

# Fire Management E.I.S. Issue Paper

Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan

2002

Pima County, Arizona  
Board of Supervisors  
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Dan Eckstrom, District 2  
Sharon Bronson, Chair, District 3  
Raymond J. Carroll, District 4  
Richard Elias, District 5

County Administrator  
Chuck Huckelberry



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# MEMORANDUM

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Date: August 7, 2002

To: The Honorable Chair and Members  
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry  
County Administrator 

Re: **Fire Management Issue Paper**

## I. Background

In May of 2002, a cost model described future impacts and assessed costs for unincorporated Pima County's compliance with the Endangered Species Act. Four alternatives relative to the cost of implementing the Section 10 permit were presented: ranch conservation; mountain park expansion; high conservation value land on the northwest side; and riparian protection and restoration. This fall the Steering Committee for the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan will recommend the approach they would like to see Pima County take in applying for a Section 10 permit. A combination of these alternatives might be recommended. To facilitate development of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which must accompany the Section 10 multi-species conservation proposal, a series of issue papers is being published. This paper discusses fire management in the context of the alternatives being considered to date.

## II. Wildfire Management for Eastern Pima County<sup>1</sup>

"Fire is an important factor that many ecosystems need and depend upon and have depended upon for centuries to shape their parameters. It is a dynamic force that promotes continuous natural processes and long-term ecosystem health.

A growing human population has led to an increased demand and impact on natural resources. These factors have led to a conflict with one of nature's natural forces – fire. The term Wildland/Urban Interface describes the area or zone where structures and other human development meets and intermingles with the undeveloped natural wildland ecosystems or dangerous combustible vegetative fuels. Fire management agencies have to strike a balance between the protection of life and property, and the proper management of natural resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Wildfire Management for Eastern Pima County was written by Carl D. Jones, a Natural Resource Consultant.

Numerous agencies (federal, state, county, and private) have jurisdictional authority and/or responsibility for wildland fire management. A cooperative effort between all fire protection management agencies is the only way to secure overall wildland fire management success because of land ownership, fuel, weather, topography, and fire occurrence patterns. The use of practices such as prescribed burns, prescribed natural fires, and cooperative preplanned areas along with the interagency incident command system, are just a few methods to reduce the hazard and risk associated with wildland fires.

#### **A. Wildland Fire Jurisdiction**

Wildland fire jurisdiction is the authority and/or the responsibility of agencies, districts, and departments to respond to wildland fires and take the appropriate actions. Wildland fire organizations are situated at different levels of government and the private sector.

First, is the Federal Government level with the following five federal agencies with wildland fire jurisdictions.

- Department of Agriculture – U.S. Forest Service
- Department of the Interior – Bureau of Land Management
- Department of the Interior – National Park Service
- Department of the Interior – U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- Department of the Interior - Tribal/Bureau of Indian Affairs

All of these federal agencies are required to follow the current “National Wildland Fire Policy”. This lengthy policy, simply stated, requires all federal wildland fire agencies take suppressive actions on all wildland fires that are a threat to federal lands. There are exceptions to this policy only if approved wildland fire management plans are in place. Then, natural caused wildland fires can be managed using appropriate actions consistent with land and resource management objectives, safety, and cost-effect considerations. Generally, the federal agencies carry out their policy using permanent and seasonal fire personnel and crews in addition to an array of contractual aviation resources.

Second, is the state government, which has one agency with wildland fire jurisdiction, which is the Arizona State Land Department – Fire Management Division. This agency’s jurisdiction, by state law, includes all wildland fires on state and private lands outside of incorporated municipalities. It should be noted that county lands, as well as, state lands (including state trust, state parks, game and fish lands) and private lands are included under the state’s jurisdiction for wildland fires. Much like the federal wildland fire management policy, suppressive actions will be taken on all wildland fires unless approved wildland fire management plans are in place to assist with the decision making process, which will determine what appropriate actions will be taken. This agency has a few permanent personnel that act mostly as overhead to the fire district’s and department’s engine crews and the Department of Correction’s hand crews. The agency also has a few aviation contractual resources.

Third, are the legal fire districts and departments, which are formed by state law and at the county level are assisted with the duties such as tax collection, elections, etc. These fire districts and departments provide structural and wildland fire protection, as well as, medical and other emergency services within their district boundaries. At the current time the following 16 fire districts and departments are in existence using paid and volunteer personnel.

- Avra Valley
- Corona De Tucson
- Drexel Heights
- Golder Ranch
- Green Valley
- Heritage Hills – Rural Metro
- Hidden Valley – Rural Metro
- LaCanada – Rural Metro
- Mount Lemmon
- North Ranch/Linda Vista – Rural Metro
- Northwest
- Picture Rocks
- Ricon Valley
- Sabino Vista – Rural Metro
- Three Points
- Tucson County Club Estates – Rural Metro

Six of sixteen fire districts contract with the Rural Metro Fire Department, a private organization described later.

Fourth, are the city fire departments of which there are two: Tucson and South Tucson. These city fire departments provide structural and wildland fire protection, as well as, medical and other emergency services within their city limits.

Fifth, are private fire departments, which can be further divided into profit and non-profit incorporated organizations. Rural Metro Fire Department provides fire (structural and wildland) and medical services to six fire districts (Heritage Hills, Hidden Valley, LaCanada, North Ranch/Linda Vista, Sabino Vista, and Tucson Country Club Estates). It also provides the same services for many other membership areas throughout Pima County through contractual agreements. Rural Metro Fire Department also has wildland engines and hand crews available for fighting fires on a contractual basis.

Five non-profit fire departments are operating in Pima County: Arivaca; Elephant Head; Helmet Peak; Mescal (also in Cochise County); and Sonoita-Elgin (also in Santa Cruz & Cochise Counties).

These fire departments provide wildland and structural fire protection, as well as, medical and other emergency services using mostly volunteers.

## **B. Wildland / Urban Interface**

The Wildland/Urban Interface in Pima County describes the area or zone where structures and other human development meets and intermingles with the undeveloped natural wildland ecosystems which generally contain dangerous combustible vegetative fuels under certain conditions.

These Wildland/Urban Interface areas occur both within and outside of fire district and department boundaries that have both structural and wildland fire protection capabilities. When wildland fires occur within an interface area inside a fire district or department, a structural protection problem exists but it pales to problems that exist when it occurs outside of a fire district's or department's boundary. Outside of a fire district's or department's boundary, the responsibility of the incident would generally fall on the wildland fighting agencies (federal and state) to protect structures and improvements. This structural protection can be done by a wildland fire-fighting agency (federal and state) only by contracting for structural protection to fire districts or departments at great expense. Beside the expense, fire fighting efforts (planning, operational, and logistical) are shifted to structural protection while the wildland part of the fire becomes of secondary concern and generally increases in complexity.

Land use planning of natural areas with fire behavior factors (fuel, weather, and topography) and development areas with sufficient levels of fire protection must be accomplished in order to establish efficient and effective wildland fire management. Conservation areas need to have their Wildland/Urban Interface potential identified and assessed, then mapped and displayed with the wildland fire management plan for that area."

## **C. Recommendations**

Mr. Jones recommends in part that wildland fire agencies (federal, state, and county) should enter into agreement to establish an interagency coordination dispatch center for wildland fires in the county. "This type of dispatch center has worked well in other parts of the country. It would result in all agencies coordinating to some degree, their wildland fire activities with other agencies, thus, providing a safer, more effective, and efficient wildland fire management system."

