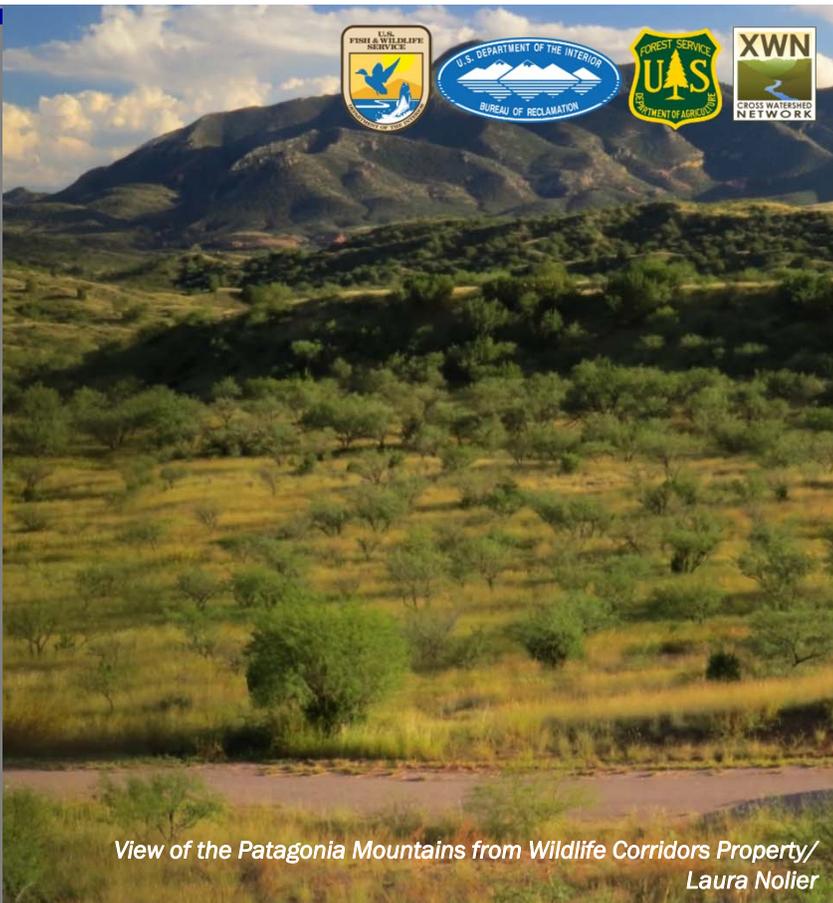


HABITAT CONNECTIONS

Wildlife Corridors LLC: Preserving and Restoring Critical Habitat Linkages in the US-Mexico Borderlands

The Wildlife Corridors property at Three Canyons Ranch near Patagonia, AZ is at the heart of a swath of land identified by biologists as an essential migratory route for many wildlife species, including jaguars. It was once slated to be a 189-lot, high-density housing development. Following the development's bankruptcy, the property was purchased by local conservation group Wildlife Corridors LLC and affiliated Borderlands Restoration with the intention of creating a single conservation easement covering the northern 80% of the property within the mainstay of the wildlife corridor.



*View of the Patagonia Mountains from Wildlife Corridors Property/
Laura Noller*

KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED

Linkages between undeveloped habitat are essential for genetic flow and biodiversity of wildlife species. These linkages—often called wildlife corridors—are becoming increasingly threatened as human populations expand. Urbanization, agriculture, highways and other human development have led to habitat fragmentation and the overall disruption of migratory paths used by animals.

The Wildlife Corridors property preserves a critical corridor segment while managing for multiple uses and enjoyment by the surrounding communities. By involving local communities in learning from and tending to their local watershed, the property also serves to educate the public about the importance of undeveloped spaces for wildlife movement.

PROJECT GOALS

- Strategic acquisition of land identified as an important habitat linkage for several wildlife species
- Community engagement and education
- Manage for moderate recreational use, ecological restoration, and wildlife corridor integrity

“UN-DEVELOPMENT” The purchase of the Three Canyons Ranch property initiated the conversion of 189 housing lots and fragmented conservation easement into a wildlife-only corridor where human impacts remain minimal.



A Dense Agave Patch on the Wildlife Corridors Property/
Allegra Mount

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Community Engagement: Public outreach and the dedication of community members who care deeply about the border region and its resident wildlife continue to be key factors in project success. Regular reports to the county, local officials, and residents help raise awareness and increase engagement. An array of people including youth, seasoned professionals, county officials, local contractors, retirees, and artists seemed to have found ways to care about a place they didn't know existed.

Mixed funding model: With cumulative expenses anticipated to be \$2.4M by 2020, the Wildlife Corridors LLC Business Plan calls for income of roughly \$3.2M coming from a combination of lot sales, grants, and philanthropic donations to the non-profit organizations Biophilia Foundation and BioR, 501-3-c. These organizations purchase the development rights on land in the corridor so it can be protected under a conservation easement. Furthermore, the Wildlife Corridors Partners have pledged that 80% of any profit made from the sale of lots will go into a dedicated fund with the Arizona Community Foundation (ACF) for the maintenance and improvement of the wildlife corridor.

Collaborators

Ron Pulliam, Jack May, Seibert Ecological Restoration LLC, and many community members of the region

Funding Partners

Arizona Department of Forestry, Fish and Wildlife Service, and private contributions

Case study support provided by US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Bureau of Reclamation, US Forest Service, and Cross Watershed Network. Updated August 2018.

LESSONS LEARNED

Considering and responding to community perceptions have been vital. Public and private needs were carefully tended to through consistent and strong communication.

Close work with the bank that held the foreclosed mortgage, including attending to the lender's values initiated success. Likewise, respectful work with existing lot owners, the easement holder, and the former development owner enabled the project to continue and morale to remain high.

A major challenge of this effort involves sustaining conservation with limited financial resources. Parsing out intricate legal and real estate nuances of the property acquisition is time-consuming and challenging.

NEXT STEPS

- Involved groups and individuals continue to seek funding to pay for the property and a viable conservation easement in addition to restoration and education activities
- Continued restoration and ecological monitoring including erosion assessments and rock-structure installation, wildlife camera traps, and pollinator habitat plantings
- Continue to work with Santa Cruz County in de-platting housing lots to create a comprehensive easement with continuous, unbroken corridor space

PROJECT RESOURCES

For more information on this project, contact David Seibert: dseibert@email.arizona.edu

For additional project resources and case studies, visit the Collaborative Conservation and Adaptation Strategy Toolbox: WWW.DESERTLCC.ORG/RESOURCE/CCAST



Rock Structures Reduce Erosion on the Wildlife Corridors Property/Caleb Weaver