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# Board of Supervisors Memorandum

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December 1, 2020

**Las Cienegas National Conservation Area's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, and Recognizing Former Congressman Jim Kolbe for his Legislative Leadership**

Background

On September 24, 1999, Congressman Jim Kolbe submitted the legislative proposal in the House of Representatives to establish Las Cienegas National Conservation Area (LCNCA) (Figure 1). The NCA legislation not only protected the five rarest ecosystem types in the Southwestern U.S. against future land and mineral development, but also demonstrated the compatibility of carefully managed livestock grazing with riparian and grassland ecosystems. It also represented a milestone in the development of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP), serving as a model for what became Pima County's ranch conservation element.

The origins of LCNCA date back to 1987, when Pima and Santa Cruz Counties urged the Arizona Congressional delegation to authorize the U. S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to acquire the privately-owned Empire-Cienega Ranch. Through subsequent land exchanges, the BLM acquired roughly 42,000 acres of deeded land and assumed management of another 57,000 acres of state grazing land.

The acquisition marked the beginning of a local effort to control urban sprawl, maintain open space through ranch conservation, provide for public recreation, and protect native plants and wildlife. Toward this end, Pima County had established Colossal Cave Mountain Park and Cienega Creek Natural Preserve in advance of the NCA legislation, and conserved additional ranch lands in the watershed after the legislation was passed (Figure 1).

Now, during this 20<sup>th</sup> year, the federal government can rightfully claim to have improved the condition of the riparian and grassland ecosystems while working with ranch operators as Representative Kolbe originally envisioned. Furthermore, the BLM's landmark Resource Management Plan addresses all six of the SDCP's elements, including (1) wildlife corridors; (2) protection of critical and sensitive habitat; (3) riparian and water resource protection; (4) recreation; (5) ranch conservation; and (6) historic and cultural preservation.

There is, however, unfinished business. Rep. Kolbe's legislation allows the Secretary of the Interior to acquire land or interests in land in the Sonoita Valley Acquisition Planning District, an area of some 148,000 acres in Pima and Santa Cruz Counties (Figure 1). While additional ranchers in Pima and Santa Cruz Counties have voluntarily protected their lands with conservation easements, much of the State trust land with the Sonoita Valley Planning District remains unprotected, and additional threats to LCNCA have arisen from the proposed copper mine at Rosemont.

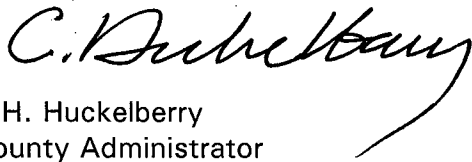
In addition to the Proclamation, I am directing staff to explore potential Land and Water Conservation Funds for additional acquisitions in the watershed.

The Honorable Chairman and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors  
Re: **Las Cienegas National Conservation Area's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, and Recognizing Former  
Congressman Jim Kolbe for his Legislative Leadership**  
December 1, 2020  
Page 2

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board proclaim December 2020 as "Las Cienegas National Conservation Area Appreciation Month" and December 1, 2020 as "Congressman Jim Kolbe Appreciation Day."

