

Issue 37 Fall 2008

Friends of the Desert

A project of the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection in Pima County, Arizona
300 E. University Blvd., #120, Tucson, AZ, 85705, (520) 388-9925, www.sonorandesert.org

- Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest
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- The Wildlands Project
- Women for Sustainable Technologies

Regional Conservation Takes Giant Steps!

by Sean Sullivan, Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection

The vision of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP) has always been a regional one. After all, wildlife pays no mind to whether or not they call Oro Valley or unincorporated Pima County home, and a functional preserve system would traverse multiple political jurisdictions. The SDCP not only seeks to comply with the Endangered Species Act, but is also a long term plan that will protect biodiversity and that which makes this area so unique. The SDCP aims to protect biological resources such as riparian areas, critical landscape linkages to facilitate wildlife movement, and core areas of wildlife habitat. It also aims to protect the cultural heritage of the region and provide outdoor recreational opportunities through the establishment of protected parks.

Everyone in this region should share and strive to meet the goals of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. Since the inception of the SDCP process over 10 years ago, the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection has advocated for cooperation between all local jurisdictions. We are happy to announce that two important regional players have adopted policies consistent with the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan.

Oro Valley and Tucson join conservation efforts

In August, the Town of Oro Valley took the bold step of adopting the Conservation Lands System as a special area policy specific to the 9,000+ acre Arroyo Grande development. The adoption of these policies will help ensure that the most valuable resources will be protected throughout the project site. But that was not all. The Council has also called for additional implementation tools of the SDCP to be studied for inclusion within the Town code and/or the Town's general plan. Although Oro Valley has not embarked upon a habitat conservation planning effort, they have voted to cooperate with Pima County's efforts to protect the biodiversity of the Sonoran Desert.

In October, the City of Tucson also approved a policy to adopt the Conservation Lands System map and apply associated guidelines in future annexations. The policy was unanimously adopted, and staff was also directed to develop policies to address conservation issues in the urban environment. These policies could protect lands such as undeveloped areas along the West Branch of the Santa Cruz River and Tumamoc Hill.

The Conservation Lands System (CLS) is a key component of the SDCP. During development of the CLS, a team of scientists from the University of Arizona and state and federal agencies, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Arizona Game and Fish Department, systematically identified biologically important habitat throughout Pima County. These areas provide habitat for a variety of threatened, endangered or vulnerable wildlife species protected under the SDCP.

During the development process, property owners typically set aside a percentage of their land as natural undisturbed open space. The percentage of open space required is dependent upon the parcels biological value. This is important because science, rather than politics, determines the amount of natural open space required in a development project. The CLS also provides guidance to ensure that natural undisturbed open space is configured in such a way as to promote wildlife movement through the property so the area can still support wildlife populations.

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The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan

In 1997, the cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl received protection under the federal Endangered Species Act. This spurred dozens of conservation and neighborhood groups to come together in early 1998 to form the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection. The Coalition's main goal was to bring sound science into land use planning as Pima County developed the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP).

The Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection's work aims to protect the Sonoran Desert's natural resources and biological diversity through our participation in the development of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. The Sonoran Desert is a unique and biologically diverse region; once this visionary plan is completed and fully implemented, it can serve as a model for other communities embarking on similar plans for biologically important and sensitive areas across the west and the country. The goal of the SDCP is to allow our community to grow without destroying the things that make Pima County special — the mountain ranges, riparian areas, habitat that supports abundant wildlife, and places where we can enjoy the solitude of nature. With the Coalition's involvement, the SDCP will make that a reality.

In October 1998, the Pima County Supervisors embarked upon the multi-year planning process of the SDCP. The Coalition has been an integral part of this process since the beginning. With the many threatened and endangered species found in the area, which was and still is experiencing massive growth, it was necessary to implement a plan that will protect the long-term survival of these species and their habitat. The county's vision exceeds that which the federal government requires under the Endangered Species Act, choosing to protect a total of 36 species under their Habitat Conservation Plan, a key aspect of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. Through the protection of habitat, and directing growth to areas of less biological importance, we will ensure that the desert remains healthy and our quality of life is protected.

The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan strives to go beyond simple regulatory compliance with the Endangered Species Act. It is a visionary plan that focuses on:

Habitat, Biological & Ecological Corridors
Cultural & Historical Preservation
Riparian Restoration
Mountain Parks
Critical & Sensitive Habitat

The Coalition's wide array of outreach, education, advocacy, grassroots activism, and conservation planning activities are focused on achieving consensus between all stakeholder groups. This will encourage local governments to act on overwhelming community support for regional conservation planning to ensure that our Sonoran Desert remains whole and viable for current and many future generations to enjoy.

***Together we have a chance
to leave a natural legacy.***

Learn more about the Coalition and how you can help support our efforts at www.sonorandesert.org

Thinking Out Loud

by Carolyn Campbell



This year, the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection celebrated its 10th Anniversary! It's hard for me to believe that the Coalition has been working to protect the wildlife and habitat of the Sonoran Desert for over a decade.

We have experienced so many successes since our first organizational meetings, where we initially formed with 19 groups. Now, ten years later, we represent 35 groups (see cover for our member list), ranging from large conservation groups to more locally-focused neighborhood associations.

Regional habitat conservation planning has long been the focus of the Coalition's work. Since Pima County embarked on the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan in 1998, we have worked with Pima County and state and federal agencies for the bulk of our work. However, through this process, we have also worked with various local governments and supported their adoption of policies to protect biodiversity.

Recently, we have experienced some exciting new developments in achieving a truly regional conservation vision. Both the Town of Oro Valley and the City of Tucson have taken steps to adopt the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan! With large tracts of land being annexed by these jurisdictions, it is imperative that we keep the biological goals and objectives of our natural preserve lands intact throughout the annexation process. If you see a Mayor or Councilmembers from either of these communities, please thank them!

On a discouraging note, State Trust Land reform continues to elude us. As you may have heard, the Secretary of State disqualified tens of thousands of signatures from the initiative that sought to preserve over 80,000 acres in Pima County, leading to its ineligibility for the 2008 ballot. But we will not let up — state lands are a crucial part of achieving meaningful conservation. Many of these lands are biologically important and should not be developed; others are important for their role in connectivity between core biological preserve areas, such as the Catalina Mountains and Tortolita Mountain Park. There is a strong possibility that an effort will be made to put another State Land conservation initiative on the 2010 ballot. Once that becomes a reality you will hear from us about a new petition drive. This time, we will be needing hundreds of volunteers to help with the effort!

We are pleased to now have a newsprint edition of our Friends of the Desert newsletter to provide you with in-depth and colorful updates about our work. This is our 2nd newsprint edition — we have heard from many of our supporters that you love this format. We will still be preparing updates to send out electronically as well, in order to keep you informed of current activities!

