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Pima County Development Services

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Introduction

The Conservation Lands System (CLS) Regional Plan Policy was adopted as part of the Environmental Element of the Pima County Comprehensive Plan 2001 Plan Update in December 2001 and was updated June 21, 2005. The CLS categorizes and identifies locations of priority biological resources within Pima County, and provides policy guidelines for the conservation of these resources. These guidelines are applied to certain types of land use changes requested of the Board of Supervisors.

- Conservation Lands System Regional Plan Policy
- Conservation Lands System Map

PUBLIC WORKS

Conservation Lands System
As Amended June 21, 2005

Regional Plan Policy 6 Environmental Element
B. Natural Resources
1. Conservation Lands System

The Environmental Planning Element calls for analysis, policies and strategies to address anticipated effects of implementation of plan elements on natural resources. Policies and strategies under this plan element are designed to have countywide applicability. Conservation actions are to be encouraged, and protection of biological resources is considered an essential component of land-use planning.

The Conservation Lands System (CLS) is designed to protect biodiversity and provide land use guidelines consistent with the conservation goal of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP). The overarching purpose of the SDCP is to:

> Ensure the long-term survival of the full spectrum of plants and animals that are indigenous to Pima County through maintaining or improving the habitat conditions and ecosystem functions necessary for their survival.

The CLS was constructed according to the most current tenets of conservation biology and biological reserve design. The CLS:

- perpetuates the comprehensive conservation of vulnerable species;
- retains those areas that contain large populations of focal vulnerable species;
- provides for the adjacency and proximity of habitat blocks;
- preserves the contiguity of habitat at the landscape level; and
- retains the connectivity of reserves with functional corridors.

The collective application of these individual tenets produces a CLS that retains the diverse representation of physical and environmental conditions, preserves an intact functional ecosystem, minimizes the expansion of exotic or invasive species, maximizes the extent of roadless areas, and minimizes fragmentation. Implementation of the CLS not only conserves those biological resources that exist today but, because of its landscape focus, preserves the future ebb and flow of resources essential to a healthy functioning ecosystem. The seven CLS conservation land categories reflect relative values of biodiversity for various lands across the landscape.

Based on the science of the SDCP with participation and oversight by the SDCP Science Technical Advisory Team (STAT), seven CLS conservation land categories (CLS categories) were created, defined, and mapped. Each category has an associated conservation guideline policy.

a. General Application of CLS:

CLS category designations and Conservation Guidelines policies apply to land uses and activities under the jurisdiction of Pima County and Pima County Flood Control District. Application of these designations or guidelines shall not alter, modify, decrease or limit existing and legal land uses, zoning, permitted activities, or management of lands. These policies apply to new rezoning and specific plan requests, time extension requests for rezonings, requests for modifications or waivers of rezoning or specific plan conditions, including substantial changes, requests for Comprehensive Plan amendments, Type II and Type III conditional use

permit requests, and requests for waivers of the subdivision plat requirement of a zoning plan. Implementation of these policies shall achieve the level of conservation necessary to protect a site's conservation values, preserve landscape integrity, and provide for the movement of native fauna and pollination of native flora across and through the landscape. New applications subject to this policy will be evaluated against the following conservation guidelines for the CLS categories, where applicable, to determine their appropriateness:

b. Important Riparian Areas:
   1) These areas are characterized by hydro-riparian, meso-riparian and xero-riparian biological communities. Hydro-riparian communities generally exist in areas where vegetation is supported by perennial watercourses or springs. Meso-riparian communities generally exist in areas where vegetation is supported by perennial or intermittent watercourses or shallow groundwater. Xero-riparian communities generally exist in areas where vegetation is supported by an ephemeral watercourse.

      Important riparian areas are valued for their higher water availability, vegetation density, and biological productivity. In addition to the inherent high biological value of these water-related communities, important riparian areas including their associated upland areas provide a framework for linkages and landscape connections. Important riparian areas are essential elements in the CLS.

   2) Conservation Guidelines - At least 95 percent of the total acreage of lands within this designation shall be conserved in a natural or undisturbed condition. Every effort should be made to protect, restore and enhance the structure and functions of Important Riparian Areas, including their hydrological, geomorphological and biological functions. Areas within an Important Riparian Area that have been previously degraded or otherwise compromised may be restored and/or enhanced. Such restored and/or enhanced areas may contribute to achieving the 95 percent conservation guideline for Important Riparian Areas.

c. Biological Core Management Areas:
   1) This category identifies lands that fulfill the five tenets used to construct the CLS and which provide greater biological diversity than Multiple Use Management Areas. These areas are primarily distinguished from other lands within the CLS by their potential to support high value habitat for five or more priority vulnerable species as identified by the SDCP.

