducing solutions to directly impacted individuals, we are helping to create cooler and healthier cities for people.”

As climate change intensifies, and demand for this award-winning, grassroots program continues to grow, TNC and Phoenix Revitalization Corporation hope it will provide a national model for building greener, cooler communities.



Securing a Clean Energy Future—A Priority for All of Us

Arizona is known for many things: world-renowned red rock and desert landscapes, diverse wildlife, vibrant cities, and our rich cultural history. Unfortunately, our state is also known as one of the most rapidly warming states in the country.

The good news is that the transition to clean energy is happening—here in Arizona, in our country and around the world. It’s generating new jobs. It’s driving innovation and technological advances. It’s delivering healthier lands, waters and air. Business and government leaders across the political spectrum agree that the question is not whether America will be part of this change—it’s how.

Arizona is primed for this moment to be a leader on clean energy. With the right science, policies and tools, we can bring critical renewable energy projects online faster, with broad support—and

ensure the protection of our most vulnerable lands, waters and communities.

TNC remains a trusted force for unifying, common-sense progress. We’re tapping decades of experience, bringing dependable science and expanding our many productive and diverse partnerships.

In the coming year, our chapter will focus on three core strategies:

- Driving climate-forward policies and funding.
- Reducing emissions related to how we move and how we power our homes and businesses.
- Providing tools to design renewable energy infrastructure that protects wildlife and natural areas.

“We have an opportunity to move past polarization and chart a path that works for Arizona,” says Nicole Hill, TNC’s Arizona climate program director. “That’s why we’re excited to bring TNC’s expertise and collaborative spirit to the table in this pivotal moment for our energy future.”

Hill points to the Power of Place-West as one exciting new tool with potential to have a major impact on Arizona’s renewable energy development. Recently released by TNC, this ground-breaking energy, economic and geospatial study lays out pathways for protecting important natural and agricultural lands while creating a 100% clean energy future for the state. “The Power of Place study has proved to be absolutely vital to planners and policymakers seeking to implement net-zero strategies that maximize benefits for climate, nature and people,” says Hill. “The keys to success? Early planning, the right incentives—and the willingness to work together.”



LOCAL TO GLOBAL

Sharing Solutions in South Africa

Arizona and South Africa may be separated by an ocean and 10,000 miles, yet the regions have striking similarities, including landscapes, climate, drought, and ongoing challenges with water sustainability.

These similarities were illuminated in August, when scientists, staff and trustees from The Nature Conservancy in Arizona traveled to South Africa on a mission to learn and exchange ideas, collaborate on scientific solutions, and gain an understanding of potential conservation strategies that could be applied across continents.

“There were places that we went on the trip, where if someone dropped you into the landscape, you might think you were in the Southwest,” says TNC Arizona State Director Dan Stellar. “It was really kind of a surprise, and I think for all of us who went, we felt it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

The trip underscores TNC’s “One Conservancy” work to prioritize collaboration and leverage science and solutions to have the greatest conservation impact in all 50 states and nearly 80 countries across the globe.

A key focus of the visit involved a learning exchange about the Orange River in South Africa and the Colorado River. Both flow through arid regions, span international borders, and serve as critical water sources for people, agriculture and wildlife.

For TNC Arizona’s Director of External Affairs Christian Stumpf, the visit highlighted the importance of thinking globally.

“To meet our biggest challenges, we have to think bigger,” Stumpf says. “You can be thousands and thousands of miles apart but still share the same goals.”

SPOTLIGHT

Colorado River Multi-State Trustee Gathering

Last spring, The Nature Conservancy hosted a powerful forum at our Carpenter Ranch Preserve near Steamboat Springs, Colorado. The first-ever Colorado River Multi-State Trustee Gathering was a huge success thanks to the diversity, enthusiasm, and commitment of its remarkable attendees. Hailing from six Basin states and Mexico, more than 100 TNC trustees and staff members arrived at the ranch ready to learn, network, and problem solve. The weekend offered them a deep dive into one of TNC’s most urgent priorities: how to chart a better future for the lands, waters, and people of the Colorado River Basin.

Featured speakers at the event included TNC’s CEO Jennifer Morris, Western U.S. and Canada Division Director Toni Hardesty, and TNC state directors from all of the Basin states, as well as from TNC’s Mexico program. Attendees heard from TNC’s Tribal trustees and partners who are deeply engaged in supporting Tribal sovereignty in the

Basin. They also got a chance to trade ideas in breakout groups designed to deepen their engagement on Colorado River issues.

This inaugural summit showcased the major progress TNC’s Colorado River Program is making to protect flows and address the complex challenges in the Basin—and how uniquely positioned TNC is to build diverse partnerships and find practical solutions that cross borders. In a special moment of celebration during the event—amid the cheers of trustees—TNC’s Colorado River Program team received The Nature Conservancy’s esteemed One Conservancy Award for contributions to conservation worldwide. This team’s work on the Colorado River is being shared with TNC colleagues in Africa, Australia, South America, and across the rest of North America as a model for collaborative work at scale.

“The health of the Colorado River is critical for all Arizonans,” says TNC Arizona State Director Dan Stellar. “I was proud to see our staff and trustees support and participate in this important gathering.”

LEARN MORE

about our Colorado River work at nature.org/coloradoriver

Hailing from six Basin states and Mexico, more than 100 TNC trustees and staff members arrived at the ranch ready to learn, network and problem solve.









The Nature Conservancy
Arizona Chapter
1819 E. Morten Ave. #100
Phoenix, AZ 85020

nature.org/arizona

Tucson Conservation Center
1510 E. Fort Lowell Rd.
Tucson, AZ 85719

Nonprofit Org
US Postage
PAID
Tucson, AZ
Permit #2216

STAY CONNECTED WITH US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!

-  @NatureConservancyArizona
-  @tnc_arizona
-  The Nature Conservancy in Arizona
-  @nature_arizona

LEFT TO RIGHT © Dan Weisz; © Mark Godfrey/TNC; © Paul Gill



Create Your Conservation Legacy.

What better legacy is there to leave than protecting the Earth for future generations? Whether you are taking the first steps toward planning your estate or are in the process of updating your estate plan, The Nature Conservancy is here to help you make a lasting difference.

CONTACT US TODAY.

(877) 812-3698 | legacy@tnc.org | nature.org/legacy