

20 Years Protecting the Sky Islands: From Our Founding to the Future



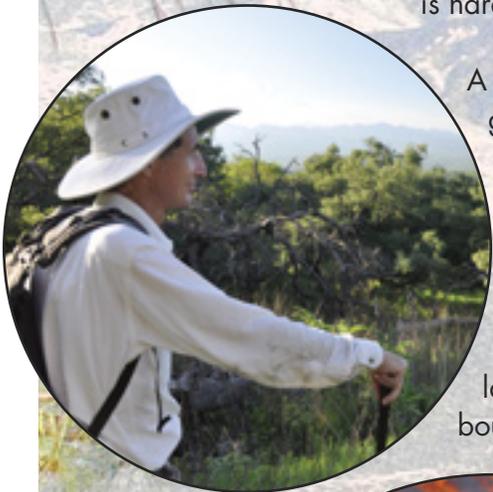
SKY
ISLAND
ALLIANCE
Protecting our Mountain Islands
and Desert Seas

SIA Founders Celebrate 20 years...

Sky Island Alliance was founded twenty years ago by volunteer activists engaged in Reagan-era environmental struggles. In particular, the battle over Mount Graham, the region's tallest Sky Island, was a turning point for many of us, revealing the difficulty of protecting biologically unique ecosystems against the prevailing view that public lands were primarily for resource development.

When the US Forest Service proposed to designate large portions of the Coronado National Forest as a National Recreation Area in 1990, many of us panicked at the thought that these beautiful, wild southwestern forests might become paved, overdeveloped RV parking lots. Clearly, we needed a new environmental vision for the region focused on living ecosystems, on wildlife and plants and free-flowing streams. And we longed for a proactive strategy — endlessly fighting bad ideas is hard on the soul.

A group of us began a campaign to convince the Forest Service and the general public that the Coronado National Forest's highest value was the diversity of life it supported. We collected data on the region's biological wealth and built allies among the region's scientists and conservation leaders. We quickly learned that the Coronado was king of biodiversity in the national forest system and that southeast Arizona has probably the greatest overall species diversity of any region in the United States. This richness extends well beyond the national forest boundaries, requiring a landscape-level vision of conservation that crosses state and national boundaries.



Dale Turner in the Sierra
la Madera courtesy
Chip Hedgcock



San Bernardino sunset courtesy Melanie Emerson

On the occasion of Sky Island Alliance's 20th Anniversary, we invite you join with us on this journey by contributing to the Founders' Fund — a year-long campaign to raise \$100,000 to ensure the sound foundation for another successful 20 years of Sky Island science, education, restoration and conservation advocacy.

and Redouble the Vision for the Future

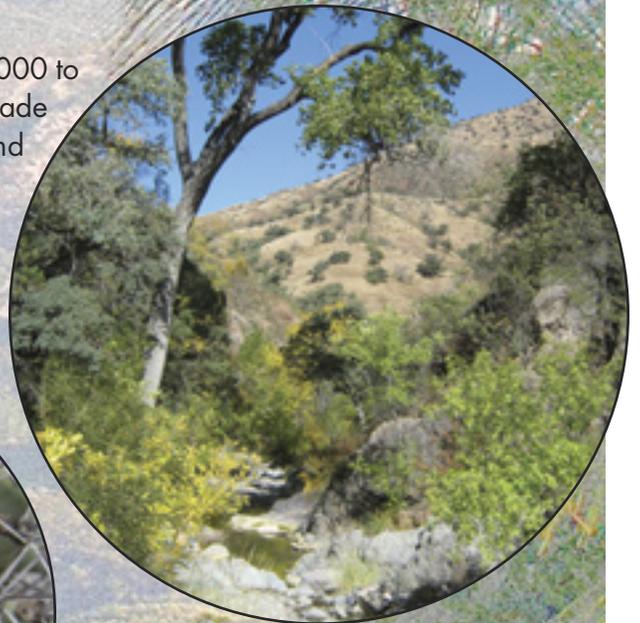
In August of 1991, a handful of Tucson activists met to establish a new organization focused on landscape-level biodiversity conservation. We took the name "Sky Island Alliance" from Weldon Heald's book about the Chiricahua Mountains, and from the alliance we saw blossoming among many groups who share a love of this region. We published our own proposal for a National Biodiversity Conservation Area, and successfully prevented the recreation area designation. Sky Island Alliance was off and running!

