



## Saguaro National Park News Release

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Contact: Scott Stonum, 520-733-5170

### **SAGUARO NATIONAL PARK BEGINS AERIAL MAPPING OF BUFFELGRASS**

*Tucson, AZ* – Saguaro National Park will be mapping buffelgrass, within park boundaries in both the Tucson Mountain (west) and Rincon Mountain (east) Districts using a helicopter. This aerial mapping is scheduled to begin the week of September 10. The helicopter will be flying slowly at low-levels, along park boundaries and up to 5,000 feet in elevation, to map infested areas. Mappers will utilize Global Positioning System and Geographic Information System to digitize buffelgrass patches on a computer while flying.

This is a repeat of an aerial survey for buffelgrass, first conducted in November 2008. The objectives of this effort include documenting the distribution and quantity of buffelgrass, estimating the growth and spread of buffelgrass within the park and prioritizing treatment of infested areas. The ultimate goal is to protect the natural and cultural resources for which the park was established.

Saguaro National Park staff and volunteers have been battling buffelgrass by hand-pulling and spraying herbicide from backpack sprayers. This is time intensive and as buffelgrass continues to spread into higher and steeper areas, mapping the invasive species on the ground is becoming more difficult or unsafe. Utilizing a digital aerial sketch mapping (DASM) system which was developed by the US Forest Service (USFS) Remote Sensing Applications Center and USFS Forest Health Technology Enterprise Team, buffelgrass can be mapped from the air, quickly, safely and less costly than by field crews on foot.

Buffelgrass is an aggressive, non-native grass that is competing with native Sonoran Desert vegetation including the iconic saguaro cactus. Research on buffelgrass indicates that native plant diversity decreases as buffelgrass increases in an area. Buffelgrass also provides fuel for wildfires that can harm native plant and animal species. The continuous spread of buffelgrass is a serious threat to biological conservation efforts and the impacts from buffelgrass fires will pose an increasing threat to public safety and property. Buffelgrass is classified as a noxious weed by the state of Arizona.

This mapping effort is supported though competitive National Park Service funds and the schedule of flights is subject to change due to helicopter availability or weather.

For information about buffelgrass or the digital system being used to map, please visit these websites:  
Saguaro National Park: <http://www.nps.gov/sagu/naturescience/invasive-plants.htm>  
Buffelgrass Information Center: [www.buffelgrass.org](http://www.buffelgrass.org)  
DASM systems: [www.fs.fed.us/eng/rsac/invasivespecies/documents/DASM.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/eng/rsac/invasivespecies/documents/DASM.pdf)

- [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) -