

## Tortolita Reserve



## Two Wildlife Corridors: Tucson Mountains to Tortolita Mountains to Catalina Mountains

**Fee Lands: 70 acres**  
**Acquired: July 2007 – April 2010**  
**Cost: \$1,684,637**  
**Fund: 2004 Bond Funds**

### Background

During the development of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, Critical Landscape Connections were identified as broad areas that need to be maintained to allow wildlife to naturally move to and from conservation areas, but which also contain barriers to such movement. For example, Interstate 10 acts as a major barrier to wildlife movement between the Tucson Mountains, Saguaro National Park West and Tortolita Mountain Park, and animals are often killed on Oracle Road trying to move between Tortolita Mountain Park and the Coronado National Forest.

In 2006, as part of a statewide project, experts from Northern Arizona University undertook a science-based approach to design two wildlife corridors from the Tucson Mountains to the Tortolita Mountains and from the Catalina Mountains to the Tortolita Mountains. The result is called a linkage design.

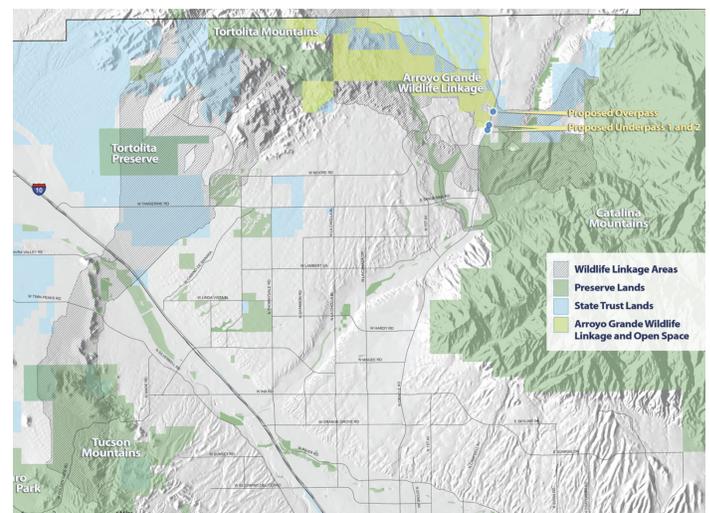
While it is important to conserve land within these wildlife corridors, land conservation alone will not be effective. To ensure viable wildlife corridors at these locations, several actions are needed, including crossing structures to enable wildlife to move safely over or under roads and railroads, fencing to funnel the wildlife to the designed crossing structures, and vegetation enhancements to ensure a low stress approach and travel period across the corridors.

### I. Tucson Mountains to Tortolita Mountains

Avra Valley Road at Interstate 10 is one of the last locations for wildlife to move between the Tucson and Tortolita Mountains, due to a combination of existing conditions including the close proximity of the northern end of the Tucson Mountains to the Santa Cruz River, an abandoned railroad tunnel under Interstate 10, culverts under the interstate, and significant amounts of undeveloped State Trust land east of the Interstate. Pima County, the National Park Service, and the Town of Marana own land for conservation within and between the Tucson and Tortolita Mountains. At the northern end of the Tucson Mountains, Pima County owns over 200 acres that was acquired primarily to conserve an important Hohokam Village site. In addition, the County's Regional Flood Control District owns most of the Santa Cruz River at this location. Two key properties west of the railroad underpass were acquired with 2004 bond funds.

### Continental Ranch Development LLC

The 15-acre Continental Ranch development LLC property was purchased for \$750,448 on July 3, 2007 with 2004 bond funds. This property is located between the eastern bank of the Santa Cruz River and the frontage road west of Interstate 10, just southwest of the underpass.

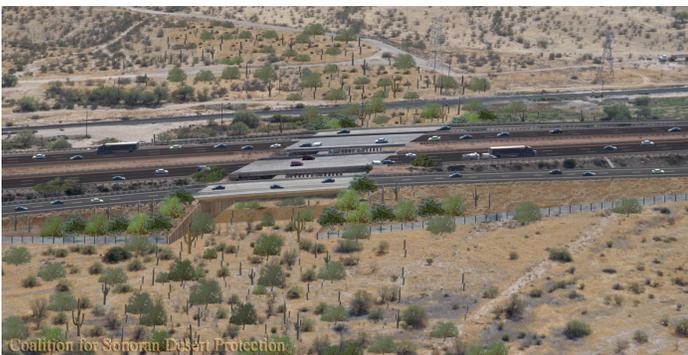


## I-10 Avra Valley Mining and Development LLC

The County entered into a development agreement with I-10 Avra Valley Mining and Development LLC on August 5, 2008 for a 100 acre parcel located directly west of the underpass, also between the Santa Cruz River and the frontage road. The development agreement provided increased development potential for about 44 acres of the site, the dedication of about of 42 acres to the County, the right for the County to purchase an additional 4 acres, and a voluntary contribution of a percentage of sales transactions that occur within the future development over 20 years to support conservation efforts in the area. This voluntary contribution has the potential to generate significant revenue in the future and is restricted to be spent on activities associated with wildlife corridor and its management. In February 2009 the 42 acres was dedicated to the County. Approximately \$14,189 in 2004 bond funds was spent on due diligence and closing costs to accept the 42-acre dedication.



I-10 Before



I-10 After - Underpass Design



I-10 After - Overpass Design

## II. Tortolita Mountains to Catalina Mountains

A significant number of animals are killed annually by cars on Oracle Road, State Highway 77, north of Oro Valley and south of the Pima and Pinal County line. Approximately 9,000 acres of undeveloped State Trust land lay west of the road, along with the County's 4,000-acre Tortolita Mountain Park. Gaps between development east of the road lead to Catalina State Park, the Coronado National Forest, and more undeveloped State Trust land. \$8.2 million in funding from the Regional Transportation Authority has been approved for installing two underpasses and one vegetated wildlife bridge during the Oracle Road widening project, scheduled to begin in 2013.

### Treehouse Properties

In April 2010, the County purchased 13 acres on both sides of Oracle Road, just south of Wilds Road to anchor part of the identified wildlife corridor between the Tortolita Mountains and the Catalina Mountains. The properties cost \$920,000 and were funded with 2004 bond funds.

### Arroyo Grande

The Arizona State Land Department, Town of Oro Valley and Pima County completed a planning effort in 2008 as a first step toward conserving two thirds of the 9,000 acres of undeveloped State Trust land west of Oracle Road.



Oracle Road - after with Overpass



Oracle Road - street view with Overpass

These artist renditions of the proposed wildlife crossing structures come from the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection.