



The “Missing Link” for Cienega Creek Watershed Protection



Sonoran Institute and BLM – Tucson Field Office

Why the “Missing Link” is Important to Residents....



**Peter and Debbie Backus, residents,
“Missing Link” Tucson, Arizona**



Protection Measures for Certain Lands North of the Sonoita Valley Acquisition Planning District in Pima County, Arizona

An Overview of the “Missing Link Assessment” by Sonoran Institute

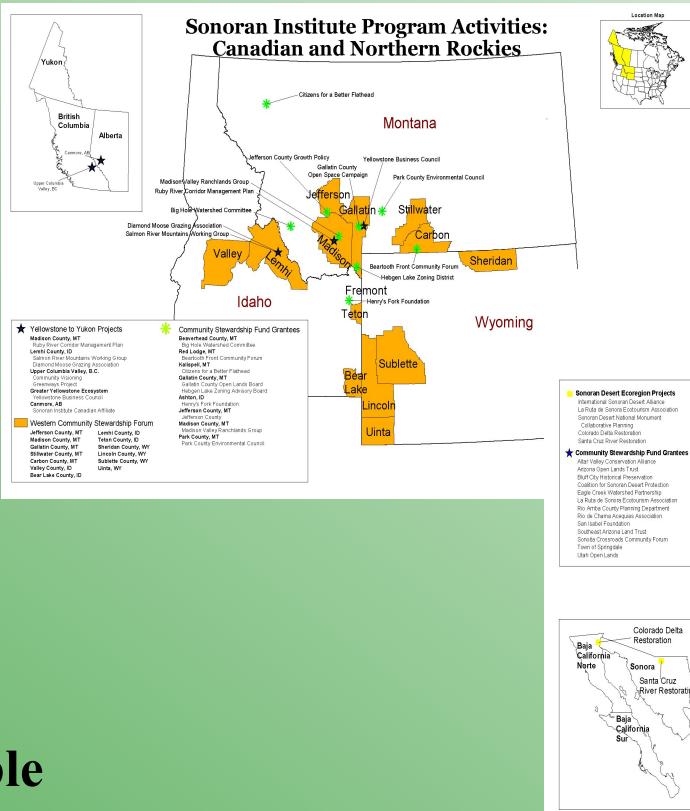
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Sonoran Institute and BLM – Tucson Field Office

The Sonoran Institute



- 12-year old Tucson-based conservation organization
 - Western U.S., Mexico, and Canada
 - Works with communities to achieve local conservation goals, including healthy landscapes, vibrant economies, and livable communities.

