

# Tempe Town Lake: Rebirth of a River Ecosystem

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The Power of Perspective

Artist's view of a U.S. Landsat satellite. Credits: NASA.

Historically the Salt River flowed through Phoenix perennially, but since the damming of the Salt River in 1902, it has turned to a dry river bed. The loss of water in the river had severe impacts on the ecosystem, with the loss of cottonwood and willow habitat. In 1999 the construction of Tempe Town Lake was completed along the Lower Salt River.

Over the next decade, water from storm and agriculture runoff began to collect outside of the eastern wall of the lake.

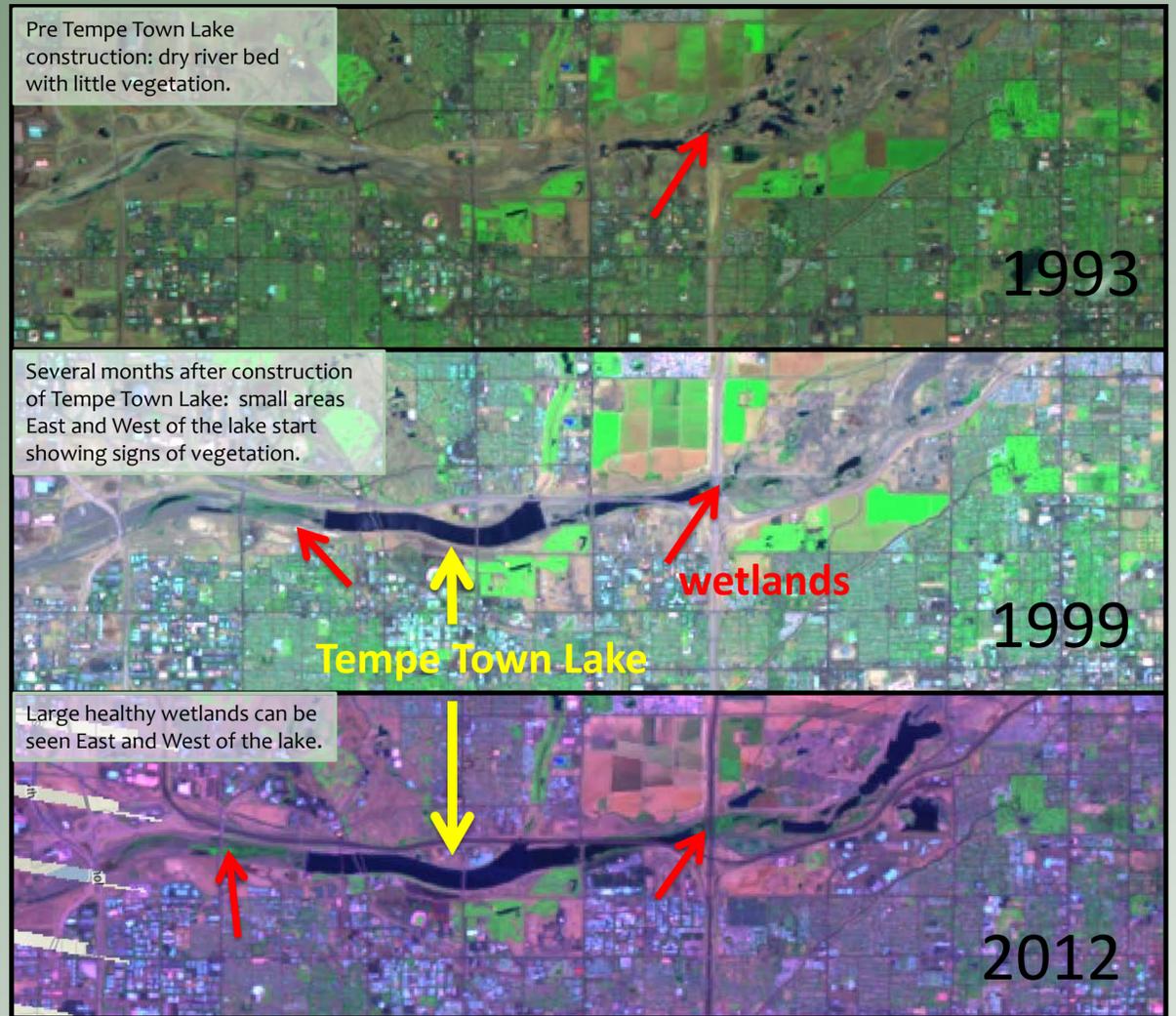
This restored the wetland area to conditions similar to those that existed along the Salt River nearly a century earlier.



Dry Salt River Bed -- Adam Thormoman



This site has become a hot spot for birds, plants and other wildlife in Tempe. Native plants provide habitat for birds such as pelicans, egrets, herons and other water fowl. Large surges of water such as heavy rainfall or dam failure have kept this wetland thriving.



Landsat images of the Lower Salt River in Tempe Arizona in June/July with healthy vegetation showing up as bright green, water is dark blue and gray is urban or developed land. The pink hue on the last image is an artifact of the Landsat data for more recent years. [These images were accessed courtesy of Google Earth Engine's Trusted Tester Program.](#)



Under the 101 freeway -- Tommy DeBardeleben  
Blue Heron -- Heather Faye Botello (top right)  
Egret Sunset Flight -- Graham Owen (bottom right)



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