

Title: Interview: Carianne Funicelli discusses study to determine the success rate of transplanting saguaro cacti
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Full Text:

MARGOT ADLER, host:

In much of southern Arizona, **saguaro** are more common as trees. The **saguaro** is a tall, upright cactus with arms that curve upward to the sky. It can grow higher than 40 feet and can live up to 200 years. As human development encroaches on **saguaro** habitat, researchers are studying how the cacti hold up when transplanted. Carianne Funicelli is a vegetation ecologist with the Harris Environmental Group, a firm in its seventh year of a 10-year study. She says the **saguaro** is an icon of the American West.

Ms. CARIANNE FUNICELLI (Vegetation Ecologist, Harris Environmental Group): They're prominently featured in all the Old West movies and Bugs Bunny cartoons, and they also figure very prominently in the Native American culture here. You know, and people really relate to them. And if you've ever been in a place covered with a hillside of **saguaro**s, I mean it really can look like people out there.

ADLER: Now you did this study--or actually, you didn't do it; you're in the midst of it. And you're looking at 1,000 **saguaro**s.

Ms. FUNICELLI: We have 1,000 **saguaro**s that are located in a development that is a housing development and a golf course and there's a wilderness area right on the northern boundary. During the course of development, over 2,500 **saguaro**s were transplanted. We're looking at 1,000. Eight hundred of them are transplants; 100 of them have been left in place; and then we have yet another 100 that are in a natural population actually up in the wilderness area, and that allows us to compare the effects of transplanting.

ADLER: And so far I gather the findings were better than you expected.

Ms. FUNICELLI: Well, I'm not so sure. There are two things that really stand out, and that's that survival rates of the transplants and the ones that are left in place are lower in the urban development than they are in the natural setting, as we expected; and also, that taller **saguaro**s are less likely to survive. Specifically, what we found: that **saguaro**s up to five meters tall have about 80 percent success rates so far. We have an intermediate-sized class of five to seven meters, and success drops to 60 percent. And over seven meters, it drops to 40 percent.

ADLER: Now the flower is the official state flower of Arizona, right, the blossom?

Ms. FUNICELLI: Yes, it is.

ADLER: And does that mean that **saguaro**s are protected?

Ms. FUNICELLI: Yes. Lots of native plants in Arizona are protected, and it really varies, depending on your jurisdiction, which plants and what the actual regulations are. In Tucson, for **saguaro**s specifically, 50 percent of all viable plants have to be either salvaged and transplanted or preserved in place when you're doing a development in their habitat.

ADLER: And what was our policy in the past?

Ms. FUNICELLI: I've heard anecdotes from people who say that growing up they would recall seeing just, you know, piles of **saguaro**s lying around. When people would clear lots, they would just, you know, bulldoze them and leave them to rot.

And it's a pretty interesting process moving a **saguaro**. They dig the **saguaro** out and they leave a radius of about two meters for the roots and they sort of lay it down on this hydraulic truck and move it to where it needs to go and sort of put it right back in.

ADLER: Well, thank you so much for speaking with us.

Ms. FUNICELLI: Oh, you're very welcome. It's my pleasure.

ADLER: Carianne Funicelli is a vegetation ecologist with the Harris Environmental Group. She spoke with us from Tucson, Arizona.

(Soundbite of music)

JOHN YDSTIE (Host): This is ALL THINGS CONSIDERED from NPR News.

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