From the start our work focused on citizen science and public education, connecting people to nature and shaping policy. Led entirely by committed volunteers for years, SIA soon attracted donor support enabling it to hire some of the most dedicated conservationists in the region.

Through the hard work of many, many volunteers and a core of talented staff, SIA has put the natural values of this region on the map of global conservation priorities and become the Sky Islands' strongest advocate. Most of us who launched SIA twenty years ago remain involved and active today, amazed and proud of this organization's accomplishments. It is a testament to the power of citizens to bring positive change through hard work and commitment.

Please join our 2011 Founders' Fund campaign to raise \$100,000 to keep our programs thriving and growing during SIA's third decade as the leading advocate for nature and responsible land management in the Sky Islands.

*Paul Hirt, Dale Turner, and Susie Brandes
Sky Island Alliance Founders*



from left:

Hyla wrightorum courtesy Sky Jacobs

Ferocactus emoryi courtesy Chris Roll

El Aribabi courtesy Sergio Avila

Nancy Zierenberg and fellow activists in front of the Federal Building in Tucson courtesy Rod Mondt

From Founding to the Future

SIA was founded and has thrived due to the effort, vision and generosity of volunteers and supporters — essentially you! Over the past 20 years, your contributions of time and resources have enabled SIA to make exceptional conservation gains. Your support has brought us to this moment. 2010 has been the culmination of 20 years of amazing work, and offers a springboard for the next two decades.

This report highlights some of the exceptional work undertaken and accomplishments realized in 2010. It similarly aims to direct our collective vision forward, to reflect on what will be — to further that proactive strategy envisioned by our founders and reaffirmed in our new strategic plan, and to anticipate with fortitude and conviction the challenges ahead.

It has been twenty years since a group of volunteer activists joined together to form a strong, resonant and enduring voice for Sky Island conservation. Please celebrate our successes at 20th anniversary events throughout 2011 (see back cover). Please continue to volunteer out in the field, in the halls of government and with us in the office. Please share your love for and dedication to this spectacular region with those around you— give a gift membership, bring a friend to a workshop, hike your favorite wild places. Undoubtedly, with our collective voice in advocacy and boots on the ground, we will continue to fulfill the promise to protect and restore the Sky Island Region over the next 20 years.

Melanie Emerson, Executive Director

Conservation deserves more than 2%*

Only 2%! ↗

Please help us meet the Earth Friends Conservation Fund Challenge by making a tax-deductible donation today to Sky Island Alliance's 20th Anniversary Founders' Fund.



* Of the \$307.65 billion donated in the United States in 2008, only 2% went to environmental conservation.

Source: Giving USA Report.

