

# A Wild Way to Create Jobs

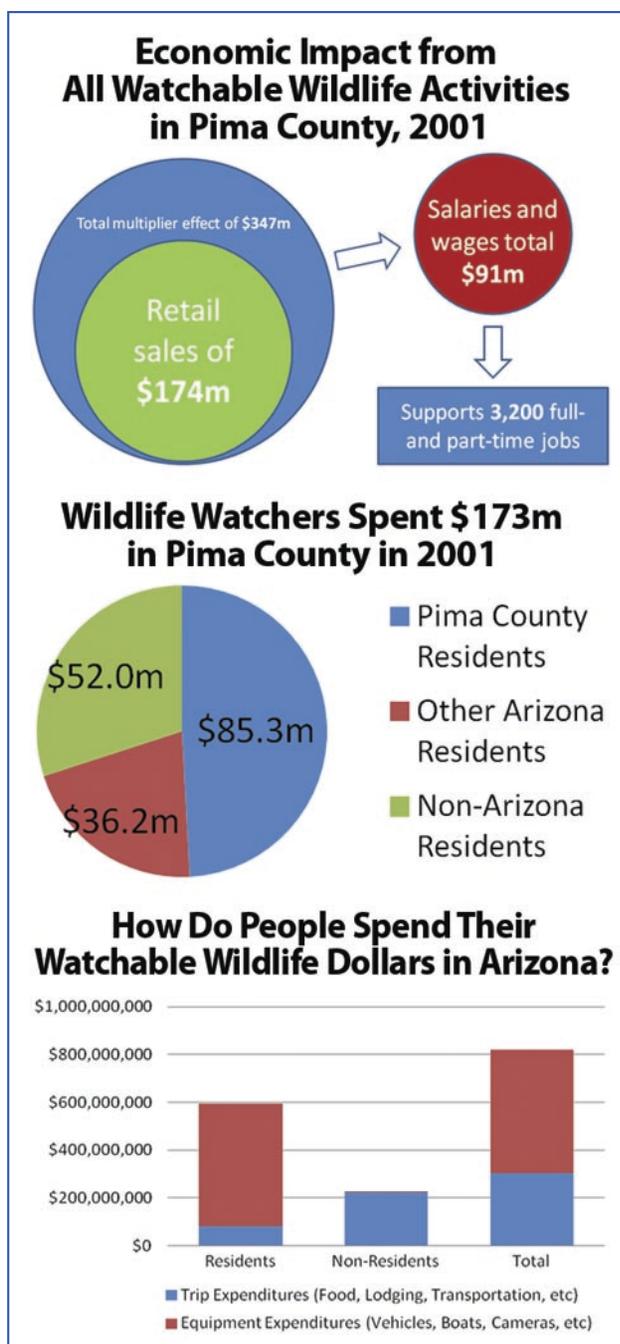
by Dr. Paul Green, Executive Director, Tucson Audubon Society

How would you describe the true value of our natural areas — those places to which you go in order to escape the stresses of daily life, to relax, and maybe observe wildlife? You may first think about how you personally value these places. Perhaps there are places to which you have deep personal connection, perhaps a favorite childhood retreat, or maybe a place to which you return frequently because it makes you feel good. From there, you may think about community values, such as the ecological services provided by natural habitats (e.g. erosion control, crop pollination, and flood protection). Finally, economic values (e.g. jobs and revenue from recreational uses and tourism) are yet another way to state the “value” of natural areas.

Economic values generated through wildlife-based recreation and tourism attract a great deal of attention given the downturn in general economic activity. How many jobs do recreational uses of natural areas, such as hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing, generate in our community? How do these uses, which directly depend on thriving wildlife habitats and the animals and plants they support, contribute to our economy? One tool we have to answer these questions is the *National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation* report, published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) every five years. These reports estimate expenditures on wildlife-related activities and how many people participate in wildlife-related recreation.

Wildlife-related expenditures represent the money we spend in order to watch or hunt wildlife. These include trip-related costs (such as gasoline, hotel rooms, and food) and equipment-related costs (such as boats, off-road vehicles, cameras, and binoculars). Most of us understand the costs related to hunting and fishing. Watchable wildlife recreation, on the other hand, includes observing and photographing any wildlife that lives freely in a natural

or wild environment. For example, if you take a trip to Sweetwater Wetlands in Tucson to watch the ducks this winter, you are participating in a “watchable wildlife” activity.



The most recent USFWS report on fishing, hunting, and wildlife-associated recreation, from 2006, revealed that nine percent of Arizonans took part in hunting and fishing, while 21 percent took part in wildlife watching. The same report revealed that wildlife watchers in Arizona spent \$71 per day of recreational activity, which compares with \$61 per day of activity for hunters and \$69 per day of activity for anglers. In general, wildlife watching as an activity is increasing in popularity as the number of people participating in hunting and fishing is declining. Spending by wildlife watchers increased by around one fifth in the ten years ending in 2006, while spending by hunters and anglers declined by a similar amount.

Money spent by watchable wildlife recreationists generates additional spending throughout the local economy. The total economic impact resulting from these expenditures was analyzed specifically for Arizona in a 2003 report by Southwick Associates. This report was based upon a 2001 USFWS dataset and reveals many important insights into the economic effects of watching wildlife in our state, analyzing specific types of activity county by county.

The results of this detailed survey are impressive and ultimately prove that the activity of watching wildlife contributes significantly to Arizona’s economy. The total economic impact of watching wildlife in Arizona was calculated at \$1.5 billion dollars

at 2001 levels, creating around \$430 million in salaries and wages, and around 15,000 full- and part-time jobs. The total economic impact of out-of-state tourists exceeded those from in-state residents, making Arizona a “destination state” for wildlife viewing, with 1,742 of the 3,196 jobs in Pima County supported by watchable wildlife activities related to out-of-state tourists.

