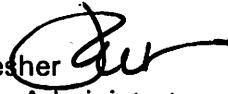




MEMORANDUM

Date: July 13, 2022

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: Jan Leshner 
County Administrator

Re: **Overview of County Conservation Acquisitions**

Various members of the Board of Supervisors have recently expressed interest in the County's efforts to acquire conservation land and have inquired about priorities and potential future acquisitions. The Board also included \$2 million in the Fiscal Year 2022/2023 budget to begin an open space acquisition fund. The attached report provides an overview of our conservation acquisition efforts to date that give context for consideration of a potential future programmatic effort.

Background

The establishment of Tucson Mountain Park in 1929 marks the beginning of the County's acquiring land for conservation purposes. Today, the County's conservation land holdings total more than 250,200 acres comprised of lands owned in fee as well as those controlled via conservation easements, state and federal grazing leases, and other agreements.

Significant public input and oversight has informed the County's efforts to acquire conservation land. This is particularly so in the preparation for the 1997, 2004, and 2015 bond initiatives where citizens and experts recommended lands eligible for acquisition as well as identifying acquisition priorities. Lands identified as priority acquisitions for the 2015 bond initiative still guide the County's acquisition efforts even though voters did not approve this bond initiative.

Citizen oversight committees were especially key to implementation of the 1997 and 2004 bond programs. These committees deliberated further refinement of acquisition priorities and made recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.

A variety of mechanisms have been used to acquire conservation land including voluntary property donations, grant funding, and voter-approved bonds. There are a few instances where the General Fund was used to support individual acquisitions but it was not used to fund the entire cost of acquisition.

The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors
Re: **Overview of County Conservation Acquisitions**
July 13, 2022
Page 2

Conservation Land Benefits

The report examines benefits from two perspectives: are acquisitions responsive to the interests of county residents and do they advance the goal of the SDCP. Findings show our conservation acquisitions accomplish both.

The residents of Pima County accrue benefits at multiple scales. Some benefits are experienced personally while others are experienced communally. Personal benefits include paying less for flood insurance premiums; realizing higher home values when living adjacent to or near conservation land; and earning a paycheck when employed by a business providing outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities. Buffering heat island effects, enhancing the capacity to reduce greenhouse gases, and preserving our sense of place benefit the community at large.

The goal of the SDCP is to balance the conservation of our natural and cultural heritage while sustaining a vibrant economy. Our approximately 250,200 acres of conservation land contribute to and advance the landscape connectivity and natural open space goals expressed in the Maeveen Marie Behan Conservation Lands System (CLS). These holdings also underpin the County's Multi-Species Conservation Plan (MSCP) and the Incidental Take Permit authorized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2016. In that context, our conservation lands provide the mitigation necessary to offset the impacts of public and private development allowing these developments to streamline compliance with the federal Endangered Species Act.

Conservation land acquisitions also preserve the stories and tangible evidence about the lives and day-to-day community of the people that have resided in this area over at least the last 12,000 years including indigenous ancestors of the Tohono O'odham, Pascua Yaqui, and Hopi, Spanish missionaries, and territorial settlements. Today, they sustain current cultural interests such as continued practice of tribal rights and traditions, outdoor recreation, ranching, and management of natural resources to improve ecological conditions.

Summary

Our conservation lands are integral to the community's well-being and our economic development potential. They are the direct result of locally led and designed plans and programs informed by science, shaped by considerable community input, and include measurable targets. Benefits accrue to the community at both the individual level and community-wide scale. They are also investments in the region's recreation and tourism industries as well as providing public and private development with significant regulatory relief. The acquisition of conservation land is important to realizing the balance envisioned by

The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors
Re: **Overview of County Conservation Acquisitions**
July 13, 2022
Page 3

the SDCP and is synonymous with economic development. The information contained in the attached report provides background that can help guide future County conservation acquisition efforts.

JKL/dym

Attachment

- c: Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator
- Francisco García, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator and Chief Medical Officer,
- Linda Mayro, Director, Office of Sustainability and Conservation
- Suzanne Shields, Director, Regional Flood Control District
- Victor Pereira, Director, Natural Resources, Parks, and Recreation
- Yves Khawam, PhD, Senior Advisor, Pima County Administrator's Office
- Nicole Fyffe, Senior Advisor, Pima County Administrator's Office



Pima County Conservation Acquisitions: An Overview



This report gives an overview of the County's long history in acquiring and protecting land for conservation purposes. In certain instances, it mentions and incorporates by reference in-depth details provided in previous publications. It also summarizes the variety of methods the County has used to acquire conservation land, highlights the role that the public has played, and offers a fresh perspective on the value of these efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Our land conservation efforts go back nearly 100 years to 1929 with the establishment of Tucson Mountain Park. Many other acquisitions followed, which are the fruit of significant investments from Pima County residents in terms of both financial resources and citizen participation. These more recent acquisitions were largely possible because of several successful bond elections. Even though bond dollars for conservation acquisitions are exhausted, staff continues to be vigilant for opportunities to secure new lands in order to continue implementing County plans and programs.

Currently, the portfolio of conservation acquisitions consists of approximately 250,200 acres and is comprised of lands owned in fee as well as lands controlled by the County via conservation easements, state and federal grazing leases, and other agreements (Map 1). These lands tangibly support the vision of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP) by:

- promoting the continuation of traditional uses including farming and ranching;
- providing new and expanding upon existing unparalleled outdoor recreational opportunities that underpin our ecotourism sectors;
- protecting traditional cultural places and archaeological and historic sites that reflect thousands of years of human presence in this region;
- reducing the community's exposure to harmful flood events; and
- conserving natural habitats, riparian areas, and native wildlife species including those that are rare and unique.

In 2020, the Board adopted [Policy C.3.20](#) to address protection and management of the County's conservation acquisitions.

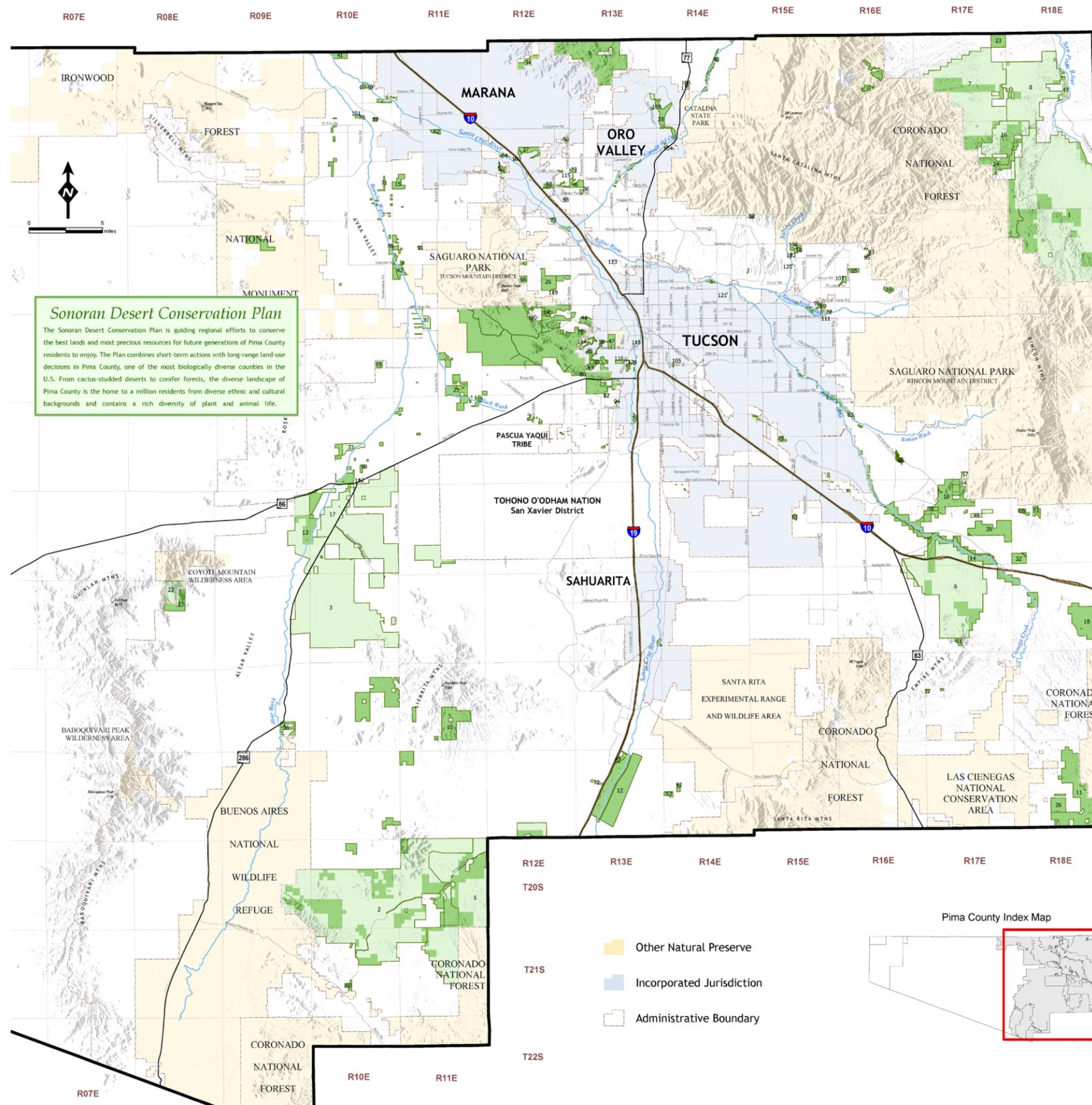
IDENTIFYING ACQUISITION PRIORITIES

A great deal of citizen input and oversight has ensured there is a rhyme and reason to which lands the County pursues for acquisition. For example, in preparation for the 1997 bond election, citizens' and experts' recommendations resulted in the identification of 256 specific eligible parcels within 18 target acquisition areas. The creation of the Open Space Acquisition Review Committee (OSARC) followed. The OSARC, an independent expert citizen committee, refined these acquisition priorities and made recommendations to the Board of Supervisors (Board) on implementation of the Open Space Bond Fund Program.