Finally, my heartfelt thanks to all of you, our supporters, for continuing to supply us with the necessary financial resources that it takes to accomplish our work!

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Rosemont Mine: Not a Done Deal

by Kim Beck, Coordinator, Save the Scenic Santa Ritas (SSSR)

This past spring we saw a flurry of activity, in both the community and the media, about the proposal of the Rosemont Copper Company, a subsidiary of the Augusta Resource Corporation, to use approximately 3,400 acres of National Forest land in the Santa Rita Mountains for an open-pit mine.

An open pit copper mine in this unique and diverse area is not a foregone conclusion! And the work of the community and anyone who wants to keep these public lands free from the degradation of mining is not finished!

Environmental Review

While the scoping period (first public comment period) for the Rosemont Mine is completed, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process continues. The NEPA process includes several opportunities for public input, and can take several years to complete. Under NEPA, the Forest Service is required to analyze the environmental impacts from a project on federal public land. Scoping is the first step in this process and involves environmental review of Augusta's *Mine Plan of Operations*. The Forest Service will review all scoping comments received and respond to the questions and concerns received during the scoping period. Based on these comments they will prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). This DEIS will include alternatives to the mine proposal, including a NO ACTION alternative. The public will have an opportunity to comment on this draft document once it is released.

Recently, the Forest Service made two announcements regarding the status of the Rosemont Mine proposal. This information is available on the U.S. Forest Service website at fs.fed.us/r3/coronado/Rosemont.

The first announcement addressed the invitation to the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution by the Forest Service to convene and facilitate a citizen working group to contribute to the analysis of public comments.

The second announcement released a revised memorandum of understanding between Rosemont Copper and the Forest Service, including a new timeline.

The original completion date of March 2009 for the DEIS was changed to Fall 2009. Having more time is good news, as there is still much work to be done.

Water Resources

The 1972 Clean Water Act dramatically changed how the United States protects its waterways and wetlands for the better. Now, a 2006 Supreme Court decision (called the "Rapanos decision") is moving water quality protection backwards, and in the process is throwing regulators into chaos. The Rapanos decision requires any body of water or drainage regulated by the Clean Water Act to have a connection to a "navigable" water of the United States. In May 2008, the Santa Cruz River was declared navigable, requiring the Rosemont Mine to get additional permits and go through additional reviews on their impacts to water resources, but the designation was suspended in July by the Army Corps of Engineers, "for review." To sum it up, without that designation, waterways connected to the Santa Cruz River, including those that will be impacted by the Rosemont Mine, could lose protection under the Clean Water Act.

In addition, Augusta's plans for their water supply would affect both sides of the Santa Rita Mountains. They plan to pump groundwater from Sahuarita and pipe it over the Santa Ritas to the mine. This would detrimentally impact both the Santa Cruz aquifer and the Davidson/Cienega watershed.

Opposition to the mine is more widespread than ever. Many elected officials and all government bodies in the region oppose the Rosemont Project. Endorsements from groups to support our efforts have continued to grow, with over fifty groups representing more than 50,000 members signed on.

YOU can still make a difference! Get your family, friends, neighbors, group members and co-workers involved! Email kim@scenicsantaritas.org or call 495.4339 for an endorsement form or to have Save the Scenic Santa Ritas make a presentation to your group. Visit www.scenicsantaritas.org for updates and ways you can help stop this mine.



Rosemont Ranch in the beautiful Santa Rita Mountains. Photo courtesy of Trevor Hare.

Conservation Acquisition Program Updated to Reflect New Science

When Pima County voters approved over \$174 million to buy and preserve open space in 2004, a map identifying all eligible lands was also adopted. \$112 million was allocated for *Habitat Protection Priority* lands, identified based upon their high biological value, \$37.3 million was allocated to scenic *Community Open Space* parcels, \$15 million was allocated for local jurisdictional requests, and \$10 million went to prevent urban encroachment of Davis Monthan. The *Habitat Protection Priorities* are a key component to implementing the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. *Community Open Space parcels* include requests from other jurisdictions, such as the City of Tucson, and areas that have been identified as important to the community such as Painted Hills and Tumamoc Hill in the Tucson Mountains, and Colossal Cave expansion in the Rincon Valley.

Habitat Protection Priorities:

Since the Habitat Protection Priorities were developed in 2003, new scientific information has become available. Additional lands were identified through scientific inventory processes; lands that contain important grasslands, springs and streams, and/or provide habitat for key wildlife species and contribute to landscape connectivity to facilitate wildlife movement. Through these inventories, scientists from The Nature Conservancy, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and Pima County identified approximately 50,000 acres of additional land as priorities for acquisition.

A key tenet of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan is to utilize the “best available science,” and as such was developed to be adaptive to changes.

Because Habitat Protection Priorities are so important to fulfilling the goals of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, the Conservation Acquisition Commission recognizes the value of springs, streams, and grasslands to the preserve system.

Community Open Space:

Additional Community Open Space parcels were recommended by the Conservation Acquisition Commission for inclusion for in the upcoming 2009 open space bond election. These lands, totaling 31,550 acres, were identified by community members and neighborhood groups throughout Pima County, and will be considered by the Bond Advisory Committee during their

