



Friends of Ironwood Forest



Photo by John Durham

Crested Saguaros

A Special Treat

by Bill Thornton

For dedicated “cactus huggers” or even the mildly curious, the sight of a crested saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*) is a special treat.

For decades the conventional wisdom was that no more than about 200 of these fascinating

plants existed throughout the entire Sonoran Desert; but nobody really knew since there was no record of a systematic search. That began to change nearly 20 years ago when Bob Cardell and friends from the Southern Arizona Hiking

Club took a special interest in crested saguaros, photographing and recording GPS coordinates of each one they spotted.

Following leads from every corner of saguaro country, they eventually found and documented more than 2,000 with crests. While not as rare as once believed, each new sighting is memorable. Such was the case on a recent trip to Ironwood Forest National Monument when we spotted this beauty just inside the northern boundary.



Photo by Bill Thornton

Despite countless visits to IFNM and participation in many workdays, this is the first fully developed crested saguaro I've seen in the monument. A budding crest is also developing alongside Silverbell Rd. near the foot of Ragged Top.

Many species of cacti form crests. Potted specimens are highly prized by collectors and bring high prices at nurseries and trade shows. For more information and photos, enter "crested cactus pictures" in your internet search engine.

Many thousands of mature saguaros are yours to enjoy in both units of Saguaro National Park, Pima County's Tucson Mountain Park, and of

course, IFNM. You may be lucky enough to spot a crested saguaro. If you spot one in IFNM, please snap a photo and send it to: cactusworld@msn.com.

Crested Saguaros: A Photo Gallery

Photos by John Durham



New Initiative to Support Wildlife Migration National Public Lands Day Event 2021

By Tom Hannagan and Carolyn Campbell

Wild animals need to move around for their survival. They are constantly looking for suitable habitat, food/water sources, safety, and mating opportunities. Some animals (mountain lions, for instance) need much more room to roam than other species.

Wildlife is just that, wild. Animals don't recognize the arbitrary boundaries observed by humans. Nature is one integrated and balanced world. Supporting wildlife needs is a critically important aspect of preserving Ironwood Forest National Monument. Desert bighorn sheep from the IFNM herd have been seen and photographed in the Tucson Mountains and in Saguaro National Park West.

A significant part of Pima County's Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan deals with wildlife migration and the need for connectivity between protected preserves. For IFNM to thrive, Friends of Ironwood Forest (FIF) supports efforts to promote wildlife migration between IFNM and nearby basins and ranges.

FIF is participating in a new interagency initiative to find ways to improve or restore wildlife migration. The southern portion of IFNM is very close to the Tucson Mountains and Saguaro National Park West. This vicinity is an obvious area of interest from a migration perspective and also serves as a somewhat manageable starting point.

One thing that you see when driving around this area is fencing, both new and old. Some fences are necessary, while others appear to be abandoned. Most, unfortunately, are not at all "wildlife friendly." We declined, for now, to use photos from Pima County biologists and the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) showing what happens to wildlife caught in these fences. The photos are quite gruesome.

FIF is joining an initiative working with representatives from AGFD, Pima County, National Park Service, City of Tucson, Bureau of Reclamation, and Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection to identify unneeded fences in some places and, in other places where fencing is necessary, to replace barbed wire with more wildlife-friendly materials. This project is in the planning stages, gathering data on where and what kind of fencing exists. Property owners will be involved as soon as they are identified.

We already know of some properties where the managers would like to have no-longer-needed fencing removed. This "low hanging fruit" is where FIF will start this fall with volunteers and our agency partners to begin removal.

It may well take years to have a significant impact, but one animal saved from an ugly death hung up in old barbed wire fencing will be worth the effort. The room to move freely will help to ensure that wildlife populations remain healthy and robust.

Our first volunteer outing is planned for Dec. 11, 2021. This is our annual celebration of National Public Lands Day. If you want to assist with this program, let us know. Even if you don't want to risk a few scrapes, we will find a job for you!