## **III. Alternatives**

In the following text, each alternative, plus a no action alternative, is briefly described in relation to fire management considerations. The conclusions drawn for purposes of this discussion paper are of a general and comparative nature. When specific recommendations are forwarded by the Steering Committee or interested members of the community, the merits of each specific proposal can be weighed.

No Action Alternative

With the No Action Alternative there is a continuation of present growth and development patterns which leads to open spaces fragmented by urbanizing areas. This alternative would have the greatest negative impact on fire management efforts since the ability to implement fire strategies on large landscapes would become increasingly limited, and the risk to urbanizing areas would become increasingly great.

Ranch Alternative

Under the Ranch Alternative, Pima County would establish a reserve of 20,400 acres of high resource value ranch land. The wildland/urban interface creates dilemmas for fire ecology strategies on ranch lands in most areas of Eastern Pima County, with the exception of larger unfragmented landscapes in Altar Valley, the San Pedro, and in some of Ironwood Forest National Monument areas. Ranch conservation efforts would slow or stop the increase of wildland/urban interface situations, and in that way benefit fire ecology and administration efforts. The following table shows the fire districts and land management jurisdictions which could benefit from the Ranch Conservation Alternative, along with the acreage of each.

<b>Fire District</b>	<b>Vacant Private Ranch Acres</b>
Arizona SLD, Fire Management Division	152,978.2 acres
Avra Valley Fire District	4,034.8 acres
Corona De Tucson Fire District	2,599.9 acres
Golder Ranch Fire District	905.1 acres
Green Valley Volunteer Fire District	7.2 acres
Northwest Fire District	53.6 acres
Picture Rocks Volunteer Fire District	857.8 acres
Rincon Valley Fire District	1,720.7 acres
Three Points Fire District	16,896.4 acres
City of Tucson Fire District	0.1 acres
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>180,053.8 acres</b>

Mountain Park Expansion

Under this alternative, Pima County would expand natural resource lands, particularly parks, by a total of 20,400 acres. The wildland/urban interface creates dilemmas for fire ecology strategies on County park lands in most areas of Eastern Pima County.

Mountain Park expansion efforts would slow the increase of wildland/urban interface situations, and in that way benefit fire ecology and administration efforts. However, as the map of parklands shows, significant residential development exists within the buffer zones of parks. The following table shows the fire districts and land management jurisdictions which could benefit from the Mountain Park Expansion Alternative, along with the number of acres within each fire district.

Fire District	Vacant Private and State Acres	
	Within One Mile	Within Five Miles
ASL Dept, Fire Management Division	22,472.3 acres	64,102.1 acres
Avra Valley Fire District	0 acres	306.1 acres
Corona De Tucson Fire District	0 acres	6,385.2 acres
Drexel Heights Fire District	1,406.7 acres	7,365.9 acres
Golder Ranch Fire District	1,825.2 acres	8,486.4 acres
La Canada Fire District	0 acres	4.1 acres
North Ranch Linda Vista Fire District	0 acres	4.9 acres
Northwest Fire District	2,201.3 acres	5,124.1 acres
Picture Rocks Volunteer Fire District	0 acres	1,611.4 acres
Rincon Valley Fire District	2,630.7 acres	9,651.8 acres
Three Points Fire District	1,040.8 acres	5,873.2 acres
City of Tucson Fire District	0.8 acres	1.4 acres
Tucson Estates Fire District	118.1 acres	0 acres
Total Acres	31,695.9 acres	108,916.6 acres

Riparian Protection and Restoration

Efforts to protect the important riparian areas would slow the increase of wildland/urban interface situations, and in that way benefit fire ecology and administration efforts. Outlying watershed riparian areas hold the most promise while riparian areas closer to urbanizing areas are more likely to have residential land uses. The following table shows the fire districts and land management jurisdictions which could benefit from the Riparian Protection Alternative, along with the number of acres within each fire district.

<b>Fire District</b>	<b>Vacant Private and State Acres</b>
ASL Dept, Fire Management Division	38,279.9 acres
Avra Valley Fire District	4,956.4 acres
Corona De Tucson Fire District	300.9 acres
Drexel Heights Fire District	369.3 acres
Golder Ranch Fire District	1,147.9 acres
Green Valley Volunteer Fire District	121.6 acres
Heritage Hills Fire District	13.9 acres
Hidden Valley Fire District	35.7 acres
Mount Lemmon Fire District	6.3 acres
North Ranch Linda Vista Fire District	56 acres
Northwest Fire District	700.7 acres
Picture Rocks Volunteer Fire District	45.3 acres
Rincon Valley Fire District	187.7 acres
Sabino Vista Fire District	10.2 acres
Three Points Fire District	3,154 acres
City of Tucson Fire District	0.4 acres
Tucson County Club Estates Fire District	1.7 acres
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>49,387.9 acres</b>

High Conservation Value Land on the Northwest Side

Efforts to conserve lands in the northwest urban area would not significantly reduce wildland/urban interface problems, given the extent to which the area is built out. Under this alternative, it is likely that the management of wildland fires for the benefit of covered species and their habitats will take a back seat to structural protection of homes and businesses.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In the area of fire management, the alternatives that preserve the greatest amount of unfragmented landscape offer the most benefits. These are the protection of ranch lands and riparian areas. Emphasis on expanding existing parks has limited benefit, given the amount of urban encroachment near many parklands. Emphasis on the northwest area and continuation of the present growth patterns offer the least benefit since the ability to implement fire strategies on large landscapes is limited, and the risk to urbanizing areas is potentially great.

Draft issue papers have been forwarded on the topics of cultural resources, ranching, recreation, water resources, invasive species, and environmental justice. Alternatives are discussed from most beneficial to least beneficial in light of goals of those particular resources. While the conclusions drawn for purposes of this discussion paper are of a general and comparative nature, the studies supported initial rankings of alternatives as follows:

##### Ranch Conservation Alternatives Analysis

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Alternative</b>
1	Ranch Conservation
2	Riparian Conservation
3	Mountain Park Expansion
4	High Conservation Value Land in Northwest Tucson
5	No Action

##### Cultural Resources Alternatives Analysis

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Alternative</b>
1	Ranch Conservation
2	Mountain park Expansion
3	Riparian Conservation
4	High Conservation Value Land in Northwest Tucson
5	No Action

Recreation Alternatives Analysis: The study of recreation resources indicates that mountain park expansion and ranch land protection seem to hold the most promise for recreation goals, depending on the particular areas protected, the needs of the species in that area, and the level of impact associated with the recreation activity.

Water Resources Alternatives Analysis: The water resources issue paper concludes: "The riparian area and ranch land protection alternatives offer the greatest positive impacts to both water supplies for riparian purposes and water quality. The no action and emphasis on the northwest side [proposals] have the least positive impact."

Invasive Species Alternatives Analysis: Findings are that "no matter which alternative is chosen, Pima County will benefit from adopting policies and increasing coordination with government and non-profit groups to deal effectively with invasive species. The alternatives that preserve the greatest amount of undisturbed land offer the most benefits. These are the expansion of preserves and riparian protection. Emphasis on the northwest area and continuation of the present growth patterns offer the least benefit. Emphasis on ranch conservation has great potential, depending on management techniques."

