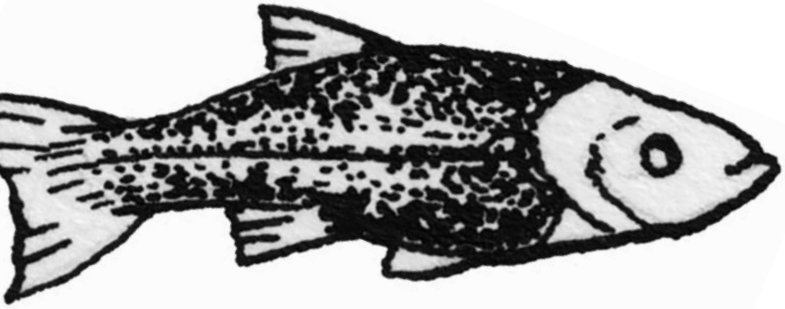
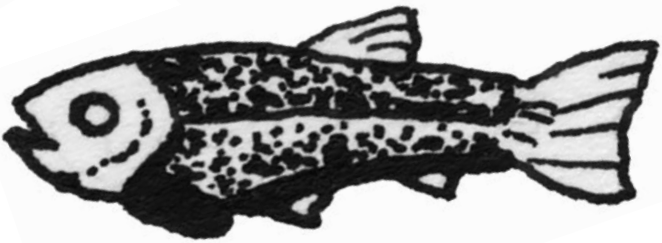
# SAN PEDRO ANTHOLOGY

VOLUME I
JUNE, 2019





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S. Kanning 2019

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*Essays submitted in support of the 30th Anniversary of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area*

Compiled by

KATE SCOTT & TONY HEATH

with

NICOLE GILLETT

IN COORDINATION WITH

TUCSON AUDUBON SOCIETY

*In Memory of Margaret Neale Heath*

San Pedro Anthology © 2019
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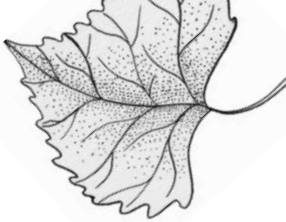


# *Introduction*

**The San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area** (SPRNCA), in southeastern Arizona, turned 30 years old on November 17, 2018. The San Pedro is the last free-flowing desert river in Arizona, a critical flyway for neo-tropical birds and a haven for desert wildlife.

The anniversary comes during a period in which State and Federal agencies are threatening to undermine original protections entered into law in 1988. Much of it involves allowing more hunting and cattle grazing in larger, sensitive areas of SPRNCA. Current official proposals undermine efforts to protect the aquifer and promote the river's protection and preservation, as mandated by law. (Please see Appendix I on Page 32 for more information.)

When my wife, Kate Scott, founder of the Madrean Archipelago Wildlife Center, came to me (Birdland Ranch), she asked me to consider producing a short book of informative essays and creative pieces submitted by people who love the San Pedro River. The idea was to honor the River through the voices of the people who are trying actively to save it. Nicole Gillett, a conservation advocate with the Tucson Audubon Society, provided valuable encouragement, funding and production assistance.

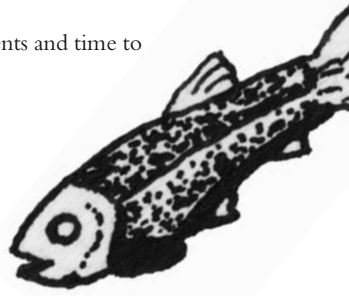
Having enlisted me for a number of reasons, not least of all because I'm her husband, I also had a ten year old copy of QuarkXpress lying around from my days in publishing—so I agreed to do it.

This was not a juried selection and consists of both professional writers and inspired naturalists who chose to put their appreciation of one of the world's "last great places" in writing.

Special thanks to Barbara Kingsolver for her support and participation; Saraiya Kanning for her fine illustrations; Bob Luce for his photography *and* his essay; Michael Gregory for his poetry, support and guidance, and Tricia Gerrodette for her astute proof reading of the second printing.

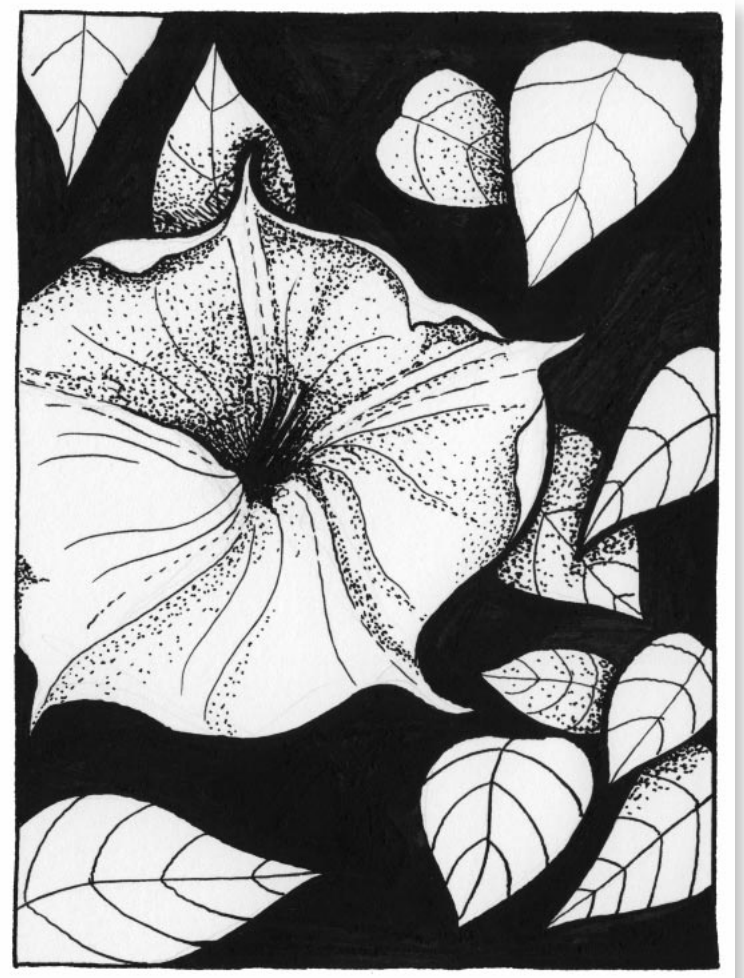
With heartfelt thanks to all those who vounteered their talents and time to make this book possible.

Tony Heath, *Editor, contributor, volunteer*



*vox clamantis in deserto*

*– Book of Isaiah*



# *Contents*

*i thank You God for most this amazing*
*day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees*
*and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything*
*which is natural which is infinite which is yes*

*- e.e. cummings*

Escapule Wash (R. J. Luce)

Barbara Kingsolver

# *The Patience of a Saint: San Pedro River*

When I was nine years old, I jumped across the Mississippi. My family sought out its headwaters in Itasca State Park, Minnesota, where a special trail showed the way for adventurers with this feat in mind. I took my leap reverently. My parents let me know this modest stream I'd taken in stride was actually one of Earth's great corridors, dominion of paddleboats and Huck Finn, prime mover of flood, fertility, and commerce across our land.

However we might long to re-create the landmark events of childhood for our own children, water passes on. You can't—as Heraclitus put it—step in the same river twice. Nowadays when my family sets out for a lesson in river, we drive southeast from our Tucson home to a narrow, meandering cottonwood forest where our kids may attempt to vault the San Pedro. They've done it often, and sometimes don't even get very wet. Where its headwaters cross from Mexico into Arizona, this river is barely three feet across. As it flows north across some 150 miles of desert, it rarely gets much wider. In the scheme of human commerce it's an unimpressive trickle. Mostly it's a sparkling anomaly for sunstruck eyes, a thread of blue-green relief.

