

Friends of the Desert

Issue 48 Summer 2015

A Strong Voice for the People and Wildlife of the Sonoran Desert

Photo: Tom Wiewandt

Open Space and What it Means for You

Open spaces benefit our health, economy, environment, and quality of life

On November 3, Pima County voters will be voting on a new set of Pima County bond projects. We urge you to vote yes on all the bond questions and especially on Proposition 430: Natural Area Conservation and Historic Preservation.

Why do we need more protected open space in Pima County?

The Sonoran Desert is still threatened by a growing population. This includes an expanding road network and new housing and commercial developments. New roads and development break up the desert into smaller and smaller pieces, isolating habitat and the wildlife that live there.

Over the last 18 years, Pima County has protected over 200,000 acres of natural open space with bond funding. This is a legacy we can be proud of.

But the job is not done yet.

We have to continue “filling in the gaps” to ensure that the land we’ve already protected is also *connected*. There are dire consequences if wildlife can’t travel to find food and mate. Wildlife populations will become isolated. Genetic diversity will decline. Species can even go extinct.

Proposition 430 addresses this problem by allocating \$95 million for new open space purchases. Important target areas for acquisition have

been identified by Pima County. If you vote YES on Proposition 430, Pima County will be able to protect new open spaces *and* increase the connectivity of our existing protected areas.

Why else should we protect more open space?

Open space is good for our health and quality of life. It gives our community places to hike, bike, watch wildlife, and experience the quiet solace of nature.

In 2013, Saguaro National Park visitors (635,039 non-residents) spent \$40.6 million in our local economy and supported 563 local jobs. Open spaces boost our economy.

Open space is good for our economy. It raises property values and drives the economic engine of tourism.

Open space is good for our water. It provides important flood control functions and allows more water to soak into our aquifer.

More protected open space = healthy wildlife, connected habitat, more places for recreation,

a robust tourism sector, strong flood control infrastructure, clean water, and a high quality of life.

On November 3, vote yes on Proposition 430 and vote yes on ALL the Pima County bond questions.

For more information on Prop 430 and all the bond questions, visit <http://webcms.pima.gov/government/bonds>.



What Can You Do?

Write Letters to the Editor in support of Prop 430, talk up the Prop to your family & friends, and stay informed via <http://www.yesonpimacountybonds.com>.

Left: Empire grasslands, purchased with 2004 open space bonds. Right: Mule deer in the Tucson Mountains. Thank you for supporting open space and doing so much for a new 2015 open space bond! Photos by Tom Wiewandt



Carolyn's Corner

Now is the Time to Act!

You can make an impact in our community

We have an opportunity this fall to improve our quality of life and to invest in our community. The seven bond propositions that the Pima County Board of Supervisors placed on the ballot have been under development for many years. Bonds are, in effect, how local communities finance public improvements. The last comprehensive bond package in Pima County was in 2004, over a decade ago.

While our focus here at the Coalition is on protecting our native wildlife and habitat and we are working hard to promote the Open Space Acquisition Program, the projects in the overall bond package are intended to complement each other and work as a cohesive community package. In order to better protect our open space and our health, kids need fields to play soccer and softball. The community needs libraries and job training to feed our minds. And for drivers and cyclists alike, we need to repair our roads, which in much of the urban area are in dismal shape. For healthy and safe neighborhoods, we need investments such as sidewalks, native trees, pocket parks, and affordable housing.

This past year, you showed up in droves to speak out for habitat and open space! We hope you will do the same in November at the ballot box!

I have had the honor of serving as Vice-Chair of Pima County's Bond Advisory Committee for the last 12 years. We have heard from thousands of residents that in order to be a vibrant community, we must invest in ourselves. Residents of moderate and even meager means are willing to pitch in their share of taxes so that the whole region can become richer. And you showed up in droves to speak out for habitat and open space!

In addition to helping develop this list of projects, the bond committee served as watchdog of the previous bonds. The county gets high marks from me, and well as from auditors, on how responsible they are with the taxpayers' money. I am happy to have served Supervisor Elias and Pima County with this responsibility. The Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection has voted to support the Open Space Acquisition Program and the entire bond package. I would be happy to have you join us.

The Coalition works to create a community where: ecosystem health is protected; nature and healthy wild animal populations are valued; and residents, visitors, and future generations can all drink clean water, breathe clean air, and find wild places to roam.

Coalition Staff

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The Coalition is a non-profit alliance of 40 conservation and neighborhood groups. To see a list of all our member groups, please visit sonorandesert.org > **About us** > **Member groups**

There is something in every proposition that is worth supporting. Here's a sample:

Prop 425—Road Improvements: The bulk of this funding goes to repair roads, used by drivers and cyclists alike.

