



PROTECT THE IRONWOOD FOREST NATIONAL MONUMENT DESIGNATION

Raúl M. Grijalva, Chairman, Pima County Board of Supervisors

A monument is a lasting reminder of something noble and great. As a reminder, it informs future generations about the aspirations and achievements of those who built or declared the monument. Only a confident community can make such a proclamation.

The recently designated Ironwood Forest National Monument is Southern Arizona's statement of what we believe is noble, great, and should last forever. Our Monument is being reviewed now, by interests in Washington D.C. who would like to find an excuse to return the destiny of these protected lands to mining and development.

I would like to describe why I think it is important that we continue to express our commitment to the Ironwood Forest National Monument as a reflection of our conservation ethic, and commitment to future citizens of Southern Arizona.

Public Space and its Role in Defining our Community

The next generation of historians, cultural specialists, and the public in general will assess Arizona as a state that has been proud to provide public spaces.

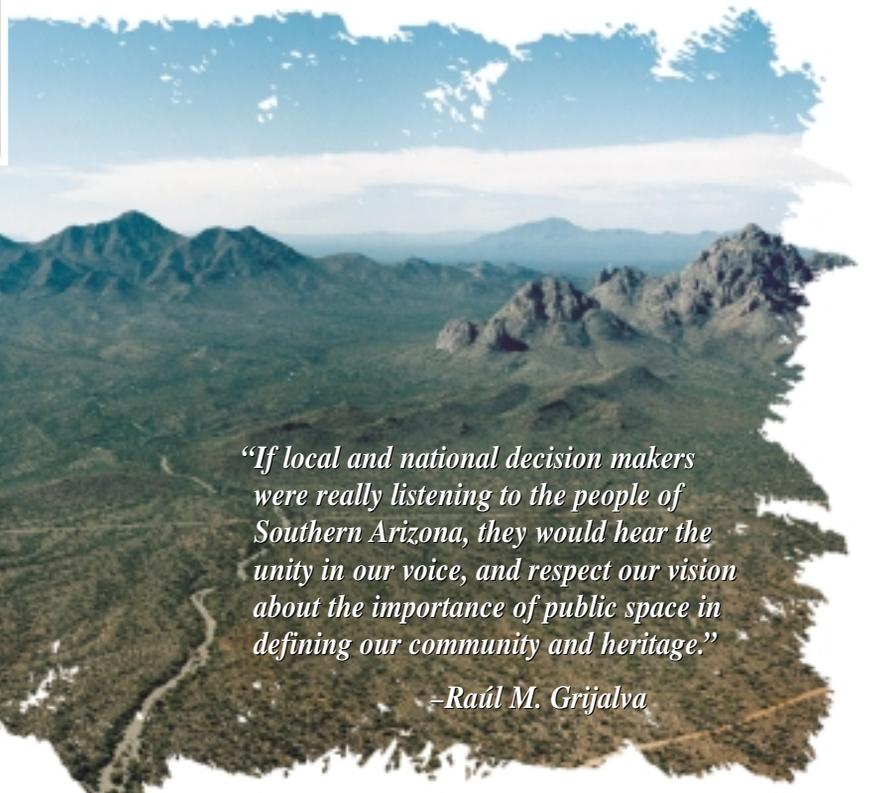
Our public realm, and therefore our sense of community, is upheld by the ancient architecture of our mountains, saguaro, ironwood, and the natural systems and cultural resources they support. We have come to a decision point. Without an awareness of the importance of natural contributions to our sense of

community, and without a commitment to preserving and protecting the natural environment, we will lose one of the strongest unifying forces of our community ethic, and we will be unable to regain this in the future.

A mistaken course of past land use laws, resource exploitation, and the single-minded course of economic progress require our active commitment to the protection of landscapes now. We must change past practices and even the laws that have allowed these valuable areas to be taken away from us. And we must speak out more, to express how we feel about this topic to people who do not live here or understand what is in our hearts.

Public Space and Who We Are

The dimensions of public space and their different values can be felt as you drive from downtown Tucson to the Ironwood Forest National Monument and pass through four worlds. The first is the urban environment of Tucson with its buildings, highway, channelized washes and mining operations that mark up the riparian corridor of the Santa Cruz. The second is the flatland of Marana's agricultural setting with its narrow irrigation ditches supporting vast expanses of farm land. The third is the scrubby arid buffer land that connects agricultural lands to the Silverbell Mountains. And the fourth is the dense forest of saguaro cacti and ironwood trees that surround the Silverbell Mountains, so rich that you feel it when you have passed into this other dimension of public space, and you understand first hand the need to protect the area. Ragged Top Mountain, the centerpiece of



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the Silverbells, is itself noble and great. These are four dimensions of our public space, all important, but some more vulnerable than others.

