

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

