



Arizona State Trust Lands Conservation Profile: Verde Headwaters



WILD AND SCENIC

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

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was created by Congress in 1968 to preserve the free-flowing condition of rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Rivers are classified as wild, scenic, or recreational. In 1984, Arizona's Verde River was tapped as having both Wild and Scenic segments making it the only river in Arizona to receive this designation until 2009.

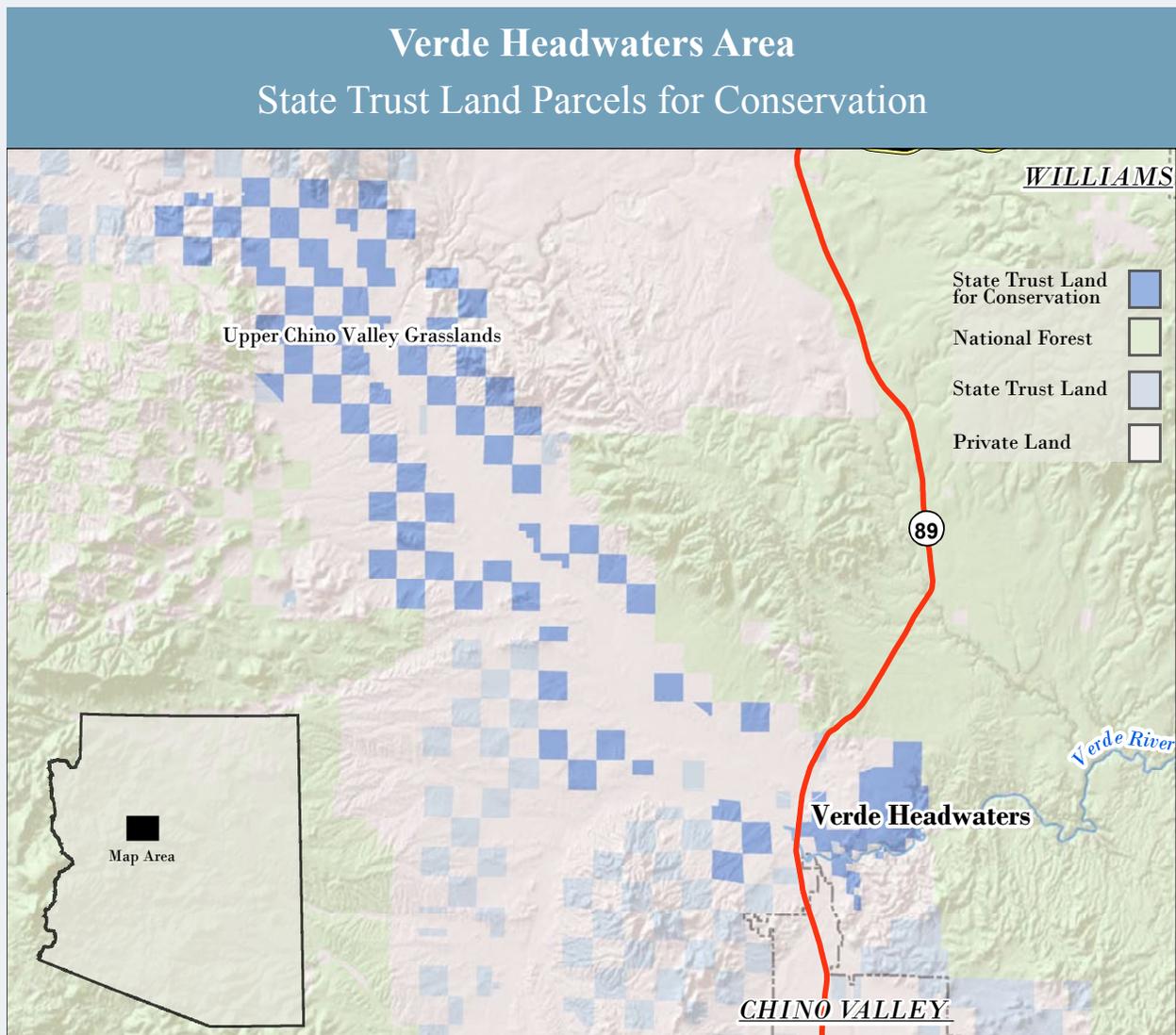
Since the late 1800's, civilization has affected the river's ecosystem. The introduction of non-native aquatic and vegetative species, timber harvest, grazing, fire suppression, mining, agriculture, development, groundwater pumping, and surface diversions have significantly impacted the river. The conservation of 6,200 acres of state trust land that surround the headwaters would provide a substantial buffer to minimize the heavy demands currently being placed upon the river from agricultural irrigation, domestic, municipal, and industrial water uses for the Verde Valley.

In 1999, Yavapai County was the fastest growing rural county in the United States. Its population, listed as 132,000 in 2000, is expected to more than double over the next 50 years. Continued depletion of aquifers through groundwater pumping to support this growth threatens the flow of the springs, and consequently the flow of the upper Verde.

LOCATION

Verde Headwaters

The 189-mile Verde drains over 6,000 square miles of Arizona and is an important tributary to the Colorado River. The upper Verde River begins in a series of springs in the upper canyons below Sullivan Lake east of Paulden and southwest of Flagstaff. Much of the first 20 miles of the Verde's flow is dependent on these springs, fed by aquifers in the Big and Little Chino basin. Below Perkinsville the Verde is joined by additional springs. Tributaries of the upper Verde include Granite Creek, Big Chino Wash, Hell Canyon, and Sycamore Canyon.





REASON FOR CONSERVATION

Verde Headwaters

If the additional 6,200 acres of state trust lands that surround the Verde Headwaters were conserved, it would provide a buffer zone for this crucial water source. Near these headwaters, Arizona's Game and Fish Department manages the Upper Verde River Wildlife Area for riparian habitat and native fish diversity. Tavasci Marsh has been designated as an Important Bird Area by the Audubon Society and the National Park Service manages several national monuments within the watershed, including the pre-historic Tuzigoot and Montezuma Castle sites. The Verde River Greenway, a six mile stretch of cottonwood and willow dominated forest near Cottonwood, is managed by the State Park system as a natural area. The Fort Verde State Historic Site preserves the first military installation in the Verde Valley. The Wild and Scenic River segments begin at Beasley Flat and include about 40 miles of river, managed for its free-flowing character and wild and scenic values.



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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