



FRIENDS OF SABINO CANYON

FALL 2020

Friends of Sabino Canyon Looks to the Future

By Conrad Grims, president of the FOSC board of directors

You are probably expecting me to announce a massive campaign in reaction to the catastrophic impact of the Bighorn Fire that burned 119,987 acres in our Santa Catalina Mountains from June 5 through July 23, 2020.

The University of Arizona presented three very informative webinars regarding the fire and its aftermath. Across the board, all of the experts noted what MIGHT happen, but none could commit to a description of what WILL happen. All of us anticipate that eventual rains will further effect Sabino Canyon, and the weather will define the plans of the US Forest Service, the organization responsible for administration of programs. FOSC has therefore deferred any fund raising that would directly target damage resulting from the fire until the Forest Service identifies that damage and expresses a need for an FOSC response. We at FOSC await the Forest Service direction and you can count on us to enlist your financial support when that time comes.

Today I reach out to you for your involvement in our efforts to ensure that Friends of Sabino Canyon is solidly prepared to meet the future, whatever it brings. We are facing the critical challenge of strengthening our human



(above: photos of dam after fire)

capital. Effective January 31, 2021, three FOSC board members will be giving up their current roles on our board. Each has served FOSC for years, and we wish that the pressing personal demands that make it impossible for them to continue in their current roles could be put off because of FOSC needs. I'm appealing to you today to help

FOSC to replace those crucial individuals. We need to add new members to our board. We look for individuals willing to devote time and energy to the FOSC cause and to enable FOSC to support the US Forest Service programs developed to preserve, protect, and enhance the Sabino Canyon Recreation Area.

The core purpose of FOSC is to raise money to support projects in the Sabino Canyon Recreation Area as they are identified by the US Forest Service. We need to be able to process donations efficiently and quickly. Today we are asking you to do more than open your wallet. We need to add to our human capital. We need volunteers willing to devote time and energy to the FOSC commitment to preserve, protect, and enhance the Sabino Canyon.

FOSC has recently taken measures to rethink the workload of our volunteer Board of Directors to ensure our future.

THESE MEASURES INCLUDE:

- Reaffirmation of our core purpose which is to finance projects identified by the US Forest Service as important for the preservation, protection, and enhancement of the Sabino Canyon Recreation Area.
- Reorganization of responsibilities assigned to board members.
- Streamlining financial support protocols by accepting mailed checks and online donations which are efficient options for FOSC.
- Commitment to develop a formal Strategic Plan to map out a sustainable future for FOSC.
- Updating communication to our members and potential supporters by focusing on our website: www.sabinocanyon.org

We need you to volunteer to step up and donate your time. If you are willing to pitch in, please let me know by emailing friends@sabinocanyon.org. Please include in your email subject line “board position” so that I am sure to prioritize your email. We look forward to your joining us!



The FOSC board is proud to share with you our recent accomplishments:

Jim Darling has accepted appointment to the FOSC board. Jim has extensive experience in public environmental policy analysis and financing, designing, developing, and operating mixed-use, industrial, commercial, and federal real estate investments, port facilities, municipal public works infrastructure, solid waste systems, urban forestry programs, parks and open space. He has guided planning efforts and land use entitlements, as well as the creation of local economic stimulus programs. His work has required his active involvement in local, state, and federal policy and legislative matters. Jim will lead the effort to develop the FOSC Strategic Plan.

The FOSC Board is proud to welcome Riley Blute as our first youth representative. Riley is in the 9th grade at The Gregory School. He is an athlete, an editor, a student council representative, and a straight "A" student. Riley plans to engage his fellow students and faculty members in actively supporting FOSC.

FOSC also welcomes Kate Blute to the board. Kate has extensive experience in the hospitality industry as Director of Marketing and Public Relations at the Arizona Inn, and she retired from the position of Director of Investor and Public Relations at Providence Service Corporation. Kate will be providing logistical support to our new treasurer, Josh Baylson, and our donor manager, Sharon Vandergriff. Kate is the proud grandmother of our youth board member, Riley Blute.

The FOSC Board has provided a grant of \$50,000 to the National Forest Foundation for surveying, mapping and eradicating buffelgrass in the Sabino Canyon Recreation Area. That work is currently progressing with restricted access due to the risks related to the Bighorn fire.

Friends of Sabino Canyon is proud to have received two awards in 2020 in the Southwest District of the US Forest Service — the Enduring Service Award and the Citizen Stewardship and Partnerships Award.

Your current board members are committed to FOSC. Please demonstrate your commitment by joining us and donating your time and energy. Thank you for your generous and continued support.



The Ongoing Threat of Invasive Grasses

In Sabino Canyon's neighborhood, where suburban yards adjoin wild foothills, we can't ignore the accumulation of incendiary invasive grasses that double in fuel load every two years. The proximity and intensity of the Bighorn Fire was a wake-up call. — *by Mark Hengesbaugh*

Ever take the top off a pan of popcorn while it's popping?

Kernels whiz everywhere and fly into more hard-to-reach corners than you'd ever think possible. In recent years, the lid seems to have come off Sabino Canyon. Millions of wind-borne seeds of invasive grasses have dropped and sprouted in far corners of our recreation area. These fast-growing invasives, including **buffelgrass** and **fountain grass**, have rooted on creek beds, canyon sides, trails and ridges—places we've never seen them before.

Why worry? Look closely at any large patch of invasive grass. You'll see that nearly every native Sonoran Desert plant is missing within the patch of an invasive grass. These invasive grasses deny water, nutrients, and light to native plants. Loss of those native plants eliminates food, shelter, and nesting opportunities for Sabino's wildlife.

The danger of invasives like buffelgrass is not just to the appearance of Sabino's Sonoran Desert landscape or to native wildlife populations. These invasive grasses are extremely flammable, and they can spread at an exponential rate. This reality resulted in disaster at "A" Mountain in 2017 when a buffelgrass-fueled fire scorched 274 saguaros, half of which have since died.

A University of Arizona study in 2012 shows that when wind-blown buffelgrass seeds sprout in the gaps between the 15-20 native Sonoran Desert plant species that normally live on canyon slopes, they will be nearly all crowded out by the intruder. Only mature saguaros and buffelgrass survive... no young saguaros will sprout. Because buffelgrass quickly fills in between the widely spaced Sonoran Desert plants, the natural barrier to wildfire disappears.

Another University of Arizona study showed that the buffelgrass footprint nearly doubles every two years on south-facing slopes. So, a patch you find in Sabino today will be significantly larger next year and double in size the year after. In addition, an infested tract will spread its seeds wherever the wind blows them.

There are not just one or two invasive species that are having their way in our canyon. In 2014, sections of

Blackett's Ridge Trail, for example, looked like a wheat field because of non-native soft-feather pappusgrass and natal grass.

We can preserve Sabino's plant diversity by controlling invasive grasses. In 2008-2010, we were successful in the elimination, along the creek, of the giant reed, another invasive grass. During that time, volunteers equipped with tools provided by a FOSC grant and in partnership with the US Forest Service, spent 6,000 hours removing the towering invasive canes.

Once those stands of giant reed were removed, a profusion of native creek-side plant species returned. A team of Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists twice surveyed seven test plots that formerly were covered entirely in giant reed and found that a total of 85 plant species returned voluntarily.

Bringing Sabino's giant reed under control was a struggle. The task we face today, especially with buffelgrass, will be far more difficult now that the lid's come off, and we're finding invasive grasses in so many more places. Thirty years ago, giant reed was confined to small patches in the dam area. Removing it then would have saved 6,000 hours of work and would have preserved the many native trees along the creek that the giant reed killed.

The sooner we treat invasives the less damage the canyon will sustain and the cheaper it will be. The same results we could have obtained this year through a \$15,000 effort will cost \$150,000 just a few years down the road.

