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April 30, 2021

The Honorable Chellie Pingree  
Chairwoman,  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Joyce  
Ranking Member,  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Pingree and Ranking Member Joyce,

I am requesting \$148,620 for the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum - Collaborative Restoration and Wildfire Mitigation in the Tucson Mountains in fiscal year 2022.

This proposal will restore a total of 158 buffelgrass-infested acres across three sites in the Tucson Mountains. These three sites fall within three different jurisdictions, Tucson Mountain Park (Pima County), Tumamoc Hill (University of Arizona), and Sentinel Peak Park (City of Tucson). A combination of contractors and youth crews would be hired by the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. In the past, the desert would serve as a natural firebreak between our forests and our most populated urban centers, but invasive grasses are filling in the open space in the desert.

This project fits the DOI – FS – Forest Health Management account protecting Saguaro National Park West from this fire fueling invasive species as well as aiding in protecting areas of Coronado National forest devastated by fire in 2020. This project is a priority because it protects future encroachment of the invasive buffelgrass into Tucson’s urban center and surrounding public lands. Buffelgrass is an invasive grass that threatens the iconic Saguaro cactus. In our Sonoran Desert ecosystem, there are many open spaces, but buffelgrass fills in all that space, creating a continuous flammable carpet. Most of our native plants are not adapted to fire. In contrast, buffelgrass thrives on fire. This is one of the major dangers of buffelgrass. If a fire occurs in an uninvaded desert setting, it burns out quickly, but if fire starts in a buffelgrass-invaded desert, it will spread rapidly as far as this fire-loving grass will carry it. Buffelgrass

fueled fires can convert a rich desert ecosystem into a barren buffelgrass grassland almost overnight. We have identified public lands that serve as an interface to both Saguaro National Park West and the urban west side community of Tucson.

Restoring our public lands is a cost-effective alternative to wildfire suppression and the only means of preserving our exceptional biological and cultural diversity. The USFS spent \$40 million preventing the Bighorn Fire from spreading into Tucson's wildland-urban interface. In comparison, \$4 million would be enough to restore over 5,000 acres of Sonoran Desert, nearly every acre of buffelgrass in the Tucson Basin. The federal funding provided to the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum provides support for a tide-turning effort to restore priority habitat and mitigate the threat of wildfire within the Tucson Basin's public lands while providing a buffer to Saguaro National Park West.

I appreciate your time and consideration of this important project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raúl M. Grijalva". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress