

Ahwahnee Awards

2 0 0 1
2 0 0 2

Regional
Initiatives



▲ The conservation plan will protect ranch lands as well as wildlife habitats and cultural resources.

Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan PIMA COUNTY, AZ

Desert plan balances nature and growth

“This is an exceptional planning effort by the county and all the cities to save the desert. It is a unique way to curb sprawl.”

– Ahwahnee Awards jury

“Pima County is attempting to find that balance (between natural resources protection and economic consideration) by incorporating into the planning process a public participation program that represents numerous facets of the community.”

– Congressman Jim Kolbe

Most people don't think of the desert as a fast-paced hotbed of activity, but Tucson and surrounding Pima County is one of the fastest growing regions in the United States. But it is also home to more than a dozen threatened and endangered species. As population growth puts increasing pressure on the region, government officials and residents responded with a plan to protect the Sonoran Desert's valuable natural and cultural resources.

The resulting Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan concept, which covers six million acres, takes a regional approach to integrate conservation goals with planning for cultural resources, ranching, parks and open space – and balances them with the land use and infrastructure needs of

rapidly growing greater Tucson communities.

A prime example of smart growth, the plan calls for economic development in a timely, orderly manner and establishes an ample supply of land, both for development and to set aside for meaningful open space and environmental protection.

The plan also entails a cooperative and comprehensive planning effort. Since the County Supervisors first accepted the conservation plan concept in October 1998, 140 public meetings have been held, and County staff have presented the plan at more than 550 meetings. Diverse interests continue to be represented in the process, and adoption of the final plan is expected in 2002.

Regional ecosystems and economy

The conservation reserve system developed for the plan covers all of the six million acres of Pima County outside of the Tohono O'odham Nation, and provides for the conservation of the 56 most vulnerable species as well as the full range of the county's ecosystems and special landscape components.

A key focus in this Conservation Lands System is the framework of linkages: important riparian areas and landscape-scale connections between existing reserves and lands managed for biological conservation.

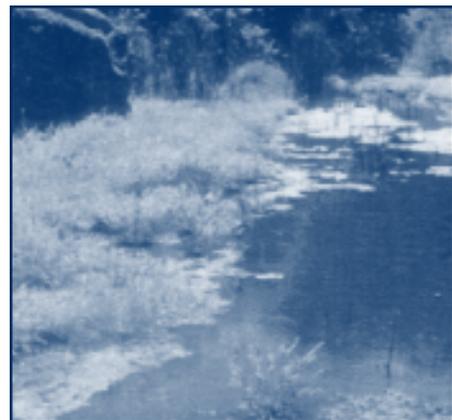
The conservation plan preserves existing regional greenbelts and wildlife corridors, linking them with new and larger regional natural areas – thus providing direction for urban development. The plan defines those areas suitable for developing housing, commercial and industrial uses that require public infrastructure support such as roads and utilities – focusing the delivery of services and avoiding sprawl, leading to

shorter trip lengths, cleaner air, efficient utilities, conserved water, and reduced impacts to critical habitats and scenic landscapes.

The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan focuses on five key elements: ranch conservation; mountain parks; riparian protection; habitat and biological corridor conservation; and cultural and historic resources (only 12% of the planning area has been formally investigated for archaeological and cultural resources).

Ranching is a significant land use in its own right, comprising some 1.4 million acres – about 125 ranches – of eastern Pima County. The Ranch Conservation Element defines the metropolitan urban boundary by preserving ranchlands that represent a vital, regional economic base, vast landscapes of open space, and the rich cultural heritage of the West.

The plan's Riparian Corridor Element reflects a new vision that the community has for its system of riparian corridors, deemed the most threatened and vulnerable of Sonoran Desert environments. It constitutes a comprehensive, region-wide planning effort to protect and restore these riparian ecosystems. The plan encompasses eastern Pima County's growing system of river parks, and lays out a framework for re-establishing native aquatic species. The element also takes advantage of renewable water supplies such as treated effluent and water sources.



▲ New vision for vulnerable riparian corridors

Public participation is high on desert conservation plan

The coalition behind the plan is a broad one, with Pima County, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection, Defenders of Wildlife and Desert Watch just some of the stakeholders involved.

The amount of public participation backing up the plan has been staggering: to date, 140 public meetings on the plan; more than 550 Pima County staff presentations, a steering committee of 84 members, 600 letters and public comments received by the County, a web site (www.co.pima.az.us/sdcp), and a Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan Kids program.

Contact

Maezeen Behan, Project Director
Pima County
130 W. Congress St., 10th floor
Tucson, AZ 85701-1317
520.740.8015
www.co.pima.az.us/sdcp

Ahwahnee Awards

The Ahwahnee Awards were established by the Local Government Commission to recognize exemplary projects and programs that further the creation of livable communities in the 14 western states.

The 2001-02 awards, with funding from Bank of America, were cosponsored by The American Institute of Architects, California Council and the California Chapter of the American Planning Association. This year's award recipients were honored at the New Partners for Smart Growth conference held in January 2002, in San Diego, California.

The awards are named after the Ahwahnee Principles, which were first unveiled in 1991 at Yosemite National Park's Ahwahnee Hotel. The principles call for resource-efficient, livable communities with a diverse and balanced mix of housing, jobs, businesses and recreational activities located within easy walking distance of one another and within regions that preserve agricultural lands and open space. Learn more about the LGC and the Ahwahnee Principles:

www.lgc.org/ahwahnee/principles.html



LOCAL GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION



2001-02 AHWAHNEE AWARDS JURY MEMBERS

Lee I. Lippert, AIA, Secretary, The American Institute of Architects, California Council; Harrison S. Fraker, Jr., FAIA, Dean and Professor, College of Environmental Design, UC Berkeley; Cathy Creswell, Deputy Director, California Department of Housing and Community Development; Bruce A. Race, FAIA, AICP, Principal, Racestudio; Jeffrey Lambert, AICP, President, The California Chapter of the American Planning Association; Judy Corbett, Executive Director, Local Government Commission; Luis Arteaga, Associate Director, Latino Issues Forum; Paul Morris, FASLA, Senior Supervising Landscape Architect, McKeever/Morris, a Division of Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc.