

## **Sopori Ranch in Pima County Permanently Protected**

Arizona Land and Water Trust partners with Pima County to protect 4,135 acres of wildlife habitat and ranch lands

Tucson, AZ - Pima County, Arizona Land and Water Trust, and the owner of the Sopori Ranch (First United) have reached an agreement for the county to purchase the Sopori Ranch holdings in Pima County. The ranch is located on the north and south side of Arivaca Road, west of I-19, and northeast of Arivaca. The purchase includes 4,135 acres of fee land and 10,480 acres of State grazing and agricultural leases, for \$1.6 million. The property in Santa Cruz County is not included in the purchase.

All of the fee lands included in the purchase are identified in the 2004 Conservation Acquisition Program as Highest priority in the Santa Cruz and Altar Valley sub areas of the Habitat Protection Priorities. The Pima County portion of the acquisition will expand the system of conservation lands in the area, including Pima County's Ranch Seco, the Coronado National Forest, and the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge. The landscape is a topographically diverse desert grassland characterized by a mix of native annual and perennial grasses, woody shrubs, agaves, cacti and forbs. Both parcels of land are ecologically rich with diverse native wildlife species present. In addition to contributing to the protection of the wildlife corridor between the Cerro Colorado and the Tumacacori Mountains, the area is also home to several Priority 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-winger sparrow.

The acquisition will occur in two phases: 1)Phase One includes 2,740 acres of fee land, including the majority of the intact riparian area, approximately half of the irrigated pasture, and the upland parcels to the south: Phase two includes 1,395 acres of fee land, including 477 acres along Arivaca Road, the remainder of the irrigated pasture, and all of the State grazing leases.

The acquisition will also include a Ranch Management Agreement. The Sopori parcels have historically been used for livestock grazing. Responsibility for management of the Sopori property will fall to natural Resources, Parks and recreation (NRPR) within Pima County. The property will be managed as a working landscape in a similar manner as other historic ranch acquired by the County in the past four years. A Coordinated Resource Management Plan will be developed that will guide use of the lands as a ranch unit and will set broad management goals, objectives, and activities.

The Arizona Land and Water Trust is a non-profit land conservation organization dedicated to protecting southern Arizona's vanishing western landscapes and wildlife habitat by acquiring and managing sensitive lands. In addition to its role as land steward, the Trust also engages in programs that support its mission, including appropriate legislation, public education, and outreach that encourages citizens to support protection of landscapes, ecosystems and working ranches that are vital to the well-being of all residents -- present and future. Founded in 1978, the Trust has protected more than 20,000 acres of riparian habitat, wildlife habitat and the vast open space cherished by southern Arizona residents. For more information contact the Trust at (520) 577-8564 or visit the web at [www.alwt.org](http://www.alwt.org).

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