



**Pinal County Open Space Initiative:
Next Step Priorities & Recommendations**



**Pinal Partnership:
Parks, Trails, Open
Space & Public
Lands Committee**

2012 Report



**Rivers, Trails, &
Conservation
Assistance
Program**

**Pinal Partnership:
Parks, Trails, Open Space and Public Lands Committee
Summary Report 2012**

Cyndi Ruehl, Committee Chair & Northern Regional Leader

Gina D'Abella, Western Regional Leader

Celeste Andresen, Eastern Regional Leader

Peter Villaverde, Pinal Partnership Board Member

Executive Summary

Existing open space may be the most valuable infrastructure in Pinal County. Nearly 1.4 million acres of proposed open space, trails and regional parks are identified in the Pinal County Open Space and Trails Master Plan (OSTMP) to meet diverse recreation demands, provide trail connectivity throughout the county, protect critical natural and cultural resources, all to sustain the quality of life the county residents envision. The lands identified in the OSTMP have the potential to save the county money in terms of storm water and watershed management, wildfire management and energy costs by mitigating the effects of urban heat islands. Furthermore, managed open space generates income with working landscapes, recreation and tourism, and increased property values. For these reasons, Pinal Partnership's Parks, Trails, Open Space and Public Lands Committee is committed to supporting implementation of the OSTMP through education, outreach, research and action.

Pinal Partnership is a non-profit corporation that is comprised of private land and business owners, state and federal agencies, municipal and county government representatives, and non-profit corporations. The Partnership's Open Parks, Trails, Open Space and Public Lands Committee (the Committee) has been meeting for over five years to discuss open space successes, opportunities and challenges and ways to assist Pinal County with implementation strategies for the OSTMP and the Comprehensive Plan's open space goals, objectives, and policies. Membership of the Committee is diverse, dedicated and growing. Regular meeting participants include countywide residents and landowners, business, development, and nonprofit leaders, county, state and federal agency staff. Respectful dialogue has been the cornerstone of the monthly Committee meetings, allowing the expression of various ideologies and the understanding of different values of open space. All meeting notes are posted on the Pinal Partnership website www.PinalPartnership.com.

In an effort to encourage participation from a wider variety of community groups, tribal entities, government agencies and private citizens, the Committee created four regional groups to organize local efforts. The Committee was successful in acquiring a technical assistance grant from the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program in August 2011 to help its members coordinate community outreach meetings and assist Pinal County with implementation strategies of the OSTMP at a regional level. The regional groups were coordinated and led by volunteer Committee members.

This report presents background information about the Committee and summarizes key topics from the general Committee and regional meetings held October 2011 to September 2012 to discuss implementation strategies for the adopted OSTMP. All of the recommendations and next step priorities in this report were developed by participants in the general and regional meetings according to the priorities, issues and concerns that they identified and discussed.

In addition to coordinating the regional group effort, the Committee recognized and facilitated discussions about four major open space issues relevant to the entire County:

1. Promoting awareness of the economic benefits of open space;
2. Managing the watersheds and natural drainage corridors as an integral component of the County's infrastructure for storm water management and economic benefit;
3. Identifying low cost opportunities to acquire, develop and maintain parks and trails;
4. Exploring opportunities and need for stewardship coordination and education.

The intent of the following recommendations from the Committee and regional groups is to share the views and values of meeting participants with the County Manager and staff, Board of Supervisors and the Pinal Partnership Board of Directors. Some recommendations are considered critical next steps for effective implementation of the OSTMP and other recommendations can be used to guide decisions on priority open space and recreation areas across the County.

Recommendations to Pinal County

1. Identify additional staff, staff time and/or create a County Parks Department to advance implementation of the County's adopted Open Space and Trails Master Plan and other recreation considerations;
2. Establish a County relationship with the BLM as early as possible to begin R&PP discussions and potential agreements;
3. Manage the watersheds and natural drainage corridors as an integral component of the County's infrastructure for storm water management and economic benefit;
4. Identify and discuss funding options for the acquisition and maintenance of parks, trails, and open space;
5. Request an opportunity for the Arizona Game & Fish Department staff to discuss ways to incorporate results of the upcoming Pinal County Wildlife Connectivity Assessment in current and future County revisions of the OSTMP and Comprehensive Plan;
6. Add a green infrastructure layer that identifies critical washes and streams, important wildlife corridors, protected and other biologically diverse areas, working landscapes and proposed parks and trails to other infrastructure maps and discussions (e.g. utilities and transportation).
7. Become involved in the large-scale conservation issues as they relate to implementation of the Comprehensive Plan and the OSTMP, with specific focus on the current activity of community driven conservation efforts on the San Pedro River ecosystem.

Next Step Priorities for the Committee and Regional Groups

1. Continue to promote increased public awareness of the OSTMP and opportunities to become involved with implementation and stewardship of regional parks, trails and open space;

2. Work with the County to establish a Stewardship Program for management assistance of the proposed Regional Parks and Trails;
3. Immediately identify and build a case for the benefits of a County Parks Department and Advisory Board or Committee for discussion purposes with key decision-makers. Several members of the Committee will help develop concepts for starting a County Parks Department;
4. Collaborate with other Pinal Partnership committees and volunteer groups in the County as a vehicle to bring forward information about economic benefits of open space;
5. Work with the County to identify which natural drainages are critical to preserve for watershed management, storm water management and recreation so that developers will be able to target new development effectively and meet their objectives while protecting important washes;
6. Work with the County and OHV groups to help identify funding opportunities and other ways to assist management entities and landowners to identify and restore areas damaged by illegal OHV activity.

This report is prepared for: the Pinal County Board of Supervisors, the Pinal County Manager and staff, the Pinal Partnership Board of Directors and members, members of the Parks, Trails, Open Space and Public Lands Committee, County residents, interested community organizations and recreation user groups, to increase awareness of, and value for open space in Pinal County. Now is the time to begin implementation of the County OSTMP. The discussions and potential partnerships exist to identify creative ways to reach the clear and strongly articulated community goals and values for open space in Pinal County.

Respectfully submitted by:

The Pinal Partnership: Parks, Trails, Open Space, & Public Lands Committee
Cyndi Ruehl, Chairperson & Northern Region Leader
Gina D'Abella, Western Region Leader
Celeste Andresen, Eastern Region Leader

