

## Cultural and Historic Resource Acquisitions



*Pithouse excavated at Dakota Wash. An example of the hundreds of pithouses preserved at this ancient village - Photo by Henry D. Wallace.*

## Dakota Wash

**Site:** 23.46 acres

**Cost:** \$440,000

**Acquired:** Final acquisition, October, 2005

**Fund:** 2004 Bond Funds

### Background

The County has acquired the land parcel encompassing the “core area” of the Dakota Wash site on the west side of South Mission Road, in southwest Tucson. South Rosepine Road forms the western boundary of the parcel. The 23.46-acre parcel was acquired to establish a special Conservation Area to protect and preserve as much of these ancient ruins as possible.

### Cultural and Historical Significance

The Dakota Wash site has been identified in the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan as part of the West Branch Priority Archaeological Site Complex that includes several Hohokam villages situated along the West Branch of the Santa Cruz River. The Dakota Wash site is the earliest settlement in the complex; dating from A.D. 450 – A.D. 900, Dakota Wash grew to a sizeable village with a ballcourt and central plaza, but the site was essentially abandoned by A.D. 950 and settlement shifted northward to the West Branch Site, which became a major settlement and center of ceramic production between A.D. 950 and A.D. 1150. Settlement then shifted away from the West Branch site to other sites in the area, including re-occupation of the Dakota Wash site, which experienced a resurgence of settlement during this later period. The “core area” encompasses the zone of most intensive occupation at the site, including a ballcourt, many trash mounds, room blocks, and hundreds of pithouses.

### Biological Resources

Most of the Conservation Area is within the Conservation Lands System category of Important Riparian Area because Dakota Wash passes through the property as it drains to the Santa Cruz River. The property also supports native plant and animal

communities within the urban context. Dakota Wash provides a link for wildlife movement between the nearby Santa Cruz River to the east, and the Tucson Mountains to the southwest.

### Management

The Dakota Wash Conservation Area is currently managed as open space and as a Cultural Resources Conservation Area. Archaeological preservation and management efforts were supported by 2004 bond funds remaining from the acquisition, including a detailed mapping and GIS database project completed in 2008. The property is extremely vulnerable to potential impacts from surrounding residential neighborhoods as recreation pressure increases in urban Tucson, so the primary goal of the Conservation Area is to protect and preserve the cultural resources. The best strategy for preservation is to keep the property and its resources secure and closed to public access. Impacts from natural causes are a serious threat to the resources; for example, erosion caused by episodic flows along Dakota Wash presently is impacting important archaeological features of the ancient village. An important management goal is to implement corrective measures to control erosion within the property. A comprehensive Management Plan is also slated for development.

### Value to the Community

Dakota Wash is a uniquely important cultural resource whose undisturbed, buried remains contain an important body of information about the prehistory of the Tucson Basin. Equally important, the Tohono O’odham Nation considers Dakota Wash an ancestral site. Dakota Wash is one of the “Last of the Best” of Pima County’s cultural resources. The core area of the prehistoric village has been acquired and will be protected as one of Pima County’s 2004 bond projects. The archaeological resources will be protected as a Pima County Conservation Area to save them from encroaching development, and to preserve them for the future of Pima County.

### Ongoing Property Activities

Current activity at the Dakota Wash Conservation Area involves site monitoring or site protection and property maintenance through intensive clean up efforts to restore the property to a natural desert oasis within Tucson’s urban setting.

### Completed and Planned Projects

- Inventory, mapping & GIS database
- Erosion control
- Security fencing and signage
- Management plan.