



# Friends of the Desert

Issue #34

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A project of the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection in Pima County, Arizona  
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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](mailto: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](http://www.sonorandesert.org).

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### • **2004 Open Space Bond, Update:**

It has been three years since Pima County voters approved \$174 million dollars in bond revenue to purchase open space in Pima County. Land acquisitions made with this money form core preserve areas of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. With the oversight of a citizen advisory committee, the Conservation Acquisition Commission, the County has been actively purchasing land for preservation. Acquisitions have been made throughout the County. The County also holds leases on more than 86,000 acres of state trust land and now owns over 25,000 acres of conservation land bought with the 2004 bond money. Some key purchases include:

**\*A-7 Ranch:** This purchase added 6,828 private acres and over 30,000 leased state trust land acres to the County preserve. The A-7 Ranch is found on the northeast side of the Santa Catalina Mountains and includes a stretch of the San Pedro River. This rugged area includes multiple riparian areas full of cottonwood trees, as well as perennial streams and mesquite bosques. Much of the acquired lands are found within the Biological Core category of the Conservation Land System (see [www.sonorandesert.org](http://www.sonorandesert.org) for more info on the CLS). This area has potential habitat for many of the priority vulnerable species the SDCP aims to protect.

**Acres: 6,828 (private)**

**Price: ~\$2 million**

**Acquired: 8/2004**

**\*Bee/Mordka:** Found on the west side of the Tucson Mountains just south of the Tohono O'odham Garcia Strip, the Bee/Mordka purchase was comprised of three private parcels totaling 160 acres. These parcels are located along the Brawley Wash in the Avra Valley with more than 50% of the parcels in an Important Riparian Area, the category of the Conservation Land System that calls for the highest level of protection. This acquisition helped preserve a wildlife linkage between the West Branch of the Brawley Wash and the Santa Cruz River across the Tohono O'odham Reservation. The Brawley Wash has been damaged over the years, but has very high potential for restoration in the future. This purchase will protect against future damage along this section of the wash.

**Acres: 160**

**Price: ~\$60,800**

**Acquired: 11/2004**

**\*Bar V/Davidson Canyon:** This property totals over 1,700 acres of private land and comes with over 12,600 acres of leased state trust land. This property is located southeast of Vail, east of Sonoita Highway, and mainly south of I-10. The acquisition of this property has preserved a major wildlife corridor, with two of the northern most private parcels in the Bar V/Davidson Canyon connecting with the Pima County Cienega Creek Natural Preserve underneath I-10. This area is mainly Biological Core and has potential habitat for at least 34 out of the 55 priority vulnerable species protected by the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP).

The area contains perennial waters and is now protected from development that was fast approaching from the southeastern Tucson metro area. A linkage between the Rincon Mountains and the Santa Rita Mountains will now be protected from development and other threatening activities because of this acquisition.

**Acres: 1,763 (private)**

**Price: ~\$8.1 million**

**Acquired: 2/2005**

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**\*Rancho Seco:** This important addition to the Pima County Preserve is found in the Altar Valley and consists of over 9,500 acres of private land and 12,000 acres of leased state trust land and BLM land. The water rights attached to the private property were also acquired by Pima County. Semidesert grassland and open mesquite woodlands are found on this property which has the potential to support over 120 wildlife species including nine priority vulnerable species. A stretch of the Sopori Wash is found along the western boundary of the property which also shares a border with the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge. This acquisition assured the protection of an extremely large unfragmented area within the Altar Valley.

**Acres: 9,574 (private) Price: ~\$18.5 million Acquired: 2/2005**

**\*NW properties:** A number of properties were recently purchased this year on the northwest side of Tucson in Pima County. This area of the County may be the most difficult area in which to acquire land due to high land prices and few willing sellers, both of which, present challenges to the Open Space Program. Although the land in this area is expensive, the Coalition has supported acquisition of all parcels that have a willing seller. One of the last unprotected Ironwood tree forests is found in this area and is interlaced with a multitude of Important Riparian Areas. The habitat in this area is highly important to the cactus ferruginous pygmy owl and the lesser long nosed bat, both of which are protected species under the SDCP. This area is also important for landscape connectivity between the Catalina Mountains, through the Tortolita Mountains, to the Tucson Mountains. The Coalition will continue to advocate for the protection of the Northwest area and the Tortolita Fan. The Open Space Program and the SDCP were based upon the best available science, and we strongly believe the County should continue to follow that science even if it is expensive to do so.

