



Lower San Pedro River Collaborative Conservation Initiative

Planning Update #1

June 2012

The Lower San Pedro River runs through Cochise, Pima and Pinal Counties. Photo courtesy of The Nature Conservancy

Thank You for Participating!

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is exploring the idea of a collaborative conservation initiative and a national wildlife refuge along the Lower San Pedro River. We have discussed this proposal with many local stakeholders over the past year and learned what people care about in the river valley.

We are now entering an official 60-day “scoping” phase of our planning effort. We are accepting comments through August 6, 2012, about issues, concerns and ideas that we should address in future planning documents. All the comments and concerns you have previously given to us during the past year will still be analyzed and addressed, as well.

This is the first in a series of updates to keep you informed about our efforts. Please share your ideas with us by attending one of the public meetings, mailing in a comment card at the back of this update, or via email to me at jeannie_wagnergreven@fws.gov. Your participation and input is a critical part of this evaluation and planning process.

Jeannie Wagner-Greven
Thank you,

Jeannie Wagner-Greven
Natural Resource Planner

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The Mission of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people

Public Meetings

- Tuesday, June 12
3:00 p.m. — 5:00 p.m.
Doubletree Hotel
445 Alvernon Way
Tucson, Arizona
- Wednesday, June 13
6:30 p.m. — 8:30 p.m.
Cascabel Community Center
5871 Cascabel Road
Cascabel, Arizona
- Thursday, June 14
6:30 p.m. — 8:30 p.m.
San Manuel School
Auditorium Cafeteria
711 McNab Parkway
San Manuel, Arizona

Why Here, Why Now?

The San Pedro River is the last major undammed river in the Southwest. This Globally Important Bird Area is located at the convergence of four major ecosystems—the Sierra Madre and Rocky Mountains, and the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts, which contribute to its high biodiversity values. The San Pedro River is recognized as one of the primary migratory bird corridors in the West, with estimates of up to four million birds annually traversing the corridor between Mexico and breeding areas in the West. The San Pedro River basin is considered to be a “keystone” transition zone that sustains biodiversity in other eco-regions. The San Pedro contains vital habitat for approximately 250 species of migrant and wintering birds and over 100 species of breeding birds. The river is designated critical habitat for southwestern willow flycatchers.

While the river valley has outstanding qualities, the river valley and watershed are threatened. Climate change could affect water quantity in the future. Large infrastructure proposals could degrade habitat quality, increase erosion potential, and bring more water demands to compete with current users. Non-native invasive plants and animals compete with native plants and animals, degrade habitat quality and interfere with productive land uses. While there are a number of organizations working towards conservation and sustainability goals within the Lower San Pedro River valley, a unified and overarching collaborative landowner organization could be more effective in dealing with the threats and opportunities arising.

The Proposal’s Vision

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is exploring the idea of a collaborative conservation and management initiative along the Lower San Pedro River involving interested landowners, land managing agencies, local communities, nonprofit organizations, businesses and the public who share a vision of a healthy river system contributing to people’s livelihoods and a functioning, hydrologically healthy riparian corridor that supports a diverse and rich native flora and fauna.

The Fish and Wildlife Service could serve as a facilitator for coordinated efforts among participating landowners and other partners to accomplish the shared vision of landscape scale restoration of ecological integrity contributing to the working landscape on the lower San Pedro River. This collaborative venture would be landowner/land manager driven. FWS could contribute an array of various tools that landowners could voluntarily and freely choose from including technical assistance, cooperative

agreements for management, Partners for Fish and Wildlife grants, conservation easements, or fee title acquisition by the FWS for a National Wildlife Refuge. This initiative would build on the success of existing cooperative landowner groups along the Lower San Pedro River.

The Lower San Pedro River Collaborative Conservation Initiative would:

Be an entirely voluntary cooperative and collaborative endeavor among participants

Embrace and continue the shared vision of a working landscape by supporting working ranches and farms.

Be guided by a steering group of landowners and land managers with support from agency/organization liaison representatives.

Have no regulatory power. Landowners remain free to manage their lands as they wish.

Provide efficiencies and savings by coordinating resources to help landowners restore, improve, manage, or conserve their lands to maximize returns while contributing to a healthy river system.

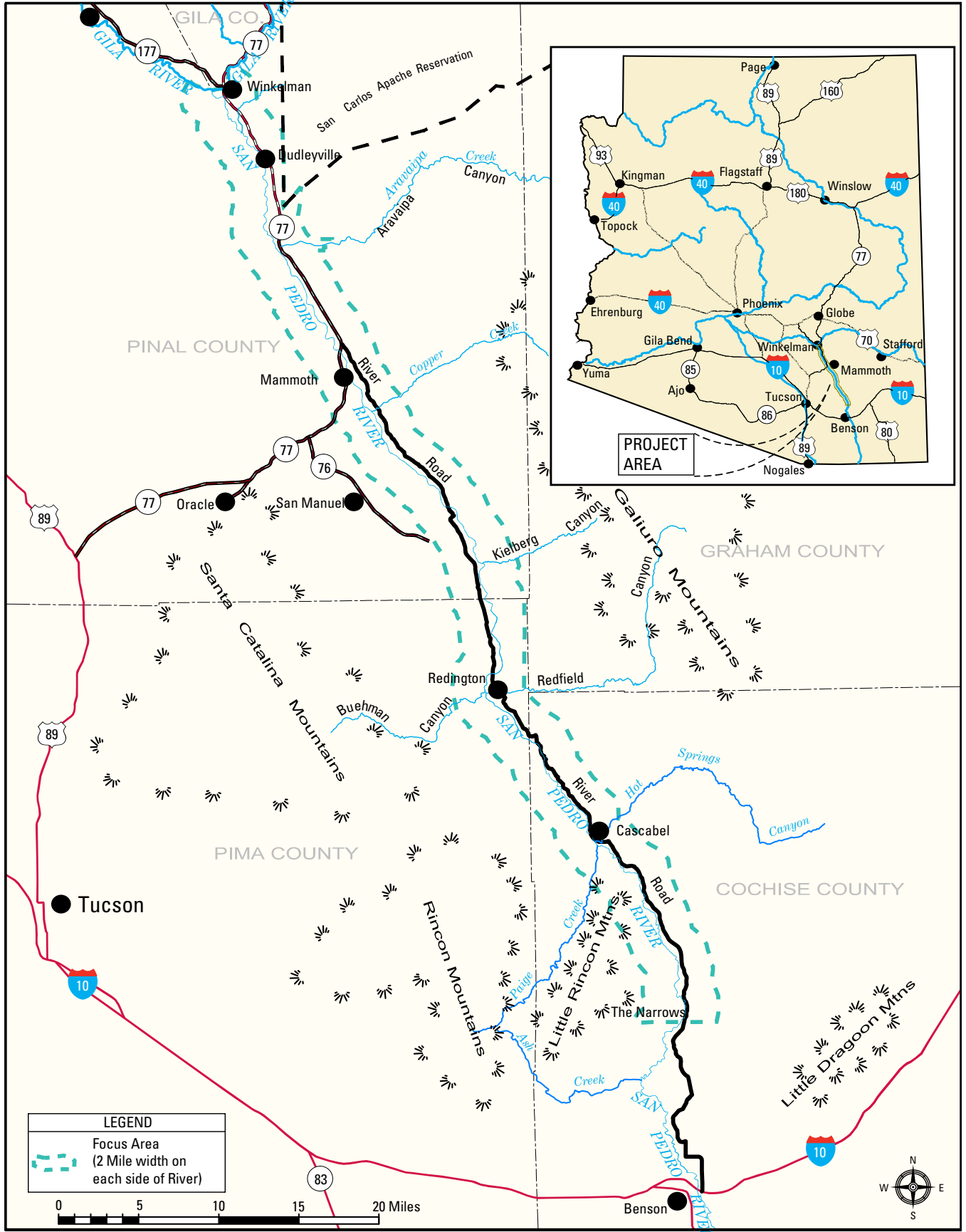
Enable the FWS to acquire lands within the approved project area from voluntary sellers or donors only. Acquired lands or conservation easements would be managed by the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Be modeled after similar endeavors around the nation including the Malpai Borderlands Group, the Altar Valley Conservation Alliance, the Blackfoot Challenge, and the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area.