## Who We Are



The Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection works daily to create a community where:

- ⊕ Ecosystem health is important;
- ⊕ Nature and healthy wild animal populations have value;
- ⊕ Visitors, children and future generations can all drink clean water, breathe clean air, and find wild places to roam.

In 1997, the cactus ferruginous pygmy owl received protection under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). This spurred dozens of conservation and neighborhood groups to come together to form the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection (Coalition) in February of 1998. Since then, the Coalition has advocated for the development and implementation of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, with the goal of protecting our region's natural resources and biological diversity. The Coalition is a leader in local planning processes and conservation efforts.

The Coalition is currently comprised of 40 member groups. These groups represent well over 30,000 members. The Coalition staff works on a grassroots level with thousands of direct supporters. The Coalition has non-profit 501(c)3 status through the fiscal sponsorship of Coalition member group Sky Island Alliance, and is able to operate through donations from individuals and support from a variety of foundations.

**The Coalition's wide array of outreach, education, advocacy, grassroots activism, and conservation planning activities are focused on achieving consensus between all stakeholder groups, demonstrating overwhelming community support for regional conservation planning to ensure that our Sonoran Desert remains whole and viable for current and 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](http://www.sonorandesert.org)

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## Carolyn's Corner

# Wildlife and Money: Embracing the Economic Benefits of our Natural Resources

by Carolyn Campbell, Executive Director



Economic revenue directly tied to our thriving wildlife habitats contribute immensely to our local economy. Revenues brought into the state specifically from “wildlife watching” activities are actually quite staggering. As you will read about in this edition of our newsletter, studies have shown, year after year, how much money comes to Arizona simply because of our incredible natural resources, sunny climate, and our position as a popular tourist destination. And while many of us understand those “intangible benefits” that the desert provides such as solitude and space for personal reflection, it is heartening to learn about the *billions* of dollars of state revenue that directly result from wildlife-related activities and wildlife-related recreation. This amounted to \$1.5 billion spent in the state in 2001, the latest year with detailed data (not including hunting and fishing, which also bring in significant amounts of revenue).

Studies show that the majority of money spent is by out-of-state tourists. I hope that all of you take these numbers to heart – let's memorize them! – to respond to the false “jobs vs. the environment” argument that has increased recently. Our economy truly is built on our environment, and activities that degrade or destroy wildlife habitats *will* have a negative effect on our economy. We need to envision a new economy that embraces and celebrates our natural resources for the tangible and intangible benefits they provide.

**We need to envision a new economy that embraces and celebrates our natural resources.**

The tourism, homebuilding and real estate industries have recognized this for quite some time, with marketing campaigns appealing to “spectacular views of the Catalina Mountains,” “beautifully rugged natural landscapes,” and “preserved natural desert vegetation, habitats and open space.” In contrast, industries such as open-pit copper mining in the Coronado National Forest, as being proposed by Rosemont Copper, have no place on public lands like the Santa Rita Mountains. The few short-lived jobs based on resource extraction pale in comparison to those created, and maintained long-term, by outdoor recreation-based sales and tourism.

The Coalition continues to seek, facilitate, and construct creative solutions to a variety of conservation issues throughout the region. You will learn in our newsletter about our recent victories in Avra Valley, where two new solar farms will produce a net conservation gain for some of our vulnerable desert species. Restoring and enhancing burrowing owl habitat, which has been losing ground in recent decades, will co-exist with much needed solar energy creation here in the Sunbelt. A true win-win!

Our dedicated staff here at the Coalition continues to work hard to create successes on the ground, with projects ranging from open space acquisition to wildlife infrastructure in transportation projects to creation of habitat preserves and broader-ranging wildlife connectivity through private development set-asides.

Once again, I want to thank you for your continued support and encouragement as we continue to work together to protect our beautiful Sonoran Desert habitat for both people and wildlife.

# The Value of Conserving Wildlife

by Jamie Rappaport Clark, President & CEO, Defenders of Wildlife This opinion editorial originally appeared in *The Huffington Post* 10/4/11.

Why save a lizard? Who cares about some little fly? What difference does it make if we kill off a few unwanted prairie dogs?

These are fair questions. At a time when 9% of Americans are unemployed, another seven percent are marginally employed or working only part-time, and millions more are struggling to stay afloat, protecting obscure endangered species probably isn't the first thing on people's minds. But that doesn't mean we should turn our backs on the countless species, large and small, that still need our help.

Nearly 40 years ago, our government made a commitment in the form of the Endangered Species Act to preserve all native wildlife for the

**By fighting to save endangered species, we are preserving the vitality of the entire ecosystems that they inhabit.**

benefit of future generations. And since that time the Act has been 99 percent effective in preventing the extinction of the plants and animals it protects. But tragically, Congress is preparing to use our current economic crisis as an excuse to abandon America's commitment to preventing extinction.

Before the August recess, no fewer than 13 different proposals had been introduced to limit the federal government's ability to protect endangered species. Since Congress returned from recess, another four have been added to the list, and more will no doubt surface long before a comprehensive funding bill is finally passed this fall.

At the center of nearly all of these attacks on our landmark wildlife conservation law is the implicit argument that saving imperiled plants and animals is simply a luxury we can no longer afford. Some members of Congress are taking it a step further, exploiting our country's very real financial difficulties by pinning job losses on endangered species protections. Of course, this sham calculus disguises the fact that many of these politicians rely on certain big corporate interests hostile to the Endangered Species Act to line their campaign coffers.

Despite the protestations of anti-wildlife politicians, there are very good reasons to protect a lizard, or a fly or a prairie dog. Though they may seem trivial, these animals are an integral part of the web of life that

sustains us all. Lizards control insect pests and provide food for hawks. Flies feed reptiles and can help pollinate crops. Prairie dogs mow down prairie grasses, reducing risk of wildfire, and they provide food for ferrets, badgers and owls. What's more, by fighting to save these species, we are preserving the vitality of the entire ecosystems that they inhabit.

