



Issue 36 Spring 2008

A project of the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection in Pima County, Arizona
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Arroyo Grande: Thousands of Acres of State Trust Lands Planned for Development between Tortolita and Catalina Mountain Ranges

by Carolyn Campbell, Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection

Last month, the Arizona State Land Department released a report planning for the development of 9000+ acres of State Trust Land. The development is called “Arroyo Grande,” as some of the land is in the vicinity of the Big Wash. The Big Wash, appropriately named, parallels SR 77 (Oracle Road) in the undeveloped area west of Catalina State Park in unincorporated Pima County, north of the Town limits of Oro Valley.

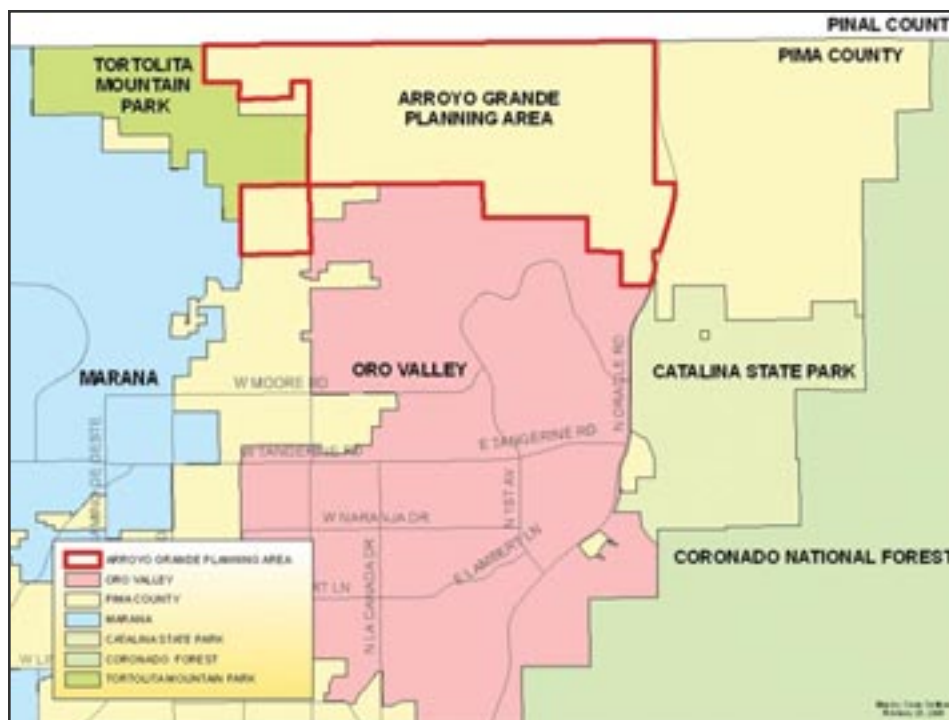
Did I say NINE THOUSAND ACRES? The area slated for development is far more than simply adjacent to the Big Wash west of Oracle Road; it stretches into the Tortolita Mountains, surrounding the County’s Tortolita Mountain Park on three sides. All of the land falls within the County’s Conservation Lands System. All of the land is designated by the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan as the *Critical Landscape Linkage* between the Catalina Mountains and the Tortolita Mountains. And all of the land is part of two Arizona Preserve Initiative (API) applications for 100% conservation; the western portion was re-classified for

conservation as the “Tortolita Mountain Park Expansion” API, and the rest was submitted, but not yet re-classified for conservation, as the “Tortolita East Biological Corridor” API.

The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan and Critical Wildlife Linkages

For the last 10 years, the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection has been working with Pima County and other agencies and citizens to develop the visionary Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. Through this process, scientists have identified and prioritized important biological lands, which the County has targeted in their Comprehensive Land Use Plan for protection, either through acquisition or environmentally-sensitive development. These sensitive lands have been designated as the “Conservation Lands System” (CLS; learn more about it on page 3). Development standards in the CLS include open space set-asides on biologically-sensitive lands and other standards that protect and enhance wildlife habitat and movement. Key elements

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Arroyo Grande Planning area: the planning area is currently within unincorporated Pima County and is bordered by Pinal County to the north, Tortolita Mountain Park to the West, and Oro Valley to the South.

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Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection

Who We Are:

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 Southwest is one of the most biologically diverse and fragile regions left in the United States; once this visionary plan is completed and fully implemented, it can serve as a model for other communities embarking on similar habitat conservation plans for other biologically important and sensitive areas across the west and the country.

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. The Coalition's main goal was to bring sound science and planning into the equation as Pima County was moving towards development of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP). The Coalition has since become a leader in the planning process of Pima County's SDCP and other conservation efforts in the area, such as the Town Marana and the City of Tucson Habitat Conservation Plans.

The Coalition is currently comprised of 35 member groups. Those groups represent over 30,000 members. The Coalition staff works on a

grass roots 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 employs a full-time Executive Director, a 3/4 -time Outreach Coordinator and a 1/2-Program Associate. In addition, several member organizations donate staff who dedicate a portion of their time to Coalition work, and many individuals from the community donate their time and energy to make the numerous and ambitious projects of the Coalition successful.

Some of Our Successes:

Thanks to our member groups and the Coalition's regular supporters, we have made tremendous strides towards the goal of creating lasting protection for the Sonoran Desert. Thus far, the Coalition has many successes, which include:

- Ⓞ Successfully persuaded Pima County to adopt the far-reaching Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP) planning process.
- Ⓞ Worked to amend Pima County's Comprehensive Land Use Plan to adopt a Conservation Lands System map and guidelines that will protect the most biologically important areas in unincorporated Pima County.
- Ⓞ Successfully led the movement for the conception, promotion, and designation of

the Ironwood Forest National Monument (IFNM).

Ⓞ Through efforts on the SDCP Steering Committee, achieved common ground with various stakeholder groups traditionally at odds with conservationists — ranchers, developers, property rights advocates, realtors, etc.

Ⓞ Completed, published, and distributed numerous reports, including a Proposal for the Establishment of the Morris K. Udall Ironwood Forest-Upland Corridor National Monument, Economic Benefits of Protecting Natural Resources in the Sonoran Desert, Protecting the Sonoran Desert: an Exploration of Open Space & Habitat Conservation Plan Funding Mechanisms, and Proposal in Support of Tortolita Preserve, among others.

Ⓞ Facilitated a grassroots campaign that persuaded voters to support an Open Space Bond that provides over \$174.3 million to fund protection of lands in Pima County.

Ⓞ Secured \$45 million for wildlife crossing structures within the 2006 Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) package.

The Coalition's wide array of outreach, education, advocacy, grassroots activism, and conservation planning activities are focused on achieving consensus between all stakeholder groups that will encourage the local governments within the region 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.

Support the Coalition by Becoming a Monthly Donor

One of the easiest ways to become a Sonoran Desert activist is to become a monthly donor to the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection. Becoming a monthly donor will allow you to provide a steady stream of support for local conservation efforts.

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

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

And you can be sure that your voice will be heard through our grassroots action on the issues that matter to you most.

