

NEWS EXTRA NEWS EXTRA EXTRA

Canyon Approach

Some Fear That When Pima Canyon Gives Way To A New Resort And Housing Development, Hikers And Wildlife Will Be Obstructed.

PRIZED FOR THE large saguaro cactus population and the riparian plant life that densely mark its rocky course, Pima Canyon is considered by some to be one of the richest pieces of land in Pima County. Braided natural channels wind down the canyon, creating an unusual geologic configuration, perhaps etched by nature during the last ice age some 15,000 years ago.

About 20 years ago, the fate of Pima Canyon began to change. A large parcel of land at the canyon's mouth, about 450 acres, was acquired by Donald Diamond, a high-profile Tucson developer, and Donald Pitt, Diamond's partner in a number of land deals.

Diamond and Pitt plan to sell about 200 acres to the Stouffer Hotel Company. Stouffer, a

subsidiary of the Swiss-based Nestle Corporation, wants to start building a 400-room resort and an 18-hole golf course on the site in 1994, to open in the spring of 1996. On the remainder of the property, 250 custom homes are planned by Diamond and Pitt's development company, Foothill Resort Properties.

A myriad of groups, including the Tucson Rod and Gun Club, the local chapter of the Sierra Club, the Southern Arizona Hiking Club and the Neighborhood Coalition of Greater Tucson, have grave doubts about what the development might mean for one of the last untouched canyons on this side of the Santa Catalina Mountains. Their concerns range from losing access into the national forest to losing a unique desert habitat that supports a



Unhappy trails: Sierra and Southern Arizona Hiking club members (from left): Rich Genser, William Hale Jr., David Paranka, Wayne St. John, George Hallett, Nancy Kelly and Ann Wartchow are trying to keep developers from reducing access to Pima Canyon.

diversity of wildlife, including a small herd of bighorn sheep living on adjacent national forest land.

The economic gains from the Stouffer Resort, on the other hand, cannot be ignored. The resort is expected to bring \$65 million annually into Tucson—a figure that takes into account conference fees, air travel, food and beverage sales, employee salaries and other revenue generators—not to mention an

additional \$4.3 million in state and local taxes. The Stouffer Hotel Company anticipates employing 600 full-time workers with an average wage of \$25,600 per year.

"Wages will start at about \$6.25 an hour and range upward toward the \$50,000 or \$60,000 yearly salary, raising the overall average wage of a service employee in Pima County," says

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Fair Warning

Time Is Running Out To Grouse About Pima County's New Guidelines For Growth.

LOCAL BUREAUCRATS have struggled the last two years to convince ordinary citizens to get involved in this thing called The Comprehensive Plan. But every time they clear their technocratic throats, the collective community snore can be heard from Vail to Aravaipa.

The officials just can't seem to convince Tucsonans to care about something that sounds so dry. This is in spite of the fact that the plan will shape Tucson's efforts for the next 25 years in realms ranging from public transportation to environmental conservation.

It must just sound boring. That's the only possible reason the room was nearly empty last

week when, after \$2 million in tax dollars and five years of work, planners unveiled a draft of the map showing how Tucson

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The map shows how officials think Tucson should look in the year 2010, when an estimated 1.2 million residents will push the metropolitan area's boundaries past Marana and Oro Valley on the north, Ryan

Field on the west and Colossal Cave on the east.

Extensive revisions to Pima County's zoning code will be based on the map, which will be open to revision just once a year for a three-month period.

The parts of unincorporated Pima County that planners expect will be highly built-up by 2010 are colored fuchsia. Commercial centers are dark purple and industrial corridors are black. Low-density residential areas are drawn in

graphics, only half the members of a citizens' task force coordinating the plan's preparation showed up on August 13 for the bureaucratic ribbon-cutting. The event also attracted four concerned citizens, three journalists and a handful of professional planners.

Comprehensive Plan
Administrator Greg George says officials hope to draw bigger audiences for an upcoming series of public hearings about the plan scheduled to begin this week. The meetings will be the last chance for public input into the comprehensive planning process before the plan is sent to the County Board of Supervisors for final debate starting in October.

Topics addressed at the meetings will include the plan's 60 goals, ranging from forcing real estate developers to share in the cost of new urban infrastructure to such lofty projects as replenishing Tucson's underground aquifer, lowering unemployment, injecting the metropolitan area

shades of gold and yellow.

Tendrils of green representing washes and rivers to be protected snake across the map, forming new parks as well as a buffer zone on the outskirts of the metropolitan area.

But even given the colorful

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THE Skinny

TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN: Arizona election-watchers have noted a wide disparity in the campaign coffers of the three candidates for the U.S. Senate seat now held by Republican John McCain. Recent reports filed with the Secretary of State show that McCain has over \$1 million in his war chest. That's more than 10 times the amount reported by either Claire Sargent or Truman Spangrud, the two Democratic hopefuls for the seat.

