

Release Date: March 28, 2012

## **The Only Way: Save South Mountain, complete the 202 extension and create balanced sustainable economic growth for the Gila River Indian Community**

By: Joseph M. Perez and Nathaniel Percharo

*NOTE: Mr. Perez and Mr. Percharo are enrolled Tribal members of the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC). Perez is a Partner of PANGEA Development and Mr. Percharo owns land in the Pecos road area. Mr. Perez has worked with Mr. Percharo for the last 7 years banding together some 1,200 individual landowners in order to develop fractured allotted lands on the reservation. By bringing together the landowners and the divided landmass, it will provide critical opportunity for progression from relying on gaming and the government towards self-empowerment and greater economic self-sufficiency.*

After the Gila River Indian Community's "no build" vote on February 7th regarding the proposed 202 freeway we had a general tribal landowner meeting where concerns were voiced with the outcome. They felt voters in general were misled and were given inaccurate information by the ardent "no-build" group and they did not know that the State of Arizona would continue with plans to build the freeway despite the election results. These "allotted" landowners wanted to know what they could do to help the neighboring city of Awhatukee and save South Mountain from an imminent demise brought by those who claim they want it "saved." The mountain will not be saved if ADOT proceeds with the Pecos Road alignment through the mountain and Ahwatukee, as they have said they will do absent any further action from our tribe.

Fortunately, two new options exist.

The first brings the freeway south of Pecos Road and onto the "allotted" land; this would avoid all "community" land but could only save Ahwatukee and not the mountain. Community land is that owned by the tribal government. Allotted land is owned by individuals or groups of them. This parkway option has been presented to ADOT. A public vote – whether that on February 7<sup>th</sup> or a new one -- is not necessary to proceed since only private land is involved.

However, the landowners seemed most interested in a second option, evoking "the People's rights" under the tribal Constitution and put forth (the first ever) "Peoples Initiative" to rescind the election result of February 7th, 2012. We believe this initiative is more clear and compelling than the confusing choices on the February 7<sup>th</sup> ballot. It lays out clear benefits to each tribal member, land compensation, financial compensation and follows a route that would save most if not all of the mountain. Both community and allotted land would be used for this parkway.

As members of the tribe, we want tribal members, government officials and the community-at-large to know we are not out of options. The State, ADOT and other governmental agencies are moving forward with the Pecos Road alignment that borders our land and we do not want to see the mountain destroyed. We also want to serve as good neighbors and save the homes, church and schools in Awhatukee.

This Initiative will only have (realistic) options on the ballot. The sample language reads: “Do you want a freeway on the Gila River Indian Community?” “Yes: or ‘No’”. We currently have over 460 of the 536 signature needed and are on tract for a June election. Don’t give up on us yet! We do not want to rely on gaming or the government any longer and need support from the people and the government entities in order for us to progress towards self- empowerment and self-sufficiency.

Joseph Perez, Managing Partner  
PANGEA Development, LLC  
480-991-0591  
[jperez@pangealand.com](mailto:jperez@pangealand.com)

Nathaniel Percharo, Landowner  
480-522-8995