

CHIRICAHUA REGIONAL COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER

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Plans for recreation management and development in the Chiricahua Mountains have suffered from inadequate knowledge of the amount of visitor use. Previous estimates were based on minimal hard data, and extrapolations of future requirements were similarly flawed. Recognizing the importance of having a reliable data base against which to judge anticipated proposals for recreation development in Cave Creek Canyon, the Chiricahua Regional Council in 1997 carried out a survey of campground usage which now furnishes a current and quantitative data base. In this Newsletter we present our findings in somewhat condensed fashion, comment on some aspects of their significance, and offer other regional newsnotes.

THE SURVEY.

Early every morning (ca. 6-7 a.m.) in 1997 from March 12 to October 12 (with only two exceptions), CRC volunteers went through each campground and recorded the following data: number of campsites occupied, which specific sites were in use, mode of overnighing (tenting, trailer, camper/van, large RV), and number of vehicles associated with a given site. Overflow camping within a campground but not associated with a particular campsite was also noted. Infrequent overnighing away from campgrounds was not included in our survey. By checking early in the morning we hoped to record occupancy before overnighers had left and before new campers had arrived. Also, this reduced the possibility of mistaking day-use picnickers for overnight campers. Sporadic surveys made before and after the detailed survey showed little campground use in other parts of the year, so we assume the survey spanned the period of most intensive use of the campgrounds. We have no reason to sup-

pose that the usage in this period was atypical in any way, and assume that the data provide insight of broad applicability.

DESCRIPTIONS OF CAMPS

The following descriptions of the five Forest Camps on Cave Creek serve as background for the data on campground usage and analyses thereof. The camps range in elevation from 5000 to 5800 ft. None of the campsites has hookups, there is no canyon dump station for RV's and piped potable water is not always available, though the system is being upgraded.

IDLEWILD CAMPGROUND is reached by crossing a ford 0.4 miles upstream from the visitor center. The ten campsites are shaded, some located well above stream level, others close to it. Most have areas suitable for tenting, though some are less than ideal. Some have parking for larger vehicles, but park-

ing immediately adjacent to tables is not possible at all sites.

STEWART CAMPGROUND, 0.7 miles from the visitor center, has six shady campsites. Most are somewhat shielded from one-another by vegetation or topography and have moderate to large parking areas.

SUNNY FLAT CAMPGROUND is reached by a turnoff at 1.6 miles from the visitor center and a broad ford across the creek. With 12 designated sites, this is the largest campground on Cave Creek. The camp area is little elevated above the creek but sites are not right beside it. Most sites have ample space for RV's and flat areas suitable for tenting. All sites have at least some shade, though parking spots may be exposed. Several sites are grouped in a relatively open area, offering little privacy.

JOHN HANDS CAMPGROUND is 4.5 miles from the visitor center on a graded gravel road. A parking lot above the camp can accommodate large RV's. The camp, which has five sites, had an earlier existence as a picnic area. Neither campsites nor parking spaces are well delimited, and space for tenting varies in quality among sites. Most sites are quite close to the stream.

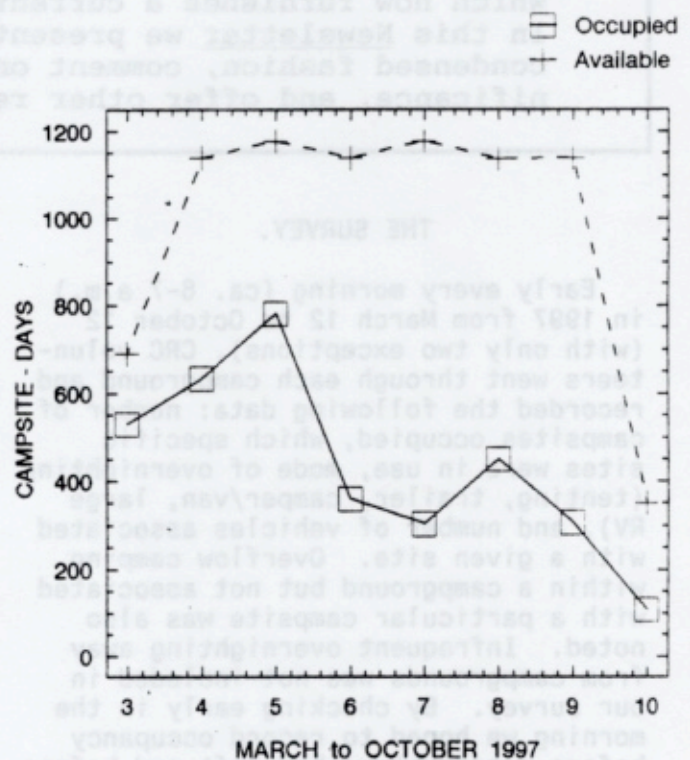
HERB MARTYR CAMPGROUND is 5.6 miles from the Visitor Center on the road past John Hands campground. There are five shady campsites, two located adjacent to a parking lot on a bench well above the creek, three lower down next to the creek. Those by the parking area require that gear must be carried in; cars cannot be parked close to the tables. A sharp, steep curve in the narrow road between the parking lot and the lower sites limits the use of the lower sites by large vehicles.

This camp and John Hands Camp, each with five sites, are the smallest of the five campgrounds surveyed. Herb Martyr also has the appearance of a picnic site, with no special attributes for camping such as leveled tent sites; parking areas by the lower sites are not clearly delimited. Herb Martyr Dam

once provided habitat for introduced trout and was popular with sport anglers. It is the scientific type-locality for the threatened Chiricahua Leopard Frog. The dam has been filled to the brim with gravel for many years and currently supports neither trout nor, apparently, frogs. Maintenance practices of the impoundment in the past could be considered for reactivation.

SUMMARY OF USAGE

We express usage in two ways: as campsite-days and as percent of occupancy. The five campgrounds have a total of 38 designated campsites. A single day with all sites occupied would equal 38 campsite-days. Thus, with allowance for some days when campgrounds were closed to the public, there were 7954 campsite-days during the survey period.



This graph summarizes monthly campsite occupancy compared to the number of sites available. Two factors explain the low number of sites available in March: the survey did not commence until March 12, and Idlewild Camp

