



Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection

Friends of the Desert

Issue 44 Winter 2013

1998-2013: Celebrating 15 Years as a Strong Voice for People and Wildlife

Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest

Arizona League of Conservation Voters Education Fund

Arizona Native Plant Society

Bat Conservation International

Cascabel Conservation Association

Center for Biological Diversity

Center for Environmental Connections

Center for Environmental Ethics

Defenders of Wildlife

Desert Watch

Drylands Institute

Empire Fagan Coalition

Environmental and Cultural Conservation Organization

Environmental Law Society

Friends of Cabeza Prieta

Friends of Ironwood Forest

Friends of Madera Canyon

Friends of Saguaro National Park

Friends of Tortolita

Gates Pass Area Neighborhood Association

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Neighborhood Coalition of Greater Tucson

Northwest Neighborhoods Alliance

Protect Lands and Neighborhoods

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Sierra Club—Grand Canyon Chapter

Sierra Club—Rincon Group

Silverbell Mountain Alliance

Sky Island Alliance

Sky Island Watch

Society for Ecological Restoration

Sonoran Arthropod Studies Institute

Sonoran Permaculture Guild

Southwestern Biological Institute

Tortolita Homeowners Association

Tucson Audubon Society

Tucson Herpetological Society

Tucson Mountains Association

Wildlands Network

Women for Sustainable Technology

Too Many Houses — Too Close to the Park Coalition Supporters Make a Difference for Catalina State Park

“Too many houses — too close to the park,” was the rallying cry for hundreds of concerned residents and citizens that overflowed out of the Oro Valley Town Council meeting on December 5th, 2012. These advocates had all come with one goal in mind, to protect our valued wildlife and the unique wildlife habitat in and around Catalina State Park.

At issue was a proposal in front of the Oro Valley Town Council to amend their General Plan to allow for increased housing density directly adjacent to Catalina State Park on the Desert Springs property. After hours of presentations and a public hearing, the council voted to delay their vote and gave specific instructions to the property owner, Sunchase Holdings, to return with a proposal that reduced the density of houses and that incorporated a natural open space buffer along the park boundary.

The Desert Springs property is a 108-acre piece of land along the eastern edge of Oracle Road at the intersection with Tangerine Road, surrounded on three sides by Catalina State Park (see map on page 4). The property is currently in unincorporated Pima County but is adjacent to the Town of Oro Valley. In its General Plan, a voter-approved document revised every ten years, Oro Valley has designated potential land uses for this property, in the event that it is annexed into the town. Sunchase Holdings has expressed interest in having the

Desert Springs property annexed into Oro Valley, and this proposal is the first step in that process.

While the current General Plan calls for a mix of low density housing, commercial and office space, and a resort complex, the amended plan would generally replace the resort and low density housing with medium density housing and some open space on the ridgelines. The Coalition strongly believes that this increased density will be harmful to Catalina State Park and is inappropriate for this biologically-rich land.

The Coalition has analyzed the proposal in light of various land-use planning documents, policies, and regulations, both from Oro Valley and from Pima County. **The current proposal is clearly incompatible with the community, economic, and wildlife resources in the area.** Only 12% of the property is designated

as open space, a vastly insufficient amount given the rich biological resources on the site and its location. The property is designated in Pima County’s Conservation Lands System as having Important Riparian Areas and Biological Core Management Areas. If these two designations were correctly translated to Oro Valley’s own regulations, this property would be required to protect at least 80% of the land as open space.

We applaud and commend all the people that spoke up about this project! Your emails, phone calls, attendance at the Town Council meeting, and comments at the public hearing made a real difference for this special piece of property!

continued page 3



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 are valued;
- 🌿 Residents, visitors, 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 41 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.

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

Carolyn's Corner

Thank You for 15 Years of Support for Sonoran Desert Conservation!

In February of 1998, the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection was born. And so, this month we celebrate 15 years of work focused on Sonoran Desert conservation. In our last newsletter, I addressed the consistent support that conservation has received from our county elected officials. This time, I want to express my deepest thanks, and profound gratitude, to all of you that have worked with us and supported the Coalition.

