

INFO FOR PRESS KIT -- 1st DRAFT

NATURAL RESOURCES

Vegetation and many wildlife species reflect the **tropical origins** of the Sonoran Desert. Our columnar cacti – saguaro, organ pipe and senita – are all tropical. Saguaro grows here and in other parts of southern Arizona. On this side of the international border, organ pipe and senita cactus grow primarily within monument boundaries (They are common in Mexico). All these cacti are cold-sensitive. Their range is dictated primarily by temperature. Saguaro can tolerate several hours of sub-freezing temperature, senita cannot tolerate any freezing, and organ pipe is somewhere in between these two extremes.

Other **plants** such as limberbush also indicate tropical origins. (Sue, help, please) Elevation changes, soil types and temperatures encourage a variety of vascular (non-succulent) plants; over 550 species have been noted within the monument boundaries. Common species include mesquite, palo verde and iron wood trees. Brittlebush, creosote, triangle-leaf bursage and ocotillo are common plants. Secluded canyons of the Ajo Mountains hold remnants of ice-age forests, including Ajo oaks, rosewood and one-seed juniper.

Wildlife is adapted to the extremes of high temperatures and little water. From small insects and arthropods to large mammals, most creatures are nocturnal. Coyote is common. Javelina (collared peccary) is an unusual sighting. Mammals range from mountain lion to black-tailed jackrabbit, cottontails, and an abundance of small rodents such as mice and the famous pack rat and kangaroo rat. These rats are so adapted to arid conditions that they obtain all the water they need from the food they eat; they do not need to drink free-standing water.

Reptiles are plentiful throughout the summer months; most hibernate in winter. We have 43 species of reptiles, 16 of which are lizards, including the Gila monster. Desert tortoise are fairly common sightings in early spring. Warm spring temperatures also bring out the snakes. Common sightings range from the harmless gopher snake and coachwhip to the venomous western diamondback rattlesnake.

Amphibians include two species of toads which are seen primarily during the summer monsoon season. Two species of mud turtles are restricted to Quitobaquito springs.

Birders come from around the world to observe our Sonoran Desert specialties. We have a variety of habitats ranging from desert riparian canyons to dry creosote flats and windy juniper-clad mountain tops. These varied habitats host a variety of birds totaling over 270 species. Nearly everyone's favorite, Gambel's quail, is a guaranteed sighting any time of year, as are Gila woodpeckers, cactus wrens and curve-billed thrashers. Cardinals are common. Spring bird migration begins as early as late February and usually peaks by late April. Common migrants are black-headed grosbeaks, western tanagers, Lazuli buntings,

and assortment of warblers. The desert-adapted Scotts oriole is a summer resident. By mid-August we begin to see early fall migration.

T&E species, Species of Concern
Ask tim and sue

CULTURAL RESOURCES

The monument preserves a rich archaeological record, with documented human use for the last 10,000 years. Today, our heritage is truly tri-cultural. We have sites ranging from Hohokam to modern O'odham (formerly Papago), Mexican and Anglo.

Hohokam used this valley as a trade route and established family camps as they seasonally hunted and gathered wild foods. Their descendants, the O'odham, also used this valley as they too seasonally hunted, gathered wild foods, and farmed. Modern O'odham live in nearby communities and continue their traditions; they come periodically to gather wild foods or hold private ceremonial events.

Although we are unsure of the exact route, we know that Captain Melchoir Diaz of the famous **Coronado Expedition** passed through here in 1540. The famous explorer/priest Father Eusebio Francisco Kino traveled throughout this area, eventually establishing the infamous and treacherous Camino del Diablo- the Devil's Highway. The Camino passes through a corner of the present day monument. **Mexican and Anglo** prospectors found enough trace minerals to begin mining in the early 1880; they intermittently worked a variety of gold, silver or copper mines until the areas received wilderness designation in 1977.

Anglo ranchers moved into the area in the early 1900s. Cattle ranching was established within future monument boundaries and continued until the mid 1970s. Today the monument preserves ancient Native American sites, old mine sites and ranch buildings. Our place names and monument signage may be English, Spanish, or O'odham.

THE INTERNATIONAL BORDER

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument shares 33 miles of international border with Mexico. Many US citizens in Southern Arizona have relatives across the line in the Mexican state of Sonora. People may live in one country and work in the other. International travel for local family visits, shopping, employment, commerce and recreation are part of the daily traffic on AZ Hwy #85 that bisects the monument. Traffic increases considerably on weekends, as recreationists in the metropolitan areas of Phoenix and Tucson head for the beach resorts at Puerto Peñasco (Rocky Point), Mexico. International traffic totals approximately 30,000 vehicle crossings per month.

The world often views America as the land of opportunity, and many of those living in impoverished countries want to experience that opportunity and earn their share of the

American dream. Name a nationality or an ethnicity and they have come, legally and illegally, from around the world to fulfill that dream. America has always had illegal workers; they will continue to come, most for honest work.

The high volume of undocumented immigrants passing through Organ Pipe Cactus damage the fragile ecosystem the monument was established to protect. Their needs are not our needs. Human survival is their most basic need. They walk for hours, often in the relative cool of the night, then rest under the protection of desert trees, the very same places where young cactus get their start. They collect wood and make small fires to warm themselves or a few tortillas; these same fires escape and burn a fire intolerant desert. They quickly deplete any small water source; wildlife goes thirsty. They use slow moving desert tortoise as dinner. They discard empty containers, worn out or useless clothing and other items. Their trails become well marked.

Others come by the vehicle load, bringing contraband for the drug market. A very small percentage comes north to escape the Mexican law or to continue their criminal activity in the land of opportunity. As the drug traffic increased, the smugglers viewed Hwy #85 as a route to their distribution points in major cities. As more and more contraband-loaded vehicles avoided the official port of entry and drove across wilderness areas, they severely damaged the fragile ecosystem with a plethora of illegal roads, abandoned vehicles and trash.

The situation came to a head on August 9, 2002 when, in a drug-related scenario on the international border, criminals hired by the Mexican drug cartel ambushed and killed law enforcement Park Ranger Kris Eggle. Kris will be in our hearts and minds forever, but he not die in vain. His death brought the nation's attention to drug trafficking and illegal entry along the international border.

Kris' blood was enough. Tears and sweat followed as many, many people successfully lobbied Congress to *do something*. When it acted, Congress delegated \$18 million for construction of a vehicle barrier across Organ Pipe's section of international boundary. More sweat followed as the barrier was constructed. By August 2006 the project was completed. Today, that vehicle barrier is highly successful in keeping out illegal vehicles, yet still allows wildlife - and people - to freely cross our southern boundary. The vehicle barrier has proved so successful that Organ Pipe's neighbors, Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge to the west and the Tohono O'odham Nation to the east are constructing their own similar vehicle barriers.

Many federal agencies have control over vast sections of the Sonoran Desert. They may have resources and problems similar to those at Organ Pipe, but each agency has a different Congressional mandate for its respective jurisdiction. National Park Service staff works in cooperation with these other agencies, such as DHS/BP, Customs, Pima County Sheriff's Office, TO Nation and others. Nevertheless, many decisions or situations are beyond monument control. Such is the situation with the pedestrian fence currently being constructed near Lukeville. For information regarding this fence, please contact-----.