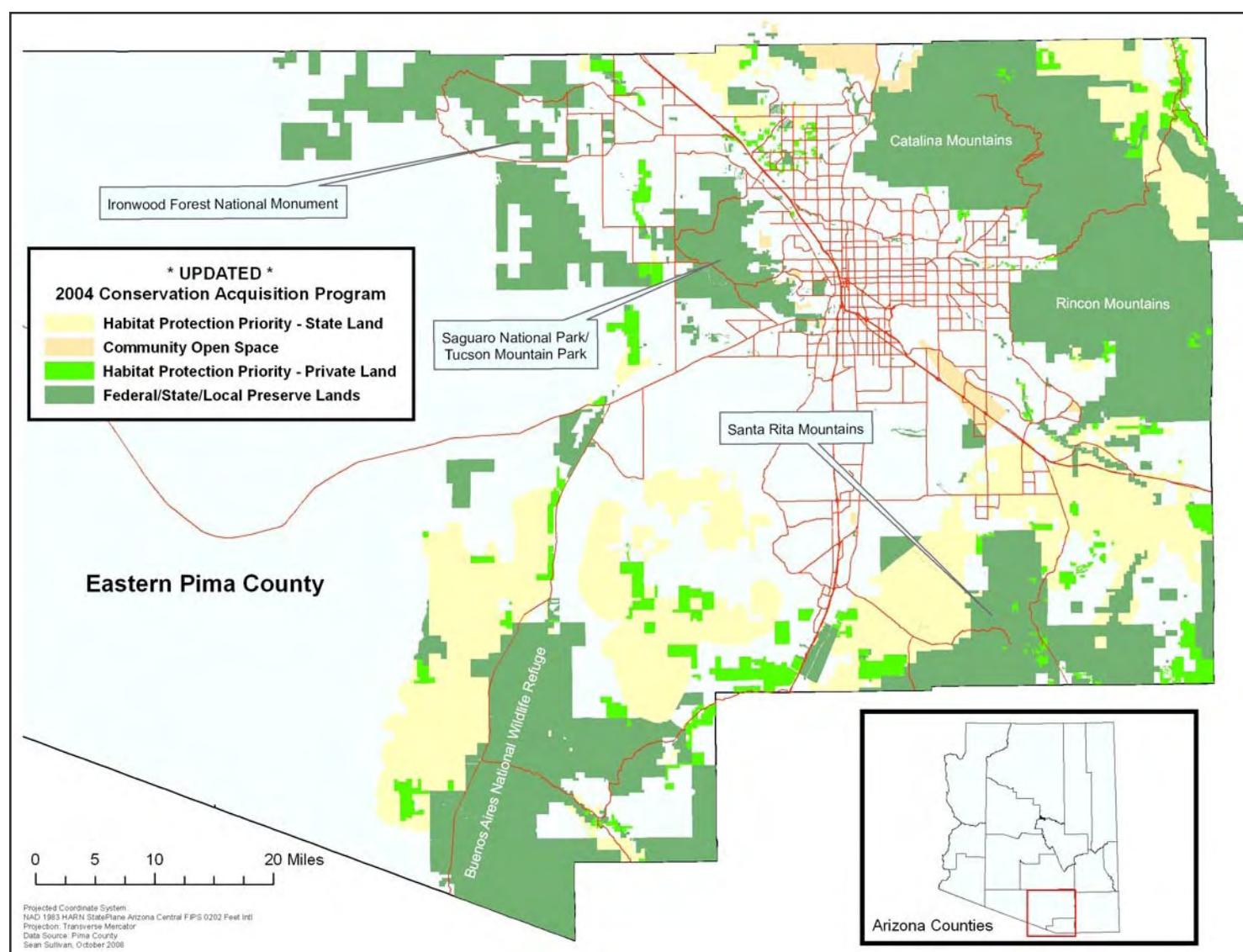
deliberations this fall. New properties in this category include land surrounding “A” Mountain (Sentinel Peak), the West Desert Preserve in Green Valley, Saguaro National Park (East & West) expansion lands, and others.

The value of the lands identified in both the Community Open Space and Habitat Protection Priorities categories far exceeds the amount of money that was approved in the 2004 bond election, and will necessitate multiple future bond elections to complete our vision of protected open space. Even with the passage of \$285 million for conservation acquisition in the next bond election, there will be more land deserving of protection than what can be purchased. To date, the program has been extremely successful and deserves continued support from the community.

2004 Conservation Acquisition Program Status—\$174.3 million

| Categories | Beginning Authorization* | Number of Acquisitions | Remaining Authorization* | Percentage Remaining |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Community Open Space | \$37.3 | 15 | \$18 | 48% |
| Jurisdictional Requests | \$15 | 4 | \$12.1 | 81% |
| Habitat Protection Priorities | \$112 | 21 | \$56.7 | 51% |
| Davis-Monthan Encroachment | \$10 | 14 | \$2.2 | 22% |
| TOTAL | \$174.3 | 54 | \$89 | 51% |

* In millions



2009 Open Space Bond Preparation Moves Forward

In the fall of 2006 various citizen committees began developing recommendations for a 2008 Pima County Bond election. Bond programs are utilized to fund public programs such as affordable housing, historic preservation, neighborhood reinvestment, flood control, parks and recreation, and conservation land (open space) acquisition. In July of 2008 the Pima County Board of Supervisors voted to postpone the bond election until November of 2009 for a variety of factors, particularly because bonds approved in 2008 would not have been sold until 2010 or 2011. Projects would not have been completed until after that time. Therefore, postponing the election for one year had no impact on the time frame for the sale of bonds and the completion of projects.

The Pima County Bond Advisory Committee, which is charged with recommending a final package to the Supervisors, met in September to resume the process the next Bond Election, which is scheduled to be held in November. The committee is comprised of various community stakeholders, representatives from local towns and the cities, and representatives of the Tohono O'odham Nation and Pascua Yaqui tribes. The Executive Director of the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection serves as Vice Chair of the Committee.

In the 2004 bond election, Pima County voters overwhelmingly approved over \$174 million for the acquisition of conservation lands. The acquisition of biologically important lands helps to protect the natural heritage of the Sonoran Desert for future generations and also provides important habitat for many types of wildlife. Since 2004 the County has spent over \$77 million of bond funding for conservation. Various acquisitions are currently under negotiation and it is likely that the remaining funds will be spent prior to November 2009. Nationwide, there are very few communities that have shown the commitment to protecting natural areas like we in Pima County have.

The Conservation Acquisition Commission, a citizen committee that oversees the conservation acquisition program, has recommended an allocation of \$285 million for conservation in the 2009 bond program.

The Coalition will work with the Bond Advisory Committee and the Pima County Board of Supervisors to put to approve the full \$285 million for inclusion on the November 3, 2009 ballot to continue the conservation land acquisition program. While Pima County has successfully conserved over 26,000 acres since 2004, there are still hundreds of thousands of acres of land that are too important to lose to development.

TIMELINE:

Spring 2007–Spring 2008: Subcommittees of the Bond Advisory Committee held a number of meetings to gather public input on projects. Subcommittees finalized recommendations on projects, but were directed by the County Administrator to further pare down the project list.

July 2008: The Board of Supervisors voted to move ahead with planning for a November 2009 bond election.

October 2008: The Bond Advisory Committee (BAC) approved a process for preparing a list of projects for a 2009 bond program. The BAC asked the Pima County Administrator to return in November of 2008 with a prioritized recommendation for specific projects and dollar amounts.

Winter–Spring 2009: The Bond Advisory Committee will deliberate on bond project proposals and make a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors on the dollar amount of the entire package and the projects to be included. A recommendation to the Board of Supervisors could be made to the Board as soon as February 2009.

Summer 2009: The Board of Supervisors calls for the bond election by July 2009. The bond ordinance is drafted and noticed to the public.

October 1, 2009: Early voting begins

November 3, 2009: Election Day



**Send to CSDP at
300 E University
Blvd., #120,
Tucson AZ 85705**

I would like to make a contribution to the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection of:

\$50 \$75 \$100 \$250 \$500 Other: _____

The Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection is a tax-exempt nonprofit organization operating under a 501(c)(3) umbrella. All donations to the Coalition are tax deductible to the maximum extent allowed by law. Your contribution will help us continue our innovative environmental campaigns that are helping to preserve our irreplaceable natural treasures, save endangered and threatened wildlife, and protect this fragile desert environment we call home.

