

CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION NEWS

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Your Comments Needed on Tucson Parks Master Plan



The Tucson Parks and Recreation Department is working on a five-year master plan that will guide park management. The department seeks public input, so please weigh in! There is one more public meeting in October:

**Wednesday
October 7, 2015
Sahuaro High School
545 N. Camino Seco**

Here are some points to bring up at meetings:

- Wildlife watching has a total economic impact of \$300 million in Pima County—birders are big contributors to our sustainable economic engine.
- As Tucson has developed, many recreation facilities have been built for swimmers, soccer players, and other user groups. The Master Plan provides an opportunity to incorporate environmentally responsible access, facilities and interpretation targeted to accommodate wildlife watchers and naturalists.
- Development, urban sprawl, and groundwater pumping have eliminated many local wildlife habitats, making a healthy system of parks and natural areas even more important for birds and other wildlife.
- Parks and Recreation should preserve natural open space (wildlife habitat) in parks for wildlife and wildlife watchers.
- Ponds should be managed and enhanced for their value to wildlife.
- Where possible, turf should be reduced to save water and mowing.
- Native trees, shrubs, and grasses should be planted for birds and pollinators.
- Parks and Recreation should use Integrated Pest Management to avoid pesticides, especially toxic neonicotinoids.

Monitor tucsonaz.gov/parks/masterplan for future meeting dates and other ways you can give input. For more about the master planning process and to comment directly, write to: parksmasterplan@tucsonaz.gov.

Legal Victory for the Patagonia Mountains Important Bird Area

A year ago, we reported that the Sierra Vista Ranger District of the U.S. Forest Service had issued a “categorical exclusion” (CE) to foreign-owned Regal Resources for its proposed “Sunnyside” exploratory mineral drilling project in Humboldt Canyon of the Patagonia Mountains. A CE is

essentially a policy short-cut that allows mineral, energy, or geophysical investigations on public lands that meet certain criteria to avoid undergoing a detailed environmental analysis and public process. Tucson Audubon and partner organizations questioned if Sunnyside met these strict criteria. Humboldt Canyon is home to birds of conservation concern such as the Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Elegant Trogon, Broad-billed Hummingbird, Zone-tailed Hawk, and the threatened Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Mexican Spotted Owl, as well as ocelots and jaguars. The project would drill six exploratory holes up to 6,500 feet deep, one of which was proposed 0.1 miles from a Mexican Spotted Owl nesting core area. Loud mineral drilling and construction noise would occur 24 hours a day for months at a time over a period of three years.

The Patagonia Area Resource Alliance and Defenders of Wildlife joined together in a lawsuit against the Forest Service to challenge the CE decision. A September 15th legal opinion by Honorable Rosemary Marquez ruled against the Forest Service, confirming the project cannot move forward without the proper review of its cumulative environmental impacts.

Wendy Russell, Coordinator for the Patagonia Area Resource Alliance, was vindicated: “We’re not going to stand by and let the Forest Service rubber-stamp these mining projects in the Patagonia Mountains. There’s too much at stake for both our community and wildlife. This is the second time we’ve had to take them to court, and the second time we’ve won.”

The Patagonia Mountains are a true biological gem, widely known for their outstanding birding and impressive biodiversity, but numerous mining proposals threaten the integrity of their wildlife habitat and water quality. The Patagonia Mountains are a designated Important Bird Area and Tucson Audubon’s Paton Center for Hummingbirds is located astride Sonoita Creek in the town of Patagonia, which is fed by the watershed of this special sky island.

Tucson Audubon strongly supports reforming the antiquated 1872 Mining Act and is an active member of the Arizona Mining Reform Coalition. In the wake of the tragic mining waste spill into the Animas River in southern Colorado, as well as a similar but smaller-scale incident that occurred in the Patagonia Mountains last year, we have joined with dozens of other conservation and community organizations and tribes to call on Congress to pass comprehensive mining reform legislation.



Polluted Animas River in Colorado, Mor