

Nomination for SWVMA Weed Manager of the Year Award

Don has done more in his retirement for invasive plant management than many professionals have done in entire careers. Twelve years ago, when doing trail adoption on the Tonto National Forest for his community of Las Sendas, he first learned what invasive plants were. From that day, he began mapping and digging buffelgrass and fountain grass, not only in his community, but also on the National Forest and lands of other jurisdictions nearby. 10 years ago he was a founding member of Friends of the Tonto National Forest. He is now both Vice President and Chair of the Natural Resources Committee. He has mapped thousands of acres of these 2 invasive grasses in the areas of the Lower Salt, Usery Mountain, and western Superstitions. From October through April, twice a month, he leads groups of volunteers on hikes to do heavy-duty fountain grass and buffelgrass control using pick-mattocks.

He educates everyone who goes out with him about how to identify and map, control methods, and why these control efforts are so important. Two years ago, he developed a new mapping feature for the ARC GIS Field Maps app that allows the user to re-check sites that have been mapped and indicate by different colored flag icons whether the infestation is still there or is gone. This allows him and all his students of mapping to doggedly re-treat infestations and track whether they are returning and need additional control. He has met with Tonto GIS and Weed personnel to ensure his mapping is compatible with that of the Forest so that they can benefit from all his work.

Don is well known at the State Land Department, where he has obtained grants to control these 2 grasses and now also stinknet on the Tonto. His reporting is meticulous and the projects show clear results.

He has come up with various ways to inform people recreating on the Tonto and the Tonto's neighbors about invasive grasses and the hazard they bring as fuel that carries wildfire in the Sonoran Desert. He regularly gives presentations to professional invasive plant managers, HOAs, various Forest user groups, booth events, high school students, and families who participate in the AZ State Parks Family Campout Program. He sets up brochure holders during cooler months and he and his assistant stock them with brochures about invasive plants. He has done bulk mailings to property owners who live near the Tonto.

In the last year, he has taken on a new project, in coordination with NAU and the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, to map saguaro cactus, in order to provide data to land managers on effects of invasive grasses and wildfire. It is a rare day that Don is not in the field, even during this record hot summer, mapping weeds and saguaros. He not only has had a sustained effort of 12 years in invasives management in central Arizona, but his knowledge and passion have grown especially in the past 2 years, to give land managers new tools to provide them the data they need to join his efforts in addressing the problem of wildfire in the desert.