**Acres: ~50 (three parcels)\* Price: ~\$2.8 million Acquired: 1/2007 & 5/2007**

\* Some land purchased with 97' bond funds

All together there has been three dozen properties acquired using the 2004 Open Space Bond Program. These properties range in acreage from just a few acres to over 9,500 acres, and all are extremely important to the success of the SDCP. These acquisitions help build the SDCP Preserve, expand mountain parks, maintain riparian functions, preserve wildlife linkages, and also helps protect our way of life and shows the community's love of the Sonoran Desert. The table below illustrates Open Space Program activity through April 30, 2007.

**\*\*2004 Open Space Bond Program Activity (through April 30, 2007)**

Private Acres Acquired	Gazing Lease Acres	Acquisition Cost	Total Bond Authorization***	Allocation Remaining	Percentage Remaining
25,556	86,200	\$71,935,814	\$164,300,000	\$92,364,186	56%

\*\* figures provided by Pima County

\*\*\*excluding Davis Monthan allocations

There has always been more land identified than can be purchased with the money authorized by the voters in the 2004 Open Space bond election, which is why Pima County is preparing for a 2008 bond election. Open Space will be a part of the overall bond proposal, along with park and recreation, public health, and other bond categories. The Conservation Acquisition Commission has already approved the recommendation for a \$285 million open space bond program. This additional money will help ensure that the land that has already been identified can be purchased. There were also a handful of new additions to the identified lands that will be included in the 2008 Open Space bond proposal. Additions include water right acquisitions, parcels with springs and streams located on them, additional wildlife linkage areas, important grasslands, and community open space parcels, such as the West Desert Preserve located in Green Valley.

Information on the 2008 bond process can be found at [www.bonds.pima.gov/future](http://www.bonds.pima.gov/future). All of the bond subcommittees, including the Conservation Acquisition Committee, are scheduled to send their final recommendations to the Pima County Bond Advisory Committee, which oversees the entire bond package, in July 2007. The Bond Advisory Committee will then deliberate and send their final recommendation to the Board of

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Supervisors in April 2008. During this time, Pima County will hold open houses and accept comments from the general public. Once these activities have been scheduled, we will post them on our website, [www.sonorandesert.org](http://www.sonorandesert.org). The Board of Supervisors should make a final decision on the 2008 Bond Program in July 2008, in order to put the bond questions on the ballot in the November 2008 general election.

It will take a community effort to accomplish what we did in 2004. We will keep you up to date and let you know how you can help to ensure that core areas of the Sonoran Desert will continue to be purchased for preservation!

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- **Pima County Receives Monitoring Grant**

Last month, the Department of the Interior awarded Pima County \$274,505 to assist with the final planning stages of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP). The federal HCP (Habitat Conservation Plan) Planning Assistance Program provided the grant to Pima County to assist their work on the SDCP monitoring plan in conjunction with the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGF). This step in the SDCP planning process is essential to the long-term success of the regional conservation plan. Monitoring plans are needed to evaluate the success of current management practices, and an effective monitoring plan will also allow the County to properly implement adaptive management practices as circumstances change over time. A strong scientifically-based monitoring plan will allow the health and condition of protected species populations to be determined and conservation actions to be adjusted before it is too late.

With this grant Pima County, along with AZGF and an independent team of scientists, will now be able to design a biological monitoring plan based on scientific criteria and ensure that the conservation goals of the SDCP are met. The Coalition will be involved in this process and will work to design a monitoring plan that is centered on scientific, rather than political considerations.

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- **Rosemont Mine: Update**

Good News! In January Pima County passed a resolution opposing mining on Rosemont Ranch and also urged the AZ Congressional Delegation to, "initiate permanent withdrawal from mining and mineral exploration all federal lands within the Santa Rita Mountains area of the Coronado National Forest" (Pima County Resolution NO. 2007-15). Since then other jurisdictions have lent their voice to the cause and adopted similar resolutions. Thanks to the following jurisdictions for adopting resolution to protect Rosemont and the Santa Rita Mountains: Tucson, Santa Cruz County, Patagonia, Oro Valley, and Sahuarita.

