



Friends of Ironwood Forest



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The Summer of 2020

by Joe Sheedey

If it wasn't already a different year when summer began this year, it sure got interesting fast.

In June the Bighorn Fire raged through the Catalina Mountains. When it was put out, over 120,000 acres had burned. At the same

time, more fires were burning all over the state.

Everyone prayed for an early monsoon to help the firefighters working in scorching heat to control these fires. Unfortunately, the monsoons were hardly a sprinkle.

The lack of moisture combined with record temperatures was a recipe for disaster for our wild lands and wildlife. Fortunately, the Bighorn Fire didn't burn a lot of the country the bighorn sheep use, and the fire that did burn sheep habitat wasn't severe and will ultimately be very beneficial to bighorn sheep in the Catalinas.

Lack of rain affects IFNM sheep

Although Ironwood Forest National Monument (IFNM) didn't have any fires, the lack of rain could have triggered some bighorn sheep related events.

One of the rams that was collared for the I-11 project was found dead. There was no predation, and by the time it was found, the cause of death couldn't be determined.

In July the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) received a call from the Pioneer Pit that there was a dead ram on their property. The 8-year-old ram was picked up and tissue samples sent to a lab, but the results were inconclusive, except that it was negative for pneumonia.

In all the disease testing the AZGFD has done on IFNM sheep, there have been no disease issues found. This ram could have died from heat-related issues.



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Hopefully these were isolated cases and aren't indicative of the effect the lack of rain and abnormally high temperatures had on the entire IFNM bighorn sheep herd.

Wildlife waters are essential

The wildlife water catchments were in good shape going into the summer. In the spring, vegetation was as lush as I've seen it in a long time. I knew if we just had an average monsoon, the wildlife waters would be fine.

However, IFNM didn't have any significant rain until the end of July. It was alarming how the waters that were full in April were dry or almost dry by the end of June. AZGFD resources were already strained by the Bighorn Fire, but when I conveyed the criticality, they began hauling water to many catchments in IFNM. This effort no doubt also saved some deer and other wildlife.

In the last few years, the AZGFD Development Branch, in partnership with the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society, has redeveloped several wildlife waters in IFNM. The fact that these catchments now have more storage capacity allows them to hold water much longer than the old systems did.

In a normal year, all these locations would have held water until the monsoons came. None of them did go dry, but some reached dangerously low levels. In some areas there was just enough rain to keep water in them.

There are certain waters that have so much wildlife use in the summer that I don't know how they make it through June. I

hiked into one at 2:00 in the afternoon in July, and there were 21 sheep at the trough. I looked at the water level and didn't know how it could sustain that much use with no rain in sight. We must have received some rain the following week, because when I checked it 10 days later, it had the same water level. There were still at least 21 sheep using it every day.

I believe the reason the IFNM sheep population has increased at such a high rate during the last decade is because the catchments have been redeveloped so they are much more reliable than they were in the past.

The AZGFD conducts an annual bighorn sheep survey via helicopter, but it could be postponed this fall because of Covid. However, the population appears to remain stable with good lamb recruitment. I keep thinking of the Merle Haggard song, "If we make it through September" in anticipation of the weather cooling down.

The AZGFD has tentatively scheduled another sheep capture in IFNM in October. The plan is to capture 20 sheep and put them in the Newman Mountains to supplement the sheep that were transplanted there in 2017. However, unless the governor changes the Covid status level that state employees are currently under, there won't be a capture in October.

The positive aspect of all this is the bighorn sheep population in IFNM is healthy and doing well.

(Joe Sheedey is a member of the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society. The photos are from wildlife cameras located at water catchment facilities in IFNM.)

FIF Mission Statement

The Friends of Ironwood Forest is a local non-profit organization that works for the permanent protection of the biological, geological, archaeological, and historical resources for which Ironwood Forest National Monument was established.

We accomplish our mission by providing resources, such as volunteers, expertise, public outreach, education, and advocacy, on behalf of Ironwood Forest National Monument.

