President’s Report

By Robert Weissler

Naturally, the COVID-19 pandemic has overshadowed most activities, events, and news for most of this calendar year. Back in March, the Friends closed both bookstores and ceased all interpretive walks. That situation remains the status quo for now, although we do have volunteers outside of San Pedro House (SPH) available to greet the public, even while the house itself remains closed for renovation (see article, p 2). In addition, the trails in the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNC) are open to the public. Hiking SPRNCA trails is one relatively safe outdoor activity during the pandemic, with appropriate social distancing and masks at the ready.

We are sad to note the passing in March of Dutch Nagle, a stalwart volunteer and past Board president of the Friends (see article, p 4). His love for the River is embodied in a very generous bequest to the Friends. The FSPR Board is discussing a possible summer internship or scholarship in his name as an appropriate use of some of these funds, to honor his legacy with the River. Dutch will be sorely missed by many of us.

On the financial side, we have been very fortunate for the generosity of our members. Despite the loss of revenue with our bookstores closed, the Friends are financially stable. The Friends have received an additional anonymous donation of $15,000. It is targeted for further renovations at SPH. This comes on top of many other donations in the past year. These are welcome expressions of support for our mission to protect and conserve the River and interpret its natural and cultural resources for visitors.

The political winds reached the San Pedro this year. Unfortunately, the Friends’ concerns over the prospect of barrier construction across the River were largely ignored. These comments were submitted during the public comment period established by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP). We shared our concerns about erosion and barriers to important wildlife corridors, but construction moved forward over the summer anyway. We also expressed our frustration with inadequate public engagement by CBP during this process. How long this barrier withstands flooding remains to be seen.

This past summer—one year after the Record of Decision for the SPRNCA Resource Management Plan (RMP)—the BLM’s Tucson Field Office hosted a virtual meeting of SPRNCA stakeholders, including representatives from FSPR. The meeting began by covering a brief review of the final SPRNCA RMP, including implementation and adaptive management. Livestock grazing and vegetation management were discussed next, including Assessment Inventory and Monitoring (AIM) strategy and land health evaluations required prior to the renewal process for the four grandfathered SPRNCA grazing allotments.

(continued on p. 2)
FSPR raised concerns about good stewardship and river protection, given the issue of trespass cattle that continue in SPRNCA outside these allotments. The meeting continued with a progress report on RMP implementation and opportunities for projects to implement the strategy. The final discussion addressed how best to move forward with implementation and encourage continued stakeholder engagement.

The Annual Meeting was held virtually on October 30. Due to the pandemic, we chose to hold the meeting on the Google Meet platform online, instead of in person at SPH as we normally do. Members and volunteers heard about recent news, activities, and Board election results. Renell Stewart, Sally Rosén, and I were reelected to the board. Not surprisingly, volunteer hours and SPRNCA visitors for this most unusual year were far lower than normal. Nevertheless, 17 volunteers with over 100 hours of service will receive gift certificates for our bookstores. (Unfortunately, the gift certificates may not be redeemed until the bookstores reopen and the timeline for that is still undetermined.)

As winter approaches, we hope to resume our regular interpretive walks and look forward to the completion of renovations at SPH. See you virtually, if not down at the River!

---

**San Pedro House Renovations**

*By Laura Mackin*

In November 2019, the Friends of the San Pedro River (FSPR) received a generous donation for the repair and restoration of the interior of San Pedro House (SPH). FSPR is very grateful for the thoughtfulness and generosity of this much-needed funding for some much-needed repairs. The donor wishes to remain anonymous and FSPR will respect those wishes.

Original renovations of SPH began in 1988 and were completed in time for the SPRNCA dedication on May 6, 1989. The hardwood floors were refinshed in 1988 and the interior walls last painted in 1997. Most of the bookshelves and merchandise display fixtures were installed in 1994 and are still in use today.

There have been very few improvements made to the building’s interior since. With SPH being open seven days a week, year round, with all four rooms being utilized, it has been very difficult to do even

*(continued on p. 3)*
minor repairs without disrupting the retail functions. The walls and ceilings were in desperate need of new paint and the hardwood floors have seen foot traffic from hundreds of thousands of visitors. Originally, the plan was to close in October, one of our slowest months, to do the renovations. Then COVID hit. We closed the store in March and watched and waited out the novel coronavirus. After being furloughed for five months, I returned to work in September and immediately started working on the renovations. With COVID going in the wrong direction, the store will remain closed until it is safe to reopen and all renovations are completed.

