

## ***A Blueprint for Pima County's Future:***

*Creating a Healthy Landscape, Vibrant Economy, and Livable Community*

An unprecedented opportunity awaits Pima County residents—the chance to build a healthy future for our community by implementing **four significant initiatives**:

- The **Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan** will provide us with the foundation for planning which lands to protect and which lands will be appropriate for growth;
- **Reforming the management of State Trust Lands** will protect environmentally-sensitive land surrounding Tucson and simultaneously improve education funding and the quality of urban development on state lands that are sold for development;
- **Urban planning in the City of Tucson** will improve the framework for urban growth using existing infrastructure while strengthening our City's core; and
- Passage by voters of the **Open Space Bond (Question #1) May 18 2004**, which will provide necessary funding for these initiatives to begin.

These four initiatives form the *Blueprint* for Pima County. Unlike at any other time in our County's history, the choices we make now will create our future: continue the status quo of unplanned growth, loss of community character, and destruction of open space; or choose a balanced approach to development, conservation, and planning, which together provide the *Blueprint* for a healthy landscape, vibrant economy, and livable community far into the future.

### ***Why We Must Act Now***

We see the change around us every day. Pima County's growth rate is more than double the national average: an increase of more than 39 percent since 1990. Our population is projected to top 1.2 million residents in less than 20 years, while vital resources such as clean water, air, and open space are dwindling.

A 2001 study indicates that Tucson's projected water supply can only sustain a population of approximately two million people.

The strength of our economy is tied to the open spaces, scenic views, and opportunities for outdoor recreation that attract people and businesses here. At the same time, a prosperous economy is necessary in order to generate the funding needed to protect our natural heritage and enhance our quality of life.

By implementing the four points in the *Blueprint* now we can create:

A healthy landscape -

- Healthy rivers and watersheds for groundwater recharge;
- Protection of wildlife habitat and endangered species; and
- Protection of scenic views.

A vibrant economy -

- Certainty for landowners and businesses through planned growth areas;
- Fair and consistent regulations; and
- Increased community wealth by attracting new businesses and tourism.

A livable community -

- World-class opportunities for outdoor recreation;
- Clean air and water; and
- Reasonable taxes by spreading the cost of conservation and economic development over the broadest possible base.

## Four Components of the *Blueprint*

### **Pima County Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan**

Five years ago, Pima County leaders embarked upon what has become one of the leading regional conservation planning efforts of its kind. The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan provides a foundation for balancing growth with the protection of wildlife habitat, endangered species, and cultural resources in eastern Pima County. The Plan's components have been developed over the past five years by the County and more than 500 community members, including teams of expert representatives in recreation, ranching, science, and cultural resources; eighty members of a citizen steering committee; fourteen government agencies; and over 400 public meetings.

The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan has six conservation elements: Ranch, Mountain Parks, Cultural and Historic Resources, Riparian, Habitat, and Corridors.

The Habitat and Corridor elements will provide the structure for planned growth and conservation of open space through four tools:

1. **the Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan**, which identifies and protects at-risk species and their habitat;
2. **the Conservation Lands System**, which identifies conservation and growth areas, and proposes conservation goals for areas with high ecological values;
3. **Habitat Protection Priorities**, which identifies areas to set aside permanently as open space through outright acquisition for protection or purchase of development rights; and
4. **a funding plan**, including the sale of general obligation bonds—the **Open Space Bond – (Question #1 on the May 18, 2004 ballot)**—and matching federal and state dollars.

These four elements are linked. To meet its requirements under the Section 10 Permit, Pima County's Multi-Species Conservation Plan will be implemented consistent with the Conservation Lands System and through the preservation of lands identified as Habitat Protection Priorities. The preservation of these lands will be made possible, in part, through funding from the sale of general obligation bonds, if approved by voters this May.

The Conservation Lands System was adopted in December 2001 as the Environmental Element of the Pima County's Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update and is already being implemented by Pima County. It provides guidelines for land use proposals requiring legislative action by the Board of Supervisors, but does not alter, diminish or effect existing valid land uses.<sup>1</sup> The Conservation Lands System assigns conservation goals to lands within the system that contain high ecological values. These conservation goals vary from protection of 95 percent of identified lands for riparian areas to 30 percent in urbanizing areas.

Development impacts to the lands included in the Conservation Lands System are projected to amount to 7,000 acres during the first 10 years, 34,000 acres during the second 10 years, and

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<sup>1</sup> Pima County Comprehensive Plan Update, adopted December 2001.

