

THE  
**FUTURE**  
OF  
**AMERICA'S**  
**NATIONAL**  
**PARKS**

First Annual  
Centennial Strategy for

# Saguaro National Park

August 2007

CENTENNIAL INITIATIVE



Site: SAGU

Year: 2007

**Vision Statement**

Saguaro National Park, established in 1933, protects a superb example of Sonoran Desert ecosystem, featuring exceptional stands of saguaro cacti, important wildlife habitat, critical riparian areas, and associated mountains. The park also protects significant cultural resources, including archeological sites, as well as places important to American Indian cultural traditions, and historic period structures. This 91,000 acre park protects designated wilderness and the associated qualities of solitude, natural quiet and scenic vistas. Visitors have the opportunity to understand and enjoy Saguaro National Park in a manner that is compatible with the preservation of park resources and wilderness character.

Saguaro is faced with significant external factors that affect the future of the park. Population growth in Tucson is soaring and the park is becoming a protected island in a sea of development. Fragmentation of the landscape is compounded by roads and traffic which threaten wildlife and bring in invasive non-native plants. Recreational pressures are increasing as residents demand more and different opportunities from the diminishing open space available in the region.

Our vision for Saguaro National Park is that it remains a priceless American treasure with intact natural and cultural resources. We will provide traditional learning experiences through excellent visitor center exhibits and will work with underserved schools to help create an understanding in students and teachers of the importance of national parks. We will expand our outreach efforts to encourage non-traditional and traditional park visitors to see themselves in park stories. We will demonstrate environmental and recreational leadership by providing opportunities to experience the park in a way that protects the resource and is financially sustainable. We will strive to provide an atmosphere where visitors and employees feel safe and secure. We will use science to respond to changing conditions and to manage the park effectively including the removal of non-native plants that threaten the Sonoran Desert ecosystem. We will care for our infrastructure using sustainable and environmentally sound techniques and materials that provide opportunities for engaging the community in learning how to reduce impacts to our precious resources keeping in mind the problems of global climate change. Most importantly our vision is to protect and preserve Saguaro National Park for this and future generations.

**Park/ Superintendent/ Program Manager**

Sarah Craighead

Site: SAGU

**STEWARDSHIP**

**Improve the condition of park resources and assets.**

**Restore native habitats by controlling invasive species and reintroducing key plant and animal species.**

Invasive non-native plants, particularly Buffleggrass, have the potential to transform the Sonoran Desert into a flammable grassland causing the permanent demise of Saguaro Cactus and other key desert species. Buffleggrass alters ecosystem structure and function, physically crowding native species, and increasing fire frequency in Sonoran plant ecosystems not adapted to fire. Over time plants that are characteristic of the desert southwest will be replaced by non-native grasslands, as has already occurred in Mexico. Buffleggrass removal is a high priority for park staff who work closely with many partners in southern Arizona to make a significant landscape scale impact on controlling Buffleggrass. Park staff and partners will develop a detailed implementation plan, define priority ecological restoration needs, and coordinate treatment efforts.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: SAGU

**ENVIRONMENT**

**Inspire an environmental conscience in Americans.**

**Demonstrate environmental excellence through increased use of alternative energy and fuels at every park.**

As a National Park, Saguaro has an obligation to be a leader in sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. The park has already implemented several programs which have reduced energy and water consumption, require the use of least impact chemicals, utilize alternative fuels, incorporate "green" design elements in buildings, and reduced the waste stream to our land fill.

We will continue to utilize "green" products, energy efficient appliances, sustainable design, recycled products, and low impact techniques in our daily operations and when we are developing new projects for the park. Park staff will work to develop a program to inform the public about how the park reduces wastes and conserves energy and educate them on ways they can apply these methods at home.

The climate of the Sonoran desert is ideal for the use of photovoltaic panels for power generation. The park will continue investigations into how we can best utilize this clean energy source.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: SAGU

**RECREATION**

- Encourage collaboration among and assist park and recreation systems at every level—federal, regional, state, local—to help build an outdoor recreation network accessible to all Americans.
- Rehabilitate over 2,000 miles of trails within or connected to national parks, including trails accessible to those with disabilities.

Park Trails are critical park assets and are essential for connecting visitors with Saguaro National Park. Park staff will implement the new Comprehensive Trails Plan by adding trails, removing unsustainable and redundant trails, improving trailheads, and adding accessibility trails. Crews will realign trail segments creating a sustainable trail system, reconstruct and preserve historic trail structures, and perform critical deferred maintenance. Trailheads will be reconstructed to provide safer and more accessible parking as well as needed sanitary facilities. Additional trail mileage will be built in partnership with local trails organizations. This project addresses local demand for trail use as well as adequately protecting park resources within the park.

- The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: SAGU

**EDUCATION**

- Promote life-long learning to connect generations through park experiences.
- Enroll an additional two million children in the Junior Ranger program.

Saguaro has a unique opportunity to engage teachers and students to park resources because of its proximity to a large urban population. The two districts of Saguaro sit on opposite ends of the city and most Tucson schools can reach one of those districts in less than 30 minutes, some in much less time. The park will increase its efforts to engage children through educational and Junior Ranger programs both through direct recruiting and also use of the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program which provides unlimited potential to engage teachers, and thus their students, with the park. Saguaro will be a leader in the Junior Ranger program through these efforts and by looking at non-traditional ways to provide those services that connects with the local population and diverse demographic.

- The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: SAGU

**EDUCATION**

**Impart to every American a sense of their citizen ownership of their national parks.**

**Increase visitors' satisfaction, understanding, and appreciation of the parks they visit.**

Visitor Center exhibits are an excellent method of orienting, informing, and educating park visitors. They provide resource protection, safety, orientation, education, and interpretive messages that clearly connect visitors to the resources and help them understand the deeper meaning of the importance of that resource. We will replace the 40 year old exhibits in the park's Rincon Mountain Visitor Center. The exhibits are now older than many of the visitors that we serve, particularly the youth that we need to target. The park's performance result for visitor understanding continues to show that we are not adequately educating our visitors and part of that rating can be directly attributed to poor Visitor Center exhibits. The Friends of Saguaro National Park are actively engaged in fund raising activities so that the exhibits can be produced professionally. We have entered into a partnership with the Arizona State Museum to plan, design, fabricate and install new exhibits. The exhibits will be produced as funding becomes available.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: SAGU

**PROFESSIONALISM**

**Make national parks the first choice in philanthropic giving among those concerned about environmental, cultural, and recreational values.**

**Improve communications and marketing capacity to increase public understanding of our mission, opportunities, and benefits.**

Although Saguaro exists in the diverse community of Tucson, Arizona with almost 50% Hispanic demographic, park visitors are underrepresented in this population. The park developed a Communication and Outreach Plan and has begun partnerships efforts to serve this community more effectively. These efforts will continue through a variety of ways of marketing the park and communicating with diverse communities to connect all Americans with their national parks.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS