

# Introduction

Since 1997, Pima County has been working on fulfilling the task assigned by this community to conserve this region's most prized natural and cultural resources. On May 16, 1997 and May 18, 2004, voters showed overwhelming support at the ballot box for the protection of these places by approving bond measures that authorized the acquisition of properties for conservation purposes. In fact, in 2004, the Trust for Public Lands' yearly list of the largest state and local measures passed by voters for conservation listed Pima County's 2004 Conservation Bond measure as one of the top five in the country, alongside San Diego County in California, Charleston County in South Carolina, Adams County in Colorado and Scottsdale, Arizona. Today, the County is pleased to report on the significant accomplishments made possible through the community's continued support.

The County now manages about 230,000 acres for conservation, with over 100,000 acres of it owned in fee by the County. Since 1997, we have purchased more than 50,000 acres and lease 130,000 acres associated with the large working ranches acquired. The properties range in size from less than an acre to over 30,000 acres, and represent the diversity of landscapes that make Pima County unique. For the majority of Pima County residents who live within the Tucson metropolitan area, it is a short trip to many of the newly protected areas. There is truly something for everyone.

## West

A number of properties were purchased around the County's popular Tucson Mountain Park. At the **west end of 36th Street**, we now have another place with access into the heart of Tucson Mountain Park. At the base of A-Mountain a 5-acre site known as **Mission Gardens** was purchased by the County in an area occupied continuously for over 4,000 years. Associated with the Mission San Agustin, an adobe wall has been constructed around the Mission Gardens, and plans with the City of Tucson and community partners for the re-creation of the gardens are underway. For those that regularly hike the steep but rewarding path up **Tumamoc Hill**, 300 acres of State Trust land on the west side of the hill were purchased by the County. This property will remain part of the longest-lived scientific environmental research center in the country, which is managed by the University of Arizona. Physically challenged residents and visitors, as well as those that just prefer a more level path to explore the desert, may want to

visit **Feliz Paseos Park** - the County's 50-acre universally accessible trails park north east of Gates Pass. Regarding **Gates Pass**, the scenic views as one drives or bike rides up the Pass have much to do with the dollars the community authorized in 1997 and 2004. Ten properties were purchased along both sides of the road, totaling over 800 acres. Another significant addition was the 695-acre **Sweetwater Preserve**, east of Saguaro National Park, boasting actively used hiking, biking, and equestrian trails. Before the 2004 election, neighbors near the Sweetwater Preserve raised thousands of dollars privately to begin the process to protect this special place.

## Northwest

On the northwest side, one can visit the site of what was once a thriving pre-historic Hohokam Village and the center of an extended community of Hohokam sites along the Santa Cruz River - **Los Morteros**. Further north and east, near **Avra Valley Road and Interstate 10**, a future land bridge or underpass is being discussed, allowing animals to cross from the Tucson Mountains to the Tortolita Mountains. Critical pieces of land have been purchased and the planning to make the corridor more safe and inviting for wildlife has begun. Further north and east, almost 1,000 acres were purchased in the **Tortolita Mountains**, preserving scenic vistas and sites of future adventures. East of the Tortolita Mountains, two properties were purchased on either side of Oracle Road in close proximity of the future site of another land bridge already funded by Regional Transportation Authority that will support movement of wildlife between the Tortolita and Catalina Mountains. Further east, the Regional Flood Control District purchased more than 50 flood-prone properties up and down the Canada del Oro Wash, providing four contiguous miles of conserved lands along the Wash for future passive recreational opportunities. For a bit of history and pre-history, people will soon be able to visit the 13-acre **Honey Bee Village Preserve**, the core of a large prehistoric Hohokam village site in Oro Valley, and 15 acres of **Steam Pump Ranch**, a collection of historic ranch and farm buildings from the frontier era located beneath Pusch Ridge, also in Oro Valley.

## Northeast

On the northeast side of town, the historic **Ft Lowell Park** has been expanded to include an additional 5 acres containing portions of 3 more officers' quarters buildings. An additional 30 acres was purchased along **Bear Canyon**, south of the



popular Sabino Canyon Recreation Area. Those driving along Houghton Road between Tanque Verde Road and Speedway Boulevard after a heavy rain storm have most likely noticed the flooding that occurs in this area where the **Agua Caliente Wash and Tanque Verde Creek** converge. Almost 200 acres was purchased here conserving the natural flood flows and significant stands of mesquite trees supporting a lively bird population. Further upstream, as the **Agua Caliente and La Milagrosa Washes** flow out of the Coronado National Forest between the Catalina and Rincon Mountains near Redington Pass, two properties totaling 24 acres were purchased by the County.

