

Floodprone Land Acquisition Program



The Floodprone Land Acquisition Program

Purpose of the program

The goal of the Pima County Regional Flood Control District's (District) Floodprone Land Acquisition Program (FLAP) has been to purchase properties located in flood zones with many of the structures authorized prior to the adoption of the Floodplain Ordinance. The program is strictly voluntary with residents contacting the District for acquisition consideration. Properties are scored and rated based on the type of use, with occupied residentially zoned land in floodplains being given the highest priority; the higher the flood zone, the higher the priority. Vacant land is the lowest priority with the assumption that development requirements and the permitting process will ensure compliance with the floodplain ordinance. Potential acquisitions are also reviewed for riparian habitat under the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan criteria. The lush riparian environments along watercourses serve many populations of birds, reptiles, plants, and mammals and often provide Priority Conservation Areas for endangered or threatened species. Lastly, a hierarchical rating of watercourses in Pima County with certain watercourses being ranked more favorably than others based on flood potential or flood histories.

Funding

Following the significant floods of 1983, Pima County voters approved the sale of \$8.6 million in bonds to fund the initial FLAP program with an additional \$20 million being approved in 1986. The District receives funding through the secondary property tax with a small amount of the overall levy being directed to the Floodprone Land Acquisition Program. Over the years, the District's levy rate has been as high as \$0.7630 per \$100 dollars (1988) of assessed valuation to its current reduced rate of \$0.2635. While FLAP is not guaranteed any set annual amount for acquisitions, in recent years the program was able to use funds of approximately \$3 million per year. Voters also approved \$5 million in bond funding for the program in 2004. That same year, a \$3 million dollar federal grant was

received by the District following a large relocation effort in the flood damaged Cañada del Oro area of northern Pima County. Given the recent financial crisis and downturn in the economy, the program does not anticipate any significant funding in the immediate future, however, the program remains a viable method of reducing the numbers of properties and property owners in floodplains. To date, the District has been able to purchase over 10,300 acres of floodprone land at a combined cost in excess of \$66 million dollars.

One of the most significant acquisitions made using both FLAP monies and other voter-approved land conservation programs was the Cienega Creek Natural Preserve, which spans nearly 4,000 acres along a 12-mile long reach of Cienega Creek. These acquisitions protect one of the region's few remaining perennial streams, along with natural ecosystem functions such as groundwater recharge and regeneration of floodplain vegetation. Establishment of the Preserve in 1986 marked Pima County's first major flood control effort that included riparian habitat preservation. In response to eliminating grazing and off-road vehicle activity, the density of cottonwoods, willows and other trees and shrubs along the stream have increased dramatically.



Flood damage, Rillito Creek 1983



Flood damage, First Avenue and Rillito Creek 1983

Accomplishments

Aside from the acquisition of many acres of floodprone land, other rewards of the FLAP program include: removing residents from floodprone areas; removing non-conforming floodplain uses; reducing the need for structural flood control improvements; reducing infrastructure maintenance costs; reducing the need for community disaster assistance and emergency relief efforts; maintaining overbank storage areas along watercourses; reducing flooding and erosion damage; enhancing groundwater recharge; protecting water quality; preserving wildlife habitat; providing recreational opportunities; and preserving open space. Additionally, with FLAP as an integral part of the District's floodplain management philosophy, it has helped Pima County achieve a high Community Rating System (CRS) ranking with FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) thereby reducing the cost of flood insurance to Pima County residents.

In summary, the Flood Control District's Floodprone Land Acquisition Program has proven to be a valuable tool in the District's comprehensive approach to floodplain management, and with adequate funding, will continue to provide this beneficial service to residents of Pima County.



June 1998 – Looking east along Cienega Creek towards bedrock outcrop west of “railroad horseshoe bend , J. Fonseca



July 2008 – Looking along the same stretch of Cienega Creek towards bedrock outcrop, D. Scalero