

Gates Pass - photo by Bill Singleton

Tucson Mountain Park Expansion

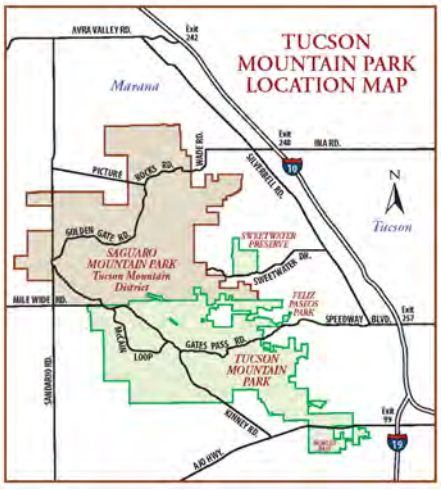
Fee: 1,840 acres
Cost: $16,174,086
Acquired: June 1998 to October 2009
Fund: 1997 and 2004 Bond Funds
Partners: Arizona Land and Water Trust

Background

The tireless efforts of C.B. Brown, considered to be the "father of Tucson Mountain Park", to set aside large tracts of land in the Tucson Mountains for future generations, led to the Pima County Board of Supervisors' request to the U.S. Department of the Interior to set aside thousands of acres of land in the Tucson Mountains for park purposes in 1929. This groundbreaking request was granted under the Recreational Act of 1926, and the Board of Supervisors promptly established Tucson Mountain Park (TMP). Today, the 20,000-acre Park offers some of the most impressive natural Sonoran Desert beauty in the Tucson Basin and contains some of the most significant wildlife habitat in the Tucson Mountains. It is located west of metropolitan Tucson and is bounded on its northern side by the Tucson Mountain District Saguaro National Park. TMP is home to the Arizona-Sonoran Desert Museum and Old Tucson Studios, and includes the Gates Pass Scenic Gateway and the Gates Pass overlook, camping and picnic areas and miles of shared-use recreational trails.

Once seen as a rural park in 1929, TMP is practically surrounded by development today. Its popularity as a destination and the appeal of being located on the edge of a protected natural area has led to increased residential development on its fringes, as well as a high-end resort, golf courses and other commercial development. More recently, the University of Arizona completed their Mountain Lions and Bobcats in the Tucson Mountains: Monitoring Population Status and Landscape Connectivity report in June 2010. This report was primarily funded by Pima County's Starr Pass Wildlife Enhancement Fund, stemming from a special revenue sharing agreement between the County and the JW Marriott Starr Pass Resort. The university mounted infrared-triggered cameras in Saguaro National Park and Tucson Mountain Park to monitor mountain lions and bobcats in the Tucson Mountains between January 2008 and May 2010. While the majority of the sightings were within Saguaro National Park, the report also confirmed the presence of mountain lions within Tucson Mountain Park. Presence and reproduction of this large predator is one indicator for us of an intact and viable natural system. The complete report can be viewed on Pima County's Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation Department website at www.pima.gov/nrpr/.

In order to ensure that this natural area does not become an isolated biological island, Pima County's efforts to maintain viable wildlife corridors from TMP to other conserved areas continue. Using voter-approved 1997 and 2004 Bond funds, the County has acquired over 1,000 acres that expand TMP's boundaries and protect habitat and natural areas. These acquisitions fall into three areas around the Park: Camino de Oeste, Robles Pass, and 36th Street Corridor.



Camino de Oeste Area

Using both 1997 and 2004 bond funds, the County acquired 10 properties totaling 800 acres, for a total cost of $7,167,473. The properties were acquired between June 1998 and October 2009, and include the Diocese of Tucson, Saguaro Cliffs, Holsclaw, L & F International, Selective Marketing, Matesich, Serr, Des Rochers, Route 606, and Dos Picos properties. These properties are located near Camino de Oeste north and south of Gates Pass Road.

These acquisitions significantly expanded the eastern boundary of Tucson Mountain Park in a critical corridor and provide links to vital biological corridors, including Roger Wash, Trails End Wash, Camino de Oeste Wash and Greasewood Wash.

They also protect highly visited viewsheds of the upper foothills of the Tucson Mountains and cultural resources, including several Civilian Conservation Corps check dams dating to the early 1930s. A trailhead was constructed at the end of Camino de Oeste providing access to some of these properties and other major trails in Tucson Mountain Park.



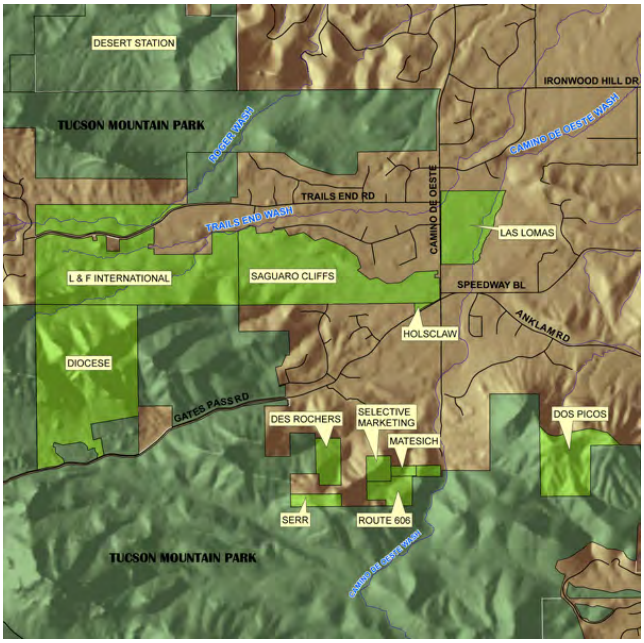
Mountain lion photo taken by University of Arizona infrared-triggered camera in May 2010 in the more rugged and mountainous area just west of the Camino de Oeste area.



Dos Picos Property - photo by Kerry Baldwin



Camino de Oeste Trailhead - photo by Nicole Fyffe



Robles Pass Area

Using both 1997 and 2004 bond funds, the County acquired 8 properties totaling 968 acres at a total of $8,390,641. The properties acquired were the Lefkovitz/Lakia, Perper/Rollings, Berard, Heater, Hiett, Pacheco, Firkins, and Hyntington properties, generally located south of Ajo Highway and west of Mission Road. The Perper/Rollings property was the largest by far in this area at 746 acres. These properties preserve this corridor, protect a key scenic gateway into Tucson, buffer the effects of urban encroachment, conserve habitat in the Tucson Mountains and provide further recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. This area of Tucson Mountain Park is referred to as the Robles Pass Unit on maps and informational materials.

This area contains a significant portion of the prehistoric Hohokam Village archaeological site known as the West Branch Site, which was settled by A.D. 950, and soon became one of the largest villages in the Tucson area and a major center of pottery production, with its pottery distributed and used throughout the Tucson area. By A.D. 1150, most residents of the West Branch Site had moved away and the village was essentially abandoned.





Berard Property - photo by Michael Berard





Geology class at Tucson Mountain Park. Photo by NRPR

36th Street Corridor Area

Using 2004 bond funds, the County acquired the Belvedere Estates property located at the end of West 36th Street, totaling 72 acres for $615,972. This acquisition contributes to the protection of a wildlife corridor from the Tucson Mountains east to the West Branch of the Santa Cruz River along the Enchanted Hills Wash. A trailhead was constructed on this property at the end of 36th Street as a jump off point for a new connector trail into Tucson Mountain Park. Additional acquisitions were made along the 36th Street corridor and are discussed under the section titled Acquisitions that Contribute to the Reserve.



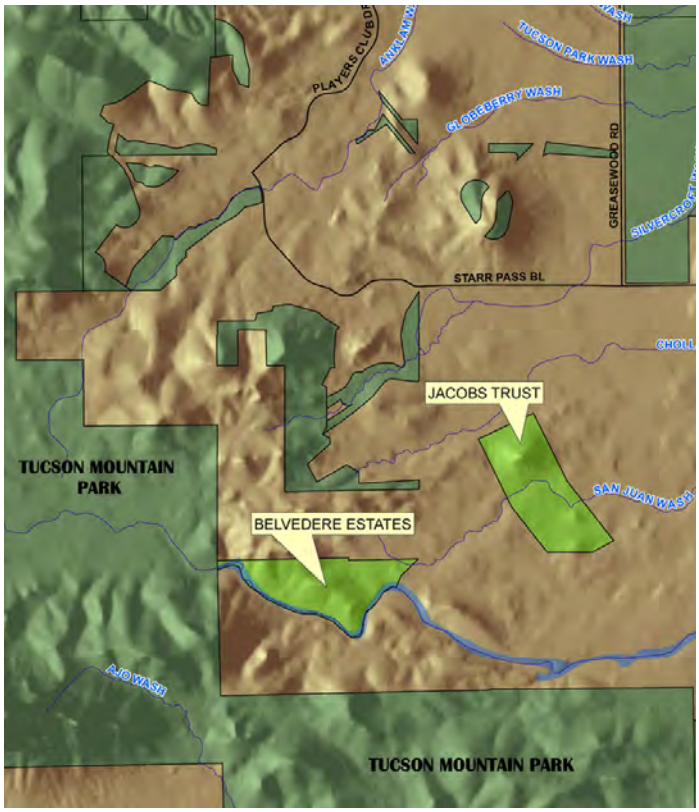
Trailhead on Belvedere Estates Property, 36th Street. Photo by Andrea Altamirano

Recreation

As part of the overall management strategy for Tucson Mountain Park, new trail developments and locations for increased public uses have been designed for these buffer properties to the original Tucson Mountain Park boundaries. This will allow the core of Tucson Mountain Park to stay relatively undeveloped and the high ecological values protected over time. The development of the new properties will include multi-use trail systems, trailhead parking areas, interpretive trails and other nature-based programs and facilities for diverse audiences with different physical capabilities. All development will however, be done in a way to maintain the conservation values the property was originally acquired for.



Hikers on 36th Street Trail. Photo by Andrea Altamirano



Ongoing Property Improvements

- A Master Plan has been developed for the Robles Pass Unit.
- Illegal wildcat trails have been removed.
- Trail signage is being installed at various points and a multi-use recreational trail system is being developed in the Robles Pass Unit.
- Methods to connect the Robles Pass Unit south of Ajo Highway to the main body of Tucson Mountain Park north of the highway are being evaluated.
- The Sonoran Desert Weedwackers continue their fight to control buffelgrass in Tucson Mountain Park.
- Additional work has been completed to install a vandal proof gate to protect a historic and active bat roosting cave.
- Properties have been fenced to minimize unauthorized uses and routine monitoring of the new properties continues.
- Ongoing partnerships for wildlife monitoring in Tucson Mountain Park.