

CHIRICAHUA REGIONAL COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER

NO. 16
August 2004

P. O. Box 16480
Portal, AZ 85632

In this issue: proposed and pending Forest Service construction and plans for the Chiricahuas; Goshawks have their day in court; Turkeys return to the Chiricahuas and broadcast their activities; endangered Leopard Frogs get some respect; a proposal to reopen and expand an open-pit quarry on Coronado National Forest land in the Dragoon Mountains is in the works; fires wild and tame; a new DVD for subscribers; new and *reduced!* CRC dues.

SUNNY FLAT CAMPGROUND RENOVATION. The Coronado NF Supervisor's Office has contracted with an Albuquerque landscape architect for detailed layout design of the Sunny Flat Campground improvements. Completion of the design is expected by early fall. If funds in next fiscal year's budget are not diverted for fighting wildfires in the West or other high priority work, construction could be done from October 2004 through February 2005. Construction not completed during this period would be postponed until the following fall, after the Spotted Owl nesting season.

The design is expected to follow closely the plan specified in Alternative B of the

Environmental Assessment, and in the Douglas District Ranger's Decision Notice of August 22, 2000. This alternative calls for 13 to 15 campsites, a small increase over the existing 12 sites. Campsites in the riparian area will be replaced by new sites along the upper edge of the open, grassy field now being invaded by brush. Most of the campsites will be renovated and at least two will meet barrier-free access standards. The existing restroom will be replaced by a new one at the edge of the grassy field, and the existing power line over the field will be buried. No trees larger than 9 inches in diameter (at breast height) will be removed. No cottonwoods, sycamores or madrones will be removed, and no trees will be removed from the upper edge of

the grassy field. The campground will be closed while renovation is in progress.

CAVE CREEK BRIDGES. Robert Freel, Coronado National Forest Roads Engineer, expects work to begin on August 16, 2004, installing a bridge over the South Fork Cave Creek road crossing. The road will be closed to vehicles from about 600 feet downstream of the crossing for about three weeks, but pedestrian traffic can continue, with a short detour, on up to the South Fork Trailhead and Picnic Area.

Soon after the South Fork bridge is installed, work should begin on the bridge at the Sunny Flat Campground entrance. Both will be free span, welded steel bridges with prefabricated abutments, similar to the one installed recently at the entrance to Idlewild Campground. They are designed to be dropped in place with a large crane, causing minimal disturbance to the streambed, and to oxidize to a dull color that blends well with surroundings.

The public has questioned the need for these rather expensive bridges. One justification given is that they will keep leaking grease, oil and antifreeze out of Cave Creek, should it flow again some day. Visitors driving vehicles with low road clearance should appreciate the easier access.

SOUTH FORK PASS UPDATE. Access to the picnic area and trail in South Fork now costs \$5 per vehicle, but the South Fork Annual Pass, available at the Cave Creek Canyon Visitor Information Center for \$20, is valid in South Fork and also on the Crest Trail at Rustler Park, in Madera Canyon, and on Mt. Lemmon

(except Rose and Spencer canyons). Those 62 and over who have a Golden Age Passport (Golden Geezer Card) get free access in South Fork (leave passport on your dash), and also pay half-price at campgrounds.

DRAGON MOUNTAINS MINING PROPOSAL. The Forest Service is considering a request by Alpha Calcit, Inc., an international mining company, to reopen and expand an open-pit quarry on Coronado National Forest land in the Dragoon Mountains above the town of Dragoon. The public will have an opportunity to comment on the draft environmental impact statement when it is completed, perhaps in a year or more from now. The EIS will detail potential effects of the mining project on Forest Service land and on surrounding private lands.

Besides limestone and related products, Alpha Calcit envisions mining 100,000 tons of marble annually for 20 years. Their proposal includes construction of about one-half mile of new road in the inventoried roadless area. Considerable opposition to the proposal has already been voiced by Dragoon residents and others concerned with noise of blasting operations, possible degradation of air and water quality, impacts on the land and on public safety, and other matters.

The FS is awaiting information, requested in June 2003 from Alpha Calcit, concerning what the company proposes to do off Forest land, such as constructing new roads and a crushing facility. Also needed are the results of additional core drilling by the company, so that the ore body may be adequately described in the EIS. Among other things, the FS

must determine from the ore body description that sufficient minerals are present to cover land reclamation expenses out of mining operation income.

In a notice received July 24, the FS requested comments on their proposed action to authorize core drilling at two locations in Section 33, about 1 mile west southwest of Dragoon Peak. Drill pads would be established out of washes, at the end of existing roads that lead to the established quarry. Comments on the proposed core drilling are due by August 16, 2004.

Additional information is available at <http://www.epa.gov/EPA-IMPACT/2003/January/Day-27/i1693.htm>. To comment now on the proposed core drilling, or to be notified when the draft EIS on the entire project is available for public comment, contact Beverley Everson, Geology and Minerals Program Manager, Coronado National Forest Supervisor's Office, 300 W Congress, Tucson, AZ 85701, 520 670-4606, or e-mail beverson@fs.fed.us.

