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# MEMORANDUM

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Date: April 6, 2016

To: The Honorable Chair and Members  
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry  
County Administrator 

Re: **Pima County Ranch Conservation and the Multi-Species Conservation Plan**

The US Fish and Wildlife will soon grant a Section 10 Permit (Permit) to Pima County based on the County's Multi-species Conservation Plan (MSCP). The Permit will provide the County with a streamlined procedure for compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and it relies on a robust set of measures Pima County has set forth to avoid, minimize and mitigate actions that will harm endangered species. These conservation actions – many of which have been implemented over the past decade or more – are set forth in the County's MSCP.

A critical component of the County's mitigation package is the County's open space properties, most of which were purchased as a result of the 2004 bonds. Most of these lands remain active cattle ranches, and there are good reasons for such. From a social and cultural perspective, ranching was identified during the development of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP) as an important part of the cultural landscape of our region. It provides an important economic base for some communities and helps define a culture that has strong ties to the land. From the perspective of the environment, ranchlands define the urban fringe in eastern Pima County, and the development of those lands would lead to the deterioration of environmental benefits all open space lands provide – clean water, flood control, natural habitat and open space for recreation. Keeping ranchers ranching is in the best interest of the County, and it is in the best interest of our ranching community.

As the County began implementating the SDCP, the traditional battles between ranchers and most in the environmental community began to subside as there became a mutual recognition that good grazing practices and positive environmental outcomes were not exclusive. Pima County has long recognized this and the important contributions that ranchers make in stewarding and managing these lands.

In implementing the 2004 bonds, we also recognized the open spaces that sustained ranching operations provided the last opportunity to conserve large areas of land in eastern Pima County that were free of development and that would provide habitat for the MSCP and other environmental initiatives of the County. Protecting cattle ranches was a win for species, a win for ranchers and a win for the MSCP.

The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors  
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Today, most of the rangelands purchased with bonds remain active ranch operations under the same ownership that existed at the time of our purchase. These ranchers know the land, and we value the important day-to-day management they perform.

Recently, we heard some concerns about the potential for the County to discontinue ranching under the MSCP. In a recent letter to all ranchers operating on County lands, Chris Cawein, Director of Pima County Natural Resources, Parks, and Recreation, made it clear there is to be no foreseeable change in the County's policy toward ranching under the Section 10 Permit. Ranching is neither contrary to the overarching intent and goals of the MSCP nor threatened by any detail contained in that document.

Pima County has been criticized by some for not excluding livestock from all Pima County owned and leased lands. Though some areas have been excluded from grazing for varying lengths of time to protect site-specific resources (e.g., Davidson Canyon), these are isolated situations and not a blanket policy. We disagree with the perspective that cattle should be excluded from all County lands; we do not see an inherent conflict between ranching and environmental protection, and we will continue to evaluate the condition of our lands on a case-by-case basis.

In order for ranching to continue on County lands, those lands need to remain natural open space to serve as mitigation lands for other areas in the County that will be impacted by growth and development. Once the Section 10 Permit is issued, the County will be required to perpetually conserve these County-owned lands through conservation easements or restrictive covenants. Such easements or restrictions would not restrict the current ranch management agreements; the purpose is to retain the natural landscape and habitat as mitigation lands that cannot be sold or leased for incompatible new development.

The issuance of the Permit will usher in some new responsibilities for Pima County, including ecological monitoring, greater management action, working closely with the development community, and reporting. However, Pima County does not view the Permit as a reason to change our land stewardship responsibilities nor our relationship with our ranch operators, many of whom continue to operate their family ranches, while providing Pima County with day to day ranch management services that maintain our investment. We look forward to a continued strong partnership between Pima County and our ranching community.

CHH/mjk

c: John Bernal, Deputy County Administrator for Public Works  
Nanette Slusser, Assistant Deputy County Administrator for Public Works  
Chris Cawein, Director, Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation  
Suzanne Shields, Director, Regional Flood Control District  
Linda Mayro, Director, Office of Sustainability and Conservation  
Kerry Baldwin, Superintendent, Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation