



# our living river

COMMUNITY VALUES AND MANAGEMENT PREFERENCES FOR THE  
SANTA CRUZ RIVER NORTHWEST TUCSON TO MARANA, 2017



Is the Santa Cruz River an important part of your life? How do you use it? Where are your favorite spots? What role should the river play in your community, and how should this be achieved?

These are some of the questions Sonoran Institute recently asked 550 residents across Pima County, Arizona, about the stretch of river from Sweetwater Wetlands in northwest Tucson to Trico Road in Marana. Their answers will inform decisions about how the river will be managed in the future.

This document provides a summary of the results of this outreach effort. Read the full report at [tiny.cc/lscr\\_ce2017](https://tiny.cc/lscr_ce2017)

Conditions on the Santa Cruz River in northwest Tucson and Marana have improved, and residents are noticing. Increasingly, they see this flowing stretch of river as an amenity, a pleasant place to bird, bike, or relax and enjoy nature. But will the river stay this way? If its water were diverted for other uses, what would it mean to the community? Understanding how residents feel about their river is important to making informed management decisions.

The Santa Cruz River is an integral part of our identity, its water the reason people could settle in the Tucson area historically. In recent years, the river system has suffered from both a lack of water and water contamination. However, the release of highly treated water into the river has helped restore Pima County's principal wetland habitat and has provided a popular recreation destination for the community.

Recycled water has maintained a flowing river ecosystem here since the 1970s. In 2013, Pima County completed a \$600 million upgrade to the two wastewater reclamation facilities that release water into the river. The upgrades rapidly improved the river's water quality.

This water supply is not guaranteed, however. Proposals that would move water from the river for other beneficial uses may mean less water for maintaining cooling trees, scenic river parks, and wildlife habitat. Now is the time to understand how our community values the river so decision makers can balance potentially competing priorities.

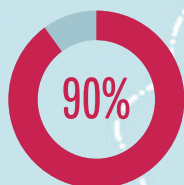
The results from community workshops and surveys begin to answer these questions. Sonoran Institute will use the data to map priority areas for conservation and to propose water management strategies that conserve valuable areas along the river. Pima County will use the data in their upcoming river management plan.



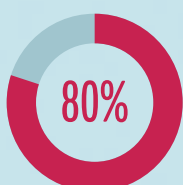


## WHAT ARE THE **BEST THINGS** ABOUT THE SANTA CRUZ RIVER?

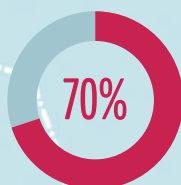
People value the river for many reasons, but 90% of participants agreed that it provides open space for connecting with nature and helps replenish our groundwater supply.



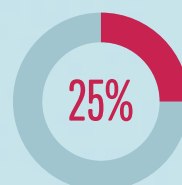
Open space for connecting with nature  
Replenishes groundwater supply



Flood Protection  
Offers environmental resilience  
Cultural identity



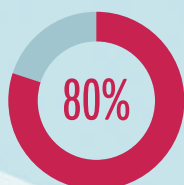
Natural habitat  
Recreational & travel corridor  
Community space



Personal financial benefit

## WHAT ARE THE **PREFERRED RIVER** MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES?

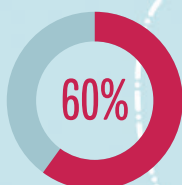
Managers along the river may be able to achieve their different mandates or missions while supporting other community goals. For example, Pima County Regional Flood Control District manages the river to minimize flood risk. Where possible, Pima County could combine flood control measures with actions that maximize wildlife habitat, something which 80% of participants agreed was a high priority for the river.



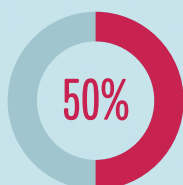
Maximize wildlife habitat



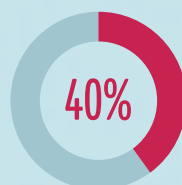
Maximize aquifer recharge  
Restore upstream tributaries



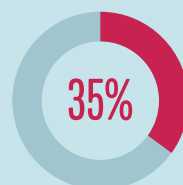
Flood safety, Recreational improvements  
Environmental sustainability



Pest control



Minimize expense  
Minimal management



Water visibility

## MANAGEMENT DECISIONS OFTEN INVOLVE **TRADE-OFFS**

Pursuing one objective may limit the ability to achieve another important goal. When two priority objectives are incompatible, then a balanced management approach must be found. This can be complicated when specific needs and interests of the community vary by location or lifestyle. Some examples that were found:

In high flood risk areas, safety and bank protection were the biggest priority to workshop participants. But in areas that already have bank protection, it was frequently described as a barrier to highly valued “naturalness.”

Some nearby river residents want pest control while minimizing maintenance costs. Active river recreationists are not as concerned as residents about these issues. However, both groups align in their support for native species restoration.



