

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.”

Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan Update: May 2009

Multiple Species Conservation Plan (MSCP) Update

Responses to [public comments](#) on [Draft 5](#) of the MSCP are posted on the [Pima County MSCP website](#).

Revisions to the MSCP are underway. Changes that would have a significant impact on the MSCP include:

- (1) Eliminating wildcat development from the list of covered activities;
- (2) Developing an opt-in provision for entitled properties. The opt-in program would provide entitled properties with a means to gain Endangered Species Act coverage under the County’s permit. If adopted, this provision would be strictly voluntary on the part of the developers, but opting in would involve a fee, which has not been determined;
- (3) Covering Board approvals for proposed planned communities on current State and BLM lands, if these lands are made private during the 30-year permit period; and
- (4) Creating an incentives-based approach for gaining mitigation credit on state-trust lands whereby higher ratios of mitigation credit would be awarded for greater conservation and improved conditions for covered species.

In addition to changing the list of covered activities, Pima County is adding a select set of talus snails to the list of covered species. The addition of the species was approved by the Science and Technical Advisory Team (STAT) at their May meeting. The STAT also approved a procedure for updating priority conservation areas and models.

Land Acquisitions

The county closed on Phase I of the Marley property, located west of Green Valley. To be called the Marley Ranch Conservation Area, the ranch covers over 115,000 acres of deeded lands and State grazing lease lands. This is one of the largest working ranches in southern Arizona and its acquisition is the largest under the 2004 Open Space Bond program. The purchase will be completed in three Phases



and is likely to take at least 8 years. Phase one acquired about 6,800 acres of fee title (private) land.

An API matching grant will be requested from State Parks to cover half of the acquisition costs for the Valencia site south of Tucson. The City of Tucson is supporting the application for use of Jurisdictional Open Space Bond funds. This site is one of only three remaining Hohokam ball courts in metro area and also provide wildlife habitat in an urbanizing area.

Phase II of the Sopori Ranch acquisition should be completed by June 30. This will finalize the acquisition of the full 4,135 acres of title lands and the transfer of the 10,480 acres of State grazing leases.

Buffelgrass Study

Pima County, in conjunction with the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service, is moving ahead with a study to determine the efficacy of using helicopters to treat large stands of buffelgrass. County staff are evaluating several sites on Tucson Mountain Park for this study.