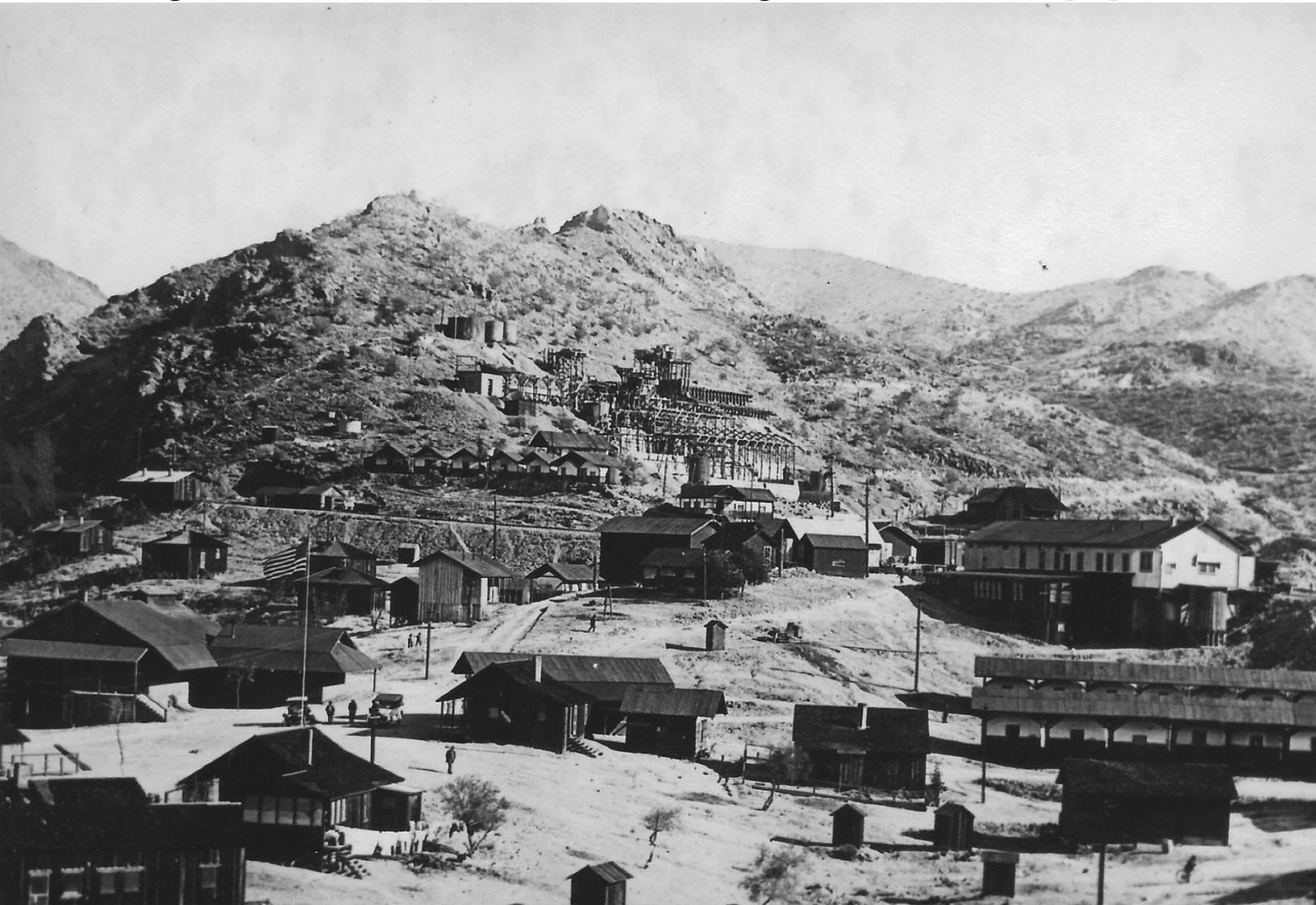
Silver Bell Historical Society

The Silver Bell Historical Society was formed in the summer of 2018 with a vision of preserving the history of the communities that existed within the Silver Bell Mountains of Pima County, Arizona. Every member of the board of directors lived in the town of Silver Bell, which existed from 1951 until 1984. They are dedicated to maintaining a community spirit among those who lived in Silver Bell, as well as their descendants.

The earliest community in this area was Pelton, which boasted a population of 276 people in 1882 and lasted until about 1901. The town supported the Young America and Old Boot mines. Today, remains of the smelter site can be seen as well as a dozen or more graves at its cemetery site.

The Old Boot mine had its beginning about 1865 and was purchased and revitalized by wealthy investors from Tucson. In 1902, most of the mines in the area were acquired by the Imperial Copper Company, which created the first community of Silver Bell. As many as 1,000 people lived there. The town boasted mercantile stores, saloons, laundries, bakeries, a post office, a hospital, and a school. Silver Bell lasted until the early 1930s when the mines shut down.

