

Environmental Planning Advisory Committee (EPAC) Meeting

9:30 a.m., Thursday, February 1, 2024

Pima Association of Governments
1 E. Broadway Blvd., Suite 401, Tucson

Public Access to Meeting Audio/Presentation: <https://youtube.com/live/9a5FIDZmaFk>

Notice is hereby given to the public and to the Committee members that the Environmental Planning Advisory Committee (EPAC) of Pima Association of Governments (PAG) will meet at the above stated time and date.

SPECIAL NOTICE: Members of the EPAC may attend the meeting remotely or in person. The meeting room will be open to the public. However, members of the public are invited to attend the meeting via the link above. EPAC members will be provided with a separate link to participate. Members of the public may submit written comments relating to this meeting to info@pagregion.com within one hour of the meeting's posted start time. These comments will be filed with the committee's records.

EPAC is a technical advisory committee established by PAG to make regional environmental planning recommendations to the PAG Executive Director. EPAC provides technical review and develops recommendations on studies, reports, plans, programs and submittals in support of continuous, comprehensive and cooperative sustainability planning and programming within the PAG planning area and in full compliance with PAG policies and procedures. Committee members are prohibited from interfering with administrative functions of the organization.

Pima Association of Governments is committed to maintaining high standards of conduct and prohibits harassment and retaliation against all employees pursuant to PAG's Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment and Retaliation. It is the responsibility of all committee members to comply with and to report violations or suspected violations of the Rules of Conduct, PAG policies, or state laws.

AGENDA

1. Call to Order and Introductions

2. In-kind Form

The participants will be asked to confirm their estimated in-kind time for the meeting.

This is an information item.

3. Approval of December 1, 2023, EPAC Meeting Summary

Action: Approval of the Meeting Summary.

4. Nomination to fill vacant Professional/Technical Interest Area EPAC committee member

PAG staff will ask the committee to nominate a representative to the EPAC to fill the professional/technical interest area vacancy.

Action: The committee will be asked to nominate Alejandra Fraijo Arce to fill the professional/technical interest area vacancy for endorsement by the PAG Executive Director.

5. EPAC Top Environmental Issues List for 2024

PAG staff will present a draft of EPAC's Top Environmental Issues List for 2024 that incorporates additional feedback received by members for discussion.

Action: Review and discuss the final draft of EPAC's Top Environmental Issues List for 2024.

6. City of Tucson Urban Forestry Program

A representative from the City of Tucson will provide an update on the Urban Forestry Program and the Tucson Million Trees Initiative and how these efforts address climate change resiliency.

This is an information item.

7. Save Our Saguaros – Beat Back Buffelgrass Month

A representative from the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum will provide a brief update on the Save Our Saguaros – Beat Back Buffelgrass Month.

This is an information item.

8. Future Agenda Items

Future agenda topics to be considered by PAG may be suggested by members of the committee.

****Pursuant to open meeting laws, the committee cannot discuss or act on any matters raised that are not listed on this agenda.*

9. Adjournment

The EPAC meeting packet containing materials related to the meeting is available at www.PAGregion.com for public review. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), those requiring special assistance, such as large typeface print, sign language or other reasonable accommodations, may request those through the administrative offices at: (520) 792-1093 at least two business days before the meeting.

PAG operates its programs without regard to race, color and national origin in compliance with [Title VI](#) of the Civil Rights Act. We invite you to complete our voluntary self-identification survey ([English/Spanish](#)).

If you need translation assistance, please contact Zonia Kelley at (520) 792-1093. Si necesita ayuda con traducción, llame por favor al (520) 792-1093 y comuníquese con Zonia Kelley.

Environmental Planning Advisory Committee (EPAC) Meeting Summary

Summary of 9:30 a.m., Friday, December 1, 2023, Meeting

Full Video Recording (YouTube): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-86uYrU7z4>

ATTENDEES

Voting Members

Natalie Shepp, Pima County DEQ
Christina McVie, Tucson Audubon
Barabara Johnson, Tohono O'odham Nation SXD
Kimberly Baeza, Pima County RWRD
Alexandra Chavez, Town of Oro Valley
Teresa Bravo, TEP
Howard Myers, SAHBA
Jessica Rodriguez, Tucson Water
Paula Bluemer, Town of Marana
Charles Stack, Town of Oro Valley citizen

Abigail Okrent, Pima County DEQ
David Robinson, Tucson Audubon
Ben Elias, City of Tucson
Jessica Rodriguez, City of Tucson

Non-Voting Members

Katie Predick, Arizona Sonora Desert Museum

Staff Lead

Hannah Oden

1. Call to Order and Introductions

The meeting was conducted electronically and called to order by the Chair at 9:31 a.m. Introductions were made.

