

Volunteers improve wildlife corridors in Saguaro National Park.

Tucson, AZ -- This weekend volunteers from across the Tucson area will work together to remove or replace old fence restricting wildlife movement within the western Tucson Mountain District of Saguaro National Park, to improve conditions for deer, bighorn sheep, and other large migrating animals.

“Many studies have shown that barbed wire fences can stop large animals, change their movement patterns, and keep them away from water and food sources they need to survive,” says Don Swann, a biologist at Saguaro National Park. “Animals can also be killed trying to jump over a barbed wire fence if they become entangled and are not able to free themselves.”

Swann continues, “This project was inspired by two young desert bighorn sheep crossing the Central Arizona Project canal and Tucson Mitigation Corridor to enter the park in 2016. It became a priority for the park and our neighboring park partners to remove barriers and encourage these movements.”

Of particular concern are the wildlife corridors between Saguaro National Park, Tucson Mountain Park, the Tohono O’odham Nation, and Ironwood Forest National Monument. These corridors are the pathways that allow migrating animals to move between the protected lands.

Where fences are still necessary to control livestock, volunteers will make them “wildlife friendly” by converting the top and bottom wires in the fence from barbed to smooth wire, and lowering the top wire, as recommended by the Arizona Game and Fish Department. This kind of fence will still restrict the movement of cattle, but not of deer or other large mammals which crawl under or jump over the fence.

Partners in this project include the Friends of Ironwood Forest, Friends of Saguaro National Park, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection, Friends of Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, Tucson Audubon Society, Arizona Wildlife Federation, and others.

“Wild animals don’t recognize boundaries and many species need to be able to migrate for their survival. We are dedicated to protecting animals in the park and to help them as much as we can,” says Swann.

This weekend’s event has sufficient help lined up, but the partners plan to remove additional fences in Avra Valley, which may take several years.

If you would like to volunteer for the next Avra Valley fence removal event on March 10-12, please contact Carolyn Campbell at the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection at Carolyn.Campbell@sonorandesert.org.

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