



For Immediate Release

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**Important San Pedro River Properties Protected**  
*Project Was Top National Priority of the Forest Legacy Program*

OCTOBER 28, (TUCSON, AZ) —Four private properties linking an important wildlife and bird migration corridor along the lower San Pedro River will be forever protected as part of a partnership between landowners, the U.S. Forest Service, Arizona State Forestry, Arizona Game and Fish Department and The Nature Conservancy.

The properties, totaling 613 acres, include biologically rich riverside forest that is highly threatened throughout the Southwest.

The San Pedro Ecosystem project was selected in 2010 as the top national priority for protection through the Forest Legacy Program, which funds conservation easements on private forestlands that provide important benefits like water and wildlife habitat and have a high potential for being developed.

The voluntary land-use agreements prevent development that could degrade the biologically rich riverside forest, a rare habitat type that is highly threatened throughout the Southwest. The agreements will also prevent pumping of water that could further harm the San Pedro River, one of Arizona's last flowing rivers.

"I've wanted to protect this property for more than a decade, so I'm thrilled," said Nathan Sayre, one of the landowners who signed a conservation easement.

The four properties were some of the largest unprotected tracts of land from the San Pedro River to the Muleshoe Ranch Cooperative Management Area. Now these private lands make up part of

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a protected 10-mile-long wildlife corridor linking the Galiuro Mountains to the Rincon and Catalina Mountains.

The Forest Legacy Program, funded by the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, is a program of the U.S. Forest Service that partners with the states. The Arizona State Forestry Division administers the program for Arizona.

“Cooperation and diligence between private landowners, Arizona State Forestry, The Nature Conservancy and the Forest Service culminated in these momentous agreements, which now protect environmentally sensitive and rare riverside forests. We are extremely pleased to have been part of this effort and a member of this exceptional partnership,” said Cal Joyner, regional forester, Southwestern Region, U.S. Forest Service.

In exchange for agreeing not to develop their property, the landowners receive an agreed-upon financial benefit, in this case a payment that reflects the development rights they are giving up.

“We truly appreciate the efforts of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy. Most of all, we applaud the commitment of the landowners to conserve their riverside forests from conversion to non-forest uses. Through their actions, unique and critical habitat along the San Pedro River will be permanently protected,” said Scott Hunt, Arizona State Forester.

Arizona’s forests span roughly 27 percent of the state, but forests along rivers are the rarest, most threatened and ecologically important forest type.

The forest along the San Pedro River – predominantly cottonwood, willow and mesquite – provides a migratory corridor of hemispheric importance that supports nearly half of all bird species found in the United States, including the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher and the threatened yellow-billed cuckoo. Wildlife including beaver, bighorn sheep, coatimundi, javelina, fox, bobcat, bear and mountain lion frequent the river valley.

“Holding the conservation easements through this unique partnership will further the department’s effort to protect wildlife habitat along the San Pedro River,” said Joyce Francis, Arizona Game and Fish’s habitat branch chief. “The San Pedro provides one of the state’s most critical riparian areas and the landowners’ willingness to participate in conservation now will pay dividends in the future.”

This Forest Legacy project contributes to the success of a larger effort that has protected more than 65,000 acres in the San Pedro River watershed from threats such as fractured landscapes and groundwater pumping.

“This agreement will help protect one of Arizona’s most important remaining rivers, which provides drinking water for people and habitat for wildlife, including millions of resident and migrating birds that depend on its riverside forest,” said Patrick Graham, state director of The Nature Conservancy in Arizona.

The Conservancy, which has worked with partners to protect more than 53,000 acres along the San Pedro over the last 30 years, helped negotiate and coordinate the agreement between the landowners and the agencies.

Said Nathan Sayre: “As a landowner, I’m happy to be fairly compensated for giving up my development rights. But the main reason I’m doing it is the importance of protecting the rare and beautiful habitat on my own property and the larger area.”

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**The Nature Conservancy** is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. To date, the Conservancy and its more than one million members have been responsible for the protection of more than 18 million acres in the United States and have helped preserve more than 117 million acres in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. Visit The Nature Conservancy on the web at [nature.org/arizona](http://nature.org/arizona).

**US Forest Service, Forest Legacy Program**, which focuses on protecting working forests and is funded by the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, has protected 2.4 million acres of forest land. Landowner participation is entirely voluntary.

**U.S. Forest Service** is a Federal agency that manages public lands in national forests and grasslands, as well as other congressionally designated areas. The Forest Service is also the largest forestry research organization in the world, and provides technical and financial assistance to state and private forestry agencies. The mission of the Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.

**The Arizona State Forestry Division** provides resources for the prevention and suppression of wildland fire on State Trust Land and private property located outside incorporated communities. The agency also provides services for fire prevention, urban and community forestry, forest stewardship, forest health, utilization and marketing, forest land conservation, and has a wide variety of grants available.

**AZ Game & Fish Department** is the state’s management authority for more than 800 species of native wildlife – the most of any inland state. In addition to wildlife management, the department also oversees hunting, fishing, watercraft recreation, off-highway vehicle recreation and offers many outdoor recreation-related education programs. Visit the department at [www.azgfd.gov](http://www.azgfd.gov).