

# Cienega Valley-Empire Ranch Reserve



## Sands Ranch

**Fee lands: 5,040 acres**  
**Development Restrictions: 200 acres**  
**Acquired: December 30, 2008**  
**Cost: \$21,015,503**  
**Fund: 2004 Bond Funds**  
**Partner: Arizona Land and Water Trust**

### Background

In its entirety, the historic Sands Ranch totals 64,000 acres, spanning east of the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area to the San Pedro River in Cochise County. With the assistance of the Arizona Land and Water Trust, the County acquired the 5,000 acres of the Sands Ranch located in the far southeast corner of Pima County. This acquisition further connects a system of publicly-owned lands from the Santa Rita Mountains to the Whetstone Mountains, especially when coupled with the County's subsequent acquisition of the adjacent Clyne Ranch. Not only does it contribute to the health of the Cienega Watershed, but also conserves high quality native grasslands and wildlife movement corridors. The Sands Ranch was recently featured in the March 2010 issue of Arizona Highways Magazine.

### Historic and Cultural Resources

There are three recorded archaeological sites found on the Sands Ranch property. The USGS 1914 General Land Office map shows several historic ranch houses existed at one time. It is likely that historic-period cultural resources related to ranching, and perhaps mining, are present. A well known camping point for Calvary troops fighting the Apache was the Cottonwood well site located on the southeast portion of the ranch.



*Cattle on Sands Ranch. Photo by Kerry Baldwin*

### Biological Resources

The Sands Ranch property is located in a desert grassland community, which in terms of number of species, is a community that supports more species than any other ecosystem, according to EPG's biological assessment. Not only is the Sands Ranch a valuable acquisition because of its proximity to existing conserved lands, but also for its direct link to significant riparian areas, such as Sonoita Creek, Babocomari River and Cienega Creek. It also includes critical wildlife corridors, such as the drainage in Bear Spring Canyon, which connects the Whetstone Mountains to Cienega Creek. The ranch supports modeled habitat for at least 9 Priority Vulnerable Species, including Bell's vireo and Pale Townsend's big-eared bat.

### Management

The Sands Ranch property has been used for livestock grazing since the turn of the century and remains relatively undisturbed. The ranch is managed as a working landscape through a Ranch Management Agreement with the County. Because of the important native grassland habitats present, the conservation and enhancement of the base resource is a primary management goal. Maintaining the structure, diversity and viability of the high quality native grasslands and wildlife corridor functions are the primary management goals.



*Goat tank on Sands Ranch. Photo by Kerry Baldwin*



Photo by Robert Dawson



## Recreation

The ranch has historically been open to public recreation and will remain open at controlled access points. A map of the recommended access route is included in the appendix. Primary outdoor recreation activities will include hunting, hiking, camping, off highway vehicle travel on designated routes and wildlife watching. The rugged interior and unimproved ranch roads provide access points to the Coronado National Forest and Las Cienegas National Conservation Area.

## Ongoing Property Improvements

- A Coordinated Resource Management Plan has been completed involving the ranch manager, NRCS, BLM, and the Forest Service to intensively document and coordinate resource management efforts and set sustainable resource use levels.
- Travel access signage and gates
- Water development enhancements and maintenance of year-round water sources.
- Intensive surveys of the ranch ecological units are underway and permanent monitoring transect plots have been established.