Environmental Justice Alternatives Analysis: Findings are that: (1) Of the alternatives, the no action approach "is the least beneficial to environmental justice;" (2) The conservation plan will not create any new air or water pollution or hazardous materials problems for anyone in the community, including low income/minority community members; and (3) The conservation plan may reduce the costs of subsidies to new growth in outlying areas and thus have an economic benefit for residents.

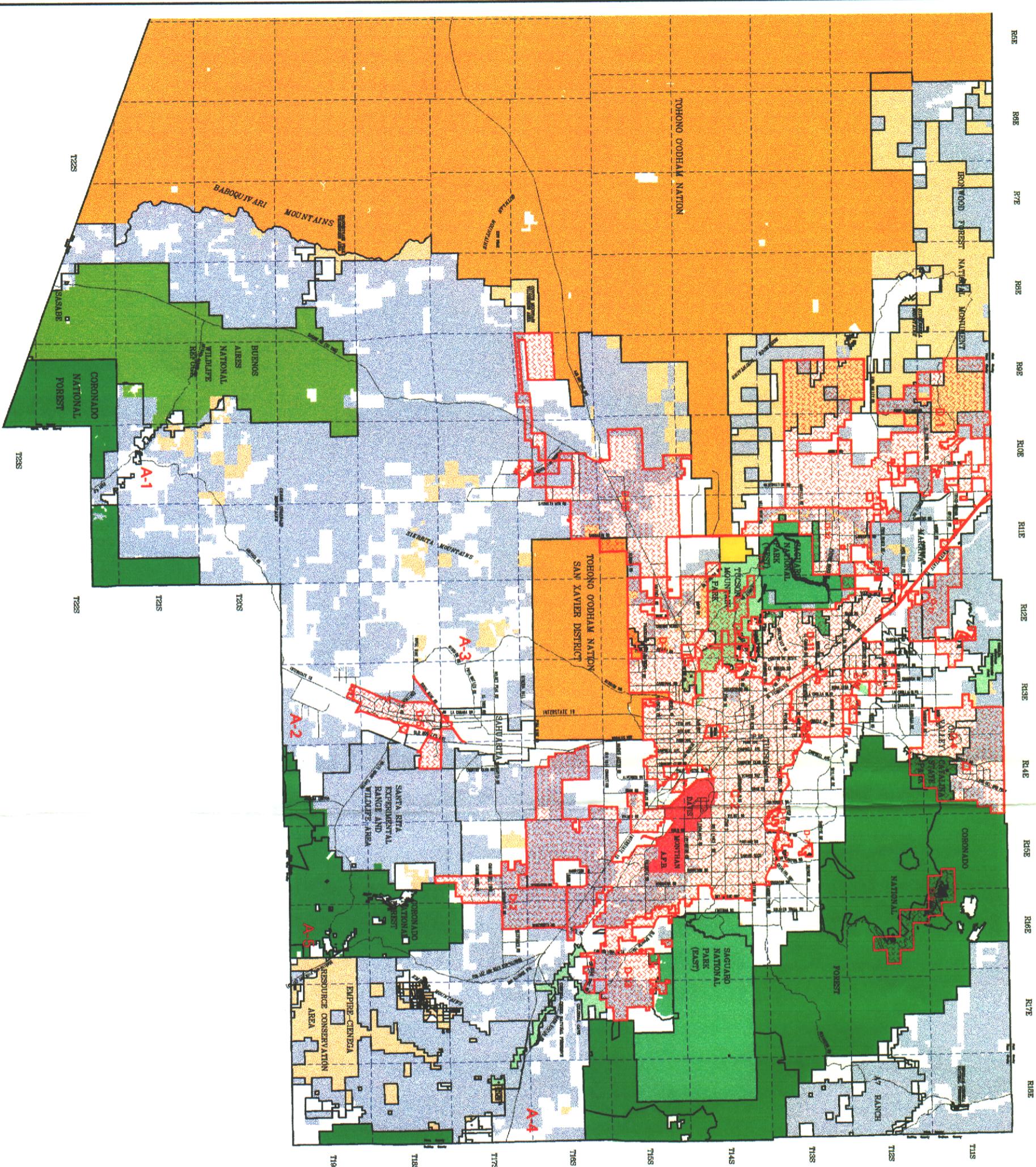
The final recommendation for land to be included in the Section 10 permit will likely include a combination of lands from the ranch, mountain park, riparian and northwest areas. When a specific recommendation is forwarded by the Steering Committee or by interested members of the community, the merits of each specific proposal will be reviewed and published in light of considerations in this issue paper, and additional information that might be provided as part of future discussions.

Attached Maps:

1. Fire Management Ownership/Fire Jurisdiction
2. Fire Management Ownership/Fire Jurisdiction/Development
3. Private Ranch Lands, Single Family Residences and Mobile Homes
4. Private Ranch and Fire Management
5. Mountain Park Expansions, Single family Residences and Mobile Homes
6. Mountain Park Expansions and Fire Management
7. Northwest Recovery Area 3, Single Family Residence and Mobile Homes
8. Northwest Recovery Area 3 and Fire Management
9. Important Riparian Areas, Single Family Residences and Mobile Homes
10. Important Riparian Areas and Fire Management

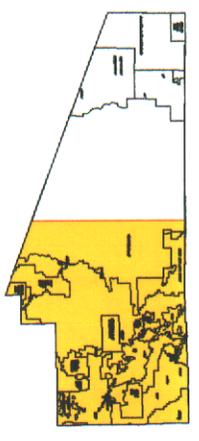


# Fire Management Ownership/ Fire Jurisdiction East Pima County



- Major Streets
- Administrative Boundaries
- Private Lands - Arizona State Land Department / Fire Management
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Tribal / BIA
- Military - Department of Defense
- State Lands - Arizona State Land Department / Fire Management
- County Parks - Arizona State Land Department / Fire Management
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Park Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- Mitigation Corridor
- Fire Districts

- County Fire Districts**
- D-1 - Avra Valley
- D-2 - Corona De Tucson
- D-3 - Drexel Heights
- D-4 - Golden Ranch
- D-5 - Green Valley
- D-6 - Heritage Hills - Rural Metro
- D-7 - Hidden Valley - Rural Metro
- D-8 - La Canada - Rural Metro
- D-9 - Mount Lemmon
- D-10 - North Ranch/Linda Vista - Rural Metro
- D-11 - Northwest
- D-12 - Picture Rocks
- D-13 - Rincon Valley
- D-14 - Sabino Vista - Rural Metro
- D-15 - Three Points
- D-16 - Tucson Country Club Estates - Rural Metro
- City Fire Departments**
- C-1 - South Tucson
- C-2 - Tucson
- Private Fire Departments**
- Rural Metro Membership Service Area & District Contracts
- Associations - Non-Profit/Inc.
- A-1 - Arivaca
- A-2 - Elephant Head
- A-3 - Helmer Park
- A-4 - Meccal
- A-5 - Sonoma-Sign