Support the Coalition by Becoming a Monthly Donor

One of the easiest ways to become a Sonoran Desert activist is to become a monthly donor to the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection. Becoming a monthly donor will allow you to provide a steady stream of support for local conservation efforts. Now more than ever, we need support from people like you!

The Coalition has been at the forefront of local conservation planning, advocating for measures that give the strongest protections to our important native habitats and natural resources.

When you contribute to the Coalition, you help us continue our innovative environmental campaigns that are helping to preserve our irreplaceable natural treasures, save endangered and threatened wildlife, and protect this fragile desert environment. And you can be sure that your voice will be heard

through our grassroots action on the issues that matter to you most.

The Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection is a tax-exempt nonprofit organization operating under the 501(c)(3) status of Sky Island Alliance. All donations to the Coalition are tax deductible to the maximum extent allowed by law.

Contact the Coalition office (520.388.9925) to become a monthly donor or simply visit www.sonorandesert.org and click on **Donate Now**. This paperless giving option reduces fundraising costs by eliminating the need to mail supporter renewals. Your support ensures that our work will continue to protect the unique and diverse plant and wildlife found within our Sonoran Desert home.

Pick up the Perfect Holiday Gift and Support the Coalition

Short Sleeve T: A classic. Perfect for the warm, dog days of late Summer and Fall, and an inspiration for your next desert adventure! These quality cotton T-shirts sport a bold Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection logo on the front, and a desert mountain lion next to words of wisdom by Tucson's own Charles Bowden across the back. 100% unbleached organic cotton construction is naturally soft, breathable and comfortable. Available in sizes SMALL through X-LARGE for only \$10.00 includes shipping and handling.



Long Sleeve T: Perfect for the cooler days of Autumn and Winter, these quality cotton T-shirts sport a bold Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection logo on the front, and across the shoulders, in Spanish, reads: *Un Amigo del Desierto es un Amigo Mio* (A Friend of the Desert is a Friend of Mine). 100% unbleached organic cotton construction is naturally soft, breathable and comfortable. Available in sizes LARGE to X-LARGE for only \$12.00 includes shipping and handling. (While Supplies Last.)



Send to: CSDP, 300 E University Blvd., Suite 120, Tucson, AZ 85705

| Order Form | quantity | | total |
|----------------------------|----------|-------------|-------|
| Short Sleeve | | | |
| Small | _____ x | \$10 each = | _____ |
| Medium | _____ x | \$10 each = | _____ |
| Large | _____ x | \$10 each = | _____ |
| X-Large | _____ x | \$10 each = | _____ |
| Long Sleeve | | | |
| Large | _____ x | \$12 each = | _____ |
| X-Large | _____ x | \$12 each = | _____ |
| Total \$ Enclosed = | | | _____ |

Little T's Haiku Corner

Erosion Arroyos can heal
 Grass and old oaks bind soil
 Fat turkeys love it

Earth Mother she cries out
 We do hear you and we will act
 Father ignore us

Snake The coachwhip is long
 and some are thicker than others
 depends on prey size

Universal Knowledge is nature
 Nature just is

Wildflower Pissed
 No Love for Me



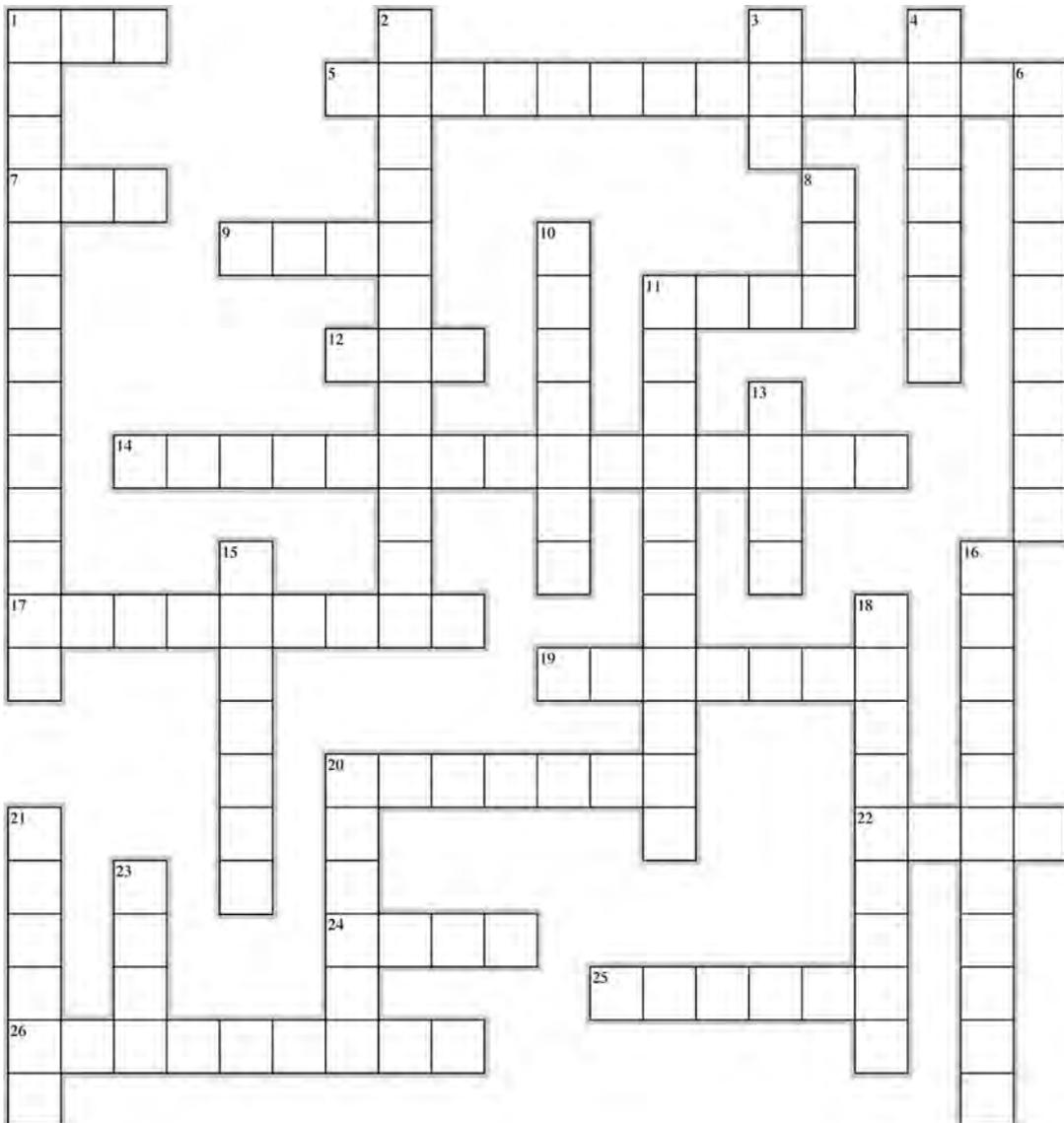
Captured Critters

Jack Rabbit foraging on desert fruit, photo by Diane Ensign.
Do you have a photo of Sonoran Desert wildlife? Please send your photos to Sean@sonorandesert.org for publication in *Friends of the Desert!*



Cartoon courtesy of Rand Carlson.

