

Issue 41 Summer 2011

A project of the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection in Pima County, Arizona
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Photos above by Bob Wenrick

- Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest
- Arizona League of Conservation Voters Education Fund
- Arizona Native Plant Society
- Bat Conservation International
- Center for Biological Diversity
- Center for Environmental Connections
- Center for Environmental Ethics
- Defenders of Wildlife
- Desert Watch
- Drylands Institute
- Empire Fagan Coalition
- Environmental and Cultural Conservation Organization
- Environmental Law Society
- Friends of Cabeza Prieta
- Friends of Ironwood Forest
- Friends of Saguaro National Park
- Friends of Tortolita
- Gates Pass Area
- Neighborhood Association
- Neighborhood Coalition of Greater Tucson
- Northwest Neighborhoods Alliance
- Oro Valley Neighborhood Coalition
- Protect Land and Neighborhoods
- Safford Peak Watershed Education Team
- Save the Scenic Santa Ritas
- Sierra Club—Grand Canyon Chapter
- Sierra Club—Rincon Group
- Silverbell Mountain Alliance
- Sky Island Alliance
- Sky Island Watch
- Society of Ecological Restoration
- Sonoran Arthropod Studies Institute
- Sonoran Permaculture Guild
- Southwestern Biological Institute
- Tortolita Homeowners Association
- Tucson Audubon Society
- Tucson Herpetological Society
- Tucson Mountains Association
- Wildlands Network
- Women for Sustainable Technologies

Renewable Energy: Smart from the Start Conservation Lands Must Be Protected

by Matt Clark, Southwest Representative, Defenders of Wildlife

For several decades now, the conservation community has been pounding the drum that America needs to transition away from reliance on fossil fuels to domestically-produced, clean, renewable energy sources. The advancement of climate science, and the realization of the magnitude of the threats posed by rapid climate change, have engaged governments at all levels to enact policies and programs in an effort to tackle this monumental challenge. This newfound urgency to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions produced by the energy sector has quickened the tempo and amplified the volume of the renewable energy drumbeat, especially in states that have adopted their own ambitious renewable energy standards and in the neighboring states that may export energy to help achieve those standards. Arizona is located in a crucial geographical location for both renewable energy production and transmission, and therefore renewable energy will be a growing industry that will play a strong role in shaping the future of Arizona's diverse and largely rural landscape. The question is, can we avoid the costly mistakes of poorly planned energy development patterns of the past and instead do it "smart from the start" this time around?

Much like oil and gas drilling, renewable energy projects are being proposed across vast areas of our shared public lands. It is important for the public and decision makers to understand that solar, wind and geothermal projects have their own unique set of environmental impacts, from needing to de-vegetate and fence-off thousands of acres of land and to construct hundreds of miles of new transmission infrastructure, to requiring large amounts of water for use in power plant cooling and washing solar mirrors or photovoltaic panels. The location, scale and type of technology proposed by a given renewable energy project will determine if it is truly any better and more sustainable than other conventional power plants.

Solar farm proposals are sprouting up like daisies — and some of them smack dab in the middle of

intact and ecologically sensitive habitats on public lands. In an attempt to contend with a literal "gold rush" of solar applications, the Bureau of Land Management – in conjunction with the Department of Energy – has undertaken a programmatic environmental impact statement in six Western states to establish the framework for its new solar energy development program. The Draft EIS, released earlier this year, produced two dramatically different alternatives. The BLM's "preferred alternative" would open up nearly 22 million acres of public land to new solar facility applications. This "kitchen sink" of identified public lands includes expansive tracts of wild lands containing sensitive wildlife habitat, wilderness quality lands and cultural resources. BLM's second alternative proposes to focus solar development on a much more discrete set of "solar energy zones" (670,000 acres). By and

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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; as this visionary plan is 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 many threatened and endangered species found in our area, which was and still is experiencing massive growth, it is 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 49 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:

- **Critical Habitats & Biological Corridors**
- **Cultural Resources**
- **Riparian Protection**
- **Mountain Parks & Natural Preserves**
- **Ranch Conservation**

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

I recently gave the keynote talk at Environmental Lobby Day at the State Legislature. This year's theme was *Protecting Arizona's Environment: The Next 100 Years* and I was asked to talk about the accomplishments over our first hundred years as a State. As I recalled key environmental protections, I felt very encouraged. In 1980 we saw passage of Arizona's Groundwater Management Code, a major landmark in Arizona's efforts to preserve our most vital natural resource. This was an innovative law establishing a comprehensive and effective approach to groundwater management, including the creation of the Arizona Department of Water Resources. Four years later, the Arizona Wilderness Act of 1984 was passed by Congress, adding over one million acres of federal forest land and doubling the amount of wilderness in Arizona since the federal Wilderness Act was adopted in 1964.



