

SHOOTING SAGUARO TO SHREDS

Fallen cactus Fallen Saguaro by John Scheuring.

Just as the Sphinx is an Egyptian national treasure, so the Saguaro Cactus is ours. This majestic cactus is the largest of its species in the U.S.; and, outside of Mexico, only grows in the Sonoran Desert. Napoleon's Army presumably used the Sphinx for target practice, and similarly, "recreational shooters" in Arizona are using our living treasures for target practice.

The Saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*) can grow to a height of 40-60 feet, and live as long as 200 years. They are slow-growing, but with sufficient rain a Saguaro can eventually weigh between 3200-4800 pounds. As with most cacti, they grow protective spines. Their fruit and flowers provide food and moisture for a wide variety of desert wildlife. Desert birds find refuge and nest in holes of the Saguaro cactus.

They contribute to the desert ecosystem, keeping alive other life.

When a Saguaro dies naturally, its woody ribs are often used to build roofs, fences, and even furniture.

The Saguaro's respected status is such that Arizona has strict regulations about the harvesting, collection, or destruction of this species.

In spite of that, and because of almost no law enforcement, many Saguaro plants have been used for target practice and shot repeatedly until they fell over. Spent bullets and shell casings litter the area, along with garbage hauled in by "recreational shooters" for target practice and never removed. Even cacti left standing could die within two years if they have been shot enough times.

John Scheuring of the Arizona Native Plant Society (ANPS) said, "It looks like they targeted the arms first and shot off the arms, then went to the bases and shot them down."



The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) wants to wait for six months to a year before banning recreational shooting, which would no doubt condemn many more Saguaro to early and violent death at the hands of some sick "recreational" shooters.

US AZ Representative, Jeff Flake, introduced HB3440 in mid-November, which seeks to tie the hands of the BLM from limiting the "rights" of recreational shooters on BLM managed National Monuments. HB 3440 was co-sponsored by a slew of other Republican congressmen and fully backed by the NRA.

<http://flake.house.gov/News/DocumentSingle.aspx?DocumentID=269490>

Since December 29, 2011, there have been at least five additional saguaros intentionally gunned down. The most recent was a 25 foot saguaro with six magnificent arms that was savaged two weeks ago.

Please disseminate news of this outrageous behavior by target shooters and the AZ congressman to a wider audience.

Contact John Scheuring through the Society at: aznpsinfo@yahoo.com