Sincerely,

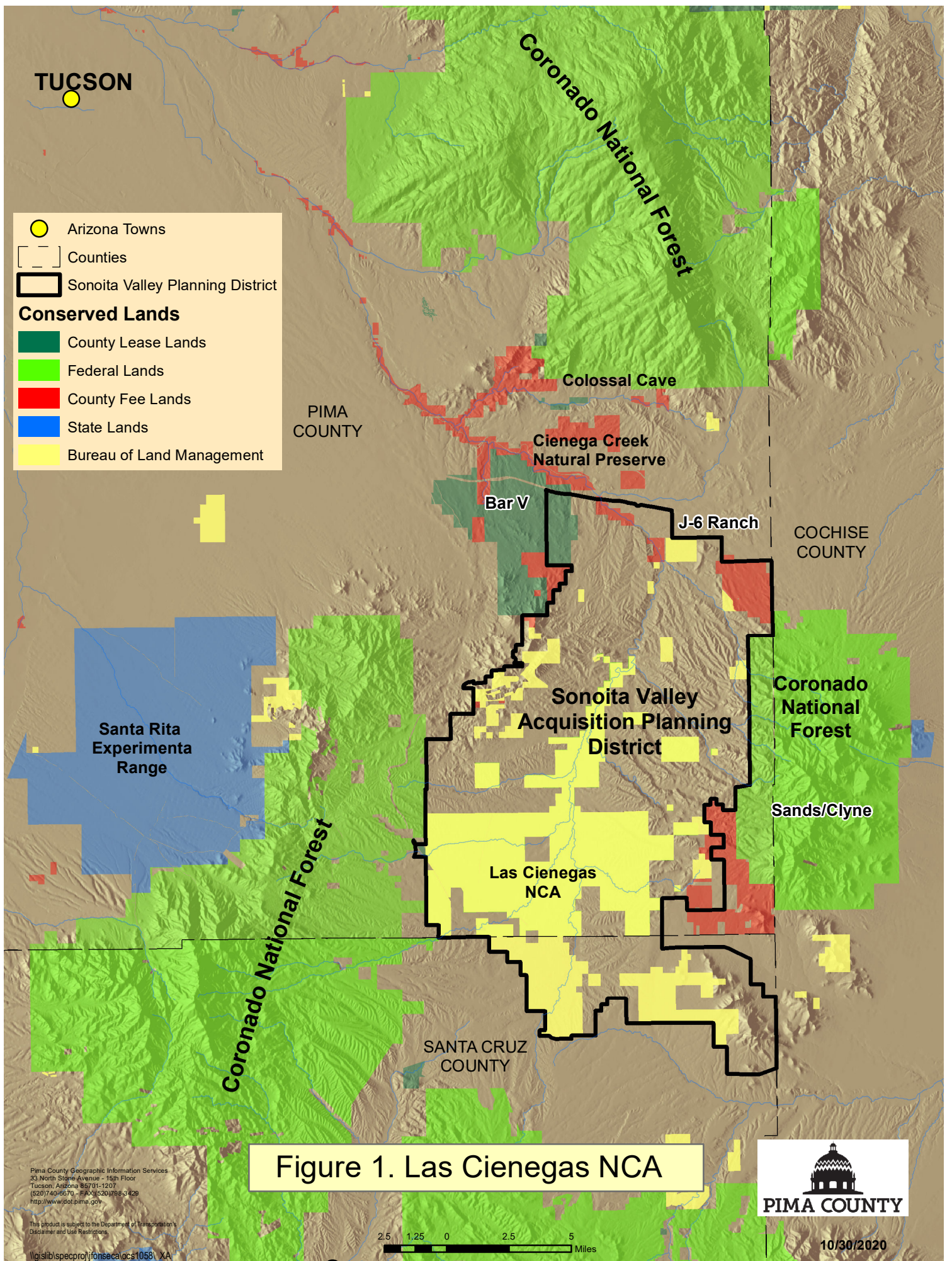


C.H. Huckelberry  
County Administrator

CHH/mp – November 3, 2020

- c: Carmine DeBonis Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
- Yves Khawam, PhD., Assistant County Administrator for Public Works
- Linda Mayro, Director, Office of Sustainability and Conservation

# Figure 1



TUCSON

Arizona Towns  
 Counties  
 Sonoita Valley Planning District  
**Conserved Lands**  
 County Lease Lands  
 Federal Lands  
 County Fee Lands  
 State Lands  
 Bureau of Land Management

PIMA COUNTY

COCHISE COUNTY

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Figure 1. Las Cienegas NCA



2.5 1.25 0 2.5 5 Miles

10/30/2020

Pima County Geographic Information Services  
 33 North Stone Avenue - 15th Floor  
 Tucson, Arizona 85701-1207  
 (520)740-8670 - FAX (520)798-3428  
<http://www.dot.pima.gov>

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