The Arizona Environmental Quality Act was passed in 1985, establishing the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality as a separate, cabinet-level agency to administer all of Arizona's environmental protection programs. The same legislation established a comprehensive groundwater protection program and the state's Water Quality Assurance Revolving Fund, to identify, assess and remediate contaminated sites with the potential to impact public health or groundwater.

More wilderness legislation was adopted by Congress in 1990. The Arizona Desert Wilderness Act protected more than two million acres of Federal Bureau of Land Management land from development. With the 1990 Act, there are now 4.5 million acres of federal wilderness in Arizona. Arizona voters also created the Heritage Fund in 1990, designating up to \$10 million a year from lottery ticket sales for the conservation and protection of the state's wildlife and natural areas.

And of course, we embarked upon the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan in 1998, and it is guiding regional efforts to conserve the most environmentally-sensitive lands and most precious resources for future generations of Pima County residents to enjoy. In Pima County, we have much to celebrate — we have government leadership, money for acquisition, over two hundred thousand acres protected thus far, and the hammer of the Endangered Species Act.

As well, local funding efforts throughout the state — in counties and municipalities — have been approved by voters, bringing in millions of dollars for open space funding. The residents of Arizona have spoken loudly that they want their tax dollars to be spent protecting open space. In Pima County, our last two open space bonds (1997 and 2004) received more votes than any other general obligation bond question on the ballot. And in 2006 voters county-wide approved \$45 million for transportation-related wildlife infrastructure as part of the larger Regional Transportation Authority plan.

In these times, when it so easy to get discouraged because of budget crises and the lack of new conservation initiatives coming from the State Legislature, let's all pause and celebrate. We have huge successes to enjoy, and it's because many of you, and activists before you, worked hard and spoke loudly for conservation. Let's keep doing it!



View of Catalina State Park and the Santa Catalina Mountains from one of the wildlife crossing underpass sites just off of State Route 77

Planning for SR77 Wildlife Crossings Moves Forward

by Kathleen Kennedy

It has now been over a year since the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) Board approved \$8.2 million in funding for two underpasses and one overpass along Oracle Road specifically designed and dedicated for wildlife movement. The crossings will be the first of their kind in southern Arizona and the Coalition remains intimately involved with the continued planning for their construction. These are exciting times for wildlife linkages in the Sonoran Desert!

Background

In 2006, as part of the larger RTA program, Pima County voters approved \$45 million in dedicated funding for wildlife linkage projects. The Oracle Road crossings are the largest construction project funded to date; they will be constructed by the Arizona Department of Transportation in conjunction with a larger project that will widen a stretch of Oracle Road from four to six lanes.

Sound science and planning were used to determine the locations of the crossings, with special attention paid to existing topography and wash locations; roadkill surveys that identified “hot spots” for attempted wildlife crossings; and adjacent protected open space.

RTA-ADOT Funding Agreement Signed

In February 2011, after months of negotiations, the RTA and ADOT signed an Intergovernmental Agreement that outlines how the RTA will

fund the crossing structures. This agreement was a critical step that allowed the crossing structures to be included in the design of the new road. ADOT engineers have begun to design the crossings structures in close collaboration with a team of scientists, planners, and other stakeholders, including the Coalition.

Monitoring Plan Proposed

Another essential component of the SR77 wildlife crossing structures is a monitoring plan that will evaluate the effectiveness of the structures after they are built. While the best available science is being used to design the structures and determine their precise location, it is also crucial that we gather pre- and post-construction data to inform the long-term management of the structures and guide similar connectivity projects in the region. This will include investigating changes in nearby wildlife-vehicle collisions; what types of wildlife use the structures; whether the structures vary in effectiveness and species use; and gathering data on environmental variables (such as vegetation) and traffic patterns.

In March of 2011, the Arizona Game and Fish Department and the University of Arizona prepared a monitoring plan proposal, with partial funding requested of the RTA. The proposal outlined a modest 5-year monitoring plan using the best available research techniques, including a partnership with the Coalition and Sky Island Alliance to create a Citizen Stewardship Program for the SR 77 linkage area. We are hopeful that the monitoring plan will be fully funded in the next few months, in order to collect both pre-construction and post-construction data.

The SR77 wildlife crossing project is an innovative, collaborative and groundbreaking effort that seeks to promote safe passages for humans and Sonoran Desert wildlife within one of our most compromised wildlife linkages. We will continue to keep you informed as this project moves forward into its next stages!

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The Empire-Fagan Valley. Courtesy Empire-Fagan Coalition

The Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection is pleased to announce the addition of a new member group, Empire-Fagan Coalition. With this latest addition, our Coalition now represents 39 international, national, and local environmental and community organizations. Our member groups contribute expertise and experience and strengthen our ability to advocate for the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan and habitat conservation planning efforts across the region.

Empire-Fagan Coalition

by Elizabeth Webb

The Empire-Fagan Coalition (EFC) is a grassroots organization dedicated to conservation and education in the Empire-Fagan Valley southeast of Tucson, AZ. EFC was formed in 2004 in response to three proposed limestone mining operations in the Empire-Fagan Valley. It was incorporated as an Arizona non-profit corporation in 2005 with a mission to “ensure the Quality of Life in the Empire-Fagan Valley.” The boundaries of EFC are loosely defined as Houghton Road to the west, I-10 to the north, Hilton Ranch Road to the south and the Empire Mountains to the east.

In 2007, EFC won a major victory for the Empire-Fagan Valley. Working with Mr. Jeff Parsons of the Western Mining Action Coalition, EFC appealed W.R. Henderson’s mining plan of operations for a limestone mine near the village of Corona de Tucson. The appeal eventually reached the Chief Magistrate of the Interior Board of Land Reviews (IBLA), the highest federal body that reviews BLM decisions. The IBLA remanded the plan back to Tucson, and put an indefinite stay on any mining operations on federal land.

Today, EFC continues to work to ensure quality of life while engaging in numerous outreach activities in the Greater Vail/Corona de Tucson community.

The latest was EFC’s annual Town Hall on March 30 which drew hundreds of local residents to the Corona de Tucson Fire House. The event focused on conservation and development issues in the community, featuring panelists from the Arizona State Mining Inspectors’ office, Pima County, and others. J.J. Lamb, of the Vail Preservation Society, gave the participants a sneak preview of the epic *Voices of Vail* movie. Pima County debuted its new 3-D model of the proposed Rosemont Copper Mine, causing quite a media stir. Supervisor Carroll also lent his voice towards civil discourse.



Residents share their concerns about Rosemont Mine at the EFC annual Town Hall. Courtesy Empire-Fagan Coalition

For more information on the Empire-Fagan Coalition, its activities, and how to help, please visit www.empirefagan.org.

Looking Ahead: The Continued Need for State Trust Land Reform

by Kathleen Kennedy and Gabe Wigtil

On February 14, 1912, Arizona was admitted as America's 48th state, making 2012 Arizona's centennial. At the outset of statehood, the federal government gave Arizona over 10 million acres of land for the benefit of public schools and 13 other state institutions. These lands come under the purview of the Arizona State Land Department and are commonly called "State Trust Lands." Under the Arizona Constitution, State Trust Land must be leased or sold to the highest bidder, leaving few opportunities for the permanent protection and conservation of biologically-sensitive State Trust Lands. Most State Trust Land is currently under lease (commercial, grazing, agriculture, or mineral), although over one million acres have been sold and developed.

For years, conservationists across the state have been working toward meaningful State Trust Land reform, with the goal of protecting a small sub-set of lands that contain important wildlife habitat, riparian resources, wildlife linkages, and recreational and scenic values. Numerous citizens' initiatives and legislative referrals have sought to provide a mechanism for the conservation of these select parcels of State Trust Land. Additionally, in 1996, the Arizona Legislature established the Arizona Preserve Initiative (API), a program designed to encourage the preservation of open space around urban areas through the reclassification of State Trust Land for conservation purposes. Unfortunately, none of the propositions have yet passed at the ballot box and portions of the API have been discontinued due to lawsuit threats.

Recognizing the continued need for State Trust Land reform, the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection has taken the reins in planning for a new State Trust Land reform citizens' initiative. The citizens' initiative is a great tool for the protection of biologically rich areas in Pima County as we work to help implement the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. Reforming our State Trust Land system once and for all will be a fitting tribute as we celebrate 100 years of Arizona statehood — we hope it will be the beginning of a legacy to be enjoyed by future generations for the next 100 years and beyond.

At this time, the Coalition is meeting with key stakeholders throughout Arizona to gain their support for a citizens' initiative before filing with the Secretary of State. The initiative language and maps are being finalized but it is critical that certain stakeholders be brought on board before commencing with an official campaign and beginning the signature-gathering drive. Once the initiative becomes official and we have petitions ready to distribute, we will be in touch with you about how you can help.

In the meantime, if you and/or your organization want to receive more frequent updates on this initiative and become actively involved with this critical campaign, please contact us at 520.388.9925 or gabe.wigtil@sonorandesert.org.



Upcoming Events

Wild & Scenic Environmental Film Festival

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17, 6:30PM

Details forthcoming at www.sonorandesert.org

Tucson Audubon Society's

1st Annual Bird & Wildlife Festival

AUGUST 17-20 Details at www.tucsonaudubon.org

Saguaro National Park Labor Day Run

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 6:30AM Details and registration

at www.azroadrunners.org/races/detail/saguaro

Race proceeds benefit the Coalition and other local groups

Oracle Road Wildlife Crossing

Stewardship Adopt-a-Highway Cleanup

FALL 2011 *Date and Time TBD* Contact Gabe Wigtil at

388.9925 or gabe.wigtil@sonorandesert.org

Saguaro National Park BioBlitz

OCTOBER 21-22 Details at www.friendsofsaguaro.org

and www.nps.gov/sagu/bioblitz-2011.htm

Renewable Energy: Smart from the Start Conservation Lands Must Be Protected

continued from cover

large these zones have fewer conflicts with sensitive resources and are of sufficient acreage to meet the BLM's stated goals for renewable energy production over the next two decades.

In concert with member organizations and other groups, the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection has submitted detailed comments on the BLM's Draft EIS, putting its support behind a modified version of the more refined solar energy zone alternative — calling for a carefully guided development approach to identify the least sensitive and most appropriate lands for solar development. The Coalition provided detailed comments regarding lands in Pima and Pinal counties identified in the preferred alternative as potentially suitable for solar development. The Coalition believes these lands would be inappropriate for such development, and if developed, would undermine the integrity of Pima County's Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan and Conservation Lands System. The Coalition has called for removal from further consideration the following lands identified in the BLM's preferred alternative:

- ◆ 57,211 acres of Important Riparian Areas in Pima County's Conservation Lands System (CLS);
- ◆ 85,167 acres of Biological Core Areas in Pima County's CLS;
- ◆ 123,694 acres of Special Species Management Areas in Pima County's CLS;
- ◆ 1,418,536 acres of Multiple Use Management Areas in Pima County's CLS;
- ◆ Extensive lands identified in Pinal County's Open Space Plan identified as having "high habitat value";
- ◆ Approximately 15,000 acres of lands in the San Pedro River watershed;
- ◆ Lands in close proximity to the Ironwood Forest National Monument.

Many argue that the distributed generation model (rooftop and parking lot solar, mini wind turbines and other locally generated and consumed energy) is preferable to the industrial-scale development model. Indeed, each approach has its pros and cons. Regardless of the merits of each approach, it is clear that industrial-scale renewable energy proposals are moving forward in our backyard, and that meeting our climate change goals is going to require quickly ramping up both industrial-scale and distributed energy production in order to supplant the vast amount of energy that is currently supplied by fossil fuels and nuclear energy. Nonetheless, we should not ramp up renewable so quickly that we abandon common sense, careful planning and our collective commitment to conserving our nation's wildest landscapes and most precious resources (i.e. potable water).

Arizona has a chance to get ahead of the curve on this issue, and it is off to a great start with Arizona BLM's Restoration Design Energy Project. This pilot project, funded by federal stimulus dollars, is identifying degraded lands across all land ownerships in Arizona that have little to no environmental conflicts and also show promise for reclamation and redevelopment for renewable energy production. Why develop virgin desert and sensitive wildlife habitat if disturbed and degraded lands are available in suitable locations? It is worth noting that Arizona's BLM office is the only state BLM office in the West undertaking such a project. The BLM is currently soliciting public input on this project's draft conceptual alternatives (see: www.blm.gov/az/st/en/prog/energy/arra_solar.html) — we encourage you to provide your input. As the old adage goes, it is all about "location, location, location." With a focused, achievable and environmentally sensitive vision for renewable energy development, Arizona is poised to lead the nation in producing clean energy with a clean conscience.