   2) Conservation Guidelines - At least 80 percent of the total acreage of lands within this designation shall be conserved as undisturbed natural open space. As such, land-use changes will result in 4:1 land conservation (i.e., four acres conserved for every one acre developed) and may occur through a combination of on- and/or off-site conservation inside the Biological Core Management Area or Habitat Protection Priority Areas. For purposes of this policy, Habitat Protection Priority Areas are those such areas referenced and mapped as part of the 2004 Conservation Bond Program. The 4:1 mitigation ratio will be calculated according to the extent of impacts to the total surface area of that portion of any parcel designated as Biological Core Management Areas. Development shall be configured in the least sensitive portion(s) of the property. Area(s) of undisturbed natural open space will be configured to include on-site conservation values and

preserve the movement of native fauna and pollination of native flora across and through the landscape. Land use and management within these areas shall focus on the preservation, restoration, and enhancement of native biological communities. Land uses appropriate for these areas must retain and improve conditions for on-site conservation values, preserve the movement of native fauna and pollination of native flora across and through the landscape, and preserve landscape integrity. A transfer of development rights may be used in order to secure mitigation lands.

d. Scientific Research Areas:
   1) This designation identifies lands currently managed for scientific research: the Santa Rita Experimental Range and the University of Arizona Desert Laboratory (at Tumamoc Hill). Land uses and management within these areas focus on balancing conservation, restoration, and enhancement of natural communities in support of scientific research on the environment and natural resources (e.g., monitoring ecological change, measuring effects of experimental grazing methods).

   2) Conservation Guidelines - Scientific Research Areas should continue to be managed for the purpose of scientific research on the environment and natural resources. Scientific research activities should minimize any long-lasting impacts that may affect adjacent or nearby CLS lands. Any land-use changes subject to Pima County jurisdiction should achieve the conservation goals of the underlying CLS category.

e. Multiple Use Management Areas:
   1) This category identifies those lands that fulfill the five tenets used to construct the CLS, but which are not as biologically rich as those lands designated as Biological Core Management Areas. These areas are primarily distinguished from other lands within the CLS by their potential to support high value habitat for three or more priority vulnerable species as identified by the SDCP.

   2) Conservation Guidelines – At least 66 ⅔ percent of the total acreage of lands within this designation shall be conserved as undisturbed natural open space. As such, land-use changes will result in a 2:1 land conservation (i.e., two acres conserved for every one acre developed) and may occur through a combination of on- and off-site conservation inside the Multiple Use Management Area or any more protective category of the CLS, including Habitat Protection Priority Areas. For purposes of this policy, Habitat Protection Priority Areas are those such areas referenced and mapped as part of the 2004 Conservation Bond Program. The 2:1 mitigation ratio will be calculated according to the extent of impacts to the total surface area of that portion of any parcel designated as Multiple Use Management Areas. Development shall be configured in the least sensitive portion(s) of the property. Area(s) of undisturbed natural open space will include on-site conservation values and facilitate the movement of native fauna and pollination of native flora across and through the landscape. Land use and management goals within these areas shall focus on balancing land uses with conservation, restoration, and enhancement of native biological communities. Land uses appropriate for these areas must facilitate the movement of native fauna and pollination of native flora across and through the landscape, maximize retention of on-site conservation values, and promote landscape integrity.

Additional conservation exceeding 66⅔ percent will be encouraged through the use of development-related incentives and may utilize undisturbed natural open space on individual lots. A transfer of development rights may be used in order to secure lands utilized for mitigation, restoration, and/or enhancement purposes.

f. Agriculture In-Holdings Within the Conservation Lands System:

1) This designation denotes those lands utilized for agricultural purposes and lands where agricultural uses have been abandoned. Agricultural land uses, in general, are more conducive to the movement of native fauna and functional pollination processes than other lands supporting higher intensity uses. Intensifying the land use of these areas could compromise landscape integrity, promote the spread of exotic species, and otherwise compromise the biodiversity of adjacent or nearby CLS lands.

2) Conservation Guidelines: Intensifying land uses of these areas will emphasize the use of native flora, facilitate the movement of native fauna and pollination of native flora across and through the landscape, and conserve on-site conservation values when they are present. Development within these areas will be configured in a manner that does not compromise the conservation values of adjacent and nearby CLS lands.

g. Special Species Management Areas:

1) These are areas defined as crucial for the conservation of specific native floral and faunal species of special concern to Pima County. Currently, three species are designated as Special Species: cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl, Mexican spotted owl, and southwest willow flycatcher. Special Species and associated Conservation Guidelines may be added or deleted in the future based on the best available regional scientific information as developed by the Science Technical Advisory Team and added to or deleted from the Special Species Management Areas as shown on the CLS map. Such additions and/or deletions will be processed as a comprehensive plan amendment. Land use and management within these areas will focus on conservation, restoration, and enhancement of habitat for these species.