This diversity of space is matched by diversity within our community. At numerous public meetings held in the months before the designation of the Ironwood Forest National Monument, support for monument status was expressed by the adjacent landowners, scientists and cultural resource experts, ranchers and the conservation community, the business sector, and governments ranging from the Tohono O'odham Nation to the Pinal County and Pima County Boards of Supervisors.

I believe that the broad and spirited community support for the designation of the Ironwood Forest National Monument is an indication that we have not asked for enough in the way of preservation, and that we have overestimated the meaning of prior defeats of protection efforts. Years before the designation, a drawn out community process that reflected near unanimous support for protecting Ragged Top Mountain as a wilderness area was flicked away in the end, when a single interest generated a moment of fear within Congress about the potential for small mining claim holders to emerge in numbers. We must not let this happen again.

Public Space and How We Will Be Remembered

If local and national decision makers were really listening to the people of Southern Arizona,

they would hear the unity in our voice, and respect our vision about the importance of public space in defining our community and heritage.

It is in our interest to speak more often on these matters, to have a greater awareness of the risk of silence, and to feel more empowered by the fact that we agree about the importance of protecting natural and cultural resources.

The Ironwood Forest National Monument, if we can protect it, will represent us well to future generations, conveying this message through its lasting ancient nobility more effectively than our spoken aspirations of this day ever could.

The quest to sustain the Ironwood Forest National Monument is simply about legacy and respect — a legacy about who we are and where we choose to live, and a respect for our community and how we choose to live.

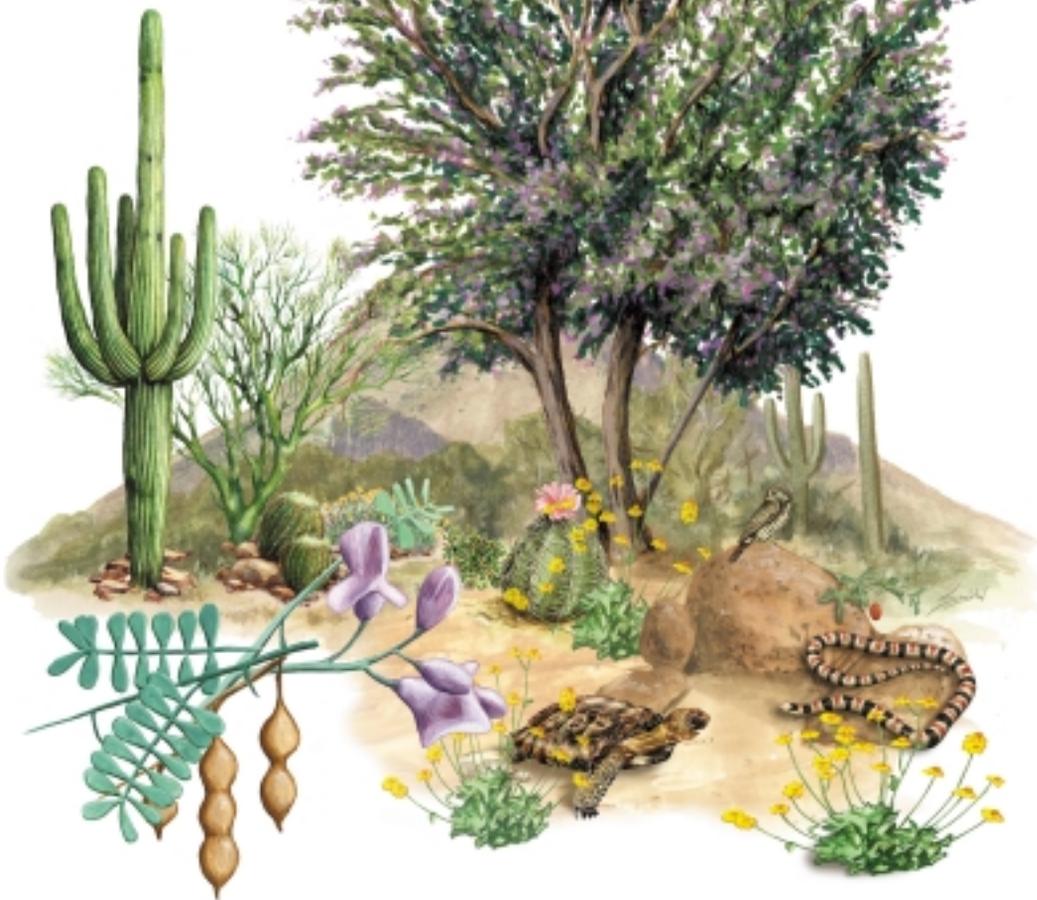


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Visit the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan Web site at www.SDCPonline.org.

Sonoran News is produced by Pima County Graphic Services.
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*The Board of Supervisors welcomes
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