

✓
AZ Daily Star (Tucson) 6/15/1995

B1

Saguaros in burned-over Sabino area will be tagged, have progress watched

By Douglas Kreutz
The Arizona Daily Star

Researchers plan to tag and monitor saguaro cacti scorched in the recent Sabino Canyon fire to evaluate the species' ability to recover after a blaze.

The human-caused fire burned about 500 acres on Saddleback Ridge between Sabino and Bear canyons from June 1 to 3.

"It's hard to immediately tell the effect of a fire like this on saguaros," said Ted Moore, fire management officer for the U.S. Forest Service. The agency manages the scenic canyon northeast of Tucson.

"A saguaro may hold on for several years after a fire and then die," Moore said. "It's also likely that some will recover."

"We're going to tag the saguaros in the burned area and go back on a yearly basis to see how they're doing."

Moore said scores of saguaros were growing in the area blackened by the blaze, but he said an

exact count won't be available until the tagging is completed in two or three weeks.

He said saguaros in the area might have been especially vulnerable to the effects of fire because red brome grass, which often grows in thick clumps around the bases of the giant cacti, was plentiful on Saddleback Ridge.

"This grass provides extra fuel around the base of saguaros," Moore said. "Because of the hot fire caused when these grasses burn, we could lose some of the saguaros."

Moore said other desert plants - including mesquite trees, acacias and scrub oak plants - are likely to recover from the fire.

"Unless it's a very, very intense fire that just totally fries the root system, that kind of vegetation will come back two or three years later," Moore said. "The mesquites and oaks that were burned may appear dead. But the root systems will resprout, and the plants will come

back up."

After the fire was put under control by 200 firefighters assisted by three air tankers and two helicopters, crews reseeded a 300-yard-long fire line with native grasses, Moore said.

He said the crews also constructed earthen "check bars" on fire line slopes to divert water flows and limit erosion.

Forest Service officials said it appears the fire was sufficiently slow-moving that most wild animals escaped the flames.

"The fire was beneficial in that it removed a lot of the undesirable underbrush - vegetation that was just getting too thick," Moore said. "By thinning that out, it made the area easier for wildlife and recreationists to move through."

Moore said investigators determined the fire was caused by one or more people because there was no lightning in the area at the time.

(text below photo of saguaro)



Benjie Sanders, The Arizona Daily Star

"A saguaro may hold on for years after a fire and then die," says Moore of the Forest Service