



MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Leslie Liberti
Office of Conservation and Sustainable Development
(520) 791-4675

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TTY: (520) 791-2639
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CITY, U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE, AND U OF A PARTNER TO CONTROL SPREAD OF BUFFELGRASS

Tucson's Mayor and Council have approved an intergovernmental agreement between the City of Tucson, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the University of Arizona (UA) for a cooperative effort to control buffelgrass on Sentinel Peak Park ("A" Mountain) and Tumamoc Hill. Funding from USFWS will be used to help with the control efforts of this highly invasive exotic grass on City-owned land, which includes Sentinel Peak ("A" Mountain) and the adjacent Mission Gardens property. As part of this effort, Pima County has allocated funding through the Starr Pass Environmental Enhancement fund to assist the UA in controlling buffelgrass on Tumamoc Hill and map and predict the spread of buffelgrass in the Tucson area.

Buffelgrass was introduced in the Tucson area as early as the 1930s and began rapidly expanding in the late 1980s. Native to Africa, buffelgrass has caused serious environmental and public safety problems in the United States and Mexico. It has become a highly invasive weed in Southern Arizona and was assigned to Arizona's Noxious Weed List in 2004. Buffelgrass forms monocultures quickly, crowding out native species and destroying the natural vegetation that characterizes our region and attracts tourism and development. Buffelgrass displaces native plants and animals and their habitats by competing for space, sunlight, moisture, and nutrients. Buffelgrass now forms large and dense colonies on the focus area of "A"-Mountain and on Tumamoc Hill, west of downtown Tucson.

A more immediate issue is that buffelgrass is fire-adapted and benefits from fire. When wildfires do occur, buffelgrass stands burn exceedingly hot. The Sonoran Desert plant community is not adapted to fire, and a hot fire will kill many of the desert native plants, including saguaros, ocotillos, palo verde and ironwood trees. These hot fires are an obvious safety concern for nearby residents.

Although several localized efforts have been organized to control buffelgrass on a small scale, to date no regional, large scale, cross-jurisdictional efforts have been attempted to remove buffelgrass from large tracts of land until now. The City of Tucson, the USFWS, the UA, Pima County, and the Starr Pass Marriott Resort are collaborating to control buffelgrass on "A"-Mountain and Tumamoc Hill. This project will compliment ongoing buffelgrass control efforts including those of Pima Community College, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, Saguaro National Park, Tucson Mountain Park, Pima County Flood Control, Arizona Department of Transportation, and Tucson Clean & Beautiful, as well as those of surrounding neighborhood associations.



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This project will include treating the buffelgrass with an herbicide, glyphosate (e.g. Roundup Pro), in the form of a liquid spray. USFWS has undertaken a contaminant study, which determined that the potential for environmental damage of not controlling the buffelgrass outweighs the potential negative effects of herbicide application. Application methods and herbicide formulations will follow those used in Saguaro National Park, which undertook a similar environmental study prior to herbicide application. Because a high density of cultural resources occurs on these properties, the project managers will take every precaution to ensure that these resources are protected. The spraying is most effective when buffelgrass is greenest after sustained summer rains and can fully absorb the herbicide, most likely in August or early September. A blue dye is applied to mark buffelgrass stands as they are treated, which will temporarily give "A" Mountain and Tumamoc Hill a blue tinge after spraying.

A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) on the project is available for 30-day public comment from June 22 to July 21, 2006. The EA is located at the Tucson-Pima Main Library and online at www.fws.gov/arizonaes and www.tucsonaz.gov. Comments on the EA may be submitted to the USFWS 2321 W. Royal Palm Road, Suite 103 – Phoenix Arizona 85021.

Surrounding neighborhood associations interested in a representative attending a meeting to provide additional information on the project are encouraged to contact the Office of Conservation and Sustainable Development at 791-4675.

For general information about buffelgrass and invasive species in the Sonoran Desert or about ongoing invasive species control efforts at the Desert Laboratory, contact Travis Bean, University of Arizona Desert Laboratory, at 520 629-9455, x104, or at <bean@email.arizona.edu>. Access information on buffelgrass invasion and control directly at <http://www.paztcn.wr.usgs.gov/buffelgrass>, http://aznps.org/html/exotics_weedwackers.html, or http://www.desertmuseum.org/invaders/invaders_buffelgrass.htm

Note to media. Contact Lupita Valencia, Office of Conservation and Sustainable Development, at (520) 791-4675 or at <Lupita.Valencia@tucsonaz.gov> to:

- ◆ Receive more information on buffelgrass and a copy of the Intergovernmental Agreement between the City of Tucson, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the University of Arizona by fax or by email.
- ◆ Make arrangements for interviews and site visits during buffelgrass eradication.

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