Sonoran Desert Crossword



Across

1. Summertime
5. Park in Pima Co.
7. Young kit fox
9. Jesuit, or Tucson street
11. Nationally recognized conservation plan, acronym
12. ___ & long.
14. Home of l'itoi
17. Spring at the foot of a black mountain
19. Santa Cruz tributary
20. Columnar cactus
22. Amount of yearly rainfall in Tucson from monsoons, roughly
24. A Clinton legacy, acronym
25. Night bloomer
26. Bond use

Down

1. Student of turtles, lizards, etc...
2. Desert oasis at OPCNM
3. Life source
4. ___ quail
6. tasty cactus pads, Span.
8. Jack rabbit M.O.
10. New World "pig"
11. Defend, for a horned toad
13. ___ acacia
15. Congressman/basketball star
16. Invasive grass
18. Tucson basin groundwater flow direction
20. Symbiotic moth and cactus
21. Old Pueblo
23. Number of seasons in Sonoran Desert

EclipseCrossword.com

Thanks to our Volunteer JP for providing us with this crossword puzzle! Feel free to send us your original crosswords for publication. Send to sean@sonorandesert.org.

Ecological Monitoring in Pima County: Tracking Progress of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan

by Brian Powell, Program Manager, Pima County Office of Conservation Science and Environmental Policy. Brian.powell@pima.gov

The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP) is an innovative and comprehensive strategy to preserve the biological diversity and cultural heritage of Pima County in response to human population growth. Pima County is now implementing the SDCP through a host of conservation measures including purchase and lease of open space, development set asides, and conservation ordinances. The Pima County Multi-species Conservation Plan (MSCP) is an important component of the SDCP; it will ensure that development-related activities comply with the Endangered Species Act through issuance of a section 10 “incidental take” permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. To complete the MSCP package, Pima County is now in the process of developing the Pima County Ecological Monitoring Program (PCEMP).

Monitoring for Conservation

Ecological monitoring is one of the most challenging endeavors in ecology and natural resource management. Single-species monitoring can be expensive, and the number and breadth of species covered under most MSCPs, like that being developed for Pima County, creates a financial burden if the goal is to effectively track population trends. The high cost and management challenges posed by monitoring multiple species require a new paradigm for which Pima County is at the forefront. In particular, a major focus of the approach being advocated for the PCEMP involves monitoring a broad suite of “indicators” (environmental characteristics) that are known to influence biodiversity across the entire county. Indicators include climate, vegetation, water quality and quantity, and land use and fragmentation (Figure 1). Monitoring a select group of these indicators, along with targeted monitoring of threatened and endangered species, will form the foundation of the Pima County program.

Thanks in part to an Endangered Species Act section 6 grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the design team, which includes Pima County staff and University of Arizona and Colorado State University cooperators, have now embarked on a design process to identify the indicators that hold the most promise for inclusion into the program. This is no small task because the choice

of which indicators to adopt is perhaps the most important decision in the development of a monitoring program. Choosing among dozens of potential indicators is best done in an explicit and transparent manner, which is the approach currently being undertaken for the PCEMP.

Environmental systems are inherently complex and conceptual models provide an opportunity to articulate physical, chemical, and biological interrelationships and their response to environmental change. The conceptual model currently being developed for the PCEMP provides a means to link the habitat needs of a diverse range of species in Pima County to their habitat components, such as vegetation, water, and soils. These habitat components are, in turn, affected by threats (e.g., development, non-native species) and ecosystem processes (e.g., nutrient cycling, groundwater recharge). The approach we are taking recognizes and articulates the important interconnectedness among these elements. Our next step in the design process is to use this information to choose those indicators that have the best chance of informing us of meaningful environmental changes, but that are also relatively inexpensive to monitor. We anticipate that this work will be completed in the spring of 2009.

See our website for the latest reports and newsletters:
www.pima.gov/CMO/SDCP/Monitoring/index.html

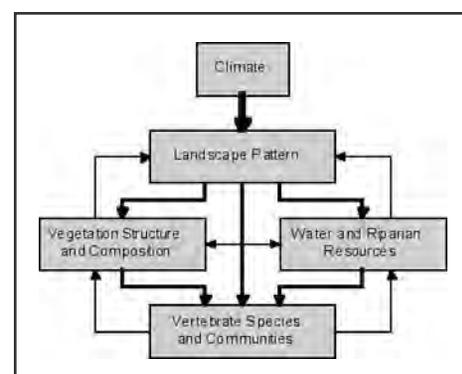


Figure 1. Relationship among environmental components highlights the importance of creating a comprehensive monitoring program.

Regional Conservation Efforts Take Two Giant Steps! continued from cover

While some local communities are taking steps towards increased habitat conservation, specific areas of regional conservation coordination are still lacking. These include:

- Ⓒ Adoption of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan by *ALL* local jurisdictions, including integration of the Conservation Lands System (CLS) into local comprehensive and general plans.
- Ⓒ Uniform and coordinated environmental ordinances, including ordinances related to native plant protection, environmentally sensitive roadway design, invasive species eradication, and wash and riparian habitat protection.
- Ⓒ Comprehensive coordination on the protection of critical landscape linkages. These linkages, which allow wildlife to move through the landscape, often cross jurisdictional boundaries. Land use decisions must be made to maintain, and in some instances enhance, the functionality of these linkages.

In addition, the City of Tucson is concurrently working on two Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs). These plans are similar to the Multi-Species Conservation Plan portion of the SDCP which seeks to comply with the federal Endangered Species Act. The HCPs are being designed for Tucson Water lands in the Avra Valley area, and for the Greater Southlands area south of I-10. The Avra Valley HCP provides conservation measures for seven species. The Southlands HCP will cover 14 species and is still undergoing development. Adopting the Conservation Lands System will ensure that the SDCP does not erode when land is annexed into the City of Tucson.

Regional coordination: What's missing?

