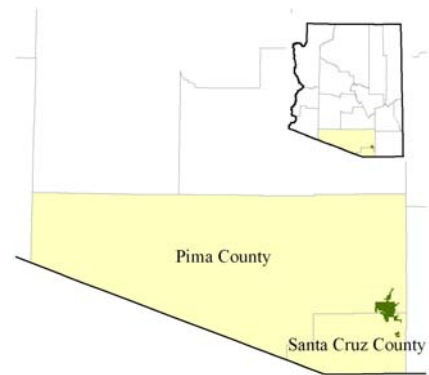


MAINTAINING A SENSE OF PLACE AMID RAPID CHANGE

LAS CIENEGAS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

Designated:	2000
Location:	Southeastern Arizona, 50 miles southeast of Tucson
Size:	42,000 acres
Counties:	Pima (Metro/commutershed, 3.34 percent of county land base) Santa Cruz (Metro/commutershed, 1.85 percent of county land base)



In contrast to the pristine expanses of desert vegetation protected by Ironwood and Sonoran Desert National Monuments, and in addition to the cottonwood and willow forests of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area, Las Cienegas National Conservation Area protects even rarer desert ecosystems: cienegas, or bogs, along with vast expanses of desert grasslands, oak-covered hills, and mountainous sky islands with oak, pine, and juniper trees. Two proposed wild and scenic river segments are also protected here. This diversity of habitats supports a wide range of species, some of which are endangered, including the Gila topminnow, lesser long-nosed bat, southwestern willow flycatcher, the Chiricahua leopard frog, and the Gila chub. Deer, antelope, and mountain lions also make their homes here, as do 230 species of birds.

In addition to providing crucial habitat for increasingly rare species, Las Cienegas preserves vestiges of a traditional ranching-based economy and way of life only an hour's drive from rapidly growing Tucson. Cultural resources protected within the National Conservation Area (NCA) range from prehistoric sites to historic travel routes, as well as the remains of mines and mining towns. The centerpiece of the NCA is the historic Empire Ranch House, which reflects the history and evolution of ranching in Arizona since the late 1800s, and which is currently being restored through the efforts of the Bureau of Land Management and a private foundation.



Before and After Designation

Changes in four key socioeconomic indicators in Santa Cruz County are summarized in Table 1 and Figure 1. Both show substantial growth in total personal income and total employment, and a near-doubling of population from 1980-2000. These trends continued at about the same trajectory from 2000 to 2002, after Las Cienegas NCA was designated. While total personal income growth did not keep up with population growth from 1980 to 2000, resulting in declining per capita personal income, this trend appears to have flattened out between 2000 and 2002.

TABLE 1 Socioeconomic indicators in Santa Cruz County, Arizona

	1980	2000 (year designated)	2002	% Change 1980 - 2002	% Change 2000 - 2002
Personal income (millions)	400	703	721	80	3
Population	20,505	38,568	39,660	93	3
Per capita personal income	19,509	18,218	18,185	-7	0
Total employment	9,402	15,830	15,938	70	1

