

Friends of the Desert

Issue 52 Spring 2017

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

Photo: Bill Lesch

Eighteen Years in the Making, Pima County's Multi-Species Conservation Plan is a Reality

Thank you for everything you contributed towards this huge accomplishment

This story began 18 years ago. It is a story of seemingly impossible goals, challenges and compromise, our dedicated community, and one tiny owl. It is also a story about YOU.

You are one of the heroes of this story.

This story begins in 1998 when the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan was born. Spurred by the listing of the tiny cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl as an endangered species, our community embarked on a challenging journey of trying to balance conservation and growth.

One of the cornerstones of the Sonoran Desert Conservation plan is Pima County's Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan (or MSCP for short), which protects 44 of our most vulnerable desert wildlife species, including 7 endangered species. Protecting habitat for those 44 species, in turn, protects a vast number of others.

Developing the MSCP over almost two decades involved countless meetings among scientists, developers, ranchers, conservationists, and passionate citizens. Emotions often ran high. Competing ideas and opinions were debated. The pygmy-owl was removed from the endangered species list in 2006. Yet, always, the best-available science served as the underpinning.

And now, after 18 years of hard work and the incredible contributions of a wide variety of community members, including YOU, the Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan was officially approved this past October.

Imagine cheers of joy, lots of clapping and pats on the back, and a real sense of accomplishment when the final documents were signed on October 13, 2016. You were with us too, a legion of supporters celebrating in spirit.

With your support we'll continue to advocate for strong conservation and smart solutions in the years ahead.

With your ongoing support, the Coalition advocated for the strongest conservation measures using the best available science in the MSCP. We provided input and recommendations every step of the way, using the expertise of our member groups, staff, and supporters. *Thank you for being by our side throughout this long process. The result was worth the wait.*

We now have a 30-year road map to permanently protect our most special areas as this region continues to grow. And we need to make sure this map is followed every step of the way. As Pima County

begins implementing the MSCP, with your support we'll continue to advocate for strong conservation and smart solutions in the years ahead.

In fact, in January 2017, we collaborated with Pima County and Lighthawk, Inc. to help Pima County with their MSCP monitoring program.

A volunteer pilot from Lighthawk took Pima County staff on an over-flight of Pima County conservation lands so they could conduct a "saguaro count," important data to establish the health of wildlife habitat in the area.

Thank you for being the heroes of this story. Your moral support, financial donations, volunteer time, and voices of passion and reason are as essential to this story as anything else. YOU are transforming our community into a place where both people and wildlife are valued.

Want to Learn More About the MSCP?

Pima County has already started taking steps to implement the MSCP, including recently releasing details of their "Certificate of Coverage" program. News and updates can be found at: <http://bit.ly/2ixfAB8>



Carolyn's Corner

Our Collective Voice is Making a Difference

Nineteen years ago this month, the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection was born. Our band of conservation groups embarked on a journey to work locally to protect precious habitat of the Sonoran Desert here in Pima County.

With the cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl becoming the latest endangered species at that time, conservation groups united in a way that we had not seen before in southern Arizona. While many of our groups were doing incredible work for the environment, there had not yet been a focus solely on our “backyard,” other than homeowner groups working in their own neighborhoods. The mission was clear: save this owl from disappearing and prevent scores of others from a similar fate. The vehicle was the Endangered Species Act, and we were determined to work with local officials and the community to avoid the inevitable, last resort lawsuits.

While we definitely had some ups and downs, we also had some immediate successes. Working with Pima County, northwest rural residents, and the office of the Secretary of Interior, in 2000 over 100,000 acres were preserved as the Ironwood Forest National Monument.

Enlisting the supporters of all of our member groups to advocate for a habitat protection plan, the Coalition was able to show strength and unity on behalf of environmental protection. As time went on we attracted more member groups and thousands of supporters and volunteers like you. This has made all the difference. Here. Locally. In the Sonoran Desert.

As the accompanying articles showcase, with your support we have played a key part in the permanent preservation of biologically important habitat, in the connecting of large blocks of parks and forests with wildlife crossings, and guided development to the least sensitive areas. The finalization of Pima County's Multi-Species Conservation Plan this past fall was another momentous achievement that showcased what can be accomplished when we all persevere with a common goal.

Most importantly, though, our community has come together to speak loudly and strongly for wildlife and the habitat that we all share. Together, we have changed the culture of our leadership by becoming the leaders — our elected officials and agencies are responding to the collective voices of a community that cares deeply about our desert, our future, and sustaining our way of life.

Thank you for being a part of it.

