



Arizona State Trust Lands Conservation Profile: Sopori Wash and Wildlife Corridor

Sonoran Institute, in collaboration with conservation groups across Arizona and with funding from the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, has assembled state trust lands suitable for conservation into a single database. The resulting profiles focus on conservation values. Political values are left for another day.



Shaping the Future of the West

WIDE OPEN SPACES

Vast, wide open spaces liberally sprinkled with cultural and archeological gems, the 29,000 acres of state trust land spread over Pima and Santa Cruz Counties near the Sopori Ranch cry out to be conserved. Locals have long desired to keep the lands in pristine condition because of their important attribute - the topography creates a wildlife corridor that shuttles several vulnerable species including; Abert's towhee, Bell's vireo, Western yellow-billed cuckoo, Cactus Ferruginous pygmy-owl, Lesser long-nosed bat, Swainson's hawk, and Rufous-winged sparrow, coati, jaguar and wolf as well as the usual mountain lion, kit fox, bobcat, coyote, mule and Coues deer between the various mountain ranges that ring this important corridor.

Sopori Wash provides a natural lush extension of the riparian habitat that begins along the Santa Cruz River and is one of the few shallow groundwater riparian areas in this region that supports a variety of deciduous trees including: cottonwoods, willow, ash, hackberry and black walnut that are extremely sensitive to groundwater pumping. Maintenance of the wash's current condition will sustain highly desirable wide open spaces as well as the critical water source for many of the avian and mammal species that live in and migrate through this area.



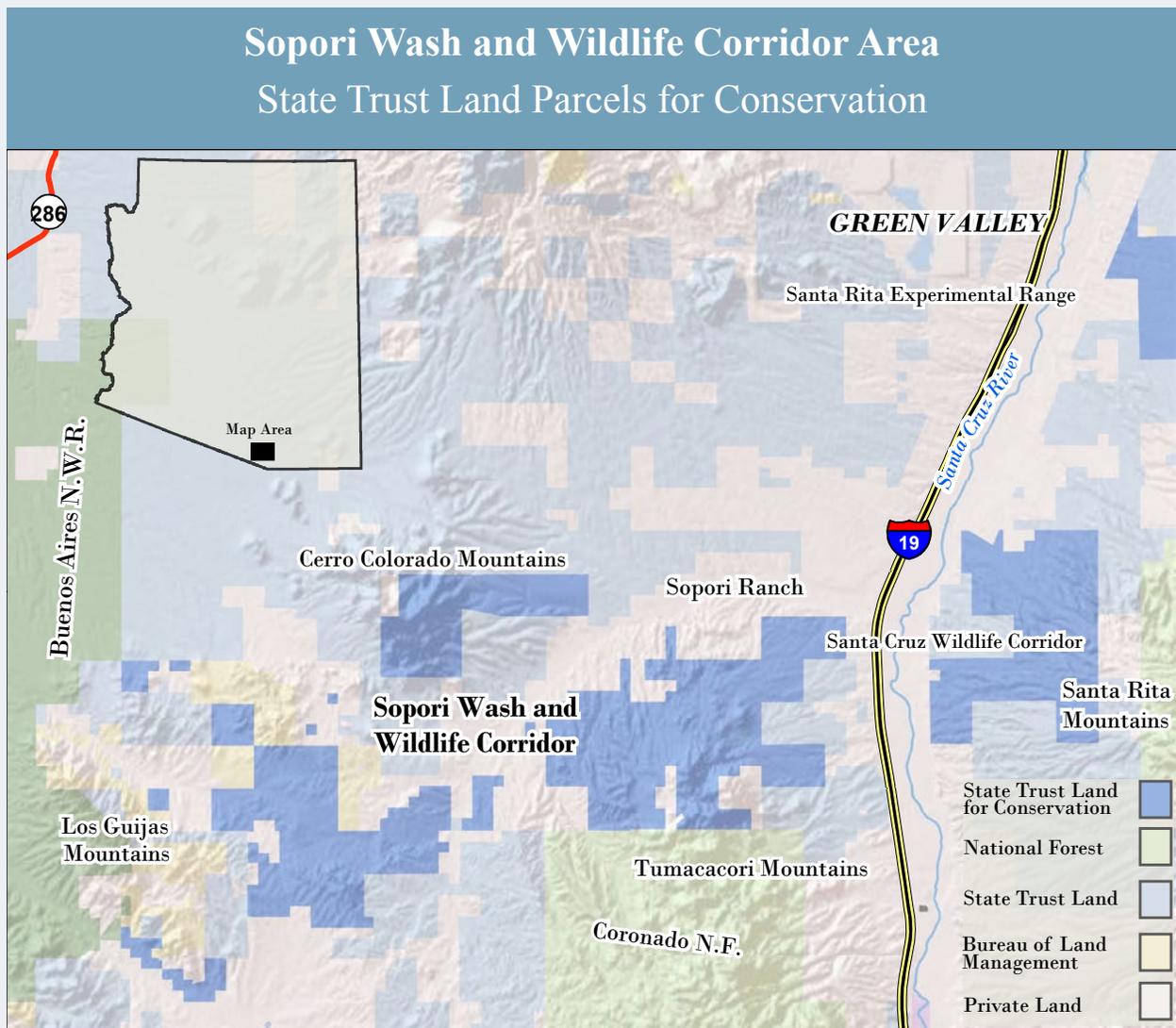
“Having lived next to Sopori Wash for the last 36 years I have observed the rich flora and fauna that flourishes in and around the wash. Conserving state trust land is extremely important to ensure that the life of this important wash continues and that it continues to serve as a wildlife corridor.”