For more information, visit www.defenders.org/programs_and_policy/renewable_energy/index.php

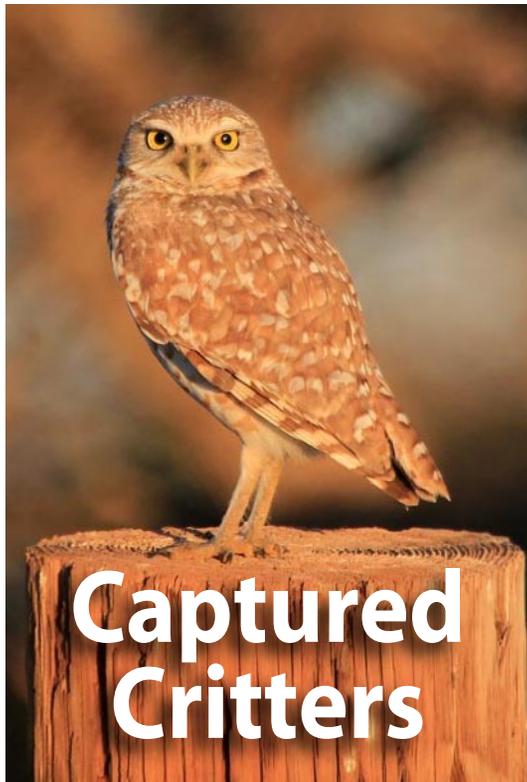


Concentrated photovoltaic (CPV) systems, as depicted in this photo, are highly efficient, require relatively little water, are modular and do not require that a site be de-vegetated and graded. This installation was recently dedicated at the University of Arizona's "Solar Zone", a solar research and development site on the east side of Tucson. Photo by Matt Clark / Defenders of Wildlife



Congratulations Carolyn!

Carolyn was awarded the Mike Seidman Memorial Award at Sky Island Alliance's 5th Annual *Mountain Islands Desert Seas Awards Banquet* May 19, 2011. This award is given to an individual in recognition of his or her outstanding contributions to land and wildlife conservation and who strives to connect the realms of science, grassroots organizing, and on-the-ground success. Photo by Sky Jacobs



Captured Critters

Photos by Ray Goodwin

Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*)

The burrowing owl (*Athenes cunicularia*) is a small owl, measuring 7.5 to 10 inches tall. It creates its nests in burrows made by prairie dogs, gophers, squirrels, foxes, turtles, and other animals. The bird is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and is found throughout the western United States, Canada, and Mexico. Throughout its range, the species is in decline, and is threatened by habitat destruction and human efforts to control squirrel and prairie dog populations. In Pima County the burrowing owl was identified as a Priority Vulnerable Species in the creation of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, and is listed as a Covered Species in the Pima County's Multi-Species Conservation Plan and the Town of Marana's Habitat Conservation Plan.

Thanks to Ray Goodwin for these images. To see more of his work, please visit www.sonoranconnection.com.

Do you have a photo of Sonoran Desert wildlife?

Please send your photos to gabe.wigtil@sonorandesert.org for publication in *Friends of the Desert!*



Pima County Desert Tortoise Survey

Pima County is looking for information to improve its model of potentially suitable habitat for the Sonoran desert tortoise. Of particular interest are observations of live or dead tortoises in the foothills of the Tortolita and Santa Rita Mountains. Observations will be used to refine the assumptions of the habitat model.

If you are willing to contribute your tortoise observations to a publically accessible website, please review the step-by-step instructions at www.pima.gov/cmo/sdcp/index.html. If you would prefer your data not be posted on the website, please email Neva Connolly at conservation@pima.gov. It is critical that observers know the difference between the desert tortoise and other turtles of the region. To aid in identification, please visit the Reptiles of Arizona website www.reptilesfaz.org/herp-turtle.html. In addition, observers are asked to *not* handle or collect tortoises or turtles for this study; simple visual observations (made from a distance) will suffice.



Desert tortoise. Courtesy Don Swann

A New Publication from the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection!

Want to learn more about why we need to protect the Sonoran Desert's wildlife linkages? This brochure is a clear and concise primer on the what, where, and why of wildlife linkages, including detailed maps, compelling photos, and FAQs. Pick one up today at the Coalition office or at other locations around southern Arizona!

Packs of brochures are also available for wider distribution at events and meetings.



Join us on Facebook!

facebook.com/sonoran-desertprotection



photos this page **El Rio Open Space before restoration efforts. Photos by Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection**

Marana Borrow Pit Restoration Begins

by Kendall Kroesen, Tucson Audubon Habitats Program Manager

Located on the northeast end of the Tucson Mountains adjacent to the Santa Cruz River, the El Rio Open Space, also known as the Marana Borrow Pit, is a key asset for wildlife.

The river is an important wildlife corridor but this location is doubly important since it is also part of a corridor linking the Tucson Mountains to the Tortolita Fan and Tortolita Mountains. The link is made possible by the only existing Interstate 10 underpass—an old railroad alignment—through which wildlife can move relatively undisturbed. The underpass is just east of the borrow pit.

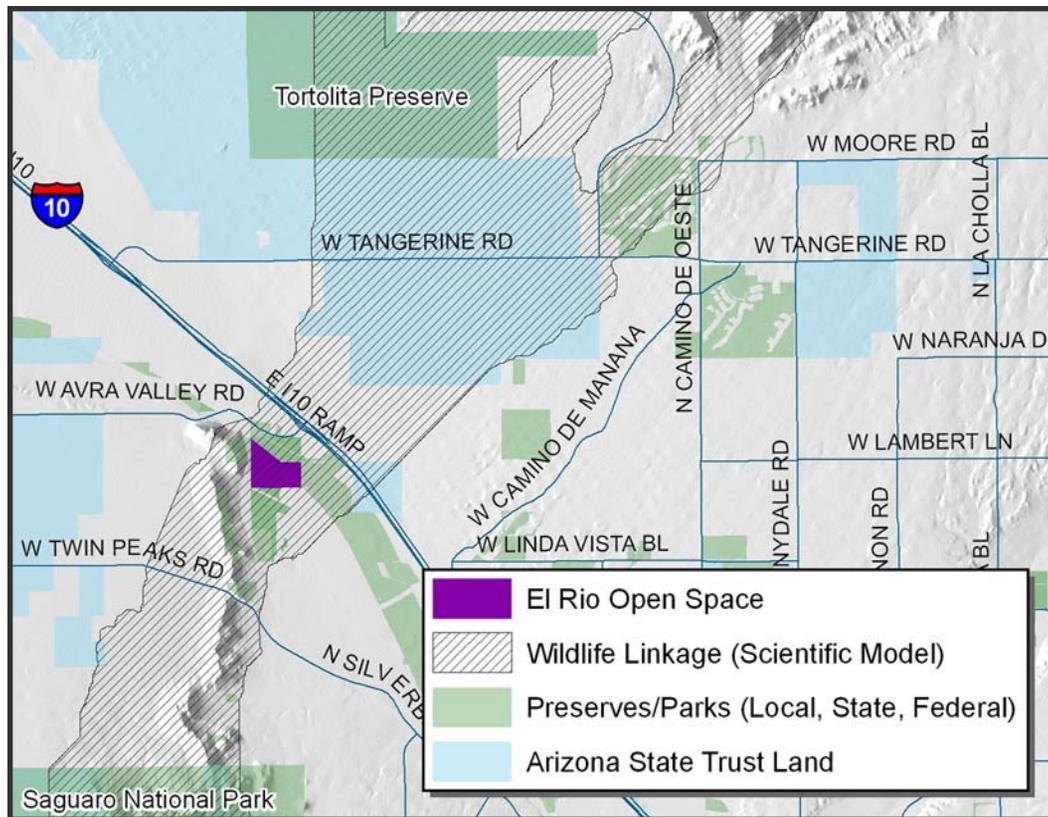
The borrow pit is dry much of the year but receives stormwater from several stormwater drains located to the west, south and east. It can also receive stormwater overflow from large events in the Santa Cruz River, leading to a substantial amount of water filling the borrow pit from time to time. There is currently sparse native and non-native vegetation in the borrow pit. Marana has worked with volunteers to remove buffelgrass, though some remains. Bermudagrass, saltcedar, giant reed and other non-natives are also present. Natives include four-winged saltbush, quailbush, Goodding's willow, and a variety of other native trees planted recently by Trees Please, a Marana-based non-profit.

The Town of Marana recently adopted a management plan for the area which prohibits wildlife and vegetation disturbance, reconciling the recreation needs of the on-site disc golf course with natural resource needs.

Under another recently-signed agreement, Tucson Audubon Society is working with the Town of Marana to plant a significant amount of additional native vegetation in the borrow pit.

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El Rio Open Space sits squarely within the Tucson – Tortolita Mountains Wildlife Linkage

Marana Borrow Pit Restoration Begins *continued*

Since funds are not adequate to address the entire surface of the pit area, vegetation will be planted in clusters. Each cluster will contain a variety of species that should be adapted to the environment there. These clusters will mature and provide patches of cover, food and nesting opportunities for wildlife. The plant species best suited to the area should produce seed that will allow for greater vegetative coverage with time.

A variety of irrigation strategies are being considered and may be used together to test which works best. Planting will be completed by the end of May 2011. Ongoing maintenance and irrigation will be accomplished through a coalition of Trees Please, Town of Marana and the Tucson Audubon Society. To volunteer with tree planting and watering, please visit www.aztreesplease.org



Volunteers have already planted more than 200 trees and will continue to plant more throughout the year. Photo courtesy Trees Please

Donor Spotlight



Mich Coker lives in Tucson and is a lawyer working for Arizona-based Farhang & Medcoff. Moving from Mississippi, Mich came to southern Arizona to attend law school and quickly fell in love with the area due to the beautiful natural environment and the amazing outdoor recreational opportunities. Mich is a self-described “birder, general nature geek, avid soccer player and world traveler.” As an enthusiastic and experienced birder, Mich joined the Tucson Audubon Society’s Board of Directors in 2005 and soon became familiar with the work of the Coalition. He recently shared his thoughts with us about the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection:

Why do you believe in the work of the Coalition?

The Coalition’s work is critical to ensuring the long-term conservation of the Sonoran Desert’s rich diversity of species and habitats. With remarkable leadership, unyielding enthusiasm, and multidimensional know-how, the Coalition and its staff do an outstanding job of staying vigilant against potential threats to our regional environment. Moreover, they routinely demonstrate mastery in bringing together various stakeholders to negotiate creative solutions to complex problems.

How is the Coalition prepared to face future challenges?

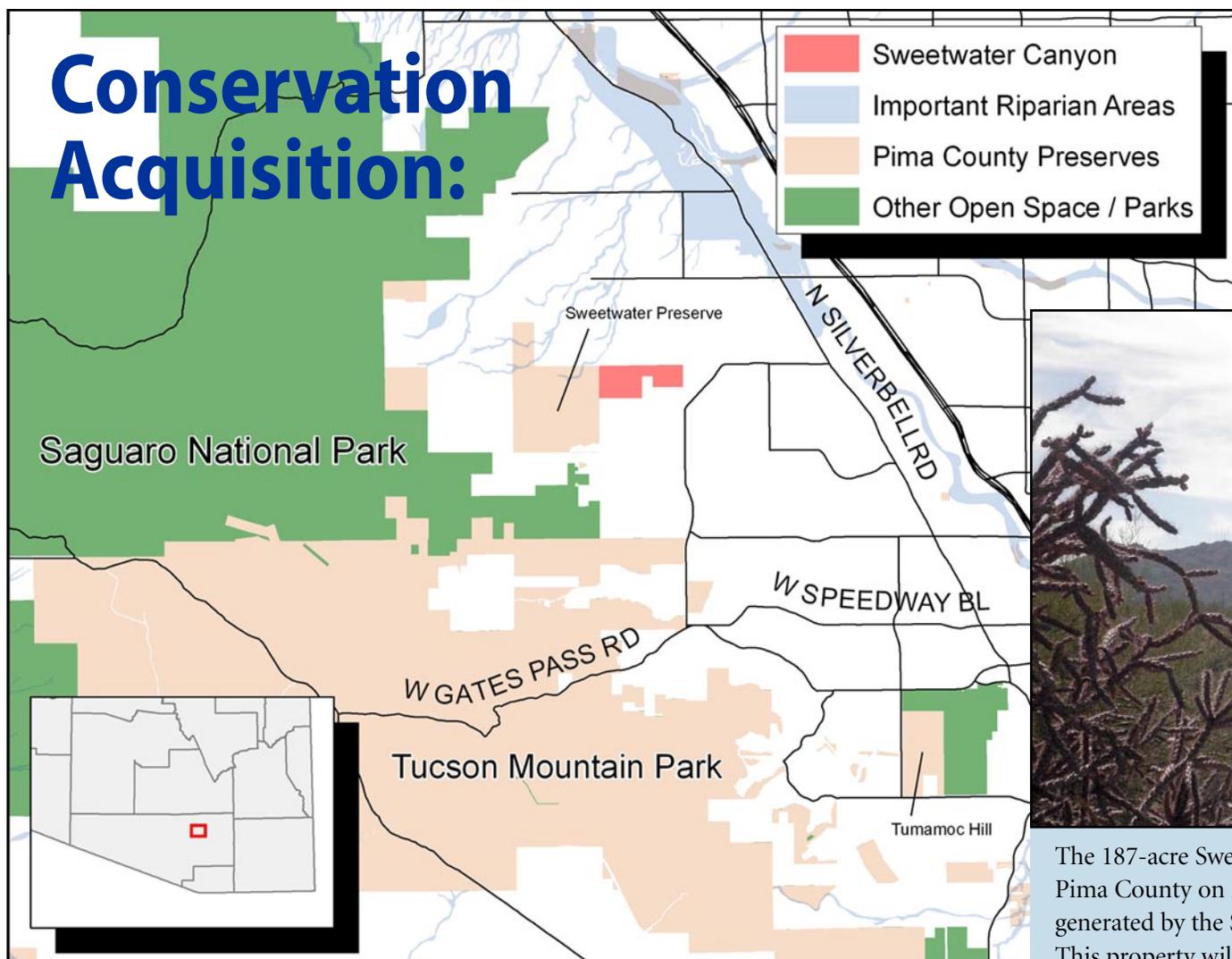
With a burgeoning population placing ever-increasing demands on limited resources, the Coalition plays an important role in fighting to preserve the ecological integrity of the Sonoran Desert. It is actively engaged with myriad issues ranging from regional transportation and urban sprawl to water conservation and wildlife corridors.

