

Arizona State Trust Lands Conservation Profile: San Pedro Riparian Area

DIVERSITY AND HISTORY

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

Eroded adobe walls and stone foundations are the last testament to Spain's attempts to create an outpost to protect their burgeoning northern territory in the 1700's. The Presidio Santa Cruz de Terrenate near the San Pedro River and west of Tombstone was initially established in 1776. These ruins of a once-extensive network of presidios throughout the Southwest are the most intact example of these fortresses and mark the northern extension of Spain into the New World.

The Presidio is one of many unique places in the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (NCA), designated by Congress in 1988. The NCA, a riparian gem of incredible biodiversity, continues to be threatened by human encroachment. Scientific sites within the San Pedro Riparian NCA provide a stratigraphic record extending thousands of years into the past that yield important information about prehistoric human societies, past animals and plants of the Southwestern United States,

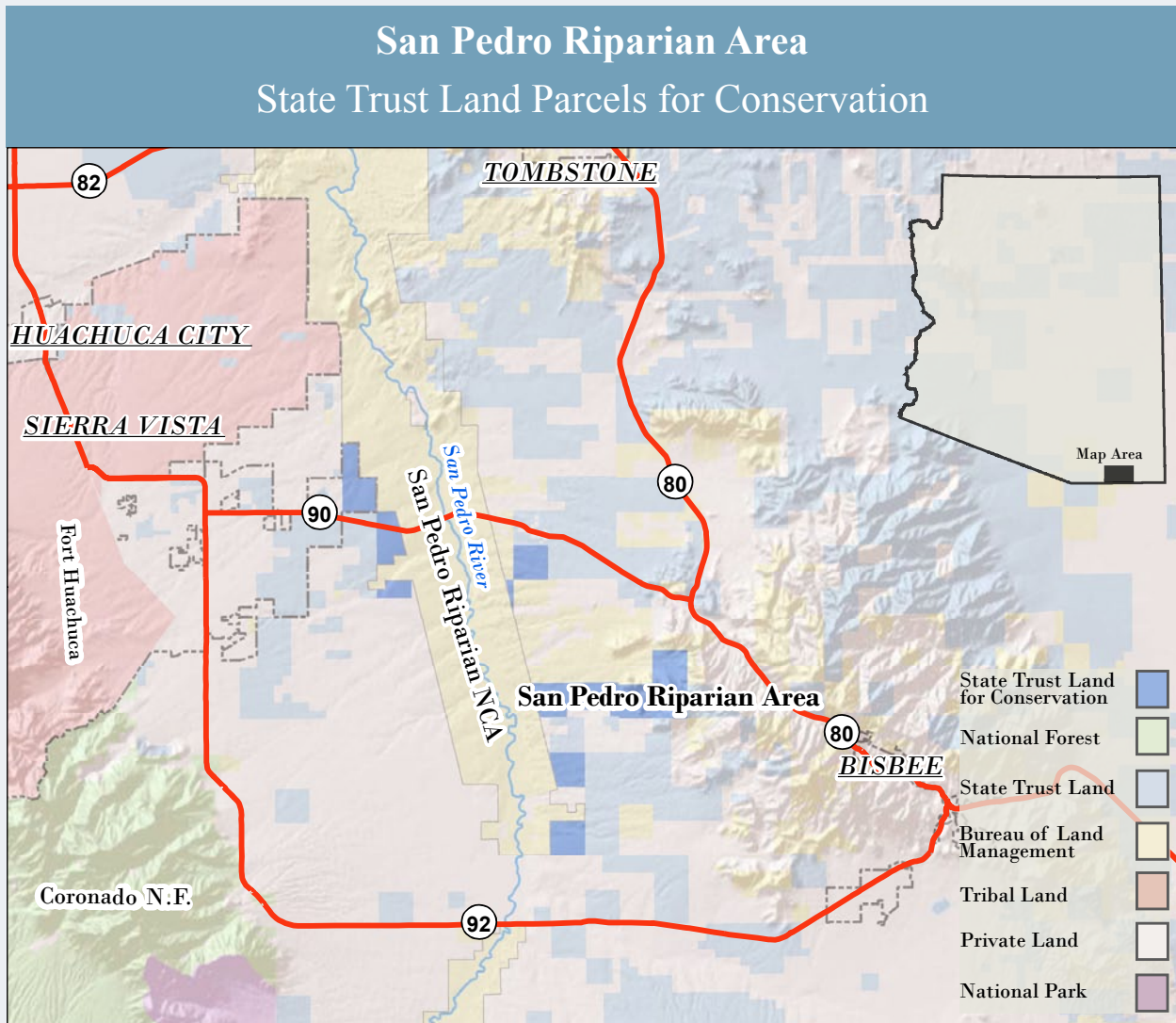
So named for their close proximity to the NCA, the state trust lands called the San Pedro Riparian Area are suitable for conservation due to the threat posed by residential encroachment that contributes to the depletion of the area's aquifer. Additional increases in the demand for water also threaten the important watersheds in the region, the perennial flow of the San Pedro River, and the water table that supports riparian vegetation critical to native and migratory birds and other wildlife.



LOCATION

San Pedro Riparian Area

Located near Sierra Vista, along State Highway 90 and on both sides of the San Pedro River, the area proposed for conservation is a series of discontinuous parcels that will provide critical additional buffers for a variety of wildlife in their native habitat along the River. The San Pedro Riparian Area proposed for conservation consists of a stretch of approximately 4,000 acres on either side the San Pedro River, which flows north from near Cananea, Mexico to the Gila River, touching the City of Sierra Vista, the western boundary of the Army's Fort Huachuca and ending at the southern end of the town of St. David. This riparian, or river habitat is rare in the desert Southwest.





REASON FOR CONSERVATION

San Pedro Riparian Area

The San Pedro River is one of the most biologically diverse areas of the United States. Four major ecosystems converge at the San Pedro —the Sierra Madre and Rocky Mountains, and the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts. The river and its watershed draw plants and animals from all of these ecosystems. The San Pedro River and surrounding National Conservation Area offer incredible species diversity; 84 species of mammals, 14 species of fish, 41 species of reptiles and amphibians, 100 species of breeding birds, and many species of insects and plants make their home in the area. Additionally, 250 species of migratory and wintering birds, representing approximately half of all known avian species in North America, spend winter months here. The conservation of state trust lands adjacent to the river and the NCA will help ensure this diversity of wildlife and as well as add a needed buffer for an ecosystem that is currently at-risk.

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

Friends of the San Pedro River is a volunteer, nonprofit, nonpolitical organization providing support to the Bureau of Land Management in its stewardship of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area.

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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