In summer this modest saint invites us down from the blazing heat into a willowy tunnel of cool shade, birdsong, and the velvet brown scent of riverbank. We take unhurried hikes, reading the dappled script of animal tracks and the driftwood history of flood and drought embedded in the steep banks. The sight of a vermilion flycatcher leaves us breathless every time—he's not just a bird but a punctuation mark on the air, printed in red ink, read out loud as a gasp. The kids dance barefoot between the sandbars, believing they have found the Secret Garden. For the space of an afternoon we're sheltered from the prickly reality of the desert where we live. Most human visitors to the San Pedro appreciate it for the same reasons they value gold: It sparkles, and it's rare.

From a resident's point of view, though, the price of gold couldn't touch this family home. For the water umbel spreading delicate roots in a lucid pool, the leopard frog peering out through a veil of duckweed, the brush-prowling ocelot, and the bright-feathered birds that must cross

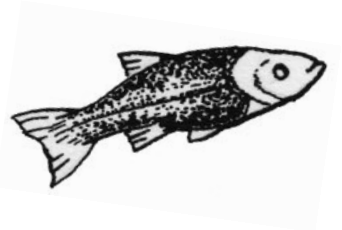
this hostile expanse of land or find a living from it, the San Pedro is a corridor of unparalleled importance. Nearly a third of the river's 150 miles and 58,000 acres of adjacent land have been protected since 1988 as the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area. The Nature Conservancy has named it one of Earth's Last Great Places.

To jump across this river with the right measure of reverence requires an animal frame of mind: 82 species of mammals—a community unmatched anywhere north of the tropics—inhabit this valley. Also hiding out here are 43 kinds of reptiles and amphibians, including the Ramsey Canyon leopard frog—a bizarre critter that calls (as if he knows it's a big, harsh desert out there) from underwater. The San Pedro harbors the richest, most dense and diverse inland bird population in the United States as well—385 species. It's one of the last nesting sites for southwestern willow flycatchers and western yellow-billed cuckoos; green kingfishers breed only here and in southern Texas. For millions of migratory birds traveling from winter food in Central America to their northern breeding grounds, there is one reliable passage on which life depends. Just this one.

■



Fogbound (R. J. Luce)



R. J. Luce

# *River of Life*

The San Pedro River is one of the crown jewels of Arizona, a true ecological wonder. Life is sparse in the desert, but abundant in the thin, magical, corridor of trees, shrubs, grasses, and plants that thrive along this slow-moving river.

The San Pedro is an international river, with its headwaters near El Cinco, east of Cananea in Sonora, Mexico, its upper thirty plus miles south of the border. The river corridor is shaped like a giant hydrologic fishhook with the sharp end pointing toward Douglas, Arizona and the shank extending north approximately one hundred forty miles to the Gila River near Winkelman, east of Tucson. A few fences slow the San Pedro, especially the border fence between Mexico and the United States, but no dams impede the flow of the river; except those built by beaver, of course.

A desert river is both a linear oasis and a native psychiatrist. Sitting quietly along the bank of a river is a soothing experience, and one simply cannot help but feel more relaxed and positive after a half hour therapy session. However, at another time, a river experience can be thrilling: noisy riffles, massive bank-to-bank logjams, or huge, old cottonwoods creaking mournfully in the wind. Unexpected encounters with wildlife are always just around the next bend.

The San Pedro River is the primary wildlife movement corridor that connects the mountains of the Madrean Archipelago, often referred to as Sky Islands. These isolated mountain ranges: Whetstone, Dragoon, Mule, Chiricahua, Galiuro, and Huachuca, to name a few rise from the Chihuahuan desert in southern Arizona. Each is unique in ecological diversity. The river corridor supports two-thirds of the avian diversity of the entire United States, including more than 100 species of breeding birds and 300 migrant birds. In addition to birds, 200 species of butterflies migrate through, going between South, Central, and North America. More than 80 species of mammals, which except for a few bat species, are present yearlong: coatimundi, ringtail cat, raccoon, bobcat, black bear, and mountain lion. Over 65 species of reptiles and amphibians occur. Native fish including Gila chub, currently proposed for federal listing as endangered,* and longfin dace, desert sucker,

roundtail chub, and speckled dace may still occur in the river.

It is sometimes hard to mark the change of seasons in the Chihuahuan desert. Except for variations in temperature and a wave of green during the monsoon season in July through September, spring, fall, and winter look much the same in the uplands. Not so along the river, though. Changes in cottonwoods and willows are obvious, and rotating shifts in wildlife populations, especially birds, mark memorable waypoints in the annual cycle.

Fall is the most colorful season. Red velvet poison ivy contrasts with flaming golden-yellow cottonwoods and willows, signaling seasonal change along the San Pedro. Beginning in August, when snow and cold threaten in the northern states, migrant songbirds arrive, some to rest and pass through, others to stay for the winter. The original snowbirds!

In winter, humidity sometimes rises overnight, and then cold, foggy mornings follow. Overflow spots on beaver dams become short-lived, but fascinating miniature ice palaces. Rarely, instant hoar frost forms on trees and grasses, lasting for only a few magical minutes before the sun arrives to dissolve it. Nevertheless, those few moments are unforgettable.

In spring, migrant birds begin to arrive by March, but April is the true season of renewal. Bird numbers explode during migration. Great blue herons become common, fishing quiet pools, hauling the catch to feed their young nestled in rookeries high in giant cottonwood trees. Brilliant Scott's and northern orioles make their first appearance. Great horned owl fledglings pop their heads out of their nest for a quick look at the world. Elusive gray hawks can be heard calling along the river. Cottonwoods wake from their winter slumber, and the river begins a slow transformation from high flows of winter to low flows of summer.

During the July to September monsoon season cloudbursts frequently dump tremendous amounts of moisture on the desert in a short time. The river and tributary washes turn mad for a few days after a big rain: clearing out logjams, beaver dams, and human litter, eventually depositing everything downriver wherever water turns to sand. Craig Childs, in *The Secret Knowledge of Water*, describes a desert river at high water: "Floods come down like rolling loads of cement." Sometimes local human residents have no choice but to stand by and watch when high water temporarily blocks local county roads.

James Ohio Pattie, the first mountain man to enter the San Pedro Valley, came in 1827 when the land was still Mexican territory. That was years before the 1854 Gadsden Purchase in which the U.S. acquired the lands

south of the Gila River. Pattie called the San Pedro "Beaver River." Beaver were abundant, creating an ecological wonderland, a series of ponds extending from Mexico to the Gila River. Trapping for furs and destruction of dams to control malaria combined to exterminate the beaver, but in 1999 the Bureau of Land Management transplanted nineteen beaver back into the upper forty-mile stretch of the river in Arizona to give the species a second chance.

In *"Crossing Boundaries,"* Barbara Tellman and Diana Hadley quote several historical sources, primarily land surveyors' journals written in the mid-1800s, which like mountain man James Pattie describe a much different river than we see now. The river of 200 years ago had a narrow floodplain level with the surrounding desert and was more like a spreading marsh ringed by willows and cottonwoods than the incised stream of today. Now, willows and cottonwoods must hug the riverbanks, growing only where their roots can reach underground water. For the first time in history, human occupation of the San Pedro Valley is so expansive and consumptive of both surface and underground water that it threatens the long-term survival of the river.

We must ask ourselves: Will there still be enough rain to make a rainbow, hundreds of kinds of birds, beavers, and cottonwoods along the river a hundred years from now? We can be sure of one thing; we will not have a "River of Life" without a river.

■

*The Gila chub was listed as endangered on 11/2/2005, effective 12/2/2005.

Lightning: Brunckow Hill (R. J. Luce)

San Pedro River (R. J. Luce)

Broad-billed Hummingbird (Tony Heath)

Paul Young

# *Environmental Engineers: Beavers on the San Pedro River*

When pioneers first observed the San Pedro River during the 1800s, they described a very different waterway than the one we see today. It was a deep, wide, meandering stream with boggy marshes and extensive beaver ponds. Trapper James Ohio Pattie called it the Beaver River.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the river had changed dramatically. Thousands of imported cattle had trampled the river bottom. Countless trees had been cut. In 1887, a violent earthquake struck, altering the water table. There was a prolonged drought followed by devastating floods that carved deep channels into the riverbanks. By this time most of the beavers had been killed for their fur. In the 1920s, soldiers from Fort Huachuca, in an effort to combat mosquito-borne malaria, dynamited the few remaining dams.