These last 15 years have paid big dividends; your support has helped change the landscape of Sonoran Desert conservation in southern Arizona forever. You have helped create a protected and connected Sonoran Desert that will endure far into the future.

Your support has changed the culture of local environmental policy making, a culture that now respects nature and understands the value that protecting our native wildlife habitat brings to our human population. As such, local governments are developing and implementing habitat conservation plans that protect vulnerable species like the Sonoran Desert tortoise, burrowing owl, and lesser long-nosed bat.

In a journey that has been as much personal as it has professional, we have developed deep friendships. We have also developed friendships that cross ideological boundaries. Yes, we still advocate different policies, regulations, and funding mechanisms than industry representatives. We disagree with jurisdictional staff and elected officials. But in many instances, we have become allies with former adversaries and with those who we petition for action. These friendships have been borne out of respect for the passion and professionalism that equal ours. In our many years of healthy debate, I believe we have successfully conveyed the intrinsic value of nature to many of our industry friends, who have realized that conservation reaps economic value as well.

While collaborating with a diversity of stakeholders has made our work rewarding — and I feel is what can bring lasting conservation measures — the success belongs to all of you, true conservation champions. **You are the champions of wild places, roaming wild creatures, protected lands, clean air, and clean water.** We have successfully worked to protect hundreds of thousands of acres, from the designation of the Ironwood Forest National Monument in 2000, to the latest acquisitions through the Conservation Bond Program.

I am proud of what we have accomplished. I am amazed at the amount of knowledge, talent, passion, and commitment that resides in the conservation community in and around Tucson. We at the Coalition have been honored to be at the forefront of this change and success, working for all of you and working beside many of you.

Cheers to all of us. I look forward to continuing our work toward a sustainable future for all wild creatures!

Carolyn Campbell, Executive Director





Too Many Houses — Too Close to the Park

continued from page 1

Standing room only at the December 5th Oro Valley Town Council meeting. The citizens have spoken: Catalina State Park is a community, economic, and wildlife asset, and it needs to be protected!

The Desert Springs property sits squarely within a Critical Landscape Connection, or wildlife linkage, of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. The property is also in close proximity to the soon-to-be-built wildlife crossings along Oracle Road (see page 4). Minimal night-time light, buffered open space, and fencing to funnel animals to the crossings are all critical elements that will lead to the successful reconnection of this important wildlife linkage. Our goal is to achieve maximum conservation on this important and unique piece of land, a significant piece in the larger wildlife linkage between the Santa Catalina and Tortolita Mountains.

The Coalition’s volunteer-driven remote wildlife camera monitoring project in the Santa Catalina–Tortolita Mountains wildlife linkage includes cameras in Catalina State Park (see page 6). These cameras have documented at least 17 animal species, including mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, javelina, badger, deer, skunk, and other small mammals and birds. We know that Catalina State Park is a healthy, biologically diverse protected area that plays an integral part in the functioning of the larger wildlife linkage between the Santa Catalina and Tortolita Mountains. We will continue to work to protect the natural resources of this unique and incredible landscape.

The December 5th meeting was certainly not the first time that citizens have spoken up to protect Catalina State Park (see page 5) and it will also certainly not be the last. Because of citizen action, we have the opportunity now to help craft a proposal that will respect the natural resources of the Desert Springs property, that will protect Catalina State Park as a community and economic asset, and that will reflect smart land-use planning.

Again, kudos to all the people that wrote emails, called their Councilmembers, and attended the December 5th Oro Valley Town Council meeting to voice their opposition to this proposed development! Your voices made a difference and we couldn’t have done it without you!

You Can Help!

We need to carry on with the momentum from the December 5th meeting. The Town Council needs to continue to hear about the importance of protecting the natural resources in and around the park. If you haven’t already, please contact the Oro Valley Town Council and voice your concerns about this proposal. They can be reached at 520.229.4714 or by email at council@orovalleyaz.gov.

This issue will be back before the Town Council in the near future. We hope that you will continue to be engaged on this important issue and we will keep you posted on news and developments as they happen.