Why do you give to the Coalition?

I support the Coalition because it consistently produces great results against often-overwhelming odds. Whenever I donate my time or my money to the Coalition, I can always be confident that my contributions are going directly towards preserving the biological diversity and natural beauty of our fragile Sonoran Desert surroundings.

Thanks, Mich, for your ongoing support of the Coalition’s work!

Conservation Acquisition:



Sweetwater Canyon



The 187-acre Sweetwater Canyon property was purchased by Pima County on March 1, 2011 for \$1.6 million, using funds generated by the Starr Pass Environmental Enhancement Fee. This property will enhance the size and habitat value of the county's existing 700-acre Sweetwater Preserve. The area, crossed by several washes and drainage tributaries, provides suitable habitat for many species, including the lesser long-nosed bat, Gila monster, mule deer, Abert's towhee, California leaf-nosed bat, mountain lion, and desert tortoise. A critical wildlife corridor is protected by this acquisition; the property will allow continued movement between the Tucson Mountains and the Santa Cruz River.

Starr Pass Environmental Enhancement Fund

In 1998 Pima County entered into a unique agreement with the developers of Starr Pass on the eastern slope of the Tucson Mountains to fund environmental and conservation projects in the region. The Starr Pass Environmental Enhancement Fund will collect 2% of all sales at the Marriott Resort Hotel for 20 years. For the first ten years of the fee collection (up to 2016), the developers will be allocated 75% of the proceeds of the fund with Pima County receiving the balance. From 2016-2026 that disbursement reverses with the county collecting 75% of the proceeds. Starr Pass will use their portion of the fund to reimburse the developer for biological corridors set-aside in the development process and managed by the county. Pima County's portion of the fund will be used to:

- ◆ Maintain, preserve and enhance open space and trails throughout Tucson Mountain Park.
- ◆ Manage, maintain, preserve and enhance biological corridors, linking Tucson Mountain Park and the Santa Cruz River.
- ◆ Conduct scientific research on function and effectiveness of biological corridors.
- ◆ Expand, through land acquisition, the eastern and southern boundaries of Tucson Mountain Park.

Thus far, Pima County's allotment has funded the University of Arizona's Wild Cat Research and Conservation Program's study of mountain lions in the Tucson Mountains, efforts to eradicate and control the spread of invasive buffelgrass, and the recent purchase of Sweetwater Canyon. This arrangement demonstrates how the private and public sector can work together to protect our natural resources and this region's unique biological diversity.

Coalition Staff Reunion



CSDP staff members (current and past) recently held a reunion to celebrate the work of the organization and to reminisce. (l to r: Gabe Wigtil, Lori Andersen, Susan Shobe, Carolyn Campbell, Sean Sullivan, Kathleen Kennedy, Kevin Gaither-Banchoff, Jenny Neeley)

Our generous donors provide critical funds to the Coalition, creating a strong foundation for our work!

Our sincerest "Thank You!" to the following donors for their recent donations to the Coalition. Their contribution to the Champions for the Sonoran Desert campaign will help the Coalition create tangible, long-lasting change for the preservation of the Sonoran Desert. Again, THANK YOU!

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