

Pima County 2015 Bond Election

Frequently Asked Questions about the Open Space Acquisition Program Proposition 430

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Why is the County proposing to buy more open space?

Proposition 430 includes \$95 million to continue the County's land conservation program, as well as \$3.75 million for new and improved trailheads. Why?

Pima County is pursuing a Federal permit under the Endangered Species Act that will increase certainty for public and private developers regarding Endangered Species Act compliance. Pima County builds roads, libraries, parks, sewer improvements and other public infrastructure, and is required to offset impacts from development to comply with the Endangered Species Act. Similarly, certain private development projects are required to comply with Endangered Species Act. The permit will be for 30 years and will streamline the Federal compliance process for the County and private developers in return for the County conserving important natural areas for native plants and wildlife. These land conservation costs would otherwise have to be funded at the individual development project level.

Tourism is one of Pima County's top industries. The top 2 reasons people travel here are our natural environment and outdoor natural area recreational opportunities (*Visit Tucson survey 2012*). In 2013, more than 4 million people visited this region, spending \$2.66 billion, generating \$150 million in tax revenues, and supporting 22,000 jobs (*Arizona Office of Tourism*).

There are many other reasons that conserving land enhances our quality of life, including conserving local water supplies, improving groundwater recharge, reducing flooding and flood insurance premiums, protecting important rivers and washes, maintaining scenic views, protecting historic and culturally important places, preserving working farms and ranches, and retaining and attracting young professionals to the region.

Can people hike and participate in other outdoor recreational activities on properties purchased by the County?

Yes. Every property purchased by the County as part of this bond funded open space acquisition program will be open to the public consistent with the types of public access provided to properties purchased by the County with past voter-approved bond funds. The 2004 voter-approved bond program resulted in 7 new trailheads and 77 miles of new trails for hiking, biking, horseback riding, birding and other wildlife watching.

Which properties will the County purchase?

The attached map shows privately owned properties and State Trust land that would be eligible for the County to purchase with the bonds funds. This map was developed through a science-based process associated with the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, as well as input from community groups, neighborhood associations, and the general public. The County will work with a citizens' commission of 11 members to identify specific properties to purchase from willing sellers. No property can be purchased unless the purchase cost is at or near appraised value based on an appraisal approved by the County.

When the County buys private property, doesn't it come off the property tax rolls?

Yes, but the impact to Pima County's property tax revenues and the property tax revenues of school districts in the County has been found to be barely measureable, partially due to the fact that agricultural lands are assessed at such a low value. Conversely, many builders and developers have found that consumers are willing to pay a premium for homes that are adjacent or in close proximity to protected natural areas.

Critics continue to cite the 10 percent of private land in Pima County as a reason to end past practices of expanding our highly visited mountain parks and conserving other important natural areas. But in eastern Pima County, where the majority of the population are located, 25 percent of the land is privately owned, 34 percent is primarily State Trust land, 31 percent is federal land, and the remaining 10 percent is owned by cities, towns, Pima County and Native American tribes. State Trust lands are not public lands and are held in trust with the purpose of maximizing revenues from land leases and sales to fund Arizona K-12 schools. State Trust land is regularly sold to the highest bidder, often for private development, which means it is then converted to private land and subject to property taxes. Almost 60 percent of land in eastern Pima County is either privately owned and already paying property taxes or is State Trust land that often becomes private land and generates property tax revenues

What does owning eligible property mean and what if a property owner does not want to sell to the County?

The County will only purchase properties from willing sellers. The eligible lands designation on the map merely means that those lands are eligible for purchase under the Open Space Acquisition Program. Nothing shall prohibit the owners of eligible property identified by this program from using their property in accordance with existing zoning, building or development codes of Pima County.

How much will it cost to manage properties purchased with voter-approved bond funds?

Based on the average cost to operate and maintain the existing Pima County natural open space parks system, it is estimated that future operations and maintenance will cost approximately \$7 per acre.

