

President's letter

Two thousand and sixteen was an extraordinary year. A divisive political campaign led to an astonishing outcome and put a dark cloud over the future. It was also the year with the highest global average temperature from instrumental records. The overwhelming scientific consensus is that the planet is warming dangerously and that the primary cause is carbon dioxide (CO₂) released into the atmosphere from burning fossil fuels in power plants, in cars, by industry and so on. The basic facts of global warming are simple and not controversial. CO₂ traps heat. The more of it in the atmosphere, the hotter it gets. Fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas) were laid down over many millions of years from dead plants and animals, compressed and transformed in the Earth's sediments. Major coal deposits date back to huge forests over 300 million years ago. They sucked CO₂ out of the atmosphere, built wood with it, died and formed coal. Now we are burning the 300 million year old carbon in that coal and releasing it into the atmosphere as CO₂ once again. We have not been doing this in a major way very long: only for the last 150 years. Just two human lifetimes. Yet, we have dramatically increased the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere and have produced temperature increases that we are all feeling. Severe weather around the globe has become more common, and much worse is predicted for the future if we do not act strongly now.

Our new president has said this is hoax. A few scientists on the fringe, who question the consensus of the vast majority, provide fuel for cynical politicians to sow doubt. There is uncertainty about the speed and severity of global warming due to the complexity of the Earth: how much heat the oceans can absorb, how their currents will change, how much CO₂ can be absorbed again by forests, and so on. Uncertainty about these details provides ammunition for climate deniers, but these details do not change the basic facts: the climate is warming, fossil fuels are the cause, and solutions exist. Vested interests make fortunes cooking the planet. We, the people, must oppose them, for ourselves, for future generations, and for life on the planet. Global warming is no longer a theory about something in the future. It is here now, it is costly and disruptive now, and it is accelerating. The Paris climate agreement between nearly every nation on Earth paved the way for the solution. To work, it needs a strong commitment from the United States. We have the authority, the expertise, and the technological capacity to save the planet and to profit from it by selling the solutions to the rest of the world. We do not have to choose between the economy and the environment.

Living in the Tucson Mountains, we all know about heat. How much hotter and longer do we want our summers to be? How much more severe our droughts and our storms? How much stress will we place on the animals and plants that make the Tucson Mountains their home? It is easy to

forget how different human lives are now from just 150 years ago. Then there was no electricity, no cars, no planes, no air conditioning, and no modern appliances. Lives were much harder. But our present comfort comes with unforeseen costs when we power our lives with fossil fuels. Now more than ever before, the politicians need to hear from the people. President Obama put rules in place to set the nation on the right course. We need to apply pressure to the Congress and the new administration to keep these rules and to go further. The coastal states of the US have been leaders in climate action. Arizona could be doing much more than it is. The more states take strong action, the more difficult it will be for the new administration to thwart them. We can start here at the local level with Pima County and the City of Tucson by charging our local governments to develop strong climate action plans. TMA is taking this on as a priority for the wellbeing of our beloved home.

Save the Date

We are very excited about special musical event we are planning for April 22. We're working on the details and will send out a follow-up email so stay tuned.

Habitat Competition

We are delighted to announce that the 2016 habitat competition drew several strong entries, and we are making three awards.

John Dennis has a small property of 1.39 acres abutting the Sweetwater Preserve. Apart from his house and a small area around it, the property is completely natural with no species not local to the area. It is continuous with the Sweetwater Preserve and increases the Preserve's effective area. Around John's house, a few non local species have been planted, but not enough to significantly impair the habitat values of the property. John is the winner of Best Preserved Natural Habitat, Properties Less than 3 Acres.

Doug and Doris Evans have a lovely property of about one acre with a small wash running through it. They have wonderful photographs of visiting wildlife. Some significant nonlocal plantings have changed its character somewhat from the original condition, but the property continues to function well as habitat for the local species. Doug and Doris are the runners up for Best Preserved Natural Habitat, Properties Less than 3 Acres.