2. In-kind Form

Members were informed that PAG would calculate in-kind contributions for meeting time from the attendees list. Members were asked to inform PAG Planning Coordinator Hannah Oden if their work is funded by federal dollars.

3. Approval of October 6, 2023, EPAC Meeting Summary

Action: A motion was made by Christina McVie and seconded by Paula Bluemer to approve the Oct. 6, 2023, EPAC Meeting Summary. Approval was unanimous.

4. Nomination and Election of EPAC Chair and Vice Chair

Action: A motion was made by Christina McVie and seconded by Paula Bluemer to elect Abigail Okrent as Chair and Paula Bluemer as Vice Chair. Approval was unanimous.

5. Update on PAG Area Water Quality Management Plan (208 Plan)

PAG Planning Manager, Mead Mier-Welborn, provided an overview of the annual administrative process to update the data in the appendices of the PAG Areawide Water Quality Management Plan (208 Plan). Administrative updates do not include any changes to adopted policies or permit review procedures but can inform agencies that fund our program on progress made towards our regional water quality conditions, accomplishments, and recommendations for consideration of related funding opportunities. Annual administrative updates will aid the next comprehensive update in 2025, during which the entire plan will undergo thorough and complete review. Ms. Mier-Welborn shared topics that have been included in the draft administrative update so far, stated which local, state, and federal agencies contributed, and gave a preview of next steps. Members interested in providing expert review or any recent information about water quality conditions, accomplishments or tasks for the Action Plan were asked to contact 208info@PAGregion.com. For inclusion in this year's administrative update, comments and review should be provided by the end of Jan. 2024. The current plan can be found at <https://pagregion.com/sustainability/water-quality/208-plan/>.

This was an information item.

6. Natural Infrastructure in Dryland Streams

Dr. Laura Norman from U.S. Geological Survey provided a presentation on Natural Infrastructure in Dryland Streams (NIDS). Dr. Norman reviewed the science behind ecohydrology and how NIDS can benefit the environment. These benefits include flood control, increased water availability, erosion control, and improved soil carbon storage and sequestration. Statistics of the impacts of rock detention structures, beaver dam analogues, and gabions were also provided. This item was identified in the EPAC Top Environmental Issues List for 2023 and a presentation was requested by EPAC members.

The presentation is available [here](#).

This was an information item.

7. EPAC Top Environmental Issues List for 2024

PAG Planning Coordinator Hannah Oden reviewed the final draft of the EPAC Top Environmental Issues List for 2024. Ms. Oden presented the purpose of the list, the development process, and key changes from the previously approved list.

Barbara Johnson, Tohono O'odham Nation SxD, requested more specificity for ongoing efforts and how the issues list could be used to track tangible committee accomplishments using measurable actions.

Abigail Okrent, Pima County DEQ, expressed the importance of addressing environmental justice in the issues list and Natalie Shepp, Pima County DEQ, requested that this issue be moved to the top of the list with the previous title.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Action: A motion was made by Christina McVie and seconded by Abigail Okrent to postpone final adoption of the EPAC Top environmental Issues List for 2024. The motion passed unanimously.

8. EPAC Membership and Vacancies

PAG Planning Coordinator Hannah Oden reviewed the committee structure, member roles and process for filling vacancies. Members were reminded of the requirements for voting members, along with the responsibilities and capabilities of both voting and non-voting members.

This was an information item.

9. Future Agenda Items

Suggested future agenda topics to be considered by PAG included:

- A presentation on wildlife connectivity
- Update on current actions related to the Carbon Reduction strategies and EPAC and subcommittee involvement
- A presentation of Pima County's Priority Climate Action Plan
- EPAC Top Environmental Draft Issues List for 2024

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE (EPAC)

Top Environmental Issues List 2024

Following is the Top Environmental Issues List compiled by Pima Association of Governments (PAG) in coordination with its Environmental Planning Advisory Committee (EPAC) and its subcommittees. EPAC is a standing technical committee and provides technical review and develops recommendations on environmental studies, reports, plans and programs within the PAG planning area, but is not a policy setting body. EPAC, as an advisory group of regional representatives, is in a unique position to coordinate a focused list of shared objectives and top issues from a multi-faceted lens and collaborate to leverage resources and multiply results. These top issues will guide priority topics to be addressed during EPAC and its subcommittee meetings in 2024 and are used to provide information to decision makers. PAG staff, together with EPAC, will utilize the list to track accomplishments, integrate diverse planning efforts, provide inclusive regional coordination and may create or advise on measurable initiatives that address regional issues, such as plans, resolutions, best practice inventories and partnerships to increase awareness and improve the health and livability of our community. This list supports EPAC's intention to share information, commit to coordinated activities, track and encourage regional collaboration efforts, gather feedback, transmit recommendations when directed by PAG, provide learning opportunities, and address gaps in environmental planning. Each header below names a priority category and is followed by a description of top issues and highlights strategies to address specific concerns. EPAC aims to hold discussions to further refine key issues, determine where there may be shared objectives, specify desired outcomes, and evaluate efforts that are most relevant and timely for decision makers.

EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AS A HIGH PRIORITY AND CROSSCUTTING PLANNING FRAMEWORK

In all contexts of regional environmental planning, emphasis will be placed on ensuring that underserved and overburdened communities are prioritized to improve their environmental conditions, and ultimately the health of individuals, who have historically suffered disproportionately from environmental degradation.

Efforts will include engaging underserved and overburdened communities in transportation and environmental planning efforts from the beginning planning stages, listening closely to how they are being impacted by local environmental degradation, incorporating traditional ecological knowledge, and prioritizing improvements within these communities based on the residents' lived experiences. Engaging with human services, local native nations, non-governmental organizations, and the government sector is advised. Environmental managers would benefit from sharing lessons and resources to ensure compliance with Justice 40 regulations for environmental justice, such as data analytics and engagement methods. Specific issues may be found in each section below.

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Clean Air – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has designated the region in attainment with air quality standards, except for the Rillito PM₁₀ nonattainment area.

Regional coordination to encourage the use of alternate modes of transportation and discourage single occupancy vehicle travel will be prioritized to reduce air pollution and ensure the continued attainment of the air quality standards and demonstration of conformity. Increased use of alternate modes of transportation also reduces greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change. Regional collaboration is key to promoting public education about the links between motor vehicle travel, air pollution and climate change, and encouraging alternate modes of transportation, such as biking, transit, and carpooling. Improved geographic datasets of infrastructure assets, needs, and gaps, will aid regional transportation planning efforts to prioritize infrastructure improvements focused on the safety and availability of alternate modes of transportation. Planning efforts to increase transportation electrification, including infrastructure development, will also be prioritized.

Overlaying investments, opportunities, available data, and needs will allow the committee to help inform regional priorities for air quality mitigation and leverage opportunities of greatest impact.

Clean Water – The *PAG Areawide Water Quality Management Plan's (208 Plan)* action items contain topics for regional coordination including stormwater mitigation, historic landfills, industrial waste, emerging groundwater contaminants, surface water quality, and septic issues. Regional collaboration is key because water quality issues cross watersheds and aquifers, and solutions, such as wastewater reclamation, are regional in scale. Planning that occurs in isolation from other disciplines risks higher costs and lost opportunities for increased co-benefits.

Multi-benefit projects such as locating recharge of high-quality treated effluent to within rivers and streams creates riparian habitat and restores community access to a natural heritage of flowing rivers while also cost-effectively improving water table levels. EPAC aims to hold collaborative discussions to learn of shared interests in flowing river reclamation including top locations, feasible miles of flow, and stakeholder interests in the high-quality of treated wastewater. Integral to this discussion, EPAC members, and experts will share tracking methods and regularly share results at EPAC meetings.

EPAC has applauded the local precautionary efforts to fund clean ups and prevent delivery of water with emerging contaminants. As the EPA continues to develop National Primary Drinking Water Regulations (NPDWR) for six per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), strategies and technologies to treat, mitigate and incentivize alternatives to PFAS and other contaminants of emerging concern will continue to be tracked and resources shared. Regional coordination and information sharing will help to prepare for NPDWR and other upcoming regulations to control these contaminants in water supplies, wastewater, and discharges. Health impacts of past Superfund sites can be encouraged to be explored.

Solid Waste Reduction – Regionally coordinated solid waste planning efforts help to improve critical local needs such as efficiently using resources, sustaining resiliency of recycling infrastructure, reducing landfill costs and water quality impacts, and improving environmental quality.

EPAC may hold discussions to refine key issues, clarify options and objectives, define opportunities for collaboration between diverse entities for solid waste reduction, and explore effective models of reuse, recycling, and related contamination mitigation. Incentives for technology development will help address issues and innovative projects should be embraced. Recent monitoring of litter sources, testing concepts of litter capture in washes, and pilot recycling programs will continue to be collaborated upon and encouraged. Reduction and reuse of materials that would otherwise be discarded in landfills are central issues to address.

Stewardship and Enhancement – With the *Sackett* decision and subsequent rulemaking revising the definition of “Waters of the United States” (WOTUS) leaving many ephemeral and intermittent waterways unprotected at the federal level, new chemicals entering the market, and worsening drought on the Colorado River, local land use and state decision makers should consider the impacts of uncontrolled pollutant discharges on water uses and riparian land protection. Increase of wildfire intensity, frequency and size has impacts on air quality, erosion, habitat, safety, water quality, recharge, and flooding, which will be tracked. Efforts to encourage native species establishment and remove invasives, such as fire-prone buffelgrass, are important given the ongoing risk to natural resources, urban infrastructure, and our cultural and environmental identity.

PAG continues to encourage riparian stewardship efforts for ephemeral, intermittent and perennial streams as stated in *PAG’s 208 Plan* and *2017 Resolution Supporting our Heritage of Desert Waters*.

This includes local support for *PAG’s Priority Waterbodies* and the state’s *Outstanding Arizona Waters*, with monitoring, preservation, and restoration should land-use changes impact water quality or resources.

Together with the San Xavier District, EPAC strives to provide information about priority waterbodies on the Tohono O’odham Nation and investigate effective regional ways to protect them. EPAC members plan to learn about water quality tracking methods so that results can be communicated to EPAC members for issues list updates.

Funding sources, such as federal grants, should be actively pursued for invasive species removal and fire protection planning and inter-agency collaboration encouraged. Upland, river, and floodplain management efforts aim to bring environmental, aquifer recharge, safety, watershed health, and economic enhancements to the region.

Wildlife Connectivity - A primary threat to native wildlife populations in Pima County is habitat fragmentation. Wildlife relies on connected, undeveloped natural corridors to migrate, find food

sources, and maintain genetic diversity, as corridors reduce isolated populations. However, human caused barriers such as buildings, roads, fences, energy facilities, and more negatively impact the ability of wildlife to safely move and thrive throughout their range.

Efforts to support wildlife sensitive design in development processes, including roadways, should be encouraged. This includes incorporating connectivity into new projects and implementing wildlife friendly designs, such as wildlife crossings and wildlife fencing, into new roadway projects in areas with high wildlife movement. These measures can also be incorporated into existing roadway projects in critical wildlife corridors for both wildlife and human safety. The latest data related to wildlife movement, mortality, and habitat fragmentation should be used during the planning and decision-making process. Moreover, land stewardship for regional and riparian habitat protection can help keep wildlife corridors intact. PAG and EPAC can assist with information sharing and coordination among jurisdictional partners to address connectivity during regional transportation planning processes.

REGIONAL RESILIENCY

Resilient Infrastructure – EPAC addresses climate concerns for our regional landscape and investments by integrating diverse experts in discussions that more efficiently use limited resources and capital.

The integration of planning efforts leads to more efficient use of resources by recognizing opportunities for shared and equitable benefits. For example, the multi-benefit approach to green infrastructure to manage surface drainage on roads can reduce flood nuisance, increase transportation safety, improve wildlife linkages, offset consumptive water use, provide access to open space, support tree shade, and mitigate heat, stormwater, and air pollutants. High priority should be placed on preserving existing trees, planting more trees, and encouraging additional shade infrastructure. EPAC will receive updates on tools, metrics, and data to support planning and decision-making. PAG's Resiliency Planning Maps feature cooling centers, heat, social vulnerabilities, and canopy data to support the assessment of environmental hazards and distribution of infrastructure. Heat management strategies can be explored that assist with heat preparedness, mitigation, warnings, and responses. EPAC has heard progress on tree campaigns and can help investigate partnerships to also support our existing vegetation with green stormwater infrastructure.

