

Tortolita Reserve



Tortolita Mountains Carpenter Ranch, Leef Property, and Cochie Canyon Property

Fee Lands: 930 acres
Acquired: March 1999 – June 2008
Cost: \$4,881,091
Fund: 1997 and 2004 Bond Funds
Partners: Arizona Land and Water Trust

Background

The County established the anchor to this reserve, Tortolita Mountain Park, in 1986 with bond funds approved by voters that year. Over 3,000 acres in the rugged backcountry of the mountains was acquired for about \$6 million. An additional 110 acres was purchased with 1986 bond funds in 1996 and a donation of 200 acres from Laurinda Queen Burleson was added in 2002. Since that time, the County has continued to conserve land around the Park with 1997 and 2004 bond funds by acquiring three properties totaling another 930 acres: the Leef property, Carpenter Ranch, and the Cochie Canyon properties. The County is also continually involved in efforts to expand the Park through the acquisition of State Trust land and the acquisition of Federal land managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Leef Property

The County acquired the 80-acre Leef property on March 24, 1998, along the southern boundary of Tortolita Mountain Park. The property cost \$280,000 and was funded through 1997 bond funds. The property offers outstanding scenic and natural resources.

Carpenter Ranch

The Carpenter family owned this small ranch located in Pinal County since the early 1920s. Donald and Sarabeth Carpenter sold a 200-acre portion of the property to the County on April 13, 1999. These 200 acres included Cochie Spring and an associated riparian area, as well as a historic homestead site. On August 29, 2005 the family sold the remainder of the ranch, totaling 360 acres, to the County. These 360 acres were directly north of the 200-acre Cochie Spring property and protect upper portions of the extensive Cochie canyon watershed. The 1999 purchase was funded entirely with 1997 bond funds totaling \$520,011. The 2005 purchase was funded with a combination of 1997 and 2004 bond funds (1997 - \$100,265; 2004 - \$1,079,771). The Burleson donation property abuts these parcels to the west, and federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management connect the properties on the south to Tortolita Mountain Park.

Cochie Canyon

On June 18, 2008 the County purchased 290 acres in Cochie Canyon for \$2,901,044, located west of Tortolita Mountain Park and separated from the park by State Trust land. This property is one of the most scenic properties purchased by the County in recent years. The property contains parts of the canyon bottom, several large washes, and most of a rocky north-facing slope of the Tortolita Mountains. Several Ironwood trees on the property are more than a century old. Priority Vulnerable Species likely to be found on the property include: California leaf-nosed bat, lesser long-nosed bat, Abert's towhee, Bell's vireo, Cactus ferruginous pygmy owl, Ground snake, and Tumamoc globeberry. The property falls within the Conservation Lands System categories of Important Riparian Area, Multiple Use Management Area, and Special Species Management Area.



Sunset at Carpenter Ranch. Photo by Iris Rodden

Management

The County has a ranch management agreement with the Carpenters for Carpenter Ranch. The Leef property is managed as part of Tortolita Mountain Park. Cochie Canyon is managed to protect its scenic and conservation values. All of the properties are currently being maintained in as natural of a state as possible. Vandalism by irresponsible members of the public is a constant concern. Livestock grazing on the Carpenter ranch has been significantly reduced during the current drought and impacts from unauthorized entry are being minimized through fencing and signage. All three properties are currently closed to vehicular traffic.



Old ironwood tree growing on bank of a large wash on Cochie Canyon property - Photo by EPG, Inc.

Recreation

The properties are currently being used for hiking, nature study, wildlife watching and hunting. Because of the limited access by vehicles, the properties do not get as much visitation as lands farther down on the lower slopes. Efforts are underway with the Town of Marana to establish public use trails and trailheads in the future.



Hackberry Emperor butterfly on desert hackberry, Cochie Canyon property - Photo by EPG, Inc



Blooming flowers of a Desert mariposa and hedgehog cactus, Cochie Canyon property - Photo by EPG, Inc

Ongoing Property Improvements

The Carpenter Ranch area was used as a site for a javelina rehabilitation project in 2009 that brought problem javelina from the urban areas together to form a new herd and were ultimately released back into the wild. The project was funded and conducted by a local wildlife rehabilitation group.

As part of a Mountain lion research project, the Carpenter ranch site has been used twice as a base camp for Arizona Game and Fish biologists working on collaring Mt. Lions in the Tortolita Mountains to track their movements via GPS satellite collars.

A restoration of the native vegetation in the Cochie Spring area was implemented in conjunction with Tucson Audubon Society and funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Javelina rehabilitation project on Carpenter - Photo by Pima County