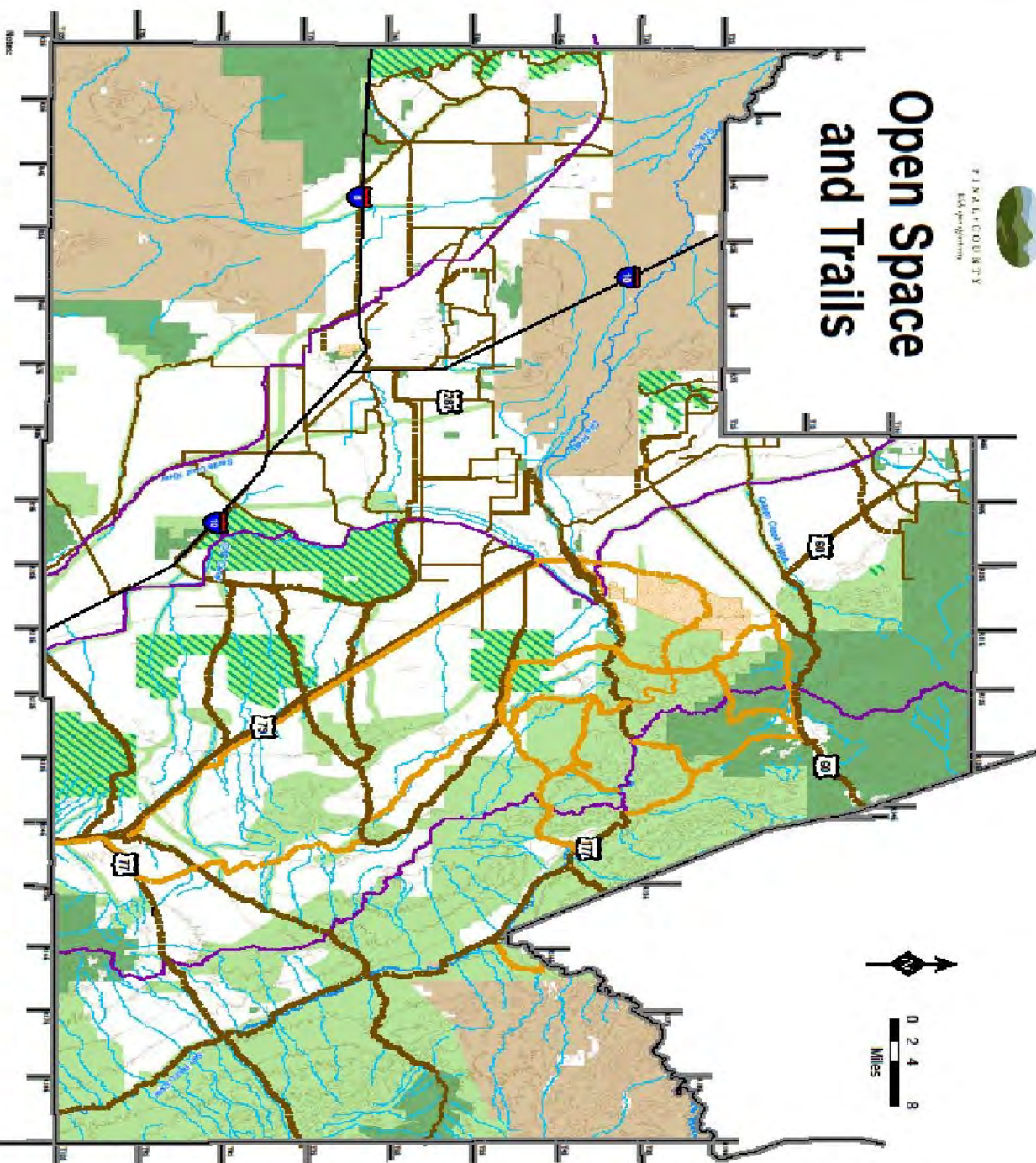
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PINAL COUNTY
His Open Space

Open Space and Trails



Legend

- Open Space and Trails Master Plan
 - Existing/Planned Open Space
 - Proposed Open Space (or 1 out of 2)
 - Existing/Planned or Proposed Regional Park
 - Restored Use Open Space
- Tribal Community
- Interstate Highway
- Topography (600 foot contours)
- Trails
 - Planned/Existing OHV Trail
 - Adopted County Trail Corridor
 - Existing/Planned Multi-Use Trail Corridor
 - Proposed Multi-Use Trail Corridor
 - Proposed OHV Trail Route

1. The Pinal County Comprehensive Plan identifies changes in land classification, adopted development agreements, or planned new development overlay districts that result in private property as of the effective date of the Plan. Any changes are made to land use or planned developments existing at the time this Comprehensive Plan is effective, such changes shall conform to the Pinal County Comprehensive Plan.
2. The land use designations boundaries are located along significant natural or man-made features, whenever possible. Boundary lines are to be considered approximate and discretion may be used in understanding them.
3. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information shown, Pinal County makes no warranty, expressed or implied, as to its accuracy and therefore, expressly disclaims liability for any errors.
4. The General Plan for cities and towns within Pinal County should be used to identify land use with incorporated boundaries. Generalized future land use plans for 2038, based on information provided by the municipalities for incorporated cities and towns are intended for planning purposes.
5. The Pinal County Open Space and Trails Master Plan adopted 2007 and amended as part of this effort provides the base open space network.
6. Designation of private State Trust, or Bureau of Land Management, lands as open space or regional park has no regulatory impact. The designation represents Pinal County's desired future management of the lands if they were acquired or otherwise considered for management as open space or regional park. These lands may be developed subject to applicable planning and zoning regulations.
7. The land use and transportation networks depicted for Superstition Vista are preliminary and conceptual in nature and will be refined through the Superstition Vista planning process. When the planning process is complete, the vision will be considered in the form of an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan.
8. Future roadway corridors reflect general locations where facilities may be located. Actual alignments will be determined by future studies with the results of those studies reflected in Comprehensive Plan updates.
9. Boundary designations shown may change due to the status of potential right-of-way corridors.



Introduction

Existing open space may be the most valuable infrastructure in Pinal County. Nearly 1.4 million acres of proposed open space, trails and regional parks are identified in the Pinal County Open Space and Trails Master Plan (OSTMP) to meet diverse recreation demands, provide trail connectivity throughout the county and protect critical natural and cultural resources. The lands identified in the OSTMP (see map page 7) have the potential to save the county money in terms of storm water and watershed management, wildfire management and energy costs by mitigating the effects of urban heat islands. Furthermore, managed open space can continue to generate income with working landscapes, recreation and tourism. As the economy recovers and development of the Sun Corridor begins to pick up pace, incorporating the natural infrastructure of Pinal County into planning has the potential to contribute tremendously to economic development in the area and quality of life of residents into the future. For these reasons, Pinal Partnership's Parks, Trails, Open Space and Public Lands Committee is committed to supporting implementation of the OSTMP through education, outreach, research and action.

The Pinal Partnership nonprofit organization was formed in 2005 to *“improve research, planning and coordination of private and public efforts related to infrastructure, natural resources and community development in Pinal County.”* The Partnership's Parks, Trails, Open Space and Public Lands Committee holds the mission: *“to promote the value of existing and planned parks, trails, public lands and open space; and to influence stakeholders to plan for and provide an interconnected system of parks, trails, public lands and open space county wide.”*

The Parks, Trails, Open Space and Public Lands Committee (the Committee) has met consistently for over five years to discuss open space successes, opportunities and challenges and to coordinate open space initiative efforts. Commitment of the Committee participants is dedicated, deep and growing, as is its diverse membership (see Appendix page 35). This report provides a background of the OSTMP and recent outcomes of the Committee's regional and county-wide efforts to initiate citizen support and involvement with implementation of the OSTMP.

Background

The OSTMP is an ambitious vision for the County that reflects the views of County residents as well as recreation and natural resource planners and managers. Stakeholder and public meetings were conducted throughout the development of the Plan. Pinal County residents have repeatedly identified the need to establish more parks for a diverse array of recreation opportunities throughout the County. In addition to identifying proposed areas for regional parks, open space and trails, the Plan lays out implementation priority areas, funding resources and potential partners/stakeholders in the “Pinal County Open Space and Trails Master Plan Implementation Program 2007 - 2032” (see Table 4 of the OSTMP, pages 54 to 63).

The 2009 Pinal County Comprehensive Plan incorporates key elements from the Open Space and Trails Master Plan. The Comprehensive Plan “encourages appropriate long range growth planning opportunities, provides for a wide range of recreational activities for residents and visitors, preserves the County’s rural and natural open space character and contributes to the well-being of its communities (Chapter 6 – page 221).”

In the Open Space Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan (Chapter 6), the County identifies three recreation categories and five related goals.

The Chapter 6 recreation categories are:

- Regional Parks – 5 new parks are proposed to provide passive and active recreation opportunities within 30 minutes of anywhere in the County with certain levels of service.
- Open Spaces – that include riparian and mountainous areas, connection corridors for wildlife and trails between existing protected open space areas, and buffers to further protect significant cultural and natural resources.
- Trails – that are intended to provide access through an interconnected trail network.

The Chapter 6 goals are:

- Develop a connected system of open space areas that protect and conserve natural, physical and social resources;
- Develop a safe, multi-use trails system that provides connectivity throughout the County and to adjacent recreational areas;
- Develop an accessible, comprehensive park system that provides a balance of passive and active recreational opportunities for County residents and visitors;
- Improve the quality, quantity and design of open space, park lands and trails in new residential development;
- Encourage coordination and cooperation between adjacent municipalities, agencies, jurisdictions and the public in open space, park and trail development.

