Tucson Mountains ASSOCIATION SINCE 1934

TMA Spring Newsletter



EcoFlight photo of proposed Interstate-11 route near Saguaro National Park West. March 4, 2026

Letter from the President

Dear TMA community,

Last month, I flew over the proposed West Option corridor of Interstate-11 with EcoFlight, a nonprofit that takes residents, advocates, and journalists up in small airplanes to see threatened landscapes firsthand. As you know, the West Option

stake.

The most sobering stretch of the flight was directly above Saguaro National Park West, where the proposed highway would come within just a few hundred feet of the signature hiking trails. We followed the proposed route, looking down on intact saguaro forests, wildlife corridors that would be severed, and quiet stretches of Sonoran Desert that would be bulldozed if the West Option is built. This new perspective made it clearer than ever that we must do whatever we can to prevent this proposal from coming to fruition.

I encourage you to watch the video of our flight on YouTube below. The footage shows the actual desert that would be bulldozed if the West Option is built, including how close the highway would come to the National Park boundary. Maps and photographs only convey so much, and I think the video makes the stakes much harder to ignore.

Click below to watch the flight footage



TMA has opposed the West Option for years, and we are far from alone. The City of Tucson, Pima County Board of Supervisors, Tohono O'odham Nation, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, and Town of Sahuarita have all gone on record against it, and a viable East Option exists that would co-locate I-11 with the existing I-19 and I-10 corridors through Tucson. Our partners at the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection have a

yourself. Per the Coalition, we expect there will be a public comment period on a new Environmental Impact Statement later this year, and we will let you know how you can participate when the time comes. Thank you for standing with us.

Please continue reading below to learn about TMA's upcoming SpeakHour presentations and read a touching tribute to TMA co-founder Gorm Loftfield, written by his niece Kim Wolf.

Sincerely,
Ed Hendel
President, Tucson Mountains Association

Something New!
TMA SpeakHour Presentations!

Would you like to hear about the Tucson Mountains with speakers, including questions, answers, refreshments, and snacks for about an hour?

The TMA Board is planning future speakers and presentations. Possible Tucson Mountains issues or topics are:

- The history of protecting the Tucson Mountains and lessons for the future
- The Bobcats in Tucson Project
- How animals survive extreme desert heat and drought
- Why the Tucson Mountains are ecologically unique
- Water conservation in the desert (what actually works)
- Indigenous history of the Tucson Mountains (Tohono O'odham connections)
- The impact of development on desert ecosystems

TMA members and friends will be welcome to attend. The day, location, and time are to be determined. We will let you know as we schedule upcoming speakers.

If you have expertise in a topic you think would be of interest or speakers you know who may want to be a presenter, please notify us at: Tucsonmountainsassoc.org. Also, let us know if you prefer week evenings or Saturdays for these presentations.



Gorm Loftfield: Tucson Mountains Pioneer and Co-Founder of TMA

by Kim Wolf, niece of Gorm Lotfield

People traveling on Silverbell Road in northwest Tucson who turn onto Sweetwater Drive may glimpse a crenelated rock tower above the trees - an unexpected appearance in the Arizona desert. For obvious reasons, it is referred to as “The Castle.” Gorm Loftfield, the builder of that iconic structure and the small house beside it, was an early settler in Tucson and one of the homesteaders who came together in 1934 and established the Tucson Mountains Association. For much of his life, he was prominent in Tucson’s past. He was not an idealistic visionary - he was a studious man, somewhat stern, who settled in Tucson in 1920 and spent the rest of his life contributing to the better of his community.

Gorm received his degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Minnesota, after which he served in the Engineering Corps in France during WWI. Returning from service in 1919, he and his brothers decided to settle in Tucson. In 1920, he bought a house right next to the University of Arizona, and continued his education. He received his MS in Chemistry in 1921 and PhD in Plant Physiology in 1924 at the University. He accepted a job as professor of Botany at Texas A & M for a year, but was back in Tucson in 1926 working as County Engineer and Superintendent of Roads in Pima County. By 1928 he had become Valuation Engineer for the Pima

that position until his retirement in 1960.

