

Arizona State Trust Lands Conservation Profile: Lower San Pedro River

BIRDS AND BUSINESS

Sonoran Institute, in collaboration with conservation groups across Arizona and with funding from the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, has assembled state trust lands suitable for conservation into a single database. The resulting profiles focus on conservation values. Political values are left for another day.



Shaping the Future of the West

Like a shimmering ribbon seen from above, the San Pedro River winds its way north from Mexico through southeastern Arizona. While long considered the lifeblood for this region, the river is in peril. Its tenuous condition results from many issues; groundwater extraction, improper livestock grazing in riparian corridors, fire, off highway vehicles, and residential development. Many sections of the San Pedro are protected, but the Lower San Pedro needs attention. In this sparsely populated area of the state why should we care? The reasons are many.

Despite relentless demands, the river provides the basis for riparian vegetation that is critical habitat for endangered species such as the Southwest willow flycatcher. The National Audubon Society has designated this area as an Important Bird Area (IBA) as it is one of the primary migratory bird corridors in the West. Not only do bird lovers find this area worth conserving, archaeologists do as well. Findings include rich archaeological history dating from earliest North American human occupation.

This land is a state treasure and an exemplary part of Arizona history. The 13 noncontiguous parcels totaling 2,000 acres held in trust by the state trust land department are ripe for conservation. These parcels are located over a 32 mile stretch of the river between Dudleyville and just south of San Manuel.



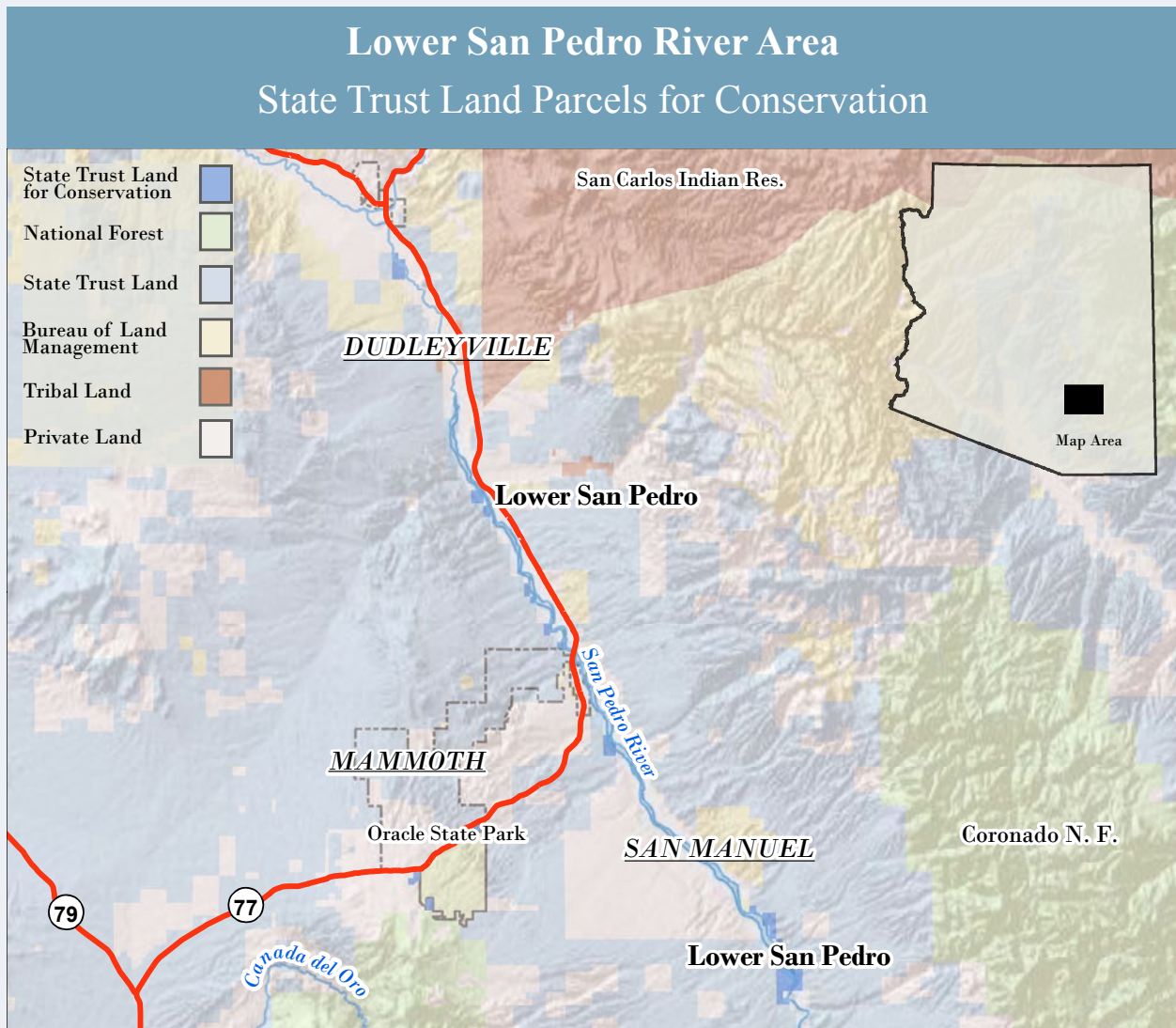
“If Wildlife Watching were a company, its sales of \$38.4 billion would rank it 33rd in the Forbes 500 list for 2001—placing it just ahead of Motorola and Kmart.”

