



Restoring Connections

The newsletter of Sky Island Alliance



Springs renew life in Bighorn Fire perimeter

One of our priorities this year is to gauge the effect of the Bighorn Fire on springs. That wildfire last year burned nearly 120,000 acres in the Santa Catalina Mountains north of Tucson, Arizona.

Springs are essential water sources for flora and fauna. When a fire removes vegetation, any ensuing rains can cause erosion and disturb habitats.

In the first half of 2021, our **Spring Seeker volunteers surveyed 11 springs** in the Bighorn Fire perimeter. All showed burn damage, but **six had standing or flowing water**.

Aleidys Lopez Romero, our summer intern from the University of Florida, worked as a Spring Seeker on Mt. Lemmon. She says many of the known springs were harder to spot amid fire debris. But her group also found several new springs.

“We were hunting for springs that were a tiny puddle and that was so incredibly important for wildlife,” she says. “It definitely made me realize how critical water is.”

Spring Seeker data will help us and Coronado National Forest to protect the springs most at risk. Simple things like installing loose rock structures above the springs can stabilize terrain and prevent landslides from burying vital spring water sources.



Top: Santa Catalina burned area; **Bottom:** Aleidys Lopez Romero

Ready to help protect springs in the Sky Islands?

We're actively recruiting new Spring Seekers in the U.S. and Mexico. Volunteers visit a site with water and use a phone app to answer a short questionnaire. Learn more at skyislandalliance.org/springseeker

Border Research & Recovery Fund

\$100,000



Director's field notes

How your gifts promote border restoration

Thank you for standing up for the wildlife threatened by the border wall. Donor gifts to the *Border Research & Recovery Fund* are at \$50,000, halfway to our goal.

These gifts support the Border Wildlife Study, a binational effort to photograph wildlife in the path of the wall, stop construction for good, and heal damaged habitats.

Some of the study's achievements this year include:



Collecting 72 observations of construction activity within the Biden Administration's first month;



Sending the White House a paper we co-authored that identified restoration priorities;



Adding eight new cameras to expand our array to the eastern side of the Huachuca Mountains.

With your steadfast support, we plan to monitor wildlife habitats along 30 miles of the border for two years. We plan to protect and restore three wildlife water sources in the southern Huachuca Mountains to provide more reliable water to species as they travel across the border.

Notas de campo de la directora

Cómo promueven sus regalos la restauración de la frontera

Gracias por defender la vida silvestre amenazada por el muro fronterizo. Las donaciones al Fondo de investigación y recuperación de la frontera alcanzan los \$50,000, a medio camino hacia nuestra meta.

Estas donaciones apoyan el Estudio de la vida salvaje de la frontera, un esfuerzo binacional para fotografiar la vida silvestre en el trayecto del muro, detener completamente su construcción y reparar los hábitats dañados.

Algunos de los logros del estudio en este año incluyen:



Recopilar 72 observaciones de la actividad de construcción dentro del primer mes de la Administración Biden.



Enviar un documento a la Casa Blanca creado en conjunto en el cual se identifican las prioridades para la restauración.



Agregar ocho cámaras nuevas para expandir nuestra cobertura hacia el lado este de las Montañas Huachuca.

Con tu apoyo, planeamos monitorear los hábitats de la vida silvestre a lo largo de 30 millas de la frontera durante dos años. Planeamos proteger y restaurar tres fuentes de agua para la vida silvestre en la parte sur de las Montañas Huachuca para proporcionar agua de manera más confiable a las especies que viajan a lo largo de la frontera.



Left: Volunteer prepares to water native plants. Credit Robert Grey.

Native plants take root in Aravaipa Canyon

More than **150 native plants** are settling into their new home in **Aravaipa Canyon Preserve**, thanks to some amazing volunteers.

Our teams are used to removing invasive periwinkle, also known as *Vinca major*, from the creek banks of this perennial riparian area. In fact, they've faithfully dug out these pesky purple flowers for years.

But in August, they also helped to restore the native plant community that was once lost to *Vinca*. Monsoon rains made this an ideal time to plant species such as butterfly milkweed, sacred datura, and giant sacaton.

Those plants will promote watershed health, propagate native seeds, and provide food for pollinators — three areas where *Vinca major* falls short.



Right: Before the monsoon and after the monsoon

Monsoon rains bring relief

Record summer rain breathed new life into our borderlands, after years of exceptional drought. Our Border Wildlife Study cameras witnessed the dramatic change.

Before the monsoon, photos showed parched grass and bare oak trees. But now we see running rivers, green grass, and oak trees lush with leaves.

Wildlife loved the rain, too. We saw plenty of deer out browsing the new growth, but our favorite photo was that of a baby bear following its mother in the Huachuca Mountains.

The drought has been hard on wildlife, so let's hope the rain continues to bring relief.



In memory of Tom Swenson-Healey

Tom Swenson-Healey, who died in July, was a great friend to the Sky Islands.

As a volunteer, Tom bushwhacked through mountains in search of springs, pulled invasive vinca, and installed native plants for pollinators. In 2018 alone, Tom invested 400+ volunteer hours, always sharing his generous spirit and infectious laugh.

Read more about Tom's legacy at skyislandalliance.org/tribute



Summer interns care for common ground

Seven summer interns joined us to strengthen the cross-border conservation movement. They represented Universidad de la Sierra in Mexico, Tohono O'odham Community College in Arizona, and the Doris Duke Conservation Scholars program.

The cohort engaged in water conservation, wildlife monitoring, and community outreach projects. They also wrote about their internships on our blog, including this childhood memory from intern Cassandra Villegas (pictured left):

"When I was little, we would visit Aravaipa to collect acorn for a meat and dumpling soup. It's an Apache traditional food and very delicious, if you can handle the taste of acorn."

Read more from our interns at skyislandalliance.org/category/news



Shop to help save wildlife

Grab your official Sky Island Alliance gear and help protect wildlife at:

bonfire.com/store/sky-island-alliance

About Sky Island Alliance

Sky Island Alliance is a regional conservation nonprofit that protects and restores the diversity of life and lands in the Sky Island region of the U.S. and Mexico. Sky Islands are forested mountain ranges that rise from arid grasslands and desert seas and provide vibrant habitat for plants and wildlife.

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