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# State law could mean protection of desert plants

by Geoffrey Platts

The CCIA Conservation Committee is dedicated to preserving as much of our Sonoran Desert and its fauna/flora as is reasonably possible. "The desert has mothered many magical things," wrote John Steinbeck and the committee not only wholeheartedly agrees with that but also wishes for these "magical things" — be they plant, animal, insect or vista — to be encouraged to continue living for their own special sakes and for the spiritual and aesthetic enjoyment of man. The committee believes in the harmonious respectful blending of man and desert.

Last October there shone a glimmer of light for desert preservation. The city of Scottsdale set a heartening precedent by becoming the first municipality in Arizona to enact a native plant ordinance. Protection from damage or removal by construction and development activity was given to the following desert flora — mesquite, ironwood, palo verde, hackberry, desert willow, crucifixion thorn, Arizona rosewood, yucca elata, ocotillo and all cacti 6 feet or larger.

Violations of this enlightened ordinance can now incur fines of up to \$10,000. Such



monies would be used by the city "to replace removed or damaged plant materials whose retention was required... and to maintain replacement plant materials for a period of three years" — 15 percent of the total fine payable would be kept by the city as payment for enforcement of these regulations.

This praiseworthy effort to protect some of our singular desert plants has promoted me to campaign for similar legislation at the state level. The coming months will see a spirited endeavor to persuade the state legislators of the dire need for a native plant statute that would curtail the large-scale stripping of our desert by vested interests.

Many of us lament the denaturing of the desert and its greening over with artificial water-guzzling lush landscapes. We came to

be a part of the Arizona desert panorama, not a Southern California-type sprawl. I believe that there can be a happy balance struck between the economic and the ecological and that it is not unreasonable (nor even impractical) to insist that developers build with and into the desert not against and over it.

The recent passage of the state Urban Lands Bill (which now permits the state of Arizona to lease or sell its urban lands to developers) makes the need for desert protective legislation all the more urgent. I have reached the tragic conclusion that, unless we act swiftly and surely to defend the desert, it will be hidden, roughshod over by the juggernaut we call progress and will not survive for the future enjoyment of generations to come.

Therefore today's column is a call-to-arms to those who cherish and love our desert for what it is and for the serene beauty that it represents.

We have just been given a golden chance to turn our protests into positive legislative action. Rep. Juanita Harelsom (R-Tempe) has introduced House Bill 2505, patterned closely after the Scottsdale ordinance and co-signed by District 24 Sen. John Pritzlaff (R-Phoenix) whose telephone number is 255-5685. This bill will be heard in the Environmental Affairs Committee (of which Rep. Harelsom is chairwoman) on Tuesday, March 2 at 9:30 a.m. (double-check time with Harelsom's office — 255-3395). I implore each and every desert-lover in the foothills area to either attend this hearing at the House of Representatives (1700 W. Washington, Phoenix, 85007) or to call or write Rep. Harelsom before Tuesday and let her and the committee know of your firm support. This will be critically important to our desert preservation effort.

Here's a rare and splendid opportunity to act in the name of our magnificent Sonoran Desert — let's seize it and put aside all apathy!