

FIELD NOTES

FOR MEMBERS OF THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN ARIZONA



SPRING 2020
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Waystations for Monarchs

The Nature Conservancy 
Protecting nature. Preserving life.

How healthy is the Verde? The Verde River Watershed Report Card

A leisurely springtime float on the Verde River: What could be more delightful? You would almost think that all is well with this river and the wildlife who depend on it.

But dig a little deeper and you'll find that the river needs some help. Some more water would be nice.

In February, The Nature Conservancy and Friends of the Verde River released a comprehensive analysis of the river's health with input from more than 16 entities and concerned citizens. The first-ever Verde River Watershed Report Card gave the river an overall score of 57 percent, for a grade of C-plus.

One of the lowest grades was the river's baseflow — river flows during

the summer — at 38 percent. That score reflects nearly 30 years of steady declines due to groundwater pumping, diversions, degraded habitats and warmer, drier weather.

Not all the scores were low. This hard-working river that stretches from Chino Valley to Phoenix, and provides drinking water, irrigation and recreation for all the communities it runs through, scored well on recreation access and visitor satisfaction: 87 percent and 96 percent respectively.

The report — which required 18 months of workshops, data compilation and stakeholder interviews to complete — provides a roadmap for where to focus our

efforts on the river, said Kim Schonek, the Verde River program director.

The report also shows the importance of the river to local communities, not only for drinking water and irrigation, but also recreation. "It's important to think about how we can achieve conservation goals in concert with economic goals for the communities in the watershed — these include housing and recreation," said Schonek.

Significant funding for the process was provided by the U.S. Forest Service and the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust. Read more about the report and the methodology at Verdereportcard.org.

From Our Partner: Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust



We are tremendously grateful for Pulliam's leadership in protecting the Verde River. The Trust has contributed \$4 million to date to TNC and partners, and recently announced another \$8 million over the next five years to this effort. We asked the Trust's board chair, Carol Peden Schilling, why they support our work in the Verde.

Why is Pulliam interested in the Verde landscape?

The Verde is one of Arizona's last perennial rivers and the sense of responsibility we have to restore and protect this waterway and the myriad of systems it supports is weighty. The Verde River

provides habitat to hundreds of bird, wildlife and fish species. It supplies drinking water to 14 rural communities along its banks and nearly 3 million residents in Maricopa County. As our state endures persistent drought and as the impacts of climate change become ever more evident, it is imperative that we protect this critical waterway.

Why is this work so important for the Pulliam Trust?

Nina Mason Pulliam was a conservationist. She loved Arizona — its landscapes, people and animals — and dedicated much of her wealth to caring for them. Acting on Nina's great love of animals and nature, we believe that if you want to help animals, you must protect habitat. And if you want to protect habitat, you must protect

water. So, in recent years the Trust has sharpened its focus on the environment, particularly on protecting and restoring waterways in Arizona and Indiana.

Why do you support TNC?

We are immensely grateful to The Nature Conservancy for its visionary leadership coalescing various entities into real action on behalf of the Verde. We are inspired by the future-focused, broad-minded and innovative projects in which the Conservancy has been engaged on behalf of the Verde River and the Verde Valley for decades. We are honored to be partners with them in this work.

THIS PAGE TOP TO BOTTOM Sunset at the Shield Ranch in Camp Verde, Arizona © Andrew Kornylak; Carol Peden Schilling © Courtesy of Pulliam Charitable Trust



KEVIN HAUSER 1960 - 2019

My Friend, A Farmer



Kim Schonek, TNC's Verde River program director, remembers her friend in the Verde Valley, Kevin Hauser, who

passed away December 27 after a two-year battle with colon cancer.

We were unlikely friends.

Kevin Hauser was everything you would want in a farmer – hard working, innovative and able to weather a storm. We met more than a decade ago. I had moved to Arizona from Oregon to work on issues related to the Verde River. I wanted to see the farms that nestled along the river and understand how the irrigation ditches worked.

Kevin was skeptical about why I might want to see his farm. How could having

The Nature Conservancy out for a visit be a good idea? Reluctantly, he agreed to show me around.

I was impressed with the beauty and productivity of his farms. My job with The Nature Conservancy is to find ways to improve and protect flows in the Verde River. I had a lot of questions. Kevin had a lot of answers. That day we didn't talk about water. We stayed on safe topics like GMO (genetically modified) corn and presidential elections. I think he



drove as fast as he could in hopes that I would not be able to find my way back. Lucky for me, I did get invited back.

Kevin wanted to steward his lands in a way that would protect them for the future. He did not want to conquer the land and push every dollar from it that he could. He wanted the land to be healthy, to turn a profit and to ensure that it was a farm for future generations. His love of farming was only rivaled by his love of family. To be able to farm and work with his family brought him great joy – and some frustration, of course. Over his years farming, Kevin's leadership resulted in successful farms throughout the Verde Valley and central valley of California.

Our first effort was to upgrade a Verde irrigation water delivery system – by installing a solar-powered, computerized system to regulate water flow to landowners and restore unneeded water to the river. I remember agreeing to meet Kevin at a spot along the ditch. I arrived first, his truck pulled up in front of mine. We stood in the weeds between the two trucks and talked. There were hard questions, best guesses and assurances from both sides. Since that day many projects have become a reality on Hauser

and Hauser Farms and around the community because Kevin was willing to take risks with us. Projects were negotiated on ditch banks, in tractors, along the river and sitting in the shop.

Thanks to Kevin's leadership and vision, there will always be farms along the river and crops will grow here. And, in 100 years, if we keep working hard, a river will run through them. Many people are part of this story, but Kevin's role was critical. My part could have been played by another, but his part could only be played by him and he played it perfectly.

I don't know what Kevin would think of what we are dealing with today, but I know what he would be doing. He would be planting crops, watering them and working hard to make them grow. He would hire local folks to do good work and eat lunch with his family. Today as I think about how food gets from the ground to the grocery store, I am happy to know that we did conservation in a way that supports

farming and addresses challenges to our water supply. There are other things that can't be measured – like the impact of having a place where conservation and agriculture work together to solve real problems. The things Kevin taught people will have a lasting impact on our community and agriculture. He taught me a lot about farming, water and life in general. We talked about raising kids and how hard it is, but how good the results can be. He taught me to negotiate a good deal, but to also accept the deal I could get. He taught me that we have to keep going if we are going to succeed, even if it's hot and dusty and in spite of what the neighbors might think or say. He inspired me to compromise, dream big and not lose focus on what really matters.

The most important thing we can all learn is to steward the lands along our rivers: They are treasures. Kevin's legacy is his family and friends, and these lands and the waters that flow, that will last forever in Arizona.



THIS PAGE TOP TO BOTTOM Kevin and his wife, Claudia Hauser © Andrew Kornylak; Four generations of the Hauser family © TNC