Living in the Watershed
-Visit lower Cienega-

Hiking, biking, water and wildlife viewing near Tucson

The key feature to the Preserve is Cienega Creek, which provides rare habitat in our desert climate for many animals, including rare and endangered fish and frogs.

Surrounded by the harsher Sonoran Desert environment, tall stands of cottonwood, willow and mesquite trees provide shelter and foraging habitat for a vast array of birds, bats and other wildlife species. The valley setting makes this an excellent area for the movement of larger wildlife between the federally protected “sky islands” of the Santa Rita, Whetstone, and Rincon Mountain Ranges.

The Cienega Creek Natural Preserve is established and managed for the protection of the unique natural and cultural resources held within its boundaries. Although accommodated, public recreation and education activities are limited to the degree that they will not degrade these resources. To preserve this rare treasure, dogs must be leashed and no camping or ORV are allowed.

A permit is required by all visitors to the Preserve prior to entry. Permits are issued by the Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation Department with the intent to limit the number of daily visitors to the Preserve and to notify visitors of the restrictive and prohibited activities.

To request a hiking permit for Cienega Creek Natural Preserve please call (520) 877-6158 or email cienegacreekpreserve@pima.gov

Use of the Arizona Trail does not require a permit. Access the Arizona Trail via the Gabe Zimmerman Trailhead (map point #1)

Cienega Creek flows North

The Lower Cienega Creek Watershed

Also in the downstream part of the watershed near Vail, AZ is Colossal Cave Mountain Park! This park features camp sites, picnic areas, cave tours, a cultural history museum and ranch, trail rides, butterfly and tortoise gardens, and Sunday in the Park lecture series. Great location to bike tour to!
16721 E. Old Spanish Trail, Vail, AZ 85641 phone: 520.647.PARK (7275)
Living in the Watershed
-Visit upper Cienega-

Horse trails, Camping, and Birding near Elgin, AZ

Located just 45 minutes from Tucson, the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area is home to rolling grasslands, oak-studded hills that connect several “sky island” mountain ranges, and lush riparian corridors that are irresistible to both people and wildlife. Cienega Creek, with its perennial flow and lush riparian corridor, forms the lifeblood of the NCA and supports a diverse plant and animal community. Las Cienegas is managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Visitor Activities
Wildlife viewing, birdwatching, primitive camping, picnicking, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, historic site, hunting, photography and scenic drives.

Special Features
Unique and rare vegetative communities including five of the rarest habitat types in the American Southwest: cienegas (marshlands), cottonwood-willow riparian forests, sacaton grasslands, mesquite bosques, and semi-desert grasslands.

Permits are not required to visit the national conservation area. Primitive camping is allowed on existing sites only.

Visit the historic Empire Ranch. Discover the Empire Ranch through self-guided tours using interpretive information designed for public learning. Explore the Empire Ranch House on your own – each room is interpreted with signage about its historical uses.

Directions to the ranch are detailed on www.empireranchfoundation.org or call 888) 364-2829 for information. For questions about group activities, permits or general land use on the Las Cienegas NCA contact the BLM Tucson Field Office at 520-258-7204.