110,000 acres at buildout.<sup>2</sup> These will be mitigated through the preservation of lands identified as Habitat Protection Priorities. The Habitat Protection Priorities narrowed down the lands identified in the Conservation Lands System for the purpose of prioritizing the lands that should be acquired or preserved first. These lands will be permanently protected by purchasing land outright, purchasing the development rights to the land, and through management agreements with landowners. It was recommended that at least half of the funding for the protection of these lands should come from publicly funded resources,<sup>3</sup> such as the bond election in May 2004.

Key provisions outlined in the Pima County's draft Multi-Species Conservation Plan provide economic certainty for the business community by identifying areas suitable for growth to occur (land outside the Conservation Lands System).<sup>4</sup> In turn, identifying areas suitable for preservation (lands inside the Conservation Lands System) provides the opportunity to protect ecologically sensitive lands, vulnerable species, water, working landscapes, recreation, and viewsheds that attract tourists and new business. [See map]

By permanently protecting wildlife habitat and open space with high conservation value as identified by the Plan's nationally acclaimed science team (led by University of Arizona scientists), there will be a direct, positive impact on reducing regulatory burdens on development. This enhances economic certainty for landowners and businesses by identifying areas suitable for growth while protecting ecologically sensitive lands and ultimately protecting our water, working ranches, recreation, and open space that attract tourists and new businesses.

*For more information see [www.pima.gov](http://www.pima.gov).*

### **State Trust Land Reform**

The 1910 federal legislation that granted statehood to Arizona gave the new state over 10 million acres of State Trust Lands to fund certain beneficiaries, primarily public schools. Today the State manages about 9.3 million acres in order to maximize revenue for education and other public institutions. (Public schools are the primary beneficiary, while universities, prisons, and state hospitals are minor beneficiaries). The policies and mandates that govern these lands are nearly a century out of date and unable to protect the community and conservation values inherent in these lands. A diverse group of Trust Land stakeholders, including the Sonoran Institute and County and City governments, have negotiated a proposed reform package that will generate more revenue for education while also improving land-use planning and protecting important conservation lands threatened by growth. Advocates for reform include representatives from the education community, the Arizona State Land Department, conservationists, cities and counties, builders, developers, and ranchers.

State Trust Lands constitute a significant percentage of land on Tucson's urban edge and if made available would accommodate much of the region's urban growth, although they contain

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<sup>2</sup> Pima County Economic Analysis Section 10 Permit, p. 3, Acres of Habitat Impacted Outside the Built Environment, Biologically Preferred Alternative if Section 10 Permit is obtained and zoning changes are made to allow development to follow market realities.

<sup>3</sup> Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan Steering Committee Report to Pima County Board of Supervisors, June 13, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Draft Pima County Multi-Species Conservation Plan, January 2004.

significant acreage with high conservation value. The City of Tucson annexed 26 square miles of state trust land south of Interstate 10 in 2001, an area now referred to as the Southlands.

In Pima County, nearly 265,000 acres of trust land have been identified for conservation in the reform package. Of that, 95,000 acres will be protected permanently by having them removed from “disposable” category; these lands overlap by 76 percent with lands identified in the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan as high and secondary priority state trust lands for protection. The remaining 170,000 acres of protected trust land will be categorized as “suitable for conservation” and available for sale at market value to municipalities or federal agencies; of these, 58 percent overlap with lands identified in the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan as high and secondary priority state trust lands for protection.

The proposed reform package, which needs to pass the State legislature this spring and be approved by voters in the fall, includes the following elements:

- The existing statutory framework, including the Urban Lands Act and Arizona Preserve Initiative, as well as applicable elements of Growing Smarter, will be merged into a unified planning and disposition framework for trust lands statewide.
- A total of 674,870 acres will be protected statewide; in Pima County, this includes 287,706 acres of trust land that will be permanently protected for conservation and 387,000 acres of trust land will be categorized as suitable for sale for conservation purposes.
- The Trust will become adequately funded as well as self-supporting so it can accomplish the reform goals.
- A new Board of Trustees will set policy for the Land Department, approve annual budgets, approve conceptual land plans prepared in conjunction with general and comprehensive plans of local communities, approve 5-year land sale plans, and oversee major sales.
- Grazing lease policy would change to impose greater accountability for land management and conservation on lessees while providing incentives such as longer-term leases and removal of the threat of competitive bidding.
- Exchange authority between the Land Department and other public bodies will be authorized in order to facilitate the conservation of certain “priority exchange” lands with significant conservation value.

