



<p>Tom Whetten (520) 628-5376 ext. 4445 Julie Hammonds (602) 789-3393 Public Information Officers</p>	<p>Ellen Bilbrey (602) 542-1996 or (602) 228-8518 Public Information Officer</p>	<p>Mary Menees (415) 495-5660 ext. 375 Director of Public Affairs Jenny Parks (505) 988- 5922 Arizona State Director</p>	<p>Jeff Humphrey (602) 242-0210 Public Outreach Specialist</p>
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NEWS RELEASE

Embargoed until Feb. 24, 2005

Recent land purchase proves cooperation is good conservation

PHOENIX — A rare species of native Arizona fish has a better chance to thrive, thanks to the recent public purchase of 2,628 acres in southeast Arizona. Spring-fed pools on the Coal Mine Canyon property are home to one of the largest remaining wild populations of the Gila topminnow, added to the Endangered Species List in 1967.

Arizona acquired the Coal Mine Canyon property through a cooperative effort between the landowner (First United Realty and the Hudson family) and public and private partners (Arizona Game and Fish Department, Arizona State Parks, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and The Trust for Public Land). On Feb. 24, the partners will meet at the Sonoita Creek State Natural Area Visitor Center at Patagonia Lake State Park to celebrate the purchase.

“The Gila topminnows in Coal Mine Spring, Fresno Canyon, and Sonoita Creek form one of the largest remaining populations of Gila topminnows in existence,” said Don Mitchell, a biologist with the Arizona Game and Fish Department. “The Coal Mine population upstream of Fresno Canyon and Sonoita Creek may be the reason Gila topminnow have persisted in these waters. Protection of Coal Mine Springs is critical to the preservation of Gila topminnow.” Other species will also benefit from the purchase, including the endangered lesser long-nosed bat, threatened Mexican spotted owl and rare western yellow-billed cuckoo.

Contributions that made this purchase possible include:

- Public support of the Heritage Fund, lottery dollars for conservation, allowed the Arizona Game and Fish Department to give \$1.5 million.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service gave \$750,000 to protect habitat for the recovery of endangered species.
- Though the land was appraised at \$3.68 million, First United Realty and the Hudson family sold it to the public for \$2.25 million.
- The Trust for Public Land (TPL), a national nonprofit land conservation organization, negotiated land purchase terms with the landowners, contracted and funded the appraisal and environmental assessment, acquired the property and transferred final

ownership to the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Estimated TPL costs were about \$40,000.

- Arizona State Parks will manage the Coal Mine Canyon property in perpetuity for conservation of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and for its aquatic and riparian values as part of the Sonoita Creek State Natural Area.

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Note to media: Event will be held on Feb. 24, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Sonoita Creek State Natural Area Visitor Center at Patagonia Lake State Park. Along with detailed information, maps and photographs, Gila topminnow will be available for photographs and videotape. After the event, media may take either a short walk to a viewpoint from which distant visuals of the property can be obtained, or a three-hour guided tour to Coal Mine Spring (limited availability, 4WD vehicles needed; contact Tom Whetten at (520) 628-5376 ext. 4445). Directions, photos and B-roll are available by contacting Julie Hammonds at (602) 789-3393 or Tom Whetten at (520) 628-5376 ext. 4445.

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