

# CHIRICAHUA REGIONAL COUNCIL

## NEWSLETTER

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A potpourri of plans provides the subject matter for this Newsletter, ranging from the eventual update of the Coronado National Forest Plan to the implementation of additional fees for use of facilities in the Douglas Ranger District. Between these two extremes, among other topics we anticipate a revised Cave Creek Recreation Concept Plan, report on an effort at native fish restoration, and note that the controversial subject of access to John Long Canyon may be moving off the back burner.

**CORONADO NATIONAL FOREST PLAN.** As part of a nationwide effort to update National Forest plans, the FS expects soon to publish a Notice of Intent, and to begin revising the 1986 Coronado National Forest Plan. In September Douglas District Ranger Doug Hardy spoke before a meeting in Rodeo sponsored by the Sew What Club. He noted that revised FS plans will devote greater attention to the potential impacts of actions taken on National Forests upon adjacent private lands and communities.

Speaking before the Outdoor Writers Association of America this past June, Mike Dombeck, Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, described another area of increased emphasis in revised FS plans: "The two main purposes for creating the National Forest System were to maintain abundant forest reserves and to supply abundant water. Over the past 50 years, the watershed purpose of the Forest Service has not been a co-equal partner with providing other resource uses such as timber production." Dombeck continued, ". . . consistent with our mandates from the Clean Water and

Safe Drinking Water acts, *watershed health and restoration will be the overriding priorities in all future Forest Plans*" (emphasis added).

The FS Chief also said, "Future Forest Plans will develop strategies and document how we will provide for the protection, maintenance and recovery of native aquatic and riparian dependent species . . ." Dare we hope that the Coronado Forest Plan will emphasize more widespread use of loose rock dams, the value of which in watershed restoration has been shown so convincingly in the West Turkey Creek watershed?

CRC will notify members when opportunities arise for the public to add ideas and constructive criticism to the planning process. It is most important that individuals, not just organizations, participate.

**CAVE CREEK CANYON RECREATION CONCEPT PLAN.** Douglas Ranger District office personnel reassignments and absences to fight fires elsewhere have delayed the Recreation Concept Plan, which is undergoing a major revision and downsiz-



ing. New campgrounds are no longer being considered. Instead, the emphasis is on fixing-up existing campgrounds, and improving water quality in Cave Creek.

Improvements envisioned for existing campgrounds include repairing tables, putting in new fire rings where needed, replacing restrooms, moving some campsites in Sunny Flat out of the floodplain to higher ground, and paving campground loops. The vehicle stream crossings, which no doubt contribute dirt, petroleum products, and at times even poisonous antifreeze to Cave Creek, will be bridged.

Steel bridges, of a new design that is much less expensive and that can be dropped in place with relatively minor disturbance to the streambed, are planned for the stream crossings near the Southwestern Research Station, on the South Fork road, and at the entrances to Idlewilde and Sunny Flat campgrounds. Bridges near the Southwestern Research Station and at Idlewilde Campground may be included in the current road paving project. Others, as part of the environmental assessment for the entire Cave Creek project, are likely to take a little longer.

Paving being considered for South Fork is of a one-lane design, with turnouts for passing. This design leaves an unpaved portion of the present road for pedestrians. There are arguments for and against paving this road and the campground loops, but paving should greatly reduce the heavy coating of dust that nearby vegetation gets during long dry spells. Birding and hiking along the South Fork Road without being engulfed in dust clouds would be another plus.

**NATIVE FISH RESTORATION IN WEST TURKEY CREEK.** In November 1998, representatives of the Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona and New Mexico Departments of Game and Fish, Arizona State University, and the owners of the El Coronado Ranch met to discuss removal of non-native fish from West Turkey Creek (on the west slope of the

Chiricahuas), its tributaries, and stock ponds in the drainage. Their goal was to restore and protect populations of two native fish, the Yaqui Longfin Dace and the endangered Yaqui Chub.

Floods following the 1994 Rattlesnake Wildfire evidently removed all non-native fish from West Turkey Creek while both the chub and the dace persisted. But in 1997, non-native Fathead Minnows were found in West Turkey Creek and in nearby stock tanks on private land. This species, probably released intentionally or unintentionally from bait buckets, has the potential to eliminate native fish species from West Turkey Creek.

After populations of native fish were moved for temporary safekeeping to stock ponds on private property this past May, West Turkey Creek was treated twice (May and June) with the piscicide antimycin. CRC sought and received assurance from Dr. Minckley, ichthyologist at Arizona State University, that this treatment would not harm frogs, tadpoles, or turtles. The treatment apparently was successful, and no adverse effects from the treatment were noted to these animals or to aquatic invertebrates. Meanwhile, the sequestered fish successfully reproduced in the stock ponds.

Another potential threat to native fishes was recognized: sediment runoff from the road paralleling the creek. In a remarkably short time, the FS designed a project to correct the problem, obtained funding, and has scheduled work to begin shortly. This will include paving approaches to three bridges in the 2 1/2 mile length of FS road, replacing a vehicle stream crossing with a bridge, surfacing the road with crushed rock treated with soil stabilizer, diverting road runoff and culvert outflows into sediment collection areas, installing loose rock check dams in gullies, installing additional culverts and drainage structures to direct runoff away from the creek, and using curbing and ditches to guide campground runoff into sediment set-

