

CHIRICAHUA REGIONAL COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER

No. 15
February 2003

P.O. Box 16480
Portal, AZ 85632

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 week-days 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.

The Scoping Report states that 81 percent of the proposed treatment areas are in transitional oak woodland. Aside from the stated objective of saving 10 to 15 percent of the manzanita, is the desired future condition of these areas primarily grassland or primarily oak woodland with grass understory? We are not suggesting which alternative is preferable, but the EA should clearly state the desired condition and detail the proposed treatment. For example, will proposed mechanical treatments attempt to remove a significant percentage of any oaks or Alligator Junipers that survived earlier fuelwood harvests, or trees that have subsequently become established?

The CRC has not received a response to concerns we expressed (sent shortly after the proposal arrived), but we hope that they will be addressed in the EA, and that the public will have another opportunity to comment on the manzanita control proposal. Meanwhile, we understand that because funds were diverted to fight fires in the West, manzanita management projects have been postponed indefinitely.

CORONADO NATIONAL FOREST PLAN. When certain Forests elsewhere in the country failed to meet legal deadlines for Forest Plan revision, the FS was sued. Congress subsequently postponed plan revisions indefinitely and directed the FS to come up with a revision schedule for each National Forest. The Coronado National Forest was chosen to be first in the Southwest Region. The Notice of Intent is now scheduled to be filed in FY 2004, with revision to be completed by FY 2006.

The rules governing Forest Plan revisions are also being revised, and were published in the Federal Register (Vol. 67, No. 235, p. 72770) on December 6, 2002. The public has 90 days from this date to comment on the proposed rules. The rules are being revised ostensibly to hasten the revision process, but they need to be examined critically to see whether they have been simplified to the point where insufficient public input or inadequate

resource protection may result. The published ruling may be viewed online by doing a Google search for: December 6, 2002 "National Forest System Land and Resource Management Planning."

NEWS FROM THE MONUMENT. This past summer Chiricahua National Monument and Fort Bowie National Historic Site acquired a new Superintendent, Neil C. Mangum.

Implementation of the recently approved general management plans for the two areas goes ahead. At the Monument, a great deal of much needed preservation and maintenance work has been accomplished this year on the network of historic trails constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps. In addition, the main road into the Monument has been repaved and overhead utility lines have been buried. The proposed new headquarters and visitor orientation facility is not likely to materialize any time soon, since major funding will be needed.

The trail to the 7310 foot-high summit of Sugarloaf Mountain, closed earlier by a major rockslide, was reopened this fall after a six-person Monument trail crew cleared the wilderness trail with hand tools.

About 600 acres of a planned 1100-acre prescribed burn in the Monument was burned successfully in October. The remainder of this site will be burned next spring if weather and fuel moisture conditions permit. The National Park Service would like to use prescribed fire to reduce fuel loads in a rather heavily vegetated 400-acre site close to the Monument's developed area, but does not plan to proceed unless or until it can be done safely.

The revised Monument Fire Management Plan will be available for public review in 2003, possibly by spring.

The entire boundary of Fort Bowie is now fenced, and funding for four cattle guards needed to complete this project has been requested. In addition, a restroom has been constructed at the

Visitor Center. Much of the water from Apache Spring is now flowing into the riparian corridor.

In the not too distant future, visitors to Fort Bowie may notice fiber-optic cable being laid across the Historic Site. The cable will be buried along the existing pipeline easement, disturbed a few years ago when a pipeline was replaced. Project sponsors will provide some funding to remove non-native vegetation certain to invade disturbed soil areas, and to regulate construction vehicles almost certain to stray off the easement.

2002 FIRES AND DROUGHT. Those watching the 2002 Fourth of July parade and fireworks show in Rodeo had only to glance to the west to see a fireworks display that was both impressive and potentially threatening. The Darnell Fire, started by lightning on June 28 about 5 miles west of Rodeo, burned some 5900 acres surrounding Darnell Peak before being extinguished; Portal Fire and Rescue was deeply involved. No residences burned, but people living just outside the Forest boundary at the base of the Chiricahuas near the mouths of Sulphur Draw and Horseshoe Canyon, and even roughly four miles distant in Cave Creek Canyon, had ample reason to be nervous. The cost of controlling the fire? \$800,000.

In another spectacular incident, propane cylinders caught fire in the back of a pickup truck and went off "like skyrockets," starting several fires in the brush along lower Cave Creek Road. Greater Downtown Portal could have been in serious trouble except for two happy coincidences: A passing Portal resident called in almost immediately, and at that same moment members of the Portal Fire crew were already assembled at the Fire House to go on another call. They diverted and quelled the threat.

The Douglas Ranger District fought or monitored six other fires on the Forest during 2002, all of them small (under 100 acres), plus one in Mexico, and assisted on four fires on state and

other land off the Forest. With the exception of one fire thought to be human-caused in the Dragoon Mountains, all the fires on the Douglas District were started by lightning. Included in the latter fires was the 500-acre Ida II Fire, which started on Ida Peak around Thanksgiving and was still creeping slowly and being monitored until declared dead on Christmas Eve, having reached Barfoot Park.

The prolonged drought of 2001, lasting somewhat beyond the first half of 2002 and causing at least one meteorologist to proclaim last spring, "the driest year in Arizona's history," postponed for yet another year the prescribed Baker Burn in the southern Peloncillo Mountains. Other prescribed burning was similarly delayed, at least until late in the year (see Chiricahua National Monument news). One probable effect of the drought and the resulting poor food supply was seen in the annual late June count of Elegant Trogons in Cave Creek Canyon. The total of ten trogons (two pairs plus six singles) was roughly half the number found in earlier wet years.

How severe was the drought? Bob Morse furnished these precipitation figures for his site in the mouth of Cave Creek Canyon: Annual average 1971-2002, 17.80"; 2000, 16.76"; 2001, 10.93"; 2002, 12.68". Weather is capricious; consider 2000: 65% of the rain that year fell in two usually drier months--June and October.

PAVING AND BRIDGES. Fire-fighting expenditures, mostly elsewhere in the West, gobbled up all FS money engineers had coveted to finish paving the last half mile of road leading up Cave Creek Canyon to the Southwestern Research Station. Also consumed was money that might have been made available to construct the abutments for a bridge across Cave Creek to Sunny Flat Campground. The FS has acquired the bridge. The enormous FS expenditures for fire fighting in 2002 may postpone the remaining paving and bridge installation until 2004, but in any event construction work would likely not be-

gin until early September 2003.

RAINBOW'S END: Late in March a sudden increase in camping activity along East Turkey Creek upstream from Paradise signaled the intention of members of the *Rainbow Family* to convene there. The *Family* has no formal organization and no leaders. Its many thousands of adherents throughout the country favor an alternative life style and since the early 1970's have come together in rural settings where they pray for peace and, some at least, express their freedom from convention with nudity, marijuana, and hallucinogens.

The locations picked for gatherings most often have been undeveloped (no formal campsites) places in National Forests and this has brought the *Family* into conflict with the Forest Service (FS) and local law enforcement. There is no indication that the meeting in the Chiricahuas would have attracted such numbers, but one near Springer-ville in northern Arizona several years ago had some 25,000 participants! The initial reaction of the FS to the gatherings was to institute a rule that requires permits and limits gatherings on FS land to no more than 75 persons. The *Family* members consider this a restriction on their constitutional right to assembly. Arrests and jailings naturally followed.

In the Chiricahuas incident the FS posted "SPECIAL CLOSURE ORDER 05-192"

signs along FS road 42B from just beyond Paradise to FS road 42 (the road across the mountains) and for a stretch of FS 42 in both directions from the intersection. The area was "closed for the protection of special biological communities," but the roads remained open to traffic with the stipulation that cars were not allowed to stop. Persons already in camp were evicted and the closure remained in effect for several weeks.

The impact of large numbers of people concentrated in a sensitive riparian habitat is certainly a matter of grave concern, but it must be admitted that the *Family* has in at least some instances done a good job of cleaning up and restoring their meeting sites.

E-MAIL NEWS UPDATES? Occasionally the CRC receives notices of impending actions by government agencies (usually the Forest Service). Only rarely do we feel that these notices warrant a special number of the Newsletter, and even then there are constraints on the production and mailing of a Newsletter that may eat into the time available for public response to a notice. We are considering establishing an e-mail service to bring these notices to the attention of CRC members. **We solicit your opinion.** Please let us know if you think such a service would be of use. Send your response to CRC, P.O. Box 16480, Portal, AZ 85632.

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

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Please check your mailing label for your most recent renewal date.

Annual membership is \$20 per household. Please make check payable to Chiricahua Regional Council and mail to: P.O. Box 16480, Portal AZ 85632

The Chiricahua Regional Council is a tax-exempt, non-profit corporation funded by memberships and donations. For IRS purposes, the EIN is 86-0695485.

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Mailing address _____

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Check here _____ if you wish to be notified by e-mail when CRC learns that a Government agency is soliciting comment on a major proposed action affecting the region covered by the CRC. E-mail addresses will not be shared with anyone.

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