In the late 1990s, conflicts arose between development and endangered species compliance, and the County proactively developed the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan to more comprehensively plan for conservation of vulnerable native species and our natural and cultural landscape, as well as development and economic growth. The SDCP and the Maeveen Marie Behan Conservation Lands System (CLS) were developed with the expertise of over 150 scientists, as well as a Steering Committee comprised of 80 members of the community. That Steering Committee recommended the County pursue voter approval for funding acquisitions of land within the CLS.

In preparation for the 2004 Conservation Acquisition Bond election, two highly respected non-governmental organizations with science-based expertise (The Nature Conservancy and Arizona Land and Water Trust) provided

MAP 1



Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan
 The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan is guiding regional efforts to conserve the best lands and most precious resources for future generations of Pima County residents to enjoy. The Plan combines short-term actions with long-range land-use decisions in Pima County, one of the most biologically diverse counties in the U.S. From cactus-studded deserts to conifer forests, the diverse landscape of Pima County is the home to a million residents from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and contains a rich diversity of plant and animal life.

Pima County Preserves

Lands Owned or Managed by Pima County for Open Space, Habitat, and Resource Protection

County Preserves

- Fee Land
- Leases, Easements, and Management Agreements

Map ID	Property Name	Area (Ac)
1	A7 RANCH	41,204
2	BANKING BLDG	31,250
3	CONCORD BELL RANCH	20,748
4	TUCSON MOUNTAIN PARK	18,746
5	SCOTT RANCH	16,740
6	BAH V RANCH	13,740
7	SOX BAR RANCH	13,652
8	M BARBERO RANCH	8,497
9	TORTOLTA MOUNTAIN PARK	6,355
10	WALLEY RANCH	5,246
11	SANDS RANCH	5,033
12	CANOA RANCH	4,900
13	KING OF RANCH	4,330
14	CIENEGA CREEK NATURAL PRESERVE	4,079
15	FLUP	4,046
16	TECORO NUEVE RANCH	3,338
17	BUCKLEY PROPERTIES	3,136
18	EMERSON RANCH	2,754
19	COLORADO LAKE MOUNTAIN PARK	2,335
20	CIENEGA CORRIDOR	2,487
21	Black Wash Preserve	1,635
22	COROTE MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS AREA	1,152
23	CHOCOLATE TRICE	1,083
24	BUEHNER CANYON	1,057
25	SIERRA MOUNT PRESERVE	874
26	CLINE RANCH	877
27	OLD WOODRICK RANCH	839
28	HONEY HILL BIOLOGICAL CORRIDOR	689
29	LORES RANCH	639
30	CASASIT	538
31	WALDEN	447
32	CITY OF TUCSON/INGLS CLF OFF-SITE MITIGATION	427
33	COCHISE CANYON	409
34	WILLY STREET CORRIDOR	374
35	MADERA HIGHLANDS	373
36	MADERA HIGHLANDS	373
37	CASASIT NORTH DONATION	354
38	AGUA VERDE CREEK	354
39	CATALINA REGIONAL PARK	294
40	DRANINGWAY	293
41	BRADLEY (MAYHURVILLE) GARCIA	290
42	BIRNBAUM (CIENEGA) NATURAL PRESERVE	288
43	PAINTER HILLS	285
44	DM LINDSAI ENRICHMENT PREVENTION	283
45	ARTUR FACK REGIONAL PARK	279
46	TUMACACI	277
47	FLICK	254
48	MARIPISO	254
49	STARBUCK BERRY ESTABLISHMENT	234
50	RANCHO AGUA VERDE	174
51	LOS MONTEROS	166
52	EL PASO ROAD BELLIS WEL LANDS	163
53	RANCHO DEL CIEGO	162
54	REE	160
55	ARCHANA	158
56	WENDY	157
57	SEIGURSON DONATION	151
58	EL ESCOBE PRESERVE	144
59	ARIZONA OPEN SPACE	124
60	UPPER MOUNTAIN PROPERTIES	123
61	LOWER SANTA CRUZ REPLENISHMENT	105
62	ROCKWELL	104
63	OPERA HOUSE	103
64	BOY DRACHMAN AGUA CALIENTE REGIONAL PARK	101
65	ESTATES AT OLD SPANISH TRAIL	86
66	TRISO	87
67	POCKET	81
68	TANQUE VERDE & HOUGHTON PARTNERS LLC	79
69	TERRA RANCHO GRANDE	73
70	CITY OF TUCSON/INGLS CLF ON-SITE MITIGATION	72
71	ESCONDIDO WASH	71
72	POCKET MITIGATION LAND	66
73	WILKINSITE	67
74	MULCOYDON DONATION	63
75	DOG POND	59
76	SOUTH-EAST CORRIDOR	58
77	LOS BOULEVARD	57
78	CATALINA RESIDUAL PARCEL	54
79	INPR	54
80	SOUTH-EAST REGIONAL PARK	53
81	CANOA RANCH PHASE II	52
82	CORTEJO HAYSTACK	49
83	ANNA VALLEY CLF OFF-SITE CORRIDOR	49
84	BRADLEY WASH Preserve	47
85	BRADLEY WASH	46
86	MANDACITA PARK EXTENSION	42
87	NANCY	40
88	PARKY	40
89	ESTHER AND DAVID TANK	40
90	PICHAKE FLOOD PROTECT BANK	38
91	SOUTH VALLEY LLC	36
92	AGUA CALIENTE CREEK	25
93	DAWOTA WASH	23
94	AGUA CALIENTE CREEK	23
95	DISCETTE	21
96	MARIANA COTTONWOODS	20
97	DOT SECTION 7	20
98	BRADLEY WASH Preserve South	19
99	HOLDEN DONATION	18
100	REDFIELD WILDERNESS - CLF OFF-SITE MITIGATION	18
101	BEAR CREEK RANCH	17
102	CORTEJO WASH DEVELOPMENT LLC	16
103	STEAR RAMP RANCH	15
104	HARVEST BETHLEHEM	15
105	SANJOSE WASH	14
106	SAN DOMINGO FLOOD PRONE AREA	14
107	HONEY HILL WILDLIFE OVERPASS ROW	13
108	TRINCHHOUSE	13
109	TRINCHHOUSE	13
110	TRINCHHOUSE	13
111	TRINCHHOUSE	13
112	ROBLES RANCH	11
113	WALKER DONATION	11
114	TUCSON MOUNTAIN PARK BIOLOGICAL CORRIDOR	10
115	LINDA VOTAW/PAUL PROPERTY	9
116	MISSION & 36TH SUBDIVISION	7
117	REED PARCEL	7
118	MILTON GARDENS	7
119	LADY C RANCH ESTATES	7
120	SABINO CREEK CANNELLA	6
121	SAN PABLO CHARL	2
122	WALNUT CONSERVATION EASEMENT	1
123	WEST BRANCH SANTA CRUZ	1
124		1

Pima County Index Map



recommendations on priority habitat acquisitions. They applied goals and selection criteria to identify not-yet-conserved lands within the CLS in eastern Pima County that warranted acquisition first. The result targeted 525,000 private and state trust acres eligible for habitat protection. The full slate of eligible lands prioritized for acquisition under this bond program grew when the Conservation Bond Advisory Committee added other properties important to communities, cities, and towns (Map 2).

Following passage of the 2004 Conservation Acquisition Bond, the Board convened the Conservation Acquisition Commission (CAC) comprised of eleven appointees who stepped into a similar role as the OSARC and whose responsibilities are enumerated in [Pima County Code Title 3, Chapter 06.050](#). The CAC is currently inactive subsequent to completing their tasks under this bond program, but can be re-activated if needed.