Coalition Staff

Carolyn Campbell *Director*

Kathleen Kennedy *Associate Director*

Sarah Whelan *Program & Outreach Associate*

The Coalition operates as a fiscally-sponsored project of Coalition member group Sky Island Alliance (EIN # 86-0796748). All donations to the Coalition are fully tax-deductible.

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**Together, we have changed
the culture of our leadership
by becoming the leaders.**

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 Member Groups

Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest

Arizona Native Plant Society

Bat Conservation International

Cascabel Conservation Association

Center for Biological Diversity

Center for Environmental Ethics

Defenders of Wildlife

Desert Watch

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

Genius Loci Foundation

Native Seeds / SEARCH

Protect Land and Neighborhoods

Safford Peak Watershed Education Team

Save the Scenic Santa Ritas

Sierra Club – Grand Canyon Chapter

Sierra Club – Rincon Group

Sky Island Alliance

Society for Ecological Restoration

Southwestern Biological Institute

Tortolita Homeowners Association

Tucson Audubon Society

Tucson Herpetological Society

Tucson Mountains Association

Wildlands Network

Website: **www.sonorandesert.org**

facebook.com/sonorandesertprotection

Office: **520.388.9925**

We have a new mailing address:

738 N. 5th Ave., Suite 212

Tucson AZ 85705



Bobcats and coyotes alike take advantage of the lush landscape (brought about by monsoon rains) as added protection along their route to the Oracle Road wildlife bridge. Seen on separate occasions by our PEREGRINE camera. Thanks to our supporters and camera sponsors, the expansion of our camera fleet allows for further understanding of mammal migration patterns around the wildlife crossings.

Expansion on the Horizon and It's a Good Thing

Expanding our citizen science efforts to combat encroachment on wildlife corridors

Even before the completion of the Oracle Road wildlife crossings, javelina and desert tortoises had explored the build sites and were safely making their way across Oracle Road. Flash forward to now, 11 months later, and both the wildlife bridge and underpass are being used regularly by animals in the region. Thanks to your dedicated support of the Sonoran Desert, the Coalition has taken on the monitoring of both crossing approach areas in partnership with the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

In the upcoming year we plan on strengthening our program and expanding our observations by adding another 20 cameras to our fleet. The initial focus will be to fill in current gaps and gain a better understanding of animal movement to and from the Oracle Road crossings. We'll also be taking the show on the road, expanding our efforts in the Tucson Mountains and throughout the Avra Valley. Our expansion into Avra Valley will allow us to start gathering data about wildlife presence, diversity, and movement in one of the areas targeted for the proposed Interstate 11. This data will be invaluable as we continue to oppose any highway through the Avra Valley.

Expanding our camera program into Avra Valley will provide important data for our fight against any highway through Avra Valley.

In the next year we hope to...

- * Expand our fleet by another 20 cameras
- * Focus on filling in the gaps to our research
- * Expand our efforts into the western Tortolita Mountains, Tucson Mountains, and Avra Valley
- * Continue engaging the community with citizen science opportunities
- * Strengthen our relationships with monitoring partners
- * Find new and creative ways to share what we find with our community
- * Identify obstacles to wildlife migrations

A month into the year and we already have 8 of the new 20 cameras out in the field and teams are forming to take on more cameras to continue our reach. All our cameras are monitored by volunteer citizen scientists and we're currently looking for more volunteers to monitor new cameras out in the Tucson Mountains. If you are interested in joining the team, please contact Sarah Whelan at sarah.whelan@sonorandesert.org for more information. Our goal is to continue piecing together the larger story of animals traversing throughout the wildlife corridors in Pima County.



We Need You!

Want to volunteer to monitor a wildlife camera or sort photos in our office for analysis? Email Sarah at Sarah.Whelan@sonorandesert.org or call our office at (520) 388-9925. We look forward to welcoming you on board!

Caught in the act by our KELLY camera, this gray fox is bringing home dinner in the Tucson Mountains. It is thanks to supporters like you that we are able to continue to expand our monitoring efforts in critical wildlife corridors.



The 5,040-acre Sands Ranch was acquired by Pima County in 2008 and is located in the far southeast corner of Pima County. This desert grassland property directly links to



A Legacy We All Share

Pima County's Open Space Preserve System Highlights Diverse Landscapes and Habitats

With the ongoing support of citizens like you, our community has established a breath-taking legacy for generations to come. Over the last few decades, Pima County has established an incredible open space preserve system. Totalling over 200,000 acres, this protected open space includes classic saguaro-studded hills, rolling grasslands, precious riparian areas, and jagged mountaintops.

