The wastewater reclamation process includes removing solids, digesting organic wastes, reducing nutrients, and clarifying the water followed by disinfection, prior to releasing effluent into the river.

View of Tucson and the Santa Cruz River from the south side of A Mountain, 1904 (Arizona Historical Society 24868)

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The lower Santa Cruz River in northwest Tucson and Marana flows year-round and provides the principal wetland habitat in Pima County. Water in this stretch of the river comes from two regional water reclamation facilities. Pima County recently completed its largest public works project by investing over $600 million to upgrade the quality of effluent released from these facilities into the river, which is expected to improve the aquatic environment. The Living River Project aims to track and communicate water quality and environmental improvements that result from these upgrades.

What changes do we anticipate?

Rivers are dynamic, with conditions influenced by many factors including amount of rainfall, depth to groundwater, and adjacent land use. The Living River Project will track many natural changes as well as any changes that are directly related to the reclamation facility upgrades—such as improved water quality and reduced odors.

Pima County’s upgrade of reclamation facilities will improve the quality of the water released into the river—ultimately benefiting aquatic animals.

You can see the lower Santa Cruz River for yourself by traveling sections of The Loop, the recreational path along the river (see detailed map at www.pima.gov/TheLoop). Effluent is released into the river near Columbus Park and Ina Road. See map for other parks and access points to see the river.

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