We are hopeful that recent actions by Tucson and Oro Valley will encourage additional measures to ensure regional conservation. There is a need for other jurisdictions, such as the Town of Marana, to adopt the same uniform land use policies. The Town of Marana is currently in the final phases of

OPINION

Now is the Ideal Time for Buying Open Space

by Bill Roe. Originally published 10.28.2008 and reprinted with permission of the Arizona Daily Star and Bill Roe.

Four years ago, voters said "yes" to protecting our land, air and water. Voters authorized spending \$174 million for lands receiving protection under the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. More than 65 percent of voters agreed that preserving native plants and animals, protecting our watersheds and enhancing the quality of life was money well spent.

A candidate quoted in the October 20 Arizona Daily Star suggested that the county delay land purchases because of the economic downturn. As chairman of the Pima County Conservation Acquisition Commission, I disagree.

Land prices are lower than they've been in years, allowing public dollars to buy more for less. It is not in the public interest to delay land purchases until prices go higher. The argument was made that putting off purchases will save taxpayers money, a classic case of being penny wise and pound foolish. As the Star pointed out, the owner of a \$200,000 home now pays roughly 30 cents a day (open space is only a small part) to service all county debt. Postponing purchases, residents may save a very small amount today. Land values will certainly increase; future debt costs will be higher. As stewards of taxpayers' money, the Pima County Board of Supervisors understands the best time to buy is when prices are down, saving the taxpayers millions.

I'm pleased to report that the county has acquired more than 26,000 acres since 2004, along with managing an additional 116,000 acres of grazing lands for conservation. As stewards of preserving our quality of life, we continue to recommend sound decisions implementing the will of the voters.

Consistent with the voters' mandate, we have purchased properties that expand public recreation areas, protect Tucson's water supply, conserve habitat for native plants and wildlife, conserve ranching and farming as a traditional economic use of the land and a local food supply, preserve irreplaceable archaeological and cultural resources, and prevent development in areas that would be costly to taxpayers to serve with infrastructure.

The argument was made that State Trust land should be seen as already protected. That argument ignores recent history. The Land Department is planning to offer 30,000 acres north of Oro Valley, east of Sahuarita and southeast of Tucson for urban development. The Land Department is mandated to obtain the highest return for State Trust lands.

Pima County's open space bond program has an unprecedented amount of oversight. The public has ample opportunity to provide comments regarding the purchase of properties. The acquisition commission meets most months and oversees every dollar spent.

The Bond Advisory Committee and the Board of Supervisors are provided with regular status reports. We have acted on the basis of what voters approved.

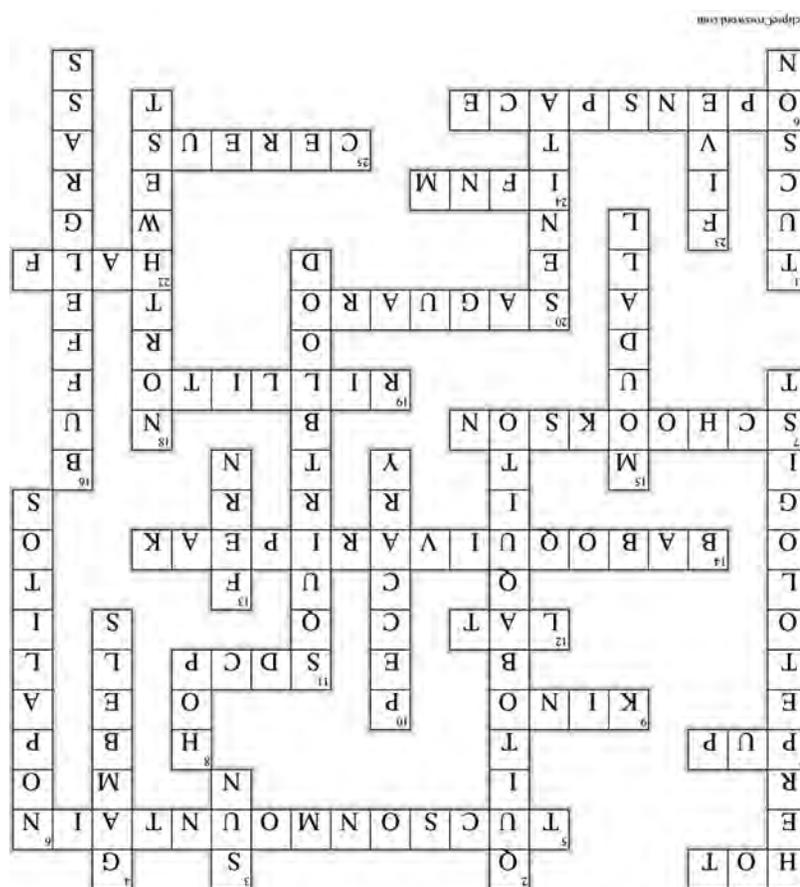
To do otherwise or slow the implementation process in the interest of a false savings would be a violation of the public trust.

The 2004 open space bond election was the first step in implementing the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. Future steps will be needed.

Regional Conservation Efforts *continued*

developing their Habitat Conservation Plan. The conservation of land within Marana town limits is extremely important if we are to successfully protect the biodiversity of the region. Although Marana is currently developing an HCP, for instance, they have yet to adopt interim conservation measures or worked toward a truly complementary regional conservation strategy.

Cooperation between all communities within Pima County is necessary to protect what makes this area so special and unique. Wildlife cannot tell the difference between Pima County and Marana; conservation policies should be consistent across jurisdictional lines. We have an opportunity to work together throughout the region to protect diversity of the Sonoran Desert for future generations to enjoy!



Updates

Arroyo Grande: Oro Valley is stepping up to the plate

In our last newsletter (which can be found at www.sonorandesert.org) we alerted you to a 9,000+ acre development proposed by the Arizona State Land Department north of Oro Valley. The State Land Department is proposing that the Town of Oro Valley annex the land into their Town limits. The Coalition is concerned about this development for a number of reasons. Foremost, the area has been designated by the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP) as a *Critical Landscape Linkage* between the Catalina Mountains and the Tortolita Mountains and provides habitat for a variety of wildlife species. Connectivity is a critical issue in the establishment and protection of preserve areas.

In particular, the mountain ranges surrounding the Tucson urban area are in danger of becoming isolated, meaning that many of the species in the various ranges will be extirpated, or lost, from our region. Protecting the linkage within Arroyo Grande will ensure that the Tortolita and Catalina Mountains do not become isolated from one another.



Southeast view of Arroyo Grande from Pinal County. Photo courtesy the Northwest Explorer.

