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Notes for Numbered Trail Markers

1. Sacaton: The large bunchgrass near this marker is giant sacaton (Sporobolus wrightii), which still occurs in large stands on the few remaining undisturbed floodplain areas in the Southwest. These grasses provide an important link between uplands and riparian areas.

2. Groundwater Well: This groundwater monitoring well is used to track groundwater levels. By tracking groundwater, precipitation and streamflow we will better understand how changing land use practices affect Sonotta Creek.

3. The Railroad: The Railroad Trail on which you are standing supported tracks for a line that ran from Benson, Arizona to Nogales, Mexico. This line, or portions of it, ran from 1882 until 1962.

4. Sonotta Creek: This creek has about 5 miles of potential flow the first 2 of which are on the preserve. The creek’s watershed covers approximately 200 square miles.

5. Aquatic: Aquatic plants and animals are among the most endangered organisms in the Southwest. This creek still harbors 3 rare aquatic species: the Gila topminnow (a fish), the Huachuca water umber (a plant), and the Huachuca spring snail.

6. Fremont Cottonwood: This cottonwood is one of the oldest and largest of its kind. It is about 140 years old. The cottonwood-willow riparian forest you see here is believed to be one of the most productive habitat types for birds in the United States.

7. Birds of Prey: 22 species of raptors have been seen at PSCP, with 6 species confirmed as breeders. The gray hawk (Accipiter nisus) is a tropical species that ranges into only the southernmost parts of Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. PSCP usually hosts 3-4 breeding pairs each summer.

8. Mixed Deciduous Forest: As you move away from the creek

the vegetation transitions from the cottonwood-willow forest to less water-dependent woodlands. The less water-dependent trees include Mexican elders, Velvet ash, Velvet mesquite, Arizona walnut, and Netleaf hackberry.

9. Cienegas: The change in vegetation you see here indicates a higher level of groundwater here than the area to the west. These marsh-like or swampy areas are referred to as cienegas. This term originates from the Spanish words cien aguas or 100 waters. This cienega is what remains of a larger swamp that may have once extended to what is now the town of Patagonia. These cienegas are rapidly disappearing throughout the southwest as groundwater recedes.

The Nature Conservancy
Patagonia-Sonotta Creek Preserve
SAYING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

Biodiversity: What is biodiversity and why should we be protecting it?

Biological diversity, or biodiversity, is the immense variety and variability found among Earth’s living organisms; it includes diversity at the ecosystem, species, and genetic levels. Whether it is birds, mammals, insects, fish, or microbes, all species have relationships with other species and with their physical environments. These relationships are the source of the ecological services that all living organisms, including humans, need to survive. These services include clean air, clean water, fertile soil, food, fuel, medicine, raw materials, erosion and flood control, nutrient recycling, and climate regulation. By understanding biodiversity and its importance, and realizing our complete dependence upon it, we hope to inspire a strong commitment to protecting it and its life sustaining relationships for generations to come.

Biodiversity in southeastern Arizona: What makes southeastern Arizona so unique?

Southeastern Arizona (and Patagonia) lies at an ecological crossroads where the Sonoran and Chihuahuan Deserts as well as the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Madres come together. This bioregional collision occurs in an area of great topographic diversity. Add to that much wild and open space and a summer rainy season of subtropical origin and you have all the ingredients for a biodiversity hotspot.

For information on joining The Nature Conservancy or volunteering at Patagonia-Sonotta Creek Preserve please stop by our visitor center and speak with a volunteer or call (520) 394-2400.