

The Friends of Ironwood Forest, a conservation group composed of over 900 individuals and families supporting the Ironwood Forest National Monument, strongly opposes the proposed route of I-11 through Avra Valley, as it represents a significant threat to a significant and unique desert ecosystem, flora and fauna populations.

The negative impact caused by this project would extend far beyond the proposed construction sites. The resulting vehicle emissions, roadway runoff, light and noise pollution, soil and water degradation will disrupt not only the wildlife, but also decrease the quality of life for human residents and visitors for miles on either side. The project would negatively impact the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum and Saguaro National Park West, two of the most important and well-loved tourist destinations of Pima County, both directly through the destruction of neighboring habitat and indirectly by accelerating encroaching commercial development. In addition, the proposed I-11 route would adversely affect the natural and cultural resources protected within the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Wildlife Mitigation Corridor, the Tohono O'odham Nation, and Ironwood Forest National Monument. Additionally, the Avra Valley route would greatly facilitate the spread of invasive plant species, like buffelgrass and Sahara mustard, throughout these protected areas.

The proposed route of I-11 would present a formidable barrier to wildlife populations in the protected habitats on either side. Recent sighting of bighorn sheep in the Tucson Mountains and SNPW that have roamed from the Ironwood Forest herd are dramatic evidence of wildlife recovery and expansion. Without a wildlife corridor, habitats on either side of the interstate may be too small or too degraded to sustain viable populations of indigenous plants and animals. Additionally, reduced connectivity threatens these populations by exposing them to greater inbreeding, reduced genetic diversity and increased disease risk.

Expansions of the existing I-10 and I-19 infrastructure would be a more appropriate way of boosting the economic development of Pima County and alleviating current and growing congestion problems on the region's interstate routes. Such a project, along an existing thoroughfare, would likely pose no major new risk to the Sonoran desert's wildlife habitats and precious public lands.