



Achieving Sustainability for the Upper San Pedro River

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Sustaining the Upper San Pedro River

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The Water Report

Water Rights, Water Quality & Water Solutions in the West

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Upcoming Stories

FEMA and NFIP Overview

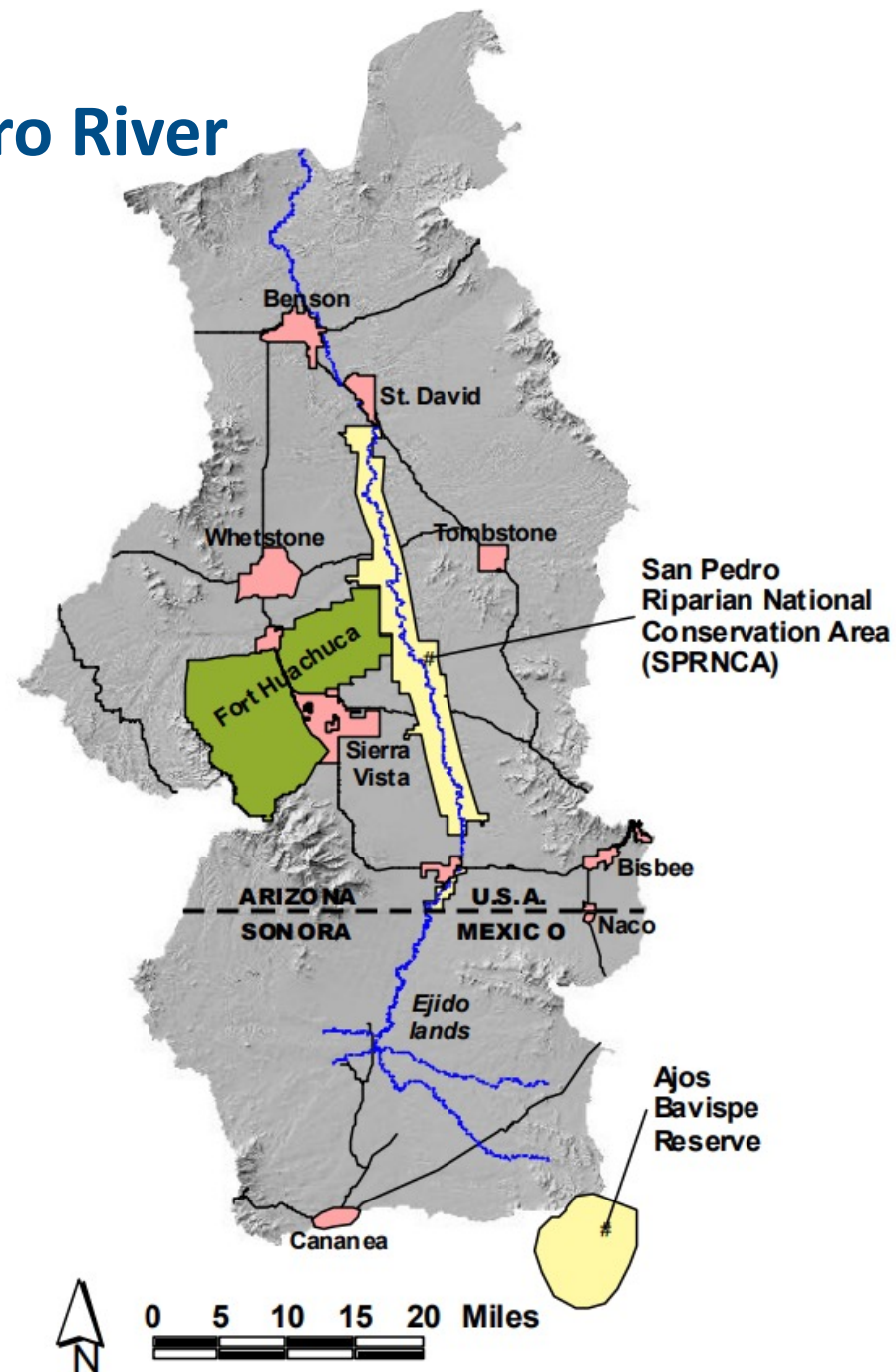
ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY FOR THE UPPER SAN PEDRO RIVER

A NEW PARADIGM FOR THE REGION

by Dave Roberts, Water Strategy Consultant (Phoenix, AZ)

Introduction

The San Pedro River (River) is one of few remaining free-flowing rivers in the southwestern United States. Flowing north from its headwaters in Sonora, Mexico, through Cochise and Pinal Counties in Arizona, the River's riparian corridor supports more than 400 animal species including four that are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The watershed supporting the River's streamflow encompasses more than 4,700 square miles and is often divided into two segments, or sub-basins, by hydrologists and water resource managers—the upper watershed and the lower watershed. The dividing point, referred to as the Narrows, is located north of Benson.