Citizen guidance and oversight, including participation in developing acquisition priorities as described above is invaluable. There is always more land identified for acquisition than available funds can accommodate. Citizen-based input on where to spend these limited dollars is important given that significant amounts of these funds are provided directly by the residents of Pima County.

In many ways, the acquisition priorities identified in previous years informed what the priorities were for the 2004 Conservation Acquisition Bond. The priorities identified for the 2015 bond election carried over and built upon the 2004 priorities (Map 3). Even though that bond election failed, these acquisition priorities remain the most current input representing community interests and expert opinion. Therefore, staff continues to use these priorities when considering potential new conservation acquisitions.

METHODS USED FOR ACQUISITION

As mentioned, the County uses various methods to fund conservation acquisitions. Bonds have been the most successful in terms of the amount of land acquired, but other means have also been productive. The more common examples are reviewed below. However, regardless of the source of funding, acquisitions have been pursued only with willing sellers.

Notably, there are few recent instances where the General Fund was used to fund acquisitions. The prevailing pattern is that the General Fund has not born the full cost of property acquisition. It has instead been the source of grant matching funds or served to advance the funds necessary to secure a property with subsequent reimbursement from bond funds.

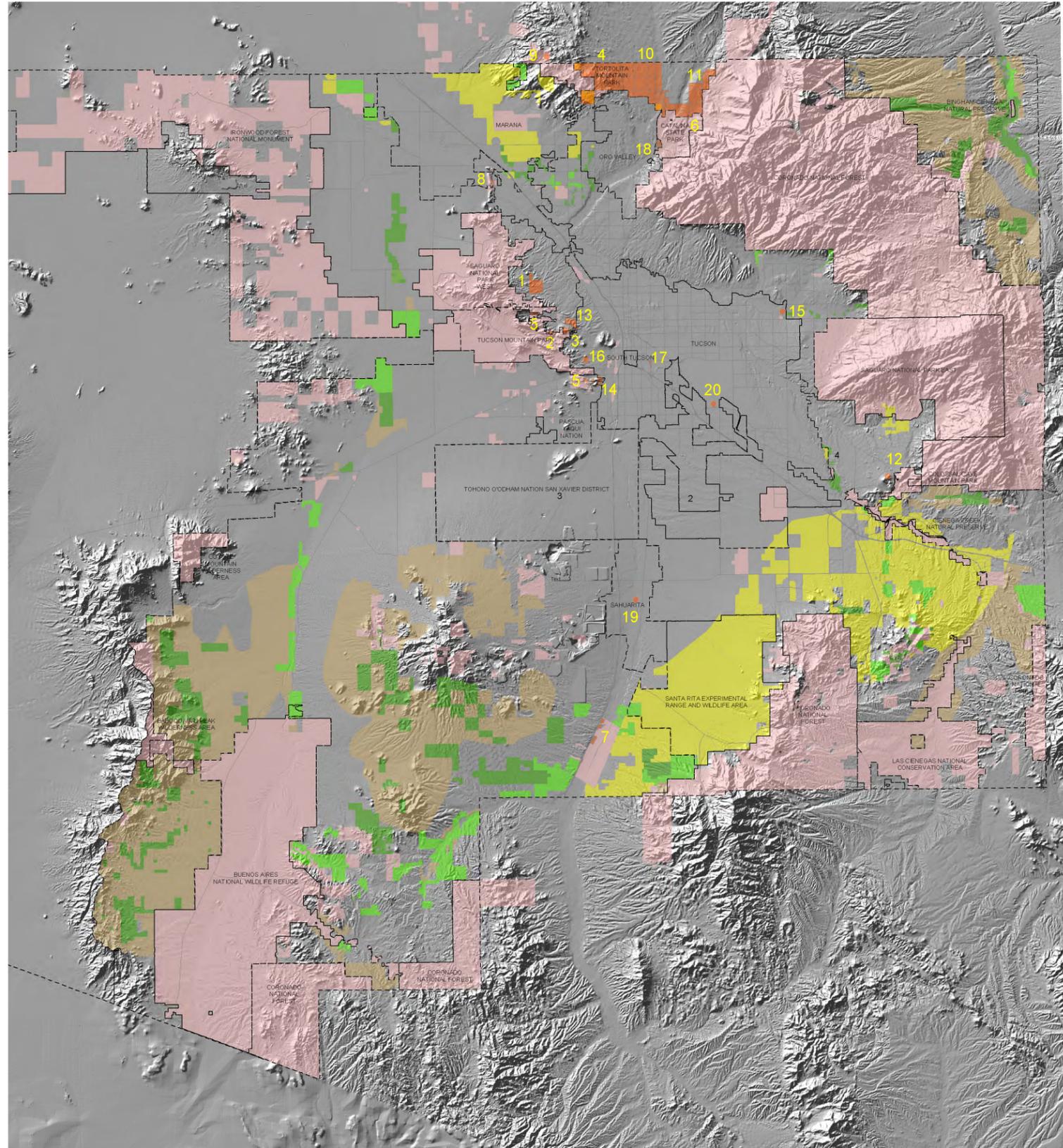
Voter-approved Bonds

The use of bond funds to support acquisition of conservation land started in earnest in 1974 with \$6 million in voter-approved bond funds that, among other acquisitions, resulted in securing 7,000 acres, facilitating the creation of Catalina State Park and expansion of Tucson Mountain Park. Subsequent bonds were authorized in 1986, 1997, and 2004.

The 2004 Conservation Acquisition Bond program has been the largest and most ambitious undertaking to date. The lion's share of the \$173 million (\$164 million) was dedicated for acquisition of priority habitats and areas important to the community. The remaining \$10 million was allocated to prevent urban encroachment into the approach and departure corridors of Davis-Monthan Air Force Base; lands acquired for this purpose are managed differently and are excluded from further discussion.

The 2004 bond program resulted in increasing the County's conservation land holdings by a total of 172,300 acres - 45,300 acres in fee and 127,000 acres in grazing leases. An extensive recounting that delves deep into the background, public processes, and successful acquisitions associated with this bond program is available in the 2011 report [Protecting Our Land, Water and Heritage: Pima County's Voter-Supported Conservation Efforts](#).

MAP 2



Pima County's 2004 Conservation Bond Program

Habitat Protection Priorities

- Highest Priority Private
- Secondary Priority Private
- Highest Priority State
- Secondary Priority State

Community Open Space Priorities

1. Sweetwater Preserve
2. Camino de Oeste (a)
3. Dos Picos (a)
4. Tortolita Mountain Park API
5. Tucson Mountain Park API
6. Catalina Conservation Easements (b)
7. Canoa Ranch (a)
8. Los Monteros
9. Carpenter Ranch (b)
10. Tortolita East Biological Corridor API
11. Catalina State Park API
12. Colonial Caves Expansion (b)
13. Painted Hills
14. South Corridor (b)

Urban Open Spaces Requested By Jurisdictions

- CITY OF TUCSON**
- 15. Agua Caliente (b)
- 16. 38th Street Corridor (b)
- 17. Habitat at 58th and Kino
- TOWN OF ORO VALLEY**
- 18. Kelly Ranch
- TOWN OF SAHUARITA**
- 19. Santa Cruz River Open Space (b)

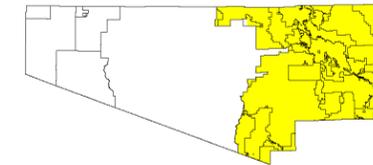
Davis-Monthan Environs Open Space

- 20. Davis-Monthan Environs Open Space (b)

- Protected Areas
- Riparian Areas
- Administrative Boundaries
- Major Streets

- (a) Parcels exceed acreage stated in Bond Implementation Plan
- (b) Parcels to be determined

Pima County Index Map



Index Map Scale 1:1,500,000

The information depicted on this display is the result of digital analysis performed on a variety of databases provided and maintained by several governmental agencies. The accuracy of the information presented is limited to the collective accuracy of these databases on the date of the analysis. The Pima County Department of Transportation Technical Services Division makes no claim regarding the accuracy of the information depicted herein.

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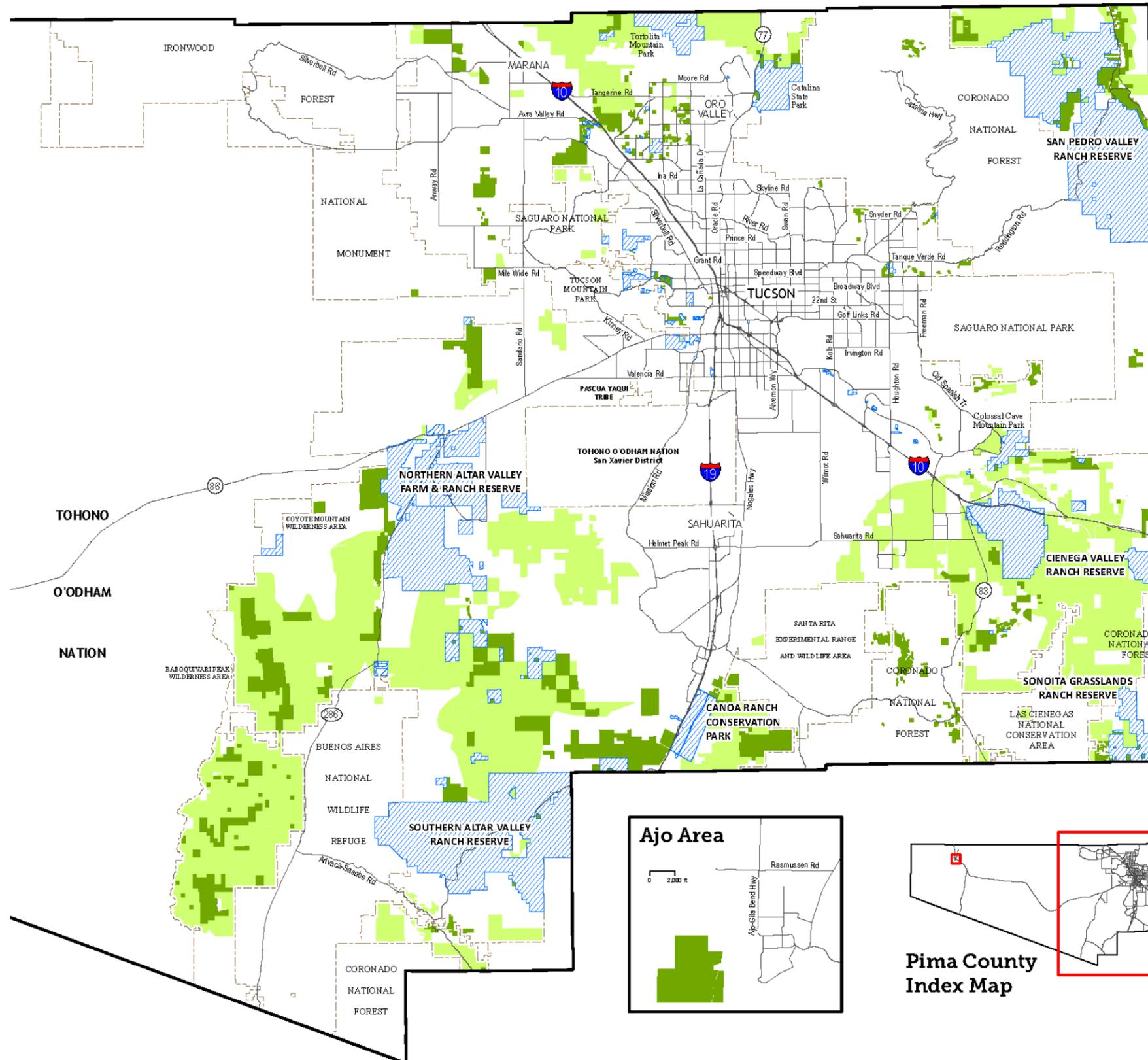
Scale 1:160,000



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MAP 3



Land Conservation Priorities for 2015 Pima County Bond Election

Properties that would be eligible for Pima County to purchase with bond funds authorized by voters at a future bond election in 2015. If purchased, these properties would be managed for conservation, continuing past efforts by the county and other organizations to expand the network of national, state and regional parks and conserve important natural areas for current and future generations.

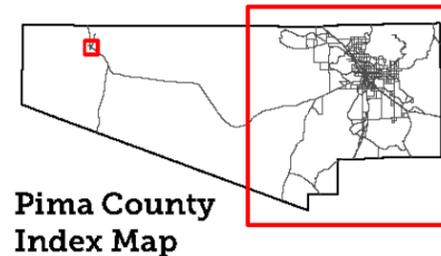
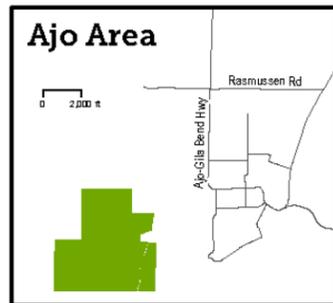
Eligible Properties

- Private (94,445 acres)
- State (357,930 acres)

Existing Conservation Properties (owned or managed)

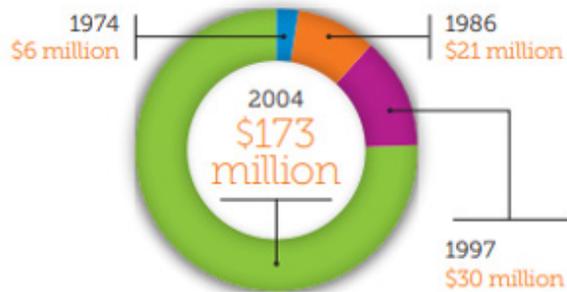
- Conserved with Voter-Approved County Bonds since 1974 (208,585 acres)

NOTE: NOT ALL ELIGIBLE PROPERTIES WILL BE ACQUIRED. The value of the properties identified is in excess of the bond funding allocation. This allows flexibility since the County only purchases property from willing sellers and some lands will be developed prior to the County having an opportunity to purchase. The County will continue past efforts to incrementally conserve these important natural areas as funding is available. Eligible State Trust land can only be purchased through the standard State Trust land acquisition process requiring a public auction. State Trust land can also be managed for conservation without purchase. During the 2004 bond program, the County acquired State grazing leases at little or no cost as a result of purchasing the associated private ranch land, and those leases are managed by the County for conservation.

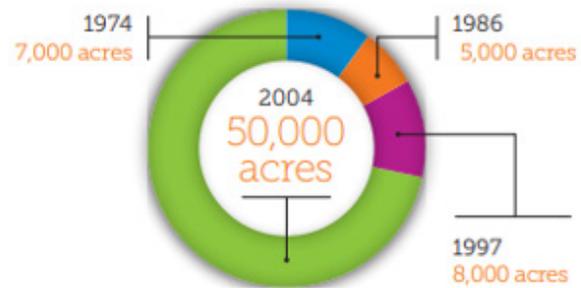


In 2016, following exhaustion of bond funds, the County published a booklet, [*This Land is Your Land - 40 Years of Voter-Supported Conservation*](#) summarizing the accomplishments of these four bond programs. In total, these bond programs provided \$230 million and acquired 70,000 acres of land that preserve opportunities for parks and recreation, greenbelts, open space, habitat protection, cultural and historic preservation, and flood control.

Bonds authorized



Acres purchased



Excerpted from *This Land is Your Land – 40 Years of Voter-Supported Conservation*, Pima County, 2016.

Floodprone Land Acquisition Program

The Regional Flood Control District’s (District) Floodprone Land Acquisition Program (FLAP) began in 1984 in response to the historic October 1983 flood. Initially, the program focused on purchasing properties damaged in the 1983 flood and providing relocation assistance to flooded property owners. Later studies of the 1983 event revealed the need to preserve open space in the upper watersheds of major watercourses. The broad floodplains in the upper watersheds were shown to slow down floodwaters and reduce flood peaks by providing overbank storage and allowing for infiltration.

One of the District’s major land acquisitions involved nearly 4,000 acres located along Cienega Creek. The purchase preserves important riparian habitat and continues to provide significant flood control benefits.

After the 2003 Aspen Fire, flooding occurred along the Cañada del Oro Wash in the community of Catalina that damaged 75 residential parcels. As was done in 1984, the District used FLAP to purchase the damaged properties and provide relocation assistance. The District now owns 260 acres of land along the Upper Cañada del Oro Wash, an area now known as Catalina Regional Park. These land purchases also helped to avoid future flood damages that could have occurred after the Bighorn Fire in 2021, as the burned watershed produced three flood flows in this area during the 2021 monsoon.

The District operates FLAP as a “willing seller, willing buyer” program. Priority is for flood and erosion-damaged properties and riparian habitat, especially where shallow groundwater occurs. The District evaluates each parcel to determine flood hazard and erosion potential using floodplain maps and studies. Additionally, maps and documents developed as part of the SDCP are used to evaluate riparian habitat, habitat value for protected species, and cultural resource values.

Purchasing flood and erosion prone lands is a cost effective strategy to reduce future flood damage and protect residents. Other benefits include preservation of the natural floodplain and flow characteristics that maintain and enhance riparian habitat, creating recreational opportunities, and maximizing natural groundwater recharge in these highly permeable areas. Through FLAP, the District has acquired over 14,000 acres of land.

Donations

Several times a year the County is approached by private entities who wish to see their property remain in its natural condition and who voluntarily offer to donate their fee land or grant the County a conservation easement. Since 2006, these types of transactions have resulted in the addition of nearly 4,000 acres to our conservation holdings. Most expand upon existing parks and conservation areas. Donations have come from 35 different owners, some of whom have made multiple donations.

It is noteworthy that about 870 of these acres came from property owners who had other options to achieve compliance with the CLS but elected to donate these conservation lands to the County. More details on this are available in a [recent report](#) that examines implementation of the CLS between 2002 and 2021.

