



Friends of the Desert

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In an effort to ensure all Coalition supporters receive regular program updates, we're sending this bi-monthly newsletter relaying information about important activities related to the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP) and other Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection efforts. Please contact Sean at Sean@sonorandesert.org or at 520-388-9925 with any questions or comments. Please visit the Coalition website to learn more at www.sonorandesert.org.

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! Pima County Releases Draft III of the Multiple Species Conservation Plan

Pima County recently released the 3rd draft of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan's (SDCP) Multi Species Conservation Plan (MSCP). The SDCP is the core of what we have worked on the past eight years and outlines the goals and details for how Pima County will protect the county's natural environment and high quality of life for the next 50 years. The latest draft of the plan is available on Pima County's website at <http://www.pima.gov/cmo/sdcp/reports.html>.

We are pleased that Pima County has incorporated details into the latest draft that address Coalition concerns. Progress continues as more work is completed on the Plan by the county's Science Technical Advisory Team (STAT), a 13-member stakeholder committee, and county staff. STAT recently developed a draft biological monitoring program to "serve as the work plan and guidance document on how Pima County will develop the biological ('effectiveness') Monitoring Plan for both the Pima County Multi-Species Conservation Plan and the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. Biological monitoring will support the Adaptive Management Plan of the MSCP and will inform the community about the County's progress in meeting the goals of the SDCP." The stakeholder committee continues to work to identify a long term funding source for management and monitoring. Pima County staff has recently developed a draft Public Works Preliminary Implementation Work Plan, which "establishes Public Works' preferred priority and sequencing of those steps that are fundamental to achieving conformity with the objectives of the SDCP and MSCP."

In the next few weeks the Coalition will submit comments on the 3rd draft. After reviewing and (we hope) incorporating these comments and others, Pima County plans to submit a formal draft to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) for a federally-mandated public review. During this period, we will be asking our friends and allies to submit public comments, write letters, and talk to your friends and family about doing the same. We'll be contacting you when the time comes!

! The City of Tucson Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) Moves Forward

On March 7, 2006, Tucson City Manager Mike Hein summarized the background of the Tucson HCP in a communication to the Mayor and Council. "The City of Tucson, in cooperation with Arizona Game & Fish Department, the USFWS, stakeholders and other jurisdictions, has been developing a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for the city, under a grant awarded in July 2003. Work under this grant began on the HCP in



June 2004 and is expected to continue through June 2009. A final HCP will outline, for all species addressed in the plan, specific conservation measures or actions that are necessary to adequately protect these species within the geographic area covered in the HCP.” One of the City’s stated objectives is to complement other regional conservation planning efforts such as Pima County’s SDCP and the Town of Marana’s HCP project.

Tucson City staff is being assisted by two Ad Hoc advisory committees, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC). The TAC provides technical, science-based information necessary for the development of the Tucson HCP conservation measures. The SAC reviews conservation recommendations made by the TAC while also making recommendations on implementation, funding sources for habitat acquisition, and monitoring/management of conservation lands, city ordinances and policies, and opportunities for multi-jurisdictional cooperation.

In response to the Mayor and Council’s recent consideration of a “preliminary draft” HCP, the Coalition submitted a letter to the City. Specifically, the Coalition commented that before the HCP becomes final and a permit application is submitted to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the following issues will need to be detailed (go to <http://www.sonorandesert.org/coalition-reports> for the complete text of the letter):

- Specific activities that will negatively impact species’ habitat;
- Total acreage impacted and acreage ratios to mitigate for those actions;
- Reserve design for mitigation lands;
- Acquisition plan to preserve mitigation lands in perpetuity;
- Specific conservation measures and actions necessary to adequately protect covered species;
- Fully developed and approved ordinances, land use plans and policies to implement the HCP;
- Fully developed management and monitoring plans;
- Estimated cost for implementing the acquisition, management and monitoring plans; and
- Identify assured funding source(s) for acquisition, management and monitoring.

The City is working with the AZ Game & Fish Department, the US Fish & Wildlife Service, citizen stakeholders and other area jurisdictions on drafting the final HCP. A city Resource Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC) is being considered by Mayor and Council that would replace the Stakeholders Advisory Committee and expand SAC duties to also consider resource planning issues not directly associated with the HCP. If your organization would like to be included on the Resource Planning Advisory Committee, contact the Mayor and Councilmembers to request representation. The current HCP information can be found at <http://www.tucsonaz.gov/planning/>.

! Congressional Staff Visit the Ironwood Forest National Monument and Las Cienegas National Conservation Area

Congressional staff from across the nation came to Tucson in early January to learn how to better support the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS). The NLCS was created in 2000 with the mission "to conserve, protect, and restore these nationally significant landscapes that have outstanding cultural, ecological, and scientific values for the benefit of current and future generations".

The NLCS consists of approximately 40 million acres of National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas, as well as other federally-managed lands. Resources to adequately protect these lands falls short of what is needed, NLCS lands are managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), whose traditional mission has an emphasis on resource extraction and recreation. In order to protect the NLCS, the NLCS Coalition, of which the CSDP is a member, is working to educate



congressional members about the importance of these lands and advocate for resources needed to conserve them.

A crucial aspect of the vision for the NLCS is to protect the wild character of these western landscapes. The remoteness of these areas is what has kept the landscape pristine and has also protected the cultural resources from destruction and unauthorized removal. The NLCS lands are not only biologically significant, but also provide an opportunity for wilderness experiences.

The NLCS is a challenging opportunity for the conservation community and the BLM to conserve some of the most beautiful and biologically important landscapes found in the western U.S. The future of the units found within the NLCS depends on the adoption and implementation of strong Resource Management Plans. These plans need to be crafted in a way that leaves past practices behind and focuses on the newly adopted mission to conserve these public lands to ensure they remain “healthy, wild, and open.” (*Bruce Babbitt, former Secretary of the Interior*)

The NLCS Coalition invited members of Congress to visit Southern Arizona’s Monuments and National Conservation Area units. Members and their staff, many of whom had never been in the Sonoran Desert, traveled to the Ironwood Forest National Monument and to Las Cienegas National Conservation Area, both just miles outside of Tucson.

These two areas, like other units of the NLCS, provide rich habitat for a number of imperiled species, including the last viable herd of Desert bighorn sheep in the Tucson basin. They also serve as landscape linkages to adjacent wildlands. The Las Cienegas National Conservation Area is a key linkage identified through the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. Pima County is currently in the process of acquiring land to better protect the connection from the Rincon Mountains north of I-10 to Las Cienegas and the Santa Rita Mountains, south of I-10.

We hope that the congressional members and their staff will take a greater knowledge of the NLCS back to Washington D.C. along with a new appreciation for the beauty of these wild areas and the need to properly fund management and implement strong Resource Management Plans within the NLCS.

To learn more about the NLCS and the Ironwood Forest National Monument please visit:

<http://www.sonorandesert.org/about/current-activities>

You can also view photos of the NLCS at:

<http://www.wilderness.org/OurIssues/Monuments/NLCSPhotos.cfm>

! **Marana Update**

In the last Friends of the Desert issue we reported that the Town of Marana was moving forward with a riparian protection overlay district within the Tortolita Fan, called the Tortolita Fan Overlay Zone (TFOZ). The proposed draft of the ordinance would affect all development plans within the overlay zone boundaries. The draft under review currently calls for 70% overall site conservation with 100% of identified riparian areas to be protected. We are hopeful that the final draft will call for strong comprehensive protection of this area as a whole.

The final draft was due to be presented to the Marana Mayor and Council in January of 2006, but language is currently being revised by the Town Attorney. It is extremely important that the Town address all legal concerns in order to implement the overlay district in this biologically-sensitive area, which is extremely threatened by suburban development.



The Coalition would like to see the final draft include strong conservation measures. Adoption of a strong TFOZ would greatly benefit the biological integrity of the entire region. The Coalition is working toward inclusion of SDCP goals and objectives in Marana's planning process with a long-term goal of adopting a truly regional Habitat Conservation Plan with the Town of Marana as a full partner on the SDCP.

The Marana area is an important contributor to a healthy regional landscape. We need you to support the Coalition's recommendations by contacting the Marana Town Council to thank them for the development of the TFOZ and urge them to work with Pima County to achieve complementary conservation plans and measures.

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! Coalition Website

The Coalition recently changed the design and content of our website in an effort to better inform the public on desert conservation issues in an understandable and user friendly manner. We were assisted by a locally owned web-design company, [Moia Group](#), who did a great job! We invite all of you to take a new look at our website www.sonorandesert.org. Please feel free to provide feedback.

You can now find the current and all past issues of the Friends of the Desert newsletter, archived action alerts and spotlighted features, a selection of [news articles](#) on the Coalition and the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP), a [short film](#) on the SDCP, and an easy and secure way to [make donations](#) - all on the main home page. We also have pictures of all Coalition merchandise with a printable order form.

We have also added new pages on the Conservation Land System (CLS), our current activities, the Ironwood Forest National Monument, benefits of the SDCP, and a number of ways that you can help as a supporter of the Coalition. We will continue to update the site as new information and issues arise. We hope that this will be a useful tool in preserving our Sonoran Desert.

Archives of all of our past newsletters can be found at: <http://www.sonorandesert.org/newsletters>
Please send any comments about the website to Sean@sonorandesert.org.

! Coalition's New Staff Addition!

The Coalition welcomes our new Assistant Director, [Lori Andersen](#). Lori comes to the Coalition from the Arizona Youth Partnership, where she worked as Community Development Director. Lori is also an artist and teaches part-time at Pima Community College in the Art Department as adjunct faculty. She currently resides in Tucson and spent much of her childhood growing up in South America. She has a great love for the Sonoran Desert and brings a profound desire to protect and preserve our desert home. Lori has been a long-time Coalition supporter and we are happy to have Lori on board to help the Coalition continue to achieve its goals!