

INFORMATION SHEET

Riparian Habitat Mitigation Standards and Implementation Guidelines

The Pima County Floodplain and Erosion Hazard Management Ordinance (FPMO) requires preservation and enhancement of riparian vegetation found along watercourses and floodplains. The ecosystem encompassing the vegetation and its associated hydrologic and geomorphic functions and features along watercourses is known as riparian habitat.

Riparian habitat is found along lakes, springs, streams, creeks, washes and arroyos and provides multiple community benefits. These areas provide open space and recreational opportunities, allow for groundwater recharge, natural erosion control, and protection of surface-water quality. Riparian corridors allow for higher biological diversity and support wildlife by providing food, water, shelter and nesting or breeding sites. These areas provide public safety and economic benefits in the form of higher property values along open space and river corridors, reduced risk of flooding and erosion and a reduction in public expenditures required for protection of infrastructure and flood control projects.

Key in preserving these critical natural resources is the riparian habitat protection regulations included in the FPMO under Chapter 16.30, Title 16 of the Pima County Code. The regulations ensure that impacts to riparian habitat resulting from development are minimized and the natural functions of the riparian systems and associated floodplains are maintained.

In 2005, the FPMO was amended to include more comprehensive riparian protection regulations, designed to protect riparian corridors from fragmentation. Ordinance No. 2005-FC2, contains revised riparian habitat protection regulations and updated riparian classification maps. Under the previous Ordinance (1999-FC1), the Board also endorsed a separate document, titled *Regulated Riparian Habitat Mitigation Standards and Implementation Guidelines (Guidelines)*. This document was created to inform applicants of the regulatory process and options for compliance when development impacts riparian habitat.

The Guidelines are being updated to reflect the changes adopted with Ordinance 2005-FC2. To assist with this task, a Mitigation Working Group (MWG) was formed by the District in July, 2007. The MWG consists of members from the public, the development community, public agencies, and conservation organizations in Pima County.

The revised Guidelines are currently under public review prior to their submission for approval by the Board of Supervisors, anticipated to be in March, 2009. Public meetings will be held in January, 2009. The guidelines will apply to individual building permits and land development permits issued by the County.

Key changes included in the 2005-FC2 language being incorporated into the 2009 mitigation guidelines include:

- Updated Riparian Classification Maps, based on more comprehensive data, including better resolution imagery, local groundwater data, and plant community maps (Harris Riparian Maps)
- The Conservation Lands System (CLS) was incorporated: linking Chapter 16.30 to the goals of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP)
- Important Riparian Areas (IRA) from the CLS were included as a regulated riparian habitat classification.
- Xeroriparian Class D (XD) was included as a regulated riparian habitat classification
- Mitigation is only required when greater than 1/3 acre of riparian habitat is disturbed for ALL classes of riparian habitat
- When a mitigation plan is required for disturbance of Class H and/or IRA habitat, Pima County Board of Supervisors approval will only be required when greater than 5% of the total mapped riparian habitat on a property is impacted.

Additions to the guidelines for implementation of Ordinance 2005-FC2 include:

- Standards for mitigating impacts to IRA
- Standards for mitigating impacts to Class XD
- Provisions for determining a minimum mitigation area
- Monitoring requirement for success of mitigation plans/improved enforcement of mitigation plan implementation
- Expanded mitigation plant list specific to watershed and habitat type
- Standard methodology for field mapping and on-site plant surveys to determine on-site mitigation requirements
- Water harvesting guidelines
- Information about noxious and invasive plant species and control
- Provisions for creating "defensible space" for fire safety
- Detailed planting, irrigation, and maintenance standards
- Checklist for mitigation plan preparation and requirements

The MWG will reconvene early 2009 to review proposed mitigation banking guidelines. The mitigation banking guidelines are currently under development and separate from the on-site mitigation guidelines due to the complexity of mitigation banking issues.

For additional information about the proposed revised mitigation guidelines, contact Carla Danforth or Marisa Rice either by calling 243-1800 or by visiting the office at 97 East Congress. Descriptions of watercourse and riparian habitat protection efforts are available online at: www.rfcd.pima.gov/wrd/