While the total value of all donations to date exceeds \$17 million, County costs, if there are any, are typically limited to paying transaction closing costs. Donations are mutually beneficial to the donor and to the County. Aside from accomplishing the donor's desire to keep their land natural and undeveloped, some donors may be eligible for tax benefits. Current tax law affords tax benefits for donations to the County or other qualified conservation organizations. The County benefits because costs associated with acquisition are small and represent a fraction of the property's market value.

Grants

Grant opportunities are not abundant, but have facilitated significant additions to the County's conservation acquisitions. Details on several notable examples follow.

- *Arizona Preserve Initiative (API) Program.*

This state program, enacted in 1996, reclassified certain State Trust Lands for conservation. Under the API, Arizona State Parks awarded grants under their Growing Smarter Matching Grant Program for acquisition of reclassified State Trust Land.

The County received five grants between 2008 and 2014 totaling over \$6.2 million. The target properties totaled just over 2,700 acres with appraised acquisition costs of almost \$13 million. The County relied heavily on the 2004 bond funds to pay half of the acquisition costs as required by the grants. Over 380 acres secured important cultural properties including Tumamoc Hill and a large archaeological site; the remainder increased the size of Tucson and Tortolita Mountain Parks.

- *Endangered Species Recovery Land Acquisition Grant Program.*

Also known as Section 6 grants, this competitive federal grant program is funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund and is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). Grant monies are specifically for acquisition of habitat for federal threatened and endangered species. Applications are submitted to and through states and territories. If awarded these grants require at least a 25 percent match.



In the early 2000s, the County partnered with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to submit two successful grant applications for Section 6 funding. This resulted in the County's acquisition and conservation of two properties (Lords Ranch and Hayhook Ranch) to benefit the cactus ferruginous pygmy owl that at the time was an endangered species. These acquisitions added approximately 1,480 acres to our conservation lands. Of the nearly \$2.4 million needed to acquire both properties, the County provided roughly 64 percent (approximately \$1,570,000) with the grants covering the remaining 36 percent (approximately \$875,000).

- *Federal Transportation Enhancement Grant via ADOT for Bar V Ranch.*

In 2004, the County received a \$500,000 Federal Transportation Enhancement grant via the Arizona Department of Transportation to acquire a scenic easement along I-10, east of Sonoita Highway 83, including a segment of Davidson Canyon that connects to the Cienega Creek Natural Preserve. The grant contributed to the acquisition and conservation of the Bar V Ranch at this location, which now includes 1,763 acres owned by the County and another 12,674 acres of state grazing leases held by the County.

Negotiated Agreements

Occasionally, the Board enters into negotiated agreements with private entities seeking to satisfy the County's concerns for project-related impacts to County-owned land and environmental resources important to both the County and its residents. To date, examples of such agreements include land exchanges, development agreements, and mitigation agreements. These agreements have resulted in money to fund the County's acquisition of conservation land or conveyance of land to the County; below are a few highlights:

- *Land Exchange with Oracle Ridge Mine LLC.*

In consideration of impacts to County-owned conservation land and the CLS related to reopening of its mining operation, Oracle Ridge Mine LLC (ORM) proposed a land exchange and an additional voluntary land donation. The Board approved this agreement in 2012 allowing conveyance of approximately 133 acres of County land to ORM and conveyance to the County of 476 fee acres plus 7,800 acres of state grazing lease affiliated with the M Diamond Ranch. Ultimately, the County's net gain was over 8,100 acres, all held as conservation land.



- *Starr Pass Environmental Enhancement Fund*

In 1998, plans to develop a resort on the eastern slopes of the Tucson Mountains failed. However, the County and developer worked toward innovative solutions that would allow the resort to go forward. These discussions culminated in a development agreement that imposed new environmental site design standards and established a 20-year cash flow for the County to use at Tucson Mountain Park for the study of wildlife, park enhancements, and park expansion. This environmental enhancement fund was based on calculations using two percent of resort revenues. These funds started to generate in 2005 and will continue to do so until 2025.

To date, this funding source has generated over \$7 million for the County and has funded the expansion of Tucson Mountain Park and nearby conservation areas by 750 acres. It has also resulted in the implementation of projects to augment recreational opportunities in and around the park, control the spread of invasive species, and support the study of species like mountain lions that are critical to the biodiversity of the Tucson Mountains and the Sonoran Desert.

- *Sierrita Pipeline LLC Mitigation and Easement Agreement*

In 2014, the Board entered into this agreement in compensation for nearly 60 linear miles of impacts from Sierrita Pipeline’s 36-inch natural gas pipeline stretching from southwest of Tucson Mountain Park to the U.S.-Mexico border near Sasabe, Arizona. Mitigation elements were structured to off-set impacts to County conservation land, other County-owned fee land, riparian areas, and lands within the CLS. Among other things, Sierrita Pipeline was required to provide \$1.0 million to the County for preservation of important habitat values in the CLS. Subsequently, this funding was used to acquire the Tesoro Nueve Ranch, including 1,476 acres in fee and 1,800 acres of state grazing leases.

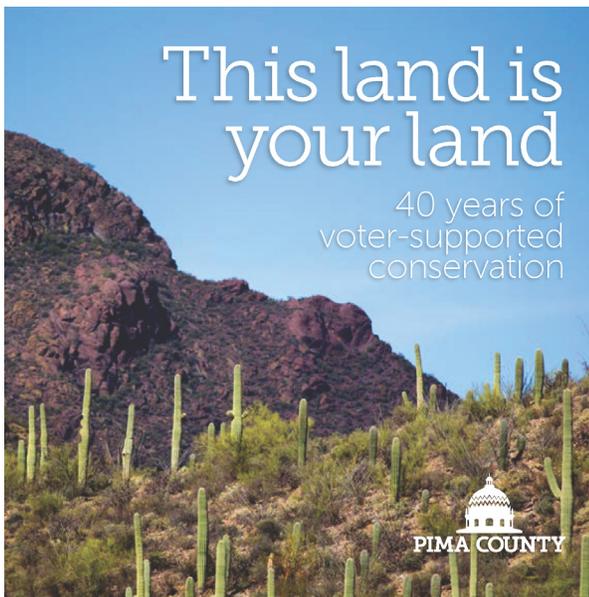
BENEFITS OF ACQUIRING CONSERVATION LAND

Even though the County has been acquiring conservation land for many decades, it is worthwhile to take a moment and consider the benefits. Two perspectives are informative. First, whether these acquisitions are responsive to the interests of county residents; and next, whether these acquisitions are advancing the goal of the SDCP.

Responsiveness to Residents’ Interests

There is ample evidence this is the case. County residents clearly made their wishes known with their approval of the 1974, 1986, 1997, and 2004 bond elections that provided the funds to acquire conservation land. Additionally, they provided essential guidance and oversight on what lands were eligible for acquisition; many of which the County subsequently acquired.

County residents are also accruing a diversity of benefits presented more thoroughly in the 2016 booklet mentioned previously ([*This Land is Your Land - 40 Years of Voter-Supported Conservation*](#)) and summarized below.



Water Quality and Quantity – County conservation acquisitions protect rivers and creeks, replenish groundwater, and reduce stormwater pollutants and flood damages.

Outdoor Recreation and Health – Opportunities to participate in activities such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, birding, hunting, and visiting cultural and historic sites promote healthy living, which can mitigate rising health care costs.

Tourism, Jobs, and Economic Development – Visitation and participation in outdoor activities on County conservation lands contribute to our local economy, support jobs and retail sales, and generate tax revenue.

Increased Home Values – Evidence shows that the value of homes adjacent to and near conservation land are positively affected by that proximity and that the benefit increases as the distance to conserved land decreases.

County conservation acquisitions are also generating financial and health-related advantages for county residents. The Regional Flood Control District recently relied on these lands to secure a new rating under the National Flood Insurance Program that reduces flood insurance premiums by 35 percent for those county residents who need flood insurance. As [reported to the Board](#), this will save approximately \$1.6 million per year in flood insurance costs.

Our conservation holdings, especially larger ones, also support healthy landscapes and native ecosystems important to sustainability and community resilience. These undeveloped areas help buffer the community from heat island effects and support biological functions that improve our air quality. Through the process of respiration, plants sequester carbon dioxide and produce oxygen as a by-product. The synergistic effect of such functions assist in our capacity to reduce greenhouse gases.

Advancing the SDCP

The goal of the SDCP is to strike balance between conserving our natural and cultural heritage and sustaining a vibrant economy. In addition to the community benefits discussed above, other aspects that speak to the protection of biological and cultural resources shed light on the contributions that our conservation acquisitions make toward that goal.

- *CLS Objectives*

The CLS represents the biological goal of the SDCP and identifies those lands that are important to maintaining the biological diversity of this region. By adhering to identified acquisition targets that were enormously influenced by the CLS, the over 250,000 acres of conservation acquisitions have done much to fulfill CLS objectives of landscape connectivity and natural open space goals.