Prop 426—Economic Development, Libraries, and Workforce Development: Funding is included for five libraries, as well as a building for the successful JobPath and One Stop Career Center, training our vulnerable populations.

Prop 427—Tourism: Investing in facilities on county-owned lands, such as a new jaguar exhibit at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Colossal Cave Mountain Park improvements, and Canoa Ranch.

Prop 428—Parks and Recreation: Building and upgrading facilities such as parks, swimming pools, river parks, and the 36th Street Natural Resource Park. It also well as provides for improved bikeability through the Urban Greenways project.

Prop 429—Public Health, Welfare, Safety: Investments in aging neighborhoods, in affordable housing, and Pedestrian Safety and Walkability Improvements.

Prop 430—Natural Area Conservation and Historic Preservation: \$95 million for the continued implementation of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan for a protected and connected preserve system. Includes funding to provide for improved public access through Natural Park Trailheads, and further investments in treasured places such as Steam Pump Ranch and Dunbar School.

Prop 431—Flood Control and Drainage: This includes funds to acquire riparian areas with the Floodprone Land Acquisition Program and funding for the Altar Valley Watershed Restoration Project.

Donor Spotlight: *Kathy Renno*

I became interested in the Coalition a few years ago when I met fellow masters swimmer Carolyn Campbell, executive director, in the locker room. After swim practice, she would often talk about the work the Coalition is doing, and I realized that this is an organization that I would like to support and get involved in. My husband Gerd and I started out by making a small monthly contribution by automatic withdrawal from our checking account, and we have since found that it doesn't hurt at all to increase that contribution. We also made a one-time donation for the wildlife linkages project and the Coalition's vital work to protect open spaces when a generous donor offered matching funds.

Not only have we appreciated the opportunity to financially support an organization that we have grown passionate about, but we are also finding more and more ways to volunteer our time for the work of the Coalition. I recently spent a morning with other volunteers, led by Hannah Stitzer, preparing an important mailing. I enjoyed meeting others while working on this mailing. My husband and I have

volunteered to help out at the Film Festival at the Loft this month. We look forward to helping out in other projects when we can.

In the 15 years that Gerd and I have lived in Tucson, we have come to love and appreciate our beautiful desert environment. As residents of the Tanque Verde Valley area, we consider it a privilege to see bobcats, deer, javelinas, jackrabbit and other bunnies, and even rattlesnakes and other creatures in our neighborhood. We have come to learn of the importance of wildlife linkages to maintain biodiversity and thriving populations. A big THANK YOU for all the work the Coalition is doing!



Coming Soon to a Wildlife Linkage Near You: More Cameras!

Thank you for helping us expand our wildlife camera project into the Tucson Mountains

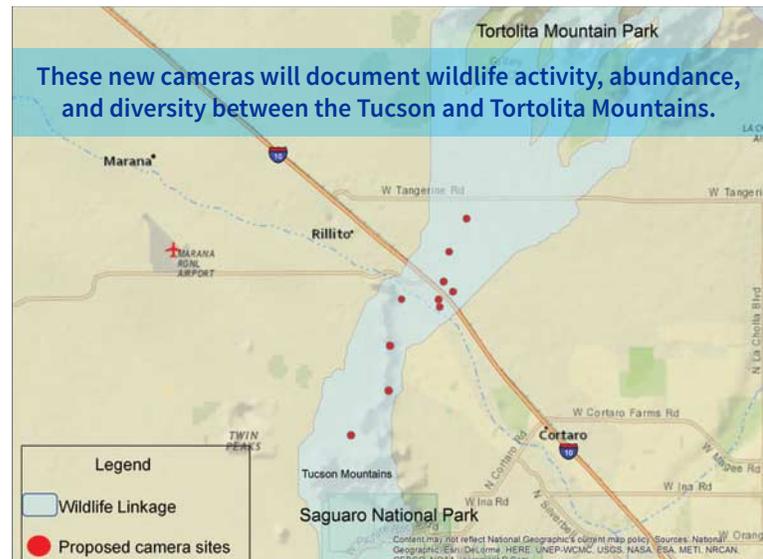
For those that think deserts are barren and desolate places, all they need to do is look at the thousands of wildlife photos our remote cameras have captured to change their mind! Strategically located, we have 17 cameras monitored by 30 volunteers in the Oro Valley area. Since April 2012, when we had just four cameras, we have been documenting an amazing variety and abundance of wildlife near the Oracle Road wildlife crossings currently under construction. This project is focused on the wildlife linkage that connects the Santa Catalina and Tortolita mountains. Badger, deer, mountain lion, bobcat, desert tortoise, and even raccoon have all made an appearance on our cameras.

We aren't stopping at this wildlife linkage though! Before the end of the year we will be adding at least six cameras to the Tucson-Tortolita mountains wildlife linkage. Bisected by Interstate 10, this linkage is increasingly threatened by roads and new development. The data we gather from these new cameras will help illustrate the need for wildlife crossing structures in this area by documenting wildlife activity, abundance, and diversity. We have identified key areas near the

Tucson Mountains where we would like to put these cameras and are currently contacting property owners to move forward. We are honored to be naming this portion of the project in memory of David Kelly, a loyal and dedicated volunteer who spent countless hours sorting wildlife camera photos in our office.

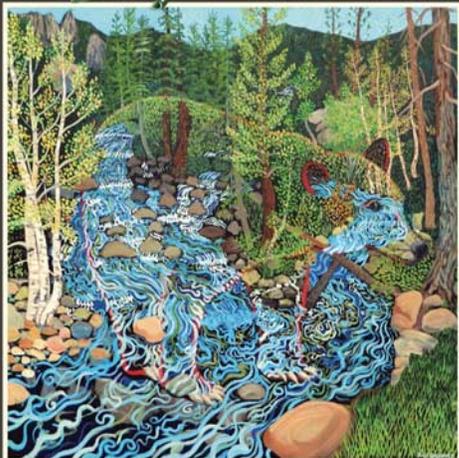
Volunteer Opportunity!

More cameras mean we'll need more volunteers! Do you like being outside? Meeting new people? Love wildlife? Have basic computer skills? We would love to have you as a volunteer to monitor a camera or two as we expand our project or help sort wildlife photos at our office. Please email Hannah.Stitzer@sonorandesert.org for more information. You can also give us a call at 520.388.9925.



This impressive badger was photographed on the east side of Oracle Road right where the underpass is being built! Kathie Schroeder and Jan Johnson monitor the TOAD camera. Thanks to all of our camera volunteers for making the project a success!

Join us!



The **Wild & Scenic Film Festival Returns to Tucson**
August 19, 6:30pm, at The Loft Cinema!

3233 East Speedway Boulevard, Tucson, AZ 85716

Hosted by the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection

Live music, raffle, food, and an impressive selection of environmental films. Come join us for an inspiring evening!

Visit www.sonorandesert.org for tickets and information.



Above: This wide wildlife underpass is just south of the wildlife bridge and will provide wildlife a way to safely move under Oracle Road. Thanks to you, this important structure will soon be finished!



Inset: And look who's already been exploring the underpass: javelina!
Photo by Kathie Schroeder

More Progress Every Day

Oracle Road wildlife crossings closer to completion!

Drive up Oracle Road just north of Catalina State Park and you can see history in the making. Pima County's first vegetated wildlife bridge is taking shape and expanding across the soon to be six-lane highway. A large wildlife underpass complements the wildlife bridge less than a mile to the south. With the expansion of Oracle Road from four to six lanes, it is critical to provide wildlife safe passages across this busy and dangerous roadway. These structures, along with miles of wildlife fencing, will not only protect wildlife, it will make the road much safer for motorists. According to the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University, vehicle-deer collisions cause an average of more than \$8,000 in property damage for each incident. This project is good for people and good for wildlife and is expected to be completed by Spring 2016. We will be working with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to monitor wildlife use when the structures are complete. If you have questions about the wildlife crossings, visit our comprehensive FAQ page at: <http://www.sonorandesert.org/learning-more/wildlifecrossings>.

Drive up Oracle Road and you can see history in the making.



Looking north (left), work is beginning on the east side of the wildlife bridge with beams being put in place. Thanks for all the years of loyal support to make this a reality! Looking south (right), Pima County's first vegetated wildlife bridge is taking shape with dirt already being added to the western portion! Because of your voice, wildlife will soon have a safe passage over Oracle Road.



We Need Your Help this Fall!

In collaboration with Tucson Audubon Society and Sky Island Alliance, we will be planting a vegetated barrier between the east ramp of the wildlife bridge and the entrance to the Santa Catalina Catholic Church. This will help shield wildlife from human activity. If you are interested in volunteering, email Hannah at Hannah.Stitzer@sonorandesert.org. You can also give us a call at 520.388.9925. Volunteers are needed September 28 through October 3.