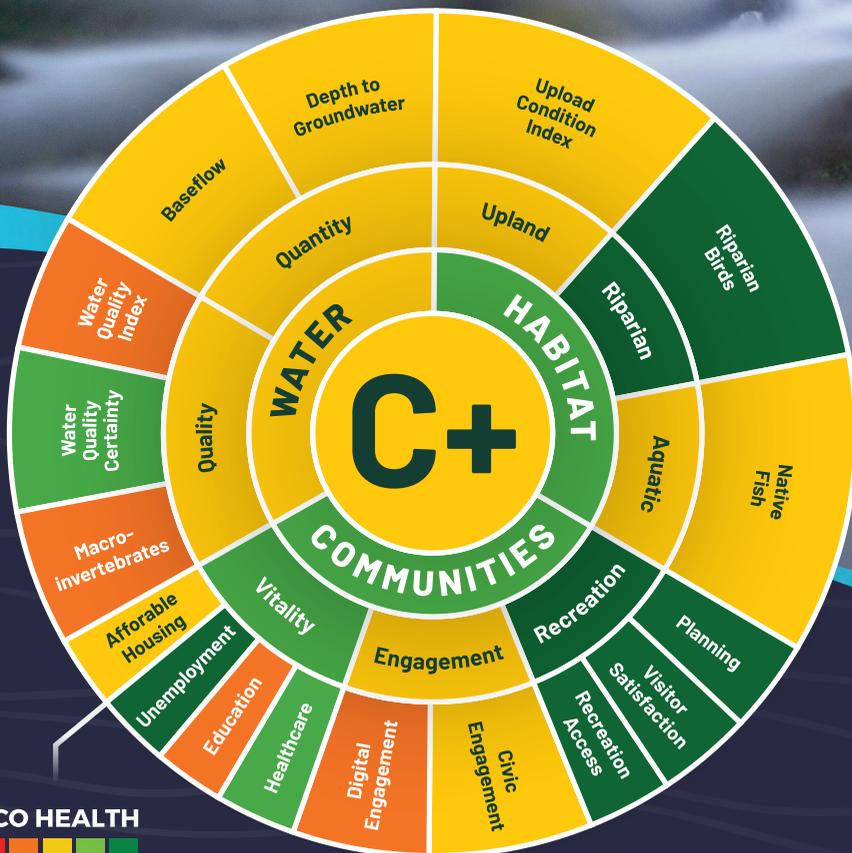


# Verde Watershed Report Card

2025 SUMMARY



# Why the Verde Matters to Our Future

To be successful in conservation, we know that our work must meet people where they live, work and recreate. Those insights many years ago led us to the Verde River, one of the last free-flowing rivers in the Southwest that supplies drinking water to more than 3 million people in Arizona.

Ecologically rich and remarkably accessible, the Verde is a lifeline for millions of people, a recreational hotspot, a verdant agricultural region and a refuge for wildlife in an otherwise arid landscape.

As pressure on the Colorado River intensifies, rivers like the Verde become even more important. We have focused our conservation work for many years on the Verde because real, local solutions are possible.

Strong partnerships with farmers, tribal nations, and communities who depend on its flows are the keys to our success.

By improving irrigation efficiency, supporting crop transitions, and investing in water reuse and recharge, we're proving that it's possible to protect a river that sustains both people and nature.



*Dan Stellar*  
**Dan Stellar**  
 State Director,  
 The Nature Conservancy in Arizona



*David Gressley*  
**David Gressley**  
 Friends of the Verde River



Photo: © Andrew Kornylak

# Challenges Ahead

The Verde River faces complex management challenges rooted in both natural and human pressures. Unrestricted groundwater pumping, rapid population growth and limited land use planning have increased water demand.

Climate change compounds these issues by reducing aquifer recharge and altering precipitation patterns leading to lower summer flows. Arizona's fragmented water management framework and a diversity of stakeholders with competing priorities have challenged efforts to achieve sustainable solutions.

Historic actions have shaped today's conditions. For more than a decade, land and water managers have been working to come together to plan for sustainable recreation, improved flow and healthy habitats.

# Data, Decisions and the Future of the Verde

Protecting the Verde River secures Arizona's future, and this report card serves as a critical planning tool for communities, policymakers and resource managers to identify challenges and prioritize actions.

We divide the watershed into seven regions to allow us to assess management needs specific to each area.

We track indicators such as water quality, habitat health and flow conditions, helping us measure progress over time and support adaptive management. This report card takes deep scientific data and presents it in a clear, accessible format.



Left Top: The Northern Cardinal © Bob Griffith  
 Left Bottom: The Longfin Dace © John Hoffman

Right: Verde River Canyon © Harold E. Malde  
 Map Data: EcoHealth Report Card, 2025

# Solutions for a Healthy Verde River

Take action to protect a healthy, flowing Verde River and tributaries that support our unique environment, vibrant economy and quality of life for future generations.

## Forest Restoration

Restoring fire-adapted ponderosa pine forests reduces the risk of severe wildfires while improving wildlife habitat, recreation and forest-based economies.

## Healthy Upland Habitats

Addressing human-caused erosion reduces sediment in rivers while improving wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

## Collective Actions

Agencies, organizations, and communities work together across watersheds to shape a sustainable future for water, recreation and infrastructure.

## Smart Agriculture

Modern infrastructure boosts water efficiency from river to farm and supports agricultural markets that use less water while staying economically viable.

## River-Friendly Living

Individuals can support healthy rivers by using less water, engaging locally and volunteering with or supporting river-focused organizations.

## Plan Our Water Future

Integrated land and water planning improves efficiency, captures stormwater for aquifer recharge and balances demand through tools like water markets.

## Restore Riparian Forests

Removing invasive plants and restoring native riparian forests helps rivers thrive with wildlife while remaining accessible to people.



# Restoration Projects Improve Long-Term Watershed Health



Restoration work across the Verde River Watershed is helping heal its landscapes.

Our work restoring upland areas like grasslands and forests is strengthening the entire system's ability to absorb rainfall, reduce erosion and withstand drought and wildfire. This helps improve wildlife corridors and support the animals that rely on these lands.

Upland habitat condition has improved from a D+ to a C since 2020.

Water quality certainty, a measure of how much information we have on water quality, has also improved dramatically since the collaborative development of a watershed-wide monitoring plan.

In 2020, the water quality score was just 27% (F), reflecting gaps in monitoring and data sharing. Today, the score has risen to 79% (B+), showing a much clearer picture of water conditions across the region.

## Actions That Support a Healthy River

 **Reduce your water use**  
*to protect the river, lower costs  
and use less energy.*

 **Be a part of your community**  
*to stay informed, attend meetings  
and make your voice heard.*

 **Volunteer and donate**  
*with one of the many river-focused  
organizations throughout Arizona.*

## Thank you to our Partners and Supporters

We extend thanks to the many partners whose expertise and contributions made this report card possible. The knowledge and expertise of local land, water, and community managers is the foundation of this work.

We also gratefully acknowledge the support of our sponsors:  
Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, Yavapai County, City of Sedona, Salt River Project,  
Swire Coca-Cola, and the Coconino Plateau Watershed Partnership.