Members of the Committee participated in the stakeholder meetings and data gathering process of the OSTMP. The Committee has also played a leadership role in two countywide open space workshops. The first in September 2010 was co-sponsored by Arizona Land and Water Trust, Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection, Friends of Ironwood Forest, Sonoran Institute, Tucson Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, Pinal Partnership, Stanely Consultants and held at Central Arizona College in Coolidge. The 175 attendees at the workshop represented land owners, agencies, nonprofits, universities and community colleges, recreation user groups, elected officials and others. Goals for the first workshop included:

- Education and awareness of working organizations, conservation tools and the County’s OSTMP;
- Highlighting open space success stories (how others across the state Implemented open space and trails) and enhancing understanding of the economic benefit of open space;

- Collaboration through regional breakout sessions to explore local importance of open space to regional stakeholders (e.g., property values, protection of the San Pedro River, tourism opportunity, watershed management, etc.).

The four regional breakout groups discussed connections between: 1) open space and quality of life, 2) identified the highest priority areas of interest, 3) explored implementation tools for the OSTMP (including working relationships with BLM and the State Land Department, regular interactions with the County Board of Supervisors, open space maintenance issues and OHV use management, etc), 4) proposed ideas to increase awareness and promote civic leadership of the County OSTMP among residents, and 5) expanded partnerships related to open space protection in the County.

The second countywide open space gathering held in January 2011, was convened by the Committee at Central Arizona College in Coolidge with 63 attendees. Outcomes from this round table workshop included:

- Formation of action-oriented regional groups to strategize OSTMP implementation and build diverse and effective partnerships;
- Creation of a mechanism to share open space education and information between user groups, landowners and land managers, (e.g. the Pinal Partnership website committee page);
- Augmentation of the Pinal Partnership Open Space Initiative to protect and conserve wildlands in eastern County;
- Exploration of maintenance strategies for open space lands and use regulations to enforce good stewardship.

The success of the Pinal Partnership Open Space Initiative Workshops in September 2010 and January 2011 set the stage for the Committee to move forward with a regional effort to initiate localized citizen participation in open space discussions and projects. As a result of the workshops, four regional groups (Northern, Western, Central and Eastern) were established to encourage broader and more convenient geographic participation.

To boost organization, strategic planning efforts and community involvement, the Committee applied for and received a grant from the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (NPS-RTCA) in August 2011. For one year (October 2011 to September 2012), NPS-RTCA provided facilitation and other coordination support to the regional groups and the general Committee monthly meetings.

This report and its findings reflect a collaborative effort from members of the general committee, regional groups, and associated sub-committees. Participants represented both the public and private sectors, including private land and business owners, state and federal agencies, municipal and county government representatives and non-profit organizations.

Regional Meeting Process

Four regions within the County were established to make participation easier and broaden community involvement with the open space discussion. Facilitated meetings began in October 2011 with assistance from the National Park Service RTCA Program and the Arizona Land & Water Trust (ALWT). Four participants from the general Committee meetings agreed to coordinate/host the monthly regional meetings.

The goals for the regional meetings were three-fold:

1. To increase awareness of the Open Space and Trails Master Plan throughout the County and encourage more participation in the discussions;
2. To learn more about existing recreation activities on the proposed Regional Parks, Open Spaces and Trails identified in the County's Comprehensive Plan; and
3. To identify other desired recreation opportunities and concerns in those same proposed places.

Raising awareness of the Comprehensive Plan and the OSTMP within the County was a major goal for all the regional meetings. Facilitators encouraged respectful discussions from all participants by acknowledging the understanding of different values and perspectives for open space and specific areas of interest. Using the Open Space and Trails Master Plan map (p.52 of the OSTMP), and the goals of the Plan, the regions focused their discussions on the proposed regional parks, open spaces and trails documented in their specific areas. Some regions also developed vision statements by which to guide their discussions.

Participants at the regional meetings were instructed how to access the County Comprehensive Plan on-line and they were provided a copy of Chapter 6 from the Plan to become familiar with the information, goals and objectives regarding open space. Furthermore, meeting facilitators provided participants with excerpts from the adopted Open Space and Trails Master Plan, including the long-term Implementation Program. Additional maps of the proposed open spaces, regional parks and trails were also made available during meetings.

Monthly meetings were advertised and open to the public. An agreed upon agenda was facilitated for orderly comments and contributions. Meeting notes were circulated widely via email to those who could not, or chose not to attend. All meeting notes are posted to the Pinal Partnership website www.PinalPartnership.com. Regional leaders also reported on the activities and interests of their groups at the monthly meetings held by the Committee in Florence.



PARKS, TRAILS, OPEN SPACE, PUBLIC LANDS COMMITTEE

Working to bring together a diverse and action-oriented group of public and private stakeholders willing to collaboratively prioritize and preserve open space throughout Pinal County by using the County's Open Space and Trails Master Plan as the roadmap.

REGION CONTACTS

Region 1 - Gina D'Abella

learth@cox.net

Region 2 - Cyndi Ruehl

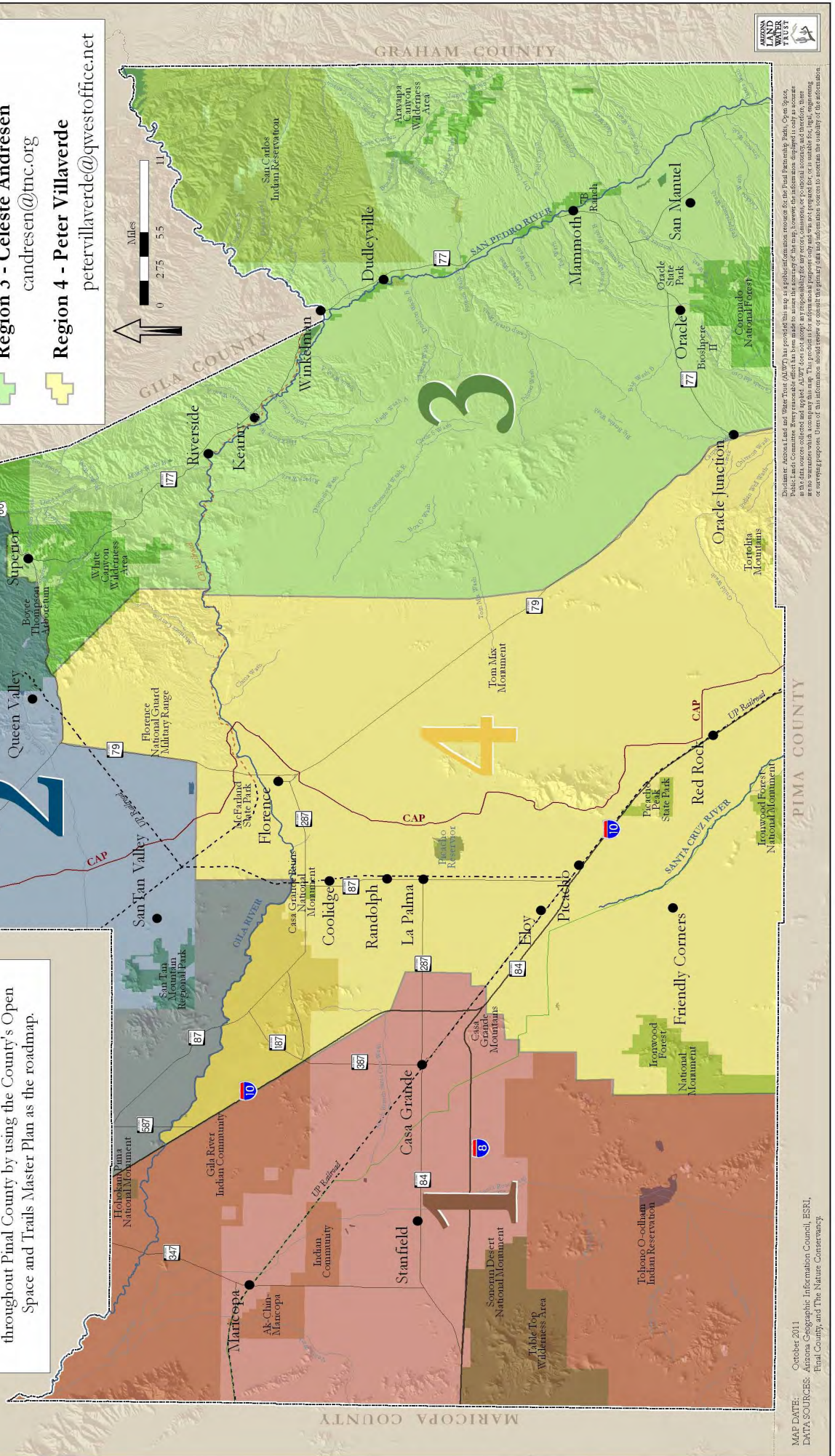
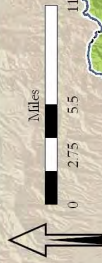
cyndiruehl@msn.com