Scale: Map Scale: 1:100,000

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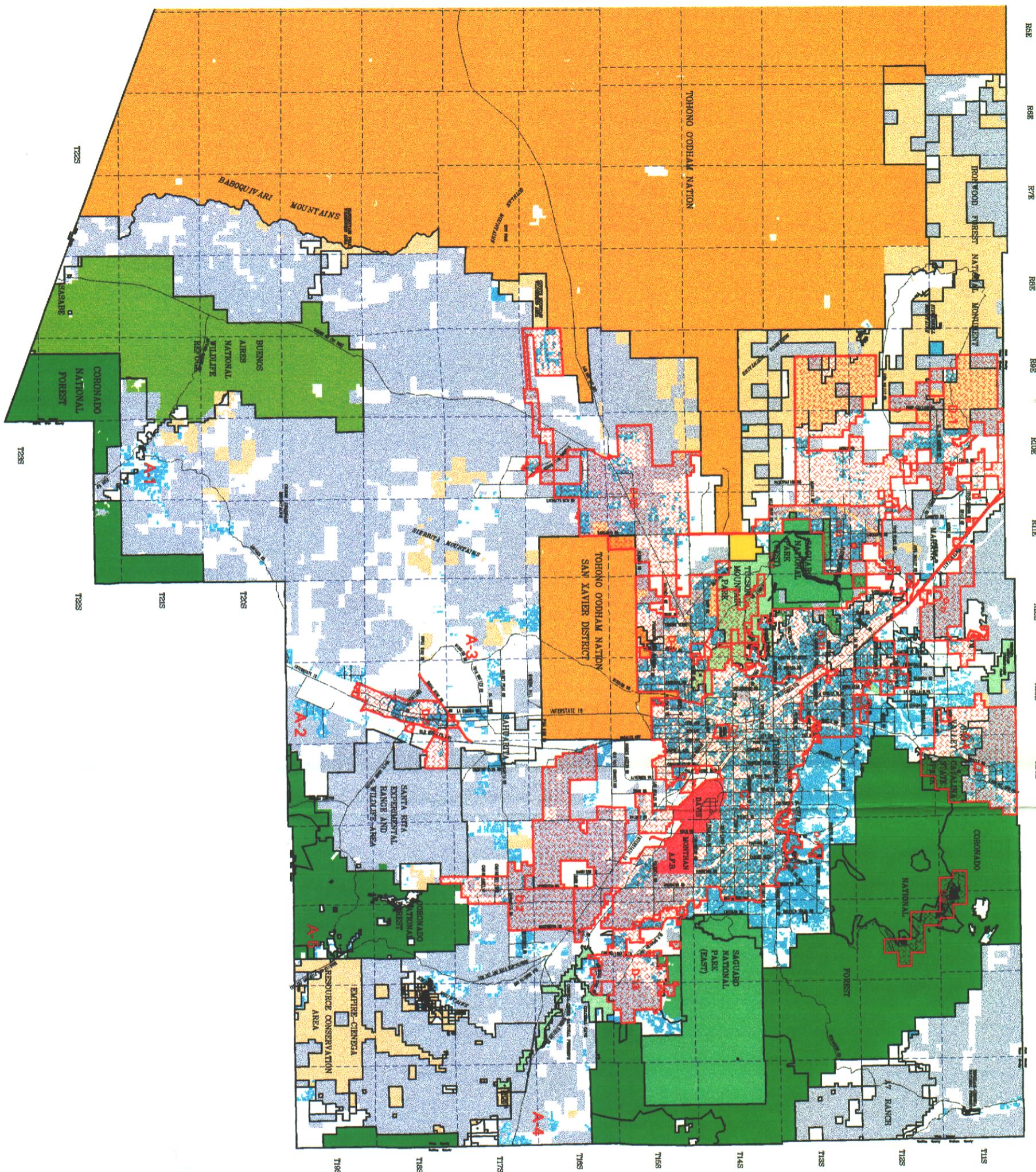
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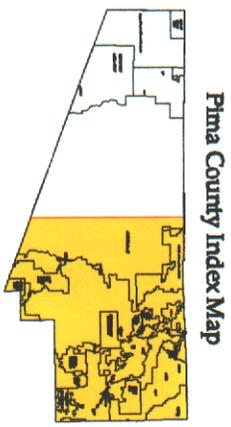


# Fire Management Ownership/Fire Jurisdiction/ Development East Pima County



- Major Streets
- Administrative Boundaries
- Private Lands - Arizona State Land Department / Fire Management
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Tribal / BIA
- Military - Department of Defense
- State Lands - Arizona State Land Department / Fire Management
- County Parks - Arizona State Land Department / Fire Management
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Park Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- Mitigation Corridor
- Single Family Residence / Mobile Home

- Fire Districts**
- County Fire Districts**
  - D-1 - Arva Valley
  - D-2 - Corona De Tucson
  - D-3 - Drexel Heights
  - D-4 - Golden Ranch
  - D-5 - Green Valley
  - D-6 - Heritage Hills - Rural Metro
  - D-7 - Hidden Valley - Rural Metro
  - D-8 - La Canada - Rural Metro
  - D-9 - Mount Lemmon
  - D-10 - North Fork/Linda Vista - Rural Metro
  - D-11 - Northwest
  - D-12 - Pickett Locks
  - D-13 - Sycron Valley
  - D-14 - Three Pines
  - D-15 - Tucson Country Club Estates - Rural Metro
- City Fire Departments**
  - C-1 - South Tucson
  - C-2 - Tucson
- Private Fire Departments**
- Rural Metro Membership Service Area & District Contracts**
- Associations - Non-Profit/Inc.**
  - A-1 - Arivaca
  - A-2 - Bearhawk Peak
  - A-3 - Haines Peak
  - A-4 - Mesal
  - A-5 - Sonora-Righ



Index Map Scale: 1:1,000,000

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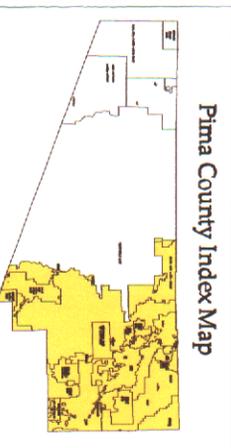
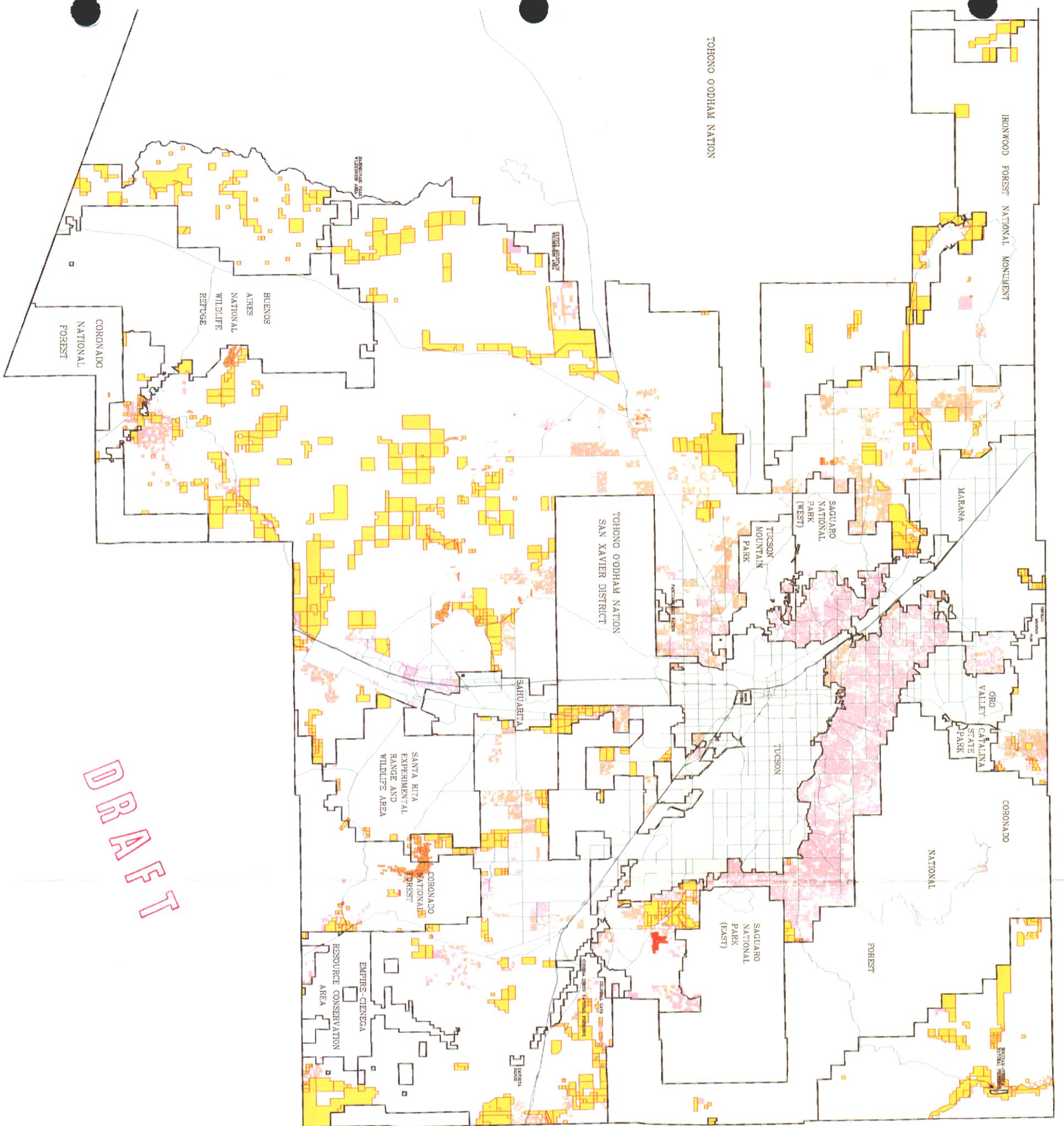


