



November 23, 2022

Rio Nuevo District
1703 E. Broadway Blvd.
Tucson, AZ 85719

Dear Rio Nuevo Board of Directors,

The Center for Biological Diversity is a non-profit environmental organization dedicated to the protection of native species and their habitats through science, policy, grassroots advocacy, education, and environmental law. We believe that the welfare of human beings is deeply linked to nature — to the existence in our world of a vast diversity of wild animals and plants. Because diversity has intrinsic value, and because its loss impoverishes society, we work to secure a future for all species, great and small, hovering on the brink of extinction.

Though we have offices across the country -- Oregon, California, Florida and elsewhere -- we are headquartered in Tucson, Ariz. and this city is, in many ways, our spiritual home. So it is with great interest that I reach out to you about the future of the 28-acre open space located between the Santa Cruz River and Sentinel Peak often referred to as the A-Mountain landfill. This site represents one of the last remaining significant open spaces near Tucson's urban core. This site also represents a great opportunity.

With 80 percent of Americans living in and around cities, ensuring a nature connection is vital – both to people's quality of life and the future of conservation. This land between the river and the mountain, in the heart of Tucson's Birthplace should be maintained as open space where it can:

- protect and assure safe habitat and wildlife corridors between the Santa Cruz River, Tucson Mountains, the Tucson Mitigation Corridor, Saguaro National Park, Ironwood Forest National Monument and the Tohono O'odham Nation, providing essential access to water for birds and terrestrial wildlife species;
- address the scarcity of green space and trees within Tucson's urban core, thereby mitigating heat generation, providing shaded urban cooling, improving air quality, and increasing carbon sequestration;
- recognize the importance of the Santa Cruz River and its floodplain for the regenerative value of riparian vegetation for climate mitigation and bank stabilization;
- provide outdoor recreation space for community enjoyment, health benefits, and quality of life;

- create a unique amenity that will attract and satisfy the expectations of cultural and ecological tourists, thereby generating and increasing dollars from tourism, one of the primary income sources in southern Arizona.

I have seen coyotes, javelinas, a bobcat and countless birds visit the Santa Cruz River in this location. The 28-acre open space is critical to those sightings. Designating this area as a Sonoran Desert Park would ensure a wilder future for area wildlife and a healthier future for Tucsonans.

On May 16, 2021 the Biden-Harris Administration outlined the America the Beautiful Initiative, a sweeping vision for how the United States can work collaboratively to conserve and restore the lands, waters, and wildlife that support and sustain the nation through a decade-long effort to support locally led and voluntary conservation and restoration efforts across public, private, and Tribal lands and waters in order to create jobs and strengthen the economy's foundation; tackle the climate and nature crises; and address inequitable access to the outdoors.

Through the Justice40 Initiative the Biden-Harris Administration also promised to ensure that at least 40% of federal climate investments are made in communities of color and frontline communities that have historically seen little to no investment in conservation and equitable access to nature.

I believe that the imperatives of America the Beautiful and Justice40 metric, along state, city, non-profit and community support, could come together well in protecting the 28-acre open space between the Santa Cruz and Sentinel Peak as an open space for communities and as a wildlife refuge. There is money available for investment in protecting open spaces that sit at the nexus of conservation, social justice, community health and climate resiliency.

I urge Rio Nuevo to find a path that brings together those things that truly strengthen what makes Tucson and the Sonoran Desert such a special place: our barrios, our biodiversity, our vision, our desert and our water. I urge Rio Nuevo to see the A-Mountain landfill for what it is: a promise of a healthier, better, more connected future for Tucson.

Sincerely,
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