

Lightning Strike at Agua Caliente Park

On September 28, 2022 lightning struck palm trees near the Agua Caliente Spring. Strong winds quickly spread the fire along the stream to the edge of the Main Pond. Rural Metro firefighters quickly responded and had the fire under control within a few hours.

What Damage Occurred?

In total, 225 palm trees were burned and 40 other trees including mesquite, willow, and hackberry also sustained fire damage. Grass within a 50-foot radius of the blaze was singed, including all of the turf along the entry drive.

The fire also damaged Park infrastructure including interpretive signs, picnic tables, a bike rack, and elements of the irrigation systems. Remarkably, none of the memorial benches sustained damage.

How Many Palm Trees Were Removed?

Staff removed about 40 palm trees (10-15% of those damaged) due to safety concerns or because they were too charred to flourish. The remaining 185 trees will be monitored and additional trees may need to be removed if they do not survive.

Was the Pond Impacted?

A filtering system was installed at the spring outflow into the pond to keep fire debris from entering the Main Pond. Fortunately, the pond has not been impacted however, the spring and spring stream water quality was affected; water was filled with ash and fire debris resulting in sludge. Continued fresh-water flow from the spring coupled with manual removal of fire debris have aided in the cleanup.



Restoring the Spring

The spring has been cleaned out and surrounded by additional rock for erosion control. Erosion-control mat and wattles will be placed to reduce erosion on steeper slopes. Vegetation will be planted to further help stabilize this area.

A pump-back system is being installed to allow pond water to supplement spring flow.

Plans for the Entryway Turf Area

Pima County is converting the entryway turf area into a desert landscape. The sprinkler system destroyed in the fire will be replaced with drip irrigation, conserving water use in the Park. The Friends of Agua Caliente are raising money to support the development of this new desert garden. The design will provide for continued use as an event space.

Why is There a Fence?

A temporary fence has been placed to protect visitors, allow for ongoing rehabilitation work, and to protect newly planted areas along the spring and stream.

The fence will remain in place for at least 6 months, possibly longer, depending on palm tree recovery and reestablishment of vegetation along the stream.