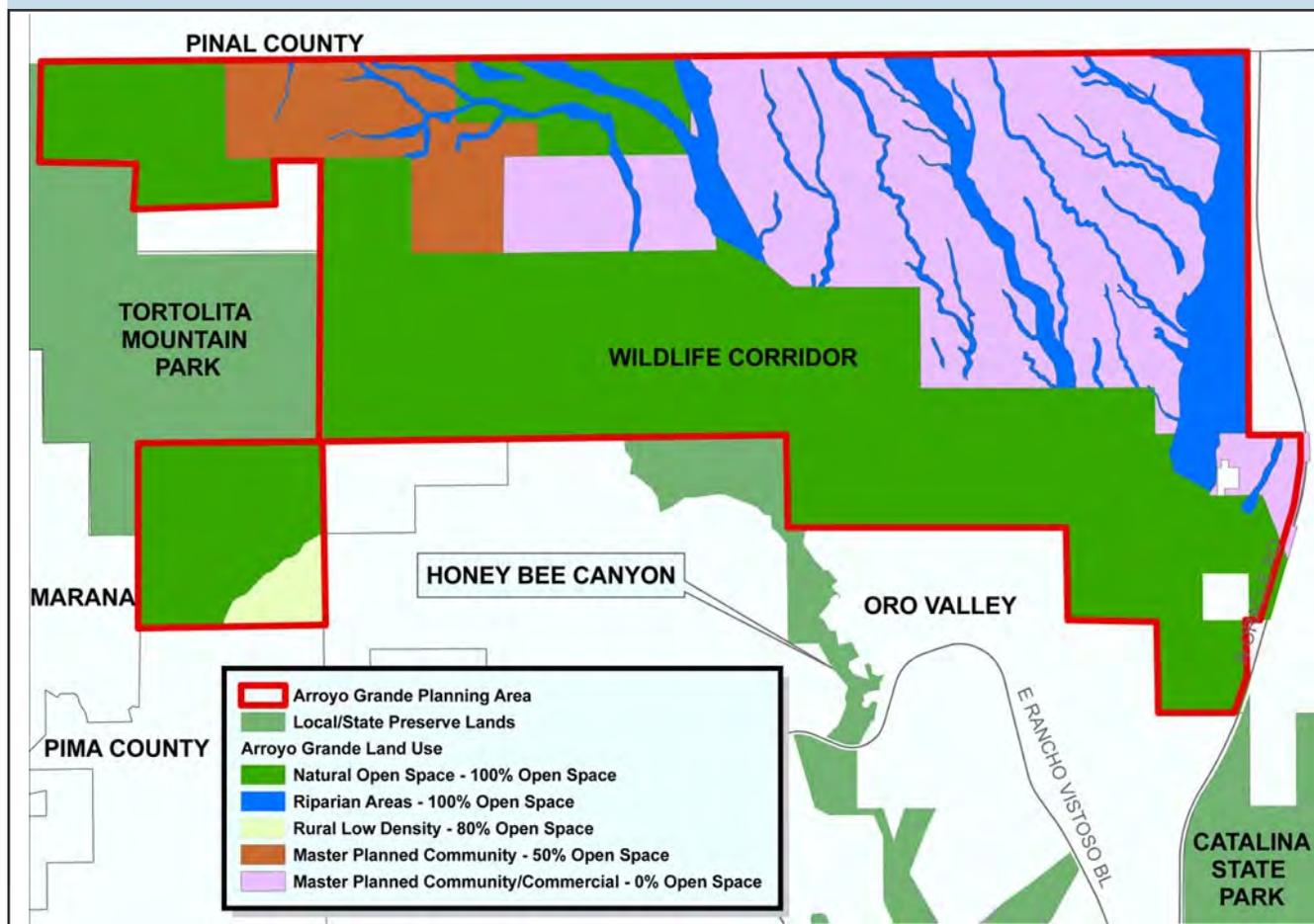
Prior to annexation into the Town, the Coalition requested that a number of concerns be addressed by the Town of Oro Valley. We are happy to report that a majority of those issues have been addressed. Oro Valley has adopted the SDCP's Conservation Lands System, in order that consistent conservation guidelines apply and that the most important biological resources within the Arroyo Grande planning area will be protected. Natural undisturbed open space has

been clearly identified, is located in common areas rather than in back yards, and provides a buffer to the already protected Tortolita Mountain Park. Furthermore, and importantly, a kilometer-wide wildlife linkage is proposed for protection, utilizing a corridor design created by Dr. Paul Beier, a researcher at Northern Arizona University specializing in wildlife connectivity.

Dr. Beier is currently analyzing a number of wildlife linkages throughout the state and named this area to be one of the most critical for protection. Information on this and other corridor designs can be found at: <http://www.corridordesign.org/arizona/>

The Coalition continues to work with Oro Valley on issues concerning Arroyo Grande, such as adopting a management plan for the natural undisturbed open space, identifying a funding source for management, and developing a joint proposal with Pima County, the AZ Department of Transportation, and the AZ Game and Fish Department to construct wildlife crossing structures along State Route 77 / Oracle Road.

This proposed development has come a long way from the initial submittal. The collaborative effort between the Coalition, Oro Valley, Pima County, and the State Land Department has so far been a success. This type of collaboration is extremely important since currently there are no



other options to conserve State Trust Land other than competing with developers at public auction.

The final approval of the General Plan amendment incorporating the Conservation Lands System guidelines is scheduled for November 19th at the Oro Valley Town Council Chambers. If approved, the next steps are annexation and rezoning of the Arroyo Grande area. The annexation is scheduled for completion in 2009, with rezoning and sale of the entire 9000+ acres occurring sometime thereafter.

2004 Bond Conservation Acquisition Update

In our last newsletter, we spotlighted on a few of the recent open space acquisitions that Pima County has made, and provided a brief summary of the program's successes thus far. The County has now spent \$78 million to acquire 26,118 acres of private land and manages 116,800 acres of State Trust Land leases for conservation. Various acquisitions are under negotiation and it is likely that the remaining \$86.5 million will be spent in the near future. The two most recent acquisitions include an 80-acre parcel near the Tucson Mountains and the 290-acre Cochie Canyon Property in the Tortolita Mountains.