Roger Carpenter's property provides a vital connection between the Tucson Mountain Park and Feliz Paseos Park. His property has a broad natural area where wildlife can live and move between these two parks. His house and developed areas are to one side, and minimal, keeping this critical connection open. A small wash runs through the property connecting also to the very important Camino De Oeste Wash, which runs all the way to the Santa Cruz River. Roger's sensitive stewardship of the property means that these vital habitat connections are secure. Roger is the winner of Best Provision for Wildlife Corridors

Winners will receive plaques at our next TMA event, and runners up will receive certificates.

It is great to see such pride in the natural values of our area along with sensitive stewardship to preserve our local ecosystems. Following these examples, we can live in the Tucson Mountains, enjoy them and keep them well.

The habitat competition for 2017 is open. Categories and guidelines are to be found on the website. Don't forget the habitat competition for kids. Youth are the future, and their wellbeing comes from active engagement with their future. So get them involved in the habitat competition by learning about the local wildlife, what can be done to preserve it, and telling us all what they have found.

Keeping the Santa Cruz River Flowing



The Santa Cruz River provides much prized riparian habitat in our dry region, as well as being an essential wildlife corridor much discussed in these newsletters. But it is a pale shadow of what it once was. It used to flow all the way through Tucson, but heavy pumping of ground water nixed that. Currently, flows in the Santa Cruz start at Christopher Columbus Park and go north using treated sewage effluent. Although restoration of flows further south have been mooted, the northern flows are under threat. The Tohono

O'odam Nation is owed water for irrigation. The Bureau of Reclamation wants to use effluent that is currently going into the Santa Cruz, and wanted to divert up to 7000 acre feet from the river, which according to their own report would have killed a five mile section of restored riparian vegetation. TMA supported the efforts of the Community Water Coalition to have this amount cut back. Fortunately, the Board of Supervisors voted December 13 on a deal that would allow only about 2000 acre feet per year to be diverted for a two year trial period, which would be far less damaging. The Community Water Coalition is urging more efforts from all parties to obtain long-term solutions to various competing water needs, including more conservation and efficient use of available resources. The environment should not come last.

Keeping Protected Ridges Protected



We live here because we love the environment. The last thing we want to see is houses on every prominent feature of the landscape. A house high up may provide wonderful views for the residents of the house, but spoil them for the rest of us. Eventually all views would be marred by houses everywhere. Thankfully, past work of TMA in conjunction with other community groups and Pima County led to the protected peaks and ridges ordinance, which put many of the prominent spots in our region off limits to development.

But an ordinance is only as good as its enforcement. Recently, the owner of one of the most prominent ridges near Feliz Paseos Park tried to get a waiver to build a house right in the middle of the ridge. The justification was hardship. Without a waiver, there was no place to build. But the owner bought the property fully aware that the ridge was protected evidently thinking the County would be

swayed by a hardship claim even though it was self-inflicted. The local residents, GPANA and TMA all rose up in strong opposition. Fortunately, the Board of Supervisors denied the waiver request at their November 22 meeting, and a truly lovely spot was saved. It would have been a terrible precedent had the Board given into a claim of hardship under these circumstances.

Proposed Monsanto Corn Project – Special Tax Breaks From Pima County

The Pima County Board of Supervisors is considering giving Monsanto's proposed agricultural project in Avra Valley a decreased tax rate as part of a Foreign Trade Zone. TMA spoke out against this special treatment, and in fact against this project in our backyard for a number of reasons:

1. Development in this geographic area runs the risk of further isolating the Tucson Mountain Park, Saguaro National Park West, and the Tortolitas from the Catalina Mountains, which would severely harm wildlife which rely on linkages among these open spaces. This development would likely serve to promote further development in this sensitive area, including Interstate 11, and associated development to the west and east. We strongly oppose this.

2. It is unclear how these operations might damage the health of the public. Monsanto has a long history of using dangerous chemicals, including carcinogens. Although Monsanto has appeared to have promised not to cause harm in these operations, they have a track record of failing to live up to their promises. In fact, they have been sued numerous times by citizens and farmers around the world for their dangerous and unethical practices.