Nearly all these conservation acquisitions lie within the CLS. When added to other natural areas such as the Coronado National Forest, Ironwood Forest National Monument, and Saguaro National Park, a very connected landscape results that facilitates wildlife movement through the region. This is vital for the persistence of healthy and diverse wildlife populations. Certain of our acquisitions are also critical in maintaining the functionality of specific movement locations. For example, acquisitions in the Oro Valley area in the Big Wash and on either side of the wildlife crossing structures on Highway 77 have been instrumental in the success of this impressive Regional Transportation Authority project, which was also funded by a voter-approved bond in 2006. Completed in 2016, these crossings now facilitate the safe crossings of numerous wildlife species without posing traffic risks. So far, 23 different species, including one mountain lion, are known to use these structures, with more than 16,600 successful crossings.

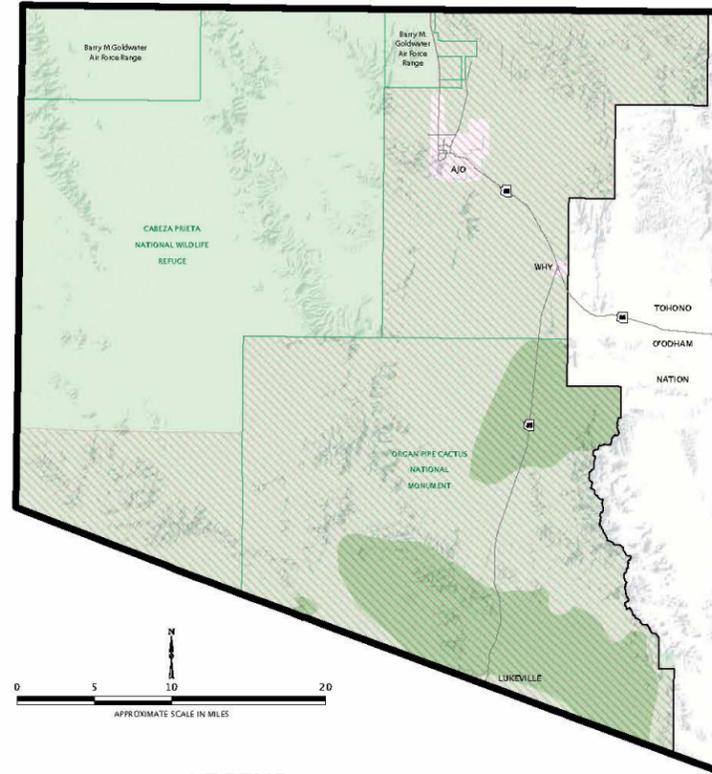
The CLS identifies and classifies land relative to its importance for biological diversity, and includes all lands within Pima County regardless of ownership and jurisdictional boundaries except for the Tohono O’odham Nation and Pascua Yaqui Tribal Lands (Map 4). CLS Conservation Guidelines define seven categories of land and specify quantifiable landscape conservation goals for four of them. These landscape conservation goals identify a specific target acreage of land to be conserved within each of these four categories. The table below expresses in acres the target landscape goal of each category.

CLS Category	Total Category Acres	Landscape Goal Percentage	Landscape Goal Total Acres
Important Riparian Areas	158,178	95%	150,269
Biological Core Management Areas	899,915	80%	719,932
Special Species Management Areas	1,385,131	80%	1,108,105
Multiple Use Management Areas	1,912,804	66.66%	1,275,075

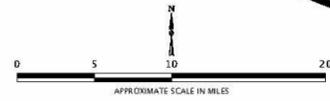
MAP 4

Maeveen Marie Behan Conservation Lands System PRIORITY BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES of the SONORAN DESERT CONSERVATION PLAN

Providing Sustainable Development Guidelines as Adopted in the Pima County Comprehensive Plan

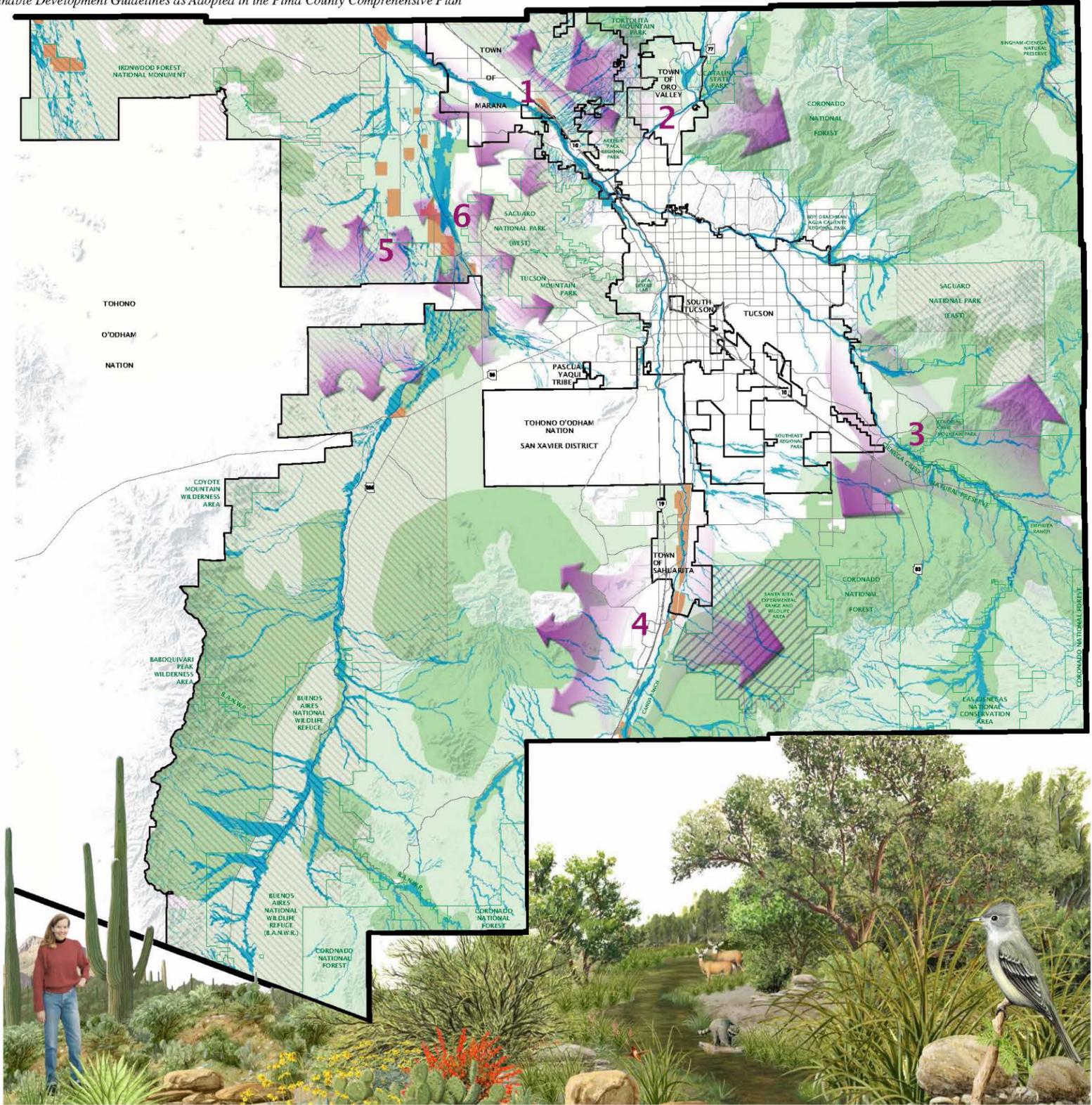
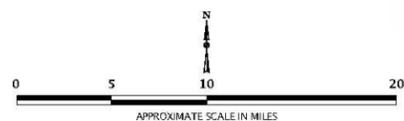


Notes:
1. Biological data is regional in application and not site specific.
2. Outlines do not show, modify, decrease or limit existing land uses, zoning, permitted activities or management of lands.
Base map provided by Pima County DOT Geographic Information Services. Layout and illustration by Pima County Graphic Services Department.

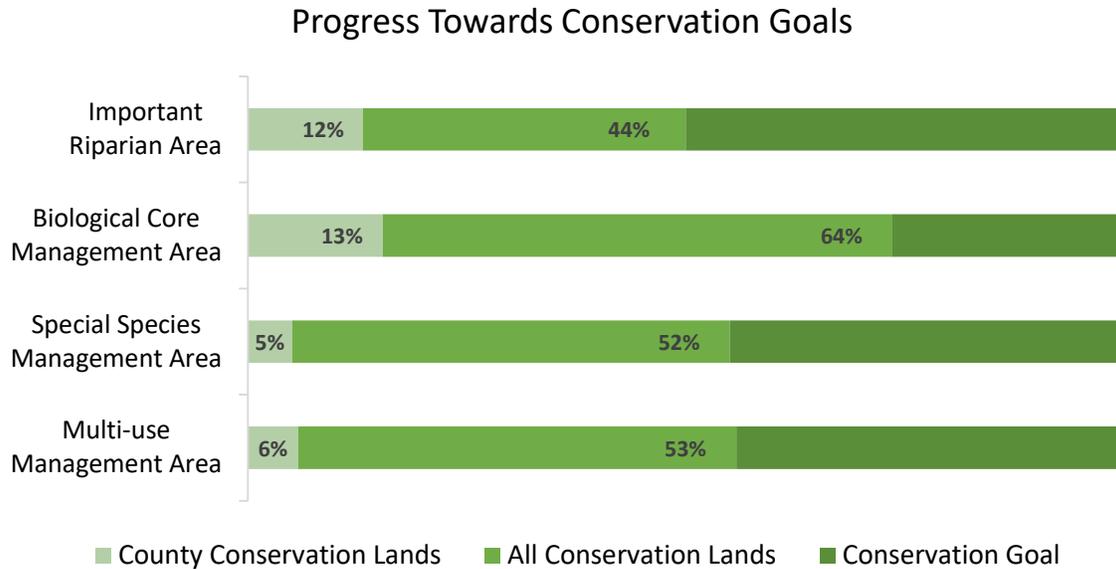


LEGEND

-  **Important Riparian Areas** are critical elements of the Sonoran Desert where biological diversity is at its highest. These areas are valued for their higher water availability, vegetation density, and biological productivity. They are also the backbone to preserving landscape connectivity.
Landscape conservation objective: 95% undisturbed natural open space.
-  **Biological Core Management Areas** are those areas that have high biological values. They support large populations of vulnerable species, connect large blocks of contiguous habitat and biological reserves, and support high value potential habitat for five or more priority vulnerable wildlife species.
Landscape conservation objective: 80% undisturbed natural open space.
-  **Special Species Management Areas** are those areas that are crucial to the survival of three species of special concern to Pima County: the cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl, Mexican spotted owl, and south west willow flycatcher.
Landscape conservation objective: 80% undisturbed natural open space.
-  **Multiple Use Management Areas** are those areas where biological values are significant, but do not attain the level associated with Biological Core Management Areas. They support populations of vulnerable species, connect large blocks of contiguous habitat and biological reserves, and support high value potential habitat for three or more priority vulnerable species.
Landscape conservation objective: 60% undisturbed natural open space.
-  **Scientific Research Areas** are those lands within the Tucson Basin that are managed for scientific research: the Santa Rita Experimental Range and the University of Arizona's Desert Laboratory at Tumamoc Hill.
Landscape conservation objective: Continue management for the purpose of promoting scientific research on the environment and natural resources.
-  **Agricultural In-Holdings** consist of active, or abandoned, agricultural lands that lie within the Conservation Lands System.
Landscape conservation objective: Ensure that future, non-agricultural land uses conserve on-site resource values where present, facilitate the movement of native wildlife and the pollination of native flora across the landscape, and do not adversely impact surrounding CLS lands.
-  **Critical Landscape Connections** are six broadly-defined areas where biological connectivity is significantly compromised, but where opportunity to preserve or otherwise improve the movement of wildlife between major conservation areas and/or mountain ranges still persists.
Landscape conservation objective: Protect existing wildlife habitat linkages, remove obstacles to wildlife movement, and restore fragmented landscapes.
-  **Areas Outside of Conservation Lands System**
-  **Incorporated Areas and Native American Jurisdictions**
-  **Pima County Boundary**
-  **Washes**
-  **Major Streets**
-  **Parks**



The graph below breaks down the collective progress as of April 2022 in achieving the CLS landscape goals and specifically shows the current contribution that County conservation lands make. *All Conservation Lands* include County conservation lands plus other lands in the region set aside for conservation (federal public lands, state parks, and some private holdings) (Map 5). Remarkably, at least 44 percent or more of each CLS landscape goal has been achieved with three of the four exceeding 50 percent.



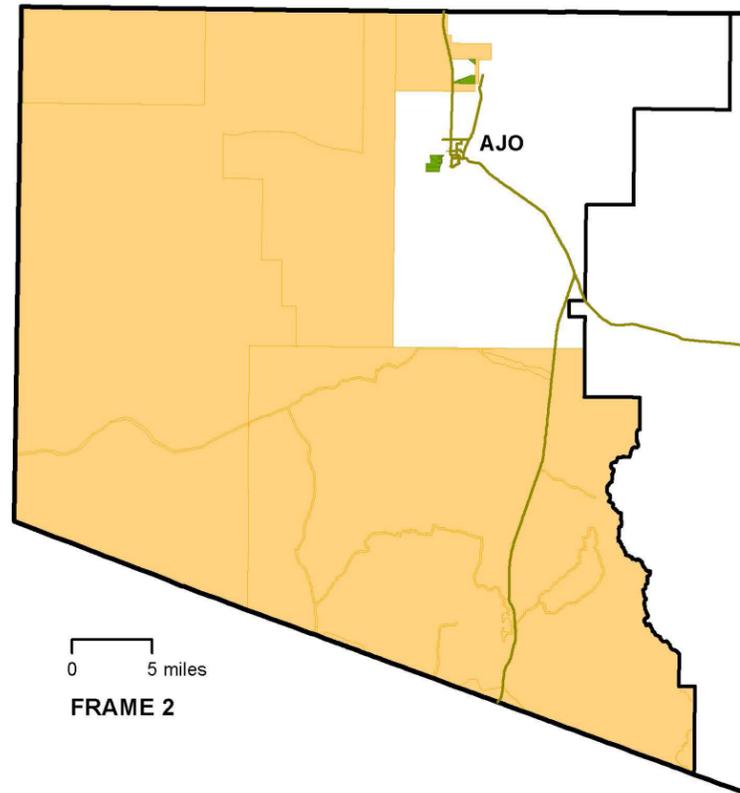
- *Cultural and Heritage Conservation*

Indigenous peoples have a long history in our region and, aside from oral traditions and written materials, the land preserves the evidence of who was here and how they lived and interacted with their environments. Lands in our Sonoran Desert region and the tangible evidence therein have told us about the lives and day-to-day community of all the people residing in this area over at least the last 12,000 years. Considered ancestral places by the Tohono O’odham, Pascua Yaqui, Hopi, and other tribal nations, we have learned that indigenous people were initially hunter-gatherers, later lived in villages communally and farmed floodplains with extensive irrigation canals. Spanish missionaries profoundly affected indigenous communities bringing European crops and livestock and new religious practices and beliefs. Territorial military and civilian settlements transformed population centers and Mexican vaqueros and cattle ranchers of yesterday and today have all influenced our sense of place.

