

Land Conservation Programs and Property Highlights



1997 Open Space Bond Program

Program Period: 1997 to 2010
27 individual properties acquired
7,200 acres acquired
\$27.9 million authorized by voters on May 16, 1997
No funds remaining
\$3,900 average price per acre

The majority of this information was excerpted and adapted from a report to the Conservation Acquisition Commission dated April 19, 2006, drafted and presented by Jim Barry, former Executive Assistant to the County Administrator, and program coordinator for the 1997 Open Space Bond Program.

The 1997 Open Space Bond Program was included on the election ballot as part of Question 4, Sonoran Desert Open Space and Historic Preservation, which included an authorization of \$27,900,000 for Open Space, \$2,000,000 for Trails, and \$6,430,000 for Cultural and Historic Preservation.

Planning

Distinct from the 2004 program, planning for the 1997 program was very conceptual and general in the beginning, with more detailed planning and prioritization conducted by a citizen advisory group after the bond election.



Perper-Rollings property within the Robles Pass portion of the Tucson Mountains, south of Ajo Highway. Photo by Arizona Land and Water Trust.

During the first phase, from the fall of 1995 through December 1996, the County's Bond Advisory Committee developed recommendations for the 1997 bond election. The Bond Advisory Committee developed its recommendations for the 1997 Open Space Bond Program largely based upon input from an informal coalition of open space advocates (Friends of the Sonoran Desert), County Parks and Recreation staff, and the County Administrator's Office.

County staff further refined the Program in the course of drafting the Bond Implementation Plan Ordinance for the May 16, 1997 election. The result of this effort was the identification of 18 "target areas" and 256 potential acquisition parcels within the target areas. The Ordinance acknowledged that the target areas were general and conceptual, that no estimates of value had been made of the parcels identified for potential acquisition, and that the costs of all parcels were likely to exceed the proposed bond authorization. The Board adopted the Ordinance on May 6, 1997, and 68 percent of voters approved the program on May 20, 1997.

In December 1997, the Board created the Open Space Acquisition Review Committee (OSARC), to develop more precise planning and priorities for the 1997 Open Space Bond Program. OSARC was to be "an independent expert citizen committee, whose goal was to ensure that further planning and analysis was an open process. OSARC is advisory to the Board of Supervisors and is to make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on implementation of the Open Space Bond Fund program."

OSARC held its first meeting on February 24, 1998, meeting regularly throughout the remainder of the year. During that time, the Committee and County staff discussed each target area and the Committee set priorities for acquisition parcels within each target area. On January 10, 2000, OSARC released its report,



Canoa Ranch. Photo by Simon Herbert.

which prioritized the list of potential acquisition parcels to 85, with an estimated price tag of \$60 million, acknowledging that this cost was well in excess of the bond funding available. OSARC continued to provide oversight to the program through May 2004 when the Conservation Acquisition Commission was appointed.

The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP) was being developed during the early years of implementing the 1997 bond program. The scientific data and additional information that resulted from the SDCP planning process also helped to prioritize which properties to purchase with 1997 bond funds.

Implementation

A total of 27 properties were purchased with funds from the 1997 Open Space Bond Program, totaling almost 7,200 acres. The majority of purchases occurred during the first 4 years of the program, between 1998 and 2001. This report provides highlights of these properties, including photographs and maps. Appendix i includes a table listing all of the expenses by property. The 1997 Open Space Bond Program expanded Tucson Mountain Park, Tortolita Mountain Park, and Colossal Cave Mountain Park, established the Canoa Ranch Conservation Park, and conserved the Clyne Ranch in the Cienega Corridor.



Tang property northwest of Tucson. Photo by EPG



Clyne Ranch looking southeast towards the Mustang Mountains. Photo by EPG.