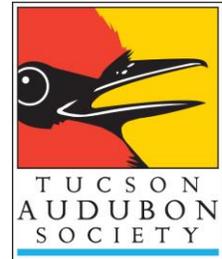


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Unique Partnership Leads to Buffer Wildlife Overpass Project on Church Property

Tucson, AZ – On Friday October 15th through Sunday October 17th, volunteers from the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection, Sky Island Alliance, Tucson Audubon Society, and the Santa Catalina Catholic Church will work together to install irrigation and plant native plants near the new wildlife overpass in Oro Valley. The work will take place from 8am-3pm each day.

After working out a collaborative and unique land exchange between the northwest-side parish and Pima County, a vegetation project on the church's former driveway is now moving forward. The Santa Catalina Catholic Church is located directly south of what is soon to be the first wildlife overpass crossing structure in the Sonoran Desert.

"It has been a great project for the county, church, conservationists and volunteers to work so closely together," said Carolyn Campbell, Executive Director of Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection. The vegetated bridge, currently under construction on north Oracle Road, is being built by the Arizona Department of Transportation and is funded by the Pima County Regional Transportation Authority.

The church has long sought to create a new entrance for their Sunday services due to overflow traffic onto Oracle Road, but did not have adequate space on-site. Pima County, however, owns land adjacent to the church, originally intended as part of a wildlife habitat corridor.

The Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection developed a successful plan to provide an access easement through the county's land for a new church entrance. Sky Island Alliance and Tucson Audubon will be providing expertise in habitat restoration and organizing volunteers. The church has removed pavement from the northern road adjacent to the new wildlife overpass crossing and dozens of volunteers will be creating a new desert landscape to help buffer wildlife from the church, and the church from wildlife.

The wildlife overpass is being built in conjunction with the widening of Oracle Road (SR 77) to six lanes. The wildlife crossing has been many years in the making and will provide a safe passage for deer, javelina, tortoises, bobcats and other animals moving across Oracle Road. Situated within the critical wildlife linkage between the Santa Catalina and Tortolita Mountains, this wildlife crossing serves a vital purpose to connect important

habitat, maintain healthy wildlife populations, reduce road kill, and increase motorist safety by reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions.

Approximately one mile south of the wildlife overpass a large wildlife underpass is also under construction. Special wildlife fencing is being placed on both sides of Oracle Road to help guide wildlife towards both of these crossing structures, which is a key component to their success.

“We are excited to be a part of this historic project, which will serve both wildlife and public health and safety for motorists,” said Jessica Moreno, Conservation Manager at Sky Island Alliance. “We love that we can engage the community in making this project their own, and helping the church at the same time.”

The Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection and Sky Island Alliance have been active in documenting wildlife activity near the crossing structures with motion-activated wildlife cameras and track and sign surveys. The results show a great diversity and abundance of wildlife in the area, including badgers.

For more information about the wildlife crossings and the volunteer project, visit www.sonorandesert.org and www.skyislandalliance.org.

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For print quality photos, please contact Jessica Moreno at jessica@skyislandalliance.org