A railroad was built between Red Rock on the Southern Pacific Railroad and Silver Bell. A large smelter and electric power house served the mines at the community of Sasco in Pinal County. The railroad passed through Sasco (a town of 600 people) on its



The mining town of Silver Bell, 1951-1984

way to Silver Bell. The ruins of Sasco still stand today. The old railroad bed can be found in many areas and railroad spikes can be found along its bed today.

There were 131 recorded burials at the Silver Bell Cemetery, which is protected by the Bureau of Land Management (and the Ironwood Forest National Monument). Residents of Silver Bell as well as ranchers from the area were buried there.

Another community in the Silver Bell Mountains was the Atlas Camp, which began in the 1880s and continued through the 1960s. It was also known as the BS&K camp.

ASARCO acquired the copper mines in the 1920s and operated open-pit mines in the Silver Bell Mountains. It continues operations today.

The second Silver Bell boasted populations of about 1,000 people throughout its short lifetime. The town had housing, a recreation hall, a swimming pool, a post office, a grocery store, a church, a gas station, and a ballpark. Children were bussed 20 miles to schools in Marana. Sadly, though, when mining ceased for a short time in 1984, the town became empty. Houses were moved away and other buildings were torn down.

In March 2019, the Silver Bell Historical Society hosted a weekend reunion, which saw about 500 people “come home.”

A monument to the Silver Bell communities was dedicated at the mine entrance, and folks were treated to a bus tour of the old townsite and the mines of Silver Bell. The reunion also included a picnic, a dessert social, and a steak dinner and

socializing at Lil Abners, a famous restaurant in Marana.

Today, the Society sponsors scholarships for descendants of Silver Bell pioneers. The Society now has its sights on building a museum to honor the communities of the area that are now long gone. Of course, social activities are important, and the Society hosts these from time to time.

The Society has adopted Avra Valley Road from the Gas Plant Road to Silver Bell. Twice a year, volunteers gather to clean the roadway. It’s an opportunity for Silver Bell folks to get together and have fun while they keep their old road home nice and clean.

The Society’s website is www.silverbella.com.

Our mailing address is PO Box 13572, Tucson, AZ 85732.

Society officers are:

David Cleaver, president
Karen Holton, vice president
Jim Hunter, treasurer
Diane Stephens, secretary



Rattlesnakes

by Mike Cardwell, wildlife biologist

*You can't save all the cute animals,
Eat all the tasty ones,
Kill all the ones that scare you,
And have a functional ecosystem too!*

As mid-level predators, rattlesnakes are important members of the ecological community within Ironwood Forest National Monument. The common species in IFNM are sidewinders and Mohave rattlesnakes, found on both flat terrain and rocky hillsides, like those that surround Ragged Top.

Shy and cryptic, rattlesnakes are ambush hunters that prey primarily on rodents and lizards. They may be encountered any time temperatures are not extreme. Rattlesnakes are most active during mild days in spring and fall when nights are cold. They shift to nighttime activity during the summer when daytime temperatures are lethal.

Rattlesnakes want nothing to do with creatures as large as humans. Bites to



people result from disturbing the snakes, either accidentally by putting hands or feet where you cannot see a snake (or haven't looked for one) or intentionally by bothering the animals.

In case of a bite, the bitten person should be transported to the nearest hospital emergency room without delay.

Snakebite deaths are rare in the United States (less than 1 per 1,000 bites), but tissue loss and permanent scarring—sometimes severe—is far more common. The only effective treatment is antivenom.

So, if you encounter one of these fascinating creatures, admire it and take photos from a safe distance (more than twice the length of the snake).

Then leave it alone.



Mohave rattlesnake (top) and sidewinder. Photos by Mike Cardwell.

President's Update

by Tom Hannaagan

Let's celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the declaration creating the Ironwood Forest National Monument. It was no small achievement getting the IFNM set aside in June of 2000, and it has been an ongoing effort (perhaps more than most realize) to keep it protected in the last few years.

So, happy anniversary Ironwood Forest, and many more!

The coronavirus world has presented many new challenges to the Friends of Ironwood Forest, just as it has for almost everyone else around the globe. I'd like to let you know that we are fortunately unaware of any of our board members, active volunteers, or partners having suffered from an infection of this novel virus. And, we certainly hope that all of you in our Friends community are weathering this situation as well as possible.

One bright spot related to everyone's health in such circumstances is the nearby availability of open public land. The great outdoors, it is said, can cure many ills. In our virus times, outdoor recreation may help prevent becoming ill. The IFNM and all protected public lands and parks, of any size, are a source of escape and comfort for many of us.