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

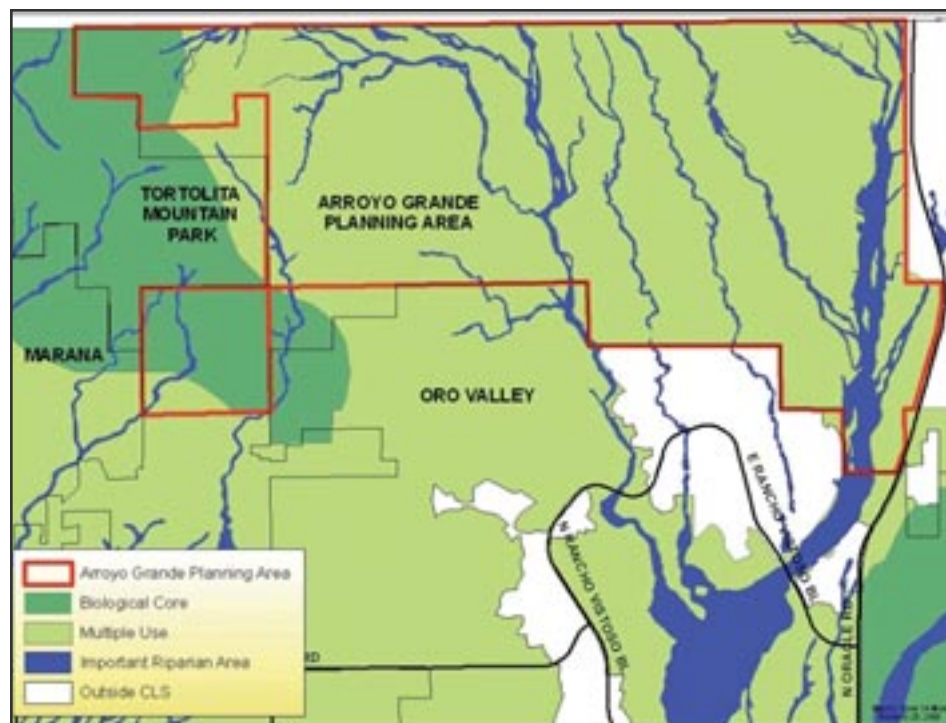
Contact the Coalition office (520-388-9925) to become a monthly donor or simply visit www.sonorandesert.org and click on *Donate Now*. This paperless giving option reduces fundraising costs by eliminating the need to mail supporter renewals. Your support ensures that our work will continue to protect the unique and diverse plant and wildlife found within our Sonoran Desert Home.

Thousands of Acres of State Trust Lands Planned for Development *continued*

of the conservation plan include assemblage of large tracts of preserve lands and connectivity between the preserve lands throughout Pima County. Categories of the “Conservation Lands System” adopted in the County’s land use plan include Important Riparian Areas, Biological Core Management Areas, Multiple Use Management Areas, and Critical Landscape Linkages (Linkages). Conservation guidelines in areas of the county designated as Linkages — there are 6 of these broadly-defined areas in eastern Pima County — include policies that protect existing biological linkages when land use changes occur.

Connectivity is a critical issue in the establishment and protection of preserve areas. In particular, the mountain ranges surrounding the Tucson urban areas are in danger of becoming isolated, which means that many of the species in the various ranges will be extirpated, or lost, from our region. And even with protection of wildlife linkages and corridors, significant barriers such as roads exist that need to be redesigned in order to facilitate wildlife movement above or below these barriers. There is hope, however. A new body of science called “road ecology” has brought together biologists and road engineers and involves the design and installation of wildlife crossing infrastructure on new roads, road improvements (widening), or retrofits on existing roads.

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Arroyo Grande Planning area with the Conservation Lands System overlaid.

Conservation Lands System and Pima County’s Comprehensive Land Use Plan

The Conservation Lands System (CLS) is considered the backbone of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP). Sensitive lands within Pima County have designations based on the biological value of the habitat. The CLS was constructed based on the science of the SDCP with participation and oversight by the SDCP Science Technical Advisory Team (STAT) and according to the most current tenets of conservation biology and biological reserve design. The five tenets are as follows:

- Ⓞ Perpetuates the comprehensive conservation of vulnerable species;
- Ⓞ Retains those areas that contain large populations of focal vulnerable species;
- Ⓞ Provide for the adjacency and proximity of habitat blocks;
- Ⓞ Preserves the contiguity of habitat at the landscape level; and
- Ⓞ Retains the connectivity of reserves with functional corridors.

The CLS conservation land categories reflect relative values of biodiversity for various lands across the landscape. Pima County’s Comprehensive Land Use Plan has adopted both the CLS map and a set of guidelines that include open space set asides in development projects that go through the rezoning process. If a landowner develops on his/her property and does not request a higher density zoning, or request any other legislative action from the Board of Supervisors, then the CLS guidelines do not apply. The categories are as follows:

Important Riparian Areas (IRA)

The guidelines call for **95% Open Space set aside** in these areas. These areas are designated for their high water availability, vegetation density, and biological productivity. Not all washes are designated as IRAs. These areas are shown as blue on the CLS map.

Biological Core:

The guidelines call for **80% Open Space set aside** in the Biological Core areas. These lands fulfill the five tenets mentioned above and are designated for their potential to support high value habitat for 5 or more priority

vulnerable species identified under the SDCP and provide greater biological diversity than Multiple Use Management Areas. These areas are shown as dark green on the CLS map

Special Species Management Areas

The guidelines call for **80% Open Space set aside** in these areas. These areas are defined as crucial for the conservation of specific native floral & faunal species of special concern of Pima County. Management of these areas will focus on conservation, restoration, and enhancement of habitat for these species. Much of this designation overlaps with Multiple Use Management Areas, but will retain the 80% set aside percentage. These areas are shown as hash marks over other CLS designations on the CLS map.

Multiple Use Management Areas

The guidelines call for **66 2/3% Open Space set aside** in these areas. These lands fulfill the five tenets mentioned above, but are not as biologically rich as those areas designated as Biological Core. These areas are primarily distinguished from other lands within the CLS by their potential to support high value habitat for 3-4 priority vulnerable species identified under the SDCP. Any overlap of the Special Species Management Areas over Multiple Use will use the 80% set aside percentage. These areas are shown as light green on the CLS map.

Critical Landscape Connections

These are broadly defined areas that provide connectivity for movement of native biological resources but which also contain potential or existing barriers that tend to isolate major conservation areas. Although there is not a prescribed percentage of **Open Space set aside** in this set of lands, any land-use change in these broadly defined areas should protect existing biological linkages. Where barriers already occur, those barriers should be removed or modified to allow biological movement through the landscape connections. These areas are numbered on the CLS map and show the general location of these connections.

Thousands of Acres of State Trust Lands Planned for Development *continued*

Critical Wildlife Linkage and State Land Use Conceptual Plan

The State Land Department has recently completed and released to the public a “Conceptual Land Use Plan” regarding the 9000+ acre Arroyo Grande proposal. What is a “Conceptual Land Use Plan?” By state statute, the State Land Commissioner must create these plans for all urban state trust lands and “consult with the city, town or county in which the land is located...regarding integrating the conceptual plan into the general land use plan of the city, town or county.” The plans are not vague; they contain enough details to provide specific areas and acreage for low, medium and high residential densities along with commercial and open space components. While all of the land is in unincorporated Pima County, the State has decided to pursue a General Plan amendment with the Town of Oro Valley, who intends to annex the land, instead of pursuing an amendment with Pima County which would require compliance with the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan.