This was accomplished because our elected officials did not back down to mining interests, the public showed up in mass to the public hearing, and Save Scenic Santa Ritas was hard at work, as always. Let's not lose the momentum. The Coalition will continue to oppose mining in these biologically sensitive lands as the process moves forward, and we hope that the community and our local elected officials will continue to do the same. Please stay tuned for the federal review process, which is where the final decision will be made on whether or not mining will take place on Rosemont Ranch.

On May 10, the 135th anniversary of the signing of the General Mining Law of 1872 by then President Grant, Natural Resource Committee Chairman Rahall (D-WV) introduced HR 2262 to overhaul one of the last remaining dinosaurs of public land giveaways. The new bill will protect special places from irresponsible mining; establish for the first time environmental standards for hard rock mines; Implement fiscal reforms including an 8% royalty and an end to patenting of mining claims; and create a fund to clean up abandoned mines and assist impacted communities. The passage of this bill would go a long ways to assist in stopping the Rosemont mine. Please ask your Congressional representative to co-sponsor the bill.

**Learn more about this on-going process at the Save the Scenic Santa Ritas website:**

<http://www.scenicsantaritas.org/>

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- **Friends of Ironwood Forest National Monument: Update**

In the last edition of the *Friends of the Desert* we brought you the exciting news about the creation of a new Friends group for the Ironwood Forest National Monument (IFNM), located just 25 miles NW of the Tucson Metro area. The Coalition received a grant to help organize the group into an independent self-sustaining organization, and things are going great!

The IFNM helps protect 129,000 acres of prime Sonoran Desert habitat. However, many of our public lands, including National Monuments, do not receive adequate funding for management. To establish a higher level of protection for the IFNM, the Coalition and the Sierra Club began some months ago to organize a Friends group, with much success.

During the initial organizing meeting in October many community activists stepped up and agreed to sit on the Board of Directors of the official ***Friends of the Ironwood Forest National Monument (FIF)***. The FIF Board of Directors includes Murray Bolesta (President), Mike Quigley (Treasurer), Lori Andersen (Secretary), Scott Jones, David Wrench, and Jeff Williamson. They have worked diligently to get the group off the ground and rolling. The official by-laws have been approved, officers have been appointed, they have received organizational training, engaged in strategic planning, and will continue to tighten nuts and bolts until FIF is fully up and running.

Learn more at [www.ironwoodforest.org](http://www.ironwoodforest.org)

The Friends of Ironwood Forest National Monument are close to accepting membership. But, before FIF can start building their membership they need to find a fiscal sponsor, which they are currently in the process of doing. So, before they get that all set up if you are interested in becoming a member, volunteering, want to receive FIF newsletters when they start going out, or if you have any questions or concerns please contact Lori Andersen at:

[lori@ironwoodforest.org](mailto:lori@ironwoodforest.org)

520-388-9925

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- **Best Hikes Contest**

The Coalition is a member of the National Landscape Conservation Alliance which aims to create a permanent, well-funded and diverse National Landscape Conservation System. To help promote the Conservation System we hope you will enter the National Landscape Conservation System Hikes Contest today. The National Landscape Conservation System is the West's best-kept secret. It holds the hidden treasures of the American West: 26 million acres of the Bureau of Land Management's incomparable lands and waters, and miles of remote, rugged trails. It's a network of the last places where you can experience the history and wild beauty of the American West. Ironwood Forest National Monument and Las Cienegas National Conservation Area are local examples of great places to hike on Conservation System lands.

Share photos, details and a story about a special hike you've taken within the National Landscape Conservation System. Those of you who submit the 12 best hikes get a chance to win free gear and share your story nationally. Best yet, all of BLM's great hikes will benefit from the increased attention this contest brings to the best hiking in the west. To enter the contest, go to [www.americanhiking.org](http://www.americanhiking.org).

Read more about the National Landscape Conservation System at [www.discovernlcs.org](http://www.discovernlcs.org).

Be sure to thank Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva for sponsoring H.R. 2016, *To establish the National Landscape Conservation System*. Legislation such as this is a long time coming and will go far to add a higher level of protection for a number of federally managed public lands.

Happy trails and remember to Leave No Trace!