Photo by John Durham

Latest Status on Dreaded Desert Route for I-11

By Tom Hannagan

ADOT released its Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed I-11, on July 16, 2021. They allowed a mere 30 days for public comment on their report that ran over 5,000 pages, including attached maps and other background information.

The Tier 1 report kept the Avra Valley corridor as a preferred option, in spite of the overwhelming public rejection of this route option. The AV route, or “Western Option,” would run along the entire eastern flank of Ironwood Forest National Monument and separate it from other wildlife habitat, such as the Picacho Mountains to the north, the Tucson Mountain Range, and Saguaro National Park.

The Friends of Ironwood Forest (FIF) has opposed this route option and joined the chorus of protests by other stake holders against this option last year.

The first thing FIF and other concerned groups did was to protest the short comment period and ask for a 90-day extension. This was not granted by ADOT.

So, FIF banded with its conservation partners in the Tucson region to write new letters of protest to ADOT. We also asked for our friends, members, and supporters to do the same, and many of you did just that. Thank you for once again raising your voices to protect IFNM.

FIF also joined our conservation partners to ask for local and state political opposition to the western route option. Our current understanding of the infrastructure bill in Congress is that any funds for construction would require local support.

There have been local successes in this regard:

- The City of Tucson [re-affirmed their 2019 resolution](#) opposing any freeway in Avra Valley at their meeting on Aug. 10, 2021.
- The Town Council of Sahuarita formally opposed the West Option for I-11 at their meeting on Aug. 10, 2021 and [submitted a letter expressing this opposition on August 13, 2021](#).
- Pima County [adopted a resolution opposing any new freeway in Avra Valley](#) and the proposed I-11 West Option at their meeting on Aug. 16, 2021.

- A diverse array of community organizations submitted comments on the EIS opposing the I-11 West Option through Avra Valley. See below for links to these comment letters.
- FIF co-signed a letter with the Coalition for Protection of the Sonoran Desert and submitted a [detailed comment letter](#) which included some 24 other community and conservation organizations.
- Many of you submitted your own comment letters, and they will help to ultimately defeat the Western Option.
- FIF, with a small group of other activists, also met twice with the staff for Sen. Mark Kelly to express our opposition to the Western Option and asked him to intervene in any funding requests that might involve that route.

Besides the coalescence of opposition to the Avra Valley Route, there is some other good news. In the Tier 1 EIS, ADOT named two routes, the western route and collocation with the existing I-10 corridor, as “Preferred Alternatives.” Until this time, they only referred to the AV route as their only “Recommended Alternative”. This is significant, because it appears to make the two routes coequal, and it gives ADOT a way out of finally admitting the western route should not be done.

The other good news is that there is no more funding at this time for a Tier 2 EIS (let alone anything approaching construction). It is pretty obvious that it would cost less for ADOT to proceed with one route for their Tier 2 study and that they’d best select the I-10 corridor if they ever hope for any level of cooperation from local governmental units.

FIF will, of course, continue to watch this threat to IFNM very closely.

Something New This Way Comes

*Be watching for a new look to the newsletter in the spring edition. The Board of Directors have been working on a new masthead and name. If you have any ideas to make it a better experience, let us know. Send us an email to information@ironwoodforest.org
We’d like to hear your ideas.*



Wildlife Water in Ironwood Forest National Monument

by Joe Sheehey

The term “trophy hunting” certainly can incite negative responses in many people, and hunting bighorn sheep is often categorized as trophy hunting.

In Arizona, an individual can kill only one desert bighorn sheep in his or her lifetime. Hunters value the desert bighorn as a highly sought-after trophy. Arizona offers three different special tags each year, two for Desert bighorn and one for a Rocky Mountain bighorn.

Each year the revenue from the sale of these three tags goes into a special fund.