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Friends of the Desert Design & Layout: Julie St. John

Safe Passages Coming in 2013

Wildlife Crossing Project Awarded Additional Funding

2013 is going to be a good year for wildlife living between the Santa Catalina and Tortolita Mountains. Instead of having to risk their life trying to cross Oracle Road, wildlife will soon have new wildlife crossings that allow them to safely roam, look for food, and find mates throughout this biologically-rich area of the Sonoran Desert.

The design of the Oracle Road wildlife crossings project continues to evolve as new facts come to light and as discussions progress with various landowners. These changes have resulted in increased costs to the project but will also result in a project that is more successful at meeting the needs of both wildlife and people.

One common question we hear is, "Are the crossings still funded?" We are happy to report that YES, the crossings are still funded, and in December, the project was awarded approximately \$3 million in additional funds by the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) Board to cover changes in the scope and design of the project and increased costs of construction.

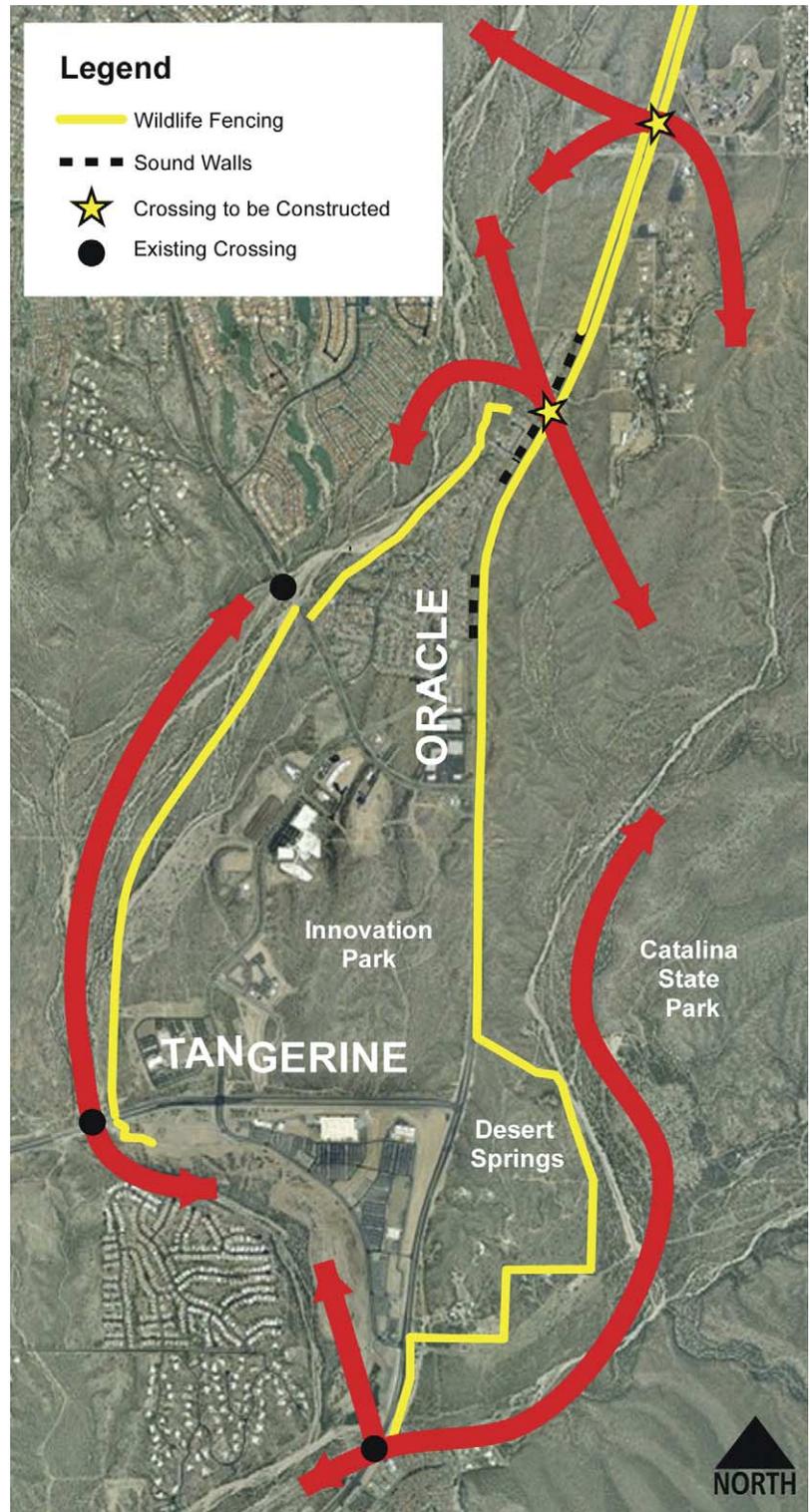
This latest set of changes comes as the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) is finalizing engineering plans for the project, with construction scheduled to begin in 2013. The scope of the project has been adjusted to reflect wildlife movement between the new crossings and existing crossing locations (such as the Oracle Road bridge over the Canada del Oro wash) and to ensure that wildlife safety is retained throughout the entire length of the project area.