The State Land Department has committed to planning for 68% of the Arroyo Grande development to remain open space. While this is commendable, how the open space is configured and managed is vital to the functioning of the landscape for wildlife connectivity. Can we support the annexation into Oro Valley? Despite the fact that the Town has stated a commitment to respecting the goals of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, the Town has not adopted the Plan, nor has it adopted an Environmentally-Sensitive Lands Ordinance, an Environmentally-Sensitive Roadway Design Ordinance, or a Water Resources General Plan policy, and has no development requirements for open space in environmentally-sensitive areas. Simply stated, the Town of Oro Valley does not currently have the tools in place to adequately protect this important biological linkage between the Santa Catalina Mountains, which are protected as state park and federal forest, and the Tortolita Mountains, parts of which are protected as a county park. Adopting Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan standards as policy or ordinance is our minimum expectation of Oro Valley as the state land parcels make their way through the planning and annexation process.

The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan was established through a community wide effort to ensure that future development is done in a manner that does not destroy the ecological integrity of the Sonoran Desert within Pima County boundaries. It is time for all jurisdictions in Pima County to adopt the principles and tools for achieving conservation within the Sonoran Desert Conservation

Plan. Assurances must be made if we are to achieve the conservation goals the Coalition has been advocating for the last 10 years. Wildlife does not recognize political boundaries. Habitat in which wildlife depends on can be found within all jurisdictional boundaries in eastern Pima County. Oro Valley, Tucson, Marana, and Sahuarita should take advantage of over 10 years worth of scientific study and work done on the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan and immediately work toward adopting the various tools necessary to implement the long range vision of the plan. Until there is regional cooperation on land use and water conservation, large scale developments in environmentally-sensitive lands such as within the Arroyo Grande proposal should not be approved.

Next Steps

On March 5, the Oro Valley Mayor and Council initiated a General Plan Amendment process for the 9000+ acres of State Trust Land north of their municipal boundaries. While these lands are outside of Oro Valley and in unincorporated Pima County, they do fall within the Town’s future planning boundary. It is heartening that one of the Town’s stated “guiding principles” in planning for these lands is to “(a) adhere to the Pima County Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan/Conservation Land System.” Over the next few months, there will be public meetings in the community as well as two public hearings before the Town’s Planning and Zoning and Commission. Following the Commission process, there will be a public hearing before the Mayor and Council prior to a Council vote to amend the General Plan. The Town staff will also soon begin drafting a “pre-annexation agreement” which will spell out commitments by both the Town and the State Land Department. Depending on the outcome of these processes, the Council will then vote on whether to annex the land into Oro Valley, and the State Land Commissioner will decide whether to agree to annexation. All of these steps are expected to occur within a year.

The Mayor and Council also voted on March 5 to complete and adopt a Town Environmentally-Sensitive Lands Ordinance. Work on this ordinance began about 10 years ago, but was never completed nor adopted by the Town.

Every acre of this land planned for development is important for conservation efforts in the region, and the Coalition will continue to be involved in all aspects of planning for the 9000+ acres, whether through Oro Valley’s or Pima County’s processes.

Prior to annexation of the State Land identified in the Arroyo Grande Conceptual Plan, the Town of Oro Valley should implement the following measures to protect the biological values and landscape connectivity of the area:

Adopt the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan’s Conservation Land System map and associated guidelines: For example, Important Riparian Area = minimum of 95%; Biological Core = minimum 80%; Multiple Use = minimum of 66.7%.

Define Natural Undisturbed Open Space (NUOS): NUOS shall be restricted from any disturbance.

Configure NUOS to provide for wildlife movement: NUOS should be configured in a way as to provide for contiguous open space throughout the entire project area.

Set-aside NUOS parcels in common areas and in perpetuity: Conserved land will be established as separate, natural open space parcel(s) from the development area, rather than outside the building envelope of individual lots. Legal safe guards such as conservation easements shall be approved to fully preserve all areas identified as open space in perpetuity.

Surround Tortolita Mountain Park with a NUOS Buffer: All of the following lands shall remain as Natural Undisturbed Open Space: Section 16, Section 10, Section 05, Section 04, Section 03, Section 10, and the southern half of Section 13.

Identify a hard-line Wildlife Linkage Area through the property: The Wildlife Linkage Area shall be Natural Undisturbed Open Space, identified on a map with distinct boundaries. The width of the corridor should be sufficient for wildlife movement and shall reflect the best available science.

Provide transition areas to the Tortolita Mountain Park Buffer Area, the Wildlife Linkage Area, Important Riparian Areas, and other preserve lands such as Honey Bee Canyon: Development adjacent to all of these areas shall be a very low density, and there shall be levels of density transition, with highest densities furthest from NUOS.

Support construction of span bridges on Oracle Road: A series of span bridges should be constructed during ADOT’s Oracle Road widening project in order to allow wildlife to safely move under Oracle Road.

Adopt a Management Plan: Areas set-aside as NUOS shall include a management plan in order to ensure the integrity of the conserved area is maintained. The management plan shall have a monitoring component.

Identify an assured funding source for management: An endowment or other assured funding should be secured that does not rely on general fund allocations or other discretionary sources.

Interstate 10 Bypass Wrong Turn for Arizona!

by Matt Clark, Defenders of Wildlife

The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) is studying the feasibility of constructing a new 250-mile, \$6-8 billion highway bypass around the Tucson and Phoenix metro areas. The call for a study to assess the feasibility of this bypass idea originated from ADOT Board Chairman Si Schorr, professional real estate and corporate/business attorney in Tucson.

Put simply, this bypass proposal would be a wrong turn for Arizona. ADOT hired the URS Corporation to conduct a bypass feasibility study. The feasibility study found the proposed bypass will *not* solve the congestion we're seeing in the Tucson area – the study anticipates a bypass would only reduce highway traffic by 5% in 2030. Traffic volume statistics demonstrate that the source of current congestion originates in and surrounding the cities of Tucson and Phoenix. Therefore, these congestion problems are best addressed at their source — in the immediate Tucson and Phoenix areas — with viable solutions such as improved public transportation. A regional solution could include commuter rail between the two areas and light rail within them.

Aside from failing to ameliorate traffic congestion, construction of such a bypass could compromise decades of progressive, collaborative work to preserve our wild lands, wildlife and cultural resources. And, at a time when global warming poses a significant and growing threat, ADOT is proposing to continue exactly the type of unsustainable transportation planning practices that got us into this hard spot in the first place. In many cases, new highways have been shown to *create more* development and traffic as opposed to *relieving* traffic.