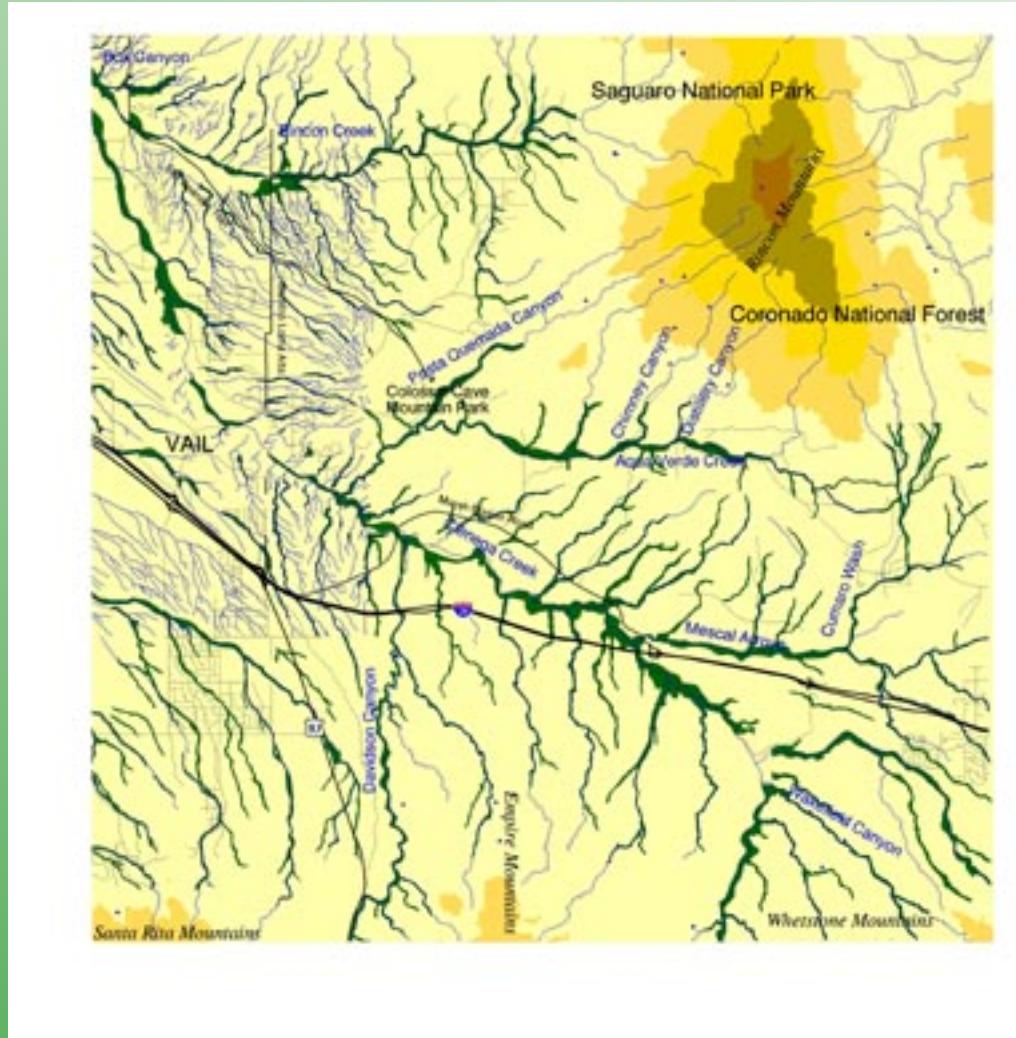


Community Conservation Successes:



- **Locally, one of the best success stories in community-based conservation is the Cienega Creek Watershed.**

Cienega Creek Watershed



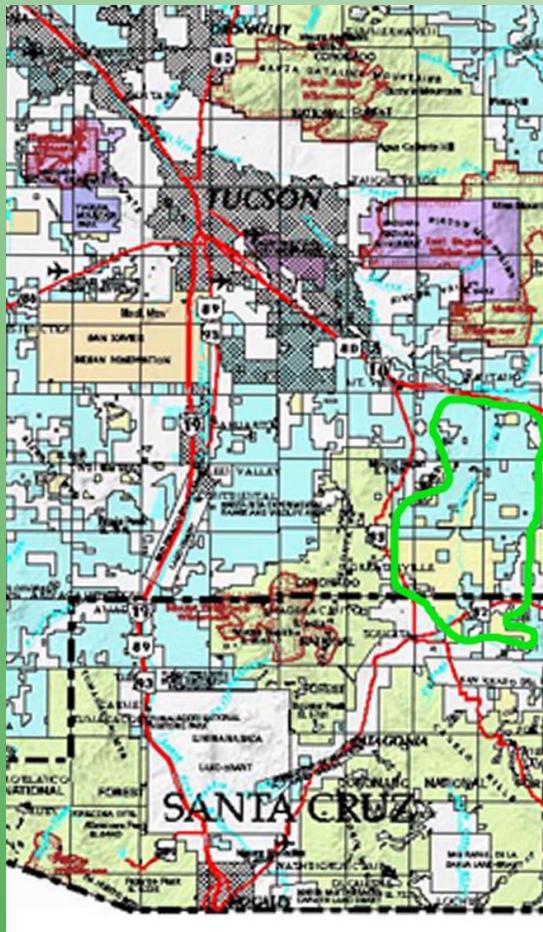
Community Values Workshops



After seven years and hundreds of monthly meetings there have been numerous outcomes, including formation of three community groups:

- *Sonoita Valley Planning Partnership*
- *Sonoita Community Crossroads Forum*
- *Save the Scenic Santa Ritas*

Results in Cienega Watershed:



- The successes carried out by these community groups have produced huge results for preserving the Sonoita Valley & the Cienega Creek watershed, which comprise the core of a huge corridor stretching from Mexico to the Mogollon Highlands.

Sonoita Valley

Planning Partnership:



- **Ad-hoc volunteer group of local residents and environmental, ranching, and recreational interests**



