

CHIRICAHUA REGIONAL COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER

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P.O. Box 16480
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THE YEAR 2002 IN REVIEW: Finally, a minimally useful Annual Permit for trailhead parking; rabies outbreak in the Chiricahuas; proposed control of manzanita; Forest Plans face revision; Monument and Fort Bowie move ahead with restoration; fires and drought take their toll; road paving and bridges postponed by fund shortages; a brief visit from the Rainbow Family; e-mail updates?

FEE DEMO PROGRAM. After months of discussion, the Coronado National Forest's Fee Demo \$20 permits can be purchased that authorize unlimited parking for one year at the South Fork trailhead. With this permit you can avoid having to search for \$5 (\$2.50 if you have a Golden Age card), go back to your vehicle for a pen or pencil, and fill out a permit every time you visit South Fork. It is also valid at three other Coronado National Forest frequent use areas, Madera Canyon, Sabino Canyon and Mt. Lemmon, but it is not valid in lieu of the \$5 per day use fee at campgrounds or for trail head parking at Rustler Park. One cannot help but wonder why the FS included the other distant sites in the permit but excluded trailhead parking at Rustler Park.

Annual permits are available weekdays year round at the Douglas District Office and Thursday through Monday at the Portal Visitor Information Center in its spring to fall open season. Nancy McAvoy, the employee authorized to sell the permits at the Portal Center, is a FS volunteer several days a week during the off season. To buy a permit in Portal during the off season, you may leave a message at the VIC (558-2221) or call Mrs. McAvoy at home to arrange to meet her at the VIC. Bring \$20 (\$10 Golden Age) and license numbers for up to two vehicles.

Permits are also available at many places in Tucson (see Coronado National Forest web site:
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/coronado/>).

Overnight camping and day use fees are now charged at seven campgrounds in the Douglas Ranger District: Cochise Stronghold in the Dragoon Mountains, Rucker Forest and Cypress Park in Rucker Canyon, Idlewilde, Stewart, and Sunny Flat in Cave Creek Canyon, and Rustler Park. Herb Martyr, John Hands, and West Turkey Creek campgrounds are still free. West Turkey Creek Campground has recently been upgraded with new picnic tables and other improvements, and is likely to become a fee campground eventually.

RABIES OUTBREAK IN THE CHIRICAHUAS. In September a Forest Service employee and his wife were attacked by a Bobcat outside their home a few miles south of Portal; the Bobcat later tested positive for rabies. Both victims received appropriate medical treatment and are doing fine.

Until really cold weather set in, many other wild mammals, mostly Gray Foxes, were observed behaving strangely, apparently sick, or were found dead in the Chiricahuas. A jogger in Cave Creek Canyon, and a car visiting Rustler Park, were both attacked by foxes,

and a Bobcat attacked a house in Paradise, possibly intent on entry.

A dead fox and another Bobcat also tested positive for rabies. To obtain a valid test, it is critical that dead animals be taken to a lab within 24 hours after death. **Wear Gloves!** Transport to Tucson is normally by Department of Game and Fish personnel.

We do not suggest that it is no longer safe to go into the woods, but remain alert and avoid any mammal behaving abnormally. Also, have your pets--dogs, horses, and outdoor-going cats--vaccinated against rabies.

What to do if you are attacked or bitten by a mammal or see one frothing at the mouth or otherwise behaving strangely? Call the Arizona Department of Game and Fish dispatcher (800-352-0700), who will try to reach the closest unit wildlife manager by radio, or call the County Animal Control Officer or County Sheriff (both 800-362-0812 in Cochise County).

MANZANITA MANAGEMENT. In March (2002) the FS issued a Scoping Report on a proposal to remove 85 percent or more of the manzanita on ten sites totaling some 9000 acres in the Chiricahua, Peloncillo and Dragoon mountains. The CRC Board concurred in the need to control manzanita where it has invaded large areas formerly dominated by oak woodland or semi-desert grassland, but found the Scoping Report lacking or incomplete in important details. Concerns raised by the Board and sent to the FS included the following:

Heavy rains occur at unpredictable times. Serious soil loss can result where bulldozing or other mechanical treatments are used, even where slopes do not exceed 15 percent. Soil erosion can be reduced by limiting the size of areas treated at one time and by leaving contour strips of existing vegetation. Removal by bulldozer has major impacts on mycorrhizal fungi, which are becoming recognized as a critical component in western soils. Will areas treated mechanically or with fire be

seeded with native grasses immediately after treatment? Is an adequate supply of such grass seed available?

The Environmental Analysis (EA) should specify the herbicides considered for use, and identify any adverse impacts noted in other areas where these herbicides have been applied. Will these herbicides kill regenerating oaks and other broadleaf plants? Windless days are very rare in canyon bottoms; drift is a major problem. Herbicides could be a heavy-handed and indiscriminate way to go.

In some years at least, manzanita berries are a major food source for bears. The EA should consider what impacts the loss of 85 to 90 percent of manzanita on 9000+ acres may have on bears and other wildlife, and whether this loss may result in additional bear problems in human residential areas. In addition to providing food for bears, Manzanita blossoms appear at the same time that Rufous Hummingbirds are migrating (March) and this is the only nectar source available to them then of which we are aware.

The Scoping Report includes the objective, "Avoid adverse effects to any T&ES [Threatened and Endangered Species]." Minimizing long-term adverse impacts on other native wildlife and non-target native vegetation should be part of the all over objective.

Will the EA specify a range of alternatives regarding treatment methods? Prescribed fire, as the most natural treatment, seems least likely to have long-term adverse impacts on soil and other natural resources. We understand that manzanita stands typically regenerate quickly following fire, and that subsequent burning is needed to achieve significant control. Seeding native grass into the ash soon after the initial burn offers the best prospect for minimizing soil loss. If the grass seeding succeeds, it provides fuel to carry a fire when the manzanita stand is too young to reseed itself yet too young to carry fire.