In the decades since, the San Pedro assumed its current character—a straighter, narrower, ephemeral river, lined with cottonwoods. By the 1990s, with local wells relentlessly sucking down the aquifer, the San Pedro also appeared to be a dying river.

When considering how to revitalize the San Pedro, BLM wildlife biologist Mark Fredlake conceived the idea to bring back one of the river's old residents—the beaver. Fredlake reasoned that beaver dams would slow the river's flow, allowing more water to soak into the ground, recharging the aquifer. The ponds might also create new ecosystems to attract other life forms, increasing species diversity.

After years of planning and obtaining government authorization, the proposal was approved. Fredlake made plans for the initial release: a fifty-seven-pound male beaver from the lower Colorado River.

The day that Fredlake had been anticipating for years finally arrived. While he secured the beaver cage at the river's edge, San Pedro House manager Ted White stood ankle deep in the water with his camera trained on the cage door. "Mark opened the door, but that beaver just sat there," White recalls. "Mark started shaking the cage and it still wouldn't budge. Finally, after waiting two or three minutes with that camera held

to my eye, I lowered it for just a second and, like a shot, that beaver hit the water and was gone. I had missed the great moment."

From 1999-2002, nineteen beavers were released into the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA), a forty mile stretch of the river in Cochise County. The beavers quickly went to work and by 2006 there were over thirty dams.

The beavers also dispersed beyond the boundaries of the SPRNCA. One beaver migrated to Aravaipa Canyon, over one hundred river miles away. Another journeyed all the way to the Gila River, earning itself the moniker "the surfing beaver." They even spread into Mexico, building several dams along the river's upper tributaries.

Despite the population increase, there have been casualties among the beaver. Low water during drought exposes den entrances, making the beaver vulnerable to predators like coyotes, bobcats, and mountain lions. BLM wildlife biologist Marcia Radke, Fredlake's successor, found a dead beaver with feline puncture wounds in its skull. Although trapping in the SPRNCA is illegal, there is also the threat of human predators. Radke found a trap along the river, but it wasn't set.

There is also natural selection. To fell a tree, beavers stand on their hind legs, using their tail as a prop, and gnaw the trunk into an hourglass shape. But sometimes things don't work out quite as planned. Mike Foster, videographer for Friends of the San Pedro River, has spent hundreds of hours recording local wildlife and river conditions. He once found the skeleton of a beaver that had been crushed by a felled tree.

The beavers' biggest challenge is Southeast Arizona's unpredictable weather. In 2008, they suffered a setback when torrential monsoon rains inundated the river, destroying every dam. A long drought followed. The following winter, Radke counted only eight dams.

Mike Foster felt dubious about the beavers' future. In some places the riverbed was dry for miles. In January, however, winter rains arrived, bringing the river back to life. The tenacious beaver rebounded, and this year's dam count is back above thirty. The current population is estimated at somewhere between thirty and one hundred and twenty beavers.

Despite challenges along the way, the goal to establish a stable beaver population on the river appears to have succeeded. But are the dams having the positive effect on groundwater that biologists hoped for? Holly Richter, director of The Nature Conservancy's Upper San Pedro River Program, has been mapping surface water on the river for eleven

Magnificent Hummingbird (Tony Heath)

years. "There's been a great deal of annual variability," she says. "We haven't been able to establish a quantitative ongoing trend." Yet she has observed a positive localized effect at dam sites.

Glenn Johnson, a University of Arizona graduate student studying the beavers' effects on species diversity, concurs. So far his research has been unable to provide any conclusive data, but he believes that the dams have clearly improved the riparian ecosystem.

Tom Wood and Sheri Williamson of the Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory agree. "We're very happy to have the beaver filling their niche on the river. They have transformed stretches of the river from shallow ripples and ephemeral flow to deep pools and continuous water flow, creating habitat for a whole suite of species."

Not everyone, however, supports the beaver reintroduction. Several birders I spoke with are disturbed by the damage to the cottonwoods. "The devastation by the Hereford Bridge is amazing," said a Bisbee man I spoke with. "The beaver here are what they call OOPS animals: out-of-place-species."

"The beaver are certainly reducing the overall canopy of the young and mid-level trees," Glenn Johnson acknowledges. Yet, as Holly Richter points out, that can have positive benefits. "Like fire and flood, beaver are a form of natural disturbance. This disturbance allows for the regeneration of species and habitats, helping to create a healthy, dynamic system, continually changing over time."

Last May, Mike Foster escorted me to a dam south of Highway 80, where the first beaver was released eleven years ago. I returned several times on "dawn patrol" to photograph the beaver. They are nocturnal, but are still active at sunrise. The last time I saw the dam was in July, during the drought. The water was shallow and stagnant. The den entrance was above the waterline. Were the beavers able to survive such conditions? I waited quietly for over an hour in hopes of a sighting then sighed and packed my camera. Just then, the unmistakable splash of a beaver's tail slapping the water resounded. Apparently, despite predators and our erratic desert weather, the resilient beaver have reclaimed their home on the river.

■

*Environmental Engineers, Beavers on the San Pedro River* © May 27, 2010 by Paul Young; Originally published in Desert Leaf, Tucson, Arizona - January 30, 2013.


Mormon Battalion Monument - 1846 (Tony Heath)

Deni Seymour

# *A River Heals: The San Pedro's Legacy*

In 1780, as Geronimo de la Rocha traveled the San Pedro River, he noted the devastation, as compared to five years before when the location of Santa Cruz *(de Terrenate)* presidio had been certified as having "abundant pastures, waters, and woods."

Rocha documented the lack of trees for miles in areas that were not saturated by especially high water tables, and that their absence resulted from intensive timber and firewood harvesting.

There was a lack of pasture because of overgrazing by presidio horses. His journey followed four-and-a-third years of presidio occupation, whose residents were starving because Apache attacks had limited their movements. Consequently, nearby resources were depleted.

Horse herds, kept corralled, further intensified the near-presidio devastation. Enemies who pressed for Spanish retreat repeatedly burned off pastureland and crops. Presidio occupants had devastated the surrounding landscape to the point where, in 1780, they retreated upriver to Las Nutrias, where they had been stationed before moving north.

When the garrison left, the river was able to heal itself.

The ecosystem established a new equilibrium because groundwater levels remained sufficiently high that trees taking root in the depleted riverbed could reach the shallow water table, causing a chain reaction of watershed restoration. As mesquite, cottonwood, and willow took hold, other species were able to thrive as stream flow rate was controlled by a thick mat of vegetation that stabilized the channel bottom and allowed arroyos to fill, activating floodplain sediment deposition.

High groundwater levels and thick vegetation are essential to arroyo filling and recovery. A series of processes both injured and then saved the San Pedro.

Apache attacks intensified Spanish land-use practices near the presidio, stressing the environment and making life unsustainable. As a result, the presidio population moved. Later, the entire valley was abandoned by all

but the Sobaipuri–O'odham. Mexicans occupied and then left the valley as Apache raiding and warfare intensified.

Had the valley not been periodically emptied, the San Pedro would have lost its beauty and resilience, becoming a dry, hollowed-out valley bottom resembling a concrete-lined channel, scoured by raging flow.

Scientists thought this process of down-cutting that began in the late 1870s was caused by sustained, heavy rains and concentration of streamflow into linear features.

Many have mostly ruled out the human role, but archaeological and historical data indicate many segments of the San Pedro were not saturated, treeless floodplains, with only marsh plants.

Hog-nosed Skunk (R. J. Luce)

Indigenous residents lived in and irrigated the floodplain, attesting to the lack of saturation. Their canals modified the river's flow long before Europeans.

The length of the river did not flow on the surface year-round even then. The occurrence of marshes and flowing surface water were determined by numerous factors, including narrows that brought water to the surface, creating upstream marshes and channeled surface flow downstream for human use, creating diverse riparian conditions.

When groundwater levels are so low that even deeply rooted mesquites cannot access the water table, understory vegetation cannot take hold, and during seasonal floods torrents rage through the entrenched channel.

Trees and riparian vegetation slow the flow, allowing it to drop its sediment load, nourishing the valley. On the San Pedro, groundwater is still near enough to the surface that roots find water.

Once this water table link is broken, the valley begins an often irreparable cycle of gullying and water table lowering. Animals and birds that now attract tourists will decrease with the loss of vegetation.

Historical inquiry shows that down-cutting occurred many times, as geologists confirm, with a devastating period in the 1770s.

The river was able to heal itself and reverse detrimental impacts after the Spanish occupation because groundwater levels remained sufficiently high that the ecosystem could heal. Recovery from another period of entrenchment and resource depletion that occurred in the late 1800s is ongoing.

Today, permanent settlements and groundwater pumping impose unrelenting pressure on the valley's water resources. Under such pressure the river's magnificence cannot be maintained.

The river is at a tipping point.

Our decisions about groundwater usage and depletion will result in either the death of the river that has nourished this valley and its residents for millennia or a renewed existence for its life-giving waters for future generations.

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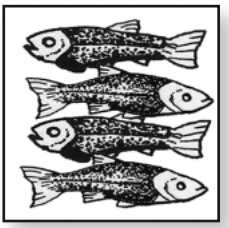
Originally published in Sierra Vista Herald Review, - November 9, 2018.

San Pedro River near Hereford (R. J. Luce)



Albert Vetere Lannon

# *The San Pedro River*

Blinded by the burning sun boiling over the desert we walked purposefully, knowingly, to the sere edge of a steep precipice, a cliff we knew, that once stepped over there could be no turning back. Our bodies would float in free-fall, briefly, and then the impact would shatter us. Irrevocably. We would survive, whatever survival means when love has broken beyond repair, beyond apologies. Beyond hope. We walked to that edge in silent fear, bravely talking logistics, the matter-of-factness of starting anew, alone, understanding how the cliché *broken-hearted* came to be, came to be so true. So very painfully true. Then the river called to us, water running after a storm making little songs, running brown and clean, mud slippery, clay banks falling from the torrential rain, all reminders that our world is never safe from dangers, nor free from beauty. That there must always be storms, that there will always be cliffs, that with love there is always the risk of a broken heart.

Loggerhead Shrike (R. J. Luce)

We stopped at that cliff's edge and listened to the river, and to the wind-talk of truth-tellers, and we pulled back. We turned away from the precipice and walked down to the river hand-in-hand and slipped in the mud and got wet and dirty and we laughed; we laughed in the company of friends, and of ducks, and of unseen watchers in the trees. We played in the channel of that holy river that has fed so many for so long, which nourished us that day under the desert sun, which bound us, forever, to each other. That last free river, a place of ancestral mystery,

of discovery, of healing and regeneration. A place where we listened to birds and water and wind and looked at bobcat and frog tracks in the mud and we knew, again, that the river could heal us, even us; that, like its flowers, the river could affirm joy and beauty and life and us, even us; that we could love in its moist warmth, far from the cliff's edge. May the river run forever free. May our love flow around the snags, soaking deep, deep, into the earth, bringing life to the parched places, enriching and being enriched, sacred waters, blessing you, and I.

■

Albert Vetere Lannon and his mate, Kaitlin Meadows, will always be grateful to Gary Marx and Julia Byfield for introducing them to the San Pedro River.

Gray Hawk (R. J. Luce)

Tony Heath

# *Requiem For a River*

We are attracted to the desert like moths to flame, hanging on the changing light with its wide-gamut, pastel illumination. We say, "It's last light! My god, it's LAST LIGHT!" At dusk, Arizona is a place where freedom and eternity are painted into the background with a brush. We live in a veritable color-field painting. We are the "purple mountains majesties" that makes America "the beautiful."

Wise people claim good things come in small packages. Our San Pedro River is a small river, some say, "a stream," not particularly long or wide, much of it having retreated into the ground beneath our feet, gradually diminished with each passing season.

This River crosses *my* country, not south directly to the sea, but north, into the mouths of the rarest of riparian mesquite bosques before disappearing into the sand.

One might pass over the San Pedro with little notice—perhaps a quick side glance from a speeding vehicle window. Some will say, "Have you seen the Mississippi lately—this is nothing!" But our River is full of tiny miracles that cling to life surrounded by vast, unforgiving landscapes.

Southeastern Arizona is still a relatively uncluttered desert, interspersed with steep mountains surrounded by oceans of grass, at least where it's been able to survive the impact of overgrazing. "Sky Islands" with titanic open spaces between them filter the sunlight across great distances. Everything is immense here (but the River), and the stars still rise in celebrated dark skies.

For future reference—or not—tourists capture billions of facsimiles onto ubiquitous image sensors, sure they have fully grokked the mystery of nature with the gentle stroke of their right index finger. But we know otherwise.

And now, formidable new challenges: rapidly warming climate, border walls, wildlife killing contests, fragile areas opened to ranchers at bargain prices, and more hunting of fewer animals. All human-caused and absolutely no fault of the River. In an absurdly short period in history,

despite millennia, the River has been forced into ruinous compromise by a single species.

"Collateral damage!" a few dare say. For some damned reason we have to allow a few cowboys to run even more cows through this fragile ecosystem. More bovines? Ironically—the original culprit in the slow destruction of the southern plains and its vanquished riparian ecosystems.

In the San Pedro watershed, the people who wage a campaign of over-development, waste, and failure to mitigate environmental threats, do so at great peril to innocent and equally relevant living things. They steal the water from plants and wild animals that critically rely on it. Some of us will always favor more and more people, and still more domestic animals marked for selfish consumption. In the process we threaten what is uniquely irreplacable.

Thinking intuitively has become optional, especially when it comes to deliberations about how we spin the wheel of change and move forward. Massive open-pit mines, golf courses, proposed housing complexes ill-suited to the land, kill trees and tax diminished aquifers.The right to continue to despoil (because somebody is always first to do it), seems etched into a sacred tablet (i.e., 1872 Mining Act), disguised with the comforting label "grandfathered." This fast-talk trumps common sense and violates a solemn obligation of ours to steward the land for its truly "highest and best use."

High-speed Crossing (Tony Heath)


Bridge Litter (Tony Heath)

So what will ultimately happen to our divine stream—in this troubled age of rapid change—to the rainbow "neo-tropicals" flying north each and every Spring for millennia, a feathered-tide following the nurturing river's solemn path northward, all of it wired into their cells. Or the tiny reptiles, toasty in the mud below the towering cottonwoods, providing shade and cover, for life's greatest mysteries just waiting to be understood. Right there under our feet. Where will the Yellow-billed Cuckoo or the Willow Flycatcher go if the water disappears? What of the preeminent apex predator, the mountain lion, pressed for space and privacy to raise its cubs; or the troops of secretive coatis; or the once extirpated, but now indomitable beaver, whose work slows the water as it seeps and collects for threatened fish, birds, insects, reptiles and mammals.

Wild animals will not survive the extinction of this river. Spoil it and we hammer the final nail into their coffin, and with that we disparage ourselves, if we survive at all.

To some it might not be much of a river, but it's our river. Be smart and protect it for the common good and those who will follow us. We will not accept a Requiem for the San Pedro River. The River and its gifts must live on.

■

Gambel's Quail Brood (R. J. Luce)

"Bridge Kill" (Tony Heath)

Kyle Ritland

# *Three Lessons from the River*

I possess three memories of the San Pedro, none of which will fade even slightly in my mind until the day I've finally gone from this earth.

The first requires a trip back in time to when I was a small boy, wearing sandals with flashing lights in their heels, holding tightly to a perspiring can of Pepsi purchased at the San Pedro House—an appeasement from my parents who had come here to bird. I had no interest in birds; I was hot, it was early, and I saw nothing worth stopping for in this dry and empty desert. I had grown up in the wet and green southeastern states, and while I had for the most part enjoyed this western summer escape, at this point in the trip I had grown weary of sand and cacti and long, straight highways. I was ready to go home.

What I was not ready for was the miraculous oasis that emerged from the shade of the cottonwoods. It had been a dry year, but even now there was water that crept along the banks on which we walked, or that sat in pools where dragonflies danced. In the soft mud, we lingered at the tracks of deer who had passed this way at dawn. At Green Kingfisher Pond, I watched a Black Phoebe flitting with its uncontainable energy, and like the trees that grew from the water, and the deer who came here to drink, I too was blessed with life from this place of rejuvenation. Here, surrounded by the dry and empty desert, I found what would become a lifelong and ever-expanding love for the life and beauty of this world.

When I was twenty-two I traveled west to learn how to write, and I brought with me one of my closest friends. Coleman and I had grown up together, and now we sought our futures on a new horizon. Our destination was the coast, but when we reached Phoenix we deemed it sensible—for reasons lost to me now—to divert our course by six hours so that I might show to him this place that had lodged itself—again, for reasons inexplicable—stubbornly in my memory.

We reached the house in the early morning; the lot was empty as the sun rose above the distant cottonwoods, and the morning chorus had just begun from the branches and the grass. I had never before seen the place so lush and green. We pushed through thick folds of vegetation as we

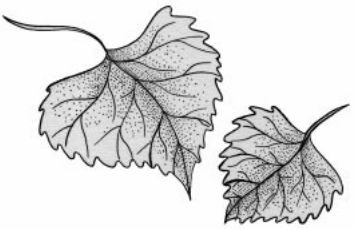
neared the river, ducking from the ceaseless whir of the honey bees, thinking sincere thoughts to ward off their stings, to gently let them know that we had no designs on their home—we were simply passing through. When we emerged from this overgrown jungle, I found no memory of the paths that lay before us. We took the long road home, scanning the tips of the low trees for color. I hadn't mentioned what we were searching for in fear that uttering the name would be a curse on our chances, but finally I saw the iridescent flash of vermilion. I remembered my father speaking of a bird so bright you couldn't miss it, yet only those who truly searched would ever see it. Coleman and I stood in the early morning light and watched the flycatcher dance in the cool air.

Our second year on the west coast, my friend who had traveled across the country with me led me to another friend who would travel with me for the rest of my life. Alannah was born of magic and starlight, and revealed to me the hidden secrets of the desert and the mountains. Together, we left the coast for the humble and honest beauty of Arizona, spending our mornings learning the songs of the birds beyond our window, and our evenings studying their shadows in the amber twilight. We lived on slices of beauty and made them last. In the spring, we traveled south to the sweet waters of Tucson, and beyond, to the still waters of Patagonia, where we watched Vermilions gallivant among the reeds—the beauty and happiness which had once been so rare to me, so unpredictable and finite, had grown to become something I carried with me every day of my life.

I asked her to marry me on the shores of Green Kingfisher Pond, surrounded by Pyrrhuloxias and Phainopeplas, and she agreed. How could I have waited, when I had there, before me, everything I had ever wanted?

The magic of this place is like no other. It's undeniable and immeasurable. The only way to understand it is to feel it. It has persisted with me throughout my life, drawing me eternally back, insistent upon my thoughts. What selfishness it would be to not fight for its continued existence. Do I not owe the River, at the very least, this? I hope that it may be enough.

■



Kelly Tighe

# *San Pedro River Memories*

I have spent thirty-eight years walking or riding my horse, alone or with friends along the San Pedro River. Over those years, I eventually covered the distance from the Mexican border to the cienega near St. David. I still visit the River once or twice a month. Here are some memories of what I saw over the years along the river trails.

In the fall, golden leaves cascading down around us from the cottonwood trees—dazzling.

One warm December day, in the wash to the north of the San Pedro House, near a spring, hundreds of butterflies swirling and floating around my horse and me.

A Great Horned Owl perching sedately under an abandoned railroad bridge near Charleston.

In June, when many sections of the river were completely dry, I came upon a pool of water with hundreds of little toads ringing the shores. They just needed tiny umbrellas to look like tourists at the beach.

People from all over the country coming to enjoy the beauty of the River—families with young children, photographers lugging cameras and tripods, hikers, equestrians, bicyclists, people walking their leashed dogs, bird watchers, old folks with walkers and canes, and a woman who lived as a child in the San Pedro House when it was part of a ranch.

Near Murray Springs, I met a Canadian archaeologist out wandering along a trail. He said the Murray Springs mammoth kill site is the most important Clovis site in North America. He did his thesis on it and had traveled from Canada to see it. He had thought he would find a visitor center or museum.

The ghost town and graveyard of Fairbank, the townsite and ruins of Charleston, Boquillas Ranch, ancient Native American pictographs, the Clanton Ranch site, the San Pedro House, the Spanish Fort *Terrenate*, the ghost town of Contention, the Murray Springs Clovis site and the St. David Cienega.

Water turtles, box turtles, gila monsters, mule deer, coatimundis with kits, ducks, blue herons, vermilion flycatchers, hummingbirds, roadrunners, many kinds of hawks and other birds, javelinas, beaver, fox, coyote, owls, jack rabbits, cottontails, tarantulas, little fish, water snakes, rattlesnakes, ringneck snakes, swallowtail butterflies, Arizona Sister butterflies, and other colorful butterflies and facinating insects.

Wonderful memories of friends—some now long gone—having picnics and relaxing on the grassy, shady banks of the San Pedro. Watching for ducks or blue heron, a breeze rustling the leaves of the cottonwoods. No cattle, no gunshots, no all-terrain vehicles. Peaceful and serene. Thankful to the people who worked to make this beautiful, special place a conservation area—the last desert river in the southwest not dammed. A safe place for hikers and bird watchers, and equestrians, and families with little children, and most importantly, for the wild creatures who live there.

Have you ever been outdoors and heard a gunshot? Frightening when you don't know where the shooter is or which way the bullet is going. Bureau of Land Management's "option C" would have been devastating. They would open up this protected area to cattle, excessive water use, bulldozing and hunting. Please no! *Life Magazine* once called the San Pedro River one of "America's last great places." Please protect the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area.

■

Charleston Crossing (Tony Heath)

# *Celebrating the San Pedro River*

The riches of nature abound in this land,
With the San Pedro River, a jewel most grand.
Where plant life grows lush, and the gentle stream flows,
Many birds take to flight as the soft breeze blows.

Lovers of nature, birders and bikers,
Photographers, writers, poets and hikers;
All come to behold this precious creation,
Tucked away in the south of our homeland nation.

A free-flowing river, the last of its kind,
Where spirits are lifted, and souls can unwind.
A place of beauty that deserves our protection,
And reminds us all of a deeper connection.

May we strive to defend this beautiful treasure,
Right here in our midst, a gem without measure.
To preserve for others, may we speak ever bold,
Of a river's great beauty worth more than gold.

Linda Perry

■

Michael Gregory

# *When it Rains in May*

Behind a thin overcast left from yesterday's shower
the moon, not quite full, seems thin too, translucent,
disappearing in the growing light as nighthawks
thrum like small engines in the distance, cactus wrens
chatter, and quail start their territorial calling.
The air is cool, the morning gentle for a change.

When it rains in May, it probably won't in July
when it's supposed to, so yesterday's sprinkle, though a relief
from the record-breaking heat, was a reminder of summers
when by August pears, despite the pumps, had lost
most of their leaves, the apples and peaches were half normal size,
the cottonwoods down by the wash had turned yellow, and cattle
out on the range lay down thick-tongued in the dust to die.