Sonoita Valley

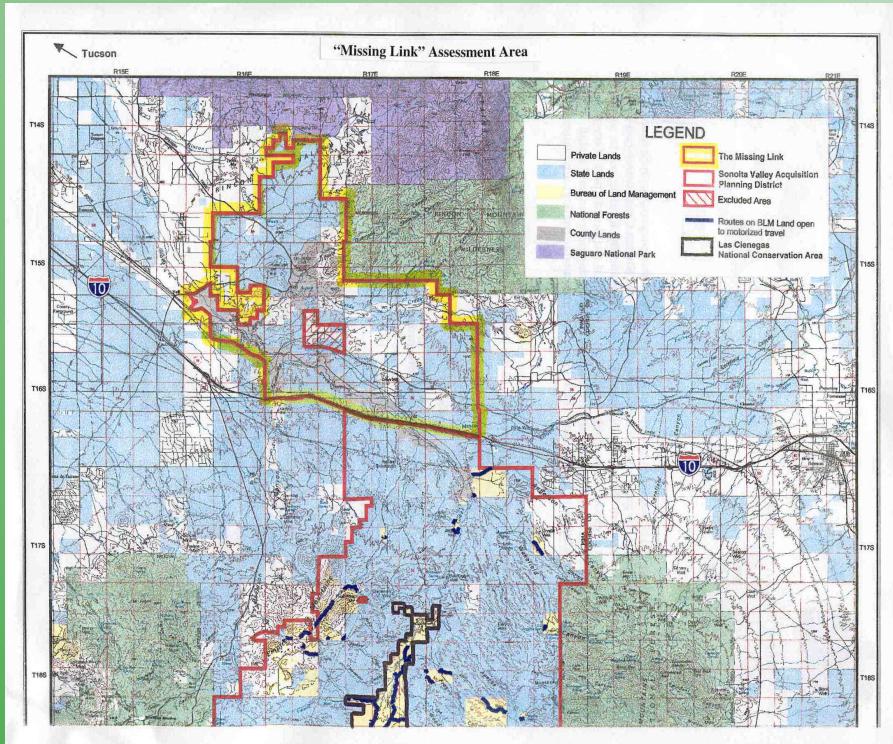
Planning Partnership:



- Worked with BLM, the Sonoran Institute, and Congressman Jim Kolbe to achieve passage of the legislation. Las Cienegas National Conservation Area - a 47,000-acre NCA within a 143,000-acre “Sonoita Valley Acquisition Planning District” (SVAPD) .

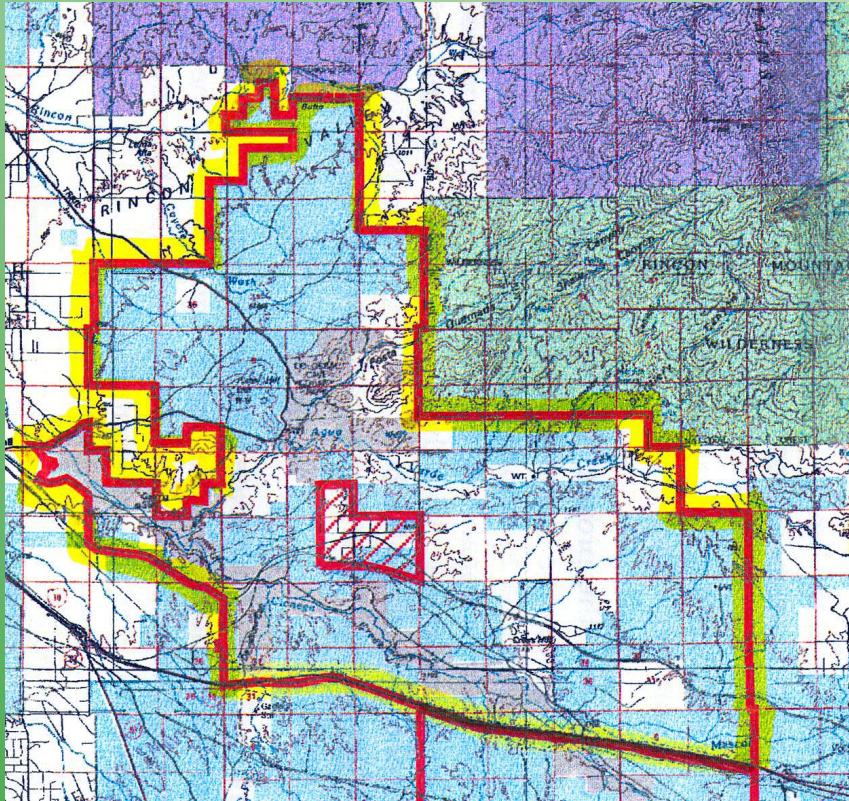


What's Missing?



- In order to move the Las Cienegas legislation through the House and Senate in 2000, the following changes were made and final provision added:

What's Missing?



- **Approximately 50,000 acres at the north end of the watershed were removed.**
- **Lands comprise a mix of state, county, and private lands, which raised concerns in Congress and the Arizona State Land Department about how they would be acquired and managed.**

What's Missing?



