Regulated Riparian Habitat Mitigation Standards
and Implementation Guidelines

Supplement to Title 16 Chapter 16.30
of the Watercourse and Riparian Habitat Protection
and Mitigation Requirements
Ordinance No. 2005-FC2
January 2010
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section one:
the ordinance
On July 19, 1994 Pima County Board of Supervisors (Board), acting as the Board of Directors of the Flood Control District, adopted Pima County’s first riparian habitat protection regulations under the Floodplain and Erosion Hazard Management Ordinance (Ordinance) as Article X, of the Pima County Code: "Watercourse and Riparian Habitat Protection and Mitigation Requirements."

In addition to the Ordinance, the Board adopted official maps indicating the general location of regulated riparian habitat (RRH), meeting certain criteria and subject to the requirements of the Ordinance. The official maps are referred to in this document as Riparian Classification Maps. The 1994 version of the Ordinance applied only to the review and approval of development plans and subdivision plats, which contain RRH within unincorporated Pima County.

In 1998, the Ordinance was revised to apply Article X to ALL properties containing RRH within unincorporated Pima County and was adopted by the Pima County Board of Supervisors on July 14, 1998.

The Board officially codified the Floodplain Ordinance and its various amendments (including Article X) as Title 16 of the Pima County Code on June 1, 1999 (also referred to as FPMO No. 1999-FC1). At this time, the “Watercourse and Riparian Habitat Protection and Mitigation Requirements” was officially changed to Title 16, Chapter 16.54 of the Pima County Code.

The most recent revision to the Ordinance occurred in 2005. At this time, new official Riparian Classification maps were adopted by the Board. The new maps were a result of studies performed for the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, which included mapping based on plant community structure and composition, vegetation density and the availability of water. The 2005 version of the Ordinance, FPMO No. 2005-FC2, was adopted by the Board on September 6, 2005. Under this revision, the “Watercourse and Riparian Habitat Protection and Mitigation Requirements” was officially changed from Chapter 16.54 to Chapter 16.30 of the Pima County Code.

Chapter 16.30 is referred to throughout this document as the “Ordinance”.

Overview of the Riparian Habitat Protection Ordinance
The purpose of the Ordinance is to promote stable flow and sediment transport conditions, preserve natural floodplain functions, and provide watercourse management by preserving and/or enhancing riparian vegetation and habitat along water courses and floodplains and to:

- Promote benefits provided by riparian habitat resources, including but not limited to, groundwater recharge, natural erosion control and protection of surface-water quality.

- Ensure the long-term stability of natural floodplains and survival of the full spectrum of plants and animals that are indigenous to the County by:
  1. Assuring riparian habitat acreage and existing or natural functional values are not diminishing during development;
  2. Providing continuity of riparian habitat along watercourses;
  3. Promoting land-use guidance for avoiding, minimizing and mitigating damage to important riparian areas; and
  4. Providing ecologically sound transmission between riparian habitat and developed areas.

- Promote an economic benefit to the County by providing aesthetic, recreation and wildlife values of riparian habitat for the enjoyment of residents and visitors.

The Ordinance strengthens riparian habitat protection by incorporating the riparian elements of the Conservation Lands System (CLS). The CLS categorizes and identifies locations of priority biological resources within Pima County and provides policy guidelines for the conservation of these resources.
Importance of Riparian Habitat

Simply put, riparian habitat is the community of plants found in areas where water tends to concentrate—either temporarily or permanently—fostering the growth of plant life. A more thorough definition is that riparian habitat is the community of plants occurring in association with any spring, cienega, lake, watercourse, river, stream, creek, wash, arroyo, or other body of water, either surface or subsurface, or channel having banks and bed through which waters flow at least periodically.

Riparian habitat is a valuable resource in the Sonoran Desert. River systems in the Sonoran Desert are important corridors for resident and migratory birds, along with providing wildlife with the resources necessary to maintain their populations. Preserving and restoring riparian habitat in Pima County provides multiple benefits to people as well as wildlife by protecting the natural function of the floodplain, providing shade, natural beauty, creating passive recreational opportunities, preventing erosion, protecting water quality, increasing groundwater recharge, and reducing the urban heat island effect.

Where is the Ordinance applied?

Administration and Enforcement of the Ordinance shall apply to individual building permits, including grading and right-of-way use permits, and land development permits associated with subdivision plats and development plans issued by the County.

The Ordinance applies to all property in unincorporated areas of Pima County, which contains RRH, including state lands and property owned by Pima County. The Ordinance does not apply to:

- any property where Regulated Riparian Habitat is not present;
- Incorporated areas of cities or towns which have elected to assume separate floodplain management powers and duties pursuant to Section 48-3610 of the Arizona Revised Statutes, unless the property is owned by Pima County (see above) and;
- Indian and military reservations.