For the past 100 years, America’s national park system has preserved and protected what Theodore Roosevelt described as “the most glorious heritage a people have ever received.” Our parks tell our shared American story, connect us to our nation’s natural and scenic treasures, and offer exceptional recreational opportunities. Our national parks belong to all of us – and they are a living testament to the passion, commitment and support of private citizens who help sustain them through philanthropy, advocacy and volunteerism.

In 2015, Friends of Saguaro joined the National Park Service and the National Park Foundation in launching FIND YOUR PARK – a nationwide public engagement campaign to introduce the national park system to the next generation of visitors, supporters and advocates, while seeking renewed and enhanced support from those who already know and love the parks. The FIND YOUR PARK campaign aims to generate broad national awareness about the work of the NPS, and to encourage stewardship support for parks, programs and public lands. The campaign is designed to inspire new visitors, and increase participation in NPS recreational, cultural, ecological, educational, and volunteer programs throughout the nation.

The 2016 Centennial of the National Park Service presents an ideal opportunity for the federal government, and nonprofit park partners like Friends of Saguaro, to invest in restoring and renewing America’s national parks. The National Park Foundation is leading a $250 million “Centennial Campaign for America’s National Parks” – presenting a bold and timely challenge to: PROTECT all of America’s special places; CONNECT people to their parks; and INSPIRE the next generation of park stewards.

Southern Arizona’s Sonoran Desert and Sky Islands comprise one of the most biologically-rich and diverse ecoregions in the world – described by University of Arizona botanist Peter Warshall as a place “unique on the planet.” Archeologists believe that sites found in present-day Tucson, along the banks of the Santa Cruz River, likely represent the oldest continuously-inhabited area in the United States . . . and perhaps one of the oldest inhabited places in the world. Nearly 80% of Saguaro National Park is federally-designated wilderness, and the Park contains the largest, roadless “Sky Island” in North America – yet, it’s all just minutes away from an urban area of more than one million people. At Saguaro, the National Park Service works to preserve and protect the ecoregion’s many biotic communities, cultural features, and scientific, scenic and wilderness values.

Friends of Saguaro wants more people to “Find Their Park”. . . and Discover Saguaro, just as we have. This Strategic Plan describes our shared vision with the National Park Service at Saguaro, as we seek to educate, engage and empower more people to support this park, and protect it for future generations to enjoy.
I. Exploration & Discovery

Our national parks – including Saguaro – represent complex ecological communities of native plants and animals that have developed over thousands of years . . . and they present unique opportunities to educate the public about biodiversity, climate change, and the need for environmental protection. At the same time, our national parks – including Saguaro – offer unique opportunities to teach contemporary peoples about our rich cultural and ethnographic heritage. Through its educational, interpretive and recreational experiences, Saguaro National Park provides visitors the chance to explore and discover our collective natural and cultural heritage.

II. Preservation & Conservation

Saguaro National Park is an integral part of a larger network of lands – both public and private – which allows for the sustainability of the ecosystems of the Desert Southwest. National parks and protected public lands preserve many of the nation’s areas of greatest biodiversity, and play an important role as natural laboratories – locations for developing ecological baselines against which data from more disturbed areas can be compared. Additionally, the region’s extraordinarily diverse cultural heritage is reflected in the park’s 523 known archeological sites and the conservation of the park’s archeological, historic and ethnographic resources help preserve the heritage of southern Arizona.

III. Celebration & Stewardship

Saguaro National Park has a strong positive impact on the economic, recreational and educational life of the Tucson community – and FOSNP seeks to create a greater public understanding that stewardship for the park is the responsibility of all of us. Through community outreach, advocacy, and collaborative partnerships, we must attempt to create a better connection between “people and place” at Saguaro National Park. Through our celebration and stewardship of this special place, we can express our collective faith in the future . . . and fulfill our promise to succeeding generations.
Strategic Priority I:   Discover Saguaro

*To encourage the exploration and discovery of the resources, heritage, and recreational opportunities of Saguaro National Park.*

**Objective A:**   Provide opportunities for the public to understand and enjoy Saguaro National Park; keep the park relevant for 21st century audiences.

