**HOW TO HAVE A HEALTHY RIPARIAN ECOSYSTEM**

**Positive Actions You Can Take**
- Remove invasive non-native plants.
- Plant native vegetation, especially low-growing plants and native trees.
- Conserve your mesquite and hackberry forests.
- Be conservative with your groundwater use.
- If you must fence, use wildlife friendly fencing (a raised bottom strand, 24 inches from ground, and no barbs on either the bottom or top strands).

**Remove Invasive Non-Native Plant Species**
Invasive non-native plants out compete our native Southwest plants for water and other resources, create fire hazards, and reduce food and habitat for native wildlife. Removing invasive non-native plants helps our native species thrive and preserves our desert riparian ecosystems.

**Conserve your Riparian Vegetation**
Cutting branches, whole trees, and clearing land all negatively affect the integrity of riparian zones, and the functions they can provide for people and wildlife. This zone of high tree diversity, density, size, and complexity is what provides for riparian communities’ unique ecosystem functions and the many wildlife species niches available.

**Promote Low Growing (Understory) Vegetation**
Mowing native grasses, or clearing understory shrubs and forbs degrades habitat. “Messy,” “thick” and “thorny” are all positive aspects of habitat for birds and many other kinds of wildlife. Cutting or clearing of trees and low-growing vegetation reduces wildlife habitat quality, nutrient cycling, and the ability of riparian systems to function for flood control.

**Allow Animals to Move Freely within the Riparian Zone**
By giving careful thought towards providing freedom of movement for wildlife, particularly close to washes (by avoiding fencing/walls or at least providing wildlife friendly designs, or a set-back within your property boundary along riparian corridors), a landowner can promote the value of riparian zones as “wildlife travel corridors” for certain animals, such as deer, javalina, and coyotes. Certain fencing, walls, or development can severely reduce the value of riparian zones to function as wildlife corridors.

**Damaging Activities to Watch Out For**
- “Dumping” creates flood hazards, impacts vegetation, causes habitat loss, and disrupts the ecology of riparian vegetation.
- Off-road vehicle use and grazing in the riparian zone causes bank erosion, soil disturbance, and vegetation loss.
- Hardening or creating concrete banks prevents natural channel movement and increases downstream erosion.
- Building (or paving), walls/fences, and roads in riparian areas disturb vegetation and reduces the positive values these ecosystems can provide.

**Requirements in Regulated Riparian Habitat (RRH)**
Riparian habitat is regulated under Chapter 16.30 of the Floodplain and Erosion Hazard Management Ordinance. When planning improvements on your property, every effort should be made to avoid and or minimize impacts to riparian habitat. Permits are required for activities that disturb riparian habitat, including permanent impacts such as structures, homes, roads, facilities, and driveways and temporary impacts such as utility lines and grading. Contact Pima County Regional Flood Control District at 243-1800 for more information or visit our website at dot.pima.gov/gis/maps/mapguide to find out what kind of habitat is on your property.

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**Riparian Ecosystems in Pima County, Arizona**

**PROVIDING BENEFITS FOR PEOPLE & WILDLIFE**

**What is “Riparian”?**
Riparian refers to vegetation, habitats, and ecosystems associated with rivers, streams, washes, springs, or lakes. They are dependent on the existence of year round, intermittent, or temporary surface waterflow or subsurface groundwater.

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**Pima County Regional Flood Control District**

201 N. Stone Ave., 9th Floor
Tucson, AZ 85701-1797

**or current resident**
Important Riparian Areas in Pima County
Tanque Verde Creek, Pantano Wash, Agua Caliente Wash, Rillito River, Canada Del Oro Wash, Cienega Creek, Rincon Creek, and Sabino Creek all are designated as Important Riparian Areas under Pima County’s Conservation Land System.

Besides providing high quality wildlife habitat in their own right, these riparian corridors are of particular importance because they provide critical cover and connectivity. They function as wildlife travel corridors for large and medium size animals to move through the Tucson basin. These critical riparian corridors allow animals to disperse, find mates, and thus provide genetic exchange between populations to ensure healthy populations, all while avoiding the busy more populated urban areas.