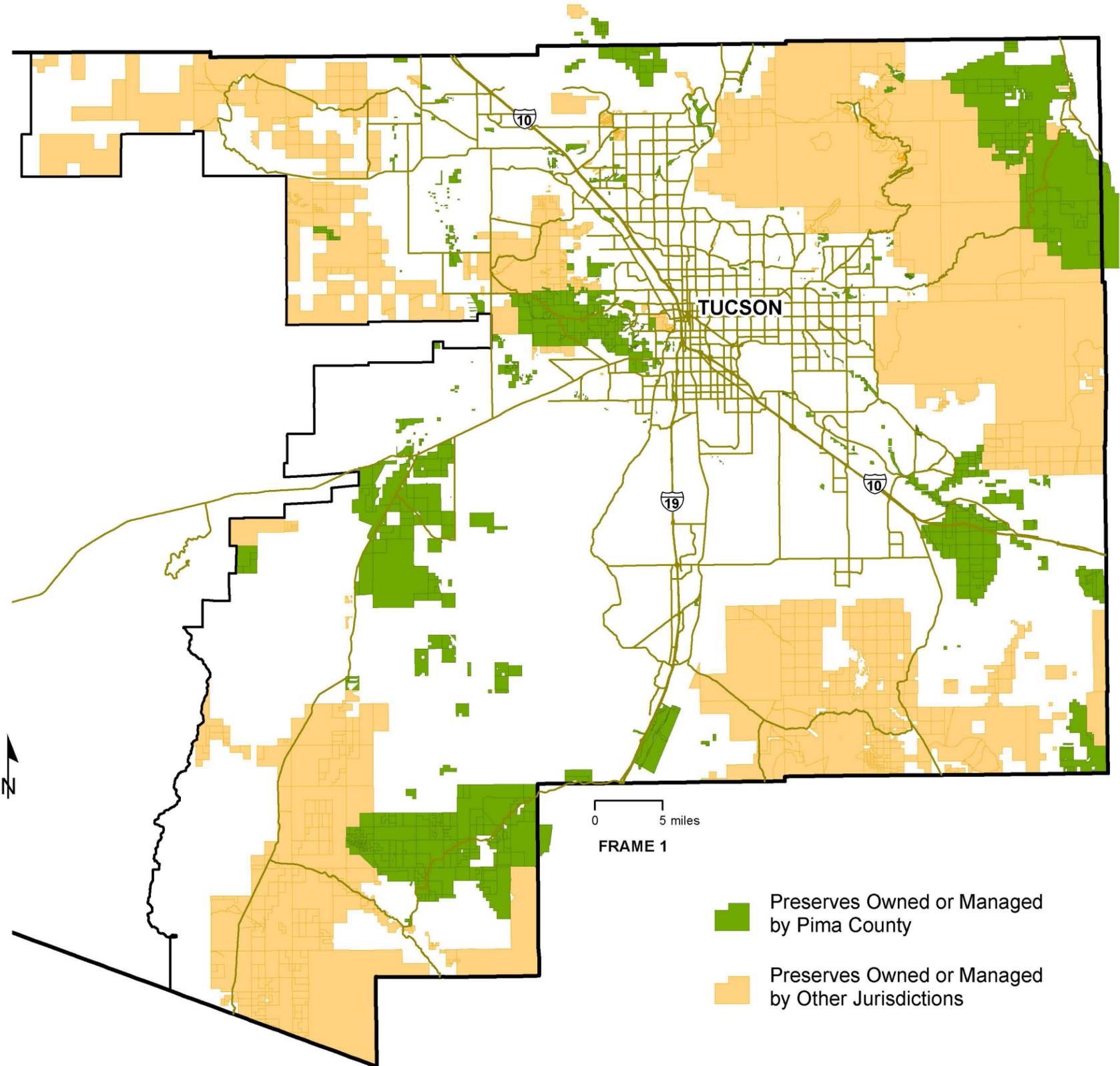
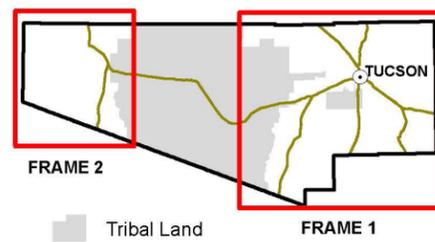
There is little question that the County’s conservation acquisitions do much to preserve our cultural heritage. In 1997 and 2004, voters passed the first County historic preservation bonds, which allowed for specific acquisitions of cultural and historic properties. They include discrete properties with specific importance such as Tumamoc Hill, Los Morteros, and Canoa Ranch as well as other properties with representative value like Cienega Creek Natural Preserve, A7 Ranch, Hay Hook Ranch, and Tucson Mountain Park. These acquisitions along with other County conservation lands and ranches were instrumental in demonstrating how the cultural and natural landscapes intersect to create a unique place in telling the nation’s story. This resulted in the recent Congressional designation of the [Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area](#) signed into law in 2019.

Currently, uses on many acquisitions promote current cultural interests such as continued practice of tribal rights and traditions, outdoor recreation, ranching, and management of natural resources to improve ecological conditions. Collection of plants for tribal ceremonies, construction of trail parks, outdoor education classes, restoration of historic structures and interpretation amenities, ranch education, removal of invasive species, and inventory of native species are common examples of such uses.

MAP 5



ALL CONSERVATION LANDS IN PIMA COUNTY, AZ



The County employs a remarkably unique approach aimed at keeping working ranches as a part of the landscape. Of the 250,200 acres of County conservation land, more than 200,000 acres are part of working ranches. The County owns and operates fifteen working cattle ranches (including one farm) which are comprised of fee land plus state and federal grazing leases. The Natural Resources Parks and Recreation Department manages these ranches via Ranch Management Agreements with local private-sector ranchers and farmers, some of whom are the same families who previously owned the ranch. These on-the-ground managers oversee the livestock or farm operations and provide land stewardship for the ranch properties on a daily basis. Adherence to the County's Rangeland Management Standards and Guidelines ensure the land and resources are managed sustainably. This approach preserves family ties to the land, creates ranching and farming opportunities for new generation ranchers and farmers, and ensures that working landscapes remain free from residential and commercial development.



The way we engage with our conservation lands and what we allow to happen there leaves behind on-the-ground evidence of our culture and values for future generations to reflect upon. Preserving these lands and landscapes honors those who came before and is a priority of the County and County residents.

- *Balancing Economic Development and Conservation*

This is the prime directive of SDCP, and the County has [enacted many initiatives](#) to further this balance since launching the SDCP in 1998. The contributions and benefits of these actions to the SDCP are even more substantial when examined en masse rather than as individual actions. However, a good example of an individual significant undertaking is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2016 authorization of Incidental Take Permit No. TE84356A-O and the County's subsequent implementation of the Multi Species Conservation Plan (MSCP). This permit and terms of the MSCP are valid for 30 years, currently expected to terminate in 2046.

The MSCP facilitates development by easing the regulatory requirements of the federal Endangered Species Act and mandates that for every project covered under the plan, lands are to be conserved in perpetuity for the protection of natural resources important for the conservation of native and rare species. County and District construction projects, plus certain private development projects authorized by Pima County Development Services Department, can avail themselves of MSCP benefits. In keeping with the MSCP, subsequent to initiation of project construction, the County provides the requisite mitigation land and resource management to offset the impacts of the project.

Our conservation acquisition portfolio is a vital component of the MSCP. This portfolio is the cache of land, or mitigation bank, used to fulfill the MSCP mitigation obligations. In the first six years of implementation, just over 730 public and private projects have benefitted from the regulatory relief offered by the MSCP, which required approximately 6,610 acres of our conservation acquisitions to provide the necessary mitigation.

Previous estimates suggest our mitigation bank will accommodate nearly all of our mitigation needs, but that some additional land may be necessary in the future, the cost of which is being incorporated into the County's Integrated Infrastructure Plan. Most other communities that have similar species conservation plans do not have a readily available cache of land to provide mitigation such as Pima County. By having a well-stocked mitigation bank, projects are able to achieve compliance with the Endangered Species Act without any delays.

SUMMARY

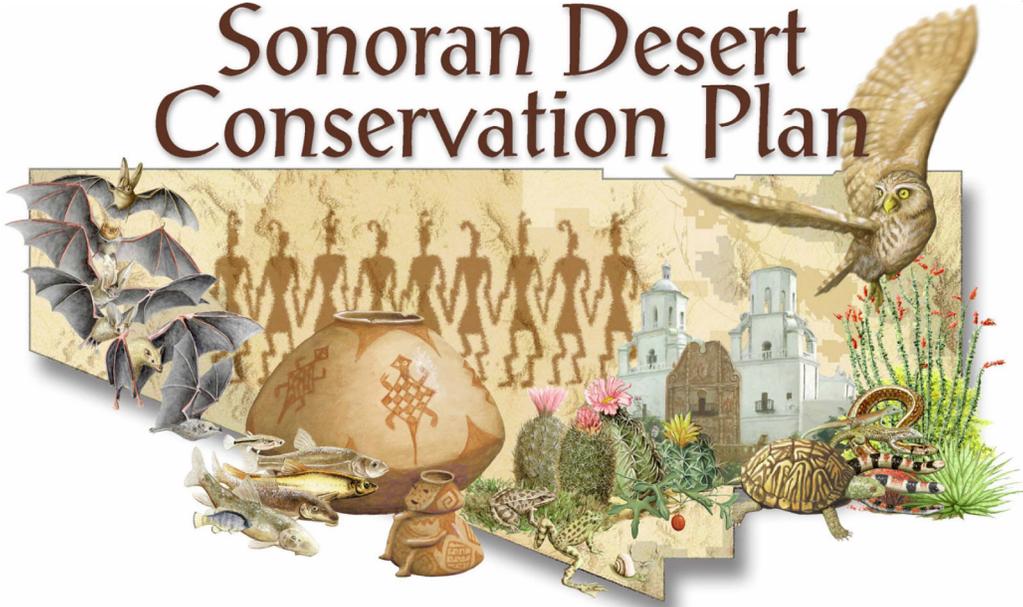
The County has a long history of acquiring conservation land to benefit the residents of Pima County. The majority of these lands are the direct result of the County executing locally led and designed plans and programs informed by science, shaped by considerable community input, and which include measurable targets. Along the way, processes and procedures were created to ensure transparency and accountability in the determination of acquisition priorities.

A variety of funding mechanisms have been used, but the largest share of the County's conservation acquisitions have been financed by voter-approved bonds. Even though funds from these voter-approved bonds have been exhausted, the County continues to acquire conservation land pursuant to our plans and programs, albeit at a lesser frequency and with fewer financial resources.

Our conservation lands provide a wide range of benefits to the residents of Pima County. Some benefits are experienced personally like tax and flood insurance advantages, jobs, and outdoor recreation opportunities. Others are experienced communally like greenhouse gas reduction, watershed health, and sense of place.

Significantly, our conservation land acquisitions are important to the community's economic development. Not only are these acquisitions an investment in the region's recreation and tourism industries, they are also an essential element in our ability to provide relief from certain regulatory requirements for public and private development. This is the kind of balance envisioned by the SDCP, whereby conservation equates to economic growth and prosperity of our community.

Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan



July 2022



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