

Cultural and Historic Resource Acquisitions



The Pantano Water Tank still stands by the Union Pacific railroad crossing through the Townsite - Photo by Cultural Resources Office staff.

Pantano Townsite

Site: 43.2 acres

Cost: \$95,207

Acquired: Final acquisition, June 26, 2000

Fund: 2004 Bond Funds

Background

The County acquired the land parcels encompassing the Old and New Pantano Townsites within the County's Cienega Creek Natural Preserve, north of Interstate Highway 10 and east of Tucson. The acquisition measures 43.2-acres and was acquired to establish a special Conservation Area to protect and preserve the important historic resources, as well as a prehistoric Hohokam village site underlying the historic resources.

Cultural and Historical Significance

The Pantano Townsite is a historic railroad-era community that was originally established as Pantano Station in 1880 by the Southern Pacific Rail Road (SPRR) on the south side of Cienega Creek. The original Townsite was chosen for its favorable location to build a depot and other railroad facilities and it subsequently attracted private businesses and residential settlement. The Townsite grew until it ultimately supported several warehouses, a store with a blacksmith and carpenter shop, and several private dwellings, claiming a population of 75 by 1880. Flooding in 1887 forced the relocation of the Pantano Townsite to the north side of Cienega creek, where it persisted as the New Pantano Townsite, providing support for the SPRR into

the mid-1950s. By 1905, the town's population had increased to 100, including a deputy Sheriff, a justice of the peace, and six small businesses including a general store and livery. By 1922, Pantano reached its zenith as a town, with a bank, a schoolhouse, a telegraph office, and a post office, all serving the Town's 500 residents. Soon after, the Town went into decline so that by 1941 only 40 people lived there. The post office closed in 1952, and the railroad operations were closed by 1956, effectively closing down the Townsite.

Biological Resources

Most of the Conservation Area is within the Conservation Lands System category of Important Riparian Area associated with Cienega Creek as it passes through the property, draining westward to the Pantano Wash and, ultimately to the Santa Cruz River. The property also provides important open space supporting native plant and animal communities and functions as part of the wildlife corridor along the creek, within the larger Cienega Creek Natural Preserve.

Management

The Pantano Townsite 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. Although distant from Tucson, the property is vulnerable to potential impacts from visitors using Marsh Station Road to gain access. 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. A comprehensive Management Plan is also slated for development.



Although the Pantano Townsite is abandoned, the town cemetery is still regularly visited and maintained by family members of former town residents - Photo by Cultural Resources Office staff.

Value to the Community

The Pantano Townsite contains the preserved remains providing a record of historic Arizona settlement associated with the railroad. Pantano Townsite is a uniquely important cultural resource whose undisturbed, buried remains contain an important body of information about the settlement and economic development of southern Arizona through the late 19th century and into the middle 20th century. Pantano Townsite is recorded as an historic archaeological site that also overlies a prehistoric Hohokam village, thus preserving both prehistoric and historic records of human occupation and use of the Cienega Creek landscape. All that is left at the town site today are foundations of the houses and business that once occupied the site and related features and artifacts, all now a part of the archaeological record of this small western railroad town.

The Townsite has been acquired and will be protected as a 2004 County Bond preservation project. The historic and 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 Pantano Townsite Conservation Area involves accurate site mapping to record the nature and extent of the historic resources to assist with management and future planning. Plans also include security fencing, perimeter signage, and development of a management plan.



Nearby Cienega Creek - Photo by county staff.

Completed and Planned Projects

- Completed acquisition
- Inventory and mapping
- Security fencing and signage
- Management plan



Surface remains of the Pantano school include these foundations, now partially masked by creosote bushes and mesquite trees - Photo by Cultural Resources Office staff.