The revised project will now prevent wildlife from moving across Innovation Park west of Oracle Road. An underpass had been planned to connect with Catalina State Park at this location, but landowner concerns and additional landscape constraints prevent this from being an ideal crossing location. Removal of this crossing structure does not affect the two remaining crossing structures (one bridge and one underpass) further north along Oracle Road.

A comprehensive and robust wildlife fencing project will dramatically increase the effectiveness of the two wildlife crossings. The latest project revision includes funds to ensure that wildlife fencing is tied into new and existing wildlife crossing structures.

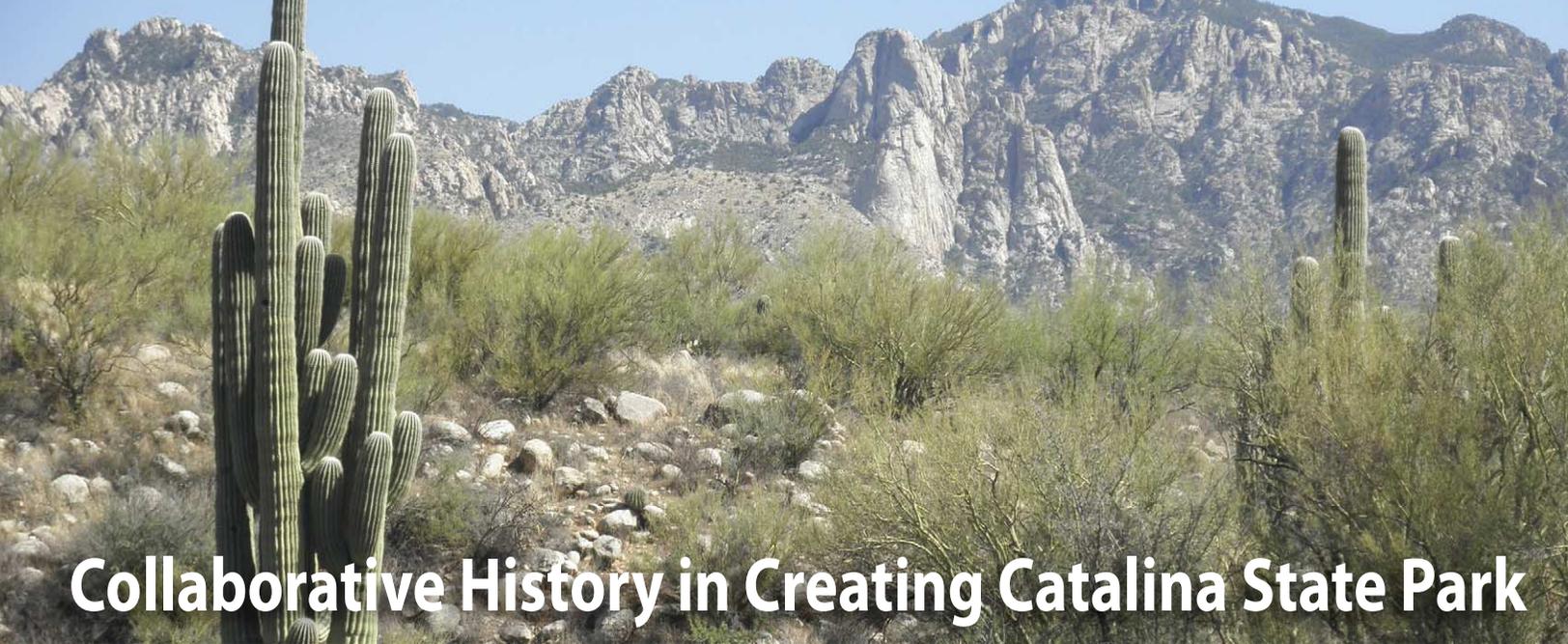
The RTA Board has approved funds to ensure the construction of all necessary wildlife fencing. This additional fencing will create a network of *de facto* wildlife crossings, including the bridges at Tangerine Road and at Rancho Vistoso Boulevard, strengthening and enhancing a network of wildlife crossings in the larger project area.