Most of these lands were purchased using voter-approved bonds dedicated for open space protection. Moving forward, these lands will serve as critical mitigation lands for Pima County's recently approved Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan. Habitat for Pima County's most vulnerable wildlife species, including endangered species, are found throughout the open space preserve system. Many of these lands are also open for recreational activities such as hiking and wildlife-watching, increasing the quality of life for all Pima County residents.

Thank you for supporting the Coalition's long-time work advocating for this open space preserve system. We are proud to be part of this legacy with you.

Cienega Creek Natural Preserve is a jewel of Pima County. Spanning 4,000 acres, the preserve was expanded in 2004 and 2007 by 192 acres and is home to native endangered fish species and wildlife habitat for a wide range of Sonoran Desert wildlife. *Photo by Pima County*



important riparian areas such as Sonoita Creek, Babocomari River, and Cienega Creek and is an important wildlife linkage between adjacent mountain ranges. *Photo by Pima County*



The A-7 Ranch is located northeast of Tucson between the Santa Catalina and Rincon Mountains. Pima County acquired the ranch in 2004, including 6,829 acres of fee lands, 34,195 acres of state grazing leases, and 80 acres of a BLM grazing permit. The ranch includes woodland vegetation habitat, semi-desert grasslands, and riparian habitat. It also provides an important wildlife linkage between adjacent mountain ranges. *Photo by Pima County*



**Invest in the Sonoran
Desert today:**
Become a Desert Champion!

Want to Learn More?

A beautiful summary report of the lands conserved through Pima County's open space acquisition program can be found at <http://bit.ly/2muHnau>.

Our recurring donors provide a critical foundation for our projects. Please join us! Call us at (520) 388-9925 or visit sonorandesert.org to sign up. Thank you!

THANK YOU for your generosity.

Your donations are making all of this work possible!

This list reflects donations from 12/17/15 to 12/31/16.

*For questions or concerns about your donation,
please call 520.388.9925.*

*We also have a lot of anonymous donors who generously
support our work. Thank you — you know who you are!*

In Dedication: Honoring Hannah Stitzer

The Deupree Family Foundation gave the Coalition a special gift of \$5,000 in September 2016 to honor the contributions of Hannah Stitzer to the Coalition's work. Hannah was the Coalition's Program and Outreach Associate from August 2013 to July 2016 and oversaw, among many other things, the significant expansion of our Wildlife Camera Project. Her dedication to this project and our many volunteers is an inspiration. We are so grateful for Hannah's dedication to protecting the Sonoran Desert, and to Caleb and Elizabeth Deupree of the Deupree Family Foundation for their generous gift in her honor.

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A huge thank you to our foundation and local business supporters.

You are an essential part of our work and we could not be successful without you!

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A Tribute to Conservation Hero Mick Meader

The Coalition lost a friend and ally on February 10, 2017 when Mick Meader passed away after a 5-month battle with non-smoking-related lung cancer. Mick was the Co-President and Chair of the Conservation Committee at the Cascabel Conservation Association, one of our member groups. Mick worked for the Department of Geosciences at the University of Arizona as a staff member for 23 years until his retirement in 2010. We were always inspired by Mick's passion for conservation, including his strong advocacy for the protection of the middle and lower San Pedro River Valley and his steadfast opposition to the SunZia Transmission Line Project.



Mick was a fearless leader and a diligent investigator — shining light on critical issues facing our region. We believe such dedication and perseverance can only come from someone with a deep connection to the spirit of the land, and an appreciation for its role in sustaining our own lives and the lives of other living creatures. We truly enjoyed collaborating with Mick over the years and value the many positive working relationships he fostered throughout our region. He will be sorely missed. Mick's wonderful tact was reminiscent of the old adage, "speak softly, and carry a big stick." In many ways, Mick was a model citizen and will always be an inspiration to us all. To read Mick's full obituary, please go to: <http://bit.ly/2mbVjE0>.

The following people had donations dedicated to them in 2016. Thank you to the generous donors who dedicated their donations to friends and family!

Adrian Meyer

*Bob & Kathy Rude with
Rude Ranch Animal Rescue*

Brooke Barrie

David Croft

David Kelly

Elaine Harden

Elizabeth Deupree

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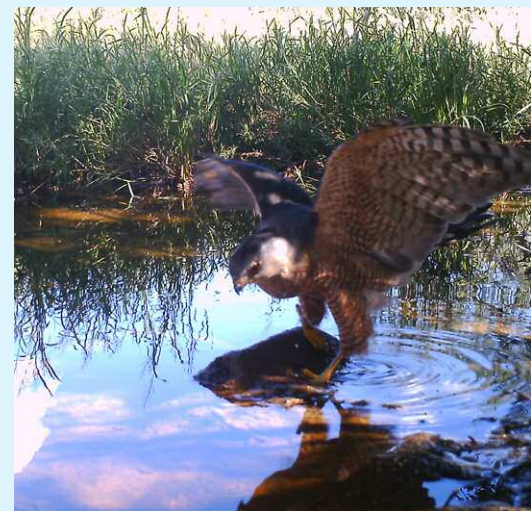
Rosie Bennett

Adopt a Camera Today!