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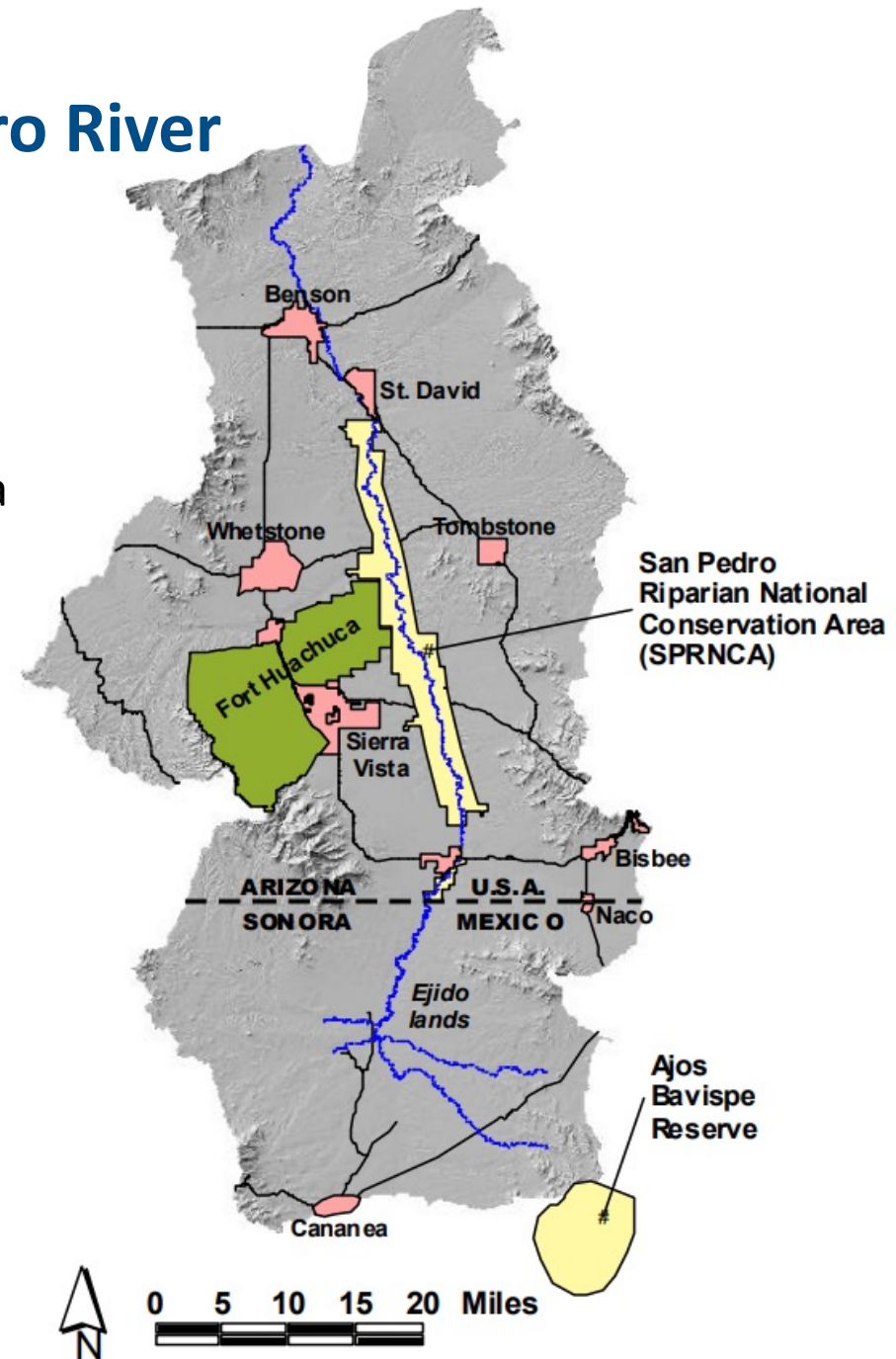
➤ Competing local needs for water:

- Environmental resources including endangered species occupying SPRNCA (surface water; shallow groundwater)
- National security interests supported by operation of Fort Huachuca (groundwater)
- Sierra Vista area economy (groundwater)

