



CONSERVATION EASEMENTS ON THE VERDE RIVER

VERDE NRCD MEETING – APRIL 19, 2024

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THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

Mission, Conservation Strategies, Global Impact



Mission: The Nature Conservancy's mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends, by employing science-based strategies to address the most pressing environmental challenges of our time.

Conservation Strategies: The Nature Conservancy utilizes a range of strategies to achieve its mission, including land protection, scientific research, collaborative partnerships, policy advocacy, and sustainable resource management.

Global Impact: The Nature Conservancy has a significant global impact, working in more than 70 countries to protect and restore critical habitats, address climate change, and support sustainable livelihoods for local communities.

VERDE RIVER WATERSHED

Importance of: Ecosystem, Water Source, Recreation



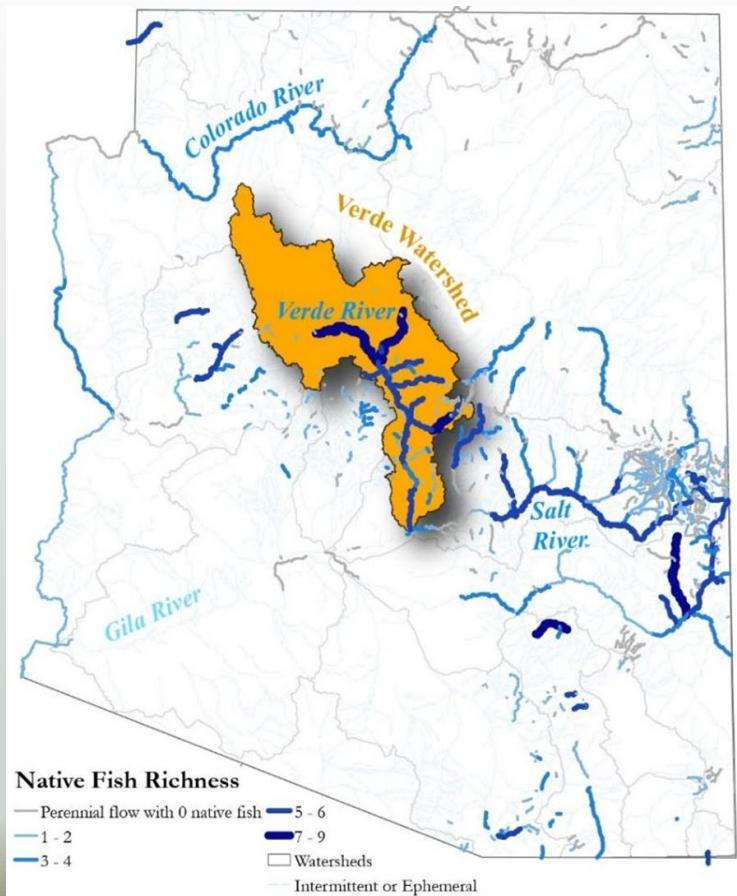
Ecosystem: The Verde River is one of Arizona's last flowing rivers. It provides critical habitat to nearly 50 threatened, endangered, sensitive, or special status fish and wildlife species.



Water Source: critically important state water supply for rural communities from Prescott to Camp Verde, as well as residents in metro Phoenix.



Recreation: The Verde River offers numerous recreational opportunities, making it an important natural and cultural resource for local residents and visitors.



CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Definition, Benefits, Role in Conservation

- **Definition:** A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust, nonprofit organization, or government agency that places restrictions on the development or use of a property to protect its conservation values.
- **Benefits to Landowners:** Financial incentives include compensation at the fair market value of the conservation easement.
- **Role in Conservation:** Conservation easements play a vital role in conservation efforts by providing a permanent legal mechanism to conserve important lands and waters, while still allowing landowners to continue using and owning the property, subject to agreed-upon restrictions.



BENEFITS FOR CONSERVATION

Habitat Preservation, Wildlife Connectivity, Climate Resilience

Habitat preservation: a wide range of plant and animal species depend on areas protected by easements.

Wildlife Connectivity: easements on private land often connect other areas, such as federal lands and allow corridors for wildlife to remain intact

Freshwater protection: Limiting groundwater withdrawals or changes in surface water use to protect important flows in rivers and streams

Climate Resilience: TNC's Resilient and Connected Network of Lands in North America.



BENEFITS FOR AGRICULTURE

Preserving traditional uses, Water Security, Economic Stability

Preserving traditional uses: Conservation easements support agricultural and ranching practices, promoting soil health and natural resource conservation.

Preservation of Agricultural Uses: Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) funding focuses on maintaining agricultural uses of land.

Economic Stability: Conservation easements provide economic stability for landowners by providing financial options.



PARTNERSHIPS



Importance of Partnership: Working collaboratively will ensure that we reach our goals at a pace and scale that matters.



Building the Capacity to Achieve Big Goals: TNC is proactively working with partners, like Central Arizona Land Trust, to build more capacity on the ground to acquire, hold, monitor and enforce conservation easements

PARTNERSHIP OVERVIEW

Shared Goals, Collaborative Approach

- **Shared Goals:** TNC and CALT each hold and steward conservation easements, as accredited land trusts.
- **Collaborative Approach:** We will work together in a collaborative manner, leveraging our respective expertise and resources to achieve effective and lasting conservation outcomes.



MIDDLE VERDE RIVER CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (NRCS) – about 1,000 acres of farmland protected to date
- Protecting the Verde River riparian corridor
- Protecting Agricultural Lands that preserve the rural character of the Verde Valley



UPPER VERDE REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

- Farm Bill funding administered by Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- Total grant award of \$11.5 million from NRCS, that is matched with \$11.5 million non-federal funds
- The Nature Conservancy is lead partner and CALT is supporting partner
- Goal is to protect up to 20,000 acres of private lands with conservation easements over 5-year term of grant



SUCCESS STORIES & CHALLENGES

How we learn from the challenges that arise

Protection tied to broader goals

Projects that fit into our roadmap

Older easement language

No connection to other protected lands





CONCLUSION



Learn: More information available online



Explore: Discuss with landowners that have easements



Reach out with Questions!