- NCA legislation did require that the Secretary of the Interior submit a report to Congress within two years that describes:
“...the most effective measures to protect the lands north of the [SVAPD and NCA] within the Rincon Valley, Colossal Cave area and Agua Verde Creek corridor north of Interstate 10 to provide an ecological link to Saguaro National Park and the Rincon Mountains.” (Section 8.a.)

Missing Link Assessment:



- **18-month assessment of conservation values.**
- [Experts workshop.](#)
- **2 community workshops.**
- [GIS mapping by UA.](#)
- **Input from Pima County, Saguaro NP, Coronado NF, Colossal Cave Mountain Park, BLM, and others.**
- [Analysis of conservation tools and socio-political climate.](#)

Missing Link Assessment:



- Two community meetings in Vail and Rincon Valley canvassed nearly 200 residents and concerned citizens.
- 50 scientists and resource experts contributed their knowledge at an experts workshop and through written comment.

Missing Link Assessment:



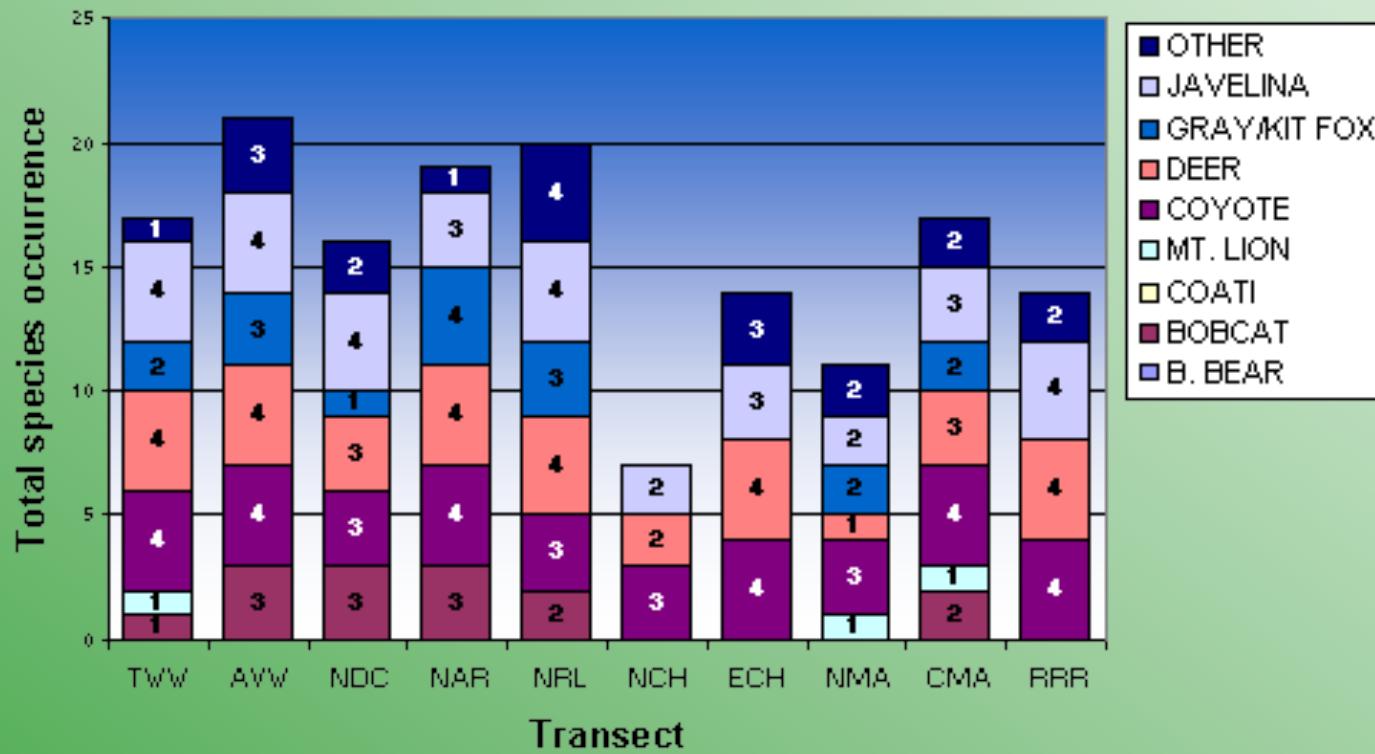
- Sky Island Alliance's wildlife monitoring:
 - ✓ 36 trained volunteers.
 - ✓ Gathering data of animal track and sign.
 - ✓ Long-term monitoring with strict protocol, beginning in 2001.