CORONADO NATIONAL FOREST PLAN. Revision of the Coronado National Forest Plan (see Newsletter 15) has progressed to the beginning phase. Jennifer Ruyle, the Planner in the Forest Supervisor's Office assigned to lead the project, has offered to meet in Portal with CRC members and all other interested folks later this year. Public input is expected to play a major role in plan revision. Ms. Ruyle would like to discuss the Plan and all that is entailed in the revision process, as well as explain how the public can participate in this important project. Suggestions made during the planning process have a greater

chance of determining how your land will be managed in the future. CRC will do its best to publicize this meeting well in advance.

FOREST PLANS REVISION AFFECTING NORTHERN GOSHAWK. In response to a November 2003 opinion filed by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, the FS Regional Office is working on a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) to address "scientific arguments challenging the agency's conclusions over the Northern Goshawk's habitat preferences." The SEIS will update the June 1996 Final EIS, which amended the forest plans of eleven national forests in Arizona and New Mexico, regarding old growth standards and guidelines for the Northern Goshawk and Mexican Spotted Owl. The Court ruled that the Final EIS "failed to disclose responsible scientific opposition that was disclosed in the project record."

The FS expects that the draft SEIS will be ready for a 45-day public comment period by mid- August 2004. When it is ready for comment, the draft will be available at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/projects/index.shtml>, or you may request a copy from Peter Gaulke, Project Leader in the Regional Office, at 505 842-3256.

NEW CORONADO NATIONAL FOREST SUPERVISOR. Jeanine Derby is now forest supervisor for the Coronado National Forest. Before coming to the Tucson office, she held Forest Supervisor positions on the Los Padres NF in California for six years, and on the Cibola NF in New Mexico. Ms. Derby has a bachelor of science degree in biology from the University of California, River-

side, and a master of science in biology from California State College, San Bernardino. Prior to her two previous assignments as a Forest Supervisor, she was a botanist and ecologist on the San Bernardino NF for ten years, a District Ranger on the Sequoia NF, and Deputy Forest Supervisor on the Lincoln NF.

Deputy Forest Supervisor Sue Kozacek served a long period as acting Forest Supervisor on the Coronado NF after John McGee accepted a visiting professor position at the University of Arizona School of Renewable Natural Resources last September.

WILD TURKEY RELEASE. Thirty-nine Wild Turkeys captured near Yecora, Sonora, under permit from the Mexican government, were released by the Arizona Department of Game and Fish in the Chiricahua Mountain's West Turkey Creek drainage in early April 2003. A slightly larger group was imported for release in April 2004. Most of the latter birds were liberated on Mt. Graham, but five hens from this group were released in West Turkey Creek, along with five gobblers brought over from the Huachuca Mountains.

The birds are of the Gould's or *mexicana* race, the largest Wild Turkey race, which has white-tipped tail feathers. It is the race from which most domestic turkeys were derived. It ranges north from Mexico into the Peloncillo and Animas mountains, and likely resided historically in the Chiricahuas as well. Merriam's Wild Turkeys, with cinnamon-tipped tail feathers, the race native to northern Arizona forests, were introduced into the Chiricahuas years ago but there are no records of this race in this area in recent

years.

Before the recent releases, the Sonoran birds were held in quarantine for 30 days, as required by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in a facility provided by CRC Board Member Josiah Austin on his El Coronado Ranch. Sixteen of the birds released in 2003, and at least two of this spring's release, were fitted with radio back packs. The Department of Game and Fish has followed those turkeys having radio transmitters biweekly from an airplane. The birds have ranged south from West Turkey Creek into Rucker Canyon, and north into Pinery Canyon, but most observations have been concentrated in Rock, West Turkey and Cottonwood canyons. The birds have had encouraging nesting success to date. Three or four broods were observed in 2003, and two broods have been seen so far this season.

The Department would appreciate reports of Wild Turkeys seen in areas away from West Turkey Creek, including colors of streamers on the birds, and numbers on streamers, if present and visible. Reports can be made to Jim Heffelfinger, Arizona Department of Game and Fish, 555 N Greasewood, Tucson AZ 85745; phone 520 628-5376, ext. 530.

SAFE HARBOR AGREEMENT:

CHIRICAHUA LEOPARD FROG. The Malpai Borderlands Group and all those involved in the task, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Arizona Department of Game and Fish, and The Nature Conservancy, are to be commended for developing a Safe Harbor Agreement for the federally listed Chiricahua Leopard Frog. The Agree-

ment will protect landowners from property-use restrictions that might otherwise be imposed if habitat improvement projects or other conservation efforts result in new or increased populations of this threatened species on their land. It will apply to landowners within the approximately one million acre-Malpai Group area of interest, and will protect neighboring landowners, through a certificate of inclusion, who might be concerned about frogs moving onto their land from a ranch participating in the conservation efforts.

Conservation steps envisioned in the Agreement include enhancement of habitat at stock tanks, maintenance of existing habitat, removal of Bullfrogs and other non-native predators, and establishment of new Chiricahua Leopard Frog populations. Within the Agreement area, as noted in the Federal Register, these frogs are known to occur in only a few locations, including three populations on the Magoffin Ranch. These three populations "exist solely due to the extraordinary efforts of the landowners to establish and maintain them prior to listing of the species."

