ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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2026Clean Water Act § 401 Water Quality Certification

Sonoita Creek Restoration Project

1. Authorization

This State Water Quality Certification (WQC) is issued by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) under the authority of the Federal Clean Water Act (CWA) § 401(a) (33 U.S.C. § 1251 et seq.) and Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) § 49-202. This § 401 WQC will become part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) § 404 permit SPL-2026-00778.

Based on the information provided and identified in Section 3 of this certification, ADEQ certifies that restoration activities within Sonoita Creek will not violate applicable Surface Water Quality Standards (SWQS).

A. Location

ADEQ PLC: # 268343 ADEQ LTF: # 118500

B. Project Proponent Information

Kimberly Schonek

The Nature Conservancy

1510 E Fort Lowell

Tucson, AZ 85719

Authorizing Signature

Josephine Maressa Date
Deputy Director, Water Quality Division
Arizona Department of Environmental Quality

2. Project Location

The Nature Conservancy is proposing restoration activities along Sonoita Creek, southwest of the Town of Patagonia, in Santa Cruz County, Arizona.

3. Description of Certified Activities

The Nature Conservancy is proposing to implement process-based restoration interventions at four sites along Sonoita Creek. Together, these four sites comprise approximately 71.1 total acres along the creek.

Using native materials and enhancement of natural processes, the proposed restoration designs include:

- Installation of grade control structures to reconnect the creek to its floodplain;
- Construction of swales and small ephemeral basins on the floodplain to detain overbanked flood flows and sediment and provide seedbeds for native riparian species establishment; and
- Partial removal of a railroad embankment that confines the stream, as well as regrading to encourage the overbanking of flood flows and natural distribution of sediment onto the floodplain.

The restoration efforts work with the processes of sediment erosion, deposition, and transport through use of native materials such as rocks, logs, soils, transplants, and native wetland sod. Exotic invasive vegetation removal may also be conducted during restoration activities.

Work within the creek's channel will consist primarily of hand work, an excavator with rubber tracks, a tracked skid steer, and/or other similar heavy machinery and will occur across isolated areas throughout the sites. Planned activities will occur in areas outside of sites containing surface water and will avoid wetted, flowing, and ponding features.

The activities will not result in negative impacts to Waters of the U.S. wetlands or non-wetland areas, but will result in an increase in wetland floodplain habitat, a restored connection between Sonoita Creek and its floodplain, decreased channelization, increased meandering and stream length, and an increase in area included within the ordinary high water mark of the creek.

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4. Information Reviewed

In evaluating and issuing this CWA § 401 WQC, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) reviewed the following:

- 30-day Prefiling Meeting held September 8, 2026 with Tom Klimas, of WestLand Engineering & Environmental Services.
- Application: CWA § 401 WQC application package, including all associated plans, maps, and project details submitted by The Nature Conservancy, received on October 7, 2026.
- Water Quality & Impairment Standards
    - Designated Uses: Pursuant to Arizona Administrative Code (A.A.C.) Title 18, Chapter 11, Article 1, Appendix B, Sonoita Creek is designated for Aquatic and Wildlife Warmwater (A&Ww), Full Body Contact (FBC), Fish Consumption (FC), Agricultural Irrigation (AgI), and Agricultural Livestock (AgL).
    - Impairments: Pursuant to Appendix C of the 2024 CWA Assessment, Sonoita Creek is classified as impaired for Zinc.

5. Notification Provisions

Mailing Address:

Arizona Department of Environmental Quality
Attn: Rosi Sherrill
Surface Water Protection Permits / 401 WQCs
1110 West Washington Street
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Direct Inquiries:

Email: sherrill.laurie@azdeq.gov
Phone: (602) 771-4409

Please include the following reference details on all correspondence:

Project Name: Sonoita Creek Restoration Project
USACE File No.: SPL-2026-00778
ADEQ LTF No.: 118500

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Certification Notes

This WQC applies exclusively to the activities specified in Section 3 of this certification and is based upon the documentation provided in Section 4. As noted in Section 1, this WQC is incorporated directly into USACE § 404 permit SPL-2026-00778 and is valid for the same time period as that permit. Any renewal, extension, modification, or other change to the USACE § 404 permit will require the project proponent to apply for a matching update, extension, or renewal of this WQC.

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