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# Private Ranch Lands, Single Family Residences, And Mobile Homes

-  Administrative Boundaries
-  Major Streets
-  Private Ranch Land
-  Single Family Residences
-  Mobile Homes



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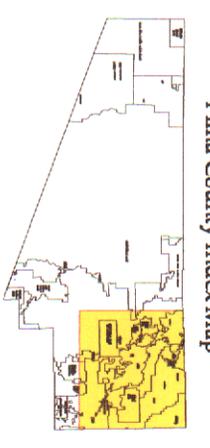
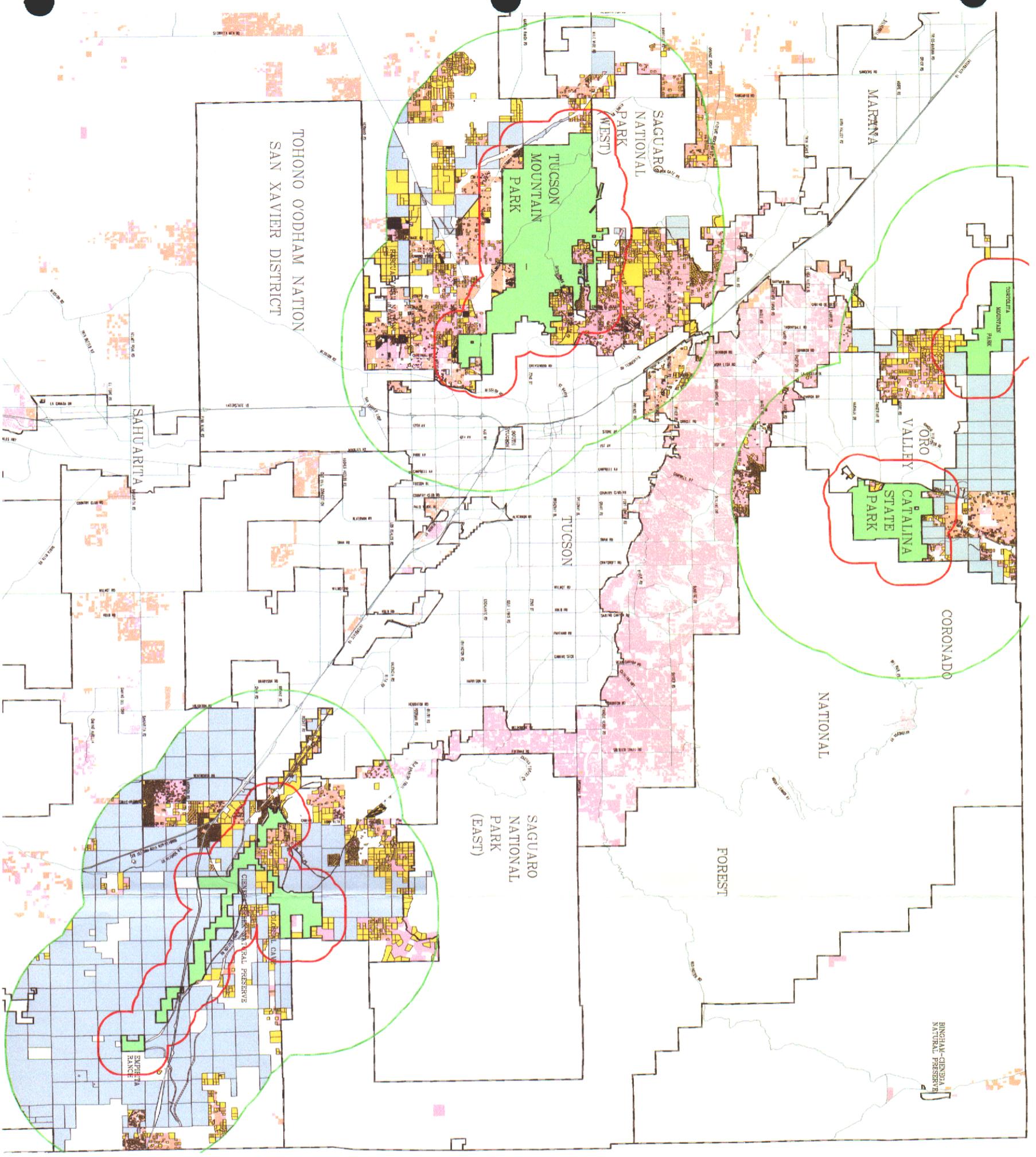




# Mountain Park Expansions, Single Family Residences, And Mobile Homes

-  1-Mile Buffer
-  5-Mile Buffer
-  Administrative Boundaries
-  Major Streets
-  Mountain Park
-  Private Vacant Parcels
-  State Trust Vacant Parcels
-  Single Family Residences
-  Mobile Homes

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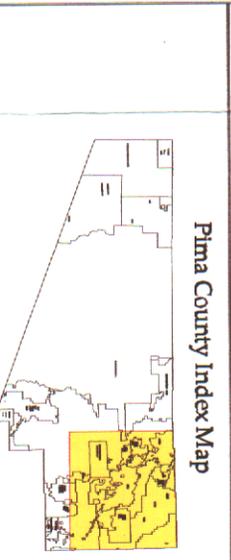
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# Mountain Park Expansions And Fire Management

-  Fire Districts
-  1-Mile Buffer
-  5-Mile Buffer
-  Administrative Boundaries
-  Major Streets
-  Mountain Park
-  Private Vacant Parcels
-  State Trust Vacant Parcels