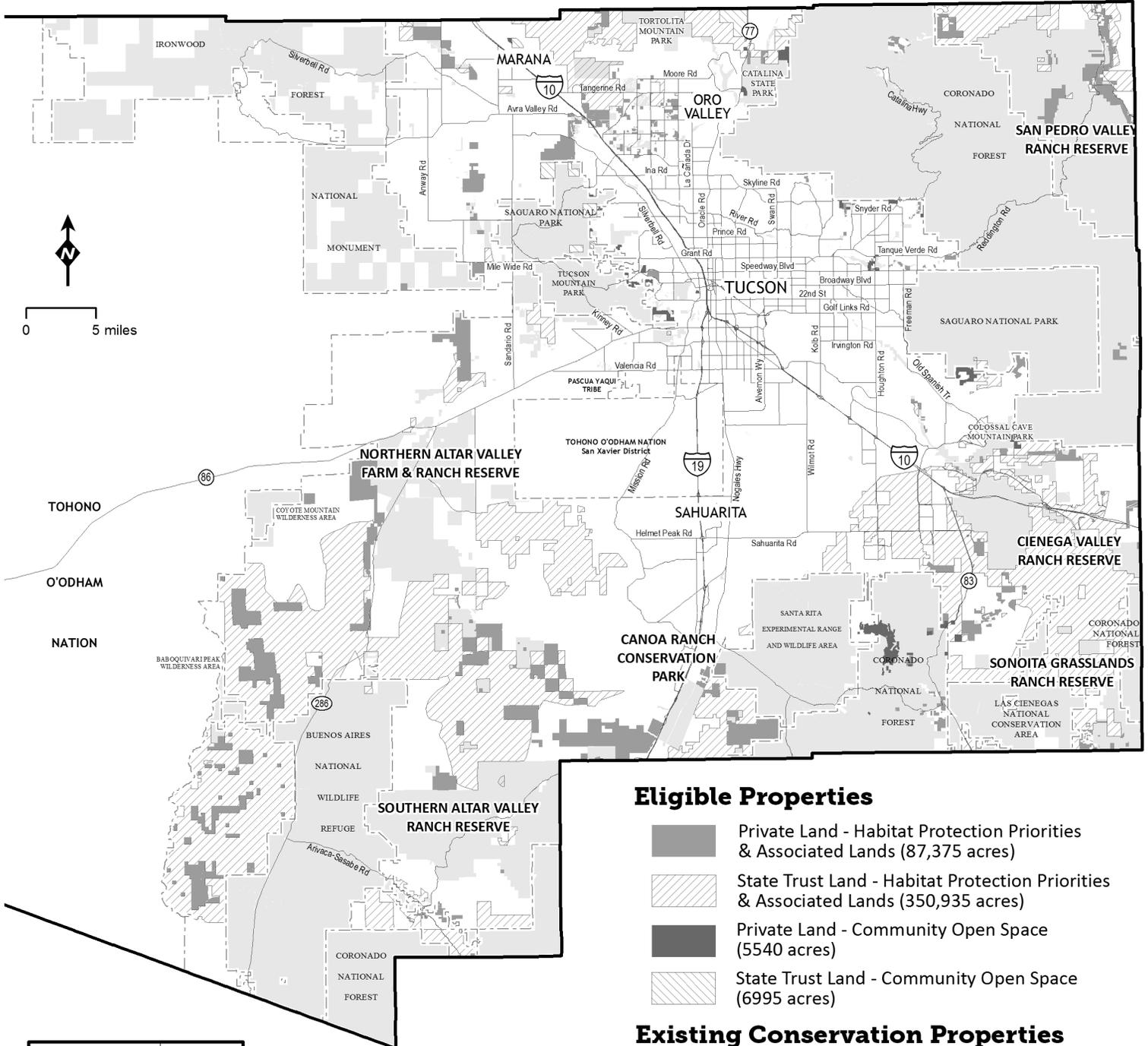
How can the public be sure the County won't turn around and sell property purchased with voter-approved bond funds?

The Federal Permit that Pima County is pursuing under the Endangered Species Act will require that properties meeting the permit requirements will be conserved in perpetuity.

Proposition 430 - Open Space Acquisition Program

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The map shows properties that would be eligible for Pima County to purchase with bond funds if authorized by voters at the November 3, 2015 election. If purchased, these properties would be managed for conservation, continuing past efforts by the county and other organizations to expand the network of federal, state, and county parks and conserve important natural areas for current and future generations.



NOTE: NOT ALL ELIGIBLE PROPERTIES WILL BE ACQUIRED. The value of the properties identified is in excess of the bond funding allocation. This allows flexibility since the County only purchases property from willing sellers and some lands will be developed prior to the County having an opportunity to purchase. Eligible State Trust land can only be purchased through the standard State Trust land acquisition process requiring a public auction. State Trust land can also be managed for conservation without purchase. During the 2004 bond program, the County acquired State grazing leases at little or no cost as a result of purchasing the associated private ranch land, and those leases are managed by the County for conservation.