Steps of the Planning Process



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Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Would this initiative or a national wildlife refuge mean that my property would be regulated by the Fish and Wildlife Service?

A. The Service would have no legal authority to regulate private properties solely because of the existence of a collaborative landowners group or a national wildlife refuge. The Service has jurisdiction under the Endangered Species Act and certain other laws with, or without, the presence of national wildlife refuges or collaborative groups that it may participate in.

Q. If I own land within the project area and want to sell or donate my land to the Service, what options do I have?

A. The Service acquires interest in lands through fee title purchase or donation, or conservation easement purchase or donation. Landowners who choose to sell or donate their development rights for a conservation easement would retain many other ownership rights. Landowners who do not sell or donate interests in their lands continue to maintain the right to exclude the public from their lands.

The Service will not acquire State, BLM or Forest Service grazing leases, if it acquires private deeded land. Those leases would become available for other potential lessees.

The Service is administratively authorized to negotiate with landowners willing to sell or donate an interest in their properties within an approved boundary. Project boundaries are typically approved by the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The boundary itself does not give the Service any special legal jurisdiction or regulatory control over these lands. Lands become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System only when they are purchased from willing sellers, or donated by voluntary donors. Landowners who choose not to sell continue to manage their lands as before and always have the right to sell their lands to anyone they choose.

Q. What if my land is within an approved project boundary and I do not want to sell?

A. You maintain every right to your land, including the right to sell your land to whomever you choose. It is the policy of the Service to acquire lands only from willing sellers or donors. An approved boundary does not require you to sell your property to the Service or abide by a certain kind of management or regulation. You would be unaffected by the establishment of the new boundary, except that a national wildlife refuge might now be one of your neighbors.

Q. How would the creation of a wildlife refuge affect the area's tax base?

A. The Refuge Revenue Sharing Act of June 15, 1935, as amended, provides for annual payments to counties or the lowest unit of government that collects and distributes taxes based on acreage and value of national wildlife refuge lands located within the county. The monies for these payments come from two sources: (1) net receipts from the sale of products from National Wildlife Refuge System lands (oil and gas leases, timber sales, grazing fees, etc.) and (2) annual Congressional appropriations. Annual Congressional appropriations, as authorized by a 1978 amendment, were intended to make up the difference between the net receipts from the Refuge Revenue Sharing Fund and the total amount due to local units of government under one of the following formulas.

Payments to the counties are calculated based on the following formulas which provide the largest return to the counties: (1) \$.75 per acre; (2) 25 percent of the net receipts collected from refuge lands in the county; or (3) three-quarters of 1 percent of the appraised value (usually this is the selected formula). Using this method, lands are reappraised every five years to reflect current market values.

It must be noted that revenue sharing payments are only made when lands are acquired in fee title. Less-than fee acquisitions (such as conservation easements) remain in private ownership and the landowner still pays property taxes.

Q. Would land use and zoning change within the refuge project boundary?

A. Zoning and land use regulations would continue under the jurisdiction of the appropriate local government. The Service would manage only its own property, or property in which it acquires a conservation easement in a manner negotiated with the landowner.

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(Yes) Keep me on your mailing list/add me to your mailing list. Email Only.

Please specify in which form you would like to receive a copy of the draft plan for review.

Electronic (CD) Hardcopy

(No) Take me off your mailing list.

Name: _____
(Please Print)

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

If you are acting in an official capacity as the representative of an organization please complete the following two items.

Organization: _____

Title: _____

Please note that names on our mailing list and any submitted comments become part of the public record for this project. The Service must release names, if requested, under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act of 1974.

Please Share Any Comments: (if needed, please attach additional pages)

Comments accepted until August 6, 2012

Thank you for your time!

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

"...to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans"

Email Address

Comments may be submitted via email to:

jeannie_wagnergreven@fws.gov

For any comments or concerns, contact:

Jeannie Wagner-Greven
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
P.O. Box 1306
Albuquerque, NM 87103
505/248-6667



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