

PIMA COUNTY
RESOLUTION NO. 2000- 63

**A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF PIMA COUNTY, ARIZONA
TO PURSUE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A RAGGED TOP AND SILVERBELL MOUNTAINS
IRONWOOD PRESERVE CONSISTENT WITH THE SONORAN DESERT CONSERVATION PLAN**

WHEREAS, on March 2, 1999, the Board adopted the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan in concept; and

WHEREAS, the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan is the largest and most comprehensive regional multi-species conservation plan in the United States; and

WHEREAS, on December 3, 1998 the Board entered into Resolution 1998-250 with the Secretary of the Interior to:

(1) support the underlying purpose of the Endangered Species Act which is to provide a means whereby the ecosystems upon which endangered species and threatened species depend may be conserved, and

(2) work with the Department of the Interior to develop the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan; and

WHEREAS, in addition to addressing species conservation and federal compliance issues through protection of Critical Habitat along with other Sensitive Habitat and Corridors, the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan encompasses six planning elements, including Riparian Restoration, Mountain Park expansion, Ranch Conservation, and Cultural and Historic Preservation; and

WHEREAS, under the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, 108 vulnerable species are being considered for protection, including 24 federally listed, proposed and candidate species, and including the endangered cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl; and

WHEREAS, under the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, 12 habitat types and 20 plant communities are being considered for protection, including riparian habitat which has been substantially degraded; and

WHEREAS, recent scientific findings published in the *Desert Ironwood Primer* establish the importance of ironwood as a habitat modifying keystone species and nurse plant that has a role in supporting the biodiversity of over 500 Sonoran Desert species, including the endangered cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl; and

WHEREAS, the ironwood-bursage habitat in the Silverbell Mountains of Pima County is associated with 674 species, including 64 mammals and 57 bird species; and

WHEREAS, *Desert Ironwood Primer* establishes that within the Sonoran Desert the Ragged Top site ... contributed the highest levels of species richness of the study; and

WHEREAS, additional findings that emphasize the importance of Ironwood to the Sonoran Desert ecosystem include that:

- ▶ “Ironwood generates a chain of influences on associated understory plants, affecting their dispersal, germination, establishment, and rates of growth. ... Ironwood is the dominant nurse plant in some subregions of the Sonoran Desert;” and
- ▶ “The mere presence of ironwood and other legume trees can increase the number of bird species in desertscrub habitat by 63%;” and
- ▶ “Recent studies show that without the protective cover of the desert legumes, the distributional ranges of saguaro, organ pipe, and senita cactus would retreat many miles, to more southern, frost-free areas;” and
- ▶ “Protecting ironwood habitat in Pima County, Arizona, will benefit a different mix of native species than would be conserved in ironwood habitats currently being protected on the islands or coasts of the Gulf of California;” and
- ▶ “North of the U.S. - Mexico border, the highest ironwood densities we recorded per hectare came from Arizona Uplands sites in Pima County (Ragged Top, 35 trees/ha; Cocoraque and Saguaro National Park West 22 trees/ha);” and

WHEREAS, the United States offers limited protection for ironwood, compared to Mexico, despite the importance of the ironwood stands to the species itself, and to the larger Sonoran Desert system; and

WHEREAS, the Ragged Top and Cocoraque Rock areas are identified by the science community as priorities for new protection and for strengthened conservation management; and

WHEREAS, the importance of cultural resources within the area has been established and includes a wide variation of petroglyph sites in the Ragged Top and Silverbell Mountains; and

WHEREAS, in addition to its valuable rock art sites, the Cocoraque Butte, listed in the National Register, is considered to be a traditional cultural place by the Tohono O’odham and Hopi Nations; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management administers a large quantity of land in the Silverbell Mountains region of Pima County northwest of the Tucson Basin; and

WHEREAS, in addition to actions at the local level, Pima County proposes that federal protections could be achieved through the establishment of a Ragged Top and Silverbell Mountains Ironwood Preserve; and

WHEREAS, the Ironwood forest has served as a quiet but enormously important protector of species diversity within the Sonoran Desert; and

WHEREAS, preserve status, up to and including a National Monument designation would serve to honor this species for its role in upholding the ecosystem and the Preserve would achieve practical conservation goals that are necessary to promote the recovery of the endangered pygmy-owl; and

WHEREAS, Pima County has a longstanding demonstrated interest in open space protection and conservation objectives that reflect quality of life values important to the Southwestern United States and Arizona; and

WHEREAS, federal support for the Ragged Top and Silverbell Mountains Ironwood Preserve confirms the importance to communities of balancing natural and economic resources;

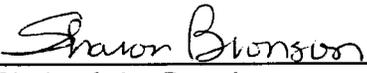
NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF PIMA COUNTY, ARIZONA, as follows:

Requests that the United States of America through the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, consistent with the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, work cooperatively with Pima County to establish the Ragged Top and Silverbell Ironwood Preserve in the Silverbell Mountains.

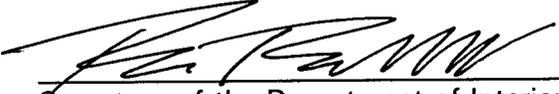
PASSED AND ADOPTED THIS 21st day of March, 2000.

PIMA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

WITNESSED BY:



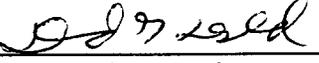
Chair of the Board



Secretary of the Department of Interior

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

ATTEST:



Deputy County Attorney



Clerk of the Board