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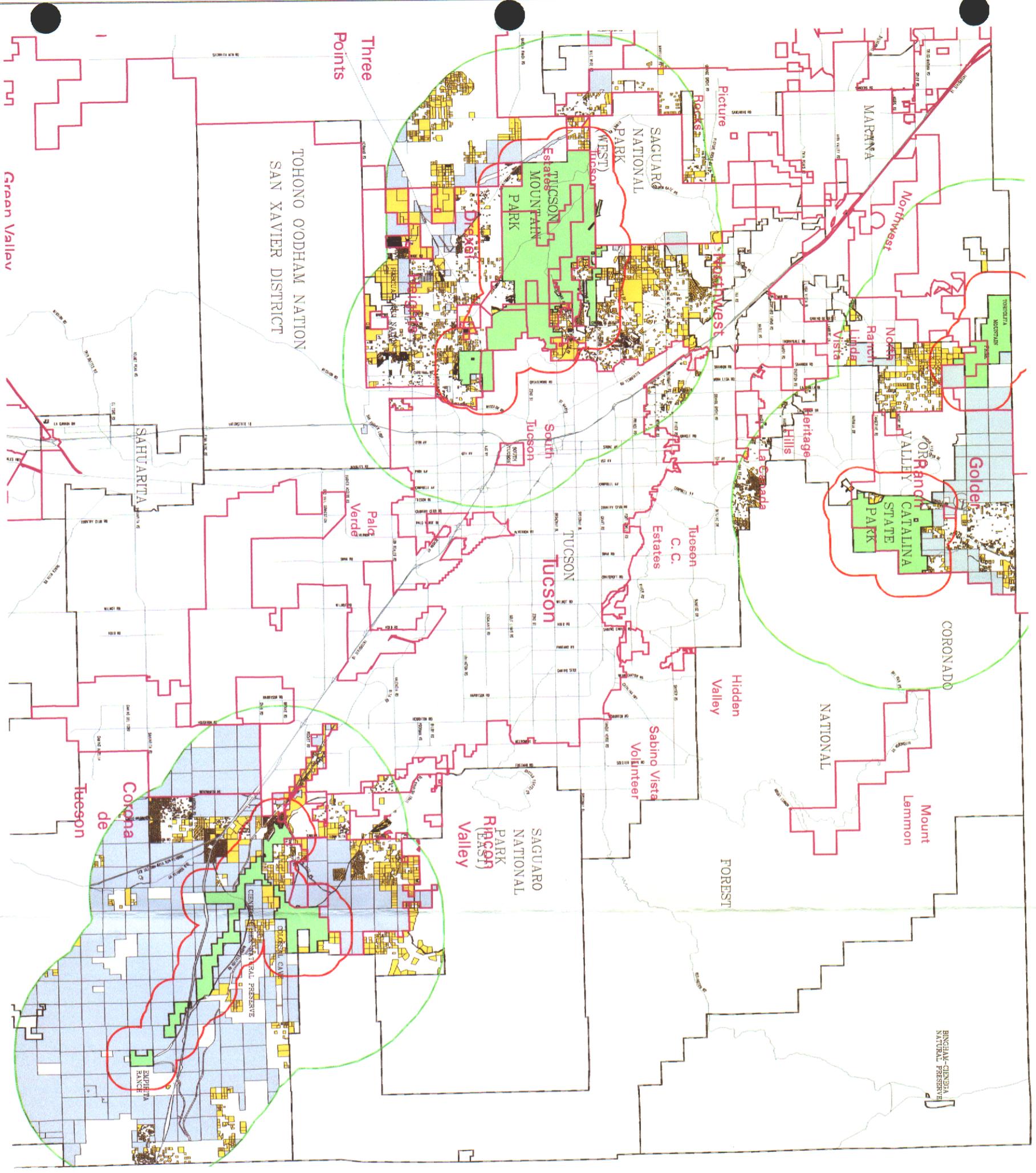
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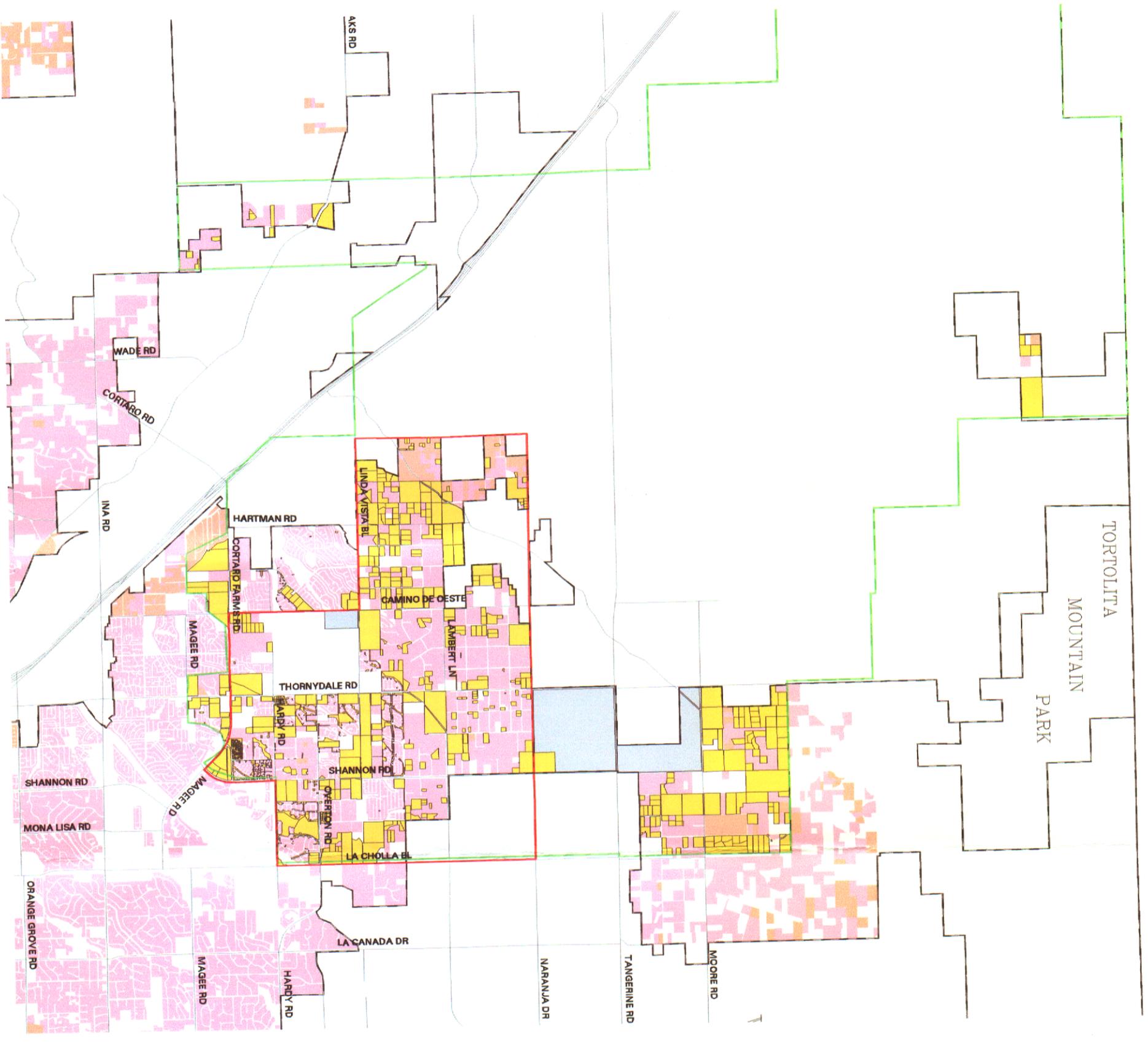
Three Points