1) Continue to assist the park in updating interpretive exhibits; help the park develop *outdoor interpretive space* at the Rincon Mountain Visitor Center.
2) Continue to assist the park in updating wayside interpretive exhibits throughout both districts.
3) **Support technology enhancements** to keep the park’s interpretive resources relevant for 21st century audiences.
4) **Utilize social media** to engage younger, more diverse audiences.
5) Strengthen the community’s connection to the park; expand the focus on currently-underserved populations.

**Objective B:**   Reconnect children with nature at Saguaro National Park; promote environmental education throughout the community.

1) Continue to support the park’s innovative “Teacher/Ranger” program.
2) Continue to build relationships with southern Arizona schools and neighborhood recreation centers; increase youth participation levels.
3) Support the national “Every Kid in a Park” initiative – introducing every American fourth grade student to national parks and public lands.
4) Support “Schoolyard BioBlitzes” at Tucson-area schools – enabling students to apply the skills and knowledge gained in the classroom to explore the biodiversity of their own schoolyard.
5) Develop, and grow, **Youth Hiking Clubs** at schools throughout Tucson – strengthening a commitment to youth fitness throughout the community.
6) Encourage diversity, and engage Tucson-area youth in hands-on, place-based conservation activities at the park by expanding financial support for school transportation subsidies.

7) **Strengthen community partnerships**, and increase youth involvement in conservation activities at the park; provide Junior Ranger/Cactus Ranger “scholarships” to increase the engagement of underserved youth. Improve Junior Ranger/Cactus Ranger participation numbers at Saguaro.

8) Support environmental education curriculum development at the park, including technology enhancements.

9) Help the NPS **increase lifelong learning opportunities** at Saguaro National Park; promote diversity and broaden civic engagement.

**Objective C:** Enable diverse local young people interested in an NPS career to discover the agency and its operations through the Next Generation Ranger Corps at Saguaro National Park.

1) Support the park’s efforts to recruit motivated and well-qualified applicants that **reflect the diversity of the local Tucson community**.

2) Support the park’s efforts to provide an experiential, engaging, and supportive working and learning opportunity for each Next Generation Ranger.

3) Support the park’s efforts to ensure that each Next Gen Ranger has a designated mentor, and all Next Gens share a **broad range of training experiences** – providing valuable skills wilderness and resource management, interpretation, safety, outreach, and visitor protection.

**Objective D:** Support the continuing maintenance and improvement of the recreational trails at Saguaro National Park.

1) Continue to **seek funding support for Saguaro’s trails** from state and federal transportation-related sources.

2) Continue to seek private donor support for Saguaro’s trails by expanding the number of **Adopt-a-Trail** donations.

3) Continue to support the park’s efforts to **provide accessibility upgrades** for selected trails in both districts.

4) Continue to **seek volunteer support** for Saguaro’s trails from collaborative partners (such as the Arizona Trail Association and the Tucson Mountains Association) to work with park management and help keep trails open and safe.
Strategic Priority II: Protect Saguaro

To assist the preservation and conservation of the natural and cultural resources of Saguaro National Park, and sustain its wilderness character.

Objective A: (Financially) support sustained scientific research at Saguaro National Park to help park managers secure the data necessary for sound resource protection decisions.

1) **Strengthen research partnerships** with collaborative organizations within the community, and support scientific research priorities as determined by the park.
2) Promote student research, and foster the next generation of resource professionals, by supporting Saguaro’s “Next Generation Ranger Corps” program.
3) Support ongoing, species-specific **BioBlitz inventories and assessments** at Saguaro National Park.
4) Support sustained efforts to **monitor ecologically-sensitive areas** in the park; assist the park in the assessment of the evolving impacts from climate change on park resources.
5) Continue support for long-term “Water & Wildlife” research at the park.
6) Continue support for long-term **Gila Monster** conservation research at the park.
7) Continue support for long-term **Lesser Long-Nosed Bat** protection at the park.
8) Work to maintain Wilderness Act protection, and provide appropriate NPS management, for the approximate 80% of Saguaro designated as wilderness.

Objective B: Maintain the native habitat(s) of Saguaro National Park and help manage/control invasive species.