2) Conservation Guidelines: At least 80 percent of the total acreage of lands within this designation shall be conserved as undisturbed natural open space and will provide for the conservation, restoration, or enhancement of habitat for the affected Special Species. As such, land use changes will result in 4:1 land conservation (i.e., four acres conserved for every one acre developed) and may occur through a combination of on- and off-site conservation inside the Special Species Management Area. The 4:1 mitigation ratio will be calculated according to the extent of impacts to the total surface area of that portion of any parcel designated as Special Species Management Area. Development shall be configured in the least sensitive portion(s) of the property. Area(s) of undisturbed natural open space will be configured to facilitate the movement of the relevant Special Species through the landscape and will include those on-site conservation values essential to survival of the relevant Special Species. A transfer of development rights may be used in order to secure mitigation lands.

h. Critical Landscape Connections:

1) These are broadly defined areas that provide connectivity for movement of native biological resources but which also contain potential or existing barriers that tend to isolate major conservation areas. Specifically, these regional-scale areas are located: (1) Across the I-10/Santa Cruz River corridors in the northwest; (2) Between the Catalina and Tortolita Mountains; (3) Across the I-10 corridor along Cienega Creek in the east; (4) Across the I-19 and Santa Cruz River corridors in southern Pima County; (5) Across the Garcia strip extension of the Tohono O'odham Nation; and (6) Across the Central Arizona Project canal in Avra Valley. Roads, other infrastructure services, and residential and commercial land uses within these areas, depending on configuration, can result in habitat loss and fragmentation that inhibits the movement of native fauna and interrupts the pollination processes of native flora.

2) Conservation Guidelines: Land-use changes in these broadly defined areas should protect existing biological linkages. Where they occur, barriers to the movement of native fauna and pollination of native flora across and through the landscape should be removed and fragmented corridors of native biological communities should be restored. Opportunities to remove barriers and restore corridor connectivity may arise as part of other, non-land use related activities (e.g., new construction for or upgrade of infrastructure services). Such opportunities should be pursued. High priority shall be given to identifying, preserving, and re-establishing the connection between native biological communities especially where natural connectivity is most constrained.

i. Adherence to CLS Conservation Guidelines

Adherence to Conservation Lands System Guidelines will protect against the loss of conservation values and landscape integrity through in-place preservation and restoration or enhancement of degraded or otherwise compromised natural resources. Urban development will occur in a manner that retains conservation values at both the micro and macro landscape scale by minimizing impacts to site-specific sensitive conservation values, maximizing landscape continuity, facilitating the movement of native fauna and pollination of native flora across and through the landscape, promoting the long-term diversity of native flora and fauna, and preserving the viability of the CLS.

j. Project Inventory and Analysis:

Application and review of requests for the establishment of land use policy (comprehensive plan amendments) and the implementation of land use policy (rezonings) that require approval by the Board of Supervisors (Board) shall include an inventory and assessment of the site's conservation values and context within an area-wide landscape as well as an analysis of the biological impact of the requested land use change.

1) Comprehensive Plan Amendments
   a) Applications for comprehensive plan amendments will, at a minimum, be reviewed for the following parameters:
      • The site's landscape context as it relates to the biological and built environments; and

- The proposed amendment's consistency with the existing infrastructure service area or land use planning and infrastructure studies that address the logical expansion of infrastructure services.

b) Requests for comprehensive plan amendments that seek to increase the intensity of allowable land uses within the CLS may be approved provided there is adequate demonstration that intensifying the land use designation will:
   - preserve the integrity of the CLS; and
   - promote development that is consistent with the existing infrastructure service area or land use planning and infrastructure studies that address the logical expansion of infrastructure services.

c) Special area policies may be applied to govern or otherwise direct subsequent rezoning to specifically address conservation of certain landscape attributes.