Green Valley

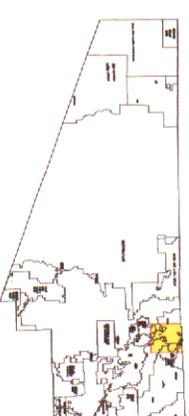
# Northwest Recovery Area 3, Single Family Residences, And Mobile Homes

-  Recovery Area 3
-  High Conservation Value Area
-  Administrative Boundaries
-  Major Streets
-  Private Vacant Parcels
-  State Trust Vacant Parcels
-  Single Family Residences
-  Mobile Homes

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**Pima County Index Map**



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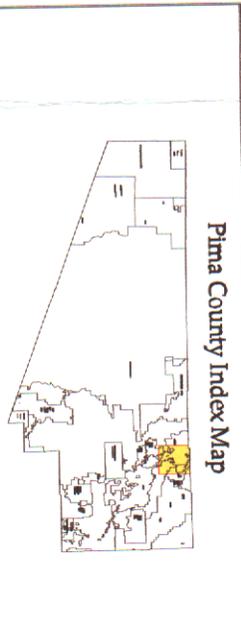
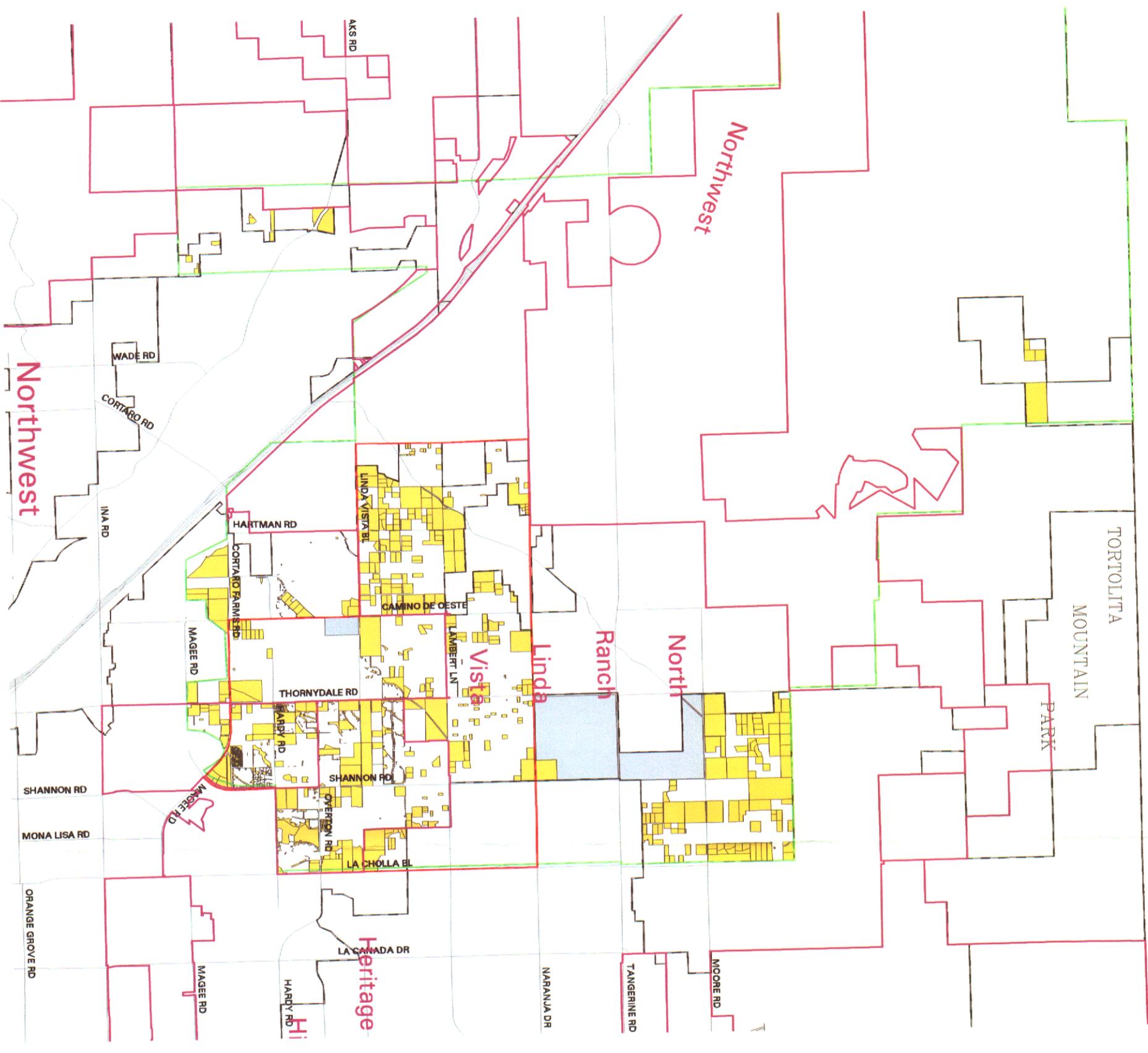
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# Northwest Recovery Area 3 And Fire Management

-  Fire Districts
-  Recovery Area 3
-  High Conservation Value Area
-  Administrative Boundaries
-  Major Streets
-  Private Vacant Parcels
-  State Trust Vacant Parcels