The 80-acre Tucson Mountains property was bought in June 2008. It is home to gently rolling



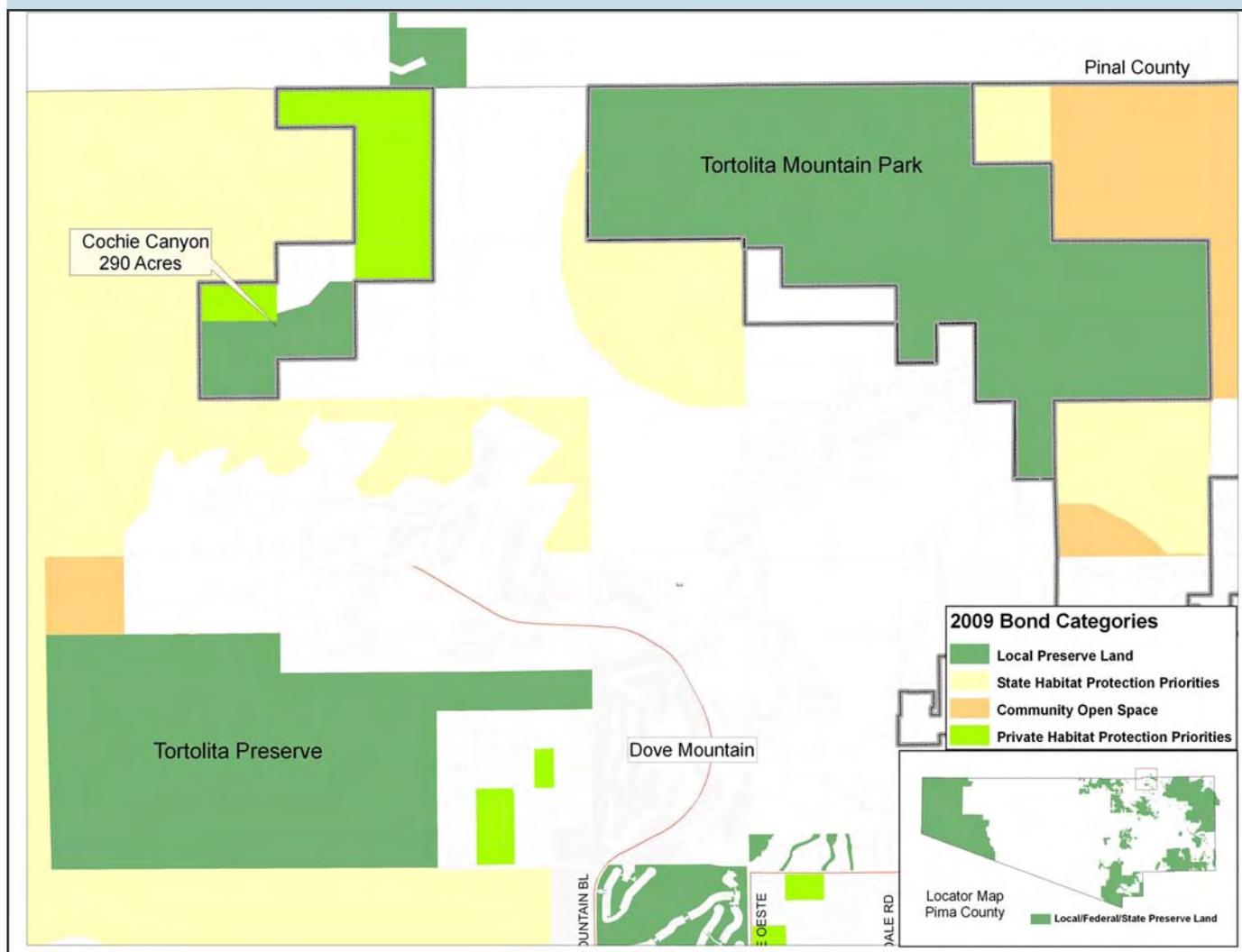
Cochie Canyon. Photo courtesy Barbara Garrison, Senior Wildlife Biologist, EPG, Inc.

hills, saguaros, and serves as a scenic gateway to Tucson Mountain Park along 36th Street. A portion of the property also contains the San Juan Wash which flows into the West Branch of the Santa Cruz River. Prior to acquisition, it was planned to be fully developed with little natural open space left. This acquisition came "just in the nick of time!"

The 290-acre Cochie Canyon property lies within the Tortolita Mountains. This highly developable property was acquired for conservation in May 2008. The property is comprised of rocky mountain slopes, a canyon bottom, with various washes flowing through. Mixed cacti and ironwood trees, including some specimens that are likely to be over 1,000 years old, dot the property. Cochie Canyon provides habitat for a

number of the wildlife species protected under the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. While the NW metro area continues to pose challenges to achieving conservation, the Cochie Canyon acquisition provides a unique opportunity to protect this rugged and biologically diverse area.

For more information on recent acquisitions, see a PDF version of our last newsletter on the web at: www.sonorandesert.org/uploads/files/web_version_192. We are also working on updating a section of our website that will be dedicated to the Conservation Acquisition Program. We will let you know when it has been completed.





Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection

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On the Horizon *(look for more in-depth coverage of this topic in the next Friends of the Desert issue)*

Preserving the Quality of Your Water: Time to Act *by Paul Green and Christina McVie, Tucson Audubon Society*

As someone concerned about the status, quality and security of wildlife habitats and natural areas in the Southwest, you may not have paid too much attention when on May 23, 2008, the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) published their finding that two stretches of the Santa Cruz River were 'a traditional navigable waterway'. You may not even have been aware when, some weeks later, the Corps removed details of that decision from their website.

While this may seem rather arcane, it may have a tremendous influence on the quality of your life in southern Arizona. Since a significant Supreme Court ruling in 2006, watercourses bearing the status of "traditional navigable waterway" are ensured protection under the federal Clean Water Act. If a watercourse does not have the navigable waterway designation, it does not have the highest level of protection, hence the relevance of the designation to the 54 miles of the Santa Cruz River between Tubac and the Pinal County line.

The Clean Water Act, originally enacted in 1972, is one of several federal environmental statutes that make up environmental law, aimed at defending and protecting particular aspects of our natural environment, and promoting public health and welfare. The Clean Water Act is dedicated to the defense and protection of our nation's water, and is designed to ensure that the water retains the correct balance in terms of its physical, biological and chemical makeup.

The Santa Cruz navigability designation could require the proposed Rosemont mine and other mines or developments to demonstrate they would not block flows in Davidson Canyon and other streambeds that enter the Santa Cruz north of the Roger Road Wastewater Plant, one of the two study areas. So why are our waterways not being protected from developments that are detrimental to our natural environment?

The controversial 2006 Rapanos Supreme Court plurality decision (4-1-4) resulted in leaving

authority of the Clean Water Act in question throughout the country, but particularly in the arid Southwest. The Rapanos decision required a "significant nexus" (or connection) to a navigable water of the United States to be shown in order for the authority of the Clean Water Act to apply. As a result, the Rapanos decision has left Arizona and other western states uncertain of their authority to regulate pollution in streambeds that do not have a perennial flow. Such requirements did not exist from 1975 until the 2006 Rapanos decision.

There is a solution on the horizon. The Clean Water Restoration Act seeks to clarify jurisdiction issues and protect the washes and rivers in the arid southwest. The bill was introduced by Representative James Oberstar of Minnesota and is co-sponsored by Representative Raul Grijalva. This issue must be resolved by Congress soon. Our watersheds depend on it.