Up at the university, scientists
read rocks and tree rings and shrinking polar ice caps.
Up on the rimrock they decipher unanswered prayers.
Down here the message goes round by word of mouth.
*Hasn't been this dry in twenty years* says Tom.
*Since the fifties,* says his dad, and his dad says
*Not since McDonald's well went dry after the war.*
Alberto says his grandad said that his grandad said….
*Not since the last time says Jack and that's God's own sweet truth.*

■

Monsoon (Tony Heath)

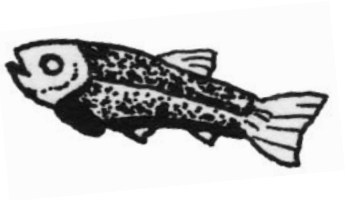
Robin Motzer

## *Follow Nature's Wisdom*

Nature's demise causes great anguish,
As more forests, deserts, beauty and species vanish.
Sold for pavement soul-less and vacant,
Earth wrapped in a smothering blanket,
Of concrete, asphalt, and buildings galore,
Please stop killing Nature!! She cannot take anymore!
Poisons, toxins, fires and floods,
How many humans and animals must shed their blood?!
Arrogance has caused the loss of her native people,
Who has the courage to stand for the wolf and the eagle?!
Clean rivers, soil and streams are long ago dreams,
Air full of toxins make it hard to breathe.
Increasing human population deepens her grief.

Wishing, hoping, doing what they can,
People scream, NO MORE!, and take a stand.
It comes from the place of great love and truth,
For there are people to educate, empower and soothe.
Nature cries so loud, they can no longer ignore.
Please be kind to nature, animals and people! they implore.

Are you earning a paycheck from doing destruction?
There are other ways, if you are open to instruction.
Respect, empathy and kindness restores her core—
Preserve and protect the San Pedro River Valley that we all need and adore!



## *I AM Nature, We Are Nature*

I live peacefully among all species, and talk with all the beasties.
Some make fun of those who are different-
Which is of no concern, as my life is happy and magnificent!

As I connect with animals, insects, reptiles and bees,
With the cacti, rocks, flowers, plants, and trees.
And swim with the aquatic life, large and small;
I walk with four-leggeds, and love them all.
We are all interconnected, and that is fact!
I do no harm as I walk, talk, and act.

I sing in harmony with all of nature's voices,
Knowing that simplicity and kindness are choices.
I connect with the earth in my bare feet,
My heart connects with all of life's beat;
Giving is my expression of love for nature, animals and, people, too—
Even though I do not like what many do.

To heal the grief for all the harm and destruction;
We must live peacefully, with nature's instruction:
Empathy for others, follow nature's way and do not pillage.
Connection with all species is like living in one big village.

Dance with the winged ones and hear their call.
We must love daily, as we are nature and related to all!
Protect and respect life in the San Pedro River,
And all the habitats and sentient beings that walk, fly, swim and slither!

■



Lizann Michaud

# *San Pedro Frequents (2016)*

I've been going to the San Pedro River often, lately, for some nature renewal—towards and through sunsets with Sharon or Darrell or both—those "comfortable ol' shoe" sorts of friends who enjoy nature as much and as quietly as I do. Lots of very wonderful and wondrous nature sightings at the River, glorious scents and sounds, cooling breezes under the trees.

There was one recent trip with both Sharon and Darrell where we lay down on a rocky sandbar to enjoy the rare event of being buzzed and swooped by many low-flying (and I mean LOW-feel-wing-wind-on-your-face-flying) nighthawks, as they caught the insects hovering close above ours and the rocks' warmth.

Another trip... seeing (and hearing!) several bees inside a large Datura flower bud—the skin of the flower cone, translucent, backlit by the setting sun, dark buzzing bee shadows bouncing inside, then, waiting and watching as the bees pried the large fragrant blossom open, in their eagerness to take pollen. The Datura was entirely intoxicating, as were the many plants in bloom, that line the river, filling the air with their strong perfume.

On another such venture, I was looking at four deer through Darrell's field glasses, when a great blue heron rose up behind the group coming straight at us, flying low—what a sight! As it closed in, I put the field glasses down and we saw it pass overhead with our own awestruck eyes.

Most recently, we were out by the river in yesterday's rain and saw a very large orange fish in the River, likely a grass carp, my brother tells me. I had never seen one before. What a fantastical creature it was, like a foot-long goldfish moving just under the surface, visible as it passed under artful tree shadows.

And on that same trip, after the rain had subsided, we all sat quietly amid beaver-chewed trees, waiting... We heard—at last—the tail-slap of beaver downstream. Woohoo! The first we'd heard in recent years.

It was time to head back. As we walked, and stopped, and gawked, we were treated to a most amazingly surreal sunset-sky. A big sky, with the kind of light that looks like one's wearing peach colored sunglasses; where one's companions look positively aglow, the grass and leaves extraordinarily green and the dry from last year golden; where the sky is shades of indigo and cobalt and the clouds all vermilion and blush...

■

Datura wrightii (Tony Heath)

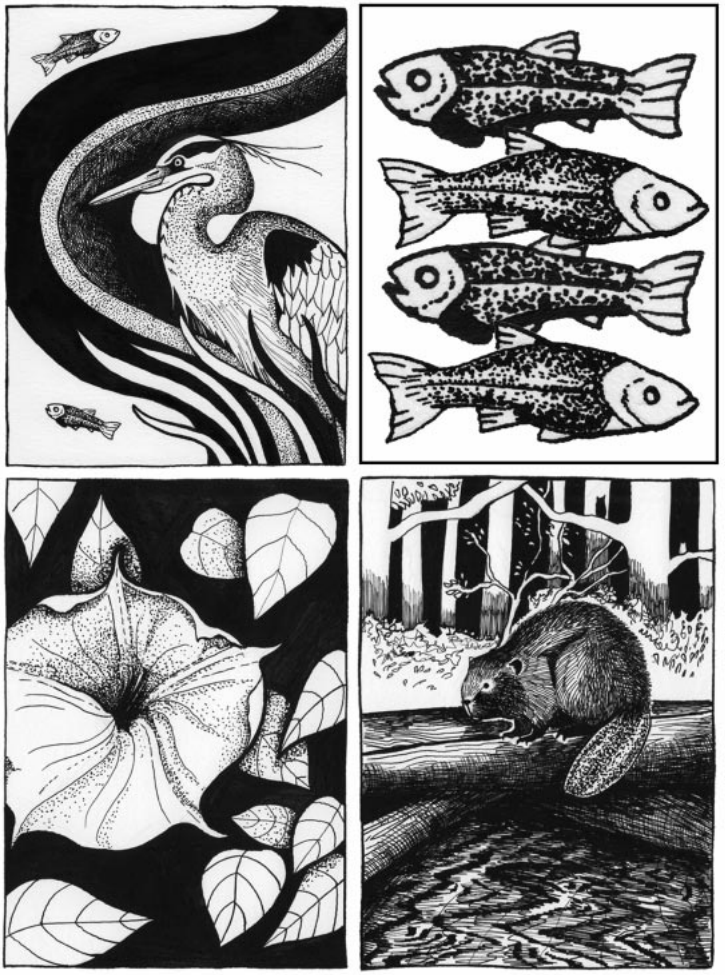
Susan Sampson

# *Destiny Remains for the first Riparian National Conservation Area*

Water still warbles through the pebbles and rocks of the San Pedro River. It whispers of an age when many rivers sustained the desert: habitat, refuge, a nursery, a home. The San Pedro remains untouched. In its almost silent journey, it demands our understanding then fills us with images that not only examine the past, but embrace a future of respect for its singular duty: to force us to remember what was, and can be again, as we allow the river to continue its pristine destiny of nurturing the wild untamed nature of southern Arizona.

■

Lucifer in Flight (Tony Heath)



# *About the Contributors*

***Barbara Kingsolver*** is an American novelist, essayist and poet. Kingsolver was named one of the most important writers of the 20th Century by *Writers Digest*. In 2000 she received the National Humanities Medal, our country's highest honor for service through the arts.

