

# CHIRICAHUA REGIONAL COUNCIL

## NEWSLETTER

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P.O. Box 16480  
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The Forest Service debates to fee or not to fee and remains undecided; road paving continues in Cave Creek; the fire season that almost wasn't; a lecture on the Sky Islands Wildlands Network; progress at the Chiricahua National Monument and Ft. Bowie National Historic Site; and some Chiricahua miscellany.

**FEE DEMO PROGRAM.** The Fee Demo Program, authorized earlier by Congress on a trial basis to provide supplemental funding for federal agencies (the FS included) that operate public use facilities, has now been extended. Almost all user fees collected at places such as the South Fork Cave Creek and Rustler Park trailheads, are supposed to be spent for the operation and maintenance of those facilities.

The Fee Demo Board at the Forest Supervisor's Office in Tucson has discussed at length the possibility of a Forest-wide permit that would allow entry into any Fee Demo site on the Coronado National Forest. Now that the program has been extended we can hope that an annual permit at a reasonable fee for frequent users of the South Fork Cave Creek trail and other Douglas District sites will be implemented without more delay. A \$20 annual permit is available for Mt. Lemmon Highway area users, and a \$20 annual permit is scheduled to become available for Madera Canyon on January 1, 2002.

**PAVING AND BRIDGES IN CAVE CREEK CANYON.** Paving two segments of the main road in Cave Creek Canyon is underway at this writing. One segment, about 0.4 mile long a short distance

upstream from Stewart Campground, brings the last remaining section of rough, narrow roadway in the lower portion of the canyon up to Federal highway standards. For 0.1 mile the lanes of this segment divide around an island of trees, as was done several years ago down canyon closer to the Visitor Information Center.

Local residents were surprised and alarmed to discover this 0.1 mile-long strip bulldozed and some fair-sized oak trunks being hauled away. They were also concerned that a small, isolated grove of maples might be sacrificed.

The strip of woods was removed to accommodate one lane of the divided highway. If the road in this stretch had been brought up to the standard width of 22 feet without dividing the lanes, a number of sycamores on one or both sides would have to have been removed. Also, the road would have encroached on the Cave Creek riparian corridor even more than it did before.

As it turned out, Douglas District Biologist Gary Helbing had flagged the grove of maples to be saved, and most if not all of those trees are still standing.

Owing to an unfortunate combination of political and weather-related factors, the primary prescribed burning effort scheduled for this past season, the Baker Burn in the Peloncillos, did not happen. The Plan for this burn was challenged, and when approval to burn was finally received on July 15, the monsoon season had started. The burn is now planned for late spring or early summer next year if fuel moisture, weather and all other factors are favorable. One concern is that increased Federal spending owing to the national crisis may result in further FS budget cuts. Funding for prescribed burning could be one victim, with money earmarked for remote area burns losing out to programs designed to make the forest/urban interface safer.

**CORONADO NATIONAL FOREST PLAN.** Congress has delayed revision of forest plans. Revision of the 1986 Coronado National Forest Plan is not expected to begin until 2002 at the earliest, and quite possibly not until 2003. We will advise members when the FS announces beginning of the revision process.

**COWS vs. CARS.** A spate of accidents involving jaywalking cattle has directed attention to this perennial and serious problem caused by a lack of fencing along much of the seven-mile stretch of Portal Road between Portal and State Line Road. An *ad hoc* committee of concerned citizens ("bring in the usual suspects") met and plans on inviting our County Supervisor and a representative of the County Highway Administration to attend a public meeting in Portal to discuss implementing fencing. Meeting time and place — probably in the first week of December — will be announced when fixed.

**TRAIL CONDITIONS UPDATES.** One of the consequences of the 1994 Rattlesnake Fire and subsequent rains was serious erosion of trails and blockage by fallen trees. The Trail Crew made up of summer employees and an experienced Trail Boss has done much to repair the damage, but with many dead trees still standing, each year brings a new crop of downfall to be cleared. Trail Boss

Adrian R. Cockerell has prepared Trail Conditions Updates (available at the Portal Ranger Station) that provide much useful information on trail conditions.

**PROGRESS AT THE MONUMENT.** The ink is barely dry on final approval of General Management Plans for Chiricahua National Monument and for Fort Bowie National Historic Site, yet considerable progress is being made to carry out the two plans. The National Park Service's preferred alternatives in the final environmental impact statements for the two areas are officially adopted as General Management Plans, effective with publication of notice in the Federal Register in October 2001.

The main road through the Monument will be repaved all the way to Massai Point with its special character preserved. With a few possible exceptions, the road will not be widened, nor will pullouts, trailheads or parking areas be enlarged. Parking areas at the top are being redesigned to enhance traffic flow and increase parking capacity. Road paving will not start until next spring or, in one area where Spotted Owls may be present, until after the nesting season. Additionally, overhead utility lines will be buried, and badly needed improvements in the Monument's water distribution system will be completed.

Large recreational vehicles are recognized as a real hazard on the road between the Visitor Center and Massai Point. Consequently, when signs can be installed and visitor handouts changed, vehicles longer than 28 feet will be prohibited beyond the Visitor Center parking area.

Possible acquisition of the King of Lead Mine, a private inholding along the Monument's northeastern boundary, is a major feature of the Monument Plan. This action may depend on the extent of contamination remaining from former mining operations. Funds are available if only minor cleanup is needed. A contract has been awarded to analyze the degree of contamination