Statistics show that incumbents who outspend their challengers win re-election in over 90 percent of all political races. The Skinny isn't inclined to make brash election predictions, especially before the primaries, but it would seem that the challengers might find better odds at the roulette wheel in Caesar's Palace.

"The outcome, barring a miracle, is a forgone conclusion," says Dana Larsen, executive director of Arizona Common Cause, an organization that wants to change the rules for political campaign spending.

"It's like, if you put two teams on a football field and give one team a 50-point advantage, are you going to bet money on the other team? Probably not," Larsen says. "Would you even be interested in watching the game? Why bother?"

Larsen says current campaign financing rules have given incumbents unfair advantages over challengers. "That's why I think that we see very few people turning out to vote, because they know the rules are rigged," he says.

Common Cause wants the government to limit the amount of money a campaign can raise and provide matching funds for candidates who comply with the rules. The organization says this would "even the playing field" by reducing the impact of special interest funds, which are more accessible to incumbents than to challengers.

The big losers in the campaign spending game, says Larsen, are the voters. Because incumbents are mostly concerned about raising the money they need to win the next election, they worry more about pleasing the people who can give them that money—special interest groups and corporations—than they do about the voters. "Until we have competitive elections, we will never have accountable government," he says.

Still, the Sargent and Spangrud campaigns insist that things aren't as bleak as they might appear. The challengers believe that voters are unhappy with the job that McCain has been doing and may boot him out of office on the crest of a wave of voter backlash against incumbents.

Sure, one of them could win, just like Angola could've whupped the Dream Team.

But who's to say? Anything can happen. After all, the Brits did win at Agincourt. Then again, they had the long bow.

Got Any Skinny? Send it to The Skinny, Tucson Weekly, P.O. Box 2429, Tucson, AZ, 85702. Or call 792-3630 and ask for the editorial department. High-tech newshounds can send tips via fax at 792-2096.

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Ken Abrahams, a spokesman for Pitt and Diamond and president of Foothill Resort Properties, the company they formed to develop the property in Pima Canyon.

Troubling questions about a development in Pima Canyon, however, prevail. What are the rights of the public and what are the rights of the private landowners when a planned development sits right next to a unique desert wilderness area on public land?

Gayle Hartmann, chairman of Buffers, a citizen group dedicated to intelligent, low-impact development near the parks, monuments and forests of Pima County, suggests, "When someone drew the boundary of the Coronado National Forest they should have etched the line a little farther down the canyon."

Over the years, Diamond and Pitt have not objected to hikers and others using the Magee Road trailhead or using the private land for recreation. Each year, as many as 27,000 people walk into Pima Canyon from the Magee Road access, says Lisa Harris, a researcher from the University of Arizona School of Renewable Natural Resources who conducted a study in 1990 on recreational use within bighorn sheep habitat. The study revealed that a fifth of the visitors stay on Pitt and Diamond's property near the Magee Road trailhead without entering the national

forest.

But trail-users fear their easy access to the canyon might be revoked when the new resort goes in. Their fears have driven local organizations to seek official access at Magee Road.

Federal statistics show that the trail-users have valid concerns. Fourteen percent of public land managed by either the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management in the 48 states lacks legal public access, according to a 1992 study compiled by the U.S. General Accounting Office, an arm of Congress that evaluates federal programs.

Permission from non-federal landowners to cross their land is not considered adequate access because such permission can be revoked at any time," the report states.

Access to other popular recreational areas on this side of the Catalinas has been limited gradually over the years. For instance, the public does not have legal access to the Ventana Canyon trail, located within the Loews Ventana Canyon Resort. Any of the three property owners there could revoke right-of-way at any time. Also, no signs mark the trailhead, trail-users are allowed to park only in spaces designated for employees and no path exists from the parking lot to the trailhead.

The corridor provided by private landowners into the national forest at the end of Campbell Avenue is an even more pathetic situation. For a half mile trail-users must walk through an 8-foot-wide caged tunnel—a path with 8-foot-high chain-link fences on either side, each with overhanging barbed wire.

Pima Canyon trail-users had high hopes for the Magee Road trailhead last December when a land swap was made between the Pima County Board of Supervisors and the property owners. The County obtained an acre of land at the end

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homes will hurt the selling price of the homes. "The guaranteed access now at Magee Road is the most secure arrangement for continued

public access," says Nancy Kelly, vice chairman of the local Sierra Club. "Why should the public have to cross through a luxury resort to reach publicly owned lands?"

Lunn says, "The best solution to the access debate is to utilize 10 acres of national forest land set aside from the Pusch Ridge Wilderness in 1978, where access wouldn't bother the neighborhoods, where hikers wouldn't walk through a resort and would be in the closest proximity to national forest land." Lunn suggests using land on the east side of the canyon, adjacent to the northeast corner of the Diamond-Pitt property.

Tom Quinn, the district ranger for the Santa Catalina Ranger District of the Coronado National Forest, however, doesn't believe constructing a parking lot on national forest land is the right solution either.

"Desert vegetation is going to be removed for this parking lot no matter where it ends up, and it makes sense to disturb vegetation and remove saguaros in an area that will be developed in some form anyway, such as the resort site," he says.

Consideration was given to protecting as many saguaros as possible, says Mark Raming, an environmental planner with SWCA Inc., an environmental consultant group that conducted the ecological site analysis for Pitt and Diamond.

"We felt we could replace the riparian vegetation removed from the area but not the clusters of large saguaros," Raming says of the saguaros on the resort site. "Only a dozen saguaros will be impacted by the hotel, one saguaro will be removed

of Magee Road for a parking lot plus a 15-foot-wide right-of-way leading to the Coronado National Forest, along the road that developers will build to private homes. In exchange, Pitt and Diamond obtained 5.2 acres of county-owned land at the end of Skyline Drive, important to their development plans.

Then last March the developers proposed moving the access to an alternative site inside the resort, surprising both the public and some of the supervisors. The reason given for changing the access: Neighborhood groups near the access and resort site were concerned about the negative impact caused by the public trail access at the end of Magee Road.

"Littering, illegal parking, traffic congestion on neighborhood streets and late-night partying have been the problems associated with the current access," says Ginny Noyes, vice president of the Cobo Catalina Hills Home Owners Association. "We are also worried about the effects a 40- to 60-space parking lot might have on the large wildlife population that comes through our neighborhoods." Others, including Greg Lunn, County Supervisor for District 1, believe the property owners want to move the access because hikers crossing an expensive subdivision with estate-like

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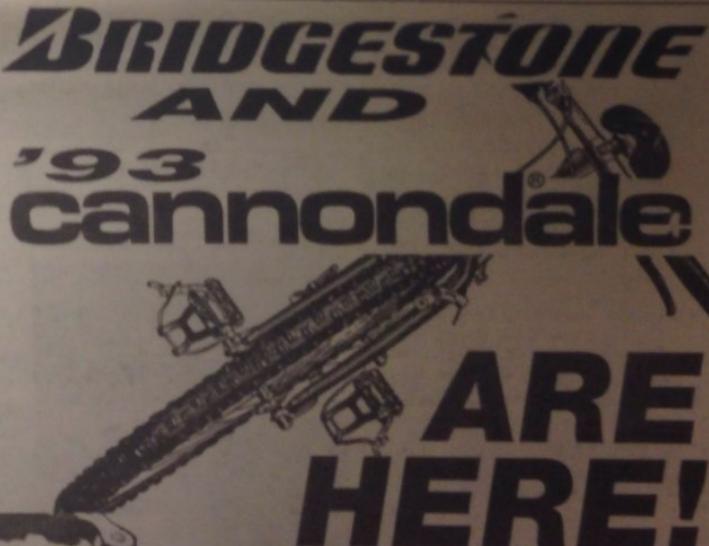
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for the tennis court and nine for the parking lot."

In the 200-acre parcel of land promised to Stouffer lies a thriving band of rich vegetation classified by the Pima County Transportation and Flood Control District regulations as a Class I riparian (streamfed) wildlife habitat. Class I habitat of this nature refers to an area connected to open undeveloped land such as a national forest or national park, that has significant wildlife value and is scarce and declining in supply.

Sherry Ruther, the Habitat Specialist for the Arizona Game and Fish Department, indicates the loss of large portions of riparian vegetation could upset the longterm environmental balance. The wildlife that travel through and use the wilderness area could be compromised.

"Among Class I habitats in the Tucson area, Pima Canyon is among the most valuable because of its rich biological characteristics," wrote Bill Shaw, a professor of wildlife ecology at the University of Arizona, in a 1986 study that identified the critical and sensitive wildlife habitats in northeast Pima County.

According to Shaw's analysis, more than 100 acres make up the riparian vegetation at Pima Canyon site. County regulations designed to protect Class I habitat permit only 10 percent of these areas to be disturbed or developed.

The SWCA study done for the property owners, however, disputes the UA study. Raming, in that study, says Class I areas are only those that are dominated by a great density of mesquite trees, which only puts value on the riparian vegetation of about 50 acres in Pima Canyon, says Ruther.

"Most significant to a Class I riparian area is its connection to open, undeveloped lands where concentration of wildlife populations appear and this project may severely impede that connection with the national forest," says Ruther.

Raming is confident the same density as well as the same plant communities can be restored to the area and much of the wildlife present today will be present after development. This does not necessarily mean the same animals will return, but perhaps their off-spring will colonize the new vegetation, he says.

A public hearing about the Pima Canyon development will be held on Wednesday, August 26 at 9 a.m. at the County Building, 110 W. Congress St., on the first floor in the Board of Supervisors hearing room. □

—BY CATHY SPENCER

Tucson-based freelance writer Cathy Spencer has written and edited for Omni and has contributed articles to Newsweek International.