Just over 16 years ago, in January 2000, RECON was awarded the contract to assist Pima County, Arizona, in their efforts to develop a county-wide Multi-species Conservation Plan (MSCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The intent was to seek an Endangered Species Act Section 10 permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), in order to streamline endangered species compliance for new development and formalize the County’s conservation commitments.

In the ensuing years, RECON team members worked extensively with County staff, USFWS, and the appointed Science Technical Advisory Team in conducting detailed analyses and GIS habitat distribution mapping of over 50 priority species. Together we developed the Conservation Lands System (CLS), an interconnected system of conservation lands prioritized for long-term protection. The CLS, adopted as an integral part of the County’s Comprehensive Land Use Plan, also identifies less sensitive areas, thereby helping to guide environmentally responsible development.

Pima County’s larger regional framework for this effort is the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP), which broadly encompasses not only critical habitats, biological corridors, natural preserves, and riparian restoration but also historical and cultural resource preservation, and ranch conservation. In early support of Pima County’s initiation of the SDCP, former Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt noted in a congressional hearing that this Plan “really is the most exciting event of its kind anywhere in the United States.”

The planning process, interim documents, and research efforts to date have garnered Pima County and RECON national, regional, and state recognition, receiving awards from the American Planning Association (APA), the Arizona Chapter of APA, the Arizona Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, and the Local Government Commission.

Continued inside…
PIMA COUNTY MULTI-SPECIES CONSERVATION PLAN AND EIS CONTINUED

The upcoming approval of the Section 10 permit, the MSCP, and the Final EIS marks a significant accomplishment by Pima County, one that RECON has been privileged to play a role in. This locally-developed plan will promote the balance of economic development and endangered species compliance for the 30-year permit period. Highlights include a permit area of ~1.3 million acres, 44 covered species (9 listed as threatened or endangered), over 1,000 GIS map layers, 15 ranches with lands used as mitigation, and over 230,000 acres managed for conservation, with over 100,000 acres owned in fee by Pima County. Learn more at http://webcms.pima.gov/government/sustainability_and_conservation/conservation_science/

DESERT RENEWABLE ENERGY CONSERVATION PLAN

RECON is proud to have been a part of the recent 5-year planning effort that helped advance the U.S. Department of the Interior’s strategy for landscape-scale mitigation policies and practices and science-based management.

In November 2015, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and California Secretary for Natural Resources John Laird announced the release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Phase I of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP). This innovative plan will conserve species and ecosystems while allowing renewable energy to be developed in the most appropriate areas on 10 million acres of lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the California desert.

Phase I of the DRECP designates 388,000 acres of Development Focus Areas (DFAs) that have high potential for solar, wind and geothermal energy, and access to transmission. Rules for these areas establish a framework for facility siting and development that will ensure impacts are managed and appropriately mitigated. Phase I also identifies 5.3 million acres of BLM lands for conservation. Management actions and development restrictions will serve to protect the biological, cultural, scenic, recreational, and other values of these lands.

RECON team members assisted in the development of the DRECP Draft and Final EIS documents. We participated in numerous public meetings and provided detailed descriptions and analysis of various resources, including BLM land designations, mineral resources, visual resources, grazing, and Department of Defense lands, and assisted with the biological and cultural resource analyses.

Our GIS experts compiled and processed extensive data from 28 different resources for the impact analysis of 6 plan alternatives. Datasets with over 300,000 records and 90 attributes were created, and maps for resource sections were prepared.

Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is primarily responsible for securing our international borders, but they are also committed to stewardship of the environment adjacent to the border. CBP is currently restoring impacted lands associated with its operations along both the northern and southern borders of the United States. In the southern border region, CBP lands extend through multiple habitat types and various federal and state landowners; extend from the coastal dunes, through the mountains to the high desert; and state parks, wildlife preserves, national parks, and the Colorado River.

With the expansion of the border infrastructure, primarily the border fence, CBP became more aware of the impacts associated with its operations. This prompted the division of CBP known as Facilities Management and Engineering (FM&E) to take action to preserve, restore, and enhance impacted areas within identified sensitive wildlands. FM&E has sought to bridge the gap between operational needs and the landowners by negotiating and implementing habitat restoration and sediment control objectives that address the needs of all parties and benefit the environment by promoting thoughtful stewardship of our natural resources.

Since 2010, CBP has teamed with RECON to restore and enhance over 300 acres of habitat along the border region extending from the Pacific Ocean to Tucson, Arizona. RECON continues to work closely with FM&E to satisfy the goals and objectives they have agreed to with multiple stakeholders and landowners. Over the course of these work orders, RECON has successfully accomplished tasks including restoring 26 acres of coastal sage scrub habitat in the area known as Smuggler’s Gulch, maintaining 150 acres of vegetation adjacent to the Colorado River for the benefit of southwestern willow flycatcher, and restoring multiple impact areas within the Otay wilderness for the benefit of quino checkerspot butterfly, which in 2014 was observed within our restored parcels. Additional work has included stormwater pollution prevention plan compliance by installation of multiple erosion control projects throughout the southern border region. Increasingly

Continued on back...
Native plants have come to the rescue as Californian’s seek new options to meet mandatory landscape water restrictions. Water-thirsty lawns are dying across the state and savvy homeowners and property managers are planting climate-appropriate California native plants in their stead.

RECON Native Plants, Inc., has been fortunate for the opportunity to share our passion for California native plants and assist landscape architects, contractors, and designers on the ornamental use of the plants we grow. Native plants fill the spectrum of textures, colors, and sun and water tolerances desired in contemporary landscape design. They attract wildlife from nectar-seeking hummingbirds and butterflies to foraging pollinators and birds. Most importantly, there are many native plants that are incredibly drought tolerant and thrive on just a few deep soakings a month.

RECON Native Plants is proud to be a primary source for the industry as California native plants retake their rightful place in our landscaped areas. Visit reconnativeplants.com for more information.