

We see elk, deer, wild turkeys, cats, fox, eagles, spiders, javelina, quail, road runners, vultures, snakes, skunks, jays, hummingbirds and much more native to the forest we have chosen to live within. My perspective is we are guests here in this forest and should act like it. Yet we do what is compatible with humans sometimes at the expense of nature.

Kill the snakes, spiders and bears, feed the hummingbirds with formulas damaging to their health, plant nonnative trees, change the natural flow and retention of water, and kill the weeds even if they flower and hold in water. Sounds green to some, but not to me.

We are human and it seems that Human Nature means that if we do not like something, it is ok to kill it regardless of the consequences.



An alternative perspective.
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A short while back, the principle communication publication for Pine Arizona Portal IV owners, The Insight, ran a short piece pleading for all to "save our precious trees!"; a laudable and fashionably green thesis, without doubt. The idea was to remove the Mistletoe to save the "infected" Juniper.

Makes sense too, parasites weaken their host and often kill them. Pesky parasites! Can live without them and hard to live with them in nature or politics!

SAVE OUR MISTLETOE!

But not fast Kemo Sabe.

Not all the trees in portal IV have mistletoe, for that matter there are not that many trees here as elsewhere in the neighboring hills. Oh and mistletoe is natural.

The Rocky Mountain Research Station, USDA, Forest Service in Flagstaff says "Mistletoe's reputation as a damaging parasite is changing. Although dwarf mistletoe can kill trees, the plant has come to be regarded as an important part of the forest ecosystem. Dwarf mistletoe creates dense patches of de-

formed branches in trees. Known as "witches' brooms," they provide a habitat for wildlife such as squirrels, hawks and spotted owls. Mistletoe berries are one of the primary sources of food for phainopepla (black cardinal like bird)".

Why might we have trees infected with a natural parasite in Portal IV? If it is serious, why are not all the trees infected? Might it be that the soil and rock conditions here, clay with little soil as compared to Pine Creek Canyon, for example, only support a few trees in a zone best suited for chaparral vegetation including Manzanita?

For that matter, we have gone out of our way, as individuals and communities, to reduce the fire hazard and are removing the manzanita fire torches. No one wants a fire to consume our homes yet Fire Wise planning, while reducing the fire danger, is also removing the vegetation and ability of the soil to retain water. Runoff from monsoon storms rarely seeps into the ground and without water; no tree can survive without a struggle. Is it possible that the weak trees that often host Mistletoe are even weaker given our collective efforts to reduce fire danger? Might our home foundations, utility trenches, roads, and house foot prints also cause stress to the natural vegetation here? Might well be. "Tonto", might we want to save a few trees that we caused to be sick in the first place?"

Even the clearing of Manzanita and underbrush and leaving a few bushes for aesthetic landscape vistas seems like a great idea, yet the evidence here in Portal IV shows that the reduction of the species reduces the natural critical mass and these remaining bushes also die. So what gives here? Good intention actions seem nice, but are they?

Well, the real questions are:

- ◆ Do you want the land to remain more or less natural?
- ◆ Is the level of mistletoe normal for this habitat?

If the answer to both of those is "yes" then clearly you shouldn't do anything. You'll have to decide what the answer to the first one (my bias would strongly be in favor of a "yes", but I'm not you). The second question probably needs someone with better knowledge of the ecology of our area than I have.

Our actions, collectively or individual, often have consequences beyond what we know or understand. To save the trees by removing the mistletoe sounds laudable to us, but not so for the birds, squirrels and forest. Weak trees, weak animals and parasites are natural and part of a much bigger ecosystem than any of could possibly understand.

Over the years we, as individuals, not organized associations, have killed rattlesnakes, encouraged the euthanizing of black bear, squashed tarantulas, removed skunks, sprayed wasps nests and who knows what else. One diamondback living under my deck for several years seemed happy enough and I for one was pleased not to have the mouse and rat problem that we have suffered since two resident's fear drove them to kill it. We have planted water consuming nonnative plants, feed the javelina, and encourage the hummingbirds with sugar water four times what is natural for them (Taubert, 2013), Then we complain that there are fewer birds the following years. We have set traps for bees and now ten years later seem to have only a few left to pollinate the plants.