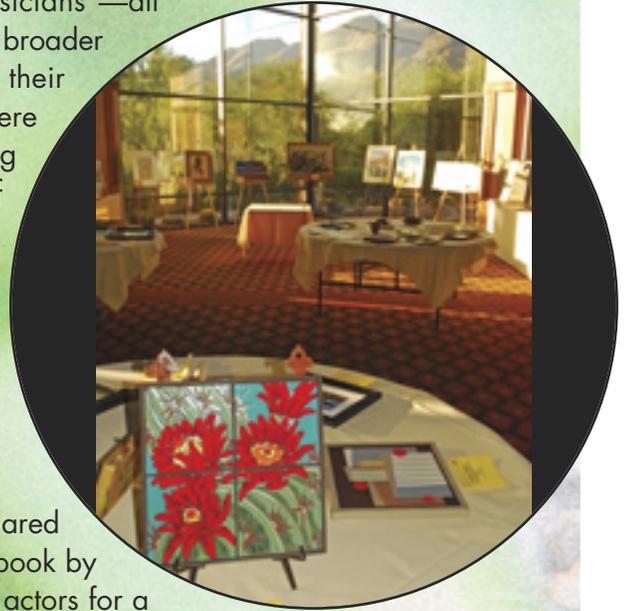
www.skyislandalliance.org



**EARTH FRIENDS
CONSERVATION FUND**
**SUPPORT
OUR CHALLENGE**

Exposing Our Mission to the Broader Community

Our first Sky Island Exposure event was a fantastic evening reception combining art, music, poetry, food and chance! Sky Island Exposure, nestled in the Santa Catalinas at The Lodge at Ventana Canyon, brought together an eclectic cohort of Tucson's generous artists, conservation-minded and art-appreciating members of the region, and musicians—all united to support Sky Island Alliance's work and "expose" it to the broader community. While ticket-holders perused artwork, identifying their favorites and eagerly anticipating the lottery drawing, we were treated to the rhythmic beats of Salvador Duran, the engaging melodies of Robert Villa and Charles Zoll, and the edgy poetry of Jefferson Carter. The event culminated with final silent auction bids and the happily frenzied selection of lottery artwork. SIA extends a tremendous thank you to all the artists who donated their time, work and substantial talents and to Susan Silverman for making this event a success.



Promoting the Sky Islands

SIA staff and volunteer Jefferson Carter submitted a chapter of shared experiences regarding work along the border for an upcoming book by Dr. Ana Córdova. The book focuses on spaces, instruments and actors for a constructive dialogue between Mexico and the US. Tom Van Devender co-edited *Biodiversity of Sonora*, the first state-wide effort to document and inventory the biological richness of Sonora. *Arizona Highways* magazine published "Esmerald Isle," describing regional cross-cultural and landscape connections and Sky Island Alliance's collaborations with landowners to preserve this region through binational approaches. *The New York Times* published a letter from Sky Island Alliance in favor of jaguar recovery in the region, with benefits to an array of less-prominent species.



Volunteers Keep Us Going — Inside and Out

From riparian restoration to wildlife tracking, gathering new species data to building support for Wilderness, SIA volunteers continue to be the key piece of the puzzle for achieving on-the-ground results for conservation in the region. Volunteers in 2010 contributed over 13,000 field hours! In addition to work in the field, our committed office volunteers have logged over 400 hours this year in data entry, data management and critical administrative tasks that help to keep this organization running smoothly.



from top: A scene from Sky Island Exposure courtesy Sky Jacobs; *Passiflora arida* courtesy Chris Roll; MABA Expedition to the Sierra la Madera

Connecting the Dots:

Documenting Top Predators Across the Border

Sky Island Alliance photographed a male jaguar in northern Mexico multiple times (January, April, June), in addition to puma, ocelot, bobcat, black bear, badger and other species. Whether in northern Mexico or the U.S. southwest, wild felines choose healthy habitats, prey populations and safe corridors; their continued presence is a testament to habitat quality in the region. To support healthy populations and movement, we submitted comments for the recovery of the Sonoran subspecies of ocelot to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Ocelot Recovery Plan. We also celebrated the Service's reclaiming authority of jaguar recovery in the United States and formally inviting our partner Carlos Robles of Rancho El Aribabi to be a member of the Jaguar Recovery Team.

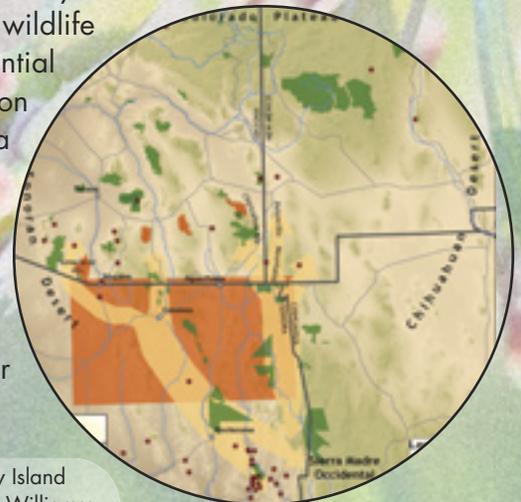
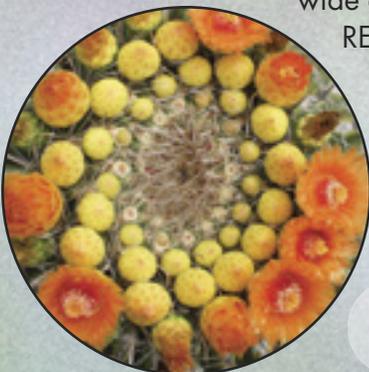