Region 3 - Celeste Andresen

candresen@tmc.org

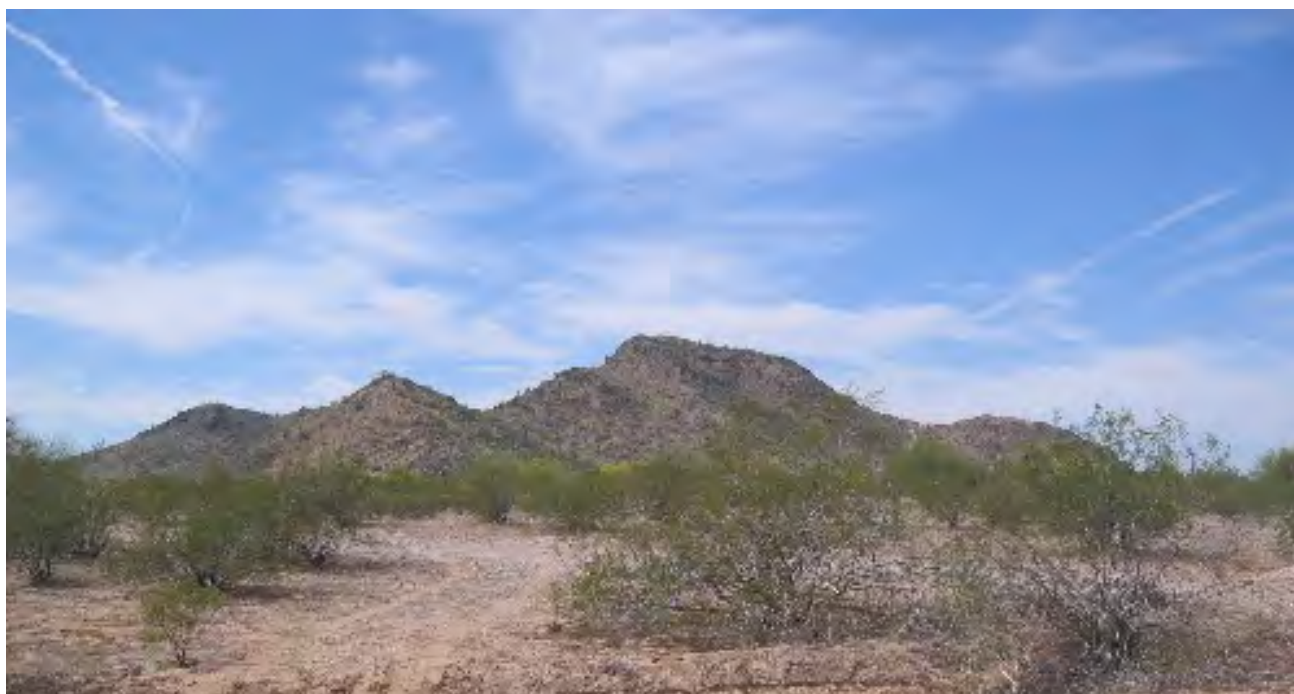
Region 4 - Peter Villaverde

petervillaverde@questoffice.net



Western Region Overview & Background

The Western Region shares its western border with Maricopa County, its eastern border with the City of Casa Grande, its northern border with the Gila River Indian Community and its southern border with the Tohono O'odham Nation. This region is generally rural with two major population clusters in Casa Grande (2010 US Census population 48,571) and the City of Maricopa (2010 US Census population 43,482). Both the City of Casa Grande and the City of Maricopa have Open Space, Trails & Parks Plans and Parks Departments. The Western Region participants focused efforts on connectivity of trails and open spaces from the "unincorporated" areas of their region. Gina D'Abella, Executive Director of ECO, Inc. (Environmental Concerns Organization, Inc.) served as the regional convener and leader for this group.



A total of 61 people participated in the Western Region monthly meetings, of which approximately 15 participants consistently attended. Participants strategized goals and desired outcomes. The group focused efforts on:

- Familiarizing the participants with the County's OSTMP, emphasizing the Regional Park and Open Space priorities located in the Western Region;
- Identifying a vision statement to guide strategic planning in the Region;
- Documenting existing and desired recreational uses in Proposed Regional Park #4 and Open Space #7;
- Determining the identified "Needs" to foster community support for the Plan and recommendations for implementation of the OSTMP in Western Pinal County;
- Identifying the next step priorities for the Western Region Group.

Western Region Vision Statement

"The Pinal County Western Region Open Space Group provides a collaborative mechanism for citizen input and advocacy for recommendations and implementation of parks, trails, and open space to preserve an interconnected latticework of natural landscapes that will provide a safe, quality outdoor experience through a well-planned and managed system for present and future generations."

Western Region Year One Outcomes

During the year-long process, consideration was given to the interconnectivity of the County's OSTMP in relation to the proposed trails and open spaces within tribal lands, municipalities and their planning areas. Both the City of Maricopa and Casa Grande represented their own Parks, Trails and Open Space Plans and Departments and participated in the process. The Western Region group identified Proposed Regional Park #4 and Open Space #7 in the OSTMP as the largest and most utilized open space areas (totaling approx. 26,100 acres) in the "unincorporated" Western Pinal County area. To familiarize attendees with Proposed Regional Park #4 and Open Space #7, the group organized a Field Trip.

Observations: Proposed Regional Park #4

Proposed Regional Park #4 comprises 23,000 acres of mostly BLM land that spans from Highway 238 to the north and I-8 to the south. The proposed park shares a western border with Maricopa County and the eastern border is mostly private land with a couple of State Trust land parcels. Existing recreational uses include: equestrian activity, hiking, off road vehicle use, recreational shooting and hunting. Although the OSTMP does not provide for OHV use or trails in this area, after discussions it was concluded there is a need to incorporate a managed space for OHV use to insure the safety of the other recreational uses of the park, as well as preserving the biodiversity of the region. Two locations were identified that could potentially facilitate a managed OHV recreational use.



Other recreational needs/uses for the Proposed Regional Park #4 were: camping, picnicking, archery, and mountain biking. All of which can be accommodated within the proposed park boundaries. Suggested trailheads and locations for all recreational uses were documented by the participants on a map of the proposed park.



Observations: Proposed Open Space #7 The Vekol Wash



The Vekol Wash has historical and cultural significance to the local residents and tribal nations. The wash is an important ephemeral riparian corridor that flows Northward from the Mexican border, through the Tohono O'odham Nation, private, State and federal lands and then enters the region through the Proposed Regional Park #4. It passes through mostly private land with a small section of County land. It completes its journey by entering the Ak-Chin Indian Reservation and runs into the Santa Cruz Wash Basin, which flows through the Gila River

Indian Community to the Gila River. The Vekol Wash has historically been utilized as a migration corridor for humans and wildlife. It is heavily used by the equestrian community, OHV enthusiasts, recreational shooters, and illegal dumpers. Hundreds of tons of illegally dumped tires and trash have been cleaned-up from this area over the past fifteen years by volunteers and non-profit environmental groups. Illegal dumping is an ongoing challenge in the Western Region.

The Western Region group documented existing trailheads used by the community to enter into the Vekol Wash and met with an equestrian group that manages an arena on County land adjacent to one of the commonly used trailheads into the wash. The Thunderbird Arena Community Council (TACC), a local nonprofit, is organizing development of the County owned arena at Ralston Road and the Vekol Wash (see photos of TACC's organized activities at the arena on page 16). The ways in which current recreational uses and access points into the wash affect the hydrology of the area needs to be studied. Partnering with this and other local recreational groups for the acquisition and preservation of the Vekol Wash (Proposed Open Space #7) is an integral part of the interconnectivity of this trail for the Region.



JB



JB



Western Region Needs Identified

- Increase Awareness about the County's Plan and recreation opportunities in western Pinal County;
- Develop partnerships for implementation of the OSTMP;
- Recruit and cultivate volunteers for leadership in open space and trails issues.

Western Region Next Step Priorities

1. Develop an action agenda with tasks/products/events to be completed in the short term to keep public interest high and expand community involvement:
 - Identify and support community champions for open space;
 - Establish a Speaker's Forum to communicate information about the Plan;
 - Determine the feasibility of creating a non-profit stewardship group;
 - Present findings and the Summary Report to elected and appointed bodies of various jurisdictions;
 - Continue community outreach about the Plan: post regional and general Open Space Committee updates on the Pinal Partnership website and other jurisdictions' websites; engage the Chambers of Commerce; get more print media coverage;
 - Get youth involved (i.e. City of Maricopa Youth Council, schools, clubs);
 - Schedule more community field trips and/or recreation events to get people out to see our open spaces (horse riding, mountain biking, guided hikes, photography clubs, etc.);
 - Create media information for community events (clean-ups, picnics, etc.);
 - Identify and attend other community events with table/booth, information, and activity sign-up sheets.
2. Pursue opportunities to help identify and resolve management issues in Proposed Regional Park #4 and Open Space #7 - to assist the County with the R&PP process and to minimize the degradation of the Vekol Wash watershed and eco-system:
 - Recommend the designation of a County staff person to work with the Western Region Group and other conservation and stewardship groups on implementation strategies for the OSTMP;
 - Work with other jurisdictions to develop a consistent open space signage image/system/plan in the County for recreation, information, maps, etc.
 - Identify and develop partnerships with community groups and corporate sponsors (i.e. Scouts, REI);
 - Partner with jurisdictions and agencies to maximize support, coordinate, information sharing, and resource pooling for the management of recreational areas and open space and trail plan implementation.

Northern Region Overview and Background

Northern Pinal region includes the area north of the Gila River in the San Tan Valley up to Apache Junction, east to Gold Canyon and Queen Valley and the Tonto National Forest and west of Highway 79 south to Arizona Farms Road. This area is mostly rural with two major population clusters, Apache Junction/Gold Canyon and the San Tan Valley, as well as the state trust lands known as Superstition Vistas south of Gold Canyon. Cyndi Ruehl served as the regional convener and leader for this group.

Two regional parks are proposed in the Northern region – Regional Park #5, 480 acres of BLM land off of Peralta Rd., and Regional Park #6, 11,000 acres of BLM land in the San Tan Mountain Park currently managed by Maricopa County under an R&PP lease though the land is in Pinal County. Two trails are also proposed in this region - Trail #2, 80 miles of non-motorized trail following the Central Arizona Project (CAP) Canal located on state trust land, and Trail #5, 15 miles of non-motorized trail connecting the Tonto National Forest at the Arizona Trail east to the CAP Trail and located mostly on state trust land. Additionally, the OSTMP recommends as open space the state trust lands (Superstition Vistas) north of Highway 60 adjacent to the Superstition Wilderness.

Participants of the monthly meetings strategized goals and desired outcomes. Their discussions and efforts focused on:

- Becoming familiar with the County's Open Space and Trails Master Plan;
- Identifying a vision statement to guide strategic planning in the region;
- Understanding land ownership of northern Pinal County through mapping;
- Partnering with other interested groups and citizens;
- Exploring issues and opportunities for Regional Park #5 and transfer of Regional Park #6;
- Trail Connectivity;
- Stewardship, involvement and education.



Northern Region Vision Statement

"Instilling values, stewardship, and use of parks, trails, and open space among Pinal County residents, visitors and decision-makers; through

- *Inclusive community-based discussion, collaboration and cooperation; to*
- *Encourage and implement recreational and ecosystem connectivity through creation of these lands; by*
- *Integrating the value of regional landscapes and land-owner rights to optimize economic benefits."*

Northern Region Year One Outcomes

Proposed Regional Park #5, 480 acres of BLM land off Peralta Road in Township 15, Range 5

The group urges the County to begin pursuing the establishment of this proposed Regional Park. Research by the group on proposed Regional Park #5 revealed there are active mining claims. However, other BLM lands with mining claims have been converted to regional parks in the past, for example San Tan Mountain Park. BLM staff made it clear they must work with County staff to provide any information about the property and to begin talking about Recreation and Public Purposes Act (R&PP) lease agreements.

Proposed Regional Park #6: San Tan Mountain Regional Park

This is an established regional park that is currently under management by Maricopa County though the land is in Pinal County. Within the next few years, the BLM lease through the R&PP will expire. Some San Tan residents are pursuing the transfer of the Park into Pinal County management, which would require establishment of a County Parks Department and possibly a parks district. Members of the Northern Region Group have researched the legal and organizational requirements to form a County Parks Department and Parks Advisory Board. The group strongly urges the County to take steps to address these most pressing needs.

Stewardship

One focus area of this group is the stewardship of the public lands in this region. Degradation of lands managed by BLM and the State Land Department by illegal dumping, illegal shooting and illegal OHV abuse is impacting the quality of the resources and quality of life in Pinal County. In March 2012, the Northern Region Group co-sponsored a desert clean-up on BLM and State Trust Land in Apache Junction. More than 70 residents turned out to participate and over 5 tons of trash was cleared and removed. A second clean-up is planned in October 2012 on BLM Land which will include a guided hike on a segment of the historic sheep trail. This segment is also a road once used by President Theodore Roosevelt to travel to the Roosevelt Dam. Educational materials will be provided for this event from local conservation, user, "Friends" and municipal parks and recreation groups. A future clean-up is already being planned for March 2013 as are more clean-ups and other community events to continue public engagement and involvement in open space issues for the northern region. The events have been highly successful in attracting new and interested people.

Trail Connectivity

The Northern Region Group is interested in pursuing trail connectivity from planned and current trails and parks of Apache Junction into the Tonto National Forest, specifically from the city's Silly Mt. Park, as well as connecting the break in the Lost Goldmine Trail which runs horizontal to the Superstition Mountains and connects into Tonto's Jacob Waltz Trail. Research and contact with relevant entities has been started.

Northern Region Needs Identified

- County to pursue the establishment of a Parks Department or some form of administration mechanism by which to accept the transfer of Regional Park #6 and to receive and manage other parts of the OSTMP;
- County to designate a staff person to work on implementation strategies for the OSTMP and implement a communications program with interested groups throughout the County;
- Continue community outreach about the plan and open space issues through events/cleanups, news media, Pinal Partnership websites, other environmental groups' websites, information tables at community events;
- Continue to gather a coalition of interested groups such as the Superstition Horsemen's group, OHV groups, Friends of Lost Dutchman State Park, Chambers of Commerce;
- Develop a speakers forum locally.



Northern Region Next Step Priorities

1. Pursue Regional Park #5, exploring the use of R&PP through the County;
2. Pursue the transfer of Regional Park #6 to Pinal County;
3. Create an educational series, and dovetail with events such as the Superstition Museum and open space brochure distribution;
4. Pursue trails as stated above and further explore connectivity to Utery Mountains at Meridian and Silly Mountain to Broadway west of Mountain View Rd. along the power line;
5. Continue to create events to keep people interested and involved in the OSTMP and open space issues;
6. Develop informational material to circulate at community events and related group meetings;
7. Contact the high schools to have a student coordinate a "Get Kids Out on Trails" event;
8. Pursue options for drainage and wash protection especially as connected to the Superstition Mountains.

Eastern Region Overview and Background

Eastern Pinal County includes the area from Oracle, north toward Superior, including the lower San Pedro River, and a portion of the Gila River. It also includes a portion of the San Carlos Indian Reservation, and a huge area of rural land between AZ Highways 79 and 77 that includes the towns of Oracle, San Manuel, Mammoth, Dudleyville, Winkelman, Hayden, Kelvin, and Kearny. West Aravaipa Creek, which flows into the San Pedro River, is an important drainage of this region, as is a portion of the Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness and White Canyon Wilderness Area near Superior. Celeste Andresen from The Nature Conservancy served as the regional convener and leader for this group.

Eastern Region Year One Outcomes

The Eastern regional group developed ideas through discussion and brainstorming needs and honed in on the importance of this region as an intact large landscape area to be protected as a conservation corridor. The group's focus is strongly aligned with conservation issues and protecting a vanishing ecosystem along the San Pedro River and seeks strong support and effort from the County to achieve conservation goals. The group is very supportive of the Arizona Trail as an amenity and tourism draw for the region.



