

Friends of the Desert

Issue 47 Spring 2015

A Strong Voice for the People and Wildlife of the Sonoran Desert

Photo: Bob Wenrick

Wildlife Crossings Underway on Oracle Road

Thanks to you, animals big and small will soon be able to cross this busy highway safely!

Can you believe that in a year's time Pima County will have its first vegetated wildlife bridge? This is currently becoming a reality on Oracle Road at milepost 85 where two large walls are in place to support the structure. There will also be a large wildlife underpass a mile south with special fencing on either side of Oracle Road to guide wildlife to the crossings. Because of your support, these structures will be the first of their kind in Pima County to connect the wildlife linkage between the Santa Catalina and Tortolita Mountains. Wildlife like deer, coyote, and mountain lion need these ranges to find resources for survival. When linkages are split by roads, such as Oracle Road, habitat becomes divided and the health of wildlife populations suffer.

The structures are incorporated into the ADOT widening project of Oracle Road from Tangerine Road to the Pinal County line. On March 8th, traffic on Oracle Road switched to the northbound lanes for four months so work can be done on the west side of the crossing structures. A third lane will also be paved. Totalling \$11 million, these structures are paid for by voter approved funds from the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). Without the support of Pima County residents and supporters like you, these structures would not be possible. Community backing

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was a driving force behind this project and now we are seeing the real and positive impact of years of hard work. Thank you!

Another part of the wildlife crossing project is a re-vegetation project at the Santa Catalina Catholic Church property, which abuts the overpass to the south. The church and the Coalition, with member groups Sky Island Alliance and Tucson Audubon Society, are working together on this project. The result will be vegetated screening between the church parking lot and the overpass. This screen will shield wildlife moving

towards the overpass from noise, lights, and other human impacts. The revegetation project will be done in September and will need volunteers from the community.

Our wildlife cameras have photographed thousands of Sonoran Desert wildlife close to Oracle Road. These safe passages are needed more than ever to ensure the

protection of animals and human motorists alike. Lands on the east and west sides of Oracle Road are priorities for acquisition and conservation. We will provide more opportunities for you to advocate for these open spaces so the integrity of the wildlife linkage and crossing structures are preserved. Thanks you for all you have done to make these wildlife crossings a reality and all you continue to do for open space!



A boring construction site? No, it's Pima County's first wildlife bridge taking shape on Oracle Road. Thank you for helping the Sonoran Desert's first wildlife bridge become a reality! Photo by Terry Minks

We Need Your Help!

Please join us in September for a fun re-vegetation project right next to the new wildlife bridge! We'll be creating an important vegetated screen between the parking lot of the Santa Catalina Catholic Church and the wildlife bridge. This screen will shield wildlife moving towards the bridge from noise, lights, and other human impacts. Volunteers will be helping with planting — everyone is welcome! If you can help, please contact Hannah at hannah.stitzer@sonorandesert.org or call our office at (520) 388-9925. Thank you!



Carolyn's Corner

The Time for a Bond Election is Now

Do you want more open space in Pima County? Act today to let Pima County know you support a 2015 Open Space Bond.

You know that we are always very busy here at the Coalition. Protecting the Sonoran Desert is a never-ending job! One of our major tasks is to identify and secure funding to preserve open space and important habitat forever. This has mainly involved local funding through county open space bonds. Right now, we are asking for your help again with this important goal.

Did You Know?

In May of 2004, Pima County voters supported the largest open space funding measure in the region's history, amounting to \$174.3 million. These funds have now been spent. With the funds, Pima County was able to buy and/or manage over 150,000 acres of open space. Thanks to you, we've protected these biologically-rich lands far into the future.

For the last 13 years, I have had the honor of representing Supervisor Richard Elias on the Pima County Bond Advisory Committee, serving as Vice-Chair. After successful bond elections in 2004 and 2006, the Committee began developing a comprehensive bond package. The County's original intent was to present a bond package to voters county-wide in 2008. Yet, 2008 experienced a global economic decline so severe that it has been commonly referred to as the Great Recession. Because of that, the bond package development evolved from a 2-year into a 9-year process.

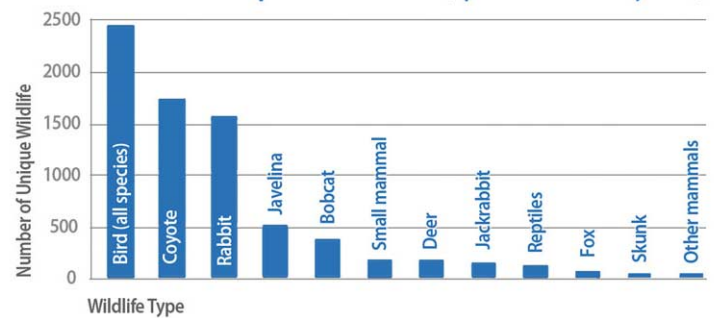
There is a vocal group that doesn't support bond money for open space protection.

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Wildlife like this bobcat and javelina (with young!) can't currently cross Oracle Road safely. With your support, our wildlife cameras have captured thousands of photos of wildlife like these. These photos provide important data supporting the Oracle Road wildlife crossings.

Wildlife Camera Species Abundance (April 2012 – February 2015)



More Cameras, More Critters!

