



News Release

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ARIZONA'S FIRST PRIVATE ENDANGERED SPECIES

CONSERVATION BANK APPROVED

-Over 1000 Acres Could Be Set Aside for Endangered Pima Pineapple Cactus-

The first privately-owned conservation bank for endangered species in Arizona was approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today. The Palo Alto Ranch Conservation Bank will protect, in perpetuity, a parcel of valuable Pima pineapple cactus habitat in the Altar Valley, southeast of Tucson.

“Now, when residential or commercial developments, roadway or utility corridors can’t avoid impacting the endangered cactus, they can offset the loss of cactus and its habitat by purchasing habitat conservation credits from the bank,” said Dale Hall, Director of the Service’s Southwest Region. “Conservation banks streamline the consultation process because the time-consuming land acquisition and management plan development have already been completed.”

The 1,016-acre conservation bank will be made available in 100-acre blocks that will be conserved and managed in perpetuity for the long-term viability of the cactus population. Landowners, municipalities, and developers can purchase conservation credits to offset the effects of their projects at ratios to be established by the Service based on the lost habitat’s value to the species’ survival. The conservation bank will be managed by the Altar Valley Conservation Alliance. The cost of each conservation credit is determined by the owner of the bank.

“This example of cooperation between a private landowner and the Service is a win-win arrangement,” said Steve Spangle, field supervisor for the Service’s Arizona office. “The bank owners, Ross and Susan Humphreys, will receive compensation for conserving an area of deeply-held natural values, developers have a mechanism for off-setting their effects to the cactus, and threats to this species’ survival can be lessened.”

“We began planning this conservation bank with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service three years

ago, even before we purchased the Palo Alto Ranch,” said Ross Humphreys. “The bank will help us protect 32,000 acres of open space in the center of the Altar Valley in cooperation with the Service and our ranching neighbors. It is an example of conservation from the grass roots, initiated from the private sector and managed in perpetuity by a cooperative association of ranching families. The bank is one tool our neighbors and we are using to enhance the 555,000-acre working landscape we care for very deeply.”

Safeway will be the first client to contribute to setting aside Pima pineapple cactus habitat in the conservation bank. Construction of a Safeway shopping center in Sahuarita resulted in the loss of a Pima pineapple cactus and 12.6 acres of cactus habitat. Safeway will replace the lost cactus habitat by purchasing credits in the conservation bank. Safeway spokesperson, Anita Cohen, stated that “Safeway attempted unsuccessfully to salvage the one Pima pineapple cactus located on its land. However, this past year, SWCA senior scientist, Ken Kingsley, has been able to nurse the cactus “pups” that were produced by the cactus. Dr. Kingsley will transplant the cactus “pups” onto a protected landscape area on Safeway’s shopping center site sometime in the next three-four months. An interpretive sign will accompany the cactus. Safeway is proud to be the bank’s first participant and to play a role in the protection of an endangered plant.”

Pima pineapple cacti are 4- to 18-inch tall, dome-shaped cacti with silky yellow flowers that bloom in early July with summer rains. They occur south of Tucson and in the Altar Valley and are threatened principally by illegal collection; degradation and loss of habitat due to mining, road construction and urbanization; and the encroachment of non-native grasses.

Endangered plants that occur on private lands receive only limited protection under the Endangered Species Act; however, Federal agencies and the projects they approve or fund on private lands are required to address the effects of their actions on threatened and endangered plants.

The Altar Valley Conservation Alliance is a non-profit organization formed in 1995 by ranching families who live and work in the Altar Valley. Its purpose is to preserve the beauty and natural diversity of the Altar Valley while also maintaining traditional ranching cultural values and economies.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

-FWS-

Note to editors: Public sector photographs and a fact sheet for the Pima pineapple cactus are available at the Ecological Services website (<http://arizonaes.fws.gov/pima/htm>).