

Friends of the Desert

Issue 69 - Fall 2026

We envision a community in the Sonoran Desert where ecosystems are healthy, valued, and protected, with benefits for current and future generations.



Coyote near the Oracle Road wildlife underpass.

“

I live next to the wildlife underpass and have noticed less roadkill after the crossings went in. Roadkill has practically disappeared!

— Jean Lewis, Desert Monitor,
2018-2026

”

Wildlife crossings—they work!

Healthy wildlife populations need room to roam. Wildlife in Oro Valley have struggled due to rapid development and roads that challenge their survival. They must navigate traffic, shrinking habitat and more to meet their needs.

In 2012, CSDP launched a volunteer-led wildlife camera monitoring program to **study wildlife trends in the area and advocate for change.** In 2016, the first wildlife bridge in the Sonoran Desert and its sister wildlife underpass were built across Oracle Road north of Catalina State Park. Using our data, complemented by data from the Arizona Game and Fish Department, we set out to explore whether these crossings are working to help local wildlife.

Our conclusion: Yes, they do!

Here's a quick summary from our final project report:

- In total, these crossings see about 3,500 animals every year.
- We documented over 65 species, meaning species diversity was high!
- We saw very few mesocarnivores, such as badgers—a sign that development is affecting this ecosystem.
- Rare cameos included Gila monster, desert tortoise, bighorn sheep, white-nosed coati, mountain lion, black bear, ringtail, spotted skunk, and striped skunk.
- Coyotes appear to play an important role as the area's top predator. Overall, urban adapted species like coyotes and bobcats are doing well.

Read the full report here!



Funded in part by
**SANTA CRUZ VALLEY
NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA**



Monitoring developments in the desert

An update on our watchdog work

Thanks to your support, we can stay engaged as waves of industrial development projects affect our region. We continue to advocate for effective protections and mitigations for habitats and wildlife corridors—and sometimes we find ourselves as **the only voice in the room speaking up for the landscape**. Recently, we've been keeping a close eye on proposals for transmission lines, gas power plants, interstates, and yes, data centers.

New regulations:

- In early August 2026, the Tucson Mayor and Council approved new regulations for large-scale data centers. We worked with the City throughout the process, and **several of our recommendations were incorporated**. The City will now officially consider the desert's natural open spaces and riparian habitats when siting data centers. This is a great step in the right direction.

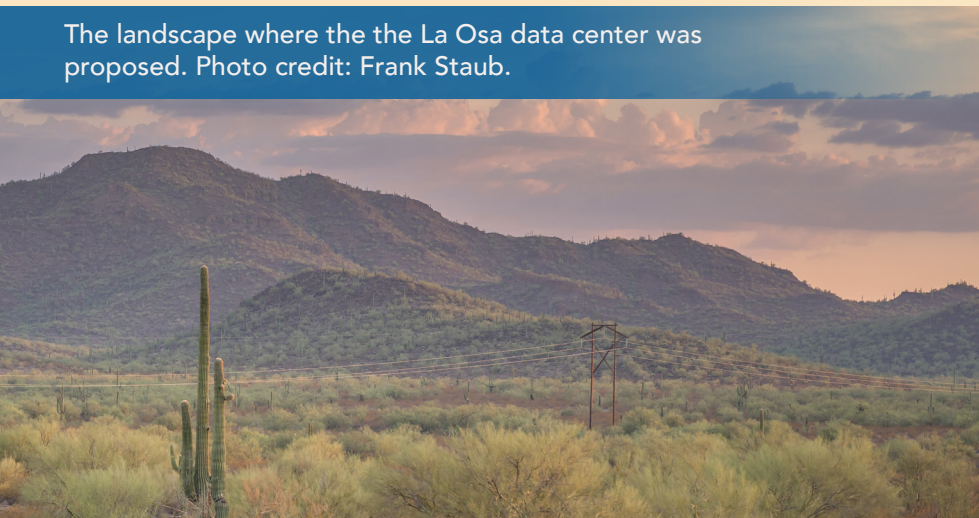
La Osa data center DENIED:

- After more than a year of advocacy from CSDP, our partners, and community members, Pinal County denied the proposed La Osa data center, which bordered Ironwood Forest National Monument. It's a powerful reminder that speaking up for wildlife and wild places can make a difference.

As development pressure continues to grow in our region, **staying vigilant and speaking up is more important than ever**. It doesn't seem to be letting up, so neither will we!

This work is **only possible through your support**. THANK YOU for standing with us.