There are also practical reasons for saving as many imperiled species as we can. The ESA acknowledges the direct link between maintaining biodiversity and our own well-being. For example, one economist has estimated that America's plants and animals provide us with "ecosystem services" (such as erosion control,

flood protection, air and water filtration, sedimentation, carbon sequestration, providing nutrients, crop pollination, etc.) totaling \$33 trillion per year. Plants like the Pacific yew tree, Madagascar periwinkle and mamala tree have all led to promising treatments for diseases like cancer, leukemia and AIDS. And expenditures for wildlife-related recreation accounted for more than \$122 billion in 2006 — about one percent of our GDP.

What doesn't show up on the ledger though is the value of upholding the principles of good stewardship. The great conservationist Aldo Leopold once wrote, "The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant, 'What good is it?' If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not."

We should ask ourselves instead, what will be left when all the lizards, and flies and prairie dogs are gone? What will happen to our lakes and forests, our deserts and oceans, our rivers and prairies, when fewer and fewer living creatures call them home? If we allow piecemeal changes now to our most important environmental laws, what else might politicians find inconvenient to protect?

The attacks on America's great conservation legacy may seem small and insignificant. But each one tugs at a thread that could unravel the entire fabric of the great safety net we have built over four decades. Killing off a few lizards or flies or prairie dogs isn't going to rescue our flailing economy. But it could very well ruin us all.

## A Wild Way to Create Jobs *continued from cover*

Moreover, significant parts of these expenditures are made in economically depressed rural areas and are especially valuable to local economies. Watchable wildlife is the main driver of ecotourism growth in Arizona, with birding being the largest watchable wildlife activity.

What can we do to promote and increase the economic benefits of wildlife watching in our region? To put it simply, we need:

- ⓐ **Abundant wildlife populations and healthy wildlife habitat** where they can live;
- ⓑ **Information** about wildlife species and the kinds of habitat they prefer, such as region-specific books like Tucson Audubon's new *Finding Birds in Southeast Arizona*;
- ⓒ **Facilities**, such as trails, viewing blinds, and interpretive signs, to help wildlife watchers understand what they see;
- ⓓ **Festivals** and celebrations, such as Tucson's annual Bird & Wildlife Festival, that can attract visitors from across the world and from down the street to learn about wildlife; and
- ⓔ **Community integration**, such as the Watchable Wildlife Resolution which was recently passed by the Pima Association of Governments in order to create a more supportive local environment for watchable wildlife.

**Watchable wildlife is the main driver of ecotourism growth in Arizona, with birding being the largest watchable wildlife activity.**

conservation, a strong base supporting our local jobs and economy:

- ⓐ Working together with tourism agencies and visitor's bureaus, opening needed lines of communication.
- ⓑ Commissioning additional research to help us better understand the local wildlife-viewing market. This research includes an analysis of the expectations for a satisfying experience, the importance of specific wildlife species of interest, willingness to pay for these experiences, and the economic impacts on local communities.

ⓔ Raising \$7,500 from businesses, foundations, and individuals to hire Southwick Associates to analyze the new 2011 National Survey data and provide up-to-date information on spending by watchable wildlife enthusiasts.

Natural areas provide a variety of values to both people and wildlife. In addition to providing wildlife habitat, flood protection, and erosion control, natural areas support local economies and jobs grounded in watchable wildlife activities, recreation, and tourism. The importance of this sector of the economy cannot be overstated, especially given its growth in Arizona. As we move forward and continue to seek sustainable solutions for a new economy, we will all benefit by remembering the foundation of this economic sector: healthy wildlife populations, connected habitat, up-to-date information, well-maintained facilities, and community support and education.

Tucson Audubon, as a proud founding member of the Coalition, continues to seek out partners and opportunities in the local community to support habitat

Read the full Southwick report at [tucsonaudubon.org/images/stories/conservation/Southwick2001AZ.pdf](http://tucsonaudubon.org/images/stories/conservation/Southwick2001AZ.pdf)



*Why do you love the Sonoran Desert? Do you have a favorite place that you return to over and over again? Somewhere special that really speaks to you? We'd love to hear from you! If you're interested in writing a short article (or poem, haiku, etc.) for a future issue of Friends of the Desert newsletter, please email [Kathleen.Kennedy@sonorandesert.org](mailto:Kathleen.Kennedy@sonorandesert.org) for more information.*

**Pontatoc Ridge rises out of the Catalina Foothills. Courtesy Kathleen Kennedy**

## **Favorite Places in the Sonoran Desert**

# **Finding Contentment on Pontatoc Ridge**

*by Kathleen Kennedy, Program and Development Coordinator*

I get out of my car and take a deep breath, raising my head to look at the mountains to the north. Finger Rock juts into the blue sky and a light breeze jostles the desert flora, beckoning me to hit the trail. I strap on my pack and take a last swig of water before locking my car and letting my legs take me away into much-needed solitude.

My destination is Pontatoc Ridge, one of my favorite places near Tucson. It is easy to get to, less than 15 minutes from my house to the trailhead, and offers expansive vistas, a heart-pumping hike uphill, and an opportunity to connect with a protected, wild piece of the Sonoran Desert.

Given the current configuration of my life, with two small children to care for, my job, and a never-ending list of family and household responsibilities, opportunities to experience wild places seem few and far between.

But, here I am, excited for the afternoon ahead of me. The summer is drawing near and I know I must take advantage of the cooler temperatures before the heat arrives. As I start up the trail, I take a series of deep breaths, inhaling the smells of the trees and the flowering plants. The rocks beneath my feet offer welcome variety to the pavement and tile I am used to and force me to focus and be in the present moment. Lizards scurry by and birds flit from branch to branch. Ocotillos sway with their

ruby buds reaching out to the sky and saguaros stand tall, reminding me somehow of the importance of stillness, the value of standing your ground.

