

Environmental Planning Advisory Committee (EPAC) Meeting

At or after 9:30 a.m., Thursday, October 23, 2025

Public Access to Meeting Audio/Presentation: <https://www.youtube.com/live/eCsa4f9jaPs>

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 will attend the meeting remotely. The meeting room will not be open to the public. However, members of the public are invited to attend the meeting via the public access link above. Committee 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 twenty-four hours 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 Management Committee and PAG Executive Director. EPAC provides technical review and develops recommendations on studies, reports, plans, programs and submittals in support of continuous, comprehensive and cooperative planning and programming within the PAG planning area and in full compliance with PAG policies and procedures. Committee members are prohibited from interfering with the 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, federal or state laws and regulations.

AGENDA

1. Call to Order and Introductions

2. In-kind Form

The participants will be asked to confirm their estimated in-kind time so the meeting can count as a local match to PAG's federally funded programs.

This is an information item.

3. Approval of EPAC May 1, 2025, Meeting Summary

Action: Approval of the Meeting Summary.

4. Invasive Species and Hazard Mitigation

Representatives from the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum and University of Arizona School of Government and Public Policy will provide an update on the current status of invasive plant

species in Pima County, management practices to maintain native biodiversity, county and state efforts to mitigate the risk of invasive species-driven wildfire, and the value to our community, including water quality and watershed resilience.

Representatives from the Sky Island Alliance and Watershed Management Group will provide updates on Arundo removal projects and progress for springs and creeks.

This is an information item.

5. Assessing Effluent Recharge Instream Potential in Green Valley

Representatives from the Sonoran Institute and the University of Arizona will present the results of a Bureau of Reclamation-funded survey of potential collaborators and sources of water for instream projects. The effluent-dependent flow scenarios study for the Middle Santa Cruz River encompasses an examination of potential flow miles, explores new collaborative regional facilities, and identifies the benefits and constraints to be considered. Pima County Regional Wastewater Reclamation Department representative will provide perspective on regulatory oversight of the process.

This is an information item.

6. EPAC Draft Top Environmental Issues List for 2026

PAG staff will present the updated draft of EPAC's Top Environmental Issues List for 2026 that was distributed to EPAC, AQS, and WPS on October 2, 2025 for comments and feedback.

This is an information item.

7. Future Agenda Items

Speaker suggestions for future agenda topics to be considered by PAG may be suggested by committee members.

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

8. 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., Thursday, May 1, 2025, Meeting

Full Video Recording (YouTube): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qausn4bd9m4>

ATTENDEES

Voting Members

Abigail Okrent, PDEQ
Alejandra Fraijo, Kimley-Horn
Becca Cammack, Tucson Airport Authority
Brendan Lyons, SAHBA
Camden Walsh, Tohono O'odham Nation
Charles Stack, Oro Valley citizen
Christina McVie, Tucson Bird Alliance
Frank Bonillas, City of Tucson
Josue Licea, City of South Tucson
Kimberly Baeza, Pima County
Lydia Barker, City of Tucson

Mike Osborne, Town of Marana
(designated proxy)
Nicole Gillett, City of Tucson
Sarah Hite, PDEQ (designated proxy)
Scott Bennet, Town of Oro Valley
(designated proxy)

Non-Voting Members

Katie Predick, Arizona Sonoran Desert
Museum

Staff Lead

Mead Mier, Planning Manager

1. Call to Order and Introductions

The meeting was conducted virtually and called to order at 9:33 a.m. by the chair, Abigail Okrent, Pima County Department of Environmental Quality.

2. In-kind Form

PAG Planning Manager Mead Mier informed participants of the in-kind form, and members were asked to confirm their estimated in-kind time for the meeting.

3. Approval of EPAC Feb. 6, 2025, Meeting Summary

Video Timestamp: [16:08](#)

Action: A motion to approve Feb. 6, 2025, EPAC meeting summary with the spelling correction of Brendan Lyons' name was made by Ms. Okrent, and seconded by Christina McVie, Tucson Bird Alliance. The motion passed unanimously.

4. EPAC Top Environmental Issues List for 2025

Video Timestamp: [21:30](#)

Ms. Mier provided a brief introduction to the EPAC Top Environmental Issues List for 2025. Members were reminded of the process and previous discussions involved in developing the list. Additionally, members had the opportunity to discuss any further refinements to the list.

Action: Ms. Okrent moved to approve the April 24 version of the EPAC Top Environmental Issues list for 2025, which was seconded by Ms. McVie. The item was opened up for discussion.