In the early 1930's, he applied for a tract of land in the Tucson mountains under the Homestead Act of 1862. That 160 acres would be granted to him if a structure he built on the plot was occupied for five continuous years. By 1932 he had constructed and moved into a small house there. It was unique because it was built of treated railroad ties with a mortar fill between them, rather than the adobe structures so common in that area. He occupied it for the required years and in March 1939 he was granted homestead rights to the property, with a deed signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. A well was dug which supplied an ample amount of water.

On June 14, 1934, a few residents living in the area, headed by Gorm, Joseph Canfield, and Joseph Coniff, met and formed the Tucson Mountains Association. What started as a small group continued to grow while promoting the well-being of the area and its environment. They worked to prevent soil erosion, improve roads, and in 1936 were involved in efforts to bring power lines into the district, according to an article in the Arizona Daily Star, December 23, 1936. Gorm continued to be an active member, holding various offices throughout his life.

As the oldest of nine brothers and sisters, Gorm took on many family responsibilities. When his father died in his home state of Minnesota in 1929, he brought his mother and younger siblings to live in his Tucson city house. His widowed sister, Sigrid, took residence there to care for their mother and to keep house and cook for the numerous relatives who came and went. He was always an important part of his large family, and his nieces and nephews remember him as being a talented storyteller with a prodigious memory who lulled them to sleep with long stories. They never stayed awake long enough to hear the endings. Gorm maintained and improved the city house, as well as continuing to manage his homestead property, until WWII interrupted his plans and he was recalled to duty.

When he returned to Tucson, he embarked on several projects. A rock wall was built around a large yard area of the homestead, and the house was modernized with plaster and paint applied over the railroad ties, and the addition of a front porch. On the land to the west of the homestead he began a second dwelling, this one built entirely of rock. It had two stories, with the living quarters on the second level, and storage rooms below. At the back of the living area was a door which was always kept locked, because it opened to a drop-off. Gorm planned that door to open onto a tower stairwell which would be constructed later. Perhaps his extensive knowledge

house.

By the time the rock house was ready to be lived in, in 1947, the University of Arizona embarked on a large building plan which absorbed the property of his city house. His sister moved into the rock house until she relocated to California in 1952, while Gorm resided in the homestead cabin. With acreage to spare, he sold plots of land, many to brothers and sisters who also migrated to Tucson. He had abundant water, and many of his neighbors were not so lucky with their wells. He built a reservoir on his property, and in early August, 1950, he was granted an application “for the purpose of installing, maintaining and operating a water plant and water distribution system” for a period of 25 years, according to the permit. His stepdaughter believed that the seemingly endless supply may have had something to do with the naming of Sweetwater Drive.

A new phase of his life began in 1955 when he married Florence Alloway, the widow of a local doctor. The authoritarian older brother who had so many family responsibilities began to relax and enjoy his married life. Although the couple lived for several years in her house on Ironwood Drive, he continued to run his water company and make plans for the completion of the rock house. By 1959, the couple had taken up residence there and the long-envisioned tower with the circular staircase was under way.

While the work progressed, both Gorm and Florence continued to be active in all the activities of the Tucson Mountains Association. Gorm retired from the County Assessor’s office in July, 1960, and In November, according to the *Tucson Citizen Newspaper*, he was elected president of the TMA, with Florence serving as secretary.

The retirement years were peaceful. The tower was finished and a pool was added to complete the idyllic life they enjoyed until Gorm passed away in 1978. The “castle” and homestead are sturdy buildings which will remain for years to commemorate an important man in the history of Tucson, and the many contributions he made, both to the town and to the Tucson Mountains Association.

Florence continued to live in the rock house for the rest of her life. Her daughter, Laurel Rottura, moved into the homestead where she was close to her mother. Both Florence and Laurel continued to be active members of the TMA. Florence made several additions to the rock house; she expanded the front, eliminating the balcony,

to house his ashes, as well as the ashes of other family members. Florence lived to be 99 years old. Laurel inherited the property after Florence's death and continued to live in the Homestead until her own death in 2014, after which the property left the family. Both buildings and the water reservoir remain to mark an important part of Tucson history.

In the photos below, you'll see the tower as it stands today. Below that, is a photo of the tower under construction. The last image is one of a family wedding at the rock house in 1952.







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