

San Pedro Valley Reserve



A-7 Ranch

Fee lands: 6,829 acres fee lands
State grazing leases: 34,195 acres
BLM grazing permit: 80 acres
Cost: \$2,041,933
Acquired: September 15, 2004
Fund: 2004 Bond Funds

Background

The 41,000 acre A-7 Ranch lies northeast of Tucson along Redington Road, between the Catalina and Rincon Mountains and the San Pedro River. The County acquired the ranch from the City of Tucson in 2004. The City had purchased the ranch in 1999. Prior to the City's purchase, the ranch was part of a larger ranch totaling about 96,000 acres known as the Bellota Ranch, which was owned and operated by the Riley-West Corporation for 20 years. The A-7 portion of the Bellota Ranch was sold to the City, while the Forest Service grazing permit was sold to the owners of the Tanque Verde Guest Ranch. Approximately 3,700 acres were sold to The Nature Conservancy. The County's purchase included 65 acres in Cochise County, 471 acres under conservation easement held by The Nature Conservancy, cattle, equipment, buildings and water rights.

Historical and Cultural Resources

In the A-7 Ranch area, the Reeve Ruin site, dating to A.D. 1200-1450, is situated on the terrace overlooking the San Pedro River. Reeve Ruin is defensively located above the San Pedro floodplain and further protected by a series of walls. The site contains a central room block surrounded by two plazas that are bounded by walls and lines of contiguous rooms. More than thirty structures are present, including a possible kiva, or Puebloan ceremonial room, within the central room block.

By 1450, archaeological evidence suggests that the valley was largely abandoned. Apache speakers were driven out by Anglo settlers in the 19th century whose ranches today hold the stories of this historic landscape.

Biological Resources

The ranch is located in the lower San Pedro River Valley and includes woodland vegetation communities at higher elevations, semi-desert grasslands at lower elevations, and riparian habitat along the canyon bottoms and the San Pedro River. In addition, the property includes limestone outcrops, perennial and intermittent streams, springs and shallow groundwater areas. Populations of Priority Vulnerable Species such as long-fin dace, lowland leopard frog, and Abert's towhee, exist on the property and provide suitable habitat for several other Priority Vulnerable Species. The majority of the ranch lies within the Biological Core of the Conservation Lands System, with a lesser amount within the Multiple Use Management and Important Riparian Area categories. The location of the property between the Catalina, Rincon, and Galiuro Mountains, provides for a corridor of open lands for wildlife movement back and forth between the mountain ranges.

Management

This is the only ranch that the County operates itself with County employees and owns the cattle herd. Pima County is one of only a few county governments that has its own brand - A7. The ranch is currently managed as a cow/calf operation to help offset costs of maintaining the ranch, with a base herd of approximately 300 head. This is about 40% of the allowed use on the State Trust grazing lease lands. The ranch is maintained as a working landscape while protecting and conserving biological and ecological values of the lands. Management activity has primarily focused on monitoring and maintaining a sustainable grazing program while offering recreational use of the ranch by the public. Significant work has been done to enhance the water systems and water storage on the ranch to provide year-round wildlife friendly water for wildlife while at the same time taking pressure off natural springs.



Farm land on A-7 Ranch. Photo by John Sullivan.

Recreation

A-7 ranch offers a wealth of recreational activities. The County has entered into a recreational access agreement with Arizona Game and Fish Department to provide and maintain designated routes to other public lands within and adjacent to A-7 for recreational users. The ranch lands offer camping, hiking, hunting, wildlife viewing, nature study, ATV/ Off Highway vehicle routes, biking, outdoor photography, equestrian trails and access to outdoor open space. Because the ranch is mostly Arizona State Trust lands, recreational users are encouraged to follow all applicable rules, regulations and necessary recreation permit requirements established by State Land as well as those of Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation (NRPR). Because of its location off Redington Road, A-7 gets significant recreational visits on an annual basis with most of the use in the fall through spring.



County cattle on A-7 Ranch. Photo by John Sullivan.



NRPR has been converting many old windmills and generator driven water pump systems to solar. This unit helps bring year-round water to over 56 square miles of the A-7 Ranch. Photo by John Sullivan.

Ongoing Property Improvements

- The County has put much of its effort in enhancing the basic infrastructure and baseline information available on the ranch.
- Water enhancements and solar generation for power have been two major ongoing efforts.
- Over 50 square miles of the ranch now has a dependable water supply via pipelines and storage tanks.
- Additional vegetative monitoring sites have been established on the ranch and are monitored annually to measure trends in plant community diversity and productivity.
- Additional effort has been made to improve the livestock management system and productivity of the herd.
- Stabilization efforts continue on historic buildings and residences present on the ranch which are still being used as part of the working ranch.