Action: A motion to close the discussion was made by Ms. Okrent, and was seconded by Ms. McVie. The motion to close discussion was passed with one nay by Mr. Lyons.

Action: A substitute motion to amend the Issues List to include the sentence “Before advancing or recommending any regional environmental planning recommendations, this body will consider economically sound environmental health strategies with balanced benefits to both private and public stakeholders” was made by Brendan Lyons, SAHBA. The substitute motion failed to get a second.

Action: The original motion to approve the April 24 version of the EPAC Top Environmental Issues list for 2025 was passed with one nay by Mr. Lyons.

The presentation can be found [HERE](#).

5. Wildlife Corridors and Crossing Infrastructure in Pima County Overview

Video Timestamp: [38:38](#)

After a brief introduction from Ms. Mier and Ms. Okrent, panel representatives shared information about various types of local wildlife connectivity studies and diverse investments, including overpasses, underpasses, bat boxes and fencing.

Jeff Gangon, Wildlife Connectivity Program Lead with Arizona Game and Fish, presented background information on wildlife-vehicle collisions and habitat fragmentation to the members. The presentation included statistics on wildlife fatalities due to vehicle collisions, wildlife movement maps highlighting habitat fragmentation for multiple species, and suggestions for region-wide improvements in wildlife linkages.

Colin Beach, Biologist with Arizona Game and Fish, presented to the members on regional connectivity studies. This included statistics on various wildlife movements that cross or meet barriers along several state routes and regional roads, demonstrating the benefits of past efforts and the ongoing needs within Pima County.

Kris Gade, Director of Pima County Conservation Lands and Resources, connected the discussion to the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. The presentation highlighted efforts toward habitat preservation and connectivity thus far and future goals, including land acquisition and the development of wildlife crossings over the CAP canal and roads.

Audrey Navarro, Biology Program Manager at the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), provided information on State Routes 77 and 86, including the construction, utilization, benefits, and next steps for the wildlife underpass. She highlighted the grant award for the upcoming ADOT Arizona Statewide Wildlife Connectivity Assessment Tool and Action Plan project.

Carolyn Campbell, past Executive Director of the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection, gave a brief review of historical RTA-related efforts to improve wildlife connectivity in the region and discussed current recommendations for future funding to meet remaining priorities.

Town of Marana and Tohono O'odham Nation representatives were on the agenda but were unable to attend.

Members asked the panelists questions. Discussions covered a variety of topics, such as preferred solutions to wildlife linkage issues, retrofits versus advanced planning, cost sharing, ongoing maintenance and monitoring needs, resource priorities, and other local projects.

All presentations are available [HERE](#).

This was an information-only item.

6. Future Agenda Items

Members requested the following items:

- Information on the Green Valley Instream Recharge Project
- Information on the Catalina State Park conservation acquisition

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:36 a.m.

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE (EPAC)

Top Environmental Issues List 2026

The Top Environmental Issues List is compiled by Pima Association of Governments (PAG) in coordination with its Environmental Planning Advisory Committee (EPAC) and its subcommittees.

This list of top issues can be used to develop EPAC and its subcommittee meeting agendas for 2026. PAG staff, together with EPAC, will utilize the list to find common ground, 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. While this list covers a range of topics, PAG may only provide resources and address issues consistent with the Overall Work Program (OWP) and as allowed by grant funding sources.

EPAC encourages the integration of affordable and innovative solutions, predictable regulatory frameworks, and collaborative engagement among diverse members and interests. Additionally, EPAC seeks to weigh the immediate impacts on stakeholders across various sectors alongside the long-term benefits to public safety, health, and environmental well-being.

ISSUE 1: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Many underserved and overburdened communities have suffered disproportionately from environmental degradation. Federal regulations have varied in application of requirements for programs. Topics addressing the issue of environmental justice include:

- Lessons and resources to ensure compliance with environmental regulations, including environmental justice, such as data analytics and engagement methods
- Health impacts and health outcomes for communities affected by environmental degradation
- Efforts to engage with underserved and overburdened communities
- Data to aid decision making, such as tracking areas with the highest densities of underserved and overburdened populations

ISSUE 2: 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. The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) updates the State Implementation Plan (SIP) for the Rillito area with PAG's assistance. As the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), PAG is responsible for evaluating and demonstrating air quality transportation conformity for transportation programs and plans and amendments (Transportation Improvement Program and Regional Mobility and Accessibility Plan).

Prioritizing regional coordination to reduce air pollution and help ensure continued attainment of the national ozone air quality standard is paramount for the sustained health of our region. Topics addressing the issue of clean air include:

- Rillito area SIP planning and conformity analysis
- Ozone research of formation and precursor pollutants (oxides of nitrogen and volatile organic compounds), mitigation strategies, transport and wildfires, status of federal regulations/standards

- Increasing use of alternate modes of transportation, including active transportation and transit
- Advancing travel reduction with carpooling, ridesharing and telework
- Alternative energy and fuel in transportation, prioritizing overall air pollutant reduction benefits of electrification
- Links between travel modes, air pollution and climate change
- Methods to improve fuel economy
- Improved geographic datasets of alternative fuel and active mode infrastructure assets, needs, and gaps
- Leveraging investments, opportunities, and available data to inform regional priorities for air quality improvement
- Regional haze mitigation
- Regional greenhouse gas inventory

Clean Water – Under Section 208 of the Clean Water Act, PAG is the Designated Planning Agency (DPA) for Pima County, excluding Native American lands, and implements the *PAG Areawide Water Quality Management Plan (208 Plan)*. The 208 Plan primarily focuses on maintaining consistency for water reclamation facilities, but also addresses other potential pollutant sources, including solid waste disposal and urban stormwater runoff.

Regional watershed planning concerns both the quality and quantity of water resources and addresses contamination and scarcity. Topics addressing the issue of clean water include:

- Wastewater reclamation
- Stormwater pollution prevention and mitigation
- Industrial waste disposal and mitigation
- Impacts and remediation of groundwater contaminants
- Surface water quality impairments
- Aging septic systems
- Regional collaboration on water quality issues that cross watersheds and aquifers
- Water quality impacts of historic landfills
- Impacts of multi-benefit in-channel recharge projects, such as the use of high-quality treated to return flows to rivers and streams, which creates riparian habitat and restores access to flowing waterways while also cost-effectively improving water table levels
- Funding for the study, monitoring, control, and cleanup of emerging contaminants
- Tracking strategies and technologies to treat, mitigate and incentivize alternatives to PFAS and other emerging contaminants
- Regional coordination to support implementation of National Primary Drinking Water Regulations and prepare for other alternative methods to limit regulated contaminants in water supplies, wastewater, and discharges
- Health impacts of Superfund sites

Solid Waste Reduction – Regionally coordinated solid waste planning efforts help to improve critical local needs. Regional inventories, discussion and solutions are integral to the management of solid waste regionwide. Topics addressing solid waste challenges and solutions include:

- Efficiently using resources
- Reduction and reuse of materials that would otherwise be discarded in landfills
- Finding opportunities for collaboration between diverse entities for solid waste reduction
- Sustaining resiliency of recycling infrastructure
- Recycling economies

- Exploring effective models of reuse, recycling, and related contamination mitigation
- Efforts to eliminate contaminated plastics from landfills with public/private partnerships
- Robust glass recycling for reuse as building materials
- Development of anaerobic digestion facilities of food waste to support cleaner air
- Reducing landfill costs and water quality impacts
- Continued collaboration to monitor litter sources, test concepts of litter capture in washes, and pilot recycling programs
- Utilizing landfill generated methane as a source of renewable biogas

Stewardship and Enhancement – With changes to the definition of “Waters of the United States” (WOTUS), new chemicals entering the market, worsening drought both locally and on the Colorado River, increasing wildfire intensity, frequency and size, and shifts in seasonal weather patterns posing environmental and livability concerns and creating management challenges for decision makers, it is important to address environmental stewardship and enhancement in an integrated and holistic manner. Topics addressing stewardship and enhancement include:

- Impact of uncontrolled pollutant discharges on water supplies
- Water uses and riparian land protection
- Upland, river and floodplain management efforts aiming to bring environmental, aquifer recharge, safety, watershed health and economic enhancements to the region
- Impacts of wildfires on air quality, erosion, habitat, safety, water quality, recharge, and flooding
- Stakeholder coordination to pursue funding sources, such as federal grants, for invasive species removal and fire protection planning
- Management of invasive species, especially fire-prone species such as stinknet and buffelgrass
- Establishment and persistence of native species
- Ongoing risks to natural resources, urban infrastructure, and our cultural and environmental identity
- Riparian stewardship efforts for ephemeral, intermittent and perennial streams, including *Priority Waterbodies* in PAG’s 208 Plan and the state’s *Outstanding Arizona Waters*, as supported by PAG’s 208 Plan and 2017 Resolution Supporting our Heritage of Desert Waters
- Effective regional strategies to protect priority waterbodies in the Tohono O’odham Nation
- Monitoring, preservation and restoration plans to address the impacts of land use changes to water quality and other resources
- Interagency collaboration to protect transportation infrastructure and travel safety
- Long-term impacts of sustained or increased noise and light pollution on the health and well-being of humans, wildlife and quality of life
- Practical and balanced solutions for the abatement of noise and light pollution
- Design, and appropriate use of technology to limit unnecessary harm to the environment