3. Pima County and the City of Tucson have a well-deserved reputation for promoting environmentally sound and healthy businesses and government policy. Supporting a corporation like Monsanto would be a huge step backward, sullyng our reputation, and hurting tourism and economic development in our community.

The Board of Supervisors is planning to vote on this proposal at their meeting on February 21. Please call our Supervisors and let them know your views on this important issue.

Buffelgrass Threatens Our Desert Environment



As many of you already know, buffelgrass is an invasive species that threatens our saguaros and other native plants, both because of its prolific spread and because it encourages fires hotter than the saguaros and other natives can survive. It was introduced many decades ago, from the African savannah, in an ill-advised effort to provide grazing for cattle. Now it is a virulent danger. Recently, it has been increasing on both "A" Mountain and Tumamoc Hill, among

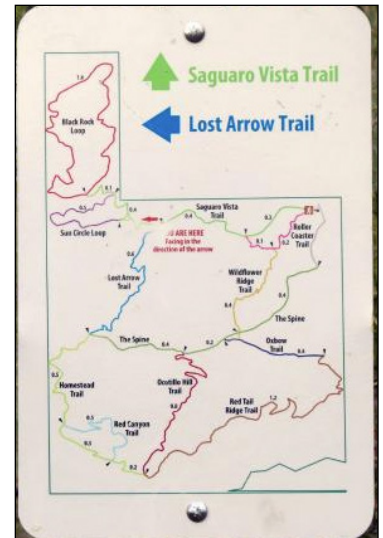
other areas. The Tucson Mountains Association works with Pima County, the University of Arizona and the City of Tucson to get them to address the problem more aggressively. But volunteers are always much needed, since the weed must be pulled by hand and carefully wrapped. The Weed-wackers is a very dedicated and experienced group which has worked tirelessly, for many years, to remove this nuisance from our Tucson Mountains. Can you help? Please consider giving a few

hours' time, to protect our little bit of endangered earth!

For more information and to get the Weedwackers brochure with dates and times for pulling buffelgrass, go to: <http://webcms.pima.gov/cms/One.aspx?portalId=169&pageId=262354>

TMA Donations for Trail Signage

The TMA Board unanimously agreed to donate the funds our membership had provided, through the Sky Island Alliance, for new or improved signage in our Tucson Mountain parklands. We will pay for new signs for the Painted Hills addition to Tucson Mountain Park, and also for revised and improved signs in the Sweetwater Preserve. This use of donated funds specifically meets our primary mission goal, "to preserve and provide for the scenic quality of the area and to establish and maintain the park and open space areas." The County has promised to acknowledge TMA's role in helping to establish both of these parkland areas in the signage. You can be proud of what you have helped to do for our community!



Board Elections Results

Judith Meyer, Paul Eckerstrom and Peter Chesson were all re-elected to the board for their new two-year terms. The 2017 TMA Board Members are:

Peter Chesson, President
pchesson@u.arizona.edu

Judith Meyer, Member
Judithdmeyer3785@gmail.com

Paul Eckerstrom, Vice President
Eckerstrom2@gmail.com

Charlene Pesquiera, Member
Cb1202mail@gmail.com

Jackie Day, Secretary
azjday@aol.com

Ivy Schwartz, Member
Ischwartz3211@cox.net

Debbie Hicks, Treasurer
debhicks@mindspring.com

We are always looking for members to volunteer their time with campaigns and to join the board. As you know we are an all volunteer organization and can always use additional participation and new energy. Thanks for your consideration.

Membership Renewals

Now is the time to renew your membership for those that have expired, so please visit our website to download a renewal form. We will also send out our gentle reminder, for those who tend to wait, or forget. Your \$30 dues/household very much help us continue to advocate for our westside residents and lifestyle, not to mention our revered Tucson Mountains and dwindling open space.