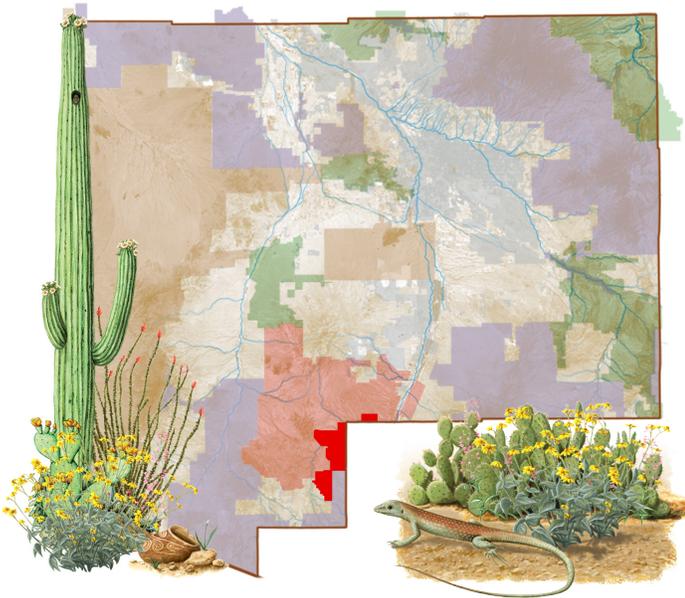


Upper Santa Cruz and Southern Altar Valley Reserve



Sopori Ranch

Fee land: 4,135 acres
State grazing and agricultural leases: 10,480 acres
Cost: \$18,602,695
Acquired: January 2, 2009 and July 15, 2009
Fund: 2004 Bond Funds
Partnership: Arizona Land and Water Trust

Background

Sopori Ranch covers lands in both Pima and Santa Cruz Counties. In 2009, the County purchased the majority of the Sopori Ranch that lies in Pima County. This is another of the ranches owned by the County in the Altar Valley and Upper Santa Cruz Valley that contributes to an interconnected system of conservation reserves. Located south of Green Valley, west of Interstate 19, and northeast of Arivaca along the Sopori Wash, the ranch covers more than 14,000 acres. The ranch has played a significant role in the legacy of the Santa Cruz Valley, and continues to do so. Conserving this portion of the Sopori Ranch protects several wildlife movement corridors between the numerous sky island mountain ranges in the area, reduces threats to groundwater pumping along Sopori Wash, and preserves the history, culture, and economic traditions of this important place.

Historical and Cultural Resources

The Sopori Ranch area has a complex history that includes many-layered stories of Native peoples, Spanish explorers, missionaries, soldiers, ranchers, miners, and two founding Tucson pioneer families – Elias and Pennington. These

numerous stories have been chronicled in historical documents and journals from Spanish times forward. When Father Kino traveled through the Santa Cruz Valley in 1691, Sopori was the location of a farming community of Pima Indians, who called themselves the “Sobaipuri”. Captain Juan Bautista de Anza was perhaps Sopori’s most famous owner. In 1771 the King of Spain granted title to Anza of 14,000 acres of land called “El Ojo del Agua del Sopori” (Eye of the Water of Sopori) after the Sopori Spring. Other noteworthy owners included Arthur Lee – a grandnephew of General Robert E. Lee, from 1926 to 1932; and Ann Boyer Warner – widow of Jack Warner of Warner Bros. movie studio, 1950-1991.

Compared to its historical record, however, very little is known about its prehistoric roots. This is almost certainly due to the lack of a comprehensive archaeological survey. What is known is that three major prehistoric archeological time periods, Paloeindian, Archaic, and Hohokam are recognized in the Upper Santa Cruz Region.

Biological Resources

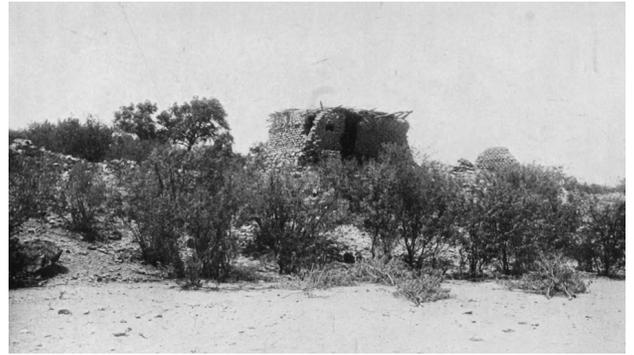
The ranch follows the Sopori Wash from the County’s Rancho Seco property into Santa Cruz County. This reach of the Sopori Wash is one of the few riparian dominated shallow groundwater areas left in Pima County. This shallow groundwater system supports older cottonwoods, willow, ash, hackberry, and large stands of mesquite trees sensitive to significant groundwater pumping. Because of the location between the Cerro Colorado and Tumacacori mountain ranges, topographical diversity and the presence of Sopori Wash, the parcels are ecologically rich with diverse native wildlife species present. Surveys of the property found that several Priority Vulnerable Species are thought to be present, including California leaf-nosed bat, Merriam’s mouse, Pale Townsend’s big eared bat, Abert’s towhee, Giant spotted whiptail, and Pima Pineapple Cactus.

Management

The larger Sopori Ranch is still managed as a working cattle ranch and includes lease lands on State, BLM and U.S. Forest Service property. Under a Ranch Management Agreement, the previous owners will still manage the County portions of the ranch as part of the larger ranch complex. County staff will monitor uses and establish annual use and stocking rates based on monitoring data and in consultation with the other land management agencies and the operator. The Sopori has an advantage in that it has a complex of irrigated pastures on the County lands that can be used to reduce livestock use on native vegetation during critical forage growing months during the year. Water use on the irrigated pastures is currently set at a not-to-exceed volume based on partial use figures from the year prior to acquisition by the County to minimize potential impacts to the shallow groundwater system.

Recreation

The ranch provides diverse opportunities for outdoor recreation. Historically, the ranch provided access to the west side of the Tumacacori Mountains and the National Forest lands. Activities included small and big game hunting, hiking, ATV road riding, equestrian uses, wildlife watching, mountain biking and camping. Access had been restricted to the general public by the previous owners for a number of years. The County has opened up access again for recreational use across designated portions of the ranch road system.



Fortified Pennington stone house on Sopori Creek – 1913.



Sopori Creek and Santa Rita Mountains in the background. Photo by Joseph Belfore, ALWT

Ongoing Property Improvements

- Development of gates, new road segments and signage for the new access points for recreational use.
- Portions of the ranch around the irrigated fields and KX headquarters have been closed to the discharge of firearms and bows and arrows to restrict unsafe hunting activities. This information can be found on the NRPR web site at www.pima.gov/nrpr.
- Planning is under way to convert existing waters to year-round sources of water for wildlife by converting them to solar pumping and storage systems.
- Existing troughs and tanks will be retrofitted to make them safer for wildlife use.
- Permanent monitoring transects are being established to monitor use by livestock and develop baseline data on current plant diversity and composition.
- Initial planning is currently underway with the operator, County, State Land and US. Forest Service to initiate a Comprehensive Resource Management Plan for the ranch that will eventually involve other resource management agencies and the public. This planning process will take several years to complete.

