

A Plague on Point Loma

Acacia cyclops Red-eye Acacia

Presentation for:

PLECA (Cabrillo NM - NPS)

Navy Region Southwest / NAVFAC Southwest

City of San Diego Park & Rec. Department

PLNU

November 2024



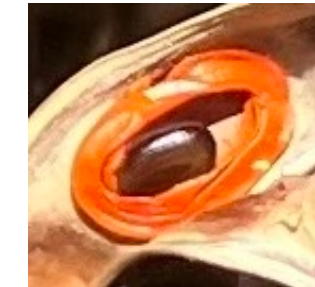
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Acacia cyclops (circled red) invading native scrub-habitat, US Navy property, Point Loma.
Pinus torreyana or Torrey Pine, young native trees, outlined in green.

Executive Summary

- ***Acacia cyclops*** is a sprawling, fast-growing, densely woody shrub-like tree native to Western Australia that is now an **invasive weed** on Point Loma.
- Called **Red-eye Acacia** because of red arils that encircle its seeds.
- Presenting multiple environmental problems, including:
 - Blocks views of ocean and bay;
 - Occupies large areas of coastal land, rendering space impassable and unusable;
 - Crowds out native plant species, reducing rare coastal plant-communities;
 - Pressures native birds, reptiles and mammals by replacing habitat with impenetrable woodland monoculture;
 - Perpetuates pests like non-native rats and parrots attracted by red arils;
 - Replaces mosaics of native landscape with insipid stands of massive, woody weeds.
- **A simple, 4-point Action-plan can mitigate this plague.**



Background: Nursery-shrub gone wild

- *Acacia cyclops* was introduced as a landscape-shrub in San Diego in the 1960s. Promoted for drought-tolerance, salt-tolerance, gopher-resistance, rapid growth and cover. Often planted as a perimeter-hedge and on slopes.
- Originally marketed as a “shrub” because of its low growth-habit on dunes in arid coastal areas of Western Australia. However, on loose topsoil and sedimentary sandstone of Point Loma it grows rapidly into a sprawling hardwood multi-trunk tree up to 25’ ht and 50’ width.
- Produces hundreds of pea-like seed-pods and thousands of seeds seasonally. Wildlife may forage arils thereby spreading seeds. Seeds are hard and persistent. Seeds will take root in loose soil remarkably easily.
- Also introduced in countries with similar climates including Portugal, Malta and South Africa. Now considered an **invasive weed** in all three of those countries which struggle to control its spread.
- *A. cyclops* is so dominant and persistent it is considered an invasive weed in states of Australia outside its native range.
- No longer sold much in California, *A. cyclops* has been replaced in nurseries by *A. longifolia*, which has a similar habit and more colorful inflorescences, more pleasing foliage, is less woody and aggressive, and does not multiply as easily.



Acacia cyclops (top) is no longer sold much in nurseries, having been replaced by *A. longifolia* (bot.), which has more colorful inflorescences and appealing foliage and does not spread invasively.

Distribution of *Acacia cyclops* - Naturalized Specimens*

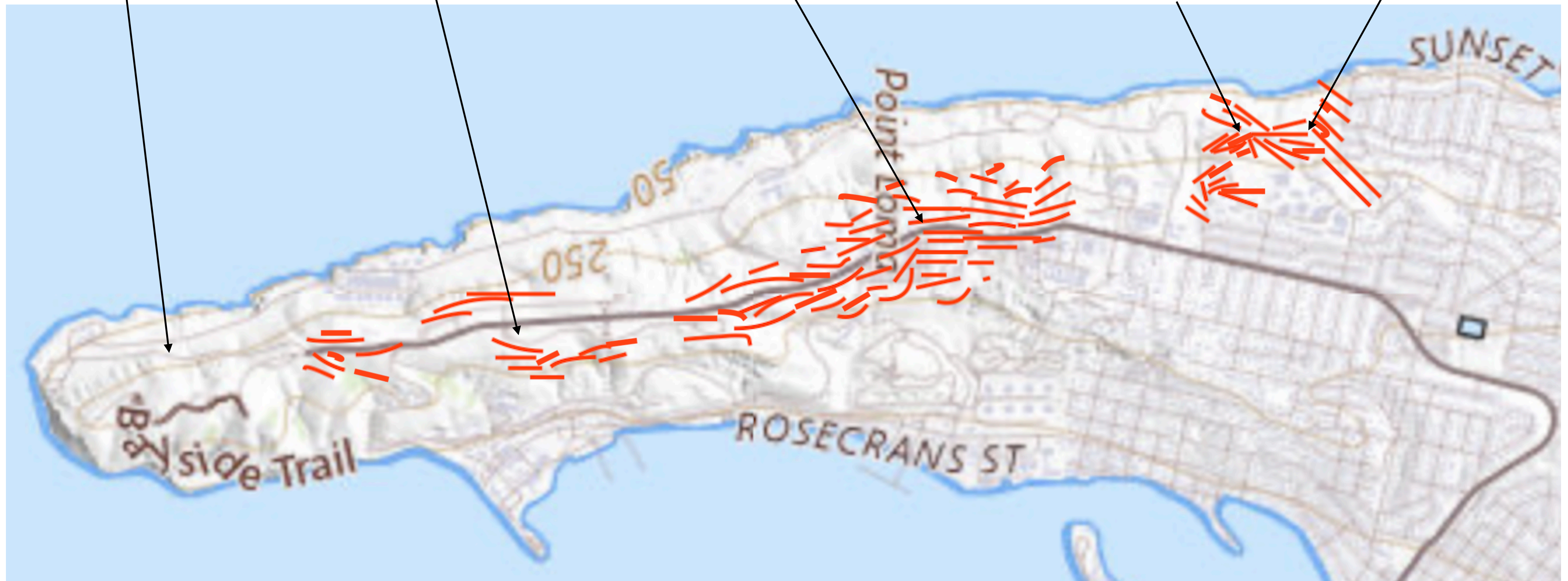
Cabrillo National Monument: Has few *A.c.* specimens due to diligent weed-removal efforts.

Veterans Affairs (cemetery): *A.c.* specimens outside perimeter-fence on both sides of Catalina Blvd have spread and block views.

Navy SW / NBPL - misc commands: *A.c.* blocks public views of ocean & bay. Proliferating in disturbed areas around structures. Has invaded native habitat.

PLNU: uniform colonies of *A.c.* populate old disturbed slopes and spread into edge-habitat areas.

Sunset Cliffs Park: large colonies of *A.c.* populate open slopes and flats and block views. Only habitat-restoration projects have prevented total dominance.



* Rough map only estimates areas accessible to public view. Restricted areas may also have *Acacia cyclops*.

Photos: Sunset Cliffs Park (City of SD)



Acacia cyclops on flat by Sub Reef (L; top).

A. c. covering hillside west of City's upper parking-lot (bot).

Between 15 - 20 acres, or up to 25% of the total City parkland S and E of Ladera St., is now covered by sprawling mature specimens of *Acacia cyclops*, blocking views, crowding out Sage-scrub, offering hiding-places for vagrants, and restricting the usable area of the park.

Only one part of the City park has been consciously spared: an area of restored Coastal Sage Scrub planted and maintained by community-volunteers. The successful native-habitat restoration project was initiated in the early 2000s by the late Point Loma resident David Kimball, who recognized the intrinsic beauty of native flora and the threat of invasive weeds like *A. cyclops*.



Photos: Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU)



The 90-acre PLNU campus is dominated by *Acacia cyclops* in non-irrigated areas. Above: Hillside slopes are densely covered with massive mature specimens. Fast-growing trees obstruct ocean-views, even for residence-halls.

Top_R: The interface between PLNU and Sunset Cliffs Park is infested with *A. c.* Weedy trees obstruct ocean-views and occupy valuable coastal space.

Bot. R: A few high-quality native-habitat areas remain on northern, western and southern margins of PLNU. Old-growth specimens of native species such as *Ceanothus verrucosus* (circled green) and *Cneoridium dumosum* (orange) must compete with sprawling, invading *Acacia cyclops* (red).



Photos: Navy Region Southwest / NBPL



Hundreds of *Acacia cyclops* specimens now populate Navy-owned property on Point Loma.

Above: The trees grow extremely fast, crowding out native plants like Cal. Buckwheat, Coastal Sagebrush and Black Sage.

Top R: On disturbed ground and in open areas around roads and buildings, *A. cyclops* now forms dense uniform thickets.

Cen. R: Along Catalina Blvd *A. c.* obscures priceless views, cheating the public of one of the highlights of a visit to Pt Loma.

Bot. R: On the western slope, uncontrolled growth follows disturbance and drainages and corrupts the unique, federally managed Point Loma Ecological Conservation Area (PLECA).