Overall, the renovations were desperately needed and long overdue. Once we got started, I realized that I totally underestimated the amount of time it would take to complete all the projects. However, being closed, we have the opportunity to take our time and do everything properly and thoroughly. The following is an update and timeline of the renovations:

 » Volunteers packed up the contents of the store and moved everything to a large storage container behind SPH.
 » Volunteers gutted the bathroom.
 » A professional crew was hired to perform a heavy cleaning after an infestation of moths and spiders resulted from SPH being closed up for five months.
 » Vinyl tiles in the back room and in the bathroom that contained asbestos were removed by Southwest Hazard Control out of Tucson.
 » Volunteers removed the subfloor in the back room, revealing the original hardwood floor in what was formerly the kitchen. The areas where the sink, hot water heater, and stove were located were in pretty bad shape, but can be repaired. Our plan is to repair and refinish the original hardwood floor, instead of covering it back up.
 » Carpenters spent several weeks installing slatwall on six walls in two rooms, which gives us a lot more versatility with displaying merchandise, especially clothing; installing crown molding in all four rooms and a strip of molding six inches below the ceiling for hanging pictures and art; building shelving for display and storing of clothing; and repairing the ceiling on the back porch.
 » Volunteers removed the screens from the front and back porches in preparation for a thorough cleaning. Both porches were power washed, then scrubbed. Mice had been living rent-free under the cabinets on the back porch for years!

(Left) Repairing the back porch ceiling. (Right) Volunteers Jane Chambers, Russell Watson, Pam Corrado, and Linda Stitt scrub the front porch walls following a powerwashing by site host Pat Jacobson. Photos by Laura Mackin.

(continued on p. 4)
Painters followed the carpenters. Everything on the inside of the house will be painted including all bookcases, cabinets, and shelving units. The front and back porches will be painted and re-screened by volunteers.

Hardwood floors in all four rooms will be sanded and refinished.

The bathroom will receive new flooring, toilet, sink, and other necessary repairs.

New ceiling fans will be mounted in all four rooms, plus track lighting in the back room. The heater will be re-installed, as will quarter-round trim to the baseboards in all rooms.

After all this work is completed, volunteers will empty the storage container, restock the store, and then reopen!

Dutch Nagle’s Passing

By Robert Weissler

We were saddened to learn of the passing of Dutch Nagle in March. Many of you have likely known or worked with Dutch, as he had been an active member of the Friends of the San Pedro River for years. Former Board president, docent, and ongoing volunteer contributor, Dutch had been a mainstay and beloved member of our organization. Dutch will be best remembered as a friend and defender of the San Pedro. Remember him when you visit the River, a place he loved and worked to protect. Following is his obituary:

Sierra Vista — Dutch Nagle passed away March 12, 2020. Dutch was born to Stanford P Nagle and Ethel Nora (Davis) Nagle on March 10, 1934 in Norwood, Pennsylvania. He was a graduate of Glen-Nor High School, Glenolden, Pennsylvania, held a Bachelor’s degree in business from the University of Hartford, Hartford, Connecticut, and an MBA from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Dutch worked at various companies and in a variety of positions in the computer industry and retired as a computer consultant.

Dutch is survived by brother John (Barbara), sister Shirley (Jim) Crawford, brother-in-law Gerry (Mary) Nolte, brother-in-law Vince Austin, and several nephews, nieces, and their offspring, as well as his close friends, Dee and Al Puff. He was predeceased by his wife Patricia, brother Stanford, sister Cathy Marcu-Austin, and foster brother Ed Morrison.

(continued on p. 5)
He was an avid birdwatcher. He did volunteer work for Friends of the San Pedro River, The Nature Conservancy, Literacy Volunteers, and various other organizations. He also was an Arizona Master Naturalist.

Dutch’s legacy with the river continues with a generous bequest to the Friends that will be used to sponsor a summer internship or scholarship in his name.

**A Walk to the Fairbank Cemetery: What Happened?**

*By Ron Stewart*

The Fairbank Cemetery is a sad sight. Was it always like this? Old-time residents tell us no. As recent as the 1950s, when there were still people living in the town, it was tended. Most graves had markers, some had fences. The hilltop location was neat, if not a garden. So, what happened?

Starting in the 1960s, we entered a period when the towns along the river were unoccupied. Little respect was shown to the towns or the cemeteries near them. Graves were looted. Most tombstones were stolen or smashed. Metal detectors were used to locate objects, even in graves, that were dug up. Some of the loose rock you see today at the cemetery came from graves that were desecrated. Pieces of lumber lying on the surface may be coffins. Such behavior continues. Cement tombstones have been smashed within the last 20 years. People ride horses into the cemetery over unmarked graves. Heedless hikers cut down the slope of the hill rather than using the trail, causing erosion that has exposed graves.