➤ Litigation over water and ESA compliance plagues the region

- CBD ESA lawsuits (1994, 2000, 2005, 2007, 2020)
- CBD Tribute Development AWS lawsuit (2013)
- General Stream Adjudication (1974)
- Other legal matters – CBD AMA declaration request (2023)

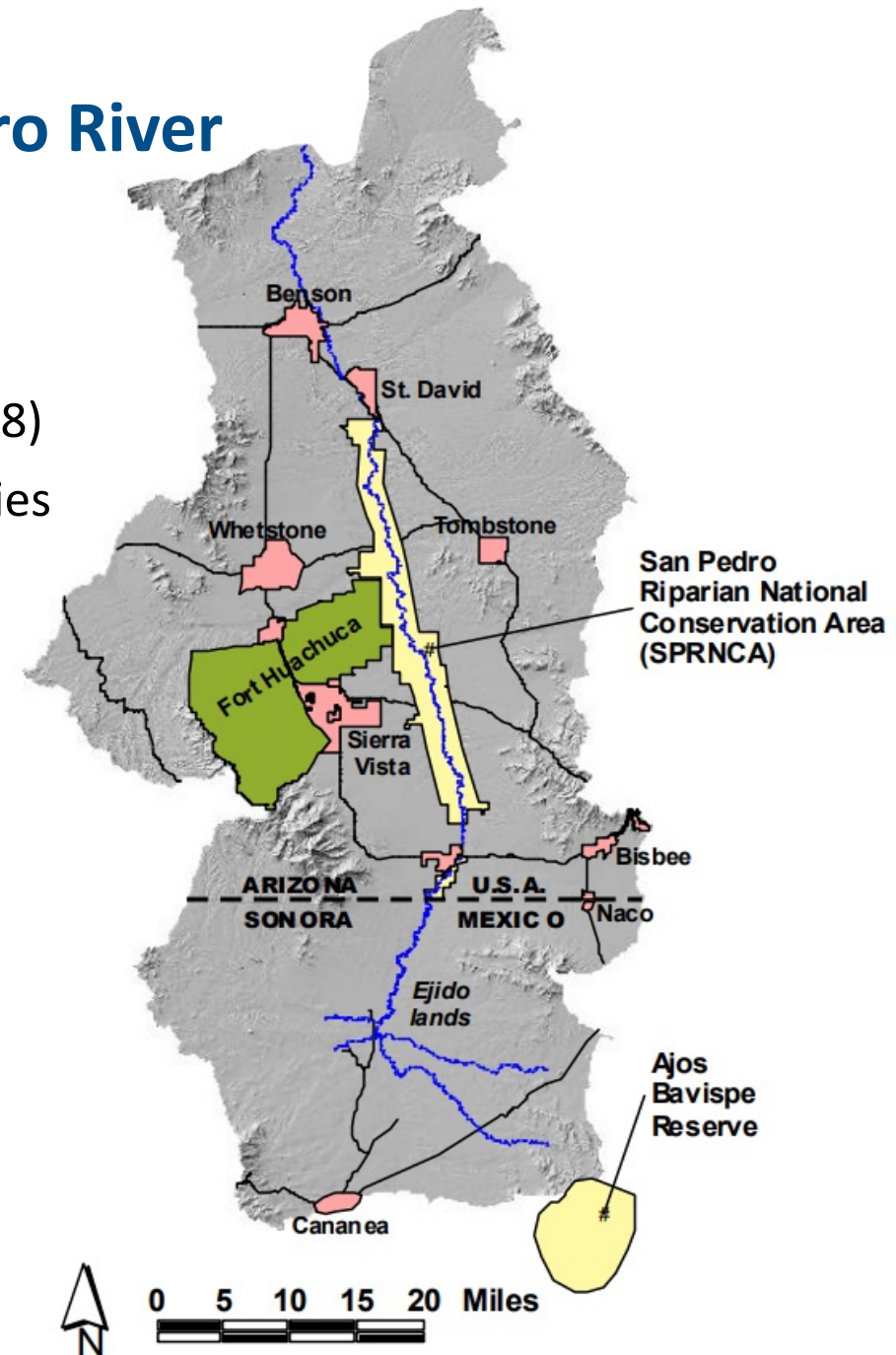
➤ Significant groundwater overdraft



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➤ Upper San Pedro Partnership:

- Created to undertake activities to achieve water sustainability (1998)
- Worked with the Fort, BLM and Reclamation on alternative strategies to achieve sustainability (2004)
- Reclamation Appraisal Study of alternatives (2007)
- Reclamation Feasibility Study (2011)



