

# THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

JULY 4, 2005

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## Loss of 'Great One' highlights problems

Regarding "Arizona wildfire scorches 'Grand One,'" (Republic, Wednesday):

Losing one of Earth's largest saguaros to flames tragically dramatizes how invasive, exotic weeds are changing our deserts. Fire kills natural deserts; they did not co-evolve. No desert species relies on fire for regeneration.

Exotic weeds - like Mediterranean red brome, African buffelgrass and Sahara mustard - are invading our deserts. Vehicles, livestock and wind carry their seeds, and nitrogen fallout from air pollution helps fuel their growth.

Weeds flourish in wet cycles but wither and dry by summer. Everywhere weeds sprout in spring; they invite wildfire in summer. A tinder-dry carpet of weeds crowds the natural open spaces between cactuses and native plants, carrying fire.

The Cave Creek lighting-sparked fire in the Tonto National Forest has been harmful to the Sonoran Desert. Red brome, a problem in the Tonto, likely carried fire right up to the "Great One."

We'll either work to curb weed invasions in our deserts, or keep on burning. -  
**Daniel R. Patterson, Tucson**