



Desert Defenders Newsletter – August 2020

The White Tank Mountains Conservancy's Desert Defenders team has been busy! Here is a recap of events since the January training.

January 2020: Mapping begins! Non-native plants (NNP) are mapped in the White Tank Mountains using the Collector app.

02-01-2020: WTMC Desert Defenders team has a booth at Outdoor Adventure Day, Waterfall Trail, White Tank Mountain Regional Park (WTMRP).



02-08-2020: WTMC Desert Defenders team continues public education as part of SciTech 2020 at the Buckeye Air Fair.

03-01-2020: WTMC Desert Defenders team educates attendees at annual Art Festival, WTMRP.

03-19-2020: Covid-19 concerns cancel a large NNP removal project with Luke AFB, but four WTMC volunteers collect 13 very large bags of Sahara Mustard at the Waterfall Canyon Trailhead, WTMRP.



4-9-2020: 3TV/CBS5 airs story and posts article by Sean McLaughlin about Stinknet (Globe Chamomile) invading the valley.

5-21-2020: The Tank Fire at WTMRP devastates Mule Deer Hill and Trail from Area 3 to the staging area. WTMC Executive Director, Les Meyers, immediately offers assistance to Maricopa County Parks & Recreation Department Director, R. J. Cardin. Juanita Armstrong, Natural Resource Specialist at Maricopa County Parks & Recreation Department, is named lead for the mitigation effort.

5-25-2020: Juanita trains and leads a small group of WTMC Desert Defenders, WTMRP staff, and other volunteers in collecting native seeds from healthy plants, such as Bursage and Brittlebush, near Ford Canyon Trail, for the purpose of seeding the burned area later in the summer.



5-28-2020: A virtual Invasive Plant Summit hosted by the Parsons Field Institute brings together organizations from across the region to discuss NNP, form working groups, discuss mapping apps, and brainstorm strategies for communicating the threat of NNP to valley communities. WTMC joined the Central Arizona Conservation Alliance (CAZCA), Maricopa County Parks & Recreation Department, McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, and Friends of the Tonto National Forest to work as a team on this issue.

6-4-2020: Juanita leads a second seed-collecting outing at Gray Fox Trail and Area 9, to collect Bursage, Senna, and others.

6-11-2020: Juanita leads a third outing at Ford Canyon and the Waddell Trail Wash, to collect tree and cactus seeds.

(Desert Lavender, Cat's Claw Acacia, Cholla)



6-17-2020: Outline of Desert Defenders' activities and Summit information presented at the virtual WTMC Board meeting.

7-7-2020: Juanita leads a small group of WTMC Desert Defenders, WTMRP staff, and other volunteers in a scientific survey of the Tank Fire at WTMRP burned area, documenting plants affected and percentage of scorch.

7-15-2020: Juanita conducts an online training on the "new" Collector app for Desert Defenders partners to test, as part of the Summit goals to determine the best app for our purposes.

What's Next?

August: Testing of the new Collector app by the Desert Defenders working group continues, with a WTMC volunteer doing the testing for WTMRP and providing feedback to the group. There are a couple of other apps being developed and investigated, and the group will collaborate to select the one that best serves our needs.

While the Tank Fire at WTMRP was tragic, we now have a unique opportunity to help the county gather scientific data on desert recovery. We are awaiting the arrival of monsoonal rains so the area can be reseeded with the native seeds we collected this summer. Juanita will divide the area into quadrants for 4 re-seeding experiments: WTMRP seeds only, Cave Creek Regional Park (CCRP) seeds only, WTMRP and CCRP seeds mixed, and no seeds. The areas will be monitored for non-native plants over time, and the data collected will help the county plan for and react to future fires in our desert.

September and October: Are you excited to get back out into the White Tank Mountains and identify, map, and remove NNP? Fall is when these plants try to take over the native flora, so we will need a robust team to tackle them. Once Desert Defenders has chosen the app we will be using, there will be training (virtual or in-person, depending on the pandemic) and then outings with small groups led by a Desert Defenders team member – and we want you to join us!

We could not protect our park and defeat non-native plants without you! If you would like to be involved with the WTMC Desert Defenders team, please consider becoming a White Tank Mountains Conservancy volunteer and we will connect you with the WTMC Desert Defenders team leader. For information on how to join, check out the "Volunteer" link on our website.

Thank you!