***R. J. Luce*** received a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Biology. He worked for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department for 30 years on songbird, marsh, and small mammal management programs. He has authored technical wildlife publications, articles for *Wyoming Wildlife* and *Birders' Digest,* and *River of Life,* a photo essay about the San Pedro River.

***Paul Young*** is an avid hiker and backpacker. He loves exploring the desert Southwest, as well as the Sierra Nevada range in California. His poetry has appeared in several journals, and he has written many articles about Southeast Arizona natural and human history. Paul is a former resident of Bisbee, now living in Tucson.

***Deni Seymour*** (PhD) has degrees in anthropology and environmental studies and is a widely published award-winning author. A woman of the West, she has devoted her life to exploring innovative approaches, pursuing unconventional but fact-based research, and exposing new pathways and perspectives. Her latest book is *To the Corner of the Sonoran Province: Environmental and Cultural Implications of a 1780 Reconnaissance.*

***Albert Vetere Lannon*** is an author and journalist. He and his mate, Kaitlin Meadows, steward a Sonoran Desert acre in Picture Rocks they call Wild Heart Ranch. In his 80s, retired with incurable multiple myeloma and on chemo-for-life, he takes life one day at a time and finds the joy in that day.

***Tony Heath*** is an artist and former professional jazz musician. A devoted naturalist and wildlife advocate, in 1997 he founded *Birdland Ranch Wildlife Conservation Area,* a private inholding in the Huachuca Mountains.

***Kyle Ritland*** earned his MFA in creative writing from the University of California, Riverside, and now works as a writing teacher and freelance environmental journalist in northern Arizona. He is a co-founder of Adventure Term, a non-profit that leads expeditionary courses on environmental storytelling through writing, photography and film.

***Kelly Tighe's*** outdoor articles have appeared in *Arizona Highways,* the *Tucson Citizen* and other publications. She coauthored the first guide for the Arizona National Scenic Trail, *On The Arizona Trail – A guide for Hikers, Cyclists and Equestrians.*

***Linda Perry*** is currently Director of Faith Formation at Sierra Lutheran Church in Sierra Vista, Arizona. She enjoys spending time in the beautiful outdoors of Arizona, hiking, camping and exploring.

***Michael Gregory's*** most recent book of poetry is *Mr America Drives His Car* (Post-Soviet Depression Press, 2013). He is a former conservation chairman of the Sierra Club Grand Canyon Chapter, and former director of Arizona Toxics Information, a non-profit policy and advocacy organization.

***Robin Motzer*** is an advocate, fundraiser, artist, writer and poet. She works with several non-profits and co-leads a group that introduced "Organic First" land management in Tucson and Pima County, to reduce pesticide and herbicide use. She is currently working on a film about the preeminence of nature and a book about bullying, harassment an scapegoating.

***Lizann Michaud*** is a Bisbee based graphic artist and musician. She is a reverent, long-time fan and active supporter of the San Pedro wilderness.

***Susan Sampson*** has been published in the *Atlanta Review,* the *New Delta Review* and other publications. She believes that each moment, artifact, emotion, creature and tree imparts knowledge if we listen to their specific existence.

# Madrean Archipelago Wildlife Center

141 Page Lane • Elgin, Arizona • 85611
Raptorhandler@gmail.com

October 24, 2018

Dear Supporters of the San Pedro River,

We know you love the San Pedro River. We need your help. We need your voice. Because we know you care, we are asking you to contribute an engaging poem or essay of your choosing for this mission-critical endeavor. We need your piece by Thanksgiving 2018, the thirtieth anniversary of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area—first conservation area of its kind in our country. We cannot afford to lose this precious national jewel. Eloquently sharing your memories and sentiments will contribute to the fight to save our last free flowing river.

The San Pedro River is under assault. Here is the political situation we are up against: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has issued a new Draft Resource Management Plan for the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA). Their preferred alternative is opening up the area to cattle grazing. BLM is mandated by Public Law 100-696 to manage SPRNCA to protect; "The Secretary shall manage the conservation area in a manner that conserves, protects, and enhances… the secretary shall only allow such uses… as will further the primary purposes for which the conservation area is established." (In other words, protection of the natural resources of this riparian area is mandated by established law).

Public law is not being upheld and the public comment period has passed. The intention of this letter is to rally our most talented writers to action and underscore our commitment to protecting the San Pedro River. By creating a small book of your collective voices to share with state and federal policymakers we can be more effective making our case. In 1995 the book *Testimony: Writers of the West Speak on Behalf of Utah Wilderness,* made the difference in preserving Utah's Red Rock Wilderness.

Remember, good work is a stay on despair. As a globally important bird area, the San Pedro River belongs to the world, a ribbon of life in the heart of the Madrean Archipelago eco-region. We would like this little book to make the difference.

May our collective voices be an exaltation of larks—a cast of hawks—a murmuration of starlings—a congress of ravens—a parliament of owls...

For the River,

Kate Scott
Founder, Madrean Archipelago Wildlife Center

Nicole Gillett
Conservation Advocate, Tucson Audubon Society

## Appendix I

## Livestock Grazing Issues in the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area BLM Draft Management plan*

The San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area was formally designated by Congress in 1988 by Public Law 100-696, "In order to protect the riparian areas and aquatic, wildlife, archeological, paleontological, scientific, cultural, educational, and recreation resources of the public lands surrounding the San Pedro River in Cochise County, Arizona, hereby established the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area." The legislation further mandates the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to manage the lands in accordance with the following language:

> *"The Secretary shall manage the conservation area in a manner that conserves, protects and enhances the riparian area and the aquatic, wildlife, archeological, paleontological, scientific, cultural, educational and recreational resources of the conservation area. Such management shall be guided by this title and, where not inconsistent with this title, by the provisions of the Federal Lands Policy and Management Act of 1976."*

At the time of designation, the BLM recognized that livestock grazing was adversely impacting the resources it was supposed to protect, and the agency immediately terminated livestock grazing in the entire NCA for the life of the original management plan. Shortly afterwards, additional state lands were transferred into the San Pedro Riparian NCA and BLM has allowed grazing to continue on the four allotments that were part of this land swap. The BLM has never considered whether that grazing is an appropriate use of the San Pedro Riparian NCA, but that use continues to this day on approximately 6500 acres.

### The Draft Management Plan of 2018

The BLM has issued a new draft Resource Management Plan (DRMP) for the San Pedro Riparian NCA and its preferred alternative (Alternative C) continues the current livestock operations and opens up an additional 19,420 acres to livestock use, bringing the total to 26,450 acres open to livestock, or just about half of the entire protected area (55,990 acres total). The BLM proposes to open up the uplands, outside of the immediate riparian corridor to 3955 AUM, or the equivalent of 320 head yearlong. This expanded use will require 43 miles of new fencing, at least 2.5 million gallons of water per year, and allow at least 30 percent of perennial native vegetation to be removed and converted to forage use. The BLM has not provided any explanation of how its preferred alternative will, "conserve, protect or enhance the aquatic, wildlife, archeological, paleontological, scientific, cultural, educational and recreational resources of the conservation area," as required by law.

The San Pedro National Conservation Area is truly a gem. More than 100 species of breeding birds and 250 species of migrant and wintering birds depend on this place. The NCA is also home to 84 species of mammals, 14 species of fish and 41 species

of reptiles and amphibians. The plant community consists of 618 different species. This remarkable diversity should be fully protected and new threats to the habitat integrity and ecosystem function should not be permitted.

