

The Path Ahead

"I would challenge you to think about a vision for the future....It is important for us to not just think about immediate needs...Think back to the 1920s when a very small group of people had the vision and forethought to set aside Tucson Mountain Park. Think how much poorer we would all be if that did not happen. We need to be thinking 50, 75, and 100 years from now and plan for what this community will be like at that stage of the game. The projects that we have done are incredibly important to protect the watershed and define the urban edge, and are part of good urban planning. The work of good urban planning merges nicely with that of the scientists who have given us direction on what properties we should be buying. It makes this a better community and a more efficient community; a community where the planned areas of it return more to the tax base than would otherwise."

----Bill Roe, Chairman of the Pima County Conservation Acquisition Commission at the October 16, 2009 Pima County Bond Advisory Committee Meeting.

In the years to come, Pima County intends to continue to take a diversified approach to protecting our land, water and heritage. We will continue to purchase important natural areas, flood prone areas, and historic and cultural sites, just as we have done in the recent past, and historically. These purchases will be guided by a combination of the best available science and the values important to our community. We will continue to conserve these important areas through development regulations requiring private developers to avoid or set aside areas for conservation, as well as the same regulations that we as County government need to comply with when building public facilities like roads and libraries. Just as important is another approach we use frequently – cooperative land use planning with other agencies. This includes planning and management agencies such as cities and towns, neighboring counties, the National Park Service, the National Forest Service, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, the Bureau of Land Management, and the State Land Department.

In the case of the State Land Department, the importance of cooperative land use planning cannot be understated. In eastern Pima County, State Trust lands comprise about 35 percent of the total land base. The County will continue to advocate for comprehensive land use planning and State Trust land reform, as opposed to the piecemeal sale of State Trust land for development that has often occurred.

The degree to which our land conservation activities are deemed successful will be regularly measured against the goals of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, including the piecing together of our ultimate reserve – the Maeveen Marie Behan Conservation Lands System. Our recent submittal of a Multi-Species Conservation Plan (MSCP) to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as the development of a comprehensive ecological monitoring plan, is a milestone in our commitment to Endangered Species Act compliance, as well as to our ongoing broader conservation efforts. The MSCP also provides additional mechanisms to evaluate our progress.

Pima County's use of bonds as the primary source of funding for purchasing land will likely continue. While other communities may rely on different sources of revenue, such as sales tax revenue, for this purpose, our voters have consistently since 1974 supported the use of bond funding for land acquisition.

It is clear that our land conservation activities will only be successful with continued partnerships. Our ranch management agreements enable the County to rely upon experienced ranchers to provide stewardship for over 130,000 acres, or over more than half of the land we own or are responsible for managing. Partners such as the Arizona Game and Fish Department and Altar Valley Conservation Alliance also greatly assist the County in meeting our management responsibilities. In addition, as we continue to purchase more land, we will continue to rely upon the Arizona Land and Water Trust to help us build relationships with private property owners.

We will continue to expand recreational access. Many of the properties we have purchased for conservation are within easy reach of those living in the metropolitan area. We know that it is important to continue developing new trailheads, trails, and interpretive signage so that these great places are accessible and easy for people to visit. For our more remote County ranches, we will continue to develop appropriate public access points, similar to those shown on the ranch access maps in the appendices.

In conclusion, land conservation is good for our health, good for our economy, and good for the plants and animals that share this environment with us. With the momentous support of voters in 1997 and 2004, we have been able to make significant strides in expanding mountain parks, conserving ranches, protecting watersheds and flood prone areas, preserving important historic and cultural sites, preventing encroachment around Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, and guiding growth to more fiscally sustainable areas. While much has been accomplished, we understand that our task is not complete. We look forward to continuing to carry out the County's long term commitment to conservation with the support of our many partners, visitors, and most importantly -- our residents.