Wildlife Connectivity - A primary threat to native wildlife populations in Pima County is habitat fragmentation. Wildlife relies on connected, undeveloped natural regional corridors, both potential and identified, to migrate through, rest, forage for 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. Topics addressing wildlife connectivity include:

- Supporting wildlife-sensitive design in transportation development processes, including roadways and interstates

- Incorporating connectivity into new projects and implementing wildlife-friendly designs, such as wildlife crossings and wildlife fencing
- Inventorying data related to regional wildlife movement, mortality, and habitat fragmentation

ISSUE 3: REGIONAL RESILIENCY

Resilient Infrastructure – EPAC addresses climate adaptation concerns for our regional landscape and investments by engaging diverse experts in discussions about resilience, sustainability, mobility, and livability. The integration of planning, infrastructure building, and maintenance leads to more efficient use of limited resources and capital by recognizing opportunities for shared and equitable benefits. PAG's 2016 Resolution for Regional Resilience to Climate and Weather Variability encourages proactive regional collaboration on climate resilience activities. Topics addressing resilient infrastructure include:

- Expanding green stormwater infrastructure to manage surface drainage, reduce flood nuisance and stormwater pollutants, increase bicycle and pedestrian safety along roads, improve air quality and wildlife linkages, offset consumptive water use, increase access to green space, and enhance tree shade resilience to reduce heat
- Evaluating Sonoran Corridor (State Route 410) proposal
- Mapping and tracking of resiliency planning elements such as cooling centers, urban heat issues, park access, flooding concerns, social vulnerabilities, and tree canopy data
- Exploring heat management strategies that assist with heat preparedness, mitigation, warnings and responses
- Evaluating social, health, and environmental benefits of multimodal solutions, electric vehicle infrastructure, and broadband infrastructure
- Exploring uses of Ecopia infrastructure and land cover GIS data to advance regional resiliency planning efforts

Resilient Economy – The Sonoran Desert's unique natural heritage resources that contribute to the region's economic vitality and sense of place are valued by our region, visitors, and prospective businesses. A changing climate makes the protection of these natural resources increasingly critical. Topics addressing resilient economy include:

- Evaluating environmentally friendly modes of transportation and street design that enhance travel and tourism, livability, safety, equity, recreation and business attraction while reducing pollution and dangerous and costly wildlife collisions with traffic
- Exploring studies on the economic and social value of watchable wildlife and outdoor recreation opportunities such as birding, bike-friendly communities, open space and trails, and healthy waterways
- Expanding public/private partnerships with local businesses, educators and additional diverse stakeholders to encourage tourism, strategic talent alignment and business opportunities
- Integrating restoration efforts with support of the local economy while balancing benefits of ecotourism with impacts to wildlife and environmentally sensitive areas
- Considering strategies to balance the need for affordable housing with environmental and risk management needs
- Considering the environmental impacts of large-scale economic development projects, such as data centers

Water Reliability – Potential for worsening future water shortages on the Colorado River, current extreme local drought conditions, and the high probability of increased variability for precipitation

identified in the Lower Santa Cruz River Basin Study impact water reliability within the Tucson region. Topics addressing water reliability include:

- Tracking shortage conditions on the Colorado River and potential impacts to CAP allocations
- Discussing water reclamation and reuse projects and strategies
- Collaborating with Santa Cruz Watershed Collaborative partners and water managers to continue to develop and implement responses to the drought
- Evaluating long-term planning for water use and delivery efficiency, infrastructure investments, and incentives while integrating water quality, street runoff, and designated environmental water uses
- Collaborating efforts between water providers, wastewater reclamation, industry including mining operations, agriculture, indigenous communities, and academia
- Addressing 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, and pursuing subregional public wastewater treatment and regional-scale stormwater capture

Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation – Changing weather patterns including extreme heat, drought and increased storm intensity continually impact the environment, infrastructure and economy of the greater Tucson region. Topics addressing climate change adaptation and mitigation include:

- Evaluating findings and recommendations of the Pima County Department of Environmental Quality's Priority Climate Action Plan and Comprehensive Climate Action Plan
- Sharing resources, regulation updates, changing funding requirements, and methods for climate variability planning, including jurisdictional climate plans
- Coordinating adaptation measures that equitably address interconnected public health and welfare issues, such as extreme heat, wildfires, flooding, and additional priorities