

Tumamoc Hill and Tucson - we need each other

Michael Rosenzweig and Joaquin Ruiz Special To The Arizona Daily Star | Posted: Sunday, July 18, 2010 12:00 am

July 20, 1960, was the magic day when the University of Arizona bought Tumamoc Hill from the U.S. Forest Service. On this 50th anniversary of the UA's ownership of Tumamoc Hill, we have much to celebrate and much yet to accomplish.

Tumamoc Hill and its scientists have a long tradition of ecological leadership. That leadership is needed more now than ever before.

A unique combination of ecology and culture in the heart of Tucson, Tumamoc is an 870-acre ecological reservation jointly owned by the University of Arizona and Pima County.

The visionary scientists at Tumamoc's Desert Laboratory began the world's first restoration ecology project there in 1906. The innovative, long-term environmental studies conducted at Tumamoc since 1903 have made the lab a U.S. National Historical Landmark.

In 1981, the state of Arizona designated Tumamoc Hill as a State Scientific and Educational Natural Area for its biological excellence. Today scientists track dozens of Tumamoc's plant species, and the record of their lives is a biological monitor of climate change.

Humans have lived on and around the hill for 2,500 years. The hill is also the Tumamoc Hill Archaeological District of the United States of America.

However, the hill's time as an isolated research station is over. Tumamoc Hill must become a place where citizens of Tucson learn how our environment can benefit from human activity and how our environment can be ruined by thoughtless actions.

The UA's College of Science has formed a new organization, Tumamoc: People & Habitats, to be a powerful engine for the preservation of natural habitat, native species and human culture in our region and in our nation. We hope that activities at Tumamoc Hill will educate our community and make our city better.

The hill will always be open space, a hallowed refuge for people and nature in the midst of Tucson, as well as a place where investigators and visitors can see and study the traces of the city's ancient people.

Researchers at Tumamoc Hill study the plants in the unique and precious permanent study plots. On and off the hill, Tumamoc's scientists are figuring out how to face such realities as climate change and invasive species, and how to overcome civilization's tendency to erode our world's natural and human heritage.

We want more people on the hill, and not just as walkers. We are sponsoring evening lectures, citizen science projects, projects in grade schools and outreach to neighborhoods. Stay tuned for the many activities we will have on the Hill.

Tumamoc Hill can make environmental preservation a cherished part of modern life and a valued legacy for our future. We can do away with the false notion that society and nature are enemies, destined to battle over every acre of land and every drop of water.

Tumamoc: People & Habitats is destined to become the international leader in reconciliation ecology, teaching people to tear down the wall separating civilization from nature and inspiring humanity to spread habitat everywhere, in affluent neighborhoods and poor ones.

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