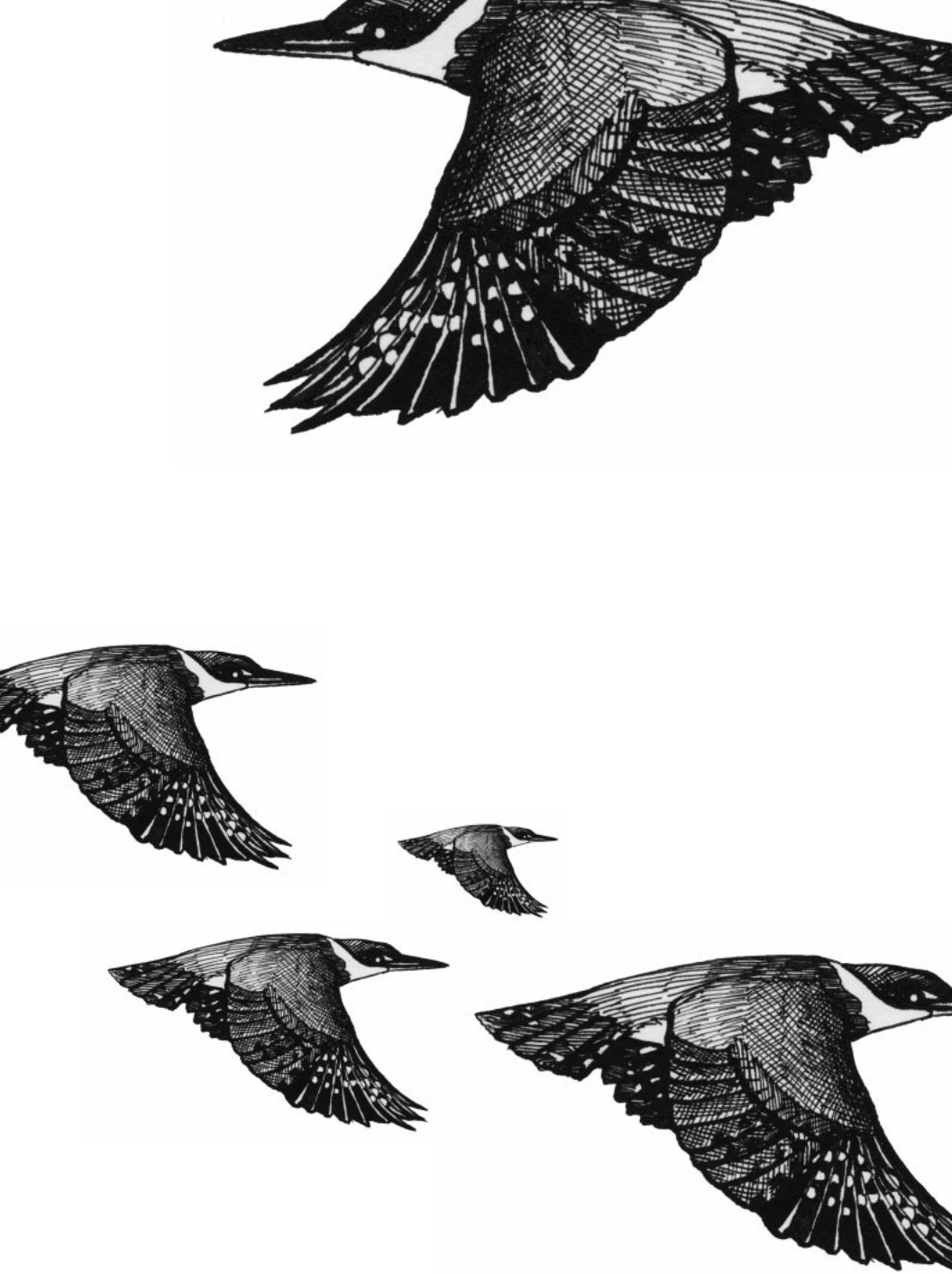
Western Watersheds Project has been actively tracking BLM's grazing management in the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area and there are serious flaws with the preferred alternative and with any ongoing grazing use in this special place. We'll be submitting extensive comments on the proposed action and we encourage the public to get involved as well.

WWP has created an online document archive that includes information we've obtained through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. We've posted our comments, land health evaluations and relevant scientific reports online here: https://tinyurl.com/ya914gno. Our hope is that this background helps inform public comments and provides support for the public assessment of the draft plan.

Contact <arizona@westernwatersheds.org>. Thank you for caring about the San Pedro River and the public lands that we all love.

*Analysis courtesy of Western Watersheds Project © copyright 2018.

*Notes:*



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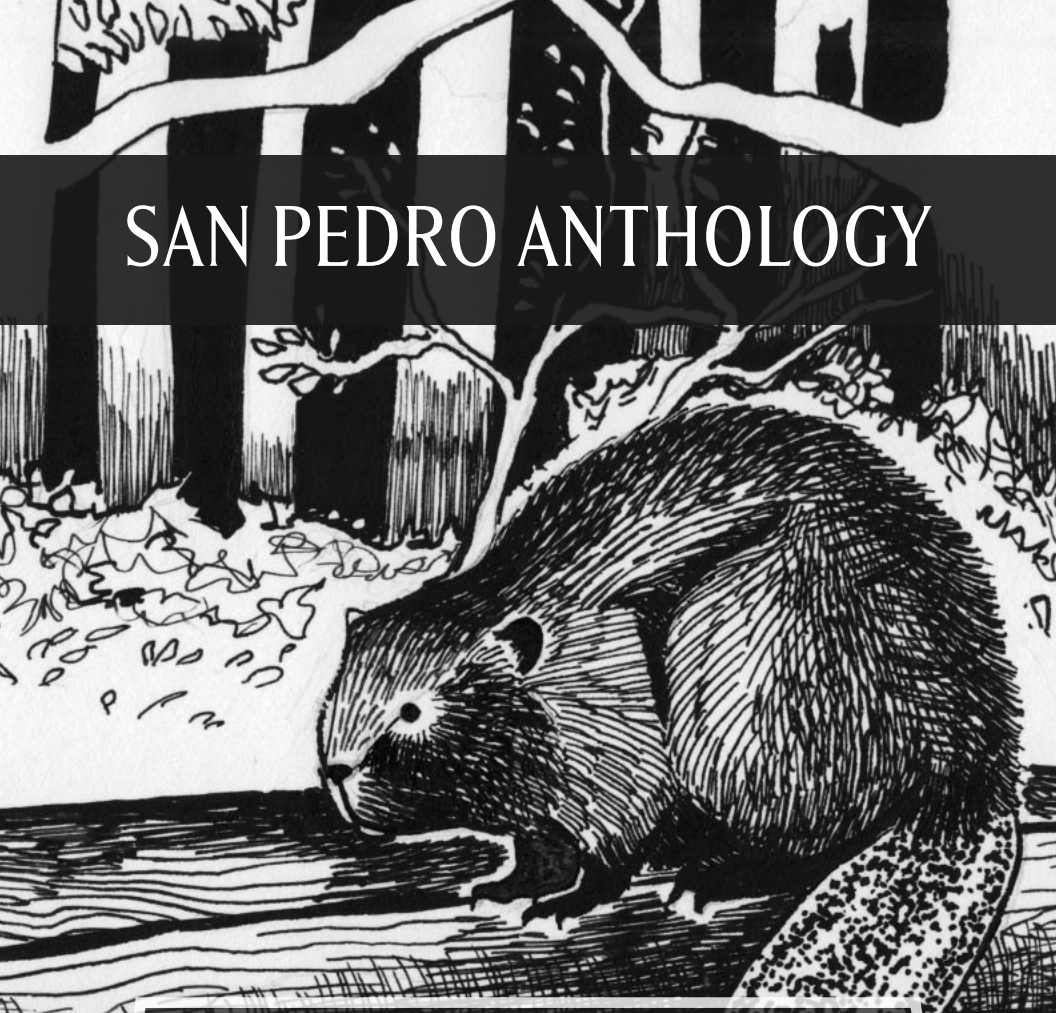
# SAN PEDRO ANTHOLOGY



A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS, POETRY AND PHOTOGRAPHS
BY LOVERS AND SUPPORTERS OF THE

## SAN PEDRO RIPARIAN NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

BARBARA KINGSOLVER, ALBERT VETERE LANNON
MICHAEL GREGORY, R. J. LUCE,
DENI SEYMOUR, PAUL YOUNG
AND OTHERS

SUGGESTED DONATION $10