2) Rezoning Activities

a) Applications for rezoning will, at a minimum, be reviewed for the following parameters:
   - The site's landscape context as it relates to the biological and built environments;
   - The on-site presence of or potential to support highly valued native floral and faunal species; and
   - The occurrence of physical characteristics that contribute to biodiversity.

b) Requests for rezoning that would result in new high-intensity residential uses, commercial and industrial uses, or other high intensity land uses within the CLS may be permitted provided there has been adequate demonstration that the new land use will:
   - preserve the integrity of the CLS;
   - actively contribute to the conservation of highly valued native floral and faunal species; and
   - provide for development that achieves at least as much conservation as development under the existing zoning.

k. Application of Conservation Guidelines:

1) The Conservation Guideline for the associated CLS designation shall apply to the total acreage of the site that lies within the boundaries of that designation. If a CLS designation applies to a portion of a site, Conservation Guidelines for that designation will apply only to that portion of the site affected by that category. For purposes of this policy, site is defined as a single lot or combination of contiguous lots. If more than one CLS category applies to all or a portion of a site, the more protective Conservation Guideline will apply to the affected portion.

2) Those conservation lands that are to be reserved from development, or which are provided as mitigation, shall be conserved and managed, in perpetuity, for the benefit of the natural resources. Various means may be utilized to protect conservation or mitigation lands including, but not limited to, the transfer of deeded property to Pima County, pending approval by the Board of Supervisors, or other conservation entities and the granting of conservation easements. Land

conserved through application of the CLS shall be established as separate, natural open space parcel(s) from the development area. Residents, or associations of residents, of a development may not serve as the sole administrator or enforcement entity for the management and protection of those conservation or mitigation lands.

3) The authority to increase, reduce, exempt, or otherwise modify the full application of the Conservation Guidelines for proposed land use changes that require the setting of land use policy (comprehensive plan amendments) or its implementation (rezoning) lies solely with the Board of Supervisors. Requests to modify or exempt the full application of the Conservation Guidelines will be deliberated on a case-by-case basis. Staff may review and make recommendations on proposals that seek to modify the full application of the Conservation Guidelines. The full application of the Conservation Guidelines may be modified as part of a decision that establishes land use policy (comprehensive plan amendment). The full application of the Conservation Guidelines may also be modified as part of a decision that implements land use policy (rezoning requests). Applicants seeking to modify the full application of the Conservation Guidelines must demonstrate that the proposed land use change is consistent with the goals of the SDCP, does not adversely impact the landscape integrity of the CLS, retains the ability of native fauna and pollination of native flora to move through and across the landscape, and will protect and enhance or restore conservation values.

   a) Should the Board, as part of a land use policy decision, reduce or otherwise adjust a comprehensive plan amendment from complying with a Conservation Guideline(s), then the adjustment will be applied to any subsequent implementation of that policy through rezoning. Applicants seeking to reduce or otherwise adjust the full application of a Conservation Guideline(s) as part of a proposed comprehensive plan amendment or rezoning must demonstrate that the proposed land use change is consistent with the goals of the SDCP, does not adversely impact the landscape integrity of the CLS, retains the ability of native fauna and pollination of native flora to move through and across the landscape, and will protect and enhance or restore on-site conservation values.

   b) Should the Board, as part of a land use policy decision, exempt a comprehensive plan amendment from complying with a Conservation Guideline(s), then the exemption will be applied to any subsequent implementation of that policy through rezoning. Applicants seeking to exempt a comprehensive plan amendment or rezoning from compliance with the Conservation Guidelines shall demonstrate that the exemption is necessary to accommodate public health and safety.

CONSERVATION LANDS SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION STATEGIES