Results of Sky Island Alliance Transect Monitoring

August-October, 2001



Species occurrence per transect



Missing Link Assessment:



- Habitat for six federally endangered plant and animal species, and 12 species of special concern.
- Vital movement corridor for “sky island” mountain mammals, especially black bears, mountains lions, coatimundis, and mule deer.
- Pima County SDCP highest-level priority for protection because of endangered and threatened species, as well as its value as a wildlife corridor in a “biological core” area.
- Watershed supplies up to 20% of Tucson groundwater recharge system (average 16,000 acre-feet per year/ estimated 50-60,000 acre-feet total).
- 21 distinct and rare soil types.
- Caves provide habitat for the endangered lesser long-nosed bat and the threatened Mexican long-tongued bat, as well as for several species of rare invertebrates.

Missing Link Assessment:

- Archaeological sites dating to 8000 B.C. and historical sites, including Butterfield Stage stop and working ranches.
- Hiking, birdwatching, biking, horseback riding, scenic drives, photography, cultural site exploration, hunting, camping, cave exploration, and picnicking.
- The regional identity of the Rincon Valley is strongly based on Western rural lifestyle values, which include ranching and love of wildlife, open space, and outdoor recreation.



Missing Link Assessment:



- Strong local support for protecting open space and ecological linkages already exists in the Rincon Valley region.
- A poll conducted in spring of 2002 indicates that of 400 high-propensity voters surveyed, 63% consider preservation of wildlife habitat to be extremely/very important.
- Local land agencies and managers are currently working well together and are favorably inclined toward protection of the Missing Link.

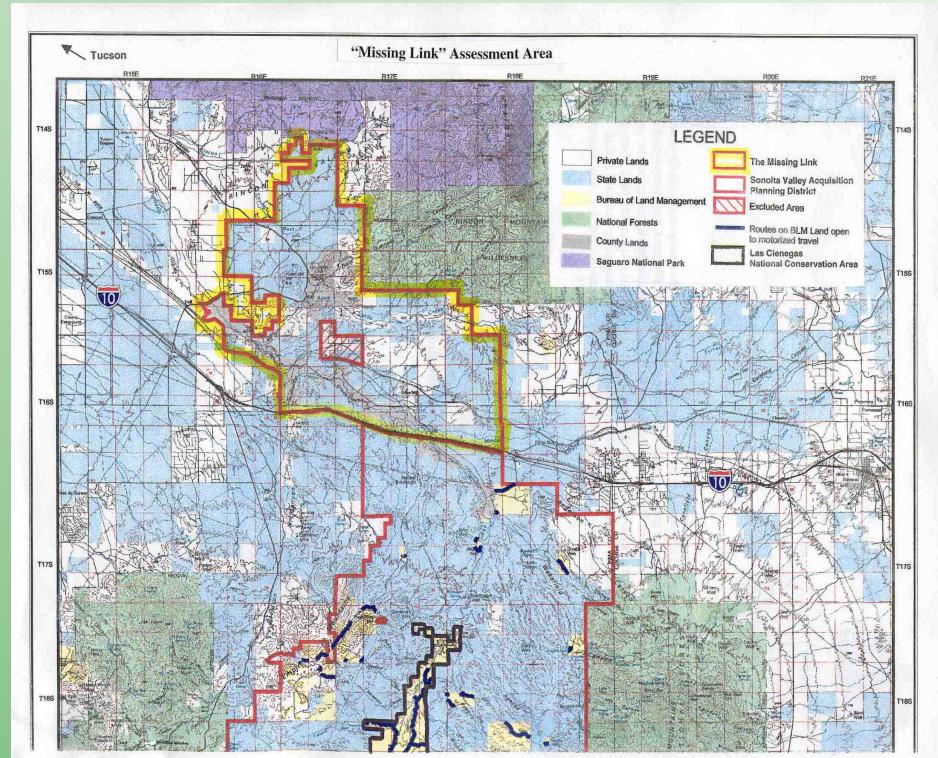
Imminent Threats:

- Land development - Since 1990, Pima County has grown by more than 26 percent.
- The County projects an annual growth rate of 2 percent through 2020, adding an additional 416,000 new residents.
- Much of that growth will occur in the Southeast sector.
- No conservation management of State Trust Lands.



Next Step: From “Missing Link” to Connected Corridor

- Report to Congress completed.
- Report back to the community.
- Develop and launch protection campaign that is firmly imbedded in community values and will yield the best results given all economic, political, and social factors.



Landscape Protection Through Community Collaboration



- By working together, we can protect this vital landscape and ensure the future of one of the most important wildlife corridors and watersheds in the Sky Islands region.





Sonoran Institute

healthy landscapes • vibrant economies • livable communities



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