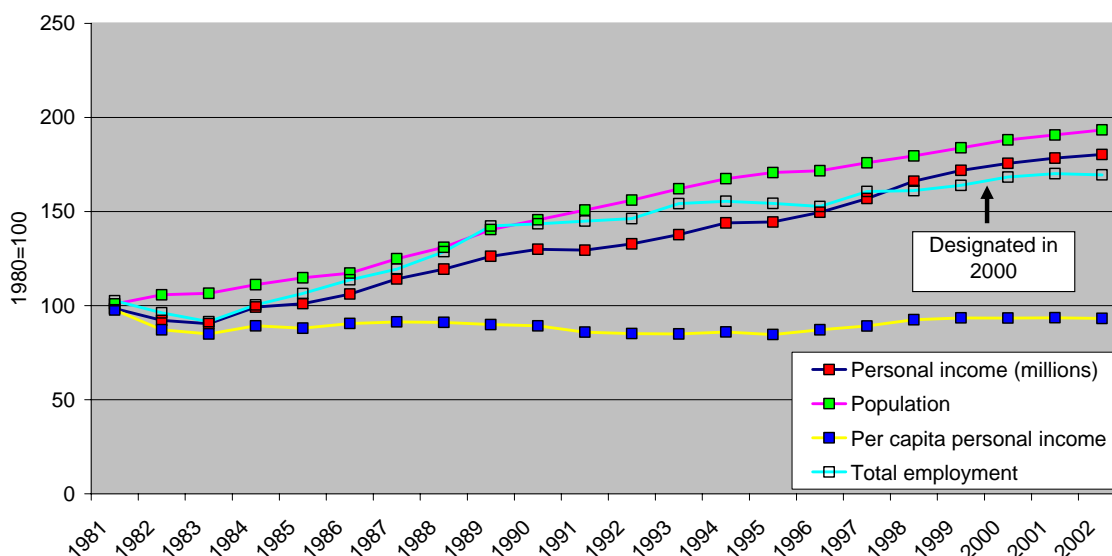


FIGURE 1. Growth of key economic indicators in Santa Cruz County, Arizona

Economic Change in Santa Cruz County

Although Las Cienegas includes lands in both Pima and Santa Cruz counties, this look at the local economy will focus on Santa Cruz County because the impact on this county is greater. A closer look at the Santa Cruz County economy reveals other positive trends. As Figure 2 indicates, Santa Cruz County’s average growth rate of 3.3 percent from 1970-2000 has largely kept pace with the State of Arizona’s rapid population growth. The county’s population in 2000 was 39,660.

Since Santa Cruz County abuts the Mexican border, its economy is tied to Mexico; the downturn in the growth rate since the mid-1990s may be due to declines in the value of the peso. The border town of Nogales serves as an important regional commercial area for northern Sonora, with many Mexican residents crossing the border to shop. When the value of the peso declined precipitously against the dollar, much of this commercial activity was curtailed.

Santa Cruz County includes very different communities. Nogales and Rio Rico, near the U.S.-Mexico border in the south-central part of the county, are fast-growing communities of young families. Patagonia and Sonoita lie on the same side of the Santa Rita Mountains as Las Cienegas..

Santa Cruz County is divided into two County Census Divisions (CCDs):: Nogales CCD, the western half of the county, and Patagonia/Sonoita CCD, which includes the towns of Patagonia and Sonoita and the rest of the eastern half of the county.

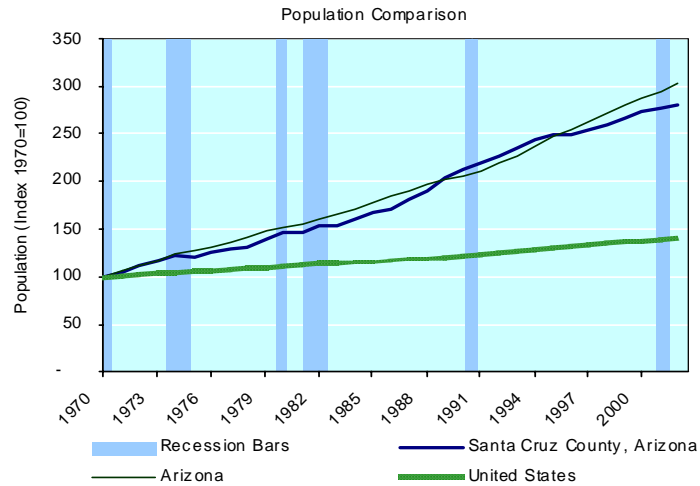


FIGURE 2. Population growth in Santa Cruz County, Arizona compared to Arizona and the U.S.

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Information System 2002 Table CA30.

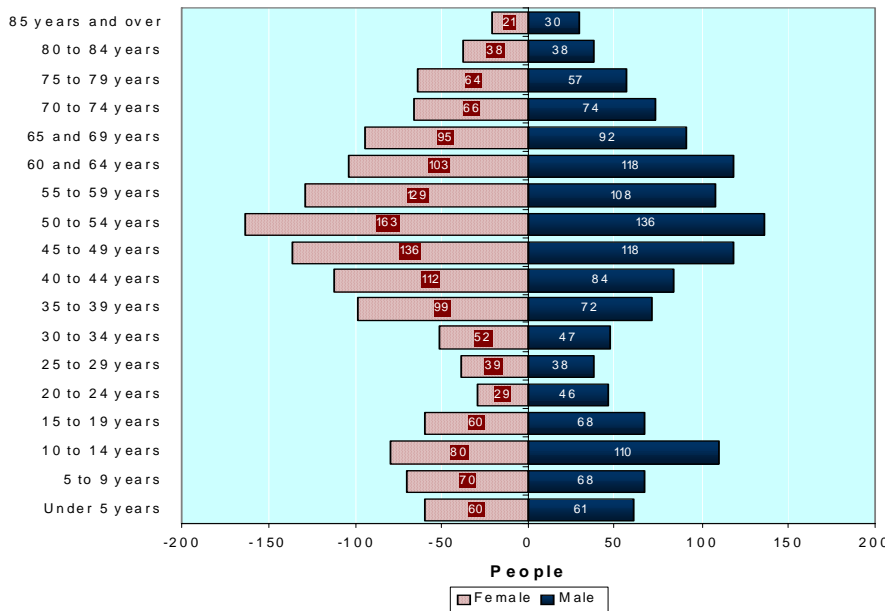


FIGURE 3. Population age pattern in Santa Cruz County, Arizona.

Source: Census 2000 and Census 1990.

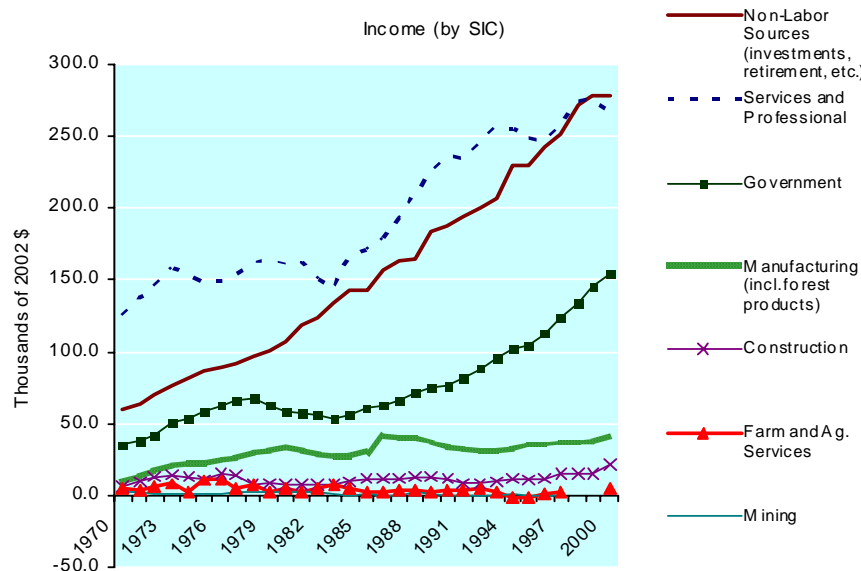
Figure 3 shows the age pattern in the Patagonia/Sonoita CCD, and indicates that Baby Boomers (those aged 40-54 in 2000) make up a large portion of the population. Residents of the Patagonia/Sonoita CCD also tend to be better educated and wealthier than the U.S. median. Thirty-five percent of residents have a college degree, compared to the U.S. county median of only 14.5 percent (Census 2000, table P37)..

Although the rolling grasslands, scattered farmhouses, and windmill-powered water pumps that keep watering tanks filled for cattle suggest that the economy of the Sonoita/Patagonia CCD portion of Santa Cruz County is based on agriculture, the Farm and Agricultural Services sector actually accounts for only a small portion of employment (2.9 percent of the total, or 461 jobs) and income (\$5 million, or 0.7 percent of total personal income).

Instead, the area is attracting a mix of low- and high-wage Services and Professional sector jobs, as well as large amounts of retirement, investment, and other types of Non-Labor income. As Figure 4 shows, Non-Labor income is about equal to Services and Professional as the most important source of income in the county as a whole.

FIGURE 4. Personal income by major sector in Santa Cruz County, Arizona

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Information System, 2004.



Household income data from the 2000 Census shows that a significant portion of households fall in the \$50,000-to-\$99,999 range, and that 12 percent of households had incomes of over \$100,000. However, 38 percent of households earned less than \$30,000, which is the poverty line for a family of four.

A closer look at employment within the Patagonia /Sonoita CCD (Table 2) shows a large portion of the jobs in the area are in higher-paid service occupations, such as the Professional, Management, and Financial categories.

The Patagonia/Sonoita CCD’s fairly rapid population growth, high percentage of Baby Boomers, and its

	Number	%
1) Professional and related occupations:	309	25%
2) Management, business, and financial operations occupations	179	15%
3) Office and administrative support occupations	145	12%
4) Sales and related occupations	118	10%
5) Food preparation and serving related occupations	81	7%
6) Construction and extraction occupations	75	6%
7) Protective service occupations	54	4%
8) Personal care and service occupations	47	4%
9) Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations	45	4%
10) Transportation and material moving occupations	43	4%
Total of Top 10	1,096	90%

evident ability to draw and retain relatively wealthy and well-educated residents to fill higher-wage service jobs are all indicators of the area’s attractiveness to current and potential residents. An important aspect of its allure is the high quality of life it offers. Protected public lands rich in cultural history, such as the Las Cienegas NCA, are part of that quality of life.

Being recognized as a desirable place to live and do business has its downsides as well. For example, increasing demand may make housing unaffordable to long-time, local residents. As Table 3 indicates, the median priced house in 2000 was affordable to the median income family [according to the Housing Affordability Index (HFI)]—but just barely. The HFI for the Patagonia/Sonoita CCD is 101, compared to 186 for the median U.S. county, and 120 for Santa Cruz County as a whole. The HFI for Santa Cruz County in 1990 was 101, indicating that at the county level housing has become considerably more affordable, but this does not appear to be the case in the areas closest to Las Cienegas NCA. Given the boom in Arizona housing values in the past five years, housing is likely to have become less affordable at both the county and CCD level.

Another potentially negative aspect of being a desirable place to live is that rising demand for housing is likely to push development into open areas. This is the case in several locations adjacent to National Landscape Conservation System areas. In much the same way that Ironwood Forest National Monument faces urban encroachment due to Tucson’s spread to the northwest, Las Cienegas NCA is being squeezed by overflow growth from the city’s expansion to the southeast.

TABLE 3.
Owner occupied housing affordability in Patagonia CCD
 (Source: 2000 Census Table SF3 - H76)

	2000
Specified owner-occupied housing units: Median value (Adjusted for Inflation in 2000 \$s)	\$ 172,700
% of median income necessary to buy the median house	25%
Income required to qualify for the median house	\$ 48,800
Housing Affordability Index: (100 or above means that the median family can afford the median house.)*	101

Universe: Specified owner-occupied housing units

Income in Patagonia CCD
 (Source: 2000 Census Table SF3 – P82, P53, P77)

	1999
Per capita income	\$ 23,333
Median household income	\$ 41,325
Median family income	\$ 49,531

Universe: Total population, Households, Families

Conclusion

Las Cienegas NCA has benefited from a high level of support from citizens, ranchers, land users, and federal, state, and local representatives since legislation for its creation was introduced by Arizona congressional representatives Jim Kolbe (R) and Ed Pastor (D). This cooperation is apparent around Las Cienegas NCA. The landscape surrounding Las Cienegas is remarkable – in many areas it flows nearly seamlessly across NCA boundaries. This is largely due to the combined efforts of local residents to



protect both public and private lands from poorly planned development. Through the Sonoita Valley Planning Partnership, a wide range of interests, including federal, state, and local agencies, grassroots organizations, and committed individuals, work together to protect the area’s natural resources and plan for its future.

Despite widespread support for Las Cienegas NCA, the threat of sprawl on adjacent lands still exists. Although it lies an hour’s drive from Tucson, Sonoita is increasingly viewed as a bedroom community for this rapidly expanding urban area. In recognition of the growing need for better development practices, the Sonoita Crossroads Community

Forum, another local group, is working with Santa Cruz County officials on zoning changes to address this rapid growth.