– 2001 National and State Economics of Wildlife Watching, US Fish and Wildlife Service

LOCATION

Lower San Pedro River

The 2,000 acres of state trust land proposed for conservation are noncontiguous parcels located in the southeastern corner of Pinal County, on both sides of the Lower San Pedro River. Mountains surround the valley include: the Catalina Mountains to the west and the Galiuro Mountains to the east. The 32 mile segment of the river is located between the towns of Dudleyville and just south of San Manuel.





REASON FOR CONSERVATION

Lower San Pedro River

This segment of the San Pedro is considered a critical piece of one of the largest unfragmented landscapes in Arizona outside the Grand Canyon region. It is a recognized Globally Important Bird Area located at the convergence of four major ecosystems – the Sierra Madre and Rocky Mountains, and the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts, which enhances its high biodiversity value to Arizonans. The San Pedro River basin is considered to be a “keystone” transition zone that sustains biodiversity in other eco-regions and is one of the three principal desert life corridors in the Southwest, along with the Colorado and Rio Grande Rivers. The San Pedro contains vital habitat for approximately 250 species of migrant and wintering birds and over 100 species of breeding birds. The economic impact of this treasure of biodiversity has not been explored, but deserves consideration given its unique characteristics and its ability to draw those who want to see birds in their native habitat. Conservation of state trust land surrounding the Lower San Pedro would enhance this potential economic driver.

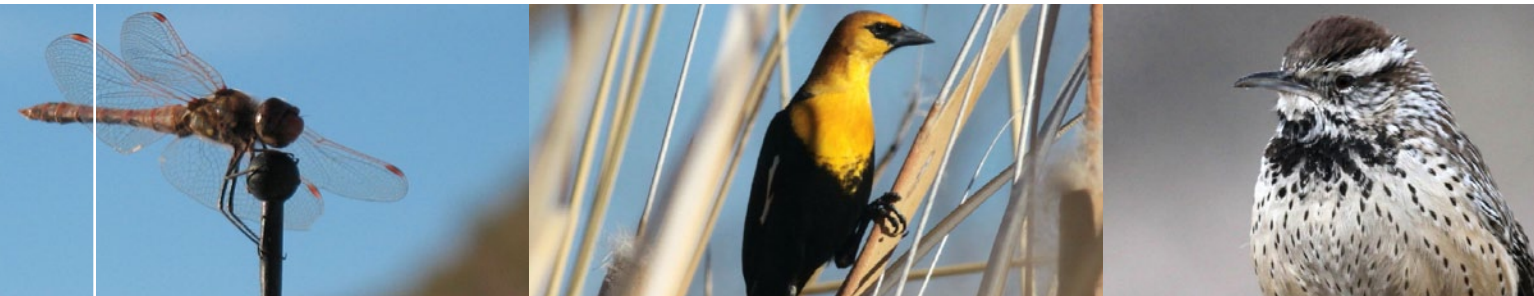


ARIZONA STATE TRUST LAND

In 1912, the federal government gave 10.5 million acres of state trust lands to the new state of Arizona. These lands are not owned by the state, but are held in trust for the benefit of the state’s school system and several other beneficiaries.

Proceeds from the sale or lease of these lands generated about \$50 million for the beneficiaries in 2010. The Arizona State Land Department, in its role as trustee for the beneficiaries, is constitutionally obligated to seek maximum financial return for trust lands.

This requirement has complicated efforts to preserve state trust land for recreational use and environmental protection. The state cannot simply turn a parcel of trust land into a park or nature preserve since it is required to receive full market value for the land. All state trust land is subject to sale or lease to the highest bidder. Preservation of trust land requires sustained community input coupled with legislative action.



STATE TRUST LAND CONSERVATION

Collaborating Partners

The Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust seeks to help people in need, especially women, children and families; to protect animals and nature; and to enrich community life in the metropolitan areas of Indianapolis and Phoenix.

The Sonoran Institute inspires and enables community decisions and public policies that respect the land and people of western North America. Facing rapid change, communities in the West value their natural and cultural resources, which support resilient environmental and economic systems. Founded in 1990, the Sonoran Institute helps communities conserve and restore those resources and manage growth and change through collaboration, civil dialogue, sound information, practical solutions and big-picture thinking. The Sonoran Institute is a nonprofit organization with offices in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona; Bozeman, Montana; Glenwood Springs, Colorado; Sheridan, Wyoming; Twentynine Palms, California; and Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico.



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CONTACT:

Dave Richins, Director
Sun Corridor Legacy Program
11010 N. Tatum Blvd, Ste D101
Phoenix, AZ 85028
(602) 393-4310 x 309
drichins@sonoraninstitute.org



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