These funds enable the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) and the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society (ADBSS) to build and reconstruct water catchments that are used

primarily by bighorn sheep but certainly benefit many other critters as well.

Many water catchments in IFNM were built in the 1960s. They usually had a large concrete apron that funneled water into a 2,500 gallon storage tank, which fed a drinking trough. These were reliable as long as there were good rains. Starting in the 1990s, many of these catchments would go dry at the most critical time of the year because of the lack of rainfall.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department would have to haul water to them when they could free up the water tanker from Phoenix. Unfortunately, this resulted in catchments going dry just because of the limited resources the Department had to keep them full.

Some of these catchments were also badly in need of repair. There were leaking storage tanks, broken water lines to troughs, and roofs over storage tanks falling apart. The ones that were working still had only a 2,500-gallon capacity. They were eventually going to go dry.

In April of 1970, the AZGFD and six members of the ADBSS built a dam at the base of a sheer rock bluff on Wolcott Peak. Two mules were used to haul cement and water up to the site. I was a senior at the University of Arizona, and this was the first waterhole project I went on. It was cleaned out once after that I know of, but I have not been to it in several years.



In 1982 the AZGFD and the ADBSS built a catchment in the saddle northwest of Silverbell Peak. The material and manpower were all shuttled up there by helicopter. There was a large apron on the ground that drained into a gutter that went into a storage tank and a water trough. It was in a great location far up on the mountain and was well utilized by the bighorn sheep.

About 2009 we noticed the trough was not very full even after a good rainfall. A hike up to the site provided the answer to why. The gutter had holes in it, and the water line between the gutter and storage tank had pulled loose. Plans were made to put it on the next year's project schedule. In February of the following year, I flew up to the site with AZGFD employees, and we made temporary repairs. The following month IFNM had a good rain. I wanted to see how our repairs worked, so I hiked in. The trough was full. In the Spring of 2012, we installed a new apron and storage tank, and it is now not only one of the most reliable waters in IFNM but a critical water source for sheep.

In the spring of 1994, the AZGFD and ADBSS built a catchment on Ragged Top. Once again, the material and manpower were flown to the site by helicopter. This project involved building collection dams and running pipelines to above-ground storage tanks. This is a critical summer water for the sheep that live on Ragged Top.

I have had a camera at this site for three years, and in the dry summer months sheep visit it every day. In the Spring of 2019, we replaced a 4-foot section of pipe that had rusted and was leaking but other than that it's been great.

In April of 2005 Catchment #880 in the west Silverbells was redeveloped by the same two groups. This was a tin apron on top of a 2,500-gallon storage tank with a 100' water line going to an old bathtub.

The timbers supporting the tin apron were rotting and not supporting the apron, and the water line to the bathtub had a break. A 5,000-gallon storage tank was buried south of the old one and a 6-inch pipe was run from a collection point to the tank. The collection dam never did provide enough water so that the trough always had adequate water in it. This catchment can be driven to but still needed to be filled twice a year. Last spring, we installed a 72-foot apron on it, and it should be a lot more reliable.

Three weeks ago, I went out with the AZGFD and we put 1,000 gallons in it. It was almost full when we arrived. Sheep are using it. Having reliable waters in the west Silverbells will hopefully keep more sheep there on a permanent basis.

In March of 2007, the AZGFD and ADBSS constructed the Waterman catchment. Except for occasional water at the Pioneer Pit, there was not any permanent water in the Watermans. This was built with two 2,500-gallon storage tanks fed by two water collection points. Sheep found this water immediately.

In August of that year Tucson received a good monsoon storm. I went out the weekend after the storm to see how full the trough was. I was surprised when I saw the trough was only half full. I figured one or both of the collection points were plugged up, so I started walking up the pipeline.