Photos: Fort Rosecrans Cemetery

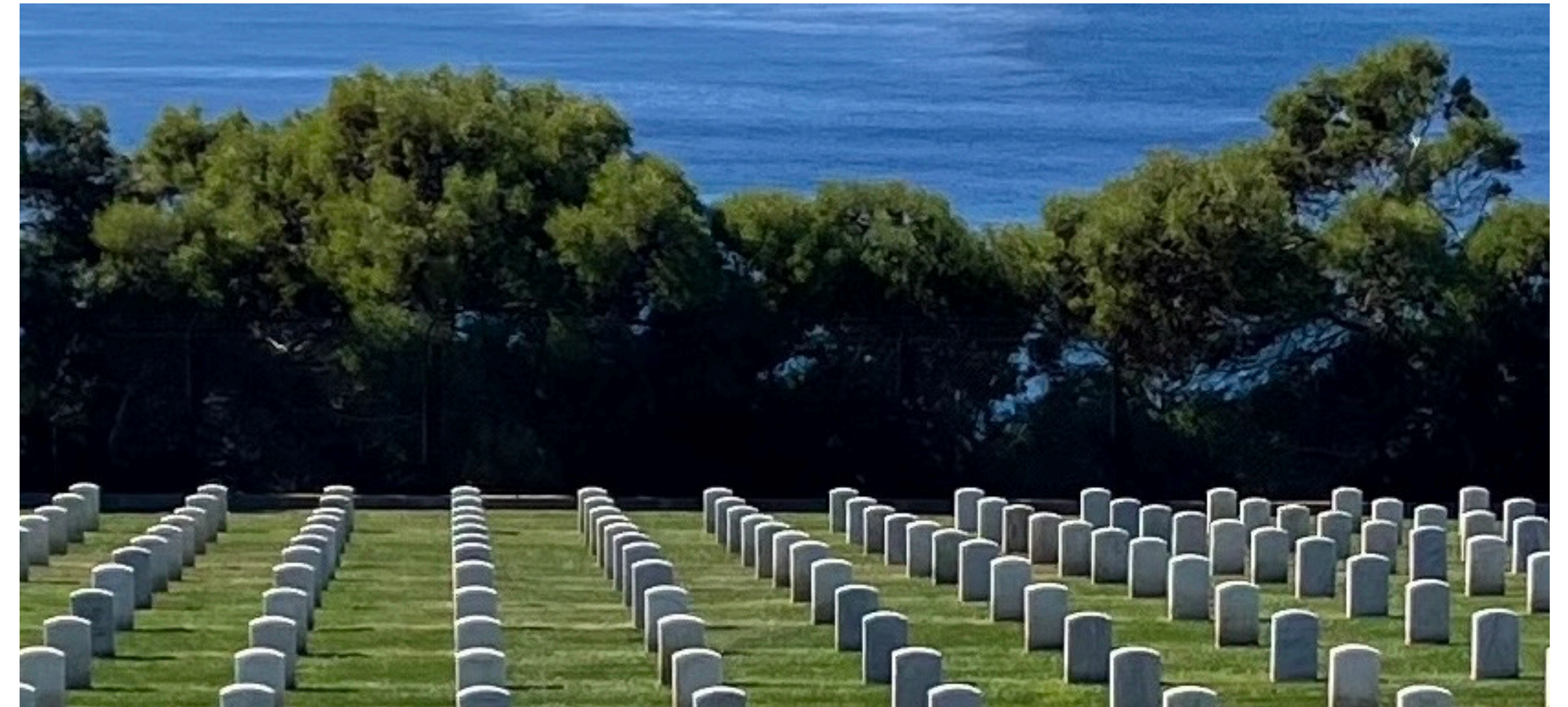


Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery has finely maintained gardens inside the fence, but just outside the fence *Acacias* grow on all sides of the property.

Top R: On the western edge, *A. c.* obscures ocean-views for visitors to grave-sites.

Bot.R: On a flat near Catalina Blvd on the approach to Fort Rosecrans, a single sprawling *A. c.* specimen occupies nearly 1000 SF of land.

Above: On the eastern edge the slope of Point Loma falls steeply; prolific *A. c.* plants threaten to spread seed into native scrub downslope.



Photos: Cabrillo National Monument (*Acacia*-free)



Cabrillo National Monument covers about 160 acres or 12% of the open space of Point Loma south of Talbot Street. It is the foundational area of the Point Loma Ecological Conservation Area (PLECA), greatly supplemented by US Navy land.

Few *Acacia cyclops* are found at Cabrillo NM. Rangers and biologists monitor the grounds and eradicate weeds.

Areas of pristine Coastal Sage Scrub present mosaics of low-lying native shrubs on the western slope of Point Loma (L). The eastern slope includes steeper slopes that are sheltered from prevailing winds; more woody chaparral may grow there, including colonies of Coast Scrub Oak (below).



Simple 4-Point Action-Plan

1. RESTORE VIEWS AND OPEN SPACE: CUT DOWN ACACIA

- Cut down *A. c.* where it blocks coastal views, esp by roads & right-of-ways; cut down or reduce sprawling *A. c.* plants on flats and in low-slope areas.
- Work-crews can move quickly with chainsaws and chippers. Chip and remove remains when by roads, buildings, disturbed areas, parks.
- *A. c.* stumps will not regrow after being cut; they dry out / die.



Acacia-free unobstructed view on trail by restored area, Sunset Cliffs Park.

2. PROTECT HABITAT: CUT DOWN ACACIA IN SENSITIVE AREAS

- Enter habitat-areas to cut down invasive *A. c.* specimens with chainsaws.
- Reduce *A. c.* to pieces. Leave remains on-site in compact “brush-piles”.
 - > Avoid hauling out cuttings; hauling out disturbs sensitive habitat.
 - > Brush-piles quickly decay + provide cover for birds, reptiles, mammals.



A.c. stumps do not regenerate (L).



Leave brush-piles; don't haul out from sensitive areas (R).

3. PULL ACACIA SEEDLINGS WHEREVER ENCOUNTERED

- Survey periodically for undiscovered *A. c.* weeds.
- Remove nascent *A. c.* seedlings and plants wherever found.



Acacia cyclops seedlings (L).



4. SUPPORT CONSERVATION EFFORTS

- Fund habitat-conservation and -restoration efforts on Point Loma.
- Raise consciousness that *Acacia cyclops* is an **invasive weed**.

Thank you