After 100 years of road building, we have learned one undeniable fact: highways are bad for wildlife and other living things, including humans. When a major highway is built, it has major impacts that extend far beyond the pavement. In the last two decades, our understanding of *how* our highways impact wildlife, our environment and communities has grown considerably with the rise of the science of “Road Ecology.” Without question, we have made great strides in better understanding and mitigating the impacts roads and highways have on wildlife and habitat. Sadly, even the best mitigation cannot replace all the values lost when a highway is built through wildlife habitat. Coupled together, habitat destruction and fragmentation is the leading causes of species extinction globally. As such, proposals to build expressways through wild areas should be scrutinized and prevented at all costs.

Thus far, the vast majority of the public comments have been in opposition to ADOT's I-10 bypass proposal. At a public meeting in Tucson to present feasibility study findings and gain public input, the Tucson Citizen reported in its 11/30/07 article *I-10 bypass plan gets chilly reception*, “Only one of about 40 speakers supported the proposal”. This is not just a “NIMBY” issue; there has been broad protest and opposition to the mere idea of a bypass from all sectors of society. For instance, both Cochise and Pima Counties have passed resolutions opposing the bypass. The Pima County Resolution reads in part: “WHEREAS, Pima County's landmark Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan identifies 55 rare local species of concern, whose areas of habitat and corridors between habitat areas already are under threat from development... [The Pima County Board of Supervisors] opposes the construction of any new highways in or around the

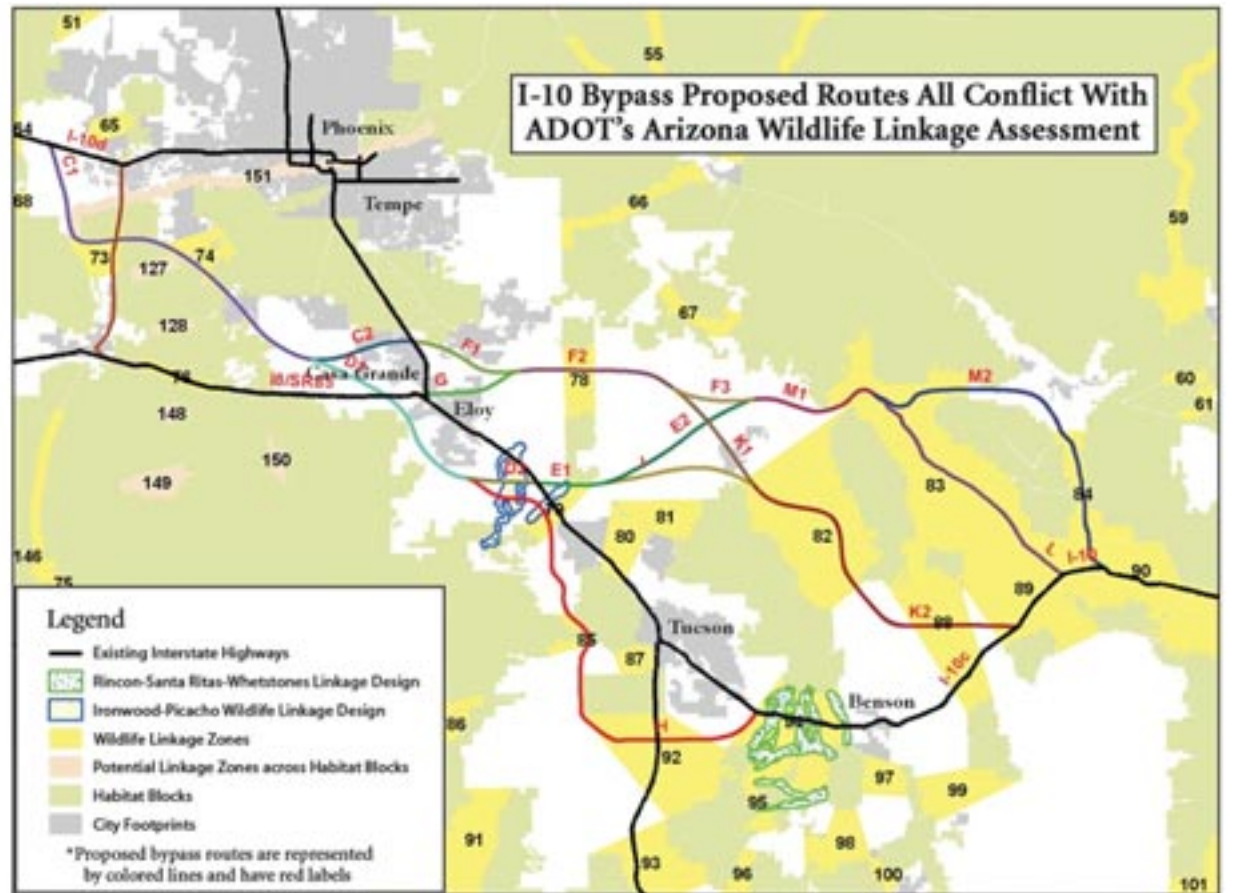


FIGURE 1. All of the proposed bypass routes intersect and would permanently fragment one or more wildlife linkages identified in ADOT's Wildlife Linkages Assessment. This is an important “environmental constraint” not considered in the preliminary feasibility study. Note the two linkage designs (outlined in blue and green) in relation to segment H.

County that have the stated purpose of bypassing the existing Interstate 10 as it is believed that the environmental, historic, archeological, and urban form impacts could not be adequately mitigated.”

The Arizona Game and Fish Commission has expressed opposition to the idea. Numerous conservation organizations have rallied in opposition to the bypass. Many local landowners have been engaged and are organizing to stop this potential invasion into their quiet, rural communities and livelihoods. This local opposition is emulated by the Cascabel Working Group, which has led the charge to challenge the proposal with grassroots organizing and thoughtful analysis of the facts. The TTT Truckstop, located just off of I-10, has registered its opposition to the proposal, with concern that siphoning off truck traffic to circumvent Tucson will also drain its business base. In fact, supporters of the bypass concept are hard to find, and the few that are out there appear to be mostly land speculators.

The basis for this groundswell of public opposition is well-founded. The bypass proposal is inconsistent with Arizona's Long Range Transportation Plan (MoveAZ), Arizona's Growing Smarter Initiative, Pima County's landmark Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan and the ADOT-sponsored Arizona Wildlife Linkages Assessment (Figure 1), among other regional conservation plans such as the Nature Conservancy's Ecoregional Assessments and the Sky Islands Wildlands Network. All of the proposed bypass routes are in direct opposition to the conservation of sensitive resources and the rural character of southern Arizona.

All of the proposed bypass routes would require disturbing undeveloped areas that provide vital habitat and movement corridors for many of Arizona's unique

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Wrong Turn continued

wildlife species, several of which — like the Sonoran desert tortoise, Tucson shovel-nosed snake, cactus ferruginous pygmy owl and bighorn sheep — are already imperiled. A new highway bypass would cause direct mortality and block movements for more common species as well, such as mule deer, mountain lion, black bear and mesopredators such as coyote, bobcat and kit fox, among many others.

More specifically, each of the proposed routes would cut through and impact large, ecologically sensitive watersheds and landscapes. For instance, the San Pedro River Valley, where “Route 3” is proposed, supports one of the most biologically diverse ecosystems in North America. This diversity stems from the San Pedro’s location at the convergence of four major ecosystems—the Sierra Madre and Rocky Mountains, and the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts. This is obviously not an appropriate route for a highway!