The first collection point looked fine, but when I looked down at the storage tanks, there was a huge hole in the side of one of them. Upon further investigation I saw a boulder had gone

right through the side of the tank. We got a crew of volunteers together, got the boulder out, and patched the tank. This catchment had to be filled by helicopter a few times over the years but never went completely dry, although it almost did too many times. Eventually the storage tanks failed, and a new ring tank was installed.

Last spring, we installed a 96-foot apron on top of the storage tanks to collect more water, and it will probably never have to be filled again. When I went to retrieve my camera card there last August, there were 21 sheep near the water.

In April of 2009, the Tucson Chapter of the Safari Club funded a water project on the south-east side of the Silverbell mountains. The labor was provided by AZGFD and ADBSS. It was built next to the existing Catchment #694. The new catchment is a ring tank with an apron on top of it and a new trough. Having this one next to the old concrete apron catchment keeps water for a lot of wildlife.

In January of 2015, another west Silverbell catchment was redeveloped. Catchment #676 was a concrete apron with a tin roof over the storage tank. The timbers were rotten and falling into the storage tank. Although we filled this several times over the years, the evaporation rate made it unreliable. In the redevelopment, four 2,500-gallon storage tanks were buried with an apron on top of them. A new trough was installed, and I do not believe this water has gone dry since. A few weeks ago, it was almost full.

In the Spring of 2019, a new catchment was installed at Solo Peak. This was a 10,000-gallon vault and a new trough. This project was built with ADBSS labor and involved four separate

weekend work events, as well as several days of subcontractor work laying block and running a backhoe. This was built next to the 2,500-gallon existing concrete apron catchment. The old trough was drained, cleaned and resealed. I had a camera at this site and did get a picture of a ram before my camera was stolen. This ram was ear tagged during the 2014 disease study. I have pictures of him at two other catchments as well.

In 2020 a new catchment was built next to #678 behind the Woodin Ranch. The existing catchment is a concrete apron with a 2,500-gallon storage tank. It had to be filled at least once every summer. This was difficult because the road was too rough for a water tanker, so water was shuttled by a truck with a 200-gallon tank. The new catchment built next to the old one has four 2,500-gallon storage tanks with a 96-foot apron on top of them. The new trough was full three weeks ago, and the old one had 14 inches of water in it. There is occasional sheep use at this site, but it seems to attract a lot of other wildlife as well.

There are three more AZGFD catchments in IFNM, one in the Pan Quemados and two in the Roskrige mountains. All three were built in the 1960s and will be redeveloped in the future. All three have to be manually filled at least twice a year, and all three have a lot of wildlife use and are important water sources.

Whether you approve of sheep hunting or not, the rewards we all reap from the sale of those three special tags benefit all wildlife and sheep in particular. That \$600,000 dollars from three special tags buys a lot of water and has no impact on the resource.



All photos by the author

The Friends donated \$1,000 to the Arizona Big Horn Sheep Society to be used to replenish water in the catchments in IFNM. This donation was made before the big monsoon rains, when the desert and the animals it supports were in desperate need of water. This is a project that truly benefits IFNM and the animals that live there. We are honored to be a part of this worthy endeavor and thank all of you who donate to us. It is because of your financial support that we are able to do the work we do that benefits IFNM directly and all of us who love it. Thank you!

The Ironwood Gallery

Send us your favorite photographs of IFNM.

Summer monsoons in 2021 created a garden-like desert, inspiring these pictures.



Photos by Jim Avramis

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

FIF provides critical volunteer labor for projects on the Monument, works with the Bureau of Land Management and many other partners, and strives to increase community awareness through education, public outreach, and advocacy.

Your Financial Contributions at Work

We care about IFNM. We hope you do too. We rely on the financial support of folks like you (we call them Friends) to help us with our mission of protecting the resources of IFNM, enhancing the visitor experience there, and creating awareness.

Please join FIF today. Become a "friend." We suggest a donation of \$35, but any donation helps us with efforts.

Contribute on line with a credit card at:

www.ironwoodforest.org

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