Eastern Region Needs Identified

- The Committee recommended that the County become involved with integrated efforts for river and watershed management since it is the most important natural resource in the County;
- The Committee recommended that the County take a position on the US Fish & Wildlife Service's proposed collaborative conservation initiative as it relates to a river management options;
- The uniqueness of this group is focused on meshing large-scale conservation issues with, and into the Pinal County Comprehensive Plan;
- The subcommittee meetings have served as an important information exchange and could continue as participants desire;
- Pertinent open space and conservation information can be posted to the Pinal Partnership website www.PinalPartnership.com through the Parks, Trails, Open Space and Public Lands Committee link;
- Planning of Proposed Trail #7 should be done in an intentional way with input from area land owners who will be impacted, inclusive of appropriate and adequate signage with facilities relative to the conditions of the trail and the trail experience;
- Explore gateway community opportunities and issues, and encourage AZ Trail users to support local facilities, stay in local hotels of Oracle, Mammoth and Kearny;
- Discuss and address the need for ecotourism infrastructure and facilities as well as outreach and education materials to other groups in the regional communities that could help in these efforts;
- Develop a communications plan within the regional communities to clarify the level of existing services and facilities in the area;



- Assist in the organization of the Birding Festival in 2013, organized by the AZ Audubon Society;
- Group members to follow up with the Board of Supervisors for a study of a river management plan for conservation;
- Group members to stay involved and provide updates on the SunZia power line public hearings.



Eastern Region Next Step Priorities

1. Participants of these regional meetings are active volunteers in the area and respected representatives of other community organizations such as the NRCD, Copper Corridor Economic Development Initiative, libraries and education centers, and will remain involved in the open space discussion and implementation process.
2. Stay involved in the large-scale conservation issues as they relate to implementation of the Pinal County Comprehensive Plan and OSTMP. Coordinate activities, information sharing, and relationship building with County Supervisors about the concerns and requests related to conservation in this region, specifically the San Pedro River ecosystem. The group will continue to monitor conservation and land use issues that impact this region and discuss how those fit with the Comprehensive Plan.
3. Determine most effective structure needed in order to influence decisions about large-scale conservation issues.
4. Continue to exchange information and monitor land use proposals, plans and decisions, and provide input and feedback to Pinal Partnership and the County Supervisors.
5. Provide assistance to help complete the AZ Trail in this region to gain better understanding of best practices for trails and tourism, and use it as a model and precedent for how to construct trails and trailhead projects in the rest of the region and the County.
6. Focus attention on issues and impacts of motorized recreation vehicles, and become engaged with the off-road recreation community to address access issues and concerns.
7. Clarify information about who is responsible for land damage done by recreationists.
8. Clarify information about who manages which land parcels, and how law enforcement can be better utilized.

PARKS, TRAILS, OPEN SPACE AND PUBLIC LANDS COMMITTEE MEETING OUTCOMES: COUNTYWIDE OPEN SPACE ISSUES

With input from the regional group effort, the Committee recognized and facilitated discussions about four major open space issues relevant to the entire County:

- A. Promoting awareness of the economic benefits of open space;
- B. Managing the watersheds and natural drainage corridors as an integral component of the County's infrastructure for storm water management and economic benefit;
- C. Identifying low cost opportunities to acquire, develop and maintain parks and trails;
- D. Exploring opportunities and need for stewardship coordination and education.

A. Promoting Awareness of the Economic Benefits of Open Space

Economic Benefits of Open Space and Trails in Pinal County, AZ – A Report from the Trust for Public Land

During the first quarter of the regional meeting process the Trust for Public Lands (TPL) issued its draft research report "The Economic Benefits of Open Space and Trails in Pinal County, Arizona". In 2008, TPL sent out a national request for proposals to conduct an in-depth study of the benefits of open space in a particular project area. Out of the national search, Pinal County was selected for this pilot study. TPL is a national nonprofit that helps communities conserve land for people to enjoy as parks, gardens, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come. They do this by applying economic research methods to study impacts and benefits of parks, trails, greenways, open space and farmland preservation.

The Economic Benefits of Open Space and Trails in Pinal County, Arizona report is posted to the Pinal Partnership website www.PinalPartnership.com under the Parks, Trails, Open Space and Public Lands Committee link. The report was presented to the County Board of Supervisors and to the Pinal Partnership Economic Development Committee, whose committee leadership agreed there would be mutual benefit for the Open Space and Economic Development committees to work together to promote open space within the context of economic development.

TPL Report Highlights:

Open Space Generates Revenue

The report highlights revenues generated from tourism in Pinal County, which totaled \$461 million in 2008. Tourists visiting Pinal County's parks and outdoor heritage sites spent \$36.5 million locally during their stay in our local communities, generating \$672,000 in County sales tax. Additionally, an increase of \$2.7 million in property tax revenues were received from increased property value (\$190 million) for properties purchased in proximity to protected open space (see Table 1 below extracted from page 8 of the 2012 *Economic Benefits of Open Space and Trails in Pinal County, AZ – A Report from the Trust for Public Land*).

Working landscapes, ranches and farms, are important economic and cultural resources, as well as open space, in the County. Livestock and poultry products are valued at more than \$500 million and crops are valued at more than \$200 million in the report. The market value of agriculture in Pinal County is valued at \$700 million.

Conservation and Cooling

- Peak air temperatures in tree groves are 9°F cooler than over open terrain.
- Air temperatures over irrigated agricultural fields are 6°F cooler than air over bare ground.
- Suburban areas with mature trees are 4 to 6°F cooler than new suburbs without trees.
- Temperatures over grass sports fields are 2 to 4°F cooler than over bordering areas.

Reducing Urban Heat Islands: Compendium of Strategies: Trees and Vegetation, see <http://www.epa.gov/heatisland/>

From page 20 of the 2012 *Economic Benefits of Open Space and Trails In Pinal County, AZ – A Report from the Trust for Public Land*

Table 1. Summary of Estimated Annual Benefits of Parks, Trails, and Protected Open Space in Pinal County

Benefit Category	Benefit Subcategory	Land Category	Pinal County Total
Recreation and Tourism			
Outdoors tourism value	Tourist spending	Parks and trails	\$36,500,000
	Sales tax on tourist spending*	Parks and trails	\$672,000
Direct use value		Parks and trails	\$100,000,000
Human health value		Parks and trails	\$12,100,000
Government Cost Savings			
Enhanced property value	Additional property value*	Parks and protected open space	\$190,000,000
	Additional property tax	Parks and protected open space	\$2,720,000
Water supply		Parks, protected open space, trust lands	Land conservation can protect and conserve drinking water supplies
Preventing and fighting wildfires		Parks, protected open space, and trust lands	147,000 acres of parks and protected open space are at high risk of wildfire, an additional 159,000 acres of state trust land are at high risk
Agriculture			
Agricultural value	Sales of agricultural products	Open space	\$700,000,000

*Additional property value is a one-time boost to the properties' value and does not accumulate each year. Sales tax on tourist spending is a subset of tourist spending. All other benefits accrue annually.

Cost Savings Associated with Open Space

Also brought to light in the TPL report are the cost savings associated with parks and open space:

Health Benefits \$12.1 million in medical costs are saved by residents as a result of physical activity at parks and trails.

Utilities and Water Consumption Open space areas mitigate the heat build up of developed areas. A household could pay \$20 to \$28 in electric costs per 1° F increase in temperature from the urban heat island effect. Additionally, with every 1° F increase in temperature, 290 gallons of water is used monthly by each single family unit.

Prevent Wildfires, Loss of Property While uncalculated by cost, conserving land can help prevent wildfires and the resulting loss of property or human life as a result. According to the TPL study, there are 147,000 acres of parks and protected areas and 159,000 acres of state trust lands at high risk of wildfire in the County.

The study calls out the value of the scenic open spaces in Pinal County and the attraction of residents and business opportunities for future economic development. Embedded in the natural and scenic environment is the incalculable value of the watershed and undisturbed drainage corridors, an extensive natural storm water infrastructure, as well as important wildlife habitat.