As I make my way up the ridge, my heart beats faster and I pass a few other hikers. Without a child to carry or a conversation to maintain, I feel like I am flying up the trail, amazed at my speed when I can walk unencumbered. It feels so good to just let all my responsibilities fall away, as if with each footstep, a small piece of the weight on my shoulders cracks off and drops to the ground, rolling away behind me. By the time I reach my

destination, a saddle with a view to the east, I am almost deliriously happy.

I take a break and eat a granola bar, re-hydrate with some cold water and continue to marvel at the diversity around me. To some, the desert can seem bleak at first glance, less rich somehow than the various forests that blanket much of our country. But, once you get to know the desert, once you develop a more observant eye and learn about its complexity, you cannot help but be astounded by its diversity. The Sonoran Desert is home to over 2,000 native plants, 100 reptiles, 60 mammals, and 350 birds. It is one of the most biologically diverse deserts in the entire world. Isn't that amazing?

**Once you get to know the desert, you cannot help but be astounded by its diversity.**

Now I am privileged enough to spend part of my days working to protect this magical, rich ecosystem. And, even better, I can see the results of my efforts on the ground. Actual pieces of land protected because of something I have, in small part, done. I am grateful for this work, every single day.

As I start back down the trail, I look out over Tucson at the Santa Ritas, the Baboquivaris, and the Tucson Mountains dotting the horizon. Memories of hikes and experiences in each of these places come to the surface, images flashing in my mind's eye.

I near the end of the trail, still in contemplation about these wild desert places that I hold so close to my heart. I think to myself - what will happen to all these desert plants and animals if we don't have people fighting for their survival? Can I muster the relentless dedication it takes to work day after day to protect somewhere under constant threat? My answer, strong and clear, is a resounding and definite *yes*.

As I wrap up my afternoon and Pontatoc Ridge recedes behind me, my mind wanders back to my two young sons and what awaits me at home. A little bit of that weight returns to my shoulders. But I also breathe a little easier, so grateful that I call this place home.

# Rosemont Mine: It Just Doesn't Add Up

by Gabe Wigtil, Program and Outreach Associate

High-dollar advertising and PR from Rosemont Mine has been extolling the supposed economic benefits that would result from approval of the proposed mine. The numbers promoted by Rosemont are convincing few within the community that the mine is an economic blessing, and a full analysis of the mine's impacts leaves little doubt that this mine is not needed, wanted, or welcomed.

The Forest Service's (USFS) newly released Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) addresses socioeconomic issues in its analysis of the mine's affects. The DEIS and its supporting documents\* shed some light on the economics of the project. Here are just a few of the findings:

- ⑥ The increases in employment, wages/salaries, and personal income would be extremely small with respect to the local economy. (Marlow p. 37)
- ⑥ Local business impacts from the proposed mine would represent a very small fraction of the local economy. (Marlow p. 37)
- ⑥ If the proposed project displaced only 1% of tourism and outdoor recreation activity, the economic losses would be greater than the entire annual payroll of the proposed project. (Marlow p. 43)
- ⑥ Impacts to nearby world-class astronomy research facilities would likely have long-term, adverse affects on the economic contributions of the astronomy, planetary, and space sciences. (DEIS p. 745)
- ⑥ Mining jobs are historically unstable. (Powers p. 49) The DEIS fails to recognize this and assumes that employment and output will not fluctuate over the life of the project. (DEIS p. 704)
- ⑥ The proposed mine is in conflict with the region's historic, current, and future primary economic driver, namely the unique and attractive qualities associated with our natural, cultural, and social amenities. (Powers p. 61)
- ⑥ Counties and states with resource-based economies have the slowest economic growth of all those in the West. (Marlow p. 10)

These socioeconomic impacts don't even begin to address the *economic* concerns from all of the other environmental damages and impacts from the proposed mine. This includes impacts to air quality, surface and groundwater



**The scenic Rosemont Valley is threatened by the Rosemont Mine proposal.**  
*Courtesy Save the Scenic Santa Ritas*

quality/quantity, biological resources, visual resources, recreation resources, transportation, and cultural resources, among others.

The proposal, which would allow Rosemont Copper to develop a nearly 5,000 acre (of which 3,670 acres are public forest lands) mining complex in the Santa Rita Mountains continues to stand in opposition to the intent and purpose of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. This proposed mine would dramatically impact our region's natural resources and biological diversity. Rosemont's proposal would:

- ⑥ Result in the loss of thousands of acres of wildlife habitat.
- ⑥ Increase habitat fragmentation and reduce habitat connectivity.
- ⑥ Approximately double wildlife-vehicle collisions along SR83.
- ⑥ Impact up to 95,000 acres of habitat due to excessive noise, vibration, and light.
- ⑥ Impact habitat for 31 of Pima County's Priority Vulnerable Species.
- ⑥ Impact habitat for 14 endangered, threatened, and candidate species.
- ⑥ Reduce water flow along Davidson Canyon, an Important Riparian Area in Pima County's Conservation Lands System.

**Now is the time to voice your comments about Rosemont Mine.** Attend one of the comment writing workshops to help formulate your ideas and then attend a public meeting, call, email or write to the Forest Service to share your comments. We need your help NOW to stop this destructive and economically lackluster project!

\*The DEIS is available for download at [www.rosemonteis.us](http://www.rosemonteis.us) and the Marlow and Powers reports are available at [www.scenicsantaritas.org/documents-and-reports](http://www.scenicsantaritas.org/documents-and-reports)

## Speak Out NOW Against Rosemont Mine!

You now have the opportunity to comment on the adverse environmental and economic impacts of the proposed Rosemont Mine in the Santa Rita Mountains.