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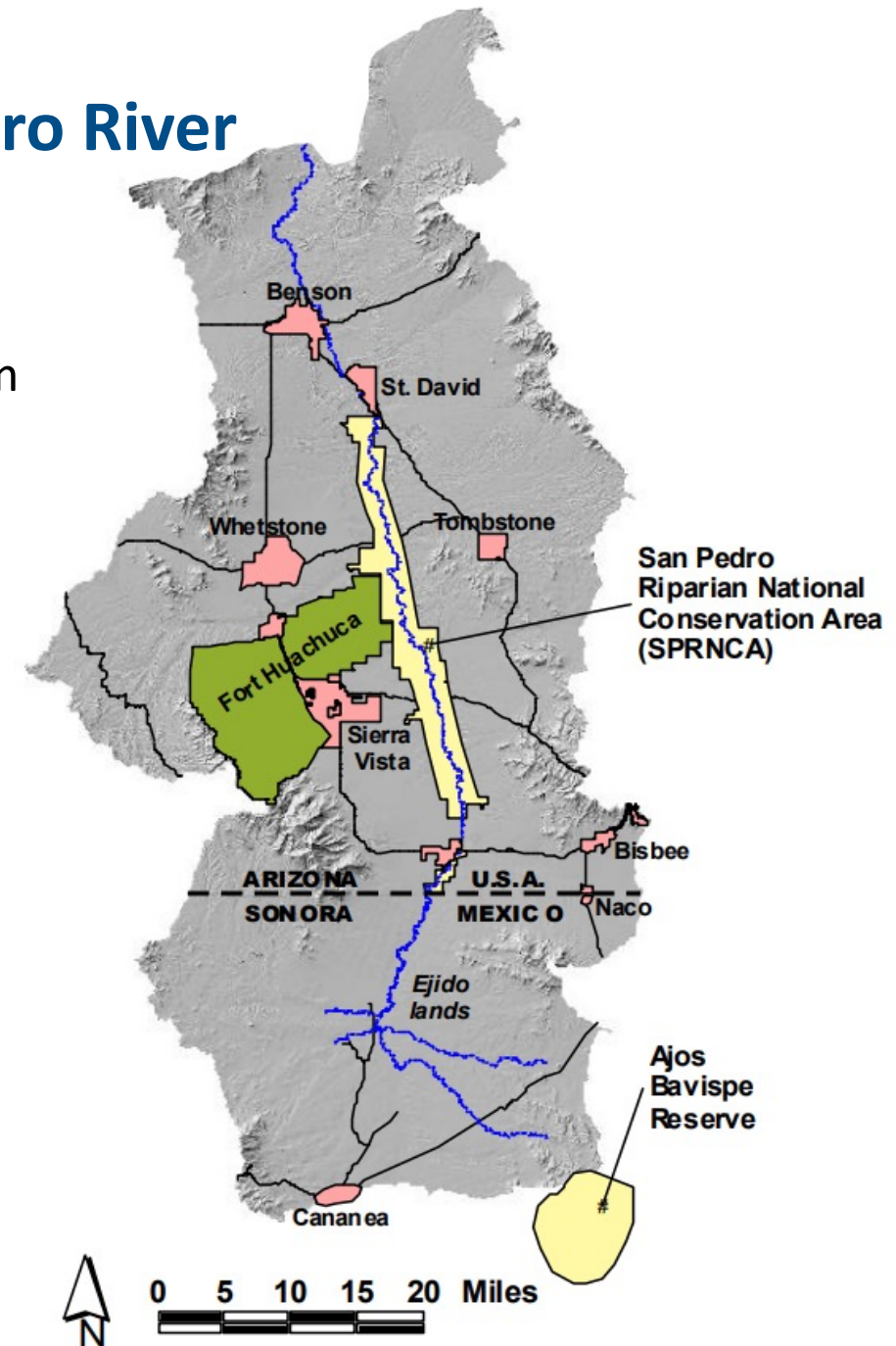
➤ 2007 Reclamation Study:

- Long-term solution – import water to the watershed; pipeline from the CAP system
- Short term – numerous options including conservation, reuse and recharge (Cochise County Recharge Network)
- Pursue Feasibility Study authorization
- Investigate acquisition of water rights

➤ 2011 Reclamation Update from Feasibility Study:

- Local water conservation, reuse and recharge will not eliminate the overdraft
- Overdraft is growing and will continue to grow