State Trust Land reform will further the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan in three ways:

1. **Providing** sensible reforms for improving the planning of state land sales and leases that better reflect Pima County’s conservation and urban design goals;
2. **Enhancing stewardship and oversight** of State Trust Land that is leased for grazing, and thus better restoring and protecting significant ranchlands identified in the Plan as having high conservation value; and
3. **Immediately protecting specific environmentally-important lands**, and designating others for their conservation value; a total of 265,000 acres in Pima County.

*See the Sonoran Institute’s State Trust Land Program on our Web site [www.sonoran.org](http://www.sonoran.org).*

## **Improving Our City with *Building from the Best of Tucson***

In addition to planning provided through the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan and reforming the management of State Trust Lands, we must encourage quality development within the City of Tucson where much of the future growth can and should occur. We must find a way to balance quality infill development by creating more livable neighborhoods inside our established urban area with development at the urban edge.

The Sonoran Institute and the City of Tucson have partnered since 2001 on a program called **Building from the Best of Tucson**. The program achieves its goal of a vibrant, livable city that is surrounded by healthy, connected landscapes by creating and implementing:

- Urban policies that encourage high civic quality infill development;
- Downtown revitalization;
- Regionally appropriate architecture; and
- Diverse neighborhoods.

An education component, the Tucson Community Design Academy, provides builders, architects, neighborhood activists, and city staff with the knowledge and tools needed to implement the goals.

**Building from the Best of Tucson** also includes projects that demonstrate how urban planning can be successful—especially for State Trust Lands at the City’s southeast edge. For example, the City of Tucson, Sonoran Institute, and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy are working together in this area on the Houghton Area Master Plan to demonstrate protection of open space, mixed commercial and residential uses, pedestrian and bicycle friendly streets and pathways, and informed decision-making about infrastructure improvements and how to pay for them. The Houghton Area Master Plan is a 10,000 acre region of mostly State Trust Land identified as a major growth area for the City of Tucson. The partners are investigating the City’s “Desert Village” concept and working with the Arizona State Land Department to plan this area which could then serve as template for growth and development for both the Houghton corridor and 26 square miles of State Trust Lands southwest of Interstate 10 and Houghton Road. If planned well, this land could absorb the majority of Pima County’s growth for the next 30 years.

In addition, the City is creating a vibrant downtown through the Rio Nuevo project, which will result in new businesses, a range of high-end to affordable housing units, and recreational attractions such as science and historical parts. The City has also adopted recommendations for improving urban planning policy, including development of an alternative development review process and adoption of a Tucson Building Resource Rehabilitation Code. These policy changes will provide incentives for developers to create infill projects or to renovate existing buildings.

*For more information, see the Sonoran Institute Web site on *Building from the Best of Tucson* under the Southeast Arizona Program, or the *5 Trends for Tucson* document at [www.ci.tucson.az.us](http://www.ci.tucson.az.us).*

## **Open Space Bond**

For the *Blueprint* to be successful, it must have a funding plan. While the entire Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan requires several funding sources, we can begin now by providing the most important tool for protecting open space— funds to purchase specific important lands.

On May 18, 2004, Pima County residents will have the opportunity to vote yes on \$174 million to fund the purchase of open space: *Question #1 – Sonoran Desert Open Space and Habitat Protection: Preventing Urban Encroachment of Davis-Monthan Air Force Base*. This will be part of a total bond package of \$732 million for law enforcement communication upgrades, community hospital improvements, repairs on an aging sewer system, and other projects. **Even better is that by their structure, property tax rates will not increase to pay off these bonds.** The package also includes tough accountability measures, including annual audits and a citizen oversight committee, to ensure that funds are spent as promised.

**Passing Question #1 on May 18, 2004–Sonoran Desert Open Space and Habitat Protection is the cornerstone of our *Blueprint*,** the key to protecting open space, water resources, recreation opportunities—in short, our quality of life for generations to come.

For more information, see [www.OpenSpaceBond2004.org](http://www.OpenSpaceBond2004.org).

### ***Together, A Plan for Our Future***

With the successful implementation of these four critical conservation and economic initiatives as a *Blueprint*, Pima County will continue to grow as one of the nation's most attractive and livable communities, with connected wildlife habitat, open space, clean air, clean water, and a healthy lifestyle for residents far into the future. **These initiatives are bold, and they will need your support.**

Never before has our community had the opportunity to guide well-planned growth, strengthen our economic base and educational system, provide a solid city core, and protect our beautiful Sonoran Desert at one time. That opportunity is now before us when we implement this *Blueprint*. The future is in your hands, and we urge you to join us.

Please call the Sonoran Institute for additional information at (520) 290-0828, or visit us on the Web at [www.sonoran.org](http://www.sonoran.org). **Together, we can protect our healthy landscapes, support our vibrant economies, and promote a livable community.**