

Lead Partner: The Nature Conservancy

Contacts:

Patrick Graham, State Director, 602.322.6990, pgraham@tnc.org

Cheryl Lombard, Government Relations Director, 602.541.6532, clombard@tnc.org

Kimberly Schonek, Verde River Project Manager, 928.925.9221, kschonek@tnc.org

Partners: Friends of Verde River Greenway, Verde Natural Resource Conservation District, Arizona Game and Fish Department and Tamarisk Coalition

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Summary:

The Verde River Habitat and Restoration Initiative focuses on two resource concerns: 1) insufficient water, particularly inefficient use of irrigation water and 2) inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife with a focus on habitat degradation. Project partners aim to improve irrigation water management and irrigation water delivery on 1,000 acres, enhance 6,000 acres of riparian habitat and protect 400 acres of agricultural lands through conservation easements over five years. The initiative will also seek to conserve private lands through voluntary conservation easements. The goal of this effort is to protect investments to date in on-farm conservation practices. Secondary concerns addressed by this initiative include soil erosion, stream bank erosion and inefficient use of energy. The result of this work will be substantial improvements to a critical watershed within the Colorado River Basin that will serve as a model for collaboration and solution-oriented conservation.

Based on our shared vision of restoring flows, preserving agriculture and improving riverside habitat, the partnership has established four objectives:

1. Restore and protect flows in the Verde River with an emphasis on the Verde Valley.
2. Improve riparian habitat primarily through the removal of invasive plants, erosion control and native plant re-vegetation.
3. Equip farmers and ranchers with the tools and resources needed to be sustainable into the future.
4. Enable long-term farming operations in the Verde Valley to preserve the rural landscape, open space and investment in conservation projects.

Community members and agricultural producers in the Verde Valley, and Arizona residents statewide, will see important benefits as a result of this initiative:

- improved water quantity and quality
- improved wildlife habitat
- reduced wildfire hazard
- improved recreational access to the river and its tributaries
- irrigation delivery systems
- healthy river system

This initiative will enhance the quality of life for residents, improve and maintain riverside property values, and encourage tourism that will provide benefits to our local communities and the state.

Each partner in this effort shares a clear and strong belief in a community approach to conservation. Habitat for fish and wildlife drives many of the actions of these entities. At the core of our actions is a fundamental desire to work together as a community to preserve a way of life and an ecosystem that will insure long-term success and sustainability. Our partnerships and relationships are not limited by the partners named as part of this initiative. We also work with the U.S. Forest Service, Arizona State Parks, U.S. National Park Service, as well as cities and towns in the watershed.