(continued on p. 6)
Help Tally Birds on December 20

The Ramsey Canyon Christmas Bird Count is tentatively scheduled for Sunday, December 20, 2020. The count circle is centered southeast of Sierra Vista. It includes some canyons of the Huachuca Mountains and portions of the San Pedro River. If you are interested in participating, please contact Ken Blankenship via email to kenblankenshipbirding@gmail.com or by calling 770-317-8486.

Captain Tovar’s 1776 Battle of Las Mesitas: A Revised Perspective
[Sometimes referred to as Tovar’s Last Stand or the first battle of Santa Cruz de Terrenate]

By Deni J Seymour

Those safe inside the presidio (fort) walls refused to come to the aid of the soldiers being slaughtered by the Apache, despite hearing their cries—at least according to the most common telling of the story. This July 7, 1776 battle was undertaken by the first commandant of Santa Cruz de Terrenate presidio, Captain Francisco Tovar. He had spent fewer than eight months at the post before he and 25 men were killed in an ambush at Las Mesitas along the San Pedro River. Viceroy Antonio Maria Bucarelli y Ursua’s September 24, 1776 report provides a description of this battle against “los Indios Barbaros” or “Las Apaches.”

This engagement is important because the story surrounding it is routinely repeated—by historians and site docents alike—because it captures the imagination and fuels interest in history. Retold many times, the narrative is nonetheless inaccurate and misinformed related to the number killed and the location of
the battle. I have transcribed and translated anew Bucarelli’s account and carried out field investigations along the San Pedro, providing fresh insights about the crossing where the battle occurred and the actions taken that day.

This battle has been inaccurately described using secondary sources and incomplete translations of the primary document. Some state that “Tovar and 29 of his troopers lay dead,” whereas others record that a total of 25 were killed. A memorial inscription at the presidio reads, in part, “Muerto en Batalla: 7 July 1776, Capt. Francisco Tovar, 29 Soldados...” But, in fact, the original document states that Tovar and 25 soldiers were killed, for a total of 26. Historians describe this battle as an attack on the presidio itself, with the battle taking place within sight of the presidio and Sentinel Hill (Fig 1): “the post sentinel shouted from the opposite side of the river. Gazing downstream, he had seen a large force of Apaches pass on foot through the river ford from the east...When they reached the base (eg, the presidio), they discovered that no one was willing to form any kind of relief force.”

This version, of course, prompts questions as to why no one in the presidio (mostly relatives) would come to the rescue of the ambushed soldiers, when they could see the carnage and hear the screams from behind the safety of the presidio walls. Tovar surely must have been unpopular. As engaging as it is, this story is not true. Instead, there are several important facts about the battle that require revision.

**Battle Location.** The battle took place many leagues from the presidio (probably between 40 and 50 miles)—as the account states, at a crossing a day-and-a-half from the presidio. While there is a ford near the presidio, it is located upstream from the presidio, not downstream, but is nonetheless not the location of this event.

**Troop Movements.** The account does not indicate which direction the soldiers marched, but a year later, the patrol route between Santa Cruz and San Bernardino presidios was discussed. This upriver (south) road is the only portion of their patrol route that bordered the San Pedro for a day-and-a-half of travel.

(continued on p. 8)
**River Crossing.** The battle occurred at a crossing. Such crossings are an important characteristic of the San Pedro River. Safe crossings can occur only in certain areas when the stream is running because of quicksand. Therefore, the Spaniards sought fords that provided a stable substrate (i.e., gravelly or rocky channel bottoms). This attribute likely also explains why Tovar “inexplicably” ordered his troopers to dismount and fight on foot.

Just four years after this battle, in 1780, Geronimo de la Rocha y Figueroa explored the river, making a map and a journal and recording leagues, crossings, and the trail traveled.

Rocha’s journal indicates he generally traveled anywhere from 8 to 12 leagues a day along the lower and middle San Pedro, providing a comparable estimate for distance traveled in 1776.

Using these sources, we can determine the approximate distance traveled in a day-and-a-half and at which crossings this likely occurred. Using this approach, there are two possible crossings that fall within the appropriate approximate league distances of a day-and-a-half of travel and that therefore could be the crossing used by Tovar in 1776. I cannot divulge the location because it is an archaeological site, protected by law. Suffice it to say that the engagement did not occur within earshot of the presidio.