Locating a major highway in the Aravaipa and Avra Valleys (Routes 1 and 4, respectively) would put the integrity of nearby national forests, wilderness areas and national parks at stake. For instance, Route H, proposed through the Avra Valley, would negatively impact treasured public resources and recreation areas contained within the adjacent Tucson Mountain Park, Saguaro National Park, Ironwood National Monument, important elements of Pima County’s Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, and the Bureau of Reclamation’s Central Arizona Project Canal Wildlife Mitigation Corridor in Avra Valley (Figure 2).

In fact, the proposed alignment of the H segment would blow through the heart of this mitigation area, nullifying the purpose for which it was preserved. Management guidelines for this mitigation area explicitly state that future developments are prohibited in the area, and that the integrity of the area is to be maintained for both wildlife and special status plant species. Given the current land ownership configuration this mitigation area can not be avoided by proposed segment “H”. The proposed alignment of segment H would also come within 6630 feet of the Ironwood National Monument, within 3,260 feet of Saguaro National Park West, and would narrowly miss Pima County’s Tumamoc Globeberry Preserve by 640 feet. All of these conservation areas would be degraded by both direct and indirect impacts of a major highway in such close proximity. Similarly, segments L and M would degrade the ecological integrity of nearby wilderness areas in the immediate vicinity such as the Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness and other sensitive lands managed by the state and Coronado National Forest.

Construction of a freeway in any of the proposed route corridors would open adjacent areas up to new commercial and residential development far from existing urban centers, further fragmenting wildlife habitat, polluting the earth, air and water, and encouraging more unwanted car and truck travel. ADOT’s role in shaping the future of southern Arizona is critical. ADOT should be investigating and investing in alternatives to avoid the above-listed detrimental environmental impacts through intelligent and progressive transportation planning. ADOT should live up to commitments it has made to public safety, health and the environment. We can do better than a bypass!

Alternatives to a Bypass

Planning at a regional scale points to the need to integrate transit, water and utility needs along with available information on sensitive and valuable natural resources across political lines. Such an approach is more likely to result in a plan

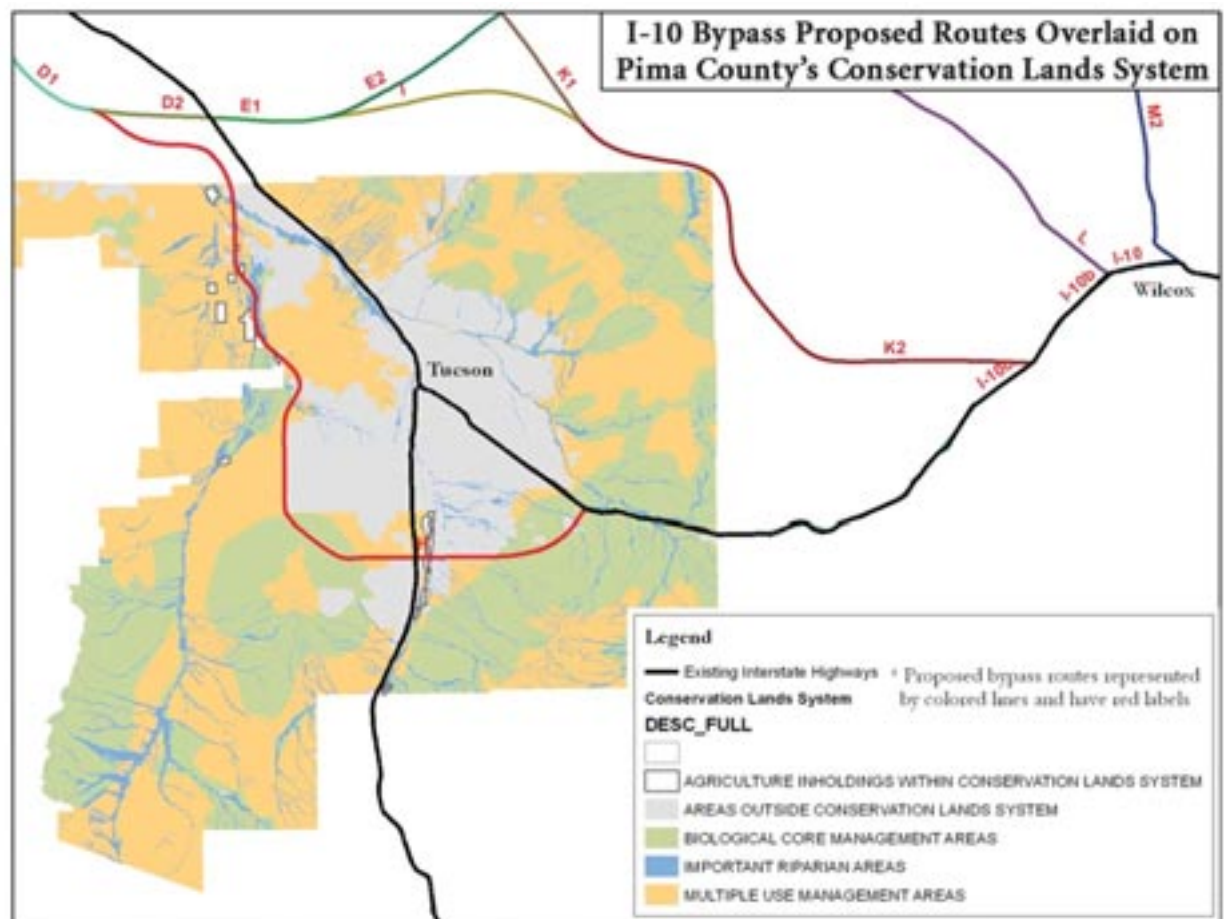


FIGURE 2. Proposed segment “H” would fragment and/or degrade numerous sensitive federal and county protected areas.

that is environmentally and economically sustainable, and thus more palatable to the public. Such a plan should capitalize on new alternatives and technologies that can more effectively address the problems at hand, such as double-decking the highway through traffic bottlenecks and investing in increased mass transit and rail infrastructure.

Anticipating increases in freight travel, a double track rail line would be a much more economical and practical choice than continuing to rely so heavily upon trucking for the shipment of goods. Rail would move freight three times as efficiently as trucks, reduce traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions, and increase highway safety by eliminating hazards related to excessive truck traffic. The bottom line: we do not want or need an expensive, environmentally damaging bypass! However, the worsening traffic problem remains real. Now is the time to explore and invest in viable and more sustainable solutions to our traffic woes.

Update

On March 21, the State Public Transportation Board, contrary to the desires of public sentiment, passed a motion to continue studying the costs, benefits, consequences, and environmental constraints of I-10 bypass routes. The newly-approved study follows a feasibility study that was recently released which concluded that a bypass is, indeed “feasible.” The Board did remove the San Pedro Valley route from consideration, but this does not lessen the need and urgency to adamantly oppose all remaining routes. Multimodal transportation was not included in the study. The feasibility study can be found at: tpd.azdot.gov/planning/i10bypass.php.