Giving up is not an option, either. There's the public safety aspect we can't ignore. Buffelgrass ignites easily and burns in a ferocious 30-foot high firestorm with heat that can melt metal. In Sabino Canyon's neighborhood, where urban lots adjoin wild foothills, there is no safe place to ignore an accumulation of incendiary grass that doubles in fuel load every two years.

How committed are we to protecting Sabino from invasives? This problem will test our passion and persistence. But we all know our canyon is worth every effort we take to preserve it for future generations.



HOW TO IDENTIFY BUFFELGRASS

Buffelgrass is a perennial plant but it only greens up for a few weeks after rain. Buffelgrass spends most of the year in a brown condition, looking dead. But the roots are still very much alive. These photos will help readers to identify the plant in both conditions. In its brown condition, Buffelgrass is ready to burn with just a spark.

Here's a link for more detailed identification of Buffelgrass from the National Park Service:

<https://www.nps.gov/sagu/learn/nature/how-to-identify-buffelgrass.htm>

And here's one from the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum:

<https://desertmuseum.org/buffelgrass/learn.php#identify>

A NOTE FROM ESTHER HOLLOWAY, FOSC BOARD MEMBER

The FOSC board, the Forest Service, and our partner organizations have been discussing for years the ongoing threats that invasive grasses present. Mark Hengesbaugh, who not long ago stepped down from his Sabino Stewards position, recently updated this article that was originally published in the Spring/Summer 2015 edition of our newsletter.

This year's overwhelming powerful fires like the Bighorn Fire here in our Santa Catalina Mountains prove that Mark's message is even more important today than it was five years ago.

At the September 15, 2020, meeting of the FOSC board, which included representatives of the Forest Service as well as Partners of FOSC, the current efforts of the Forest Service with regard to the control of invasives in Sabino Canyon were presented by Chrissy Pearson of the Forest Service. FOSC encourages understanding and solving the overwhelming threat that invasives present. FOSC looks forward to following the Forest Service's leadership in addressing this challenge.



Remembering Scott Clemans, a True Hero

Friends of Sabino Canyon (FOSC) and Southern Arizona Rescue Association (SARA) have lost a valued friend and colleague, Scott Clemans. On October 23, 2020, we received the heartbreaking news that Scott had died as a result of COVID-19.

Scott was vice-president of SARA, one of the four partner organizations whose representatives serve as voting members of the FOSC board of directors. Scott joined SARA, the non-profit all-volunteer search and rescue organization, in 1965, just shy of his 18th birthday. In his 55 years of service, Scott helped thousands of people.

Scott wrote the following article less than a month before his death. Scott was a true hero, and he will be missed. His service deserves recognition and his character deserves honor. Every time I see a helicopter on its way to rescue a stranded hiker, I'll think of Scott with fond appreciation. — *by Esther Holloway, FOSC Board Member*

Southern Arizona Rescue Association — *By Scott Clemans, SARA Vice-President*

The Southern Arizona Rescue Association (SARA) has had an interesting summer season. During the first week after the governor shut down the state, we saw a spike in hikers hitting the local trails, mainly in the mornings when it's cooler. SARA responded to several calls by hikers in trouble, mainly heat exhaustion and dehydration issues. Then the Bighorn Fire started in the Santa Catalinas, and the U.S. Forest Service shut the forest down. With trails closed in the Santa Catalinas, hikers switched to Saguaro National Park, both East and West. This moved our rescue operations to the East end of Speedway, Tanque Verde Falls, and the Tucson Mountains. Fortunately, we didn't have too many rescues to deal with, but, unfortunately, it was apparent that our advice on hiking in the summer had still not reached everyone.

SARA reminds hikers of the rules of warm weather hiking: go early and be back by about 10AM, carry and drink a liter of water an hour, and turn around when your water is half gone. It is smart to keep yourself hydrated by drinking before you get thirsty and by eating some salty snacks to help replace the salt we all sweat out in the heat.

For more information on SARA, go to www.sarci.com and click on the SARA page.

