

Title: Improvement project closes Cactus Loop for 4 months
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Byline: Tim Ellis, ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Hikers and bikers will have to wait four months before they'll be able to get back on **Cactus Forest Drive** in **Saguaro National Park East**.

Park officials closed the popular, hilly, curvy, scenic 8.4-mile loop road Monday for a four-month project to rebuild the crumbling roadway.

All trails within **Cactus Forest Loop Drive**, including the Freeman Homestead Trail, will be closed through September, park officials said.

The Javelina Picnic Area will be closed, but picnickers can still get to the Mica View Picnic Area if they don't mind the one-mile hike from the trailhead on East Broadway, said Meg Weesner, chief of science and resources management at the park.

Access to the picnic area also is available from the trailhead off East Speedway, but that's about three miles longer, she said.

Trails leading beyond the picnic area and elsewhere around the park will be closed to hikers and cyclists, Weesner said.

"We don't want people walking into the area where heavy equipment is operating," she said.

Picnickers may prefer going to **Saguaro National Park West**, the part of the park located west of Tucson.

"It has four picnic areas that can be driven to and one that's about a mile's hike from the trailhead," she said.

Crews will remove cacti and other vegetation from areas alongside the road before work gets under way to minimize the impact of the project, said Susan Early, the park's chief of administration.

Thomas Puto, project manager with the Federal Highway Administration, said Granite Construction was awarded the \$2 million contract to reconstruct the roadway, improve drainage and parking and build 12 new roadside interpretive exhibits.

The project should be completed in September, and **Cactus Forest Drive** will reopen by Oct. 1, Puto said.

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Details, directions

* To find out how to get from the East Speedway or East Broadway trailheads to Mica View Picnic Area, call **Saguaro National Park East's** visitor center at 733-5153.

* For information about picnic areas and trails in **Saguaro National Park West**, call 733-5158

* Send growth story ideas reporter Tim Ellis at 807-8414 or at tellis@azstarnet.com.

CAPTION(S):

Chris Richards / Arizona Daily Star 2004 - The Cactus Forest Loop Trail , located in Saguaro National Park East, is a multi-use trail that is great for beginners and is one of the few trails in a national park open to mountain cyclists.

Tim Ellis, ARIZONA DAILY STAR

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