



Saguaro National Park News Release

For Immediate Release

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Giving Back To Get Ahead

Volunteers Follow Conservation Ethic to Saguaro National Park

Tucson, AZ – In today's economy, hands-on internships can make a real difference for young professionals – and those same young people can make a real difference through national service. That's why Justin Kolb and Mike Montalvo, interns with the Student Conservation Association (SCA), have been working at Saguaro National Park. Since arriving this past July, some of their duties have included combating buffelgrass, an invasive plant that threatens the local ecology, and educating the public on the actions being taken and how they can get involved.

Kolb, 26 of Souderton, PA and Montalvo, 19 of Cypress, TX are two of more than 4,200 SCA members helping to protect and restore America's public lands this year. The SCA is the only national organization that develops tomorrow's conservation leaders by providing high school and college students with conservation service opportunities in all 50 states, from urban communities to national parks and forests. More than 50,000 young people have served with the SCA since 1957 and as needs outpace budgets, the efforts of SCA members are more important than ever. Former National Park Service Director Fran Minella once stated "we can't do without the SCA." Saguaro's Chief Ranger, Bob Love, adds "We rely heavily on our SCA Interns, and are consistently impressed with the character and quality of the individuals SCA attracts."

According to Kolb, "As a recent college graduate in an economy that offers few opportunities for those without first-hand field experience, the SCA has provided me with a chance to build my skill set and expose me to people, organizations, and conservation projects that I otherwise could have only read about. Mike and I are currently working as members of a crew made up of park employees, contract workers, and volunteers from the community to manage buffelgrass, along with other invasive grasses, through herbicide treatment and manual removal. Buffelgrass in particular is such an imminent threat to local vegetation because it promotes extremely hot fire in an ecosystem that is ill equipped to recover from such an event. Education remains at the root of resolving this crisis and will eventually contribute to the recovery of the Sonoran Desert as much as the physical labor that we are directly contributing to buffelgrass control. Saguaro National Park and the city of Tucson have been doing an amazing job of educating the public on this issue and I can only hope that through our continued efforts, we can instill a sense of urgency in everyone that appreciates the beauty of the Sonoran desert. I think that the take home message is that even one plant left unchecked has the potential to spread like wildfire."

SCA members hone a "conservation ethic" through their service, to the benefit of both the land and the individual. SCA experience leads a majority of members to become lifelong stewards and 60% of SCA interns go on to lead successful careers in the conservation field.

The SCA is a nationwide conservation force of college and high school-aged members who serve America's parks, forests, refuges, seashores and communities. For more than 50 years, the SCA's active, hands-on practice of conservation service has helped to develop a new generation of conservation leaders, inspire lifelong stewardship, and save the planet. The SCA is a non-profit headquartered in Charlestown, NH with regional offices in Washington D.C., Oakland, Pittsburgh and Seattle. For more information about the SCA, visit their website at www.thesca.org, or contact Kevin Hamilton at (603) 543-1700, extension 185.

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