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Road engineers join enviros in wildlife corridor effort

By Philip Franchine
Green Valley News

TUCSON—Designing roads to be less of a barrier to wildlife movements is the next step in Pima County's Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, Carolyn Campbell told an audience of environmentalists recently.

And designing roads that allow wildlife to cross over or under is not always particularly difficult or costly, but it does require that naturalists supply engineers with more data, Pima County Transportation Engineering Manager Rick Ellis said.

They were speaking at the Southwestern Carnivore Committee's Carnivores and Highways Conference at the Hotel Arizona on Tuesday, Dec. 6, a meeting that brought together environmental advocates, scientists and engineers from a half dozen Western states.

Campbell, director for the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection, said she only learned that "that road issue" is an important one from the Defenders of Wildlife as they helped in promoting the innovative conservation plan, which at first focused almost entirely on limiting development in the habitats of vulnerable species.

However, roads can often be the most important barriers to the movement of vulnerable species, especially with large mammals, Campbell said.

All but one of the major barriers in Pima County are free-ways, the other being the fenced-in Central Arizona Project (CAP) canal that runs from Maricopa County to Tucson, she said.

Bears, mountain lions and other large mammals need large hunting territories and so only a few might live in a mountain range. In order to

avoid in-breeding that eventually would weaken the local population, they must be able to travel to other mountain ranges for breeding purposes, which generally means crossing highways and or other developed areas, and that is why barriers matter, Campbell said.

With the voters' approval in May 2004, of \$175 million in bonds for acquiring open space, Pima County can acquire parcels of land on each side of a highway to improve crossings, Campbell said. If the Regional Transportation Authority sales tax is approved next spring, it will yield \$45 million toward improving the roads at crossings.

Ellis said the county so far has designed and built two road projects that indicate where environmentally sensitive road design is headed in the future.

On North Thornydale Road, in

the Northwest Tucson habitat of the vulnerable pygmy owl, the county designed special wide, raised medians and stocked them with thick leafy trees to serve as places where the owls could roost between flights.

Also, the roadsides were landscaped with thick trees, also to help the owls find places to rest between their short, low-swooping flights.

In Saguaro National Park West, on Sandario Road near Kinney Road, where javelina had been traveling in a wash and crossing the road in significant numbers, the county installed a 6-foot-high, 8-foot-wide box culvert rather than use a small culvert or pipe system that would not be big enough for javelina.

In addition, the county built solid concrete walkways along the insides of the culvert, so the near-sighted javelinas could skirt the irregular con-

crete rip-rap in the middle of the channel.

The county also placed sand on the riprap downstream of the culvert to give the javelinas easier footing.

By conducting hydrology tests, the county was able to put in enough sand to provide a soft footing for the animals but not so much that it would impede the water flow, Ellis said.

Campbell said that over the past six to eight years, "environmentalists have gotten over the really big hurdle with local officials—to accept the scientific basis for our work and to embrace the science."

For the future, Ellis said, engineers need more data to help them prioritize their efforts and to weigh the costs and benefits of different approaches.

As an example of how the art, or science, of crossings is advancing, conference speaker Bill Ruedinger wrote a paper

for a federal agency that said, among other things, that crossings should include maximize vegetation to shield animals from noise.

Ideally, Ruedinger wrote, "An animal should be able to see through a structure to habitat on the opposite side of the road. Crossings should be designed as flat and straight as possible. Crossings with a steep grade or dogleg prevent animals from seeing habitat on the opposite side of the highway."

Scotty Johnson of Defenders of Wildlife, one of the organizers of the conference, said the level of detail in Ruedinger's paper and the presence of such experts as Ellis and Ruedinger at the meeting are signs of the progress that environmentalists have made in recent years in promoting wildlife corridors.

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GOP candidate says Napolitano is 'beatable'

By Tim Hull
Green Valley News



Jan Smith Flores

One of Gov. Janet Napolitano's Republican rivals for the governorship spoke in Green Valley Saturday, telling a group of GOP faithful that "Janet Napolitano is beatable."

Jan Flores, a former Santa Cruz County Attorney and retired Arizona Court of Appeals judge, who announced her candidacy last month, told the Green Valley Republican Women's Club that illegal immigration will be the No. 1 issue in the 2006 campaign.

"First we've got to stop the flow, then we have to deal with the mess we've got here," said Flores, who has lived in the border region for some 35 years.

"I'm not for amnesty," Flores added. "We have to make people go home and get at the back of the line."

The gubernatorial candidate said that, in her view, anyone who makes a plea agreement in the state's courts should automatically give up public benefits.

Education will be another big issue in the campaign, Flores said.

"There is no reason students in Arizona cannot achieve," she said. "I will work with the state superintendent of schools to make sure that your money is funding good schools and not a baby-sitting service."

Also speaking at the event Saturday was Arizona Secretary of State Jan Brewer, a Republican who will seek a second term in 2006.

Brewer, who was instrumental in enacting Proposition 200 this year, said that Napolitano has subverted the state's constitution by enact-

ing her "pet projects" through executive order.

"She has been dealing from the bottom of the deck," Brewer said. "She wants to get us into deficit spending that will cost our children and grandchildren."

Brewer predicted that Democrats will be watching the upcoming election closely, making sure that nobody is disenfranchised by Proposition 200's mandate for ID at the polls.

"I made the ID requirement very broad, so I can't believe that anybody will be disenfranchised," Brewer said.

"The Democrats are going to make a very direct attempt to smear my name over hysteria about Proposition 200," Brewer predicted.

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Transportation Board meets in GV

As part of its effort to meet with citizens throughout the state of Arizona and learn about their transportation needs, the State Transportation Board will meet in Green Valley on Friday, Dec. 16, at 9 a.m. at the East Center auditorium.

Local officials and citizens will have the opportunity to address the board during the meeting. The board awards highway construction contracts, monitors projects and annually adopts a five-year construction program.

Immediately following the meeting, the board will hold a study session during which it will hear presentations from the Pima Association of Governments on the Pima Regional Transportation Authority and the Southeast Loop Study.

The board consists of seven members appointed by the governor for six-year terms.

Si Schorr was appointed to

the State Transportation Board in January of 2003 and represents Pima County. He is an attorney and the senior partner with Lewis and Roca in Tucson.

He is a former assistant city manager with the city of Tucson and has served on the Pima County Planning Commission and the Governor's Economic Planning and Development Advisory Board. He currently chairs the Pima County Regional Transportation Authority.

Other board members include: Chairman Dallas "Rusty" Gant of Maricopa County; Vice Chairman Dick Hileman of Western Arizona; Delbert Householder of East Central Arizona; James Martin of Southeastern Arizona; Joe Lane of Maricopa County; and Bob Montoya of Northern Arizona.

The meeting is open to the public.



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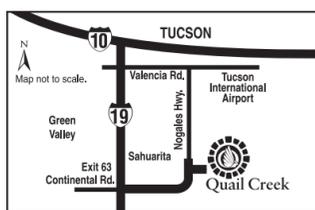
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