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Buffelgrass criticism is misguided; plant's benefits receive short shrift

In response to the scientifically misguided article about the runaway buffelgrass terror ("Scientists: Buffelgrass a threat," Aug. 22), I noticed that there was no consultation or representation for the other side of the story.

Years of research by noted Earth and plant scientists have led them to different conclusions: Buffelgrass is an excellent forage grass and is here to stay.

Buffelgrass is well-adapted to our degraded Sonoran Desert rangelands that are warm enough and wet enough (a very small area) and where grazing cows are welcomed by our Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan to a desert without perennial grasses. Buffelgrass is also welcomed by the ranchers who continue to aid the establishment of it by root-plowing, thereby killing all native desert vegetation.

By the way, simply for the record, buffelgrass is not the real culprit that stokes fire in the Sonoran Desert. Red brome, an exotic annual grass, is responsible for fueling the fires that kill the saguaro and palo verde trees.

The article also neglected to address the more beneficial aspects of this demonized plant. Buffelgrass provides the essential high rainwater infiltration to prevent massive floods as experienced in 1983. It also provides for the deep infiltration necessary to sustain mesquite and other deep-rooted trees during drought.

Also not acknowledged is the topsoil-building ability of perennial grasses. Topsoil is the thin layer of surface soil that eroded away many years ago, making native perennial grasses no longer adapted to the Sonoran Desert. This habitat has been lost to the wind and rainstorms of the past century.

Buffelgrass requires more than our normal rainfall to survive and is totally dependent upon additional runoff water as seen along the roadsides.

So why the frenzy? Because, sadly, it has become institutionalized in Tucson. Ripping out, chemical kill or other methods used to destroy buffelgrass will leave an ecological wasteland, including surface and groundwater contamination, and will foul the air we breathe.

Buffelgrass can survive in spite of the eroded soil condition to eventually rebuild the topsoil and the microbial populations that reside therein — the native invisible ecosystem upon which most aboveground plants and animals depend.

By restoring the topsoil, buffelgrass eventually paves the way for the re-introduction of native perennial grasses as evidenced by the invasion of native grasses into a longstanding buffelgrass field monitored by U.S. Department of Agriculture soil scientists in Tucson.

Buffelgrass will survive indefinitely into the future — long after the last weed whacker has succumbed to old age. I don't want to waste my tax money chasing the wind because of the hysteria propagated by these militant grass haters who base their claims upon little or no ground truth.

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