Next Step Priorities for Promoting Awareness of the Economic Benefits of Open Space

The TPL report provides compelling research and an intricate and highly beneficial component of the County's infrastructure.

1. In addition to the TPL study, many other groups, including Arizona Game and Fish Department, Arizona Horseman's Association and Arizona OHV Coalition, have conducted economic benefits analyses with specific results relevant to Pinal County. The results of these studies demonstrate that disturbances to this natural infrastructure should be calculated in benefit/cost analysis for economic development plans proposed in the County. The Committee is dedicated to promoting the economic benefits of open space and trails through a series of presentations to the County's elected officials, leaders of volunteer groups, educators, development communities and public health organizations.
2. The Committee would like to see a green infrastructure layer that identifies critical washes and streams, important wildlife corridors, biologically diverse areas, working landscapes (agriculture and cattle ranches) and proposed parks and trails included in other infrastructure maps and discussions (e.g. utilities and transportation). All of these green infrastructure components have the potential to both save and generate money for the County.

B. Managing Watersheds and Natural Drainage Corridors

The Pinal County Comprehensive Plan recognizes the importance of washes and riparian habitats and highlights the fact that *"riparian areas occupy a very small percentage of the total land area in Arizona, but the ecological value is disproportionate to their size"* (pg. 252). However, implementing protection for these important areas, beyond what has been identified in the OSTMP, has not yet come to fruition.

In Chapter 7: Environmental Stewardship, the plan calls out the importance of riparian habitats on page 251: *"Riparian Areas and Wetlands: The habitat zones found immediately adjacent to streams and lakes are called riparian areas. Riparian areas encompass not only the bed or channel of the water body, but the surrounding banks, bars, ponded waters, and floodplain surfaces. There is a great concentration of vegetation, birds and wildlife in these areas, and because the surrounding Sonoran Desert is so arid, these areas are especially distinct and rare in Pinal County."*

Intact ephemeral drainages (washes), including the associated riparian habitat, provide the same ecological functions to a watershed as does a perennial stream, including: 1) natural flood control, 2) reduction of erosion, 3) contaminant filtration, 4) groundwater recharge and retention, 5) runoff reduction, 6) wildlife habitat and migration corridors, and 7) ecological diversity. All of these ecological functions are critical to the health of the watersheds, the Sonoran Desert and sustainable quality of life.

Protection of riparian areas are encouraged and addressed throughout the Comprehensive Plan, with some specific policies as follows:

Chapter 3: Sense of Community: Land Use

Policy 3.1.4.1: *"Encourage the protection of ridgelines, foothills, significant mountainous areas, wildlife habitat and riparian areas."*

Policy 3.9.1.4: *"Encourage compatible development in environmentally-sensitive areas and minimize impact to the native desert, grasslands and riparian areas."*

Chapter 6: Open Spaces and Places

Policy 6.1.1.9: *"Develop open space and trail standards and criteria to provide sufficient buffer zones relative to roadways, river and wash corridors, critical habitat, sensitive lands and development areas."*

Chapter 7: Environmental Stewardship: Environmental Planning

Policy 7.1.2.4: *"Promote planning and decision-making that minimize disturbance to riparian areas and wetlands."*

Important ephemeral riparian protection policies, ordinances and regulations exist throughout counties, municipalities and communities of the Sonoran Desert. Additional regulations could be addressed in Pinal County. For example, current 20' building set-backs regulations from a wash channel offers no consideration to the riparian habitat, vegetation and/or the allowance of the water to alter its course, channel and/or morphology.

Given the importance of washes and riparian habitat, the Committee formed a Watershed and Natural Drainage Protection sub-committee to address the current threat to our riparian areas and propose scientifically-based recommendations to the county for riparian protection. The Watershed and Natural Drainage Protection sub-committee is composed of professionals in the fields of biology, desert ecology and engineering hydrology. Recommendations to implement the policies and intent of the Comprehensive Plan will be based on current scientific knowledge of the importance of riparian areas to the health of the environment, and models addressing buffers for riparian considerations.

Year One Outcomes for Managing Watersheds and Natural Drainage Corridors

The Committee invited Pinal County Public Works Director, A.J. Blaha, to discuss wash protection issues. Important distinctions were explained relating to flood plain management as required by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and compliance with state (ADWR and ADEQ) guidelines. The Committee recognized that the county's current management of drainage corridors was restricted to addressing only the actual flow of waters in the channel and compliance with state water quality regulations. Despite their importance to the health and sustainability of watersheds, protection of natural drainages and riparian ecosystems is not currently factored into Public Works management plans. An additional meeting with the Pinal County Flood Control District and Planning Department staff concluded that protection of riparian systems (outside of the 100-year floodplain) can be addressed through the Land Use Code under the purview of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Watershed and Natural Drainage Protection sub-committee also researched:

1. Current ephemeral wash protection policies, riparian buffer guidelines and zoning codes from neighboring cities, towns and counties;
2. The Arizona Game and Fish Department's (AGFD) Pinal County Wildlife Connectivity Assessment, which will be completed by the end of 2012 and will help identify critical wildlife habitat, corridors and linkage areas for consideration in the County's development review process;
3. Examples of successful incorporation of biological criteria, including important wash and riparian areas, species of greatest conservation need, and AGFD wildlife linkage data, in land use planning;
4. Economic development of open spaces, which clearly quantifies the recreation value of riparian areas and increased property values with riparian wash protection.

Next Step Priorities for Managing Watersheds and Natural Drainage Corridors

1. The Watershed and Natural Drainage Protection sub-committee has been invited by county staff to present examples, models and protocol currently being used or planned throughout adjoining flood control districts, counties and municipalities, as well as management agencies, including the BLM and Middle Gila Conservation Partnership.
2. Based on their cumulative research, the Watershed and Natural Drainage Protection sub-committee will make recommendations to the county regarding policies and/or ordinances, addressing the intended protection documented in the Comprehensive Plan, including identification of priority and important riparian areas throughout the county.



C. Identifying Low Cost Options to Acquire, Develop and Maintain Parks and Trails

Recreation and Public Purposes Act

Most of the areas proposed as regional parks in the Comprehensive Plan are currently administered by BLM and may be available to the County for management, and eventual ownership, under the authority of the Recreation and Public Purposes Act (R&PP). This means the County may be able to, over time, acquire thousands of acres of land for recreation at no cost. To implement the OSTMP, the first and most immediate action needed is establishing a working and focused relationship with BLM to explore options that provide outdoor recreation and natural resource protection. Until inter-governmental agreements are reached, the County has no jurisdiction or authority to manage or raise funds for management of those lands.

Discussions in regional meetings attempted to prioritize preferred areas to begin implementing the OSTMP (see regional summaries above). Regional parks #4, 5 and 6, and Open Space #7 were discussed as first priorities for the County to acquire from BLM and begin management for various levels of outdoor recreation opportunity. Issues and opportunities associated with these BLM lands have been explored and discussed at the regional meetings. However, with the potential for tens of thousands of acres of recreation land to manage, it is abundantly clear that the County needs some form of a Parks Department or staff assigned for park related responsibilities. Assessments of projected recreation impact fees should be explored as well as projections of progressive costs for operations and maintenance to achieve the planned level of service. These estimates will provide critical information about overall costs to establish a functioning County Parks Department.

Pinal County Parks Department

There are existing examples of implementation language that will serve as starting points to customize a County Parks Department. A quality feasibility study is needed to assess the cost and benefits of creating a County Parks Department

Pinal County Park District

Discussions and explorations into establishing one or more parks districts have been on-going by some in the Committee to help examine options and prospects. In 2007, The Trust for Public Land (TPL) conducted research in Arizona to assess potential for establishing funds via parks districts. The study found that to create an Open Space Special Tax District or a Park Maintenance District, amendments to Title 48 of the AZ Revised Statutes (ARS) is required. To levy a County Sales Tax for parks, Title 42 of the ARS must be amended. Because the ARS applies to the whole state, it would be necessary for a coalition of county supervisors to work together on the necessary amendment. TPL was providing assistance for a discussion group of counties in 2007, but the work lost momentum when economic changes constrained public resources.

Next Step Priorities for Identifying Low Cost Options to Acquire, Develop and Maintain Parks and Trails

1. The Committee will advocate the aforementioned low cost option of using the R&PP, to elected officials and County decision makers in an effort to meet the outdoor recreational needs of Pinal County citizens.
2. Immediately identify and build a case for the benefits of a County Parks Department and Advisory Board or Committee for discussion purposes with key decision-makers. Several members of the Committee will help develop concepts for starting a County Parks Department;
3. Research low cost options for park maintenance, including partnerships with volunteer and non-profit organizations.

D. Exploring Opportunities and Need for Stewardship Coordination and Education

Advocating the quality of life issues associated with the County's Comprehensive Plan is a critical component of community development. The Comprehensive Plan states that *"residents value a strong conservation ethic that stresses the importance of maintaining the quality of Pinal County's natural resources for future generations"* (page 31 – Chapter 2: Pinal County Vision). Chapter 7 in the OSTMP identifies environmental stewardship as an important value to maintain environmental integrity.

In addition to the importance of gaining community support for the OSTMP, the Committee recognizes the need for the community to offer support in caring for the parks and open space lands identified in the OSTMP. The regional groups coordinated successful clean-ups of State Trust and BLM lands and field trips to inspire responsible use and stewardship of recreation areas. More stewardship events, field trips and workshops are being planned.

One specific area of stewardship that has been discussed regularly at the general Committee and regional group meetings is management of illegal and uninformed recreation uses on public and state lands. Trespassing on private lands and grazing leases and the creation of wildcat trails on public lands are damaging natural drainage systems, wildlife habitat, soils and air quality, which devalue the land and creates safety concerns for land owners. Pinal County is bearing the burden of unregulated recreation use, especially off-highway vehicles (OHV) from Maricopa and Pima county users. Both of those counties have limited legal access to managed OHV areas within their county borders. Both private land owners and public land managers have insufficient budgets and resources to handle this situation. Consequently, some private landowners and lessors have a reluctance to embrace provision for more recreation use, such as is called for in the OSTMP.

The Committee met with staff from the AZ State Land Department, AZ Game and Fish, Tonto National Forest and BLM regarding OHV use and impacts to the lands of these respective agencies. It is clear there is an immediate need for this issue to be addressed in a collaborative and coordinated management effort, with which the Committee is willing to help.

There is also a need to identify funding to address the many issues related to restoration of damaged lands. The Committee would also like to help identify damaged areas for restoration funds and define and manage areas for OHV/ ATV use.

Next Step Priorities for Exploring Opportunities and Need for Stewardship Coordination and Education

1. Each regional group intends to implement a public information process of the OSTMP through events, education programs and the development of education materials as part of their local, public outreach strategy.
2. The Committee is currently developing a Communications Plan to reach elected officials, schools and school boards, community organizations and groups, and residents to promote efforts to implement the OSTMP.
3. The committee is willing to assist management entities in the coordinated Identification of damaged areas for restoration. Additionally, they are willing to assist in the coordinated efforts with the AZ State Parks Department, who administers OHV funds generated from decals, to develop effective solutions to the problems surrounding illegal and uninformed recreation use.

Conclusions

All discussions in the Committee and regional group meetings were based on the Pinal County Comprehensive Plan Chapter 6, which represents the values and goals of the Pinal County Open Space and Trails Master Plan. Both of those planning processes were widely vetted through numerous public meetings where the public message was clear – OPEN SPACE IS IMPORTANT TO THE CITIZENS OF PINAL COUNTY.

While the roots of the regional discussions were based on the contents of the adopted OSTMP, more specific information about each area emerged, revealing important next step efforts to achieve the values and goals for open space and trails in the County. The following are recommendations and the next step priorities that these County residents are willing to help the County achieve.

Recommendations to Pinal County

1. Identify additional staff, staff time and/or create a County Parks Department to advance implementation of the County's adopted Open Space and Trails Master Plan and other recreation considerations;
2. Establish a County relationship with the BLM as early as possible to begin R&PP discussions and potential agreements;
3. Manage the watersheds and natural drainage corridors as an integral component of the County's infrastructure for storm water management and economic benefit;
4. Identify and discuss funding options for the acquisition and maintenance of parks, trails, and open space;
5. Request an opportunity for AGFD staff to discuss ways to incorporate results of the upcoming Pinal County Wildlife Connectivity Assessment in current and future County revisions of the OSTMP and Comprehensive Plan;
6. Add a green infrastructure layer that identifies critical washes and streams, important wildlife corridors, protected and other biologically diverse areas, working landscapes and proposed parks and trails to other infrastructure maps and discussions (e.g. utilities and transportation).
7. Become involved in the large-scale conservation issues as they relate to implementation of the Comprehensive Plan and the OSTMP, with specific focus on the current activity of community driven conservation efforts on the San Pedro River ecosystem.

Next Step Priorities for the Committee and Regional Groups

1. Continue to promote increased public awareness of the OSTMP and opportunities to become involved with implementation and stewardship of regional parks, trails and open space;
2. Work with the County to establish a Stewardship Program for management assistance of the proposed Regional Parks and Trails;
3. Immediately identify and build a case for the benefits of a County Parks Department and Advisory Board or Committee for discussion purposes with key decision-makers. Several members of the Committee will help develop concepts for starting a County Parks Department;
4. Collaborate with other Pinal Partnership committees and volunteer groups in the County as a vehicle to bring forward information about economic benefits of open space;
5. Work with the County to identify which natural drainages are critical to preserve for watershed management, storm water management and recreation so that developers will be able to target new development effectively and meet their objectives while protecting important washes;
6. Work with the County and OHV groups to help identify funding opportunities and other ways to assist management entities and landowners to identify and restore areas damaged by illegal OHV activity.

There remains a high commitment from Committee members and participants, who have participated in the regional and general meetings, to continue working together to achieve results. This report is a call to action for the Pinal County Board of Supervisors, County Manager and staff, the Board members of Pinal Partnership, and Pinal County citizens - to join the discussion and do the same.



Photo of the San Pedro River provided by Celeste Andresen

The San Pedro River in eastern Pinal County is the last major, free-flowing undammed river in the American Southwest. Designated by The Audubon Society as a "Globally Important Bird Area", the river's ecosystem hosts two-thirds of the bird diversity in the U.S, with 100 nesting species and 300 migrating bird species.

**PINAL PARTNERSHIP: PARKS, TRAILS, OPEN SPACE AND PUBLIC LANDS COMMITTEE
(ACTIVE MEMBERS)**

ORGANIZATIONS

APACHE JUNCTION PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
AZ GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
AZ LAND AND WATER TRUST
AZ NATIONAL GUARD
AZ STATE LAND DEPARTMENT
COALITION FOR SONORAN DESERT PROTECTION
CW3
ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS ORGANIZATION, INC.
FRIENDS OF ARAVAIPA REGION
LARSON ENGINEERING
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE: RIVERS, TRAILS AND CONSERVATION PROGRAM
PINAL COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
PINAL PARTNERSHIP CEO AND BOARD LIASION
SUPERSTITION AREA LAND TRUST
THE NATURE CONSERVANCY
TONTON NATIONAL FOREST
WINKELMAN NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

PINAL COUNTY CITIZENS

GORDON BROWN
ANNE ELLIS
SHIRLEY ANN HARTMAN

2012 GUEST PRESENTERS

AZ GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
AZ OHV COALITION
AZ STATE LAND DEPARTMENT
HARVARD INVESTMENTS
LENNAR HOMES
MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENT
PINAL COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT: KENT TAYLOR (TPL STUDY)
PINAL COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
TONTON NATIONAL FOREST
U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

Website References

Pinal Partnership
www.PinalPartnership.com

Pinal Partnership: Parks, Trails, Open Space & Public Lands Committee
www.PinalPartnership.com/com_parks.html

Pinal County Comprehensive Plan
<http://pinalcountyz.gov/Departments/PlanningDevelopment/ComprehensivePlanUpdate/Documents/00.Comprehensive%20Plan%202012.pdf>

Trust for Public Land: Economic Benefits of Open Space Study
<http://cloud.tpl.org/pubs/benefits-az-PinalCountyReport.pdf>

Happy Trails ! ! !