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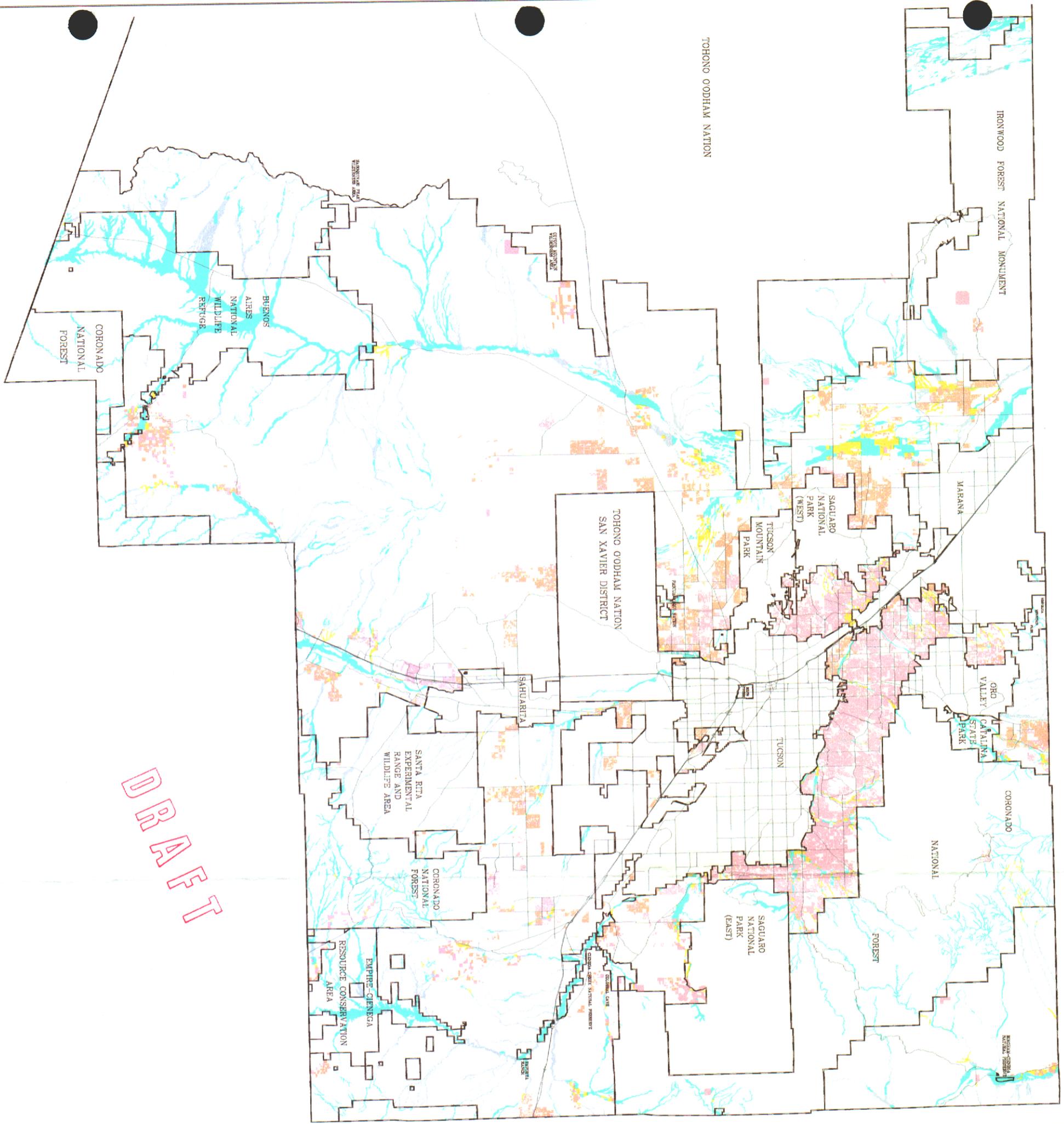
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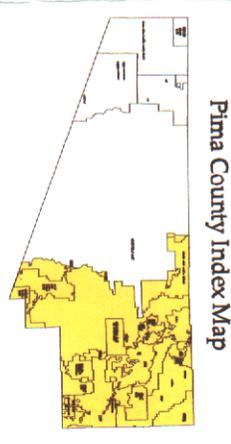

  
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# Important Riparian Areas, Single Family Residences, And Mobile Homes

-  Administrative Boundaries
-  Major Streets
-  Important Riparian Areas in Unincorporated Eastern Pima County
-  Private Vacant Parcels
-  State Trust Vacant Parcels
-  Single Family Residences
-  Mobile Homes



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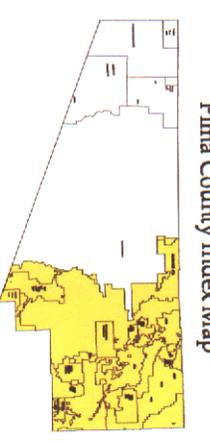
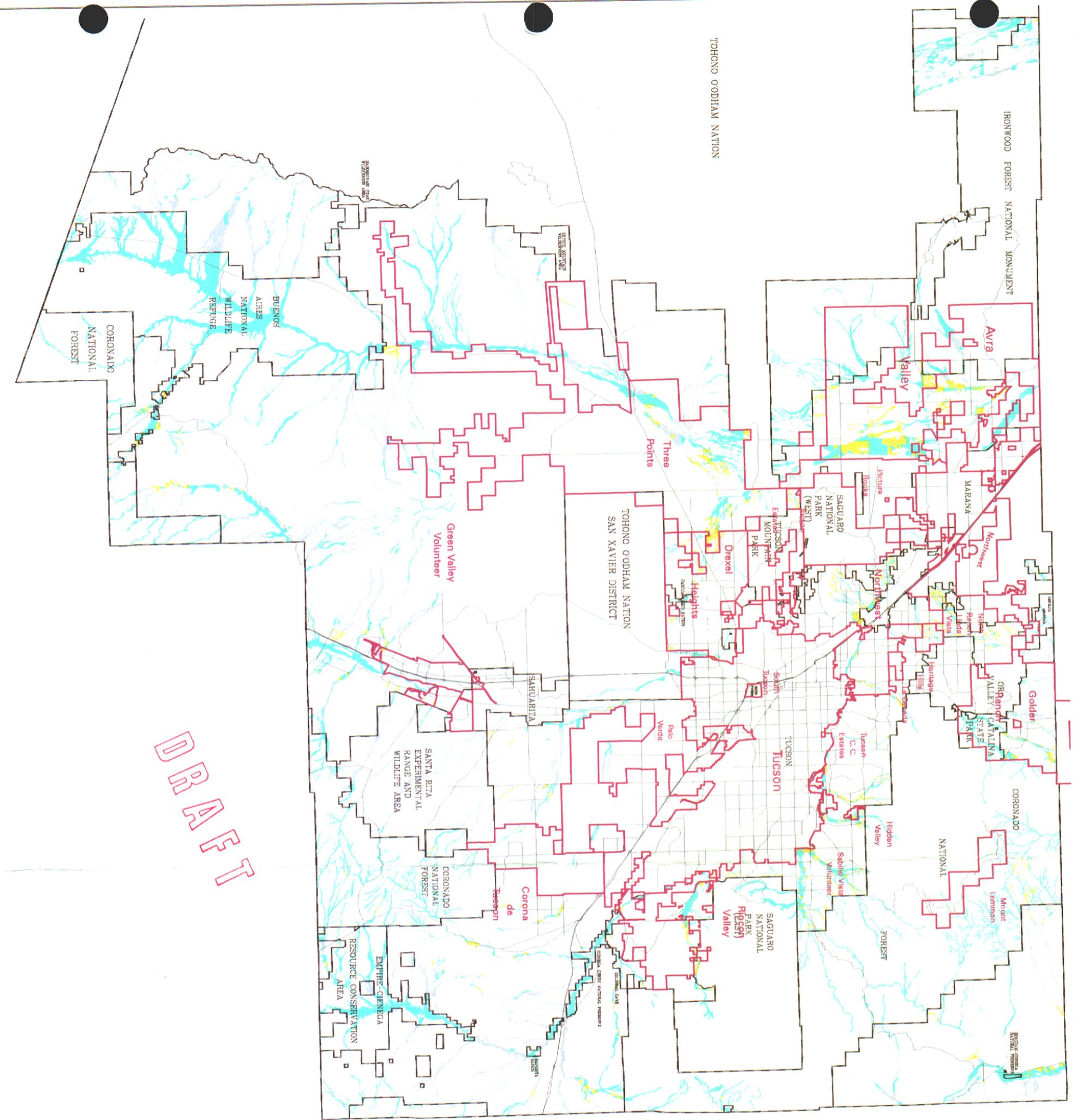
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# Important Riparian Areas And Fire Management

-  Fire Districts
-  Administrative Boundaries
-  Major Streets
-  Important Riparian Areas in Unincorporated Eastern Pima County
-  Private Vacant Parcels
-  State Trust Vacant Parcels



Pima County Index Map  
Index Map Scale 1:1,500,000

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