Santa Catalina Volunteer Patrol

By Judith Peters, SCVP President

Because of the challenges presented by Covid-19, the Bighorn Fire closure, and the summer heat, the Santa Catalina Volunteer Patrol (SCVP) presence in Sabino Canyon was somewhat limited during the past few months, but we have not been inactive. Rather than our usual activity of helping folks plan hikes, we spent July and August stationing ourselves at the entrances to the Sabino Canyon Recreation Area, and then at Inspiration Rock and Windy Point on Mt. Lemmon. In August alone, SCVP members served approximately 540 hours of “Gatekeeping Duty,” keeping the public out of closed areas. Additionally, 245 hours of Continuing Education were completed virtually by members in August.

Much of Sabino Canyon reopened on September 21, so members are back on the trails and at the Visitor Center Plaza. We look forward to the days of fall and winter allowing pleasant hours of hiking and meeting with visitors from around the world... or, this year, maybe only from the USA.

Due to the pandemic and the ongoing need for social distancing, the SCVP board has made the difficult decision to cancel this winter’s training class. Applicants have been informed, and though they were genuinely disappointed, most were willing to wait a year. In the meantime, we have plans to keep them engaged in various ways, such as including them in our Continuing Education Program.



Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists

By Phil Bentley, SCVN President

The Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists (SCVN) programs in Sabino Canyon have been dramatically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. All school field trips to Sabino Canyon have been suspended for the Fall 2020 semester and possibly beyond, pending school district decisions to allow off-campus trips. In addition, the next SCVN annual 14-week Fall training class for new volunteer naturalists will not be conducted until October 2021. SCVN is using technology to stay connected with Tucson elementary school children by producing a series of virtual videos highlighting experiences they might have encountered on a visit to Sabino. These videos will be available through the SCVN website (www.sabinonaturalists.org) and YouTube for teachers to use as a resource.



Sabino Canyon Crawler

By Jim DeGrood, RPC director

To ensure the health and safety of staff and visitors to the Sabino Canyon Recreation Area, the Sabino Canyon Crawler, in coordination with the U.S. Forest Service, suspended service effective March 20, 2020. The Regional Partnering Center is working with the Pima County Health Department, Arizona Department of Health Services and the U.S. Forest Service on the resumption of Sabino Canyon Crawler operations. We are hoping that the Crawler’s reactivation will have been a reality before the distribution of this FOSC newsletter. We appreciate the patience of our customers as we work together with our community to move through pandemic and Bighorn Fire closures.



Check the Crawler website to get the latest news about the status of Crawler service: www.sabinocanyoncrawler.com



FRIENDS OF SABINO CANYON

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Voting Members of Friends of Sabino Canyon

FALL 2020

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Josh Baylson	Conrad Grims
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Terry DeWald	Diane Meuser
Ted Forsberg	Sharon Vandergriff

FOSC PARTNERS

Regional Partnering Center, **Jim DeGrood**
Southern Arizona Rescue Association, **Joe Barr**
Santa Catalina Volunteer Patrol, **Judith Peters**
Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists, **Phil Bentley**



Join Us in Support of Sabino Canyon!

A donation of \$25 or more registers you as a member of Friends of Sabino Canyon (FOSC) for one year.

Your contributions support our effort to work with the US Forest Service to protect, preserve, and enhance Sabino Canyon. Your contributions enhance funding for educational, ecological, and enhancement activities of our partners — Southern Arizona Rescue Association (SARA,) Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists (SCVN,) Santa Catalina Volunteer Patrol (SCVP,) and the Regional Partnering Center (RPC.)

Sabino Canyon would not be such a vibrant and engaged community without you. We would also like to give a special nod to those of you who support our efforts through AmazonSmile and employer matched gifts.

Support Friends of Sabino Canyon
whenever you shop.



We very much appreciate your contributions in support of Sabino Canyon which is so very special to all of us.

If you'd like to update your contact information or advise us of your communication preferences, please email us at donors@sabinocanyon.org. Thanks!