Six more wildlife cameras were recently added, with more to come in 2015

Coyotes, bobcats, and deer! Oh my! Thanks to you, these are just three of the many types of wildlife we've captured with our remote wildlife camera project. Last spring, we added six more cameras to the project. This allowed us to fill in the "gaps" in our coverage areas. These new cameras are now documenting wildlife and gathering important data in

Big Wash, the Canada del Oro Wash, and near the Oracle Road wildlife crossings, which are currently under construction.

We also have the support of 12 new volunteers who are dedicating hundreds of hours of their time. This

brings us to 30 total volunteers! Our cameras are collecting the only pre-construction data of the wildlife crossings and will also gather post-construction data that can be used for comparison.

We aren't stopping with this wildlife linkage, though! By the end of the year, we will be expanding this project into the Tucson and Tortolita Mountains with six more cameras. This is also a critical wildlife linkage threatened by increased development and split by Interstate 10. Gathering wildlife data with cameras is an effective way to advocate for wildlife crossings and the protection of habitat and open space in this area.

You have made the project the amazing success that it is in Oro Valley, and we know we can count on your support moving forward. Expanding the project to the Tucson and Tortolita Mountains will help local conservation efforts and healthy wildlife populations even more. **Thank you!**

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Volunteer Opportunity!

Want to volunteer for the Tucson-Tortolita camera expansion? Contact Hannah.stitzer@sonorandesert.org or call us at 520.388.9925.

What Can You Do?

Attend the April 21st Board of Supervisors Meeting. We need to pack the hall!

During that time, we heard from thousands of citizens expressing their desire for a variety of bond projects. Over these last 9 years, the Committee reviewed about \$3 billion worth of potential projects covering a

broad range of needs. We included monies for natural area conservation and cultural preservation, which together will further implementation of Pima County's legacy, the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. Also included is funding to extend programs for neighborhood reinvestment, affordable housing and job training. But because the target bond package amount was \$650 million, we had to cut or reduce the proposed funding on many of the projects. We cut open space bonds from \$120 million to \$95 million.

You understand the crucial need for open space bond funding. You were there when we asked you to show up and express your support for a fully-funded open space program. And we need you now more than ever. Currently, there is a strong and vocal group that does not believe

We need your continued support of \$95 million open space protection today.

that open space should be a priority. There are also others that will not support any public bonds. I know that you and a majority of our community understand the value of open space for wildlife and humans alike. Unfortunately, it could be an uphill battle this time to secure support. We will need your voice again, we will need you to volunteer, and we will need your financial support.

On April 21, the Board of Supervisors will consider scheduling an election this November. They will also vote on the allocations for each of the bond items. Please join me in showing your support for this bond package and an election this year! And then, I will see you on the campaign trail.



Huge Victory for Wildlife in Marana

After the community protests, the proposed Lazy K Bar development is voted down twice

It's been an interesting few months in Marana for development. Recently, a proposed development, known as Lazy K Bar, was voted down not once, but twice by the Marana Town Council. The proposed Lazy K Bar development is a 138-acre property that would include 178 units. This parcel is only a half mile north of Saguaro National Park west. It is also in a critical wildlife corridor between the Tucson and Tortolita Mountains.

From the start, the Coalition worked with the property owner and neighbors to make the plan wildlife friendly. Enough neighbors opposed the development that Lazy K Bar needed a super majority vote from the Marana Town Council to pass. With one member absent, Councilwoman Patti Comerford voted against the development in October. Having failed, the plan was re-submitted and passed by the Planning Commission and heard again by the Town Council in early January. By this time, the Coalition had agreed on a last-minute set of conditions with the property owner. We were willing to support the development if these conditions were approved. Yet the proposal failed for a second time with Comerford and Carol McGorray voting nay.

The next step for Lazy K bar is uncertain and the proposal has not been re-submitted. For now, the wildlife corridor that encompasses Lazy K Bar is still preserved. This development in particular may show a changing mindset in the local Marana government. There is strong community support to protect important

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The proposed Lazy K Bar development falls within a critical wildlife corridor. Because of your strong support, the Marana Town Council turned down this development twice in recent months. Photo by Patty West

habitat and open space. Decision makers are listening and understanding the consequences of allowing development in important places.

The Coalition has been successful in two other recent developments in Marana. We've been working with property owners to encourage increased sensitivity to wildlife and native vegetation. We are hopeful that responsible decisions will continue to be made in the future to protect the Sonoran Desert in Marana. Thank you for supporting protected natural areas and open space of all sizes!

Save the Date!

Wild and Scenic Film Festival Returns to Tucson August 19 at the Loft Cinema!

Hosted by the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection



WILD & SCENIC[®] FILM FESTIVAL

where activism gets inspired

Do you love the Sonoran Desert?

Attend the April 21 Board of Supervisors to show your support for protecting Sonoran Desert open space!

On Tuesday, April 21, the Pima County Board of Supervisors will be voting on whether to call a bond election in November 2015, including critical funding for open space. We need you to show up to support open space!

Keep your eye out for email Action Alerts or check our website (www.sonorandesert.org) for more details on when and where to show up.

Will you need to say anything? No! Just by showing up, you will be making a difference for open space. Thank you for being an important open space advocate!



The Coalition works to create a community where: ecosystem health is protected; nature and healthy wild animal populations are valued; and residents, visitors, and future generations can all drink clean water, breathe clean air, and find wild places to roam.

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The Coalition is a non-profit alliance of 40 conservation and neighborhood groups. To see a list of all our member groups, please visit sonorandesert.org > About us > Member groups

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