continued next page



These wildlife crossings and the associated fencing plan received an additional \$3 million in needed funds in December. The red arrows illustrate potential wildlife movement corridors. Map by Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection

4 Nearly 10 miles of fencing will help keep wildlife off Oracle Road and direct them toward safe crossing locations.



Collaborative History in Creating Catalina State Park

by Pat Spoerl, PhD Archaeologist; US Forest Service, retired

Catalina State Park and the Desert Springs property (see front page) share certain elements of history along the western slopes of the Santa Catalina Mountains. Joseph McAdams purchased 4,100 acres on the east side of Oracle highway in 1940 and named it Rancho Romero, after Francisco Romero who had begun ranching in the area in the mid-1800s. He built a home, designed by architect Josias Joesler, which remains on the Desert Springs property today. In 1971 the McAdams family sold 4,000 acres to Ratliff, Miller and Muhr Investments, Inc., and this is where the story of Catalina State Park begins. Ratliff submitted a rezoning request to Pima County to develop his acreage as a planned community with golf courses and homes for 17,000 people.

Local opposition to the proposal was immediate and Pima County put the project on hold. The Arizona State Parks Board considered the potential of the property and adjacent land for a state park. The

land met the criteria; however, the Board decided to not pursue a park. A citizen's advocacy group formed, the Rancho Romero Coalition, and support grew to preserve the area for public use. In 1974 the Arizona legislature passed a bill establishing Catalina State Park and authorized the State Land Department to obtain the land for it through land exchanges.

Numerous entities worked together to obtain land for the park through land exchanges and about 30 private land purchases and leases. Two large land exchanges, involving the Ratliff property and Pima County property, comprised the majority of acreage. (The Ratliff property was traded to the State in exchange for another parcel acquired by Ratliff that would become Rancho Vistoso). Advocacy support came in a number of forms. A University of Arizona undergraduate class developed a master plan in 1974 that identified a park boundary of over 8,000 acres. Arizona State Parks appointed a citizens planning committee to refine this master plan and its Board approved it in 1977. It took until 1981 for the Park to purchase a parcel that provided access to Oracle Road. This acquisition allowed for construction of facilities. Catalina State Park, encompassing approximately 5,500 acres, finally opened in May 1983.

The Park's opening is not the end of the story though. Residential and commercial development around it resulted in rapid increases in land values. Because the Park was State Trust Land it was obligated by law to pay lease fees to the State. The fees almost tripled between 1983 and 1987 and the Park's existence was in jeopardy because of its lack of funds to pay higher fees. And so began another series of land exchange proposals, supported by local, state, and federal agencies who wanted to protect the Park from private development and preserve what had quickly become an Arizona "crown jewel." These efforts resulted in Congressional legislation that transferred the Park from state to federal ownership as part of the Coronado National Forest in 1991. Today, Catalina State Park continues to be a special place for people to enjoy its scenic beauty, wildlife, and history.

Safe Passages Coming in 2013

continued

The Coalition continues to be an essential and involved partner in the Oracle Road wildlife crossings project, working with landowners, engineers, planners, and local government officials to achieve creative solutions for both wildlife and people. In our many trips up and down Oracle Road, we've seen firsthand that this is a hot spot for wildlife mortality. We are thrilled to envision the day, one that is coming soon, when these wildlife will have a safe passageway over and under Oracle Road, reconnecting one of our region's most important wildlife linkages.



Discovery Through the Lens: Wildlife Monitoring a Great Experience

by Art Petty, Oro Valley Resident & Coalition Volunteer

When my wife and I retired and moved to Oro Valley, we were attracted to the warm, arid climate and virtually endless sunshine. When we arrived, we were overwhelmed by the variety of other hidden treasures. One of these was the abundance of local wildlife and flowers. And so, when a friend invited me to attend a training session for volunteers at the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection, I jumped at the chance. I knew little about the purpose of the meeting except that it involved remote, motion sensing cameras. By the end of the session I had discovered a perfect match: photography, hiking, wildlife, and camaraderie. All had been passions since early childhood.

During the initial training, which turned out to be very informative and well presented, we learned about the purpose and goals of the Coalition and also had the opportunity to meet Coalition staff. We gained insights into the proposed Oracle Road expansion project and accommodations for ensuring connectivity and unimpeded wildlife passage between the Catalina and Tortolita mountains. We were also given hands-on training with remote sensing cameras. These were to be installed in the proposed construction area to document wildlife presence and migration patterns before, during, and after construction. The highlight of the day came when we actually went to the field with cameras in hand. Working with Coalition staff, we identified a variety of locations, selected specific spots, and installed and activated the cameras.

And then the real fun began. As teams, we began regular visits to each camera site to check the equipment, replace batteries, swap memory cards, and to note any unusual activities in the area. These hikes provided an excellent opportunity to view the flora and fauna of the area over the ever-changing seasons and also to develop lasting friendships with other participants. Since some of the camera locations were in fairly remote locations, away from designated trails, we began with GPS coordinates to ensure discovery; however, after a few visits, the routes became second nature. We even began finding alternate routes to each location to take advantage of local situations, weather, and seasonal variations.

Over time, we have become quite familiar with the cameras, how they function, and some of the issues that can affect operation: one example being the effect of temperature on the motion sensitivity. Without seasonal adjustment, the variation in success ranges from extraneous photos showing every blade of grass moving in the breeze to day after day with no photographs at all.

One of the most challenging periods to date was during the late summer monsoon season. On at least two occasions, a couple of the cameras were exposed to extended, torrential downpours with substantial run-off. We actually went to the field and were not sure if the cameras would still be in place. Luckily all was well. The summer rains also brought incredible vegetation growth. One week we would hike through sandy washes to reach a camera and two weeks later we were trekking through head-high grasses. The rapid vegetation explosion also required repositioning the cameras and clearing growth to ensure unobstructed camera views.

And finally, after each camera check, came the excitement of viewing the photographs, never knowing what would be found and often being delighted by unexpected treasures.

It has been an educational, challenging, and fun-filled nine months, filled with new adventures, phenomenal seasonal variety, and many new friendships. Photos to date have included bobcat, javelina, coyote, badger, fox, skunk, along with mice, a variety of birds, lizards, and snakes and even an occasional caterpillar munching away on a fresh blade of grass.

Volunteer Now!

Would you like to help monitor wildlife? To volunteer for any of the following tasks, please email Gabe.Wigtil@sonorandesert.org or call 520.388.9925.

- 🌿 Camera maintenance
- 🌿 Photo database management
- 🌿 Help us purchase equipment with your generous donation
- 🌿 Adopt-a-highway cleanup (the next clean up is scheduled for May 2013)

6 Which animal is hogging the limelight? Coyotes, with over 250 of the nearly 1,200 photos taken in the last nine months.

THANK YOU for your generosity. Your donations are making all of this work possible!