Making One Section of the Border More Permeable for Wildlife

Sky Island Alliance teamed with the Bureau of Land Management and volunteers from Summit Hut to remove a redundant seven-strand barbed-wire ranching fence that was disrupting a key wildlife corridor just east of Douglas. Volunteers cleaned up scrap fence and other debris which posed tangling threats to wildlife. Removing the fence, which ran parallel to border vehicle barriers, allowed SIA to aid trans-boundary wildlife movement and supported the BLM's effort to mitigate impacts from border infrastructure.

Transforming Data to Maps: Visualizing Conservation

Our Geographic Information System is a powerful tool for transforming biological and field data into dynamic visuals and analyses that enhance conservation work. This year we created outreach maps for public lands advocacy campaigns, wildlife tracking and MABA field maps, analyzed habitat value of potential wilderness areas, and identified roads causing ecological damage on Forest Service land. Our Sky Island Regional maps are reaching a wide audience and are now available in the new REI store in Tucson. Additionally, in partnership with the University of Arizona Remote Sensing Lab, we commenced a complex vegetation analysis of northern Mexico Sky Islands to inform our conservation work and priority-setting.

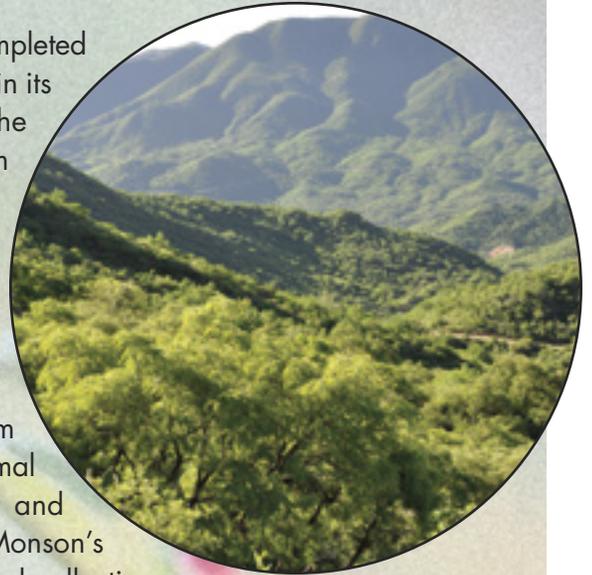


from top left: Remote camera photo of jaguar ©2010 Sky Island Alliance / El Aribabi; Barrel cactus blooms courtesy Sarah Williams; Section of map of jaguar corridors courtesy Louise Misztal

Exploring the Madrean Archipelago: From Dream to Reality

The Madrean Archipelago Biodiversity Assessment (MABA) team completed two major biological expeditions and a number of shorter field trips in its first full year, thanks to overwhelming involvement on the part of the community of volunteers, SIA Members, students, researchers from more than 15 universities and government institutions, and landowners! These volunteers have contributed over 6,500 collective hours supporting the MABA project through data entry, data management, historical research and expeditionary activities (species documentation and collection in the field).

The MABA online database (www.madrealn.org) has also gone from a dream to a reality. The database currently houses over 53,000 animal records and 9,000 plant records from MABA Expeditions and collaborating research in the region alone — including Russell and Monson's *Birds of Sonora* research, Aaron Fleisch's breeding bird surveys, and collections from the Herbarium at the Universidad de Sonora (UNISON). The MABA observations are especially rich in plants, insects, reptiles, and birds. Identifications by a team of entomologists have especially enhanced the database, especially in butterfly, dragonfly, and beetle records. Field observations are illustrated through thousands of exceptional photographs. This is being used as a resource in classrooms and by CONANP's (Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas) Ajos-Bavispe Reserve, UNISON, UNISIERRA (Universidad de la Sierra), and a number of government agencies and universities as a primary source for regional biodiversity data. SIA thanks the Veolia Environment Foundation for its generous support of this project.



from left: Oak scarab beetle courtesy Sky Jacobs; Penstemon blooms courtesy Chris Marzonie; Sinaloan wren courtesy Sky Jacobs; Exploring the Sierra la Madera courtesy Chip Hedgcock

SIA Breaks Ground on its Largest Restoration Project to Date

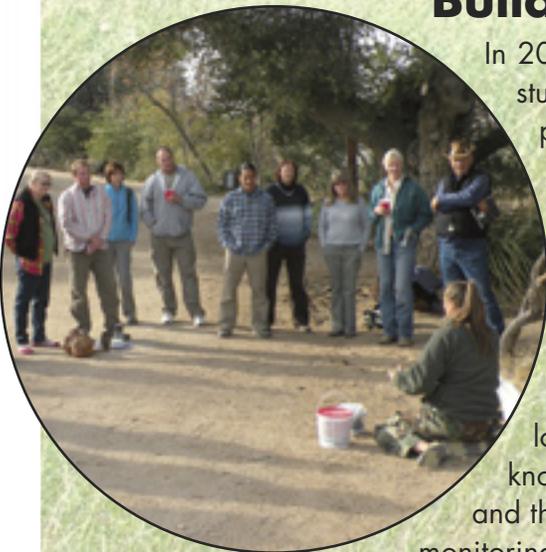
After the culmination of almost three years of planning and over the course of 21 windy field days this Spring, Sky Island Alliance and our partners from Stream Dynamics and Dryland Solutions of New Mexico implemented the multi-staged Peloncillo Mountain Ciénega Restoration Project in southwestern New Mexico. Through the removal of several man-made diversions and levees and the construction of large rock structures and earthen dams in the creek channel, the natural hydrological regime of the 200-acre historic ciénega will return. Additionally, the project provides enhanced habitat for a large population of the federally-listed Chiricahua leopard frog (*Lithobates chiricahuaensis*).

Riparian Restoration Rocks 2010

Degraded creek beds and eroding arroyos do not adhere to international boundary lines in the arid Sky Island region. 2010 marked an active year for riparian restoration on both sides of the border. Spring began with a series of field weekends north of the border in the Aravaipa Canyon area near Safford, Arizona. Working in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and The Nature Conservancy, SIA staff and volunteers planted sacaton grass plugs, constructed one rock dams and built water harvesting structures to help restore eroded areas of Turkey Creek and the surrounding watershed. Late summer found the restoration crew working south of the border on Rancho El Aribabi in Sonora. Students from Earlham College joined SIA for an exhausting weekend of one rock dam building along a mile of ephemeral creek, helping to heal and shape degrading banks. With the cool weather of fall came the opportunity to co-host a restoration workshop series in conjunction with the BLM and the Cienega Watershed Partnership. The hands-on sessions, held at Las Cienegas National Conservation Area, were led by Bill Zydeek, a watershed restoration expert from Albuquerque, New Mexico. Participants included a wide variety of agency and non-profit staff and graduate students in the field of arid lands restoration.

Building New Opportunities

In 2010, we asked University of Arizona Masters of Public Administration students to conduct evaluative analyses of our volunteer programs and provide SIA with new ideas and feedback from our dedicated volunteers. We learned a lot! Providing new, and deepening existing, opportunities was a consistent theme. In response to your input we introduced cross-program biological surveys (bio-blitzes), four new transects and two additional focal species to track, quarterly volunteer meet-up events, Wildlife Tracking Certification, and trained 28 new tracking volunteers and 50 partners and students in riparian restoration. We planted hundreds of willow and cottonwood saplings, logged over 13,000 volunteer hours, and developed extensive new knowledge of the Sonoran Sky Islands. Through our Witness for Wildlife and the Freedom to Roam Coalition partnership, we deployed and continue monitoring eight wildlife cameras — one of which resulted in the first-ever photograph of a live ocelot in Arizona.



Tracking Volunteers,
Class of Winter 2010

Protecting the Land of Legends

With our partners, SIA advanced efforts to protect valuable public lands in Cochise County's Dragoon, Whetstone and northern Chiricahua mountain ranges — Land of Legends Wilderness. We met with stakeholders, conducted over thirty-five presentations, led six hikes, and attended over half a dozen outreach events, culminating in the collection of community support from over 1,850 local residents for permanent wildlands protection in Cochise County.



Removing Non-native Predatory Bullfrogs in the Tumacacori Highlands

June marked a crucial month for bullfrog control before the arrival of the summer rains. Volunteers traveled out to the Tumacacori Highlands over the course of two field weekends to work a single dirt stock tank that was estimated to contain over 10,000 bullfrogs, all in the juvenile and tadpole stages. Eradication here was critical because of its proximity to Sycamore Canyon, a mecca for hikers and birdwatchers. Daytime seining and nighttime hand-capture methods were employed and volunteers later installed bullfrog-proof fencing around the tank and drained the water. This work is a continuation of a successful bullfrog control and native frog conservation project started last year in cooperation with The University of Arizona, US Geological Survey, Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, Arizona Game and Fish Department and the US Forest Service.

the field



from left: Building a one-rock dams; Remote camera photo of black bear ©2010 Sky Island Alliance / El Aribabi; Willow pole planting; Hoodoos in the Chiricahuas courtesy AJ Schneller

2011: Kicking off the Next 20 Years

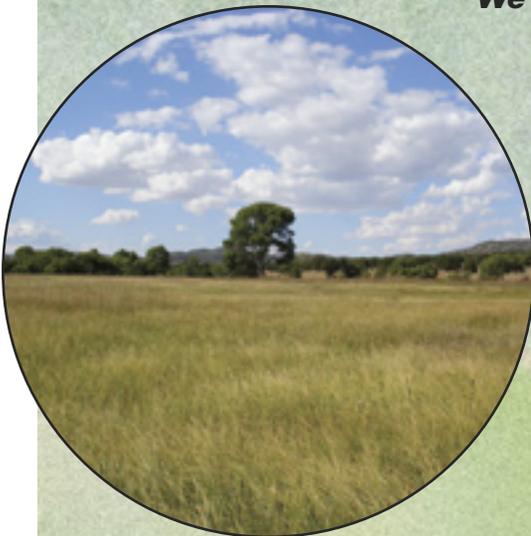
We are about to enter the second year of SIA's 2010-2013 Strategic Plan. In just one year we have made great strides toward accomplishing our ambitious yet achievable goals of developing and applying new knowledge to protect, restore and connect cores and corridors, as well as build a land ethic in the region, and ensure long-term viability of the organization. In 2011, we will work to further those goals through new efforts to address climate change adaptation, continental connectivity, and regional conservation policy.

The overarching vision contained in the Plan, crafted collaboratively by staff and Board, truly embodies an affirmative approach to securing long-term protection for this region and its unique biodiversity:

"Through all aspects of implementing Sky Island Alliance's four-year strategic plan, the organization will strive to be innovative, anticipate opportunities and challenges, stay ahead of the curve, and set the agenda. Our principal focus will be leading conservation efforts on the ground (through active science and restoration) and through formalized mechanisms (planning, policy and special designations) as the most effective organization working exclusively for protection and restoration of the Sky Islands and desert seas.

"We will seek creative opportunities to achieve our objectives. We will critically test assumptions and fears, and actively anticipate forthcoming opportunities and challenges. We will ensure that our messaging articulates a bold positive vision for the future of the region; we will define the issues frame on which we engage. We will nurture organizational agility and flexibility, enabling timely engagement on emergent issues central to this strategic plan and our organizational mission.

"We will think forward. We will think big. We will act."



from left: Cloverdale Ciénega; *Thamnophis cyrtopsis* courtesy Sky Jacobs; Jenny Neeley on a hike in the Tumacacori Highlands

Advancing Conservation Policy

In 2011 we'll fully launch our newly envisioned Conservation Policy Program to both address a broader array of regional policy issues and to be flexible and responsive when critical and urgent needs arise. To drive that effort, SIA has brought on Jenny Neeley, JD, as Conservation Policy Director. Jenny will focus on forest planning, critical ecosystem defense issues such as the Rosemont Mine, borderlands policy, climate change adaptation and overall policy tracking and response. Additionally, she will work closely with the Protective Designations staff in advancing Wilderness proposals and complementary special land designations in the U.S. portion of the Sky Islands. Jenny began her career in conservation in 1997 as a volunteer with the Arizona League of Conservation Voters and later as assistant director for the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection. Subsequently, she served as the southwest representative for Defenders of Wildlife from 2001-2007, focusing on the ecological impacts of U.S. border policy. Jenny holds a JD from The University of Arizona with a certificate in Indigenous Law, a masters degree in natural resource policy and a bachelors in photojournalism from NAU.

Climate Change Adaptation: Building Resilience in the Landscape

In 2010, SIA initiated year two of a four-year project to bring together diverse interests to combat the mounting effects of climate change by improving land managers' ability to garner, interpret and apply new knowledge and resources to build resilience in natural systems of the Sky Islands region. This year we convened a two-day workshop entitled, *Adapting to Climate Change in the Arid Southwest: A Workshop for Land and Resource Management*. The workshop brought together 70 participants representing 40 unique entities, including federal, state, county and municipal agency personnel, academic and agency researchers, conservation organizations, and private landowners. This is the first workshop in a three-part series which will ultimately move participants to identify organizational and landscape vulnerabilities, develop key strategies for addressing those vulnerabilities, and apply those strategies on-the-ground and through policy development. SIA received overwhelmingly positive feedback at this year's workshop; all involved believe SIA is filling an important niche in the region by bringing together these diverse professionals to strategize and act immediately to affect change. Co-conveners included CLIMAS, EcoAdapt, the Udall Foundation U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, University of Arizona Institute of the Environment, University of Arizona School of Natural Resources and the Environment, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Sonoran Joint Venture.

Mapping the Border: Multi-dimensional Challenges of Borderlands Conservation

This summer we initiated flights along the frontera to compile baseline data of the "before-and-after" effects of the border infrastructure, as part our Bring Back the Cats project, and supported by LightHawk (www.lighthawk.org). By photographing the border landscape from an aerial perspective, locating types of fencing (pedestrian fence, concrete walls, barbed-wire fence, metal-mesh walls, etc.) and documenting impacts on the ground (access roads, observation towers, lights, blocked drainages or destroyed vegetation) we will describe threats to wildlife corridors, long-term impacts on protected lands and watersheds at risk of blocking or diverting water. These effects will be measured on private and public lands (Wildlife Refuges, Wilderness and Riparian Conservation Areas, National Parks, etc.) within the Sky Island region. This is the first phase of a multi-layered project to fully document and understand the serious impacts that security infrastructure and enforcement activity are having on our Sky Island borderlands. Over the next few years we will be building additional resources (mapping, policy and advocacy) to aid our own work and that of our conservation partners in addressing these impacts.

2011: An Eventful Year

SIA 20th Anniversary Kick-Off

January 20, Historic Y Courtyard

Volunteer Meet-up #3 January 25, Sky Bar

Tucson Festival of Books

March 12-13, University of Arizona

Climate Change Workshop April 13-14

Volunteer Meet-up #4 April 26, Sky Bar

SIA Awards Banquet

May 19, Saguaro Buttes

Summer Speaker Series June-August

Volunteer Meet-up #5 July 26, Sky Bar

**SIA 20th Anniversary Labor Day
Campout** September 2-4

Volunteer Appreciation Picnic

October 2 or 9

Mt. Lemmon Marathon October 23

Volunteer Meet-up #6 October 25, Sky Bar

**20th Anniversary Blow-out Concert
Benefit! And Hike!** December 3 or 4



**SKY
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Protecting our Mountain Islands
and Desert Seas

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Marc Trinks, MABA Project Coordinator

Tom Van Devender, MABA Project Manager

Sarah Williams, Conservation Associate, Volunteer &
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Background image: Sierra la Madera looking toward the Sierra Huachinera courtesy Chip Hedgcock