"This is a crucial opportunity for public engagement that could lead to the Forest Service requiring more studies before it decides whether to allow Rosemont to destroy more than 3,500 acres of public lands," says Gayle Hartmann, president of Save the Scenic Santa Ritas. (See our back cover for a list of public meetings.)

**Now is the time for Arizonans to let the Forest Service know why we oppose the mine.** At the end of the 90-day comment period, the Forest Service will consider these comments and address them prior to issuing the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Find out more! [www.rosemonteis.us](http://www.rosemonteis.us) and [www.scenicsantaritas.org](http://www.scenicsantaritas.org)

## It's Easy to Comment!

Comment-Writing Workshops are available to help you formulate useful comments for the Forest Service. See the full and updated schedule for these workshops at: [www.scenicsantaritas.org/upcoming-events](http://www.scenicsantaritas.org/upcoming-events)



An adult and baby bobcat exploring Sun City Vistoso. Courtesy Sun City Vistoso Wildlife Camera Project

## Volunteer Now! We need your help monitoring wildlife!

- Ⓢ Camera maintenance
- Ⓢ Photo database management
- Ⓢ Help us purchase equipment with your generous donation
- Ⓢ Adopt-a-highway cleanup (the next cleanup is scheduled for January 7, 2012)

To volunteer for any of these tasks, please email Gabe.Wigtil@sonorandesert.org or call 520.388.9925.

# Wild Living in a Retirement Community

by Jim Hobart, Sun City Vistoso Resident

Reports that the living is wild in Oro Valley's Sun City Vistoso are greatly exaggerated (and premature). What is true is that the residents are crazy about their wildlife and are deeply concerned about their decrease in numbers as development continues to push north towards Pinal County. When the Arizona Department of Transportation announced plans for "Oracle Road improvements," and the State Land Department announced development plans for a large area north of Sun City, residents were spurred to action. Our reaction was to attempt to locate wildlife corridors, hopefully spot a mountain lion, and to participate in informational meetings and hearings on improvements. Also, we attended tracking training sessions to improve our skills at detecting wildlife.

There had been reports and actual sightings of mountain lions in the community, but not for about five years. Sun City's Community Assistance Committee, one of the many organizations in Sun City designed to improve life for its retirees, donated funds to buy three motion-activated wildlife cameras for the project. Residents also volunteered to service the cameras and record the data.

For over three years a group of Sun City-ites has been placing motion-activated cameras in likely spots within washes around Sun City. We hoped to "capture" a mountain lion. The cameras took hundreds of pictures, but none of a lion. Not until July 10, 2010 when one of our cameras finally took a picture of a mountain lion loping by a water

trough on State Trust Land just north of Sun City Vistoso and west of Oracle Road.

Like many residents, we view wildlife as evidence of our closeness to the environment and of our concern for species other than our own.

The cameras have been mounted alongside routes frequented by wildlife. Hundreds of pictures have included coyotes, javelina, bobcats, rabbits, foxes, deer, skunks, lots of birds, a badger, a suspiciously colored cat, cows, dogs, a house cat (nicknamed "Survivor"), hikers, hunters, and golfers looking for lost balls. One flicker put the camera lens out of business, probably mistaking it for a rival.

*continued next page*

## Community Stewardship of the Oracle Road Wildlife Crossings Photo Monitoring Begins!

We need your help to make our new wildlife camera monitoring project a success! The Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection is excited to announce the launch of our new remote camera, wildlife monitoring project. This project gives you and other local citizens the opportunity to monitor wildlife movement and activity near the Oracle Road wildlife crossings. Working together with residents of Oro Valley, Catalina, and others, the Coalition will track and monitor wildlife activity near the wildlife crossings before, during, and after construction and within the larger Santa Catalina – Tortolita Mountains wildlife linkage.

Your help is needed to maintain and move the remote cameras and their associated equipment, to log photo information into a database, and to help identify new monitoring locations. Your efforts will help ensure that animals like mountain lions, bobcats, javelina, and coyotes are documented in the area both before and after the wildlife crossings are constructed.

Since 2006, the Coalition has successfully advocated for the protection and restoration of Pima County's wildlife linkages. Our work has led to a

series of public actions that will restore wildlife connectivity between the Tortolita Mountains and Santa Catalina Mountains:

- Ⓢ The designation of a 5000-acre wildlife corridor by the Town of Oro Valley in their Arroyo Grande planning process.
- Ⓢ The approval of \$8.2 million in 2009 by the Regional Transportation Authority for three wildlife crossings structures on Oracle
- Ⓢ The acquisition of two important open space parcels adjacent to one of the crossings, a wildlife "land bridge," the first of its kind in the Sonoran Desert.

With construction slated to begin in 2013 on the three wildlife crossings, the Coalition has remained actively involved in the planning process. We continue to meet with neighbors, community leaders, and engineers to ensure that the wildlife crossings are built appropriately and successfully guide wildlife safely across an expanded Oracle Road.

*We would like to thank the Wilburforce Foundation and their Capacity Building Grant Program for funding the initial purchase of equipment for this project.*

# Wild & Scenic Film Festival: An Evening to Remember

The Wild & Scenic Film Festival was a rousing success on August 17 at the Loft Cinema! Over 300 people joined us for a wonderful evening of entertainment and education. Films shown included **Walking the Line**, a unique investigation into how our country's transition to renewable energy will affect the land, wildlife, and people; **Bag It**, a fun and humorous journey to unravel the complexities of our plastic world; **Wild vs Wall**, an examination of the environmental impact of our nation's current border policy; and **Witness: Defining Conservation Photography**, a stark and stunning collection of images which illustrated photography's important use in showcasing the beauty of life and the threats facing our planet. If you missed the event, you can still check out the film trailers at: [www.sonorandesert.org/2011/07/11/wsff-films](http://www.sonorandesert.org/2011/07/11/wsff-films).