Contact Governor Napolitano and tell her NO ON ALL I-10 BYPASS ROUTES:

The full mailing address is: The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Telephone (602) 542-4331 Governor of Arizona
Toll Free 1-(800) 253-0883 1700 West Washington
Fax (602) 542-1381 Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Transportation Corridors are Essential Targets for Effective Buffelgrass Control

by Travis Bean, University of Arizona School of Natural Resources, and Kathleen Kennedy, Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection

Buffelgrass (*Pennisetum ciliare*), an invasive fire-prone grass species from Africa, has become one of the most pressing conservation issues in southern Arizona. As it continues to spread out along our roadways and highways, it is now threatening more and more pristine areas of the Sonoran Desert. While buffelgrass has a host of associated conservation issues — crowding out native plants, increasing the risk of catastrophic wildlife in a previously fire-proof ecosystem, depleting the desert soil of important nutrients — the *spread* of buffelgrass along our transportation corridors is an important ecological and policy issue that demands our immediate attention.

It is widely known that roads are one of the primary pathways for plant invasions into desert regions by facilitating the dispersal of alien plant seeds. Roadsides not only experience high levels of disturbance, but they also have high levels of productivity from rainfall runoff onto road surfaces and adjacent roadside edges. According to a recent report written by the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, roadways are “the primary source of [buffelgrass] seed for dispersal into natural vegetation” and the “distribution of buffelgrass in Arizona is shaped like a brittle star centered on Tucson, with the legs along the highways radiating out of town” (Van Devender and Dimmitt 2006). Buffelgrass is ubiquitous along surface streets and highways in the center and periphery of Tucson, being found on nearly every unpaved roadside, median and vacant lot.

Once established along a roadside, buffelgrass is then likely to disperse into the native vegetation, where it can be much more difficult and costly to control. Examples of this can be seen in the wildland urban interface in the Santa Catalina Foothills where infestations along City and County roads have escaped into natural area set asides in high end developments and also into the high value saguaro paloverde habitat in the lower elevations of the Coronado National Forest. Infestations along Interstates 10, 19, and 8 pose significant threats to adjacent native vegetation, as do infestations along the Ajo and Catalina Highways.

Some transportation departments have existing contracts with private companies to control roadside vegetation, but little emphasis or resources are placed on the control of invasive species, even serious threats like buffelgrass. A comprehensive control program requires mapping of the existing infestations, control using herbicides and hand-pulling, and diligent follow-up monitoring. Buffelgrass seeds can remain viable for 3-5 years in the soil, so a monitoring period of at least this long is recommended following initial control treatments. Ongoing control efforts in Saguaro National Park, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Tucson Mountain Park and elsewhere show that both herbicides and pulling can effectively control buffelgrass as long as follow-up treatments are continued.

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Buffelgrass yellow areas creeping up the Catalinas. Photo courtesy Julio Betancourt.

Wildlife Linkages: Opportunities and Challenges

Article and photos by Janice Przybyl, Sky Island Alliance

Imagine...

Imagine a mountain lion traveling from the Catalina Mountains to the Tucson Mountains, with a stop for dinner and a nap along the way in the Tortolita Mountains. Coming down off the western flank of the Catalinas — maybe passing through Catalina State Park — is not a problem. Even the few houses that the lion passes pose little threat — a few barking dogs, lights, and dirt roads are easy to circumvent and avoid. But then the mountain lion comes up against the first major obstacle in its journey — Oracle Road with four high-speed lanes.

Even with lighter traffic at nighttime, Oracle Road still poses a challenge. Maybe there's a culvert the mountain lion could use to go under the road...no, not at this location. He chances it and dashes across the blacktop. Phew! He made it, but on the west side of the road housing density is thicker. Thank goodness there are still patches of open natural space he can slip through to get to Big Wash and then zip across a large block of state land that is still undeveloped open land — for now — and up into the Tortolita Mountains.

As Arizona's population grows at one of the highest rates in the nation, more and more of our precious desert and grassland habitats surrounding our Sky Island mountain ranges become subdivided and built out with houses and roads. This development dramatically changes the landscape and diminishes the ability of wildlife to safely move between mountain ranges. In addition, this fragmentation is one of the biggest threats to the survival of species such as mountain lions, black bears, bobcat, and their prey. Wildlife depend on landscape connectivity to meet a variety of ecological needs: for daily movements to acquire resources such as food and water; for seasonal movements; for finding mates; for natal dispersal which promotes genetic exchange and avoids inbreeding; for adjusting to environmental fluctuations such as drought; and for long-term species persistence on the larger landscape.

Extremely tenuous wildlife linkages between the Santa Catalina, Tortolita, and Tucson Mountains exist on Tucson's northwest side. Rapid population growth and the consequential infrastructure improvements in Oro Valley



Existing underpass at I-10 and Avra Valley. Work is currently underway to preserve land on both sides of I-10 and to enhance the area to facilitate wildlife movement. Wildlife have been documented using the structure.



Riparian area bisected by a road.

and Marana are changing the landscape and diminishing the ability of wildlife to safely move between these mountain ranges. The need for conservation action is urgent and Sky Island Alliance and the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection (Coalition) are currently tackling these imminent threats to wildlife movement. The Coalition is working with the AZ Department of Transportation, AZ Game and Fish Department (AGFD), local jurisdictions, and other conservation organizations to improve and restore our important landscape connections. A variety of tools exist that help keep critical landscape linkages intact. Fencing and re-vegetation can steer wildlife towards existing culverts or underpasses; underpasses can be created during scheduled road projects; and land bridges or eco-ducts can span interstates and other obstacles that would otherwise create an impenetrable barrier to wildlife. These "natural" bridges are constructed with the sole intent of getting wildlife from one side of an obstacle to the other — safely.

The Wildlife Linkages Program, a monitoring project run by the Sky Island Alliance, is carried out by volunteers who investigate where critters maneuver over the land and cross or attempt to cross roads. As traffic whizzes by on nearby Oracle Road, imagine volunteers hiking gingerly through drainages with attention focused on the ground, looking for signs of wildlife. Every so often they stop to photo-document a track left by a species of concern... a bobcat track or maybe a track left by mule deer. The information they collect, along with roadkill and other data amassed by AGFD, can help inform road engineers where to locate and how to design the best wildlife crossing structures.

Imagine the mountain lion again. After a few days, the journey continues as the mountain lion eyes the Tucson Mountains from a rock bench on the southwestern reaches of the Tortolita Mountains. This jaunt will be more daunting. The Tortolita Fan, with ironwood trees, palo verde, creosote bushes, and tall majestic multi-armed saguaros, is still navigable, but between the Tortolita and the Tucson Mountains runs the formidable barrier of Interstate-10.

The only possible I-10 crossing currently available in this area is a decommissioned railroad underpass just south of the Avra Valley Road interchange. This crossing is a veritable hole in the wall that wildlife need to first find, then access, and finally make haste to the other side (see photo on left). The gauntlet is made even more risky because in addition to I-10, wildlife need to cross a set of railroad tracks — with predictions of increased

continued next page

Effective Buffelgrass Control continued from page 7

As scientists, local governments, conservation groups, and others have recognized the imminent threat buffelgrass poses to the Sonoran Desert, various policy changes have been suggested to address the threat (for a more complete list of suggested actions, see the recently completed Buffelgrass Strategic Plan available at www.desertmuseum.org).

The Coalition supports the following transportation-related policy initiatives:

- Ⓞ Include buffelgrass removal in the scopes of work for all roadway projects, both new roads and roadway improvements (e.g., lane expansion). As roadway projects are planned and completed, buffelgrass removal should be a standard and integral aspect of all projects. This will include training crews to recognize buffelgrass and in procedures for hand-pulling and herbicide application.
- Ⓞ Increase the budgets of local, regional, and state transportation departments for roadside maintenance. Roadside maintenance includes activities such as controlling vegetation growth along right-of-ways, maintaining landscaped areas and medians, cleaning and maintaining culverts, maintaining roadway slopes, and maintaining and repairing fencing, guardrails, and gates. All of these activities present an opportunity to identify and remove new buffelgrass growth and to curb the spread of buffelgrass further into the Sonoran Desert. The Coalition recognizes that buffelgrass will be an ongoing and enduring conservation problem. Thus, including buffelgrass removal as a standard part of roadside maintenance will greatly contribute to the long-term buffelgrass control strategy.
- Ⓞ Include buffelgrass removal as part of the standard operating procedures for all Capital Improvement Projects (CIPs) conducted by local governments. CIPs include roadway projects, new bridges, new parks, and water and sewer line installation, among others.
- Ⓞ Identify an assured funding mechanism that will finance invasive species removal and control throughout all jurisdictions of Pima County.

With each passing year, buffelgrass continues its spread into the Sonoran Desert, increasing exponentially the amount of land it occupies. Roadways are the primary pathway for its expansion as buffelgrass capitalizes on the disturbed ground and benefits from the increased rainfall runoff. It is imperative that local governments both recognize this imminent threat to the Sonoran Desert and act to curb its further spread. The policy suggestions listed above are concrete steps that jurisdictions and government agencies can take to address this issue — if they don't, the future of the Sonoran Desert is at stake.

Buffelgrass Field Inspection with Community Leaders and Business Representatives

The Coalition, in collaboration with local scientists, recently organized a Buffelgrass Field Inspection in the Catalina Foothills. Dozens of community leaders and business representatives participated in a half-day field trip on March 3, 2008 that showcased the potentially devastating buffelgrass infestation in the Catalina Foothills area. The field trip was led by representatives from the U.S. Geological Survey, the University of Arizona, the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Rural Metro Fire Department, the National Park Service, and the National Forest Service. The goal of the field trip was to mobilize support and financial resources from the larger community for buffelgrass mapping, removal, and monitoring efforts. The field trip was a success, and follow-up meetings and trainings are planned with business groups.

Van Devender, T.R., and Dimmitt, M.A. 2006. "Conservation of Arizona Upland Sonoran Desert Habitat. Status and Threats of Buffelgrass (*Pennisetum ciliare*) in Arizona and Sonora. Project #2004-0013-003)." Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Tucson, AZ. Accessed Feb. 15, 2008 at www.desertmuseum.org/programs/buffel_survey_report.pdf



Field documentation of a bobcat track.

Wildlife Linkages continued

train traffic looming in the near future — two frontage roads, and an irrigation channel to reach the Santa Cruz River.

For a year now Sky Island Alliance, along with AGFD, has been conducting tracking surveys along the north-south stretch between I-10 and the Tortolita Mountains. Tracking volunteers have documented many bobcat tracks (see photo above) along with tracks of coyotes, jackrabbits, javelina, and other small mammals and reptiles. However, tracking data can only tell us that a critter was there, not if the animal made it safely through the underpass and over the other obstacles. Remotely triggered cameras that are strategically placed could help supply that data.

The larger conservation challenge is landscape-related and concerns the habitat on either side of I-10 and Oracle Road. Maintaining wildlife friendly roads is moot if adjacent land is overwhelmed with commercial or high-density residential development in the future. In order to prevent this outcome, the Coalition, Pima County, and others are working to sustain landscape permeability with tools such as land acquisition, open space set-asides, buffers, and easements. At the I-10 underpass the landscape level question also involves how wildlife could be funneled to this one underpass and thus deterred from attempting to cross I-10.

Imagine a magnificent Sonoran desert ecoduct that spans the railroad tracks, both frontage roads, I-10, and the irrigation ditches. Imagine the mountain lion moving slowly and at first tentatively over that bridge, as cars and semi-trucks zoom underneath. Imagine road engineers, wildlife biologists, land planners and conservationists working together to protect wildlife connectivity and design and build wildlife crossings throughout Pima County.

If you can imagine being a Sky Island Alliance volunteer wildlife tracker and would like more information please contact Janice Przybyl at janice@skyislandalliance.org.

Open Space Purchases

*A-7 Ranch:

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

Acres: 6,828 (private)
Price: ~\$2 million
Acquired: 8/2004

*Bee/Mordka:

Found on the west side of the Tucson Mountains just south of the Tohono O'odham Garcia Strip, the Bee/Mordka purchase was comprised of three private parcels totaling 160 acres. These parcels

are located along the Brawley Wash in the Avra Valley with more than 50% of the parcels in an Important Riparian Area, the category of the Conservation Land System that calls for the highest level of protection. This acquisition helped preserve a wildlife linkage between the West Branch of the Brawley Wash and the Santa Cruz River across the Tohono O'odham Reservation. The Brawley Wash has been damaged over the years, but has high potential for restoration in the future. This purchase will protect against future damage along this section of the wash.

Acres: 160 (private)
Price: ~\$60,800
Acquired: 11/2004

*Bar V/Davidson Canyon:

This property totals over 1,700 acres of private land and has an associated 12,600 acres of leased state trust land. It is located southeast of Vail, east of Sonoita Highway, and lies predominantly south of I-10. The acquisition of this property has preserved a major wildlife corridor, with two of the northernmost private parcels in the Bar V/Davidson Canyon connecting with the Pima County Cienega Creek Natural Preserve via an I-10 underpass. This area is mainly Biological Core

and has potential habitat for at least 34 of the 55 priority vulnerable species targeted for conservation in the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP). The area contains perennial waters and is now protected from development that is approaching from the southeastern Tucson metro area. A linkage between the Rincon Mountains and the Santa Rita Mountains is protected from development and other harmful activities because of this acquisition.

Acres: 1,763 (private)
Price: ~\$8.1 million
Acquired: 2/2005

*Rancho Seco:

This important addition to the Pima County Preserve is found in the Altar Valley and consists of over 9,500 acres of private land and 12,000 acres of leased state trust land and BLM land. The water rights associated with the private property were also acquired by Pima County. Semi-desert grassland and open mesquite woodlands are found on this property which has the potential to support over 120 wildlife species including nine priority vulnerable species. A stretch of the Sopori Wash is located along the western boundary of the property, which also shares a border with the Buenos Aires National Wildlife

Updates

Funding Open Space Acquisitions

by Sean Sullivan, Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection

In 2004, Pima County voters approved \$174.3 million dollars to fund open space acquisitions. These acquisitions help to implement the vision of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan through the creation of a natural preserve system within Pima County. So far, the County has spent just over \$70 million to acquire over 25,500 acres of private land and currently holds the associated state trust land grazing leases on an additional 86,200 acres. All of this has been done under the scrutiny of the citizen-led Conservation Acquisition Commission, implementing an open space program that will continue for years to come.