The landscape where the the La Osa data center was proposed. Photo credit: Frank Staub.



The CSDP team with Dr. William Shaw following the celebration of Pima County's designation of the William Shaw Corridor in March 2026.

Meet the William Shaw Wildlife Corridor

As part of the 25th anniversary celebrations of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, **we championed the idea of officially naming a wildlife corridor after Dr. Shaw**, esteemed ecologist and longtime champion of wildlife connectivity in southern Arizona.

In September 2026, Pima County and the Town of Marana officially designated the wildlife connections between the Avra Valley, Tucson Mountains, and Tortolita Mountains as the **William Shaw Corridor, honoring Dr. Shaw**. His work as chair of the Science Technical Advisory Team for the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan helped shape **local conservation planning efforts to this day**.

Nearly 40 years later, CSDP and our partners continue this work to ensure this linkage has lasting protections.

Wild Connections Week

A new field-trip series with CSDP

This past spring, we hosted Wild Connections Week, a series of field trips exploring some of our highest-priority areas for preserving wildlife connectivity. Along the way, we gave an on-the-ground look at where wildlife move across the landscape and why keeping these pathways connected matters.

We hosted four guided tours to:

The Santa Cruz River Wildlife Ramp

This one-of-a-kind structure helps wildlife cross the river's steep flood-control levees. Thank you to the Santa Cruz Watershed Collaborative for joining us.

The CAP canal in Avra Valley

We visited one of the custom land-bridges for wildlife that preserve connectivity across the Central Arizona Project (CAP) canal in Avra Valley and saw a fraction of the desert (and homes) that would be lost to the proposed I-11 freeway.

Picture Rocks Road

We discussed how heavy traffic impacts tortoises and other wildlife moving through the Tucson Mountains, hearing perspectives from Saguaro National Park and Tucson Herpetological Society. And we found a tortoise burrow on a nearby trail!

The Ann Day Memorial Wildlife Bridge

More than 100 guests joined us for a rare opportunity to tour the bridge, hear from special guests, make seedballs with Reid Park Zoo to use for restoration, and enjoy a cake-cutting ceremony.



Wildlife sign at the Santa Cruz River Wildlife Ramp.
Photo credit: Gracie Heim



Cutting the cake at the wildlife bridge!



Desert updates

We're experiencing an **incredible wave of industrial development proposals** here in Southern Arizona. Just this year, CSDP has worked on over 20 large-scale industrial proposals or related policies.

Many of these projects may never be built. While we can take some comfort in that, proposals can still **influence where roads, power lines, and other infrastructure go**, and can even **encourage the approval of other proposals**—putting the landscape in the path of short-sighted development.

We don't stand alone in this work. CSDP has always been **powered by a community** who cares deeply about the Sonoran Desert and are willing to show up for it. Our staff and leadership are shepherds of your voice and energy, and we're grateful to know that **CSDP's work will continue to be in great hands**.

For the desert,

Kathleen and Kate

Coalition members

Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest
Arizona Master Naturalist Association

Arizona Native Plant Society
Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum
Bat Conservation International
Cascabel Conservation Association

Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Environmental Ethics
DarkSky Southern Arizona

Defenders of Wildlife
Environmental Law Society
Friends of Ironwood Forest

Friends of Saguaro National Park
Friends of Tortolita

Gates Pass Area Neighborhood Association

Great Old Broads for Wilderness – Tucson

Living Desert Alliance
Maricopa Bird Alliance
Native Seeds/SEARCH

Save the Scenic Santa Ritas
Sierra Club – Grand Canyon Chapter
Sierra Club – Nopales Group
Sky Island Alliance

Tortolita Alliance
Tucson Bird Alliance
Tucson Herpetological Society
Tucson Mountains Association
Wildlands Network

Our team

Kate Hotten
Co-Executive Director, 2024-2026

Kathleen Kennedy
Co-Executive Director (2024-2026, other roles 2007-2024)

Allie Burnett
Wildlife Biologist

Nick Maya
Program Manager

Jessica Moreno
Wildlife Biologist (2017-2026)

Mariah Peters
Operations Coordinator

Jonni Zeman
Engagement Manager

Pick up a yard sign from the Historic Y courtyard today! We expect a new public comment period to open next year.



For the desert!

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Stay informed, speak up, show up, volunteer, and donate today!

We are an independent nonprofit and tax exempt 501(c)(3) organization. Contributions to the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law. Our EIN is 82-2156664.