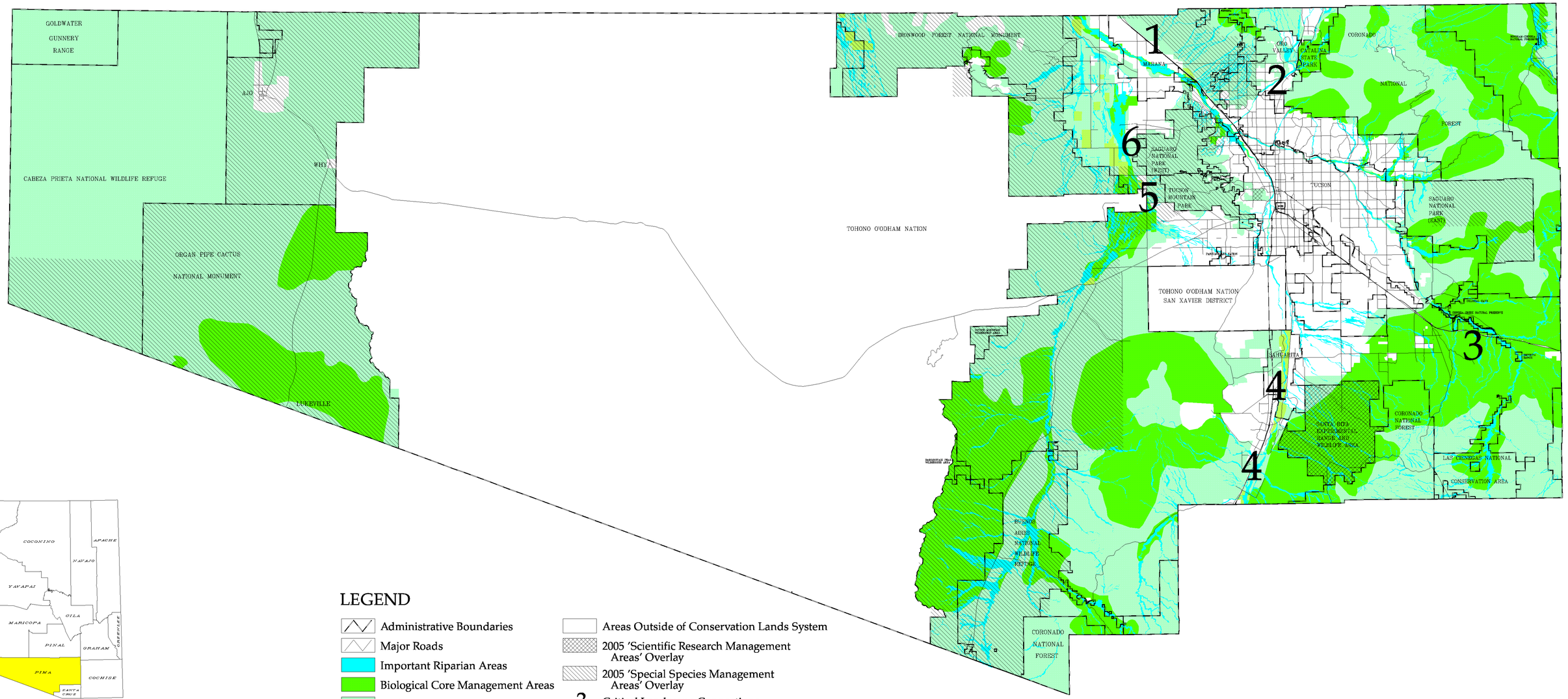
- Develop or revise Site Analysis inventory requirements for comprehensive plan amendment and rezoning applications to identify the presence of conservation values and identify areas most suitable for development.
- Develop or revise Biological Impact Report requirements for comprehensive plan amendment and rezoning applications in order to analyze the proposed land use change. Biological Impact Reports will evaluate and compare the effects of the

proposed land use against the effects of development without the proposed land use.

- Standardize staff evaluation of comprehensive plan amendment and rezoning applications to determine application's conformance with CLS, consistency with existing or logical expansion of infrastructure, and long-term conservation of highly valued natural resources.
- Develop guidance and criteria for restoration, enhancement, and mitigation proposals. Forward guidance and criteria to the Board of Supervisors for approval.
- Develop site design guidance and other site planning recommendations for environmentally-sensitive development.
- Develop and implement development-related incentives appropriate for use in Multiple Use Management Areas. Incentives may, if appropriate, be established through revision of allowable zoning districts, overlays, comprehensive plan land use plan designations;
- Develop policies and procedures to govern transfer of development rights;
- Review and revise existing environmentally-related zoning code ordinances to create incentives accessible to existing and legal land uses, zoning, and permitted activities to promote broader support of CLS and goals of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. Ordinances appropriate for review and revision may include:
    - Native Plant Preservation Ordinance (18.72);
    - Buffer Overlay Zone Ordinance (18.67);
    - Cluster Development Option (18.09.040);
    - Conservation Subdivision Requirements (18.09.100);
    - Hillside Development Zone Ordinance (18.61);
    - Modification of Development Standards in Riparian Areas (18.07.080);
    - Landscape and Bufferyard Ordinance (18.73); and
    - Off-Street Parking & Loading Standards (18.75)

PIMA COUNTY CONSERVATION LANDS SYSTEM

Adopted June 21, 2005



LEGEND

- Administrative Boundaries
- Major Roads
- Important Riparian Areas
- Biological Core Management Areas
- Multiple Use Management Areas
- Agriculture In-holdings Within Conservation Lands System
- Areas Outside of Conservation Lands System
- 2005 'Scientific Research Management Areas' Overlay
- 2005 'Special Species Management Areas' Overlay
- 3 Critical Landscape Connections

THE SEAL OF PIMA COUNTY · ARIZONA ·

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Scale 1:393,000

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