While Americans were signing the Declaration of Independence, Spaniards were expanding their grip on their northern frontier through their presence at Santa Cruz (de Terrenate). Tovar was one of three commanders from this presidio to die at the hands of the Apache. More revisions to the standard view about this presidio can be found in my upcoming book, *They Fought Like Lions: Santa Cruz de Terrenate Presidio, 1775-1780.*

The author is an archaeologist and ethnohistorian who has dedicated her entire research career to the study of Spanish missions and presidios, as well as the indigenous people the Spaniards encountered. As part of 35 years of research, she excavated for four seasons at Santa Cruz de Terrenate Presidio, both in rooms not previously excavated by Charles Di Peso, and also re-exposing some rooms that Di Peso had dug.

[NOTE from Ron Stewart: On October 17, Dr Seymour led a tour of Presidio Santa Cruz de Terrenate and another colonial era site near Fairbank for Old Pueblo Archaeology. It was hot, but those who attended had the chance to learn from one of the leading specialists on the proto-history of this area. Throughout her career, Dr Seymour has worked as an archaeologist in the borderlands of the Southwest. She has led a number of excavations and surveys in SPRNCA, including an excavation at the Presidio. Local volunteers and Friends members have helped with these projects. Her collaborative work with O’odham partners at San Xavier is especially noteworthy.]

*Dr Deni speaking at Terrenate during the tour. Photo by Ron Stewart.*
Candidate Positions on the Future of the San Pedro River

By Linda Stitt

Realizing that we are in a time when major changes are occurring in our area (eg, border wall construction, groundwater overdraft, further development of housing and agriculture), the Friends of the San Pedro wanted to gauge the stance of candidates running for office in November 2020. The goal was to educate Cochise County voters about the positions of these candidates with regard to our special desert river.

In lieu of a public forum during the pandemic, FSPR opted to create a questionnaire comprised of three questions about the future of the San Pedro River. This query was sent to ten federal- and state-level candidates (ie, all those who would serve residents of southeastern Arizona).

Three responses were received. Highlights of those responses appear below. Full text responses, as well as the original letter to candidates, can be found at http://sanpedroriver.org/wpfspr/candidate-responses-on-the-river/.

**Question 1: How do you envision the upper San Pedro River (from the border to St David) 10 years from now? This entails recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, scenic landscapes, and natural and cultural resource protection.**

**Bob Karp (candidate for State Senate District 14)**

I am not an expert of how the river should be maintained. I am opposed to allowing cattle crazing along the river. I am also opposed to allowing BLM to put any additional roads near the river. I would like to see the river maintained as free flowing as a light use recreational area. How that would happen is out of the scope of my knowledge.

**Ronnie Maestas-Condos (candidate for State Senate District 14)**

My view of the San Pedro River 10 years from now will be a desert wasteland if we do not continue to ensure the protections that have been established remain in place. We need to further codify these protections locally to reinforce federal regulations and policy, giving us more leverage and control over these protections.

**Kim Beach-Moschetti (candidate for State Senate District 14)**

If groundwater pumping continues at the present rate and the structure being built on the riverbed moves forward, as well as the dismantling of environmental protection laws, I foresee a barren landscape with little wildlife and the loss of an irreplaceable national treasure.

**Question 2: What measures do you favor to avoid aquifer depletion that otherwise would degrade the river’s surface flow and the wildlife habitat that relies on that flow and underlying groundwater?**

**Bob Karp**

Some ideas I support:

» Require large commercial wells throughout the state to have meters installed to monitor water use.

» Allow rural areas that counties declare as threatened to opt in to metering wells in groundwater basins.

» Expand existing rules to require developers of subdivisions to certify an adequate 100-year water supply to cover all areas of the state.

» Change rules for creating INA (irrigation no-expansion areas) to make it easier to limit well drilling.

(continued on p. 10)
Ronnie Maestas-Condos

I would like to see more coordination between the various counties to create regulating and monitoring policies with enforcement powers, including the necessary funding required. I feel these measures would go a long way in helping us mitigate the effects of severe weather events and hopefully help sustain the health and viability of our San Pedro for future generations.

Kim Beach-Moschetti

I believe it is the responsibility of state and local elected officials, as caretakers of the San Pedro area, to propose and pass legislation that will properly regulate and measure the pumping of groundwater across the state, and limit the industrial and agricultural use of this finite resource.

**Question 3: There is widespread concern that the border wall project has been conducted with inadequate public engagement, analysis of alternatives, and environmental impact assessment. Moreover, there are concerns that it will disrupt wildlife corridors and dispersal of large fauna, including jaguars, ocelots, puma, bears, and deer. Will you speak out for greater Congressional oversight, public input, transparency, and accountability on the part of the federal government before it embarks on such projects?**

Bob Karp

As local representatives we must lobby our state congressional delegation to be more proactive in oversight of the Department of Homeland Security and the US Army Corps of Engineers, as well as oppose exemptions to environmental protection laws to uphold the right of property owners to contest eminent domain seizures of private property along the border.

Ronnie Maestas-Condos

I will draw attention to the fact that the US government is violating laws and regulations designed to protect this national monument. This project went forward without adequate public engagement, analysis of environmental impacts, or consideration of effective alternatives.

Kim Beach-Moschetti

I will absolutely be an opposing voice to the border wall project, as well as any similar projects that would adversely affect the fragile habitats of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area.

[NOTE: None of the three respondents won their respective elections, as Republican incumbents were re-elected to their Arizona state offices.]

---

**The San Pedro River Viewed from Space**

**Part 1: Meanders**

*By Gerald R Noonan, PhD*

Google Earth Pro provides free satellite photos that people can examine and download. Satellite photos of the San Pedro River from May 2019 show that, like many other rivers, it flows in some places through meanders or lateral loops. Water flow in the following photos is from bottom to top because the river flows northward.

Photo 1 shows a view slightly north of the Mexican border. The yellow pin denoting a loop or meander of the river is at latitude 31.341322° and longitude -110.141086°.

Several factors may start the formation of a meander. An obstruction within the river may direct water toward the bank on one side. Animal activity or structural weaknesses on one side of a river may result in the water flow in the river starting to erode part of the bank. As the eroded indentation enlarges, more
and more water flows within the indentation or concave outer bank, resulting in the speed of the water slowing along the opposite or inner bank. A secondary flow of water develops and carries sediment from the concave bank across the floor of the river to the convex side. Slow water carries less sediment than faster water and sediment starts to deposit along the convex or inner bank. The faster-moving water, when it exits the growing indentation on the outer bank, may slingshot downstream and strike the opposite bank, starting erosion there. The slingshot effect of faster moving water hitting a downstream bank may produce meander after meander.

As shown in the diagram below, erosion on the outside of a river bend and sediment deposition on the inside results in the shape of a meander gradually changing over time. Sometimes the neck of land within the meander narrows because of erosion. Once the neck of land becomes significantly narrow, floodwater may cut across it and take a new, straighter, shorter route downstream. Alternatively, during a flood, a river may shorten its course by simply cutting off a meander before there is great narrowing of land within the neck. Sediment deposition occurs to cut off the entrance and exit to former meanders, leaving a somewhat circular oxbow.
Photo 3. Along the San Pedro River, we often can recognize an oxbow or former meander by noting a line of riparian trees that no longer grow along the sides of the river channel. Such trees became established when water was flowing through the meander, before it was cut off from the river. Floods washed sediment into the oxbow and gradually filled it in, resulting in a line of riparian trees no longer along the river channel. The line of trees denoted by red markers delineates a former meander that filled in with sediments during floods. The area shown is slightly southwest of Hereford. The blue marker denoting the river channel is at latitude 31.431536° and longitude -110.103295°.

Photo 4 shows river meanders north of Hereford. Red marker B is at latitude 31.464387° and longitude -110.104834°.

(continued on p. 13)
Like many other rivers, the San Pedro over time has naturally changed greatly in shape and in the habitats found within and along it. If the water supply for the river remains adequate, the San Pedro River will continue to evolve and provide habitats for many organisms.

"You cannot step into the same river twice."—Heraclitus

Contact List

- President—Robert Weissler
- Vice-President—Ron Stewart
- Treasurer—Renell Stewart
- Secretary—Sally Rosén
- Directors—Charles Corrado, Pam Corrado, Robert Luce, Steve Ogle, Sally Rosén, Renell Stewart, Ron Stewart, Linda Stitt, Robert Weissler
- Docent Activities—Ron Stewart
- Education—John Rose
- Membership—Carolyn Santucci
- Newsletter Editor—Sue Leskiw
- Office Manager—Carolyn Santucci
- Bookstore Manager—Laura Mackin

To contact any of the above individuals, please call the office at 520-459-2555 or send us e-mail at fspr@sanpedroriver.org or sanpedrohouse@sanpedroriver.org.

Mailing address: 9800 East Highway 90, Sierra Vista, AZ 85635; Website: www.sanpedroriver.org

Friends of the San Pedro River (FSPR) is a nonprofit, volunteer organization dedicated to the conservation of the River and the health of its ecosystems through advocacy, educational programs, and interpretive events.

New & Renewing Members, mid-February through October 2020
