

Arizona State Trust Lands Conservation Profile: Superstition Mountains

AN URBAN WILDERNESS OPPORTUNITY

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

Awash with legend, history, amazing geology and intrigue the Superstition Mountains are home to a myriad of incongruous and seemingly unconnected parcels stitched together by the confluence of these mountains that jut skyward from the desert floor east of Apache Junction. The mountains, designated as an official Wilderness Area in 1964, are home to prehistoric ruins, diverse geology including volcanic flows, tales of the Lost Dutchman Gold Mine, and trails named after prospectors and cowboys that have mined and ranched some of the most rugged, beautiful, and varied scenery on earth.

The easy access to the Wilderness Area is both a blessing and a curse. A short drive from the city will put you in "the wild". The 16,700 acres of state trust land abutting the Wilderness serves as a gateway to city dwellers and provides opportunities to enjoy up close and personal, habitat critical for rare and endangered plants and animals and home to some of the most popular trailheads in the region.

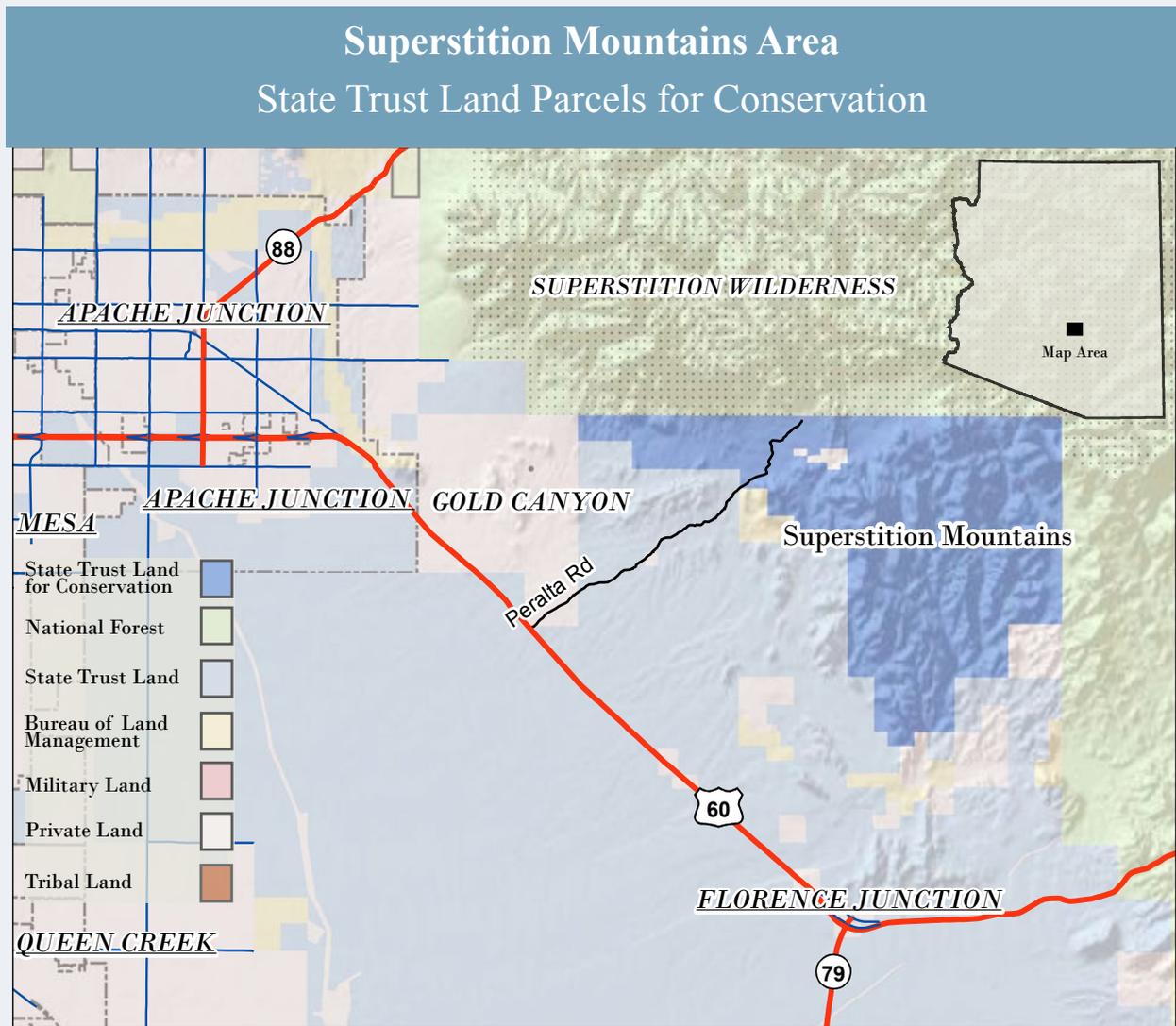
Urban encroachment creeps ever closer. Buffer lands for this sensitive area are imperative. This area is a prime candidate for conservation because of its relative ease of access to recreational activities including hiking, backpacking, climbing, kayaking, canoeing, rafting, horse packing, bird watching, stargazing, and extraordinary opportunities for solitude.



LOCATION

Superstition Mountains

The 16,700 acres of state trust land proposed for conservation are located at the southwestern base of the Superstition Mountains. The communities of Gold Canyon and Apache Junction sit due west of the area, a quick drive away via Highway 60 and Peralta Road, which bisects the northwest section of the proposed conservation area.





REASON FOR CONSERVATION

Superstition Mountains

There are legitimate concerns that the Superstition Wilderness Area will be loved to death. The preservation of this area will depend largely on impact control and education of the public. A buffer zone would greatly ameliorate the unrelenting urban push against the southwestern base of the mountains. Almost four million people live in the greater Phoenix metropolitan area. The close-in opportunity to escape the urban pressures that have been created by the ever increasing population places additional pressure on recreational opportunities in this region. The wilderness is not an unlimited resource capable of withstanding the urban impact of the greater metropolitan area. Each year more people seek the opportunity for an authentic outdoor experience and head to the Superstitions to fulfill this desire. The 16,700 acres of state trust land proposed for conservation would provide a critical cushion for this amazing wilderness that is so available to so many.



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 Superstition Area Land Trust (SALT) is the only nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of the open spaces surrounding the Superstition Mountains. We believe that this unique treasure must be protected for future generations through education, advocacy, land acquisition, and federal and state land conservation.

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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