This year's festival was held in conjunction with Tucson Audubon Society's first annual **Bird & Wildlife Festival**. Visitors from all over the world converged on Tucson for a week of birding and wildlife-related activities and we were excited to share our event as one of the festival's featured evening programs.

A huge "Thank You!" goes out to all of our event sponsors and partners: Summit Hut, Betts Printing, Buffalo Exchange, shopOrganic.com, Plants for the Southwest, Sierra Club, Tucson Audubon Society and all who donated items for the prize raffle.

*We hope to see you at our 2012 film festival with a new collection of inspiring films!*



Over 300 people joined us at the Loft Cinema to enjoy the film festival.

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## Wild Living in a Retirement Community *continued*

So far the elusive mountain lion has only posed once (see photo above), but the hunt continues. The cameras have been to a multitude of sites, and the results are being analyzed to determine the likelihood that a mountain lion can still travel between the Tortolita Mountains and the Catalina Mountains without a driver's license.

These cats require large areas to survive. They migrate between the Tortolitas and the Catalinas with roads as their principal hazard. It takes as much as 450 square miles for a single cat to have an adequately sized home-range.

We are delighted that we have finally captured an image that shows that the cats have survived the many developments around them and hope that this spurs greater efforts to restore this important linkage area. We continue to use the three original cameras, plus two new donated nighttime cameras. We're open to any other ways we can continue helping, including the monitoring of the three new wildlife crossings coming soon to Oracle Road.

## Oracle Road Wildlife Crossings Adopt-a-Highway Cleanup

On October 1, twelve outstanding volunteers joined with Coalition staff to pick up trash along north Oracle Road between mileposts 83 and 84. This section of the road encompasses two of the three wildlife crossings that are slated for construction beginning in 2013. The roadway had been neglected for quite a while and needed a lot of work to make it clean again. **Our volunteers filled 25(!) bags full of trash in just two hours!** We were also saddened to find several instances of roadkill during the cleanup and know that **the wildlife crossings can't come soon enough.** Our next cleanup is scheduled for Saturday, January 7, 2012. Please come out and join us as we continue our stewardship of the Oracle Road wildlife crossings!

Thanks to Tracey Everett, Carl Boswell, James Kurtis, Joshua Remer, Larry Ryan, Hal Knox, William Thornton, Patty Stern, David Grandmaison, Margie O'Hare, Jan Johnson, and Kathie Schroeder for their hard work!

**Our enthusiastic crew of volunteers, all suited up to clean our adopted mile of Oracle Road!**



Two Coalition volunteers clean up Oracle Road near the planned wildlife crossings. These crossings will allow wildlife to safely travel between the Santa Catalina Mountains and the Tortolita Mountains.



# What Will Effective State Trust Land Reform Really Look Like?

by Gabe Wigtil, Program and Outreach Associate

Arizona State Trust Land reform is, without a doubt, one of the most complicated and challenging conservation goals on our plate these days. Yet, also without a doubt, we know that the end result will ultimately be worth all the trials and tribulations. **If there is one thing that our continued work on State Trust Land reform has taught us, it is that State Trust Lands continue to be worth fighting for.** There are simply too many special places, rich wildlife habitat, and essential wildlife linkages on these lands that deserve protection.

In early 2011, the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection continued the fight, laying the groundwork for a new State Trust Land reform citizens' initiative by re-evaluating lands identified for permanent conservation status and the text of a proposed 2008 initiative. The intention of our review was to file a citizens' initiative for the November 2012

**State Trust Land reform will recognize the importance of wildlife habitat.**

general election. Unfortunately, in August 2011, we and our conservation partners across the state decided that we do not currently have the organizational or financial capacity needed to proceed with signature gathering for this initiative. As we reflect on our past efforts and strategize for the future, it is important to craft a clear vision of what effective State Trust Land reform will really look like. We have to know what we want to achieve if we are ever going to succeed in this long campaign.

## **Our Vision for State Trust Land Reform**

### **1. Permanently Conserve Important Wild Lands**

Effective State Trust Land reform will recognize that a sub-set of the over 9 million acres held by the Trust contains important wildlife habitat, riparian resources, wildlife linkages, and recreational and scenic values. While the exact acreage and set of critical lands to be permanently conserved may change as lands are purchased or leased, a reasonable estimate is for 10% of

*continued next page*



## **Donor Spotlight: Judith Meyer**

# **The Health of Our Community— The Importance of Conservation**

**The Coalition's work epitomizes the best sort of advocacy.**

I learned about the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan and the Coalition's work to promote the Plan's goals while

researching Tucson as a possible place to live in 2004. I learned also about TMA and its effort to have Pima County voters issue bonds to purchase open land for the Sweetwater Preserve. I was enormously impressed by the

wisdom of the people of this community when they voted to spend their tax dollars to preserve fragile wildlife habitat and the flora and fauna it supports. But it was not until years after I moved here, when I became president of TMA, that I began to regularly read about the Coalition's ongoing advocacy work. **The Coalition's work epitomizes the best sort of advocacy: gentle persuasion, relentlessly applied, utilizing the scientific and political expertise of many segments of the community.** Each time I read a letter from the Coalition on a current issue before one of the governmental bodies, I find it impressively researched and written.