### **Southeast**

In the Southeast, visitors to **Colossal Cave Mountain Park** may be interested to know that the 1997 and 2004 bond funds were used to expand the Park by more than 460 acres. Some of these new properties, combined with another 200 acres along the Agua Verde Creek and Cienega Creek, now link the County's **Cienega Creek Natural Preserve** to Colossal Cave Mountain Park and also expanded the Preserve. The Preserve is open to the public through a permit process to protect this unique and fragile ecosystem. **Davis-Monthan Air Force Base** contributes over \$800 million annually to the local economy and provides over 9,000 jobs. Almost 300 acres were purchased with 2004 bond funds to prevent urban encroachment on the primary flight paths. Some of these 300 acres are now being marketed for future solar generating sites to offset Pima County's governmental energy expenses.

### **Southwest**

Along the Santa Cruz River southwest of Downtown Tucson, the 67-acre core of the **Valencia Archaeological Site** was purchased to preserve an ancestral place of Tohono O'odham. Sometimes referred to as the downtown of the prehistoric Hohokam community, future trails and educational interpretive signage will one day make this special place a focal point for heritage tourism. South of Ajo Highway and West of Mission Road, Tucson Mountain Park was expanded by almost 1,000 acres at its southern end. Known as the **Robles Pass** Unit of Tucson Mountain Park, these additional 8 properties provide opportunities for even more trails, as well as protecting scenic views and natural areas for wildlife.

### **Ranches**

While not located as close to the majority of Pima County residents, ranches are significantly important to our quality of life. Ranches, interconnected with our County mountain parks, State parks, National parks, and National forests serve as an

unfragmented natural buffer to our developed metropolitan area and help to create a more compact and efficient urban form. Among other things, they protect our watersheds, provide habitat for wildlife, preserve scenic views, and conserve our western heritage and culture. Some ranches also provide for recreational opportunities such as hiking, horse riding, and hunting. The County purchased 15 ranches, or major portions of ranches, with 1997 and 2004 bond funding. Most of these ranches are still working ranches, thanks to ongoing partnerships between the County and previous ranch owners. Our ranches include: **Carpenter Ranch**, within the Tortolita Mountains; **Six Bar Ranch** and **A-7 Ranch**, located far Northeast in the San Pedro Valley; **Bar V-Ranch**, **Empirita Ranch**, **Sands Ranch**, and **Clyne Ranch**, located southeast of Tucson; and **Canoa Ranch**, **Marley Ranch**, **Sopori Ranch**, **Rancho Seco**, **Diamond Bell Ranch**, **King 98 Ranch**, **Old Hayhook Ranch**, and **Buckelew Farm** located southwest of Tucson.

### **Our Land Conservation Programs**

Our efforts would not be as successful or far reaching without the support of the community, outside partners and the willingness of property owners to participate and sell to the County. The Conservation Acquisition Program for example, benefits greatly from our important non-profit partner – the Arizona Land and Water Trust (formally the Arizona Open Land Trust) for their facilitation and relationships with landowners in this region.

In addition, acquisition of these properties relied upon County staff, and outside specialists, with an array of expertise - wildlife biologists, ranch managers, park planners, land use planners, archaeologists, hydrologists, environmental quality specialists, and attorneys. Without the hard work of these individuals, we would not have been able to acquire the large number of properties acquired over the last 13 years.

In this report, we have tried to commit to record every property purchased since the passage of the 1997 and 2004 bond elections. This report provides information on each acquisition, including full descriptions, photos and how some of these properties relate to each other and their larger role in the region. Additionally, this report provides the reader with information on the economic impacts of conservation, an update on our progress towards meeting the goals set forth by the County's award-winning Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, and an interesting historical account of the County's earliest conservation and planning efforts as a special feature.

It is with pleasure that we present to you the County's significant stride forward towards accomplishing the goals set forth by our Board of Supervisors, stakeholders, partners, and most importantly, the citizens of this community. We invite you to 'visit' the properties in the pages that follow and see your dollars at work.