In 2004, the voters also approved a map which identifies eligible habitat for acquisition. The value of the identified lands far exceeds the amount of money approved. Thus, it will be

necessary to hold multiple bond elections over many years to complete the natural preserve system. The next bond election is currently being planned by the Pima County Bond Advisory Committee (Committee) and the Board of Supervisors. Although initially targeted for 2008, there has been no final decision on when the election will occur.

The Committee has been presented with a recommendation from the Conservation Acquisition Commission to include \$285 million for open space. On January 19, 2008, the Committee heard a presentation on the open space portion of the overall future bond package. Many supporters of the conservation acquisition program spoke out in support of the full funding of the recommended open space program.

The Committee will make a recommendation later this year that will include a final dollar amount for the acquisition program to be included in the next bond election. There will be a multitude of bond programs competing for funding. These include Justice and Law Enforcement, Libraries and Community Facilities, Public Works, Neighborhood Reinvestment, Affordable Housing, Historic Preservation, and Parks. Since land prices will

only continue to rise, an investment now in land for open space preservation is a wise choice for future generations and the future of the Sonoran Desert.

Please let the Pima County Bond Advisory Committee know that you support fully funding conservation: \$285 million for the Conservation Acquisition Program, Send emails to bondinfo@pima.gov, or send a letter to: Bond Advisory Committee, ATTN: Nicole Fyffe, 130 West Congress Street, 10th Floor, Tucson, AZ 85701.

Pima County Water Resources Policy Adopted!

In December 2007, as part of the Comprehensive Plan Amendment process, the Pima County Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted a revised Water Resources Element. We are happy to report that County staff included many of our suggestions and as such a much improved Water Resources Element was adopted. The overall goal of the revised Water Resources Element is to address water resource impacts earlier in the

Refuge. This acquisition assures the protection of a large unfragmented area within the Altar Valley.

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

***NW properties:**

A number of properties were recently purchased on the northwest side of the greater Tucson area. One of the last unprotected ironwood tree forests is found in this area and is interlaced with a multitude of Important Riparian Areas. The habitat in this area is highly important to the cactus ferruginous pygmy owl and the endangered lesser long nosed bat, both of which are protected species under the SDCP. This area is also important for landscape connectivity between the Catalina Mountains, through the Tortolita Mountains, to the Tucson Mountains. The Coalition will continue to advocate for the protection of the Northwest Sub-area and the Tortolita Fan.

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

***Some land purchased with '97 bond funds**

land-use decision-making process. Some of the highlights include:

- Ⓞ A Water Supply Impact Review on Comprehensive Plan Amendments which are larger than four acres.
- Ⓞ The submittal of a Preliminary and Final Integrated Water Management Plan (IWMP) on rezonings. The IWMP will address issues such as water supply options, proximity of the development to existing water supply infrastructure and groundwater-dependent ecosystems, and analysis of groundwater level trends in the area, among others.
- Ⓞ Rezoning policies that promote water conservation, discourage developments that could negatively impact groundwater-dependent ecosystems, encourage connection to a renewable and potable water supply, and promote recharge in areas of shallow groundwater.

The Coalition will continue to work towards regional cooperation between all jurisdictions in Pima County to adopt similar land use policies which aim to protect our water and riparian resources.

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

\$50 \$75 \$100 \$250 \$500

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

A Friend of the Desert is a Friend of Mine



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

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

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

Mineral Withdrawal Bill Could Mean 'No More Mining' to Beautiful Areas of Southern Arizona *by Kim Beck, Coordinator, Save the Scenic Santa Ritas, www.scenicsantaritas.org*

The natural areas south of Tucson, in the Santa Rita and Patagonia Mountains, are well used for recreation and respite by the citizens of Tucson, surrounding communities, and droves of visitors. But more importantly, these sky islands provide various types of habitat for a wide range of wildlife species. These biologically important areas are now being threatened by an invasion of mining companies who have begun exploration for potential open-pit mines in these beautiful areas, just west of Scenic Highway 83 and beyond. An open-pit mine is incompatible with Pima County's visionary Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan.

In November 2007 Representative Raúl M. Grijalva introduced legislation (HR 4228) to remove potentially 500,000 acres of land in the Coronado National Forest and certain lands owned by Pima and Santa Cruz Counties from future hard rock mining claims. "The community concerns on the current and future mining proposals in our area create the need for this legislation," stated Grijalva. Representative Gabrielle Giffords of Southern Arizona is a cosponsor of this bill.

However, a lack of valid claims could limit mining. "These mines need the Forest Service lands for their operations, and if the claims are not valid, they wouldn't be able to use those lands," said Lainie Levick, a member of Save the Scenic Santa Ritas.

Earlier in 2007, Grijalva held a hearing in Tucson to receive testimony on the environmental impact of the antiquated 1872 Mining Act and the current proposal for copper mining on the Rosemont Ranch in the Santa Rita Mountains. A separate bill, HR 2262, the Hardrock Mining and Reclamation Act, to reform the 1872 Act, cosponsored by Rep. Grijalva, recently passed the House and is on its way to the Senate this spring.

In 2005 Augusta Resource, a small Canadian mining company, bought the Rosemont Ranch located in the Santa Rita Mountains. Augusta has proposed a large open pit mine on that property that includes dumping their tailings and overburden on the adjacent Coronado National Forest lands. This proposal, in addition to new mining and mineral exploration proposals in the Patagonia Mountains, Canelo Hills, and San Rafael Valley has joined the boom of mining exploration that has hit Arizona, due to an increase in copper prices. But as history has shown, the price of copper can fluctuate — creating risks to investors and to the communities near the proposed mines.

A recently released economic study also shows that the costs to these communities can be great. The full report, commissioned by Save the Scenic Santa Ritas, can be found at www.scenicsantaritas.org.

Save the Scenic Santa Ritas (SSSR), is a volunteer group based in Tucson, Arizona, working to educate the public about these bills. SSSR is a Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection member group who formed in 1996 to protect the scenic, aesthetic, recreational and wildlife values of the Santa Rita Mountains. Through education and outreach, including protection from degradation due to mining activities, the group has been watching out for new mining proposals since its inception. Visit the SSSR website for more ways to help protect our scenic backyard.

You can also help by writing your Senators and asking them to support both 1872 Mining Act reform and the mineral withdrawal bill... and write letters to the editor or opinion pieces to describe how important these places are to you in their wild state.

Senator Jon Kyl, 730 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington DC 20510, or online at kyl.senate.gov, (202)224-4521 or Tucson (520)575-8833.

Senator John McCain, 241 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington DC 20510, or online at mccain.senate.gov, (202)224-2235 or Tucson (520)670-6334.

Contact your home state Senators if you are a visitor.