I have no doubt that protecting our natural desert environment, and therefore the wildlife it supports, promotes the physical, emotional and financial health of the Tucson community's residents. The Coalition's diligent work is crucial as a balance to the ever-present pressure to develop more of our open space, rather than rebuild and improve already-developed areas. Given the difficult

economic climate likely to prevail in America for some years to come, it is often too easy for politicians to promote short-sighted economic recovery options put forth by corporate and development interests, over the healthier long-term interests of continually improving our city's core while preserving natural land in the city's surrounding areas. **The Coalition brings together many segments of the community, from the birders and bikers, horseback riders and hikers, to wildlife scientists and geologists, to form a large and therefore more powerful political force as a counterbalance.**

When I worked on a citizen's committee related to the Pima County Wastewater Reclamation Department, I learned

about mistakes attributable, at least in part, to the City and the County failing to plan and work together on issues concerning our natural resources. The Coalition has helped to focus the attention of local governments and other segments of the broader Tucson community on

the importance of conservation to the health of the community. I am grateful to have this organization working towards the goals I support, and so I am happy to contribute. Read the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, attend public meetings where the Coalition speaks, and I believe you, too, will want to support this organization.

**Thank you, Judith, for your consistent support of the Coalition!**

*Judith Meyer is a retired lawyer and currently a Court-Appointed Special Advocate for children in the Child Protective Services system. Judith has served on the boards of the Tucson Mountains Association (TMA), the Opening Minds through the Arts Foundation, as well as the Pima County Parks and Recreation Commission. Judith is also an avid hiker and sings with the Tucson Symphony Orchestra Chorus. We recently asked Judith to share her thoughts about the work of the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection.*

## What Will Effective State Trust Land Reform Look Like? *continued from page 8*

the 9 million acres to be set-aside for permanent conservation, or approximately 900,000 acres. These lands could be held by the Trust and managed by the State Land Department or sold to counties, cities, towns, and state agencies for appraised value without an auction and with their conservation status intact.

### 2. Reinvalidate the Arizona Preserve Initiative

The Arizona Preserve Initiative (API) was created by the Arizona state legislature in 1996 and was designed to preserve select State Trust Lands around urban areas for conservation and for the benefit of future generations. Lands identified for conservation were intended to be sold to state agencies or local jurisdictions *without* a public auction, but the process was later amended due to a state constitutional clause which requires that all land be sold to the highest bidder. Jurisdictions have since purchased some of the lands identified for conservation through the public auction process using matching funds from the Land Conservation Fund.

Over 36,000 acres of lands identified for conservation remain unsold and potentially available for development. Amending the state constitution through a citizens' initiative will reinvigorate the API process to ensure that these lands could be sold without an auction to state agencies or local jurisdictions for the purpose of conservation and will also spur additional petitions to re-classify ecologically critical lands for conservation at the urban boundary.

### 3. Modernize State Land Use Planning

By providing for land-use planning in consultation with local communities, effective State Trust Land reform will modernize the methods for planning and disposition of State Trust Lands. Planning in cooperation with local counties, cities and towns would require that local ordinances, regulations, and rules, all of which are applicable to private property owners, would also be applied to planning efforts for State Trust lands.

### 4. Enhance Funds for Beneficiaries of the Trust

In order to increase the ability of the State Land Department to manage the Trust more efficiently (thus leading to an increase in revenues for beneficiaries of the Trust), the state legislature will be allowed to designate Trust funds to enhance, maintain, or protect the value of State Trust lands. Currently, the administration of the Arizona State Land Department is funded through an allocation from the state General Fund. Allocating a small percentage of the department's revenue (from the sale and lease of lands) for administration makes much more sense.

**If you and/or your organization want to receive more frequent updates on State Trust Land reform and become actively involved with this critical campaign,** please contact us at 520.388.9925 or [Gabe.Wigtil@sonorandesert.org](mailto:Gabe.Wigtil@sonorandesert.org).



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## Our Newest Member Group Native Seeds/SEARCH *Connecting Our Environment to the Plants that Sustain Us*

*by Bill McDorman, Executive Director,  
Native Seeds/SEARCH*

On behalf of Native Seeds/SEARCH, I would like to thank the 30,000 citizens from 39 conservation and neighborhood groups that make up the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection. Thank you for your dedication to this work. We are honored to be invited into the Coalition. We share your vision, and want to link it with ours.

We envision the Greater Southwest as a place where farms and gardens, kitchens and tables, and stores and restaurants are brimming with the full diversity of aridlands-adapted heirloom crops; where people are keeping the unique seeds and agricultural heritage of this region alive; and where the crops, in turn, are nourishing humankind.

*Diversity strengthens ecosystems,  
be they wild or agricultural.*

In order to take care of our beautiful Sonoran Desert home, we need to take care of ourselves. The modern quest for uniformity in culture, development, food and agriculture has created an industrial system that now threatens us all. We must rethink not only how we develop the lands around us, but how we make the connections between our environment and the plants that sustain us. In the end, the goal is the same. Diversity strengthens ecosystems, be they wild or agricultural. We live, after all, in one big ecosystem.

Native Seeds/SEARCH has been conserving the rich agricultural diversity of the Southwest for 28 years. We have collected, saved and grown the seeds of more than 1,800 crop varieties from 50 tribes. Our state-of-the-art Seed Bank and Conservation Center in Tucson and 60-acre farm in Patagonia anchor the region's seed conservation efforts. Through our new website ([nativeseeds.org](http://nativeseeds.org)), mail order catalog, and retail gift store on Campbell Avenue, we are able to distribute the treasured seeds and their stories to gardeners around the world, spreading diversity far and wide.



**Gardeners worldwide use seeds grown at the Native Seeds/SEARCH conservation farm in Patagonia, AZ. Courtesy Native Seeds/SEARCH**

We think the key to preserving the abundance we inherited from the continent's oldest agriculture is for us all to rejoin the ritual that created the diversity in the first place. Imagine every urban dweller on the planet growing something. Now picture every grower saving their own seeds. This ancient practice has the power to solve our modern problems. Everything we need as a people here in the Southwest depends in the end on the diversity created by this ritual. We invite you to help us make this vision a reality. Become a member. Become a volunteer. Attend our Seed School. And most importantly, plant something — and save your own seeds.