The FIF Board has been meeting using virtual technology. It is not as collegial as meeting in person, but it is safer and allows our efforts related to the Monument to proceed more or less at full throttle. It is too bad that we have not been able to hold our usual public events, but FIF is adapting to the use of technology to bring the message of the Monument to as many people as possible.

National Public Lands Day was celebrated by FIF using live streaming from IFNM over the cellular network to Facebook. So, basically anyone could login and watch our presenter walk through an area of the Monument, discussing aspects of the plants and geology, showing evidence of plant restoration, and even answering questions from viewers wherever they were located. It's not as good as being there, but it is as close as can be safely done at this time.

The schools that FIF would normally assist with conducting field trips to IFNM are not allowing field trips this school year. We all know

that the schools, students, and parents are facing extreme circumstances. FIF is planning to create video segments, covering the same kinds of topics, with most of the same naturalist experts, that we would normally provide on school outings. The video productions will be made available online to schools and students at no charge.

We are still forming our ideas for this effort and will let you know how it goes and how you may take advantage of it yourselves. Needless to say, FIF is in learning mode in this realm, but we are moving forward to do the best we can to continue to promote the value of IFNM and the need for its continued protection.

2020 has been a year of some successes. FIF lobbied in Washington for the passage and funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This year, with your help in letting our senators know your position, the LWCF funding bill was passed and signed into law. This act provides for full funding of the LWCF along with needed funds for the maintenance of our national parks.

This year, FIF along with our partner, the Coalition for Protection of the Sonoran Desert, met with the staffs of both Arizona senators to explain why the Avra Valley desert route for the proposed Interstate 11 is not acceptable. We stressed the breadth of the opposition to the Valley route and recommended that if I-11 was to proceed, it should be aligned with I-10 through the Tucson area.

FIF, with your assistance in contacting our senators, also helped to successfully defeat the inappropriate nomination of William Perry Pendley to head the BLM. We don't want someone who wants to sell off public lands heading the office responsible for their protection.

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FIF also endorsed a letter by the Arizona Youth Climate Coalition that encouraged the City of Tucson to declare a climate emergency. Tucson, the third fastest warming city in the US, did act on this at their September meeting.

So, FIF is being creative these days, remaining

very active and looking for ways to continue getting the message out about our local natural treasure. We are also not letting up on being vigilant for any threats to the Ironwood Forest National Monument's continued protection.

Welcome to a New Friends of Ironwood Forest Board Member

Rebecca Renteria was born and raised in Tucson and is native to southern Arizona and northern Mexico. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees in anthropology with an emphasis in archaeology and specialization in dendro-archaeology from the University of Arizona. She works as an archaeologist and dendrochronologist at the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research at the University of Arizona.

Rebecca works to create spaces for underrepresented communities in archaeology, so that "these voices, our voices, shape our histories and futures in our own words."



In Memory of Maeveen Behan

Dear Friends,

Please accept this small donation on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary and in memory of my friend and colleague Maeveen Behan, who championed the creation of the Monument. It gave her great satisfaction to know it was protected not only by Presidential decree but also by flesh-and-blood real people like yourselves.

Julia, May 31, 2020

Community Supporters

Arizona Desert Big Horn
Sheep Society

Sierra Club Rincon Group

Silver Bell Historical Society

Arizona Native Plant Society

Summit Hut Ltd.

Bach's Cactus Nursery

The Coalition for Sonoran Desert
Protection

BLM Education Grant

Conservation Lands
Foundation

The National Parks and Conservation
Association

Dragoon Brewery

The Wilderness Society

National Environmental
Educational Foundation

Town of Marana

MET Foundation

Trico Electric Cooperative

Patagonia

Tucson Cactus and Succulent Society

Rusty Lizard Press

Tucson Herpetological Society



Coming in December!

The Friends will be sending out their second appeal for financial contributions in December of this year. You are welcome to donate on our website anytime you are able.

Covid-19 has changed many of the programs we normally undertake. It has also given us the opportunity to look at new ways of keeping the public informed about the Ironwood. Your support, whether financial or not, is very much appreciated and is extremely important in keeping the Ironwood protected and thriving.

Thank you!

Contribute online with a credit card or *PayPal* at:

www.ironwoodforest.org

The Ironwood Gallery

Send us your favorite photographs of IFNM.



IFNM petroglyph photos by Eric Buckley