1) Continue to (financially) support the park’s ongoing efforts to regularly monitor the health and status of its iconic saguaro cacti.
2) Continue to (financially) support the park’s ongoing efforts to manage/control buffelgrass and other invasive species; support regional (landscape-scale) buffelgrass control efforts by the Southern AZ Buffelgrass Coordination Center.  
3) Continue to recruit volunteers to assist with saguaro monitoring and buffelgrass control activities at Saguaro National Park.

Objective C: Support efforts to preserve the significant archeological, historic, and ethnographic resources of Saguaro National Park.

1) Support inventory and preservation activities – on an “as needed” schedule as may be determined by the park.

Objective D: Promote landscape-scale conservation, and protect critical wildlife corridors, by supporting the prudent expansion of the boundaries of Saguaro National Park (both TMD and RMD).

1) Work with the park to identify willing sellers. 
2) Work with the park and the state’s Congressional representatives to secure necessary federal funds from the Land & Water Conservation Fund.

Objective E: Support the NPS “Green Parks Plan” at Saguaro National Park.

1) Continue to support the park’s (2012) ban on disposable plastic water bottles – thereby helping to reduce landfill waste and carbon emissions.
2) Seek to expand the (2014) effort to remove paper towels from the park’s trash waste stream by installing energy-efficient hand-drying equipment in park restrooms.
3) Continue to support sustainability awareness and education throughout the park’s workforce, and throughout the broader Tucson community.
Strategic Priority III: Support Saguaro

To build environmental stewardship for Saguaro National Park.

Objective A: Enhance public awareness of the park’s biological diversity – and the ecological threats posed by urbanization and climate change.

1) Increase the public’s understanding of the park’s role as a natural laboratory, and the need for science-based resource management.
2) Increase the public’s understanding of ecological threats to the park presented by increasing urbanization and the changing climate.
3) Increase the public’s understanding of the park’s economic significance to the region – and why the park’s resources need to be protected as economic assets.
4) Increase the public’s understanding of the specific stewardship needs at Saguaro National Park. Utilize web-based and printed materials, and participate in community outreach events.

Objective B: Build local capacity for community engagement in conservation and resource stewardship through the National Park Service “Urban Agenda.”

1) Strengthen community outreach and enhance volunteer recruitment. Incorporate diversity and partner with collaborative organizations.
2) Provide a variety of structured opportunities for both short-term and long-term volunteerism at the park.
3) Expand teen and young adult volunteer opportunities to reach a wider audience of underserved populations.
4) Solicit feedback from volunteers to assess satisfaction, motivation, and program effectiveness.
5) Build long-term conservation relationships within the community; increase the number of long-term park volunteers.
6) Provide opportunities for volunteers to improve their own knowledge of the resource, sharpen their skills, and increase their effectiveness.
Objective C: Strengthen collaborative partnerships.

1) Continue to build the FOSNP Advisory Board; increase participation from collaborative organizations.

2) Enhance cooperative (resource) research partnerships with organizations such as the NPS Inventory & Monitoring Network, the Cooperative Ecosystems Studies Unit at the University of Arizona, the Sky Island Alliance, and the Center for Sonoran Desert Studies at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum.

3) Strengthen cultural resource partnerships with indigenous Native American tribes in southern Arizona.

4) Maintain local and regional issue advocacy through participation in the Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection (with its 41 member organizations).

5) Collaborate on national issue advocacy through the (55-organization) National Parks Second Century Action Coalition, coordinated by the National Parks Conservation Association.

Objective D: Generate enhanced public support for FOSNP.

1) Increase the public’s understanding of federal funding realities, and the evolving role of philanthropy in national parks.

2) Increase the visibility of FOSNP within the community, and enhance public understanding of how FOSNP assists the park; increase individual donor support.

3) Increase (sustained) corporate/foundation support for FOSNP.

4) Continue to make FOSNP technology enhancements (website, social media, etc.); increase the organization’s exposure to younger age demographics.

5) Increase the diversity of the FOSNP board; expand the organization’s reach into currently-underserved communities.

6) Increase the FOSNP endowment through planned giving.