

Agua Caliente Wash & Tanque Verde Creek



Looking west at the confluence of the Agua Caliente Wash and Tanque Verde Creek. Photo shows over bank flooding on both sides of Houghton Road, which is visible through the center of the photograph. Photo by Terry Hendricks, July 2006

Agua Caliente Wash & Tanque Verde Creek Ruddick, Drewes, Doucette and Terra Rancho Grande Properties

Fee Lands: 117 acres
Acquired: March 1998 – September 2010
Cost: \$4,256,229
Fund: 1997 and 2004 Bond Funds
Partner: Arizona Land & Water Trust

Background

Agua Caliente Wash is one of the most significant drainages in the northwest area of the Tucson Basin. The Pima County Regional Flood Control District places a high priority on acquisition of vacant lands along Agua Caliente Wash and has purchased over 160 acres along the wash. In addition, Pima County purchased 117 acres as part of the 1997 Open Space and 2004 Conservation Acquisition Programs. Acquisitions in this area not only preserve a valuable riparian habitat and

wildlife corridor, but also protect natural recharge and floodplain functions, minimizing the potential for future flood damages.

Drewes Property

The County acquired the 11-acre Drewes property in 1998 with 1997 Bond funds for \$388,000, located at the confluence of La Milagrosa and Agua Caliente Washes, with Milagrosa Wash crossing through the property. The property also offers a popular hiking trail that provides access into Agua Caliente Canyon. The property falls primarily within the Biological Core designation of the Conservation Lands System with ribbons of Important Riparian Areas. The riparian habitat supports numerous bat species including the California leaf-nosed bat and the Western Red bat as well as habitat for the lowland leopard frog. Adjacent uplands habitat support a population of Sonoran Desert tortoise.

Ruddick Property

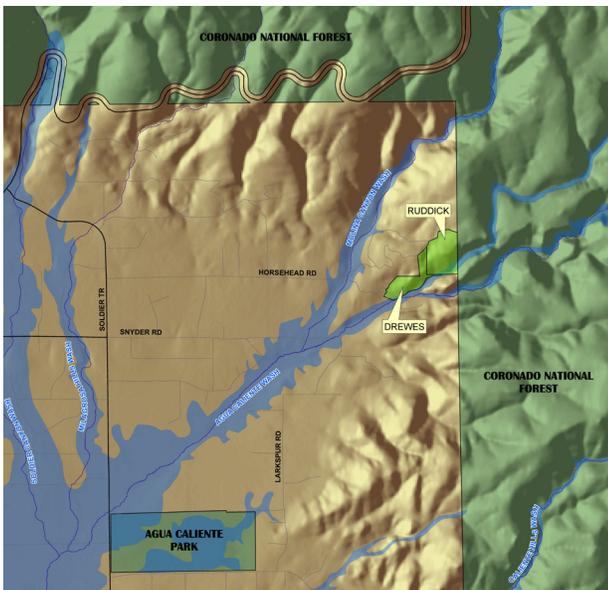
The 13-acre Ruddick property was acquired by the County for \$369,993 in September 2000. The property is located adjacent to the Drewes property and not only protects a sensitive riparian corridor within the confluence, but also protects portions of the La Milagrosa Canyon and Agua Caliente Canyon that extend beyond the boundary of the Coronado National Forest. The property falls within the Biological Core designation of the Conservation Lands System with Important Riparian Areas.

Doucette Property

In December 2004, the County acquired the 21-acre Doucette property, located near the confluence of Agua Caliente Wash and Tanque Verde Creek, for \$569,608. Acquisition of this property contributes to properties the Pima County Regional Flood Control District purchased in this same location and prevents further fragmentation of the stream and floodplain from development. The Doucette property falls entirely within the Important Riparian Area designation of the Conservation Lands System. It contains Priority Conservation Areas for the Cactus ferruginous pygmy owl and Merriam's mouse. This property is also located entirely within the Tanque Verde Creek Archaeological Complex and contains a portion of the significant Houghton Road Site, which dates approximately to the period between A.D. 1 and 500. This is a rare site that predates the Hohokam occupation.

Terra Rancho Grande and Tanque Verde and Houghton Partners LLC Properties

The County acquired the 72-acre Terra Rancho Grande property in January, 2010 for \$1,376,628. It is located within the confluence area of the Agua Caliente Wash and Tanque Verde Creek and southeast of the County's Doucette property, along Houghton Road. In September 2010, the County purchased the 78-acre Tanque Verde and Houghton Partners LLC property for \$1,552,000, located just north and adjacent to the Terra Rancho Grande property, creating a 150-acre corridor between the two major wash systems. Both properties fall entirely within the Important Riparian Area designation of the Conservation Lands System and support one of the largest intact tracts of mesquite bosque remaining in the northern Tucson Basin. Both support Priority Conservation Areas for several Priority Vulnerable Species, including Bell's vireo, Western yellow bat, and Abert's towhee. The Tanque Verde Creek bottom will also be maintained as an important linkage in the regional trails system.



Management

Due to their locations being within the developed suburban fringe, management activities focus on routine monitoring, conservation area signage and perimeter fencing where appropriate to maintain current ecological values and prevent anticipated impacts. Types of potential impacts anticipated include unplanned development of social trails, illegal off road vehicle use, invasive plant infestation and impacts to native wildlife by domestic pets running free in the area.

Recreation

The properties are all generally small and while biologically significant, they do not lend themselves to more intensive recreation. Their primary use remains conservation of the natural values and enhancement of the ecological functions. Some future opportunities may present themselves on the larger properties for very controlled and limited access for watchable wildlife related activities.

Ongoing Property Improvements

The properties have been monitored and in some cases perimeter fencing repaired or segments of new fence constructed. Signage has been put up and sites are being evaluated to install small wildlife waters.



Mesquite bosque on Terra Rancho Grande property. Photo by EPG, Inc.

