

## **ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE (EPAC)**

### **TOP ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES LIST 2020**

*Following is the Top Environmental Issues List compiled by Pima Association of Governments (PAG) in coordination with its Environmental Planning Advisory Committee (EPAC). These top issues will guide topics to be addressed during EPAC and its subcommittee meetings in 2020. PAG staff will track issues, provide regional coordination and, together with EPAC, may create or advise on initiatives that address regional issues such as plans, resolutions, best practice inventories and partnerships.*

#### **Healthy Environment**

**Clean Air:** The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) has designated the region in attainment with air quality standards, except for the Ajo and Rillito PM<sub>10</sub> nonattainment areas. The region was designated in attainment by the EPA for the revised and strengthened 2015 ozone standards, based on the 2014-2016 monitoring data. However, 2016-2018 monitoring data from Pima County Department of Environmental Quality (PDEQ) submitted to the EPA in the spring of 2019 indicate that a violation of the ozone health standards occurred. Federal, state and local activities related to ozone will be tracked and reported. The EPA is scheduled to review the ozone standard again in 2020 and will make a subsequent designation of the region's status.

**Clean Water:** The PAG Areawide Water Quality Management Plan's (208 Plan) action items contain issues for regional coordination including stormwater mitigation, solid waste, emerging groundwater contaminants, climate variability, shallow groundwater, and septic issues.

**Solid Waste Reduction:** Regionally coordinated solid waste planning efforts help to improve efficient use of resources, sustain resiliency of recycling infrastructure, reduce landfill costs and impacts, consider innovative waste diversion, and improve environmental quality. Opportunities to support these efforts with regional coordination and information sharing can be explored.

**Protection and Enhancement:** PAG continues to encourage riparian stewardship efforts for ephemeral, intermittent and perennial streams as stated in the *PAG 208 Plan* and *PAG's 2017 Heritage Desert Waters Resolution*. This includes local support for *PAG's Priority Waterbodies* and the state's *Outstanding Arizona Waters* such as monitoring, preservation and restoration, should land use changes impact resources. Efforts to encourage native species and remove invasive species, such as fire-prone buffelgrass, are important, given the ongoing risk to natural resources, urban infrastructure, and our cultural and environmental identity. Current floodplain management efforts aim to bring environmental, safety, and economic enhancements across the region.

#### **Smart Region Coordination**

**Integrated Planning:** The integration of planning areas leads to more efficient use of resources by recognizing opportunities for shared and equitable benefits. For example, a green infrastructure (GI) approach to surface drainage on roads can reduce flood nuisance, increase transportation safety, improve wildlife linkages, offset water use, provide shade and access to open space, and mitigate heat, stormwater and air pollutants. PAG's GI map and return-on-investment tools provide assessments to support decision making and metrics for regional

planning efforts. Modernized transportation systems include multimodal mobility services that provide social and environmental benefits. Innovative regional efforts connecting environmental health and quality of life to transportation and land use planning can be highlighted.

**Vibrant Economy:** The Sonoran Desert's unique natural resources contribute to the region's economic vitality, sense of place and livability. The issue of environmental stewardship of transportation corridors and gateways to city and town centers may be explored by the committee. Environmentally friendly modes of transportation and street design enhance travel and tourism, equity, recreation and business attraction while reducing pollution and wildlife collisions. Studies on the economic and social value of watchable wildlife such as birding, open space and waterways are increasingly available and demonstrate our region's unique assets. Our region's economic vitality benefits from partnering with local businesses and diverse stakeholders in building our brand to encourage tourism, strategic talent alignment and business opportunities. Environmental economics could be explored as well as educational and coordination opportunities.

### **Regional Resiliency**

**Water Reliability:** The Bureau of Reclamation's Lower Santa Cruz River Basin Study is a multi-year planning effort that builds on the region's strong water management track record. Stakeholders will evaluate projected water supply/demand imbalances to 2060 and identify adaptation strategies that could enhance resiliency in various sectors including rural wells and the environment. EPAC and its Watershed Planning Subcommittee (WPS) serve as hosts of the public forums, and committee members serve as key stakeholders on the study teams. As the odds of a Colorado River shortage declaration have continued to increase, regional efforts addressing water reliability will be tracked and shared.

**Climate Variability:** PAG's *2015 Resolution for Regional Resilience to Climate and Weather Variability* continues to guide regional efforts. Following the completion of PAG's biannual greenhouse gas emissions inventory in 2019, updates may be given on regional programs related to climate plans and actions. This can include mitigation measures to reduce carbon emissions through actions such as renewable energy efforts, travel reduction and alternative fuels. This also can include adaptation measures that equitably address extreme heat and flooding through actions such as emergency response and infrastructure resiliency planning.