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Public Lands Grab Successfully Averted

This past November, Arizona voters soundly rejected Proposition 120, the “State Sovereignty” measure, by more than a two-to-one margin. Proposition 120 would have amended the Arizona Constitution to assert state sovereignty and to establish that the state has exclusive authority and jurisdiction over air, water, public lands, minerals, wildlife, and other natural resources within the state.

This proposition, which was referred to the ballot by the State Legislature, was an attempt to both gain control of federal public lands and to undermine important federal environmental laws such as the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act. These laws are the bedrock of an environmental legacy forged over the last 50 years and are critical to protecting one of the most ecologically rich regions of the country.

This extreme amendment would have set in motion a demand by the State that all federal public lands in Arizona — roughly 27 million acres, including wildland gems such as the Grand Canyon, Tonto National Forest, and Saguaro National Park — be turned over to the state. Arizona’s state parks system has been in a perpetual state of neglect, so the idea that the state could actually afford to manage millions of acres of public land was a stretch of the imagination.

Arizona is fortunate to have public lands that provide wildlife habitat, watershed protection, and a multitude of recreational opportunities. The overwhelming defeat of this misguided ballot measure sends a clear message to the State Legislature that it needs to join the voters in supporting protection of our air, land, and water.

Ninety percent of Arizonans — from all across the political spectrum — agree that public lands are “an essential part of Arizona’s economy.”¹ They also consistently voice support for funding of conservation, even during difficult budget times, and in continuing investments in parks, water, and wildlife protection.

The Coalition played an active role in the defeat of Prop 120. The Coalition’s Executive Director, Carolyn Campbell, served as the campaign committee chair and wrote about the ballot measure for the official voter information guide and for the Arizona Daily Star. The Coalition contributed resources and outreach expertise to the campaign as well, ensuring that voters from all across the state were informed about this disastrous proposal.

www2.coloradocollege.edu/stateoftherockies/conservation_west_survey/arizonareport.pdf

Prop 120, an extreme attempt to usurp control over Arizona’s federal public lands like the Grand Canyon, was defeated with 68% of the votes, and it lost in each and every county in the state. 7



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Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection

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In the Home Stretch: County's Long-Awaited Plan Will Protect Species and Habitat

Pima County's long-awaited Multi-Species Conservation Plan (MSCP) has been released for public review and comment, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will be accepting comments now through March 15th. The MSCP is a critical component of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan and will adopt long-lasting protections for 44 of this region's vulnerable plants and animals, which in turn can provide conservation benefits for the many other species that share the same habitat. The MSCP has seen numerous revisions over the last decade and the Coalition has watched over and been a participant in the entire process, working to craft a plan that achieves large scale conservation for this unique region.

The MSCP will provide Endangered Species Act compliance for Pima County and some private sector development while protecting endangered species and their habitats. With a relatively high number of endangered species in Pima County, this MSCP is an appropriate mechanism to ensure that any incidental endangered species "takings" — to kill, harm, or harass — by any activities covered under the plan are

adequately avoided, minimized, or mitigated. The species proposed to be covered by this plan run the gamut from cacti and bats to reptiles and even snails.

Anticipating habitat loss as our region grows over the next thirty years, Pima County has proposed to mitigate for this loss by safeguarding lands it holds as part of its preserve system. These are lands that have been acquired by Pima County, most recently with over \$174 million in bond fund monies approved by voters in 2004, an effort that was spearheaded and championed by the Coalition. In addition to preserving important conservation lands, the MSCP calls for land management, ecological monitoring, and in some cases, even landscape restoration to conserve and protect this broad suite of species.

The Coalition is currently in the process of reviewing this most recent draft. We encourage you to get involved and to offer your own comments on this important conservation document. All comments are welcome and will be helpful to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service when they do their final evaluation of the MSCP.

Multi-Species Conservation Plan Meetings

Public Meeting

Thursday, February 21, 4–6pm

Pima County Natural Resources, Parks, and Recreation (3500 W River Road)

Coalition-Sponsored Open House

Wednesday, February 27, 4–6pm

City of Tucson Ward 3 Conference Room, 1510 E Grant Road, Tucson, AZ 85719

Visit

www.sonorandesert.org/?p=1350
for more MSCP updates and information.