# Solar Development that is Good for the Sonoran Desert?

## Local Projects Address Renewable Energy and Habitat Conservation

by Kathleen Kennedy, Program and Development Coordinator

Solar and wind farms are gaining momentum across the country, setting down roots in our quest to battle climate change and create a new energy future. News outlets recently reported that Arizona now ranks third nationwide in the number of solar jobs. Energy companies are proposing new and improved transmission lines, connecting these new renewable energy sources to the grid. As a result, conservation groups are faced with two potentially conflicting goals: developing renewable energy and continuing our fight for habitat conservation. Can we support new renewable energy projects and preserve important wildlife habitat, wildlife linkages, and our scarce riparian areas? Can we create solar farms, for instance, that are actually good for the Sonoran Desert?

This past summer, the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection worked closely with Pima County, Tucson Water and two solar developers – FRV Tucson Solar and NRG Solar Avra Valley – to set a positive precedent for renewable energy development in Pima County and the Sonoran Desert. As a result of the Coalition’s advocacy, two new solar farms will soon break ground that will also provide on- and off-site habitat restoration and preservation.

### FRV Solar Farm

The FRV project will be constructed on a 305-acre parcel in Avra Valley (northwest of the Tucson Mountains) and provide enough power for 4,000 homes. The Coalition first learned of the FRV project during Pima County’s consideration of a conditional use permit for the project. While the initial proposal did not require any mitigation for habitat disturbance, we fought hard to require adequate habitat restoration and preservation to mitigate for project impacts.

Pima County’s Conservation Lands System policies identify the project site as being part of Pima County’s “Biological Core,” with 80% open space recommendations. The Arizona Game and Fish Department also identified suitable Western burrowing owl habitat on the FRV site in a series of surveys funded by the City of Tucson, including recent burrowing owl activity.

Due to the Coalition’s strong advocacy, the approved permit application includes 105 acres of on-site habitat restoration, including artificial nests for threatened burrowing owls and resting sites for the western yellow bat. The details of the off-site mitigation are being finalized and will include permanent protection of nearby Tucson Water-owned lands.

### NRG Solar Farm

Due to our success at the FRV site, we were asked to assist in the development of mitigation requirements for another solar farm being developed by NRG Solar Avra Valley. The NRG project will be constructed on a 319-acre parcel that contains portions of rich mesquite habitat. Through a combination of on- and off-site mitigation, 467 acres of land in Avra Valley will be protected from development during the course of the NRG project, with 86 acres of on-site mitigation and the remaining mitigation occurring off-site.

Mitigation lands will be configured to maintain wildlife connectivity with adjacent land and preserve existing washes and hydrologic processes. We will continue to work with NRG Solar as they develop their on-site revegetation and restoration plans.

Both the FRV and NRG projects are precedent-setting examples of how multi-jurisdictional cooperation can lead to a win for both renewable energy and habitat conservation. Throughout our involvement with these solar projects, the Coalition has been encouraged by the willingness of Pima County, FRV Tucson Solar, NRG Solar Avra Valley, and the City of Tucson to negotiate viable environmental mitigation plans that allow the projects to move forward while also protecting and restoring wildlife habitat.

The rapid growth of renewable energy is an exciting and challenging development for the conservation community. In the years ahead, wise land-use planning and creative solutions will be the keys to making positive gains for both wildlife and our energy future. Here in the Sonoran Desert, we were proud to play a key role in two new solar projects that will expand our solar energy production and increase protected habitat for vulnerable desert wildlife.



## Species Spotlight: Abert's Towhee (*Pipoli aberti*)

Abert's towhee is a large sparrow with gray-brown upper parts and pinkish-brown under parts. It is distinguished from similar birds by its relatively long tail and dark brown face. This bird has one of the smallest geographic distributions of any bird in the U.S., making it a top attraction for those traveling to southern Arizona to participate in watchable wildlife activities. The Abert's towhee has experienced a population decline over the last 150 years, most likely due to habitat loss. At one time, many of the riparian habitats of Pima County were home to the Abert's towhee. Protecting and restoring our remaining riparian habitats is important for the towhee, as well as many other wildlife species. Abert's towhee was identified as a Priority Vulnerable Species in the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan and is listed as a Covered Species in Pima County's Multi-Species Conservation Plan.

Thanks to Ray Goodwin for this image. To see more of his work, visit [www.sonoranconnection.com](http://www.sonoranconnection.com).

### Do you have a photo of Sonoran Desert wildlife?

Please send your photos to [Gabe.Wigtil@sonorandesert.org](mailto:Gabe.Wigtil@sonorandesert.org) for publication in *Friends of the Desert!*

## **“Thank You!” to the following donors for their recent donations to the Coalition. Their contributions will help the Coalition create tangible, long-lasting change for the preservation of the Sonoran Desert.**

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*The Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection is a tax-exempt nonprofit organization. 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.*



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## Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection

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### Speak Out NOW Against Rosemont Mine!

#### Rosemont DEIS Public Meeting Schedule

**November 19, 2011** 1pm to 5pm

Empire High School, 10701 E. Mary Ann Cleveland Way, Tucson, AZ

**December 1, 2011 5pm to 9pm**

Corona Middle School, 16705 S. Houghton Rd., Corona, AZ

**December 7, 2011** 5:30pm to 8pm

Benson High School,  
360 S. Patagonia St., Benson, AZ

**December 10, 2011** 1pm to 5pm

Elgin Elementary School,  
HC1 Box 36, Elgin, AZ

See article on page 5 for more  
information and visit  
[www.rosemonteis.us](http://www.rosemonteis.us) and  
[www.scenicantaritas.org](http://www.scenicantaritas.org)

#### It's Easy to Comment!

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