## GET INVOLVED

Sign up and stay informed with our work: [www.sonoraninstitute.org](http://www.sonoraninstitute.org)

Learn more about the Santa Cruz River and read the *Living River* reports online: [www.tiny.cc/livingriver](http://www.tiny.cc/livingriver)

Tell us about your favorite place on the river in our interactive map: [www.tiny.cc/scrsurveymap](http://www.tiny.cc/scrsurveymap)

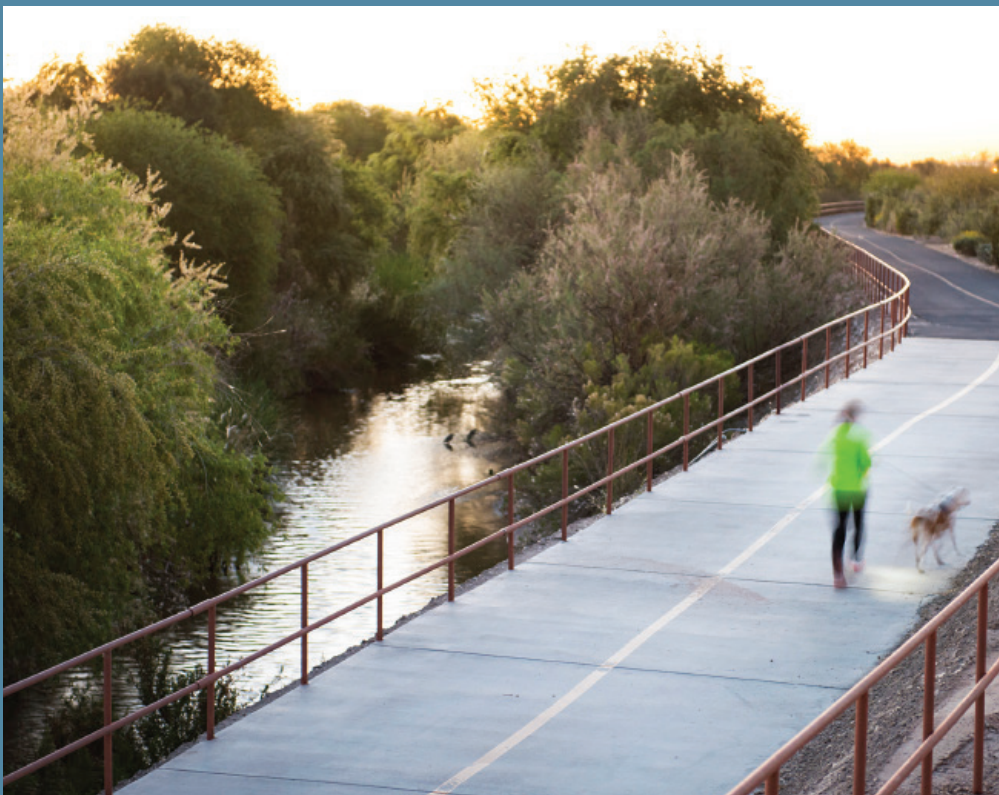
Watch Pima County's short video about the Santa Cruz River: [www.tiny.cc/livingrivervideo2017](http://www.tiny.cc/livingrivervideo2017)

Have your child enter the Living River of Words Youth Poetry and Art Contest. Sign up at [www.pima.gov/nrpr](http://www.pima.gov/nrpr)

Photographs: © Bill Hatcher, 2018; Back (right): Sonoran Institute

## LIVING RIVER

*Living River* reports launched in 2007, when the Sonoran Institute began tracking conditions in stretches of river that flow year-round due to the release of recycled water. This annual series began with the flowing reach in Santa Cruz County and was expanded, in partnership with Pima County, to include the Tucson reach in 2012. The *Living River* reports describe why the Santa Cruz is an asset for southeastern Arizona and illustrate the improvements in river health. Read the award-winning *Living River* reports on the Sonoran Institute website.



## SONORAN INSTITUTE

Sonoran Institute has worked on the Santa Cruz River since our founding in 1990. The Sonoran Institute's mission is to connect people and communities with the natural resources that nourish and sustain them. We work at the nexus of commerce, community, and conservation to help people in the North American West build the communities they want to live in while preserving the values which brought them here. We envision a West where civil dialogue and collaboration are hallmarks of decision making, where people and wildlife live in harmony, and where clean water, air, and energy are assured.



Sonoran Institute



@sonoraninst



SonoranInstitute

## PIMA COUNTY

[www.pima.gov](http://www.pima.gov)

### PIMA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Richard Elías, Chair, District 5  
Ally Miller, District 1  
Ramón Valadez, District 2  
Sharon Bronson, District 3  
Steve Christy, District 4

### COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Chuck Huckelberry