

Tucson Mountain Reserve



Sweetwater Preserve

Fee Lands: 700 acres

Cost: \$11,733,653

Acquired: June 2004

Fund: 2004 Bond Funds

Partner: Trust for Public Land

Background

The 700-acre Sweetwater property, located in the eastern foothills of the Tucson Mountains foothills and south of Camino del Cerro, is one of the last remaining intact large tracts of land in the Tucson Mountains outside of Tucson Mountain Park and Saguaro National Park West. Sweetwater Preserve protects a key segment of the Sweetwater Wash that connects Saguaro National Park and Tucson Mountain Park to the Santa Cruz River, and provides recreational opportunities for hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians. The property includes habitat for numerous plants and animals, known archaeological resources and a key portion of the viewshed of the upper foothills of the Tucson Mountains.

After hearing that this property was being considered for development, area residents mobilized an outreach effort to let others know of the threat to this property. The community strongly supported acquisition of the property and worked diligently to ensure its conservation and to realize the establishment of this preserve. Over 50 neighborhoods, environmental and community organizations provided letters and spoke at the public hearings in support of acquiring the Sweetwater property for conservation. In addition, just over 180 people contributed over \$30,000 in three months to help pay the property taxes to secure an option to purchase this property, the likes of which was not seen in any other acquisition made by the County.

Biological Resources

The property contains several major washes that cross the property, including a key segment of Sweetwater Wash, which is a major drainage for the Tucson Mountains. Sweetwater provides suitable habitat for many species, including the Lesser long-nosed bat, Gila monster, mule deer, Abert's Towhee, California leaf-nosed bat, mountain lion and Desert tortoise.



Hiker along a trail in Sweetwater Preserve. Photo by Steve Anderson

Cultural Resources

The property contains 52 check dams and other water control features built by the Civilian Conservation Corps dating back to the 1930s. They are part of several homesteads dating back to the same time.



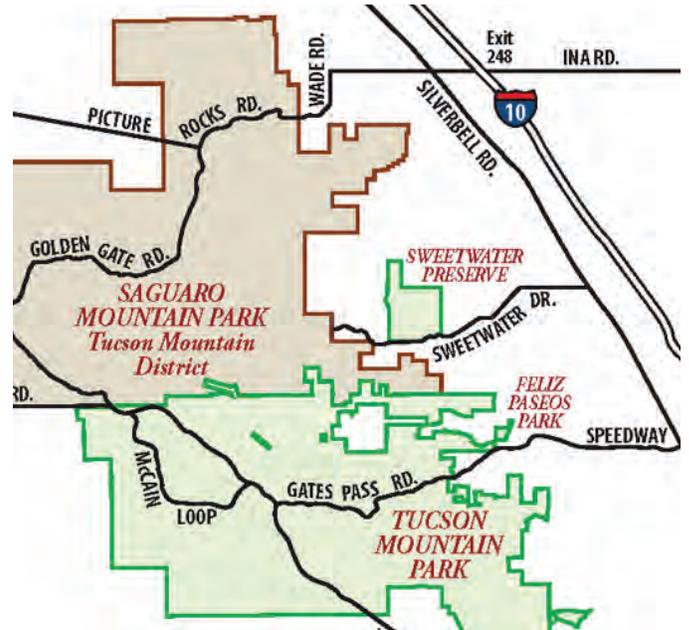
Desert tortoise



Harris hawk

Recreation

The property has been used for informal nature-based recreational activity for decades. A network of informal trails crossed the property and most of the use came from local residents. There are over 9 miles of interconnecting sustainable trails that have been constructed on site. The preserve is used for hiking, biking and equestrian use. Some archery hunting during season occurred historically as part of the larger Tucson Wildlife Area, but the site is now closed to discharge of all firearms and archery equipment for public safety concerns. The Sweetwater Preserve Trailhead is off of Tortolita Road and can accommodate 8 vehicles and 7 horse rigs.



Riding in Sweetwater Preserve. Photo by Nicole Fyffe

Ongoing Property Improvements

- The property has been developed as both a natural area of scenic value as well as a multi-use non-motorized trails park.
- A Management Plan was developed for the site in May 2008.
- A parking area and trail head has been constructed off Tortolita Road as the developed access point to the park.
- Nature programs are conducted at the park from time to time during the year.
- Portions of the park have been fenced and signed as a County conservation area.
- Dogs are allowed and restricted to be on leash at all times in the park.
- The park has been closed to the discharge of all firearms, bows and arrows and other weapons.
- All motorized vehicles are prohibited in the park and users are confined to the designated trails.
- The park is routinely monitored by County staff and the Sheriff's Office.



Aerial photo of the property looking east toward the Santa Cruz River . Photo by Chuck Park