

**Requestor: Southern Arizona Buffelgrass Coordination Center (SABCC)**

**Date: x**

### **Pima County Bond Election Proposed Project**

**Project Name:** Buffelgrass Removal, Public Safety and Parkland Restoration

**Location:** Pima County owned and managed mountain parks, conservation areas, roads and washes identified as containing large buffelgrass infestations and located in proximity to homes and businesses, or popular recreation areas for residents and visitors.

**Scope:** The purpose of this project is to restore County-owned and managed parklands and natural areas by aggressive treatment and removal buffelgrass infestations over a 5 year period, to the point that annual monitoring with spot treatments is all that is required. By essentially building fire breaks, this project will reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires caused by buffelgrass and the subsequent impacts to public safety, the local economy and our native plants and wildlife. The majority of the funding would be spent on labor, supplies and equipment. Most work would be contracted to local private contractors to build capacity and expertise in private sector. Some work would be conducted by County Public Works crews to build capacity and knowledge within the County organization for ongoing monitoring and spot treatment that will be necessary after completion of bond project. In 2010 SABCC developed a risk assessment for the Tucson Basin and surrounding lands that resulted in the identification of 81,000 acres of County parklands that are high risk for buffelgrass infestations. It is estimated that \$5 million could fund buffelgrass removal on 10,000 acres. The first step in this project will be to refine this assessment to identify the highest priority areas based on the occurrence of buffelgrass and proximity to homes, businesses and popular outdoor recreation areas. Buffelgrass treatment, removal and monitoring will then occur on an estimated 10,000 acres repeated over a 5 year period to reduce buffelgrass plants and seeds to a level that can be managed with normal weed management. Treatment will be accomplished using roadside truck, ATV mounted, backpack, and aerial spraying. Monitoring will determine the efficacy of the treatments and additional acreage will be treated if possible. This protocol was developed and perfected through implementation of a FEMA funded pre-disaster mitigation program to remove buffelgrass at the Tucson International Airport, County Jail and adjacent transportation facility.

**Benefits:** Pima County and the Tucson region are well known for having a world class network of national, state and regional parks and conservation areas, many of which are easily accessible to residents and visitors. Buffelgrass is an Arizona regulated and prohibited noxious weed, which is invasive, and a catastrophic fire hazard that is threatening homes and businesses and converting the diversity of plants and animals of the Sonoran Desert into a desolate grassland. By removing buffelgrass, the project will be re-creating the resiliency to fire that the desert had pre-buffelgrass. By creating bare ground between native plants, this project will build in fire breaks that will eliminate the continuous ground fuels created by buffelgrass, restoring the natural diversity of plants and animals, and restoring normal maintenance level costs for managing these lands. Restoration to a pre-fire vegetation regime will also reduce the frequency and cost of emergency response efforts. Federal agencies are investing in buffelgrass removal on the forests, parks and

monuments in the county. Pima County will be increasing the efficacy of and benefit from these federal efforts and restoring the value of existing County assets.

**Costs:** \$5,000,000

**Bond Funding:** \$5,000,000

**Other Funding:** Will continue to pursue funding from federal, state and local sources to increase the acreage that can be restored.

**Fiscal Year Project Start and Finish Date:** TBD

**Project Management Jurisdiction:** Pima County

**Future Operating and Maintenance Costs:** A major objective of this 5 year project is to reduce the expenditures on buffelgrass mitigation to normal weed management expenses going forward. Estimated budget is \$280,000 per year. Buffelgrass mitigation is part of the management plan for Pima County's Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation Department.

**Regional Benefits:**

A major component of Southern Arizona's economic base is tourism. The exponential growth of buffelgrass in this area means the loss of the Sonoran Desert (its iconic plants and animals) to a fire-prone grassland Savannah. Visitors from all over the world are drawn to this unique environment. Recruitment of highly educated and skilled workforce for our institutes of higher education and research, development of high tech industries, and large and small scale businesses depends heavily on our environment. In addition, this multi-year project will employ local contractors and develop the regional expertise needed to provide these specialized services long-term.

**Supervisor District of Project Location:** ALL