➤ Legal conflicts/litigation continues



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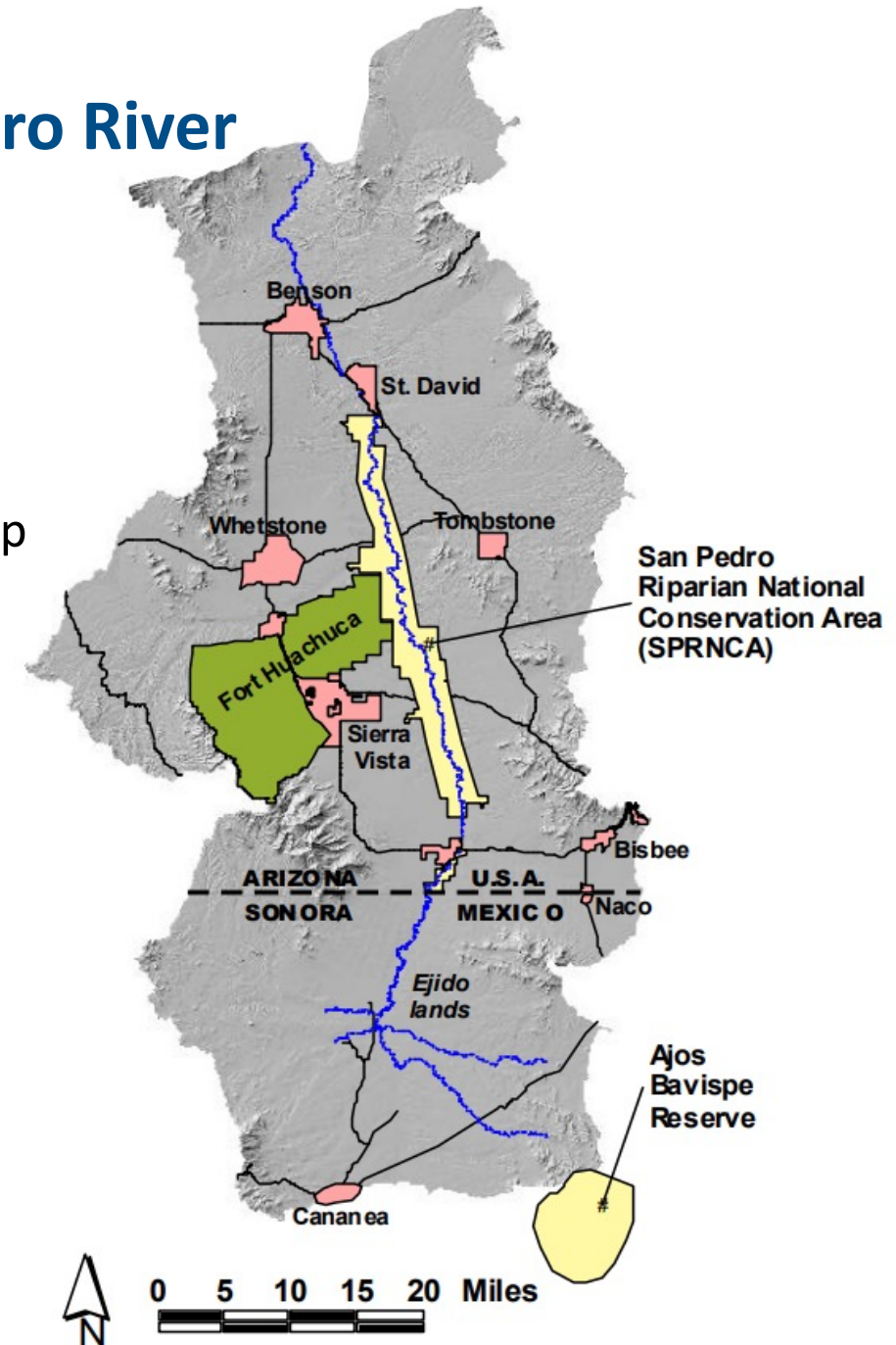
➤ Current Situation:

- Partnership continues to fund conservation and hydrology work
- Four Party Memorandum of Understanding (2021)
- Continuing CBD litigation against the Fort – restart on another BiOp
- Despite great work by the Partnership, groundwater overdraft continues
- Tribute development plans withdrawn

➤ Fort's ESA compliance in doubt

➤ A “new” approach is needed

- Federal government responsibility



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➤ New Approach:

- Craft an importation program within the framework of a regional water rights settlement — provides certainty to all water users and creates mechanism to fund water infrastructure
- Water rights settlement establishes regional water budget and sets limits on pumping
- Provides the Fort with an alternative water supply – no pumping; no more litigation from CBD!
- SPRNCA meets its intended mission with improved water supply
- Sierra Vista region has opportunity to achieve sustainability

➤ Federal government needs to take the lead

- Reauthorize Reclamation to undertake water infrastructure and water rights analysis/acquisition
- Form committee to work on settlement agreement

