

CHIRICAHUA REGIONAL COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER

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P.O. Box 16480
Portal, AZ 85632

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-

tling basins. Disturbed areas and sediment settling basins will be seeded with native plant species.

When the road sediment reduction project is finished, and when the fishery biologists are confident that Fat-head Minnows are gone (a second antimycin/permanganate treatment may be needed), the Yaqui Chub and Yaqui Longfin Dace will be released in West Turkey Creek. All the agencies and individuals cooperating in this project are to be commended for their efforts.

JOHN LONG CANYON. The Arizona Game and Fish Department--and some hunters--are again urging the FS to provide vehicle access into John Long Canyon on the west slope of the Chiricahua Mountains about two miles north of Rucker Creek. Other hunters, who like the idea of having a quality hunting area that requires hiking into, voiced their opposition to this proposal back in 1993. CRC joined in opposition, based primarily on important biological resources that could have been seriously damaged by vehicle traffic and increased human activity in the canyon. At the time, vehicle access through private land at the mouth of the canyon was denied, and the proposal has since simmered on the back burner.

Providing access could entail one or all of the following:

1. Improving an existing road through a private land parcel bordering Rucker Creek. According to Arizona Game and Fish, the landowner is willing to allow public access on this road if neither camping along his road, nor access along a creek that the road crosses, is permitted. How such activities could be prevented is a good question. The road goes through an archeological site, but protection of the site is up to the landowner's discretion as long as the parcel remains in private ownership.

2. Using an existing FS road that extends beyond the above road, and which roughly parallels a significant stretch of riparian habitat. Potential

impacts of public use of this road on the habitat will need to be addressed in the environmental assessment of the proposed project.

3. Extending this FS road to the ridge overlooking John Long Canyon, or even down to the canyon bottom.

4. Improving an old 4WD road up the canyon bottom.

Available options include a parking area on FS land either just beyond the end of the road crossing the private parcel, or closer to the ridge above John Long Canyon, with foot access beyond these points. The "No Action" option would be to leave access as it has been for the past six years or so. During this time Mule Deer populations and other wildlife in the canyon have responded positively, and those hunters willing to hike in have had successful hunts.

If the funds needed to provide access into John Long Canyon were instead dedicated to restoring riparian habitat, or to developing wetlands elsewhere, even greater hunting opportunity might be provided. The long term impacts on wildlife would be positive, rather than, most likely, negative.

Preparation of the environmental assessment is scheduled for the coming year. Recently FS Chief Mike Dombeck quoted Aldo Leopold as having said, "recreational engineering is not so much a job of building roads into lovely places but of building receptivity into the still unlovely human mind." Leopold's view would be good to keep in mind as we consider the alternatives.

FIRES, WILD AND OTHERWISE. Despite the exceptionally dry winter and spring, an unusually long monsoon season perhaps helped prevent any major wildfires thus far this year. Thirteen small wildfires broke out in the Chiricahua and Dragoon mountains, ranging in size from a tenth of an acre to the 90-acre El Tigre fire in Pinery Canyon, but none was allowed to develop into a catastrophic fire.

Grasses responded wonderfully to the long monsoon, and that response, coupled with longstanding heavy fuel loads in the Chiricahuas, led to great concern over the possibility of fires spreading from the Forest down onto private lands, or in the opposite direction. District Ranger Doug Hardy anticipates getting together with land-owners soon to discuss possible steps the FS and residents could take to avoid serious fires, particularly in the Cave Creek Canyon and Portal areas.

The FS, cooperating agencies, and ranchers completed the Maverick Prescribed Burn in the southern Peloncillo Mountains this year, burning a total of about 2900 acres on different occasions from January through June. Additional prescribed test burns planned for this winter include ones in the Johnson Peak Fire Management Plan area in the John Long Canyon drainage (see Newsletter 11), and a 5-acre test burn near West Turkey Creek. The FS hopes to treat about 4600 acres near West Turkey Creek with low-intensity prescribed fire over a period of years, and thus to keep heavy loads of silt and ash out of the creek.

CAVE CREEK WATER QUALITY MONITORING.

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality has monitored water quality in Cave Creek four times in the past two and a half years. Samples have usually been taken at nine sites along the main creek and major tributaries, but when samples were taken this past June, about half the sites were dry, reflecting the low rainfall of last winter and spring. To date, all samples have met the preliminary standards established for this State-designated Unique Water.

ADEQ is considering changing the statewide water quality monitoring program this year. Under the new plan, samples would be taken quarterly in one or two basins for one year, and in different basins in following years. Thus, if the Gila (to which Cave Creek belongs) and San Pedro basins were done this year, as is planned, it could be four or five years before those two basins were sampled again. The current

plan is to sample Cave Creek this year, probably beginning in November, but at only three sites.

It can be argued that not much is going on in the Cave Creek watershed to affect water quality seriously. Nevertheless, more monitoring is needed to develop site-specific water quality standards that have a sufficiently solid data base to be enforceable in future years.

FOREST SERVICE USER FEES Those of you visiting Forest Service sites in the Chiricahuas lately no doubt have noticed the imposition of new fees additional to the familiar ones for overnighting in developed campgrounds. These day-use fees are being applied at picnic sites (e.g. South Fork), trail head parking (e.g. Rustler Park), and campgrounds, though not all such sites have as yet been posted. Sample fees include \$3.00 for the Rustler trail heads and \$5.00 for day-use at Sunny Flat Campground; Golden Age Passport holders get a 50% discount.

The enhanced fee program receives impetus from an upper-level decision to allow 95% of funds collected to be used locally rather than be diverted to what some perceive as a black hole in Washington. Forest Service customers may feel better about fees that can contribute to local improvement in facilities and maintenance.

CRC Directors discussed the new fees with District Ranger Doug Hardy and Forest Supervisor John McGee, emphasizing the need for user permits covering longer periods of time and/or multiple destinations. For example, a single day-use fee could include a picnic stop as well as parking at trailheads, and a camping fee could be similarly inclusive. Residents of the area or others who visit several times a year would appreciate an annual pass that could be placed in view on a car's dashboard. (A window sticker would be inappropriate, considering that many resident families have more than one automobile.) Implementation of some such system should have high priority.

We have one main concern about the revised fee system: Consideration of proposals for new capital development might be influenced by their potential

for generating funds. As a worst case scenario, development might even be proposed *because* of its earnings aspect.

Comments regarding Forest Service related issues at the District level may be directed to: District Ranger, Coronado Natl. Forest, 3081 N Leslie Canyon Rd., Douglas, AZ 85607. The Forest Supervisor may be addressed at Coronado Natl. Forest, 300 W Congress, Tucson, AZ 85701.

CRC board of Directors: Josiah Austin, Pearce, AZ; Karen Hayes, Portal, AZ; Noel Snyder, Portal, AZ; Mary Winkler, Rodeo, NM; Richard Zweifel (President), Paradise, AZ. Manager: Alan Craig, Portal, AZ.

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