New camera sponsorship program launches for individuals and businesses

As our popular wildlife camera program expands and grows, we've developed an exciting new opportunity for individuals and businesses to sponsor wildlife cameras. Each yearly sponsorship level comes with special perks, such as naming your camera and receiving regular photos of wildlife that the camera captures in both print and digital format.

For a full list of sponsorships levels and more details about the program, visit our new "Adopt-A-Camera" webpage at sonorandesert.org/adopt-a-camera or email Sarah Whelan at Sarah.Whelelan@sonorandesert.org. And thank you for all your support of this project!





Mule Deer

Overpass Crossings	Underpass Crossings	Total Crossings
# Animals # Events	# Animals # Events	# Animals # Events
545 298	20 14	565 312



Javelina

Overpass Crossings	Underpass Crossings	Total Crossings
# Animals # Events	# Animals # Events	# Animals # Events
8 3	242 82	250 85

A Wildlife Linkage Re-connected

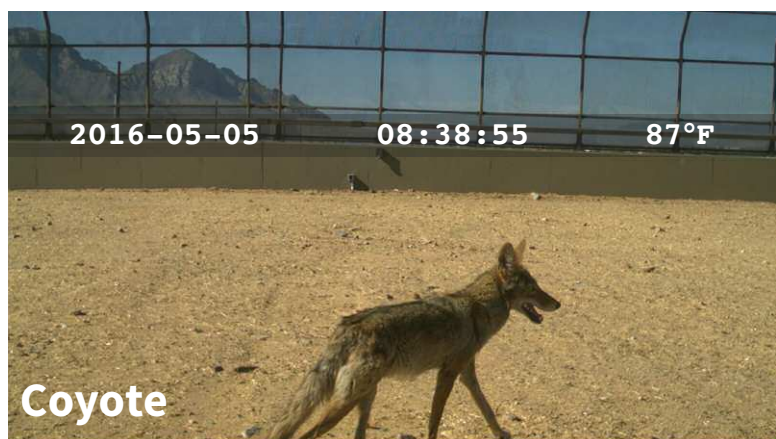
Arizona Game and Fish Department Monitoring Data is in!

For almost a year now, the Arizona Game and Fish Department has been collecting data about wildlife use of the new Oracle Road wildlife crossings. And the numbers are impressive! There have been 1,182 crossings of 13 different wildlife species at both the wildlife bridge and underpass. While use of the wildlife bridge and underpass are fairly similar overall, mule deer prefer the bridge, with 545 crossings recorded at the bridge compared to only 20 crossings at the underpass.

In 2017, along with continued monitoring of the crossings, Game and Fish will be conducting roadkill surveys along a 5.2 mile stretch of Oracle Road. We expect and hope that the incidence of roadkill will have decreased substantially now that the crossings are finished. While most of the associated wildlife fencing is also constructed, there are a few remaining sections that will be built in 2017. Lastly, Game and Fish will continue to monitor a group of Sonoran Desert tortoises living in the vicinity of the crossings. They outfitted nine tortoises with GPS tracking units in 2016 and expect to outfit 12 more tortoises in 2017.



Through your support, the Coalition continues to be an important partner in this monitoring program. In addition to the cameras on the crossings (see adjacent data), our dedicated volunteers monitor 18 wildlife cameras in the vicinity of the crossings, providing important supplemental data for Game and Fish and all project partners. Thank you so much to everyone involved in this important monitoring program!



Coyote

Overpass Crossings	Underpass Crossings	Total Crossings
# Animals # Events	# Animals # Events	# Animals # Events
112 69	191 148	303 217



Bobcat

Overpass Crossings	Underpass Crossings	Total Crossings
# Animals # Events	# Animals # Events	# Animals # Events
4 4	53 53	57 57

Other Species

Overpass Crossings	Underpass Crossings	Total Crossings
# Animals # Events	# Animals # Events	# Animals # Events
6 6	1 1	7 7

Totals All data courtesy of the Arizona Game and Fish Department

Overpass Crossings	Underpass Crossings	Total Crossings
# Animals # Events	# Animals # Events	# Animals # Events
675 380	507 298	1182 678