

WHAT'S NEW ON EVERYTHING EARTH

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1

January 2022



San Pedro: A River At-Risk

Photo Contest Winners

Recipe of the Month

Video Extravaganza

3 Minutes to Change the World

THE SAN PEDRO: A RIVER AT-RISK

How can a river die? Is it not composed of a renewable resource that falls from the sky and rises from underground? Water has never been endlessly renewable. Just 30% of the Ogallala Aquifer's ancient waters remain after less than 100 years of intense farm irrigation. It will take **6,000 years** of rain and snow to refill this aquifer.

The San Pedro River, too, snaking from Mexico into southwest Arizona, is fed by groundwater emerging from its aquifer in springs and seeps. This thin ribbon of life and its surrounding forests and wetlands supports an astonishing variety of creatures including 350 species of birds, 100 species of butterflies, and 84 species of mammals including jaguar, coatimundi and bats.



Endangered SW Willow Flycatcher

But two insidious impacts threaten to run the river dry. First, unlimited and unregulated groundwater pumping—more than 900 wells have been drilled in the upper San Pedro sub-basin since 2015 as population swells, chocking off the only source of the river's lifegiving water.

Second, and even more destructive, is cattle grazing. In 2021, while the U.S. Southwest suffered its hottest summer in recorded history, cattle were permitted to graze, trample and pollute the driest of the dry US states including Arizona's "protected" San Pedro River basin. Incredibly, for \$1.35 per cow/calf pair, a single rancher can lease thousands of acres of public land and turn their herds loose to graze unattended.



Cows—an invasive species that these fragile lands did not evolve to survive—go naturally to water, trampling streams into mud puddles, pulling young trees out by the roots and sourcing E. coli into the water.

Cindi Tuell, Western Watersheds Project Director says, "We've spent nearly a decade pointing out the legal flaws with the BLM's plans to keep cows in this fragile ecosystem... yet they turned their backs on their obligation." Although the BLM admits that none of the permittees are meeting legal requirements, it renewed [those leases](#) for another 10 years.

Even when ranchers allow their herds to trespass into the protected critical habitat of the San Pedro basin, it is ignored. Ranchers have been operating outside the law for decades. Keeping herds out of sensitive areas as required by law is expensive for ranchers and uncomfortable for agency staff who often are themselves members of ranching families. Staff would have to go looking for trespassing cattle in the vast San Pedro Watershed, maintain fences then hire contractors to round them up and return them, repeatedly, to their errant owners.

The world is a different place than when settlers gazed across miles of lush lands. We now know that environmental tolerance is limited, every natural resource is not renewable and a blanket "multiple use" policy for all public lands everywhere was misguided and destructive.

There may be ecosystems where responsible livestock grazing is possible. There is even a nascent movement among small [Texas ranchers](#) to institute regenerative ranching, eliminating chemical fertilizers and overgrazing. It's hard, it's expensive but it can be done. If humans insist on eating a product that requires [2,000 gallons](#) of water per pound to produce, there is no other way forward. In ecosystems where endemic species have nowhere else to go, cattle ranching must move on to more forgiving lands.

JANUARY PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS:

“SWAMP LILY” AND “SWAMP HEN” ADD IMPRESSIVE COLORS TO ANY SWAMP



Wonderful for attracting pollinators, *Crinum spp.* are bulb plants often referred to as the southern swamp lily, spider lily, or as a cemetery plant reflecting its use for adorning graveyards of centuries past. Make sure you have plenty of room before planting this hardy perennial—it reaches 3 to 5 feet tall and the same around.



The *Purple Gallinule* a.k.a. swamp hen is considered by some to be Florida’s most beautiful waterbird. It is a true omnivore, consuming everything from seeds and berries to frogs, snails and—uh-oh—other birds’ eggs. Males and females work together to build their nest in low, dense marsh vegetation. Both parents incubate 5-15 eggs for 22-25 days before hatching. *Thank you, Dr. Nick Aumen, for the photo of the beauties!*

TAKE THE NATIONAL VEGAN MONTH CHALLENGE



Sometimes I have a vegan day by mistake. While it’s always my goal to eat low on the food chain for health, planet and compassionate reasons, I don’t always pre-plan it. But I often find myself naturally craving a healthy plant-based meal.

National non-profit [Veganuary](#) issued a challenge, along with great recipes, for going vegan in January. One of my favorites is an Indian-inspired “[Bean and Veg Soup](#)”. Serve it with pita chips or add some crispy fried tofu and serve over rice as a main meal. Perfect for a chilly January night by the fire. Make a big pot, the leftovers are even better.

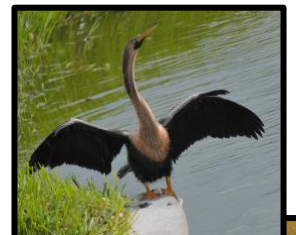
VIDEO EXTRAVAGANZA: ANHINGA, ‘GATERS AND KITTENS – OH MY!



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This month’s brief feature video is narrated by Dr. Nick Aumen explaining the mechanics of how an [alligator’s](#) tail is his most fearsome feature.

Watch this [impressive water bird](#) consume such a large lunch that he literally has to shake it down his gullet. Anhingas are stealthy hunters, spearing their prey with long sharp beaks and then flipping it into their beak. We caught this bird near the end of his lunch.

Need a break from the wildlife videos? This one of [twin kittens](#) is pure cuteness.



TAKE 3 MINUTES TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Several non-profit conservations organizations are working to save the San Pedro River from the forces that threaten to destroy it. Learn more about the San Pedro River and Conservation Area in this excellent [YouTube presentation](#).

The [Center for Biological Diversity](#) and [Western Watersheds Project](#) have been working for more than 30 years to save this irreplaceable treasure. According to Western Watersheds Project which filed a complaint against the Bureau of Land Management for renewal of four destructive grazing leases inside the National Conservation Area:

'Upon its creation by Congress in 1988, the San Pedro Riparian NCA was designated to "conserve, protect, and enhance" the riparian and other conservation resources. At the time, the BLM recognized that livestock grazing was having a significant negative impact on the river, plants, and wildlife that lived there...

Since then, however, the BLM has rubber-stamped the renewals of the leases and has allowed the cows to continue grazing this fragile riparian area despite the well-known—and well-documented—harm this has caused. ...

Unfortunately, BLM ignored our concerns, instead finalizing a decision that not only sanctioned livestock on the allotments, but could allow an increase in the number of permitted livestock and expand the use of livestock throughout the entire San Pedro Riparian NCA to "control" vegetation. This is unscientific, unsound, and unwarranted.'

*Please add your voice to help save this river and the creatures that depend on it for life.
They have nowhere else to go.*

Contact Anthony Feldhausen, BLM Gila District Manager, with a request to remove cattle immediately and permanently from the San Pedro National Conservation Area at:

blm_az_gdo_mailbox@blm.gov

Anthony (Scott) Feldhausen
BLM Gila District Manager
Bureau of Land Management
3201 E Universal Way
Tucson, AZ 85756-5021

(520)258-7200

<https://www.blm.gov/office/gila-district-office>

Note: Mr. Feldhausen works for you. You have every right, perhaps even an obligation, as a taxpaying citizen of the U.S. to contact him and ask him to perform the job you are paying him to do.

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