

CELEBRATE NEW PLANS FOR THE SWEETWATER PRESERVE!

Thursday, May 17, 6:30-8:00 pm, County Parks & Recreation Offices

3500 W. River Road (South of Thornydale from Orange Grove Road)

The Pima County Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation has created plans to develop the Sweetwater Preserve. They hope to make it more available for public use, while preserving the natural characteristics of the land. The plans include a parking and equestrian staging area at the end of Tortolita Road; hiking, biking and equestrian trails; and areas for resting and enjoying the upland desert.

Our membership, and many other supporters and donors, can be proud that this lovely land has been preserved for future generations. Now come see how the County plans to use it! Remember, your input is important. The County will present its plans at this public meeting, and we hope to see many of our members there.

Welcome New TMA Board Members

We are thrilled to introduce three newly appointed TMA Board members. Peter Chesson, Professor of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology at the University of Arizona, replaced Board member Nicole Brule-Fisher, who resigned. Kurt Luscombe, who owns a local concrete company and who has lived in the Tucson Mountains for decades, replaced Debbie Hicks, who is now President. Liz Kelley, long-time Tucsonan, TMA member, and retired teacher, who also built her dream home in the Tucson Mountains, replaced Ophelia Zamora. We welcome their efforts as we work to meet TMA's mission of representing our members and preserving the environment and lifestyle in the Tucson Mountains.

If you have an interest in joining the TMA Board, or in working with us on projects, please be in touch and let us know of your interest. This organization operates on the dedicated efforts of its volunteers, and "many hands make light work!"

Painted Hills Cluster Development Update

As you may recall, developer Land Baron Investments, Inc. intends to create a residential cluster development on 286.5 acres, at the southwest corner of Speedway/Gates Pass and Painted Hills Road. At the February meeting of the Design Review Committee (DRC) to discuss the initial proposal, the DRC neither approved nor denied the plan, but granted an extension. They encouraged the developer to revisit some concerns discussed at the meeting, and revise their plans. They were asked to consider a reduction in building density, to address the need for wildlife corridors, and to preserve more of the dense saguaro stands and riparian habitat.

On Thursday, April 25th at 7:00 p.m. at 5601 W. Trails End Rd. (COTA Auditorium) the developer held a public meeting to discuss the revised proposal, which did slightly reduce the density and increase the wildlife corridors and plant life preservation. TMA representatives attended this meeting to discuss issues of concern to the community. The Gates Pass Area Neighborhood Association (“GPANA”) has taken the lead on the matter, as this is right at their geographic core, and TMA has supported their efforts.

A revised plan will be presented to the DRC in June or July for approval or denial. Please consider attending this meeting, as it is your opportunity to express your concerns. For details concerning the plans, contact Judith Meyer. _____

State Trust Land Reform to Come to the Voters Once Again

A new proposed bill is under consideration in the State Legislature which revisits efforts to conserve state trust lands. You may recall that several ballot initiatives to preserve some of these lands have failed, both those proposed by the State Legislature and those developed by private non-profit foundations. The TMA Board agreed to support the current legislative effort, proposed for a 2008 ballot initiative, knowing that it is imperfect and that it is a work in progress. In the Tucson Mountains area, there are 167 acres adjacent to Tucson Mountain Park, 2,680 acres near in Saguaro National Park West, and 520 acres in nearby Tumamoc Hill, which could be included in the legislation.

Carolyn Campbell, the Executive Director of the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection, has informed us that in the current negotiations with several legislators, a total of under 200,000 acres is proposed for preservation, with approximately 69,000 of those acres in Pima County. They include the original API lands (Tortolita Fan, except southern lands around Tangerine Road that the City of Marana wanted removed, Tortolita Mountain Park, Tortolita Biological Corridor East, and Catalina State Park), lands included in Proposition 106 (lands near Tucson Mountain Park and Saguaro National Park, Rincon Valley, Colossal Cave, Cienega Creek, Marana Mounds) and urban state lands that were adopted for conservation under the 2004 Open Space Bond (including more land in the Tortolita Fan, and county-held grazing leases on Bar V Ranch in Davidson Canyon). Passage of this measure, Ms. Campbell explains, would allow the Growing Smarter matching funds to be spent for purchase of the lands. These funds have been locked up since the threat of a lawsuit over conservation of state trust lands.

The measure is simple and includes language that allows for conservation of state trust lands, a list of URBAN-only lands that can be purchased at market value, and rights-of-way that can be conveyed with non-monetary compensation allowable (transfer of development rights, for example). These transfers may be possible without auction.

The legislation does not preserve all of the state trust lands we might want to include, but it does not prevent conservation of additional lands in the future. Concerns raised by the Arizona Education Association (“AEA”) remain to be addressed.

Zoning Code Revisions

Pima County is considering substantial changes to its Zoning Code, and has begun a project it calls the Zoning Analysis and Text Amendment Collaboration (“ZATA”). TMA was contacted recently to provide input as to issues that require attention, changes we believe are needed, and reasons why the Code should be revised.

We responded that our membership has expressed objections to some of the permitted uses in SR, SR-2 and CR-1 zones, on the basis that they interfere with quiet enjoyment of residential land and our desert ecosystem. We told the County that our members want reduction of permitted livestock; reduction or elimination of uses such as B&Bs, hog or poultry farming, rehab or assisted living centers, guest ranches, minor resorts, and storage of junk and junk vehicles. We want protection of washes and reduction of blading, which creates health hazards and causes erosion. We want defined building pads before subdivisions are approved, and lower height restrictions. We would like to see some of these uses excluded from these lower-density residential zones where lots range between approximately one to three and one-third acres, to foster the purposes for which these zones were created and to protect the biodiversity of the upland Sonoran Desert. As Pima County's population grows and these zones are more densely populated, restrictions on use become crucial to wildlife and habitat protection and quiet enjoyment of residential communities.

Our response is based, as we believe it should be, on feedback from our membership. Reasonable people can disagree about particular aspects of the Code, but the organization as a whole must take a position in accord with our mission to preserve biodiversity and the natural uplands desert environment, as well as to foster the welfare of our members. We are always eager to hear from you, and if you have opinions to share, we welcome you to contact any member of the Board, preferably via email, to let us know.

TMA By-Laws Revisions Adopted

Thank you to the 113 members who returned ballots on the by-laws revisions proposed by the Board. Of those who voted, there were 109 votes in favor, 3 opposed, and 1 abstention. The new proposal, as published in our last newsletter, has become the organization's by-laws.