After an incredible amount of effort, the Safe Harbor Agreement, and the associated biological opinion and related documents, have now been approved. We hope (with the frogs) that the first projects will get underway within the coming year. The 70+ page Agreement may be viewed or downloaded at <http://arizonaes.fws.gov>. Questions may be directed to Marty Tuegel or Sherry Barrett at the F&WS Tucson office, 520 670-6144.

BAKER BURN II. Five years of inten-

sive cooperative planning by the Malpai Borderlands Group, the Coronado National Forest Supervisor's Office and Douglas Ranger District, The Nature Conservancy, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, many other federal and state agencies, and private land owners, culminated in June 2003 in a "picture perfect" prescribed burn on about 48,000 acres in the southern Peloncillo Mountains. The burn has been described as the largest prescribed burn ever in the United States.

The burn left a fine mosaic of burned and unburned areas. Based on mapping done after the burn, only 7 percent of the project area received high intensity burning, whereas 50 percent received medium intensity, and 20 percent low intensity, burning. Twenty-three percent of the area was unburned. Most importantly, the riparian habitat in the main downstream portion of Guadalupe Canyon was protected from burning. Fifty-six percent of the burn area was in New Mexico, with the balance in Arizona. A little more than half the burn was on federal land (FS and BLM), with slightly less than a quarter each on private lands and state lands.

The southern Peloncillos, in stark contrast to most of our area, received good rainfall after the burn. For example, 12 inches of rain fell in the area near Cloverdale from June through December. The rain resulted in excellent vegetative response to the burn. To allow grasses, in particular, to become better established, cattle in the area were kept off the burn, and are being kept off this year as well.

WILDFIRES. The Douglas Ranger District controlled or monitored 18 wildfires, twice the average annual number, in the 2003 fire season. Only two of these developed into large fires. The only one in the Peloncillos, the 3550-acre Skeleton Fire in South Skeleton Canyon, was considered beneficial. The 1014-acre Cave Fire in Middle Rucker Canyon, which burned off and on repeatedly from the end of July until early October, also was considered valuable in removing much decadent brush, much of it manzanita, and other hazardous fuels. This fire was watched closely and would have activated control measures had it threatened to cross over into Price Canyon. Ten of the remaining fires were less than one acre in size. The other six ranged from 2 to 40 acres. Of the 18 fires, 16 were lightning caused and two were human caused. A Cave Creek Canyon private land fire, was also human caused.

The 2004 fire season started early with the quarter-acre, human-caused, Bruno Canyon Fire on 23 February, followed by the two-acre, lightning-started, Fools Fire on April Fools' Day. Eleven other fires were ignited by lightning through the end of July, ten in the Chiricahuas and one in the Dragoons. All but two of these were smaller than one acre, most of them much smaller. One of the two larger fires, the Price Fire, started in the middle of the 1994 Rattlesnake Fire burn area and was allowed to burn 25 acres. One other, the Turkey Fire, started on private land in West Turkey Creek Canyon and burned onto forest land, a total of six acres, in late May.

The Douglas Ranger District has also conducted a prescribed burn in 2004, a

140-acre burn near Cloverdale in the Peloncillos, aimed at reducing junipers invading former grassland.

Our thanks to Ruben Morales, Assistant Fire Management Officer on the Douglas Ranger District, for providing helpful information on these fires.

HARVEST RAIN DVD. *Harvest Rain*, a beautiful and inspiring DVD, will be sent to you free of charge when you renew your CRC dues. While supplies last, it will be sent to new members as well. The DVDs are made available to CRC at production cost through the generosity of their producers, Valer and Josiah Austin and Foundation San Bernardino. The DVD describes a centuries-old and especially valuable method of land restoration now being used on both sides of the border, particularly at the El Coronado Ranch on the Chiricahua Mountains west slope.

The leaflet accompanying the DVD describes it best: "*Harvest Rain* is the story of breathing life back into a landscape. The land that is being restored has been farmed and overgrazed with little regard for its fragility and biological uniqueness. But now, by adopting the ancient practice of harvesting rain, natural systems are being revived. . . . The notion of harvesting rain is quite simple: by building strategically-placed rock structures and earthen berms that slow the often heavy but infrequent flows of water, moisture is allowed to seep into the ground and promote vegetation on otherwise eroded slopes. The plant growth in turn acts as a sponge, stabilizing stream banks and encouraging the further spread of vegetation and water retention. . . ."

Harvest Rain offers great potential as an

educational tool. After viewing, please share it and its message widely.

CRC DUES REDUCED. Thanks to the support of all members and generous additional donations by many individuals, Chiricahua Regional Council bank balances are now adequate to cover fore-

seeable expenses. For this reason, and to reach as broad an audience as possible, the Board of Directors voted to change the \$20 annual household membership fee. This amount will now cover a membership for two years, reducing renewal effort and expense for all. Additional donations are always welcome.

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.

TIME TO JOIN OR RENEW MEMBERSHIP?

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

Biennial 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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CHIRICAHUA REGIONAL COUNCIL

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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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Common Black-Hawk

Narcan @2003

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