



**SAN XAVIER DISTRICT  
OF THE  
TOHONO O' ODHAM NATION**

2018 WEST SAN XAVIER ROAD • TUCSON, ARIZONA 85746

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**RESOLUTION OF THE SAN XAVIER DISTRICT COUNCIL**

(Recognition and Protection of the Sacred O:šad [Jaguar] and Call for Reintroduction to its Native Range)

**Resolution No. SXDC 01-25-03**

**WHEREAS,** O:šad (Jaguar) has since time immemorial played an irreplaceable role among the flora, fauna, ecosystems, and culture of the Tohono O'odham (Desert People) and other Native American Tribes of the greater Southwest United States; and,

**WHEREAS,** First Nations of Indigenous peoples have made compelling arguments that the spiritual and ecological roles of apex predators such as wolves, pumas, bears, ocelots, and jaguars are intertwined in their traditional ecological knowledge, and illustrate how cultural practices promote biodiversity and environmental stewardship; and,

**WHEREAS,** First Nations of Indigenous peoples have made the compelling arguments that wildlife, trees, rivers, and mountains are sacred to them and should be granted "personhood" and the legal rights associated with it; and,

**WHEREAS,** the Tohono O'odham and their sister O'odham Tribes have long revered the O:šad as an important figure in O'odham Himdag (Way of Life) and spiritual practices, considering the jaguar not only a guardian of the people and the natural world but also a sacred being with deep connections to O'odham stories and traditional beliefs; and,

**WHEREAS,** jaguars are regarded as protectors of the people and symbols of ecological and spiritual balance in the O'odham culture, reflecting the values of strength, resilience, and connection between humans and the natural world; and,

**WHEREAS,** ancient O'odham traditions, stories, and songs passed down through generations, as documented by O'odham scholars such as Danny Lopez, speak of the jaguar while others come from competent historians and ethnologists who have corroborated in written form the oral histories of the traditional knowledge and values of the O'odham; and,

**WHEREAS,** O:šad is recognized by O'odham spiritual leaders and community members as a powerful being sent by the Creator to maintain balance within the desert, grassland, canyon and mountain ecosystems of the region as well as to maintain spiritual order; and,



**WHEREAS,** jaguars have begun to return to the region and the Tohono O'odham Nation after having been extirpated by direct federal killing and by state bounties promoting their killing; and,

**WHEREAS,** at least five jaguars have returned to ancestral O'odham lands in the last 15 years, including Macho B in the Atascosa Highlands, Sycamore Canyon, and the Baboquivari Mountains; El Jefe in the Whetstone and Santa Rita Mountains; Sombra in the Chiricahua Mountains; Yo'oko Nashuareo in the Huachuca Mountains; and O:shad Nū:kudam in the Huachuca and Whetstone Mountains; and,

**WHEREAS,** jaguars once roamed and should again roam from South America up to Central America through the Sierra Madre Mountains in northern Mexico, across the Sky Islands of northern Mexico and the Southwest United States, across O'odham lands and all the way north to the Grand Canyon; and,

**WHEREAS,** jaguars are under threat from habitat destruction, the expansion of border walls, mining, and other activities that fragment their natural environment, disrupting their ability to move through their ancient paths and threatening their long-term survival on O'odham lands and in the region; and,

**WHEREAS,** the reintroduction of jaguars to their historic range is essential to restoring balance to the ecosystems of the Southwest, supporting the biodiversity of the region, and upholding the spiritual traditions of the O'odham people and other Tribal nations in the area; and,

**WHEREAS,** the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a duty to engage in meaningful consultation with Tribal nations regarding wildlife management and conservation efforts, including the reintroduction of culturally and ecologically significant species such as the jaguar; and,

**WHEREAS,** collaboration between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the states of Arizona and New Mexico, Tribal nations, and other conservation agencies is necessary to ensure the successful return of jaguars to the lands that are now called Arizona and New Mexico, restoring a sacred animal to its rightful place in the ecosystem;





**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, by the San Xavier District Council, that based on such historic precedents, this resolution condemns the destruction, damage, and disruption of the natural habitat of jaguars on Tribal and federal lands that are aboriginal homelands of the O'odham; and contends that the destruction of jaguar habitats amounts to a violation of the Constitutionally guaranteed First Amendment religious liberties of the Tohono O'odham communities.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the San Xavier District Council calls for immediate and coordinated action by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the states of Arizona and New Mexico, in partnership with Tribal nations, to reintroduce jaguars to their historic range within the United States Southwest, particularly in Arizona and New Mexico, where the jaguar once thrived and continues to hold profound cultural significance.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that as appropriate actions to reverse the destruction of sacred species and habitats central to O'odham traditions, we request that all state and federal agencies:

1. Enter proper government-to-government consultation with the Tohono O'odham Nation and affected communities whenever projects or federal or state actions may potentially affect jaguars on the Tohono O'odham Nation or on or around O'odham aboriginal lands;
2. Adhere to the spirit and detail of the full government-to-government consultation and training for federal and state employees to do no harm to sacred sites, wildlife, and culturally significant habitats on federal lands. These agencies must avoid impeding access to sacred species and their habitats;
3. Refrain from any further approval of construction, damage, or interference with jaguar habitats in the San Xavier District, the Tohono O'odham Nation, or in traditional cultural properties of the O'odham on lands managed by the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, USDA Forest Service, Federal Highway Administration, and the U.S. Air Force, as well as by state Agencies such as the Arizona Department of Transportation, Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, Arizona State Land Department, and Arizona Game and Fish Department;



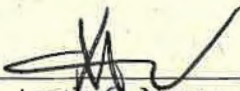
4. Begin healing the cultural, spiritual, and ecological wounds caused by destruction of jaguar habitat by taking the following actions:
- a) Agreeing to protect and restore all critical jaguar habitats and jaguar movement corridors including from mining, border barriers, and other developments;
  - b) Re-consecrating damaged jaguar habitats by O'odham spiritual leaders and paying for ceremonial costs.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the San Xavier District Council hereby requests the Tohono O'odham Legislative Council to enact a corresponding similar resolution for this same purpose.


### **CERTIFICATION**

The foregoing resolution was passed by the San Xavier District Council at a meeting held on the **21<sup>st</sup>** day of **January** **2025**, at which time a quorum was present with a vote of **3 FOR; 0 AGAINST; 0 NOT VOTING; 2 ABSENT**. Pursuant to the powers vested in the Council by the Tohono O'odham Constitution, Article IX, Section 5, as adopted and approved on 6 March 1986.

San Xavier District

  
Austin G. Nunez

ATTEST:

  
Rina Encinas, Secretary  
San Xavier District Council

MOTION: Phyllis Valenzuela  
SECOND: Manuel Martinez