

# Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan Newsletter

*"To ensure the long-term survival of the full spectrum of plants and animals that are indigenous to Pima County through maintaining or improving the ecosystem structures and functions necessary for their survival."*

## Summer 2011

### Pima County Office of Sustainability and Conservation

On July 1st, three Pima County departments merged into one cohesive department. This new office combines three separate County programs, the Office of Conservation Science, the Office of Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources, and the Sustainability Office. The newly created Office of Sustainability and Conservation (OSC), headed by Linda Mayro, brings three aspects of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP) implementation under one "roof". The biological and cultural resources elements of the SDCP are now planned and implemented from the new Office, and the overall long term sustainability of these lands and resources is incorporated into the County's Sustainable Action Plan. Robin Johnson and Daniel Cariglio join the group from the Sustainability Office. Sherry Ruther, formerly with the Development Services Department, is also a part of the new office. The OSC works very closely with the County's Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation Department to manage these lands to conserve and sustain these biological and cultural resources that are protected under the SDCP and to incorporate sustainability principles into County operations and planning efforts. This is an exciting development for the County, and provides a promising future for the County's open space and conservation areas.

### Pima County Historic Preservation Program: Conservation Areas

Work is progressing well on the County's bond-funded Open Space acquisitions and Conservation Easements for historic and archaeological preservation. Detailed mapping and GIS projects for most of the Conservation Areas are now complete. These preserves contain historic and archaeological sites identified in the Cultural Resources Element of the SDCP as Priority Cultural Resources, considered the "last of the best" heritage resources in the County to be protected and preserved for the education and benefit of present and future citizens of Pima County.

Within the past two months the GIS mapping of natural and cultural resources information has been concluded at the historic Old and New Pantano Townsites in the Cienega Creek Natural Preserve east of Tucson, the Valencia archaeological site and Tumamoc Hill in the City of Tucson, and the



Tumamoc Hill site. Photo courtesy of Pima County OSC.



Coyote Mountains in rural Pima County southwest of Tucson. These GIS databases add to the current inventory of GIS-based planning tools for the Los Morteros archaeological site in the Town of Marana, and the Dakota Wash archaeological site and historic Fort Lowell Park in the City of Tucson. These GIS databases are important tools for County management and for County planning efforts to conserve and interpret these irreplaceable and fragile resources.



Coyote Mountain site. Photo courtesy of Pima County OSC.

Part of the cultural resources conservation efforts includes the identification of immediate and imminent threats to these cultural resources. At the Valencia site and Tumamoc Hill, open and unauthorized access was noted as an ongoing and immediate problem. To counteract this problem, animal friendly fencing has been repaired and added along the exterior perimeter of the County's Tumamoc Hill parcel and along a major public thoroughfare adjacent to the Valencia site. Erosion caused by Dakota Wash has been identified as an imminent threat within the Dakota Wash site. Planning is underway with Pima County's Regional Flood Control District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to design and construct an environmentally compatible means of protecting the cultural resources from further erosion.

## MSCP Update

On June 30, 2011, the term of the original \$3 million federal grant that supported the development of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan ended. Most of the funds were used to support the scientific investigations and mapping, and years of public involvement leading to the adoption of the Maeveen Marie Behan Conservation Lands System (MMB-CLS) and other conservation measures adopted by Pima County. This past year, the funds were used to update a draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Pima County Multi-species Conservation Plan (MSCP).

The MSCP was submitted to U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in December 2010. USFWS intends to complete its review of the document in September 2011. In the meantime, Pima County has been developing the details of the "Opt-in" program described in Section 3.3.1.1 of the MSCP (see [http://www.pima.gov/cmo/sdcp/MSCP/PDF/12.10/MSCP\\_AdminDraft\\_Low\\_REs.pdf](http://www.pima.gov/cmo/sdcp/MSCP/PDF/12.10/MSCP_AdminDraft_Low_REs.pdf)). Pima County also reviewed the list of species included in listing workplan announced by USFWS (details at [http://www.fws.gov/endangered/improving\\_ESA/listing\\_workplan.html](http://www.fws.gov/endangered/improving_ESA/listing_workplan.html)). No additional species will be added to Pima County's covered species list at this time.

## MapGuide

Several changes have been made in the MapGuide layers recently. Summer 2010 USDA natural color imagery is now available! While the 2010 Pictometry orthophotos provide higher resolution and more accurate positioning for metro Tucson, the USDA imagery covers virtually all of Pima County and a small area around the county's borders. Intermittent and perennial streams are now listed near the top of the SDCP MapGuide under lines, instead of being found near the bottom of the list under the Special Elements. Shallow groundwater areas can now be found in the SDCP MapGuide, not just on the main MapGuide site. The pygmy-owl critical habitat, survey zones and draft recovery zones remain on the SDCP MapGuide layers, but have been removed from the main MapGuide site.



## Pima County Native Plant Nursery



3-month old blue palo verde seedling, ready for transplanting. Photo by Pima County NRPR.

The Pima County Sweetwater Native Plant Nursery has relocated from the northwest corner of the Roger Road Treatment Plant, to the southeast corner off the treatment plant (just off of Sweetwater Road). The nursery grows native plants used in county revegetation and restoration projects, such as the Cortaro Mesquite Bosque, and the Rillito River/Swan Wetlands Restoration Project. The nursery has recently adopted “tall pot” propagation techniques, resulting in a quicker transplanting time frame (18 months needed for traditional methods, 3 months needed for tall pot method), and a healthier root system with no irrigation systems needed. For more information on the Sweetwater Nursery and the tall pot systems, please see:

<http://tucsoncitizen.com/pima-county-news/2011/07/22/pima-county-nursery-saving-trees-water-with-tall-pots/> and [http://azstarnet.com/news/science/environment/article\\_7963bb3d-ba07-58eb-b4ce-34d21a9f7d62.html](http://azstarnet.com/news/science/environment/article_7963bb3d-ba07-58eb-b4ce-34d21a9f7d62.html) .

## Riparian Mitigation

The Pima County Regional Flood Control District (District) is in the process of revising its standards and guidelines for mitigating and protecting riparian habitat in Pima County. The purpose of the riparian habitat protection regulations is to minimize flood and erosion damage for all county residents, property, and infrastructure, and ensure the long-term stability of natural floodplains which allows for the survival of plants and animals indigenous to Pima County. The County organized a Mitigation Working Group of interested stakeholders and provided public Open Houses to receive comments. The final guidance document will be presented to the Board of Supervisors in early Fall 2011 for adoption

<http://rfcd.pima.gov/wrd/riparian/offsite/wg/>).

## Environmental Education

The Environmental Education program at Agua Caliente Park, via parklands Foundation, received a donation in honor of Ellen Susan Pinna of two custom exhibit cases to display artifacts from excavations at Agua Caliente Park and Whiptail site. Artifacts are in the Agua Caliente Park Ranch house and are on display.

Interested in hiking, birdwatching, photography, nature talks? Find out what’s happening this month with the Pima County Environmental Education public programs:

[http://www.pima.gov/nrpr/educ/PDFs/Programs\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.pima.gov/nrpr/educ/PDFs/Programs_Brochure.pdf)

## Tortoise Update

Thanks to everyone who has participated in the tortoise survey! The survey is ongoing, so if you have an observation, please contact <http://www.herpcount.org/> or email Neva Connolly at [Conservation@pima.gov](mailto:Conservation@pima.gov) .