Modernized transportation systems that provide social, health and environmental benefits can be highlighted. Examples include multimodal solutions, local stormwater design and detail updates, electric vehicle infrastructure and broadband infrastructure.

Resilient Economy – The Sonoran Desert's unique natural resources contribute to the region's economic vitality and sense of place and should not be undervalued. A changing climate makes the protection of these natural resources increasingly critical.

Environmentally friendly modes of transportation and street design enhance travel and tourism, livability, safety, equity, recreation, and business attraction while reducing pollution and dangerous wildlife collisions with traffic. Studies on the economic and social value of watchable wildlife such as birding, bike-friendly communities, open space, and healthy waterways are increasingly available and demonstrate our region's unique assets. Public/private partnerships with local businesses, educators and additional diverse stakeholders can encourage tourism, strategic talent alignment and business opportunities. Innovative financing for environmental projects will be explored.

Water Reliability – In 2024, the Colorado River will return to a Tier 1 shortage after reaching Tier 2a in 2023. While this will provide short-term relief to many communities reliant on Colorado River water, shortage is projected to intensify quickly in future years. As water providers continue to develop and implement responses to the shortage, regionally cohesive messaging will be key, and should include local drought conditions that uniquely impact shallow groundwater-dependent wells and ecosystems. Needs include long-term planning, water efficiency, infrastructure investments, and incentives for new in-stream recharge projects.

Projects, such as in-stream recharge of reclaimed water and use of the Conservation Effluent Pool, can multiply benefits and sustain year-round river flows. Regional collaboration between water providers, wastewater reclamation, industry including mining operations, agriculture, indigenous communities, and academia is key to creating a secure and clean water supply and reliable conveyance, especially as we face prolonged severe drought, climate extremes, and aridification. As mining impacts water supply, EPAC may discuss related technologies for water efficiency and mitigation for communities vulnerable to groundwater overdraft and subsidence. Resilience of infrastructure is an important component to protecting our limited water supply and distribution, so evaporation on the CAP and municipal leak detection technologies can be explored. EPAC will explore both accomplishments and additional funding opportunities to address key issues identified in the Lower Santa Cruz River Basin Study, including the disconnect between groundwater withdrawal and recharge locations that cause physical supply risks for people and the environment. Strategies include sub-regional public wastewater treatment and regional-scale stormwater capture and could be supported by an update to PAG's 208 positions.

Climate Variability – Resources and methods for planning for climate variability will be shared at EPAC including adaptation measures that equitably address interconnected public health and welfare issues, such as extreme heat, wildfires, flooding, and additional priorities, through coordinated regional actions. Jurisdictional collaboration on these efforts will be critical to reduce greenhouse gas emissions most effectively from both mobile and stationary sources as well as to prepare for more extreme weather conditions through mitigation and adaptation. Renters do not benefit from sustainability incentives that are available to homeowners, thus making adaptation measures more costly to adopt and leaving this population more vulnerable to the impacts of climate variability and increasing utility bills.

PAG's 2016 Resolution for Regional Resilience to Climate and Weather Variability continues to guide regional efforts related to climate and weather variability. Several actions were taken in

2023 that will help the region implement strategies to address climate-related risks, including the approved City of Tucson's Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (Tucson Resilient Together), Pima County's \$1 million Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) award to create a regional climate action plan, and a completed update to PAG's biennial greenhouse gas emissions inventory. In addition, PAG has received approximately \$6.4 million under the Federal Highway Administration's Carbon Reduction Program for FFY22-24 to implement measures to reduce carbon emissions from the transportation system, with additional funding to become available to the region for FFY25-26. Locally, key impactful mitigation measures would include increasing renewable energy sources and decreasing carbon-based sources, encouraging and protecting alternate modes of travel, and improving electric vehicle infrastructure. Data-driven, cross-sector strategies should be implemented quickly, with goals to strengthen our clean energy economy, enhance the necessary workforce training opportunities, and address environmental, safety and health impacts that are most often felt by disadvantaged communities. Incentives for landlords to invest in renewable energy and conservation measures to make resilience benefits more equitable should be encouraged. Coordinated regional collaboration on these efforts will also be essential to efficiently use, increase and effectively utilize financial resources that are currently being provided by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) for the greatest benefit to community resilience.