– Ellie Kurtz, Advocate for Sopori

LOCATION

Sopori Wash and Wildlife Corridor

These 29,000 acres of state trust lands proposed for conservation are comprised of noncontiguous parcels scattered on all sides of the historic Sopori Ranch which is located south of Green Valley and west of Interstate 19. The migration path covers large a large swath of land that extends from the Santa Rita Mountains to the east, the Tumacacori Mountains to the south, the Cerro Colorados to the north, and the Los Guijas Mountains to the west.





REASON FOR CONSERVATION

Sopori Wash and Wildlife Corridor

The area's rich history that includes recorded settlement in the late 17th century by the Native American tribe now known as the Tohono O'odham and new world explorers who built the Tumacacori Mission in 1701, now a designated national park, make this state trust land ripe for conservation. In addition to the land's historical value, many of these parcels of state trust land abut Sopori Ranch and are especially important for conservation. This working ranch has irrigated pastures that are actively managed to reduce livestock's damage upon native vegetation during critical forage growing months. A negotiated Ranch Management Agreement ensures that water used on irrigated pastures does not exceed a specific volume in order to protect water flow in the Sopori Wash area. This active management program negotiated among multiple parties minimizes impacts to the shallow groundwater system. Additional conservation will provide a necessary buffer for wildlife. This diverse mix of parcels lies alongside land rich with history and can provide a buffer for the working ranches throughout the region that will help ensure preservation of this iconic western way of life.



ARIZONA STATE TRUST LAND

In 1912, the federal government gave 10.5 million acres of state trust lands to the new state of Arizona. These lands are not owned by the state, but are held in trust for the benefit of the state's school system and several other beneficiaries.

Proceeds from the sale or lease of these lands generated about \$50 million for the beneficiaries in 2010. The Arizona State Land Department, in its role as trustee for the beneficiaries, is constitutionally obligated to seek maximum financial return for trust lands.

This requirement has complicated efforts to preserve state trust land for recreational use and environmental protection. The state cannot simply turn a parcel of trust land into a park or nature preserve since it is required to receive full market value for the land. All state trust land is subject to sale or lease to the highest bidder. Preservation of trust land requires sustained community input coupled with legislative action.



STATE TRUST LAND CONSERVATION

Collaborating Partners

The Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust seeks to help people in need, especially women, children and families; to protect animals and nature; and to enrich community life in the metropolitan areas of Indianapolis and Phoenix.

The Sonoran Institute inspires and enables community decisions and public policies that respect the land and people of western North America. Facing rapid change, communities in the West value their natural and cultural resources, which support resilient environmental and economic systems. Founded in 1990, the Sonoran Institute helps communities conserve and restore those resources and manage growth and change through collaboration, civil dialogue, sound information, practical solutions and big-picture thinking. The Sonoran Institute is a nonprofit organization with offices in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona; Bozeman, Montana; Glenwood Springs, Colorado; Sheridan, Wyoming; Twentynine Palms, California; and Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico.



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