

**CHIRICAHUA REGIONAL COUNCIL**

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**NEWSLETTER**

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Star Route #74  
Portal, AZ 85632

You helped create the Chiricahua Regional Council (CRC) in response to a 1992 Forest Service plan to turn a big piece of the Coronado National Forest into a National Recreation Area. The CRC helped show that the Forest Service proposal was a budget-driven scheme that neither protected the land nor considered public opinion.

They dropped the National Recreation Area proposal, but that was only one of a panoply of Forest Service and BLM activities that continually affect us. That NRA idea showed us the need to constantly monitor the federal agencies and act quickly to bring issues to the attention of our members.

The CRC is now a tax-exempt corporation and has hired a part-time director, Michael Julian. He and his wife Dale live in Paradise on East Turkey Creek. Michael is a former law professor, district attorney, and public defender, presently working as a carpenter. He's backpacked many thousands of mountain miles and is committed to helping preserve the immense diversity of the Chiricahua region.

Michael is responsible for staying up to date on Forest Service and BLM activities, for keeping members informed, for encouraging more public involvement in Forest Service decisions, and for working to develop a special congressional designation for parts of the Chiricahua region.

The CRC needs to raise money for office equipment and to provide a modest salary for its new executive director. Our tax-exempt status will help, and the CRC gratefully acknowledges several generous donations that have helped us toward becoming a more effective organization.



David Mullan, one of the CRC's founders, continues to help us, though he now lives in Oklahoma and is chief counsel for the Cherokee Nation. David was invaluable in our effort to gain congressional withdrawal of Cave Creek from mining development. Since then he has drafted appeals of the Forest Service decision to build a road into John Long Canyon.

## JOHN LONG CANYON UPDATE

John Long Canyon is on the west side of the Chiricahua Mountains between West Turkey Creek and the Rucker road.

In March of 1992 the U.S. Forest Service proposed building a road into John Long. The CRC opposed that project because the road was to be in a highly sensitive riparian area. The Forest Service gave interested parties less than two weeks to study seven alternatives and submit written replies. This project is inconsistent with the Coronado National Forest Plan for the area.

When the Forest Service ignored the CRC's objections, we filed an administrative appeal. We lost our appeal at the Coronado National Forest level, then appealed to the Regional Forester in Albuquerque. That appeal also failed. The next level of appeal would be the U.S. District Court.

The CRC is presently considering its options. At the very least we'll petition for reconsideration on both the Coronado National Forest and regional levels. New administrators will soon be making decisions, and we're optimistic about stopping this road.

## WOOD AND EMIGRANT CANYON ACCESS

Wood and Emigrant Canyons drain the area northwest of Cochise Head in the northern Chiricahuas. In both canyons county-maintained roads end at private ranches which are surrounded by National Forest.

In March of 1994 the Forest Service proposed constructing 1.2 miles of single-lane road in Wood and .5 miles in Emigrant Canyon. Both roads would end with small parking areas beyond which motorized traffic would be "restricted."

The Forest Service plan provides for public access while minimizing the damage to riparian areas. The CRC supports the Forest Service access plan for both of these



canyons. We do, however, intend to carefully monitor implementation of the plan.

### THE RATTLESNAKE FIRE

An unprecedented fire burned a large part of the upper elevation forest in the Chiricahua Mountains between June 28 and July 22, 1994. Started by lightning near Rattlesnake Peak, the fire spread over most of the drainage systems. It was helped by unusually dry conditions and record high temperatures.

Fire crews were able to save most of Rustler Park and all of the Rustler buildings. Of the 28,000 acres burned, about 600 acres crowned-out with complete destruction of large pines and firs. In most areas, however, it took only the understory which hadn't seen fire in decades. Luckily, the fire never reached the Southwestern Research Station or the lower part of the South Fork of Cave Creek.

### CAVE CREEK RECREATION DEVELOPMENT

"We plan to provide a wide spectrum of recreational opportunities in the northern Chiricahuas to satisfy a broad range of visitor interests...." Thus, the draft Cave Creek - Pinery Corridor Concept Plan of 1991 reflected the broad scope of recreational development being contemplated by the Coronado National Forest.

At that time the CRC questioned both the plan's advisability and its legality, raising such issues as:

a) Broad scale recreational development of the northern Chiricahuas is a major shift in management focus. This is a systematic federal action that cannot legally be implemented piecemeal, but requires a comprehensive plan.

b) The primary goal of National Forest management should be protection of the resource rather than promotion... and then meeting an ever-increasing demand for new facilities.

c) An area's recreational carrying capacity should always be established prior to planning for development.

d) Surveys and public meetings have clearly demonstrated overwhelming local opposition to major recreational development in Cave Creek Canyon.

e) Any recreational use in Cave Creek Canyon should recognize the area's biodiversity and tradition of biological research as paramount values.

The Cave Creek - Pinery Corridor Concept Plan of 1991 is being replaced by the "Cave Creek Recreation Concept Plan". Once again the Forest Service held a series of



meetings with invited members of the public. They voiced many concerns about the appropriate level of recreational development for Cave Creek.

A draft of the new concept plan was due in June and we had hoped to include a description of it in this newsletter. It was delayed by the Rattlesnake fire; we now expect the plan to be out in September or October. We'll publish another newsletter as soon as it's available.

## REINVENTING THE LANGUAGE

In March of '93, Vice President Gore began a movement to reinvent Federal Government. He instructed the Feds to "put customers first, cut red tape, be empowered, and get back to basics."

The U.S. Forest Service created a Reinvention Team that was to focus on four objectives: 1) describing the Forest Service of the future; 2) articulating the strategies that would create a new Forest Service; 3) positioning the Forest Service as a reinvention laboratory; and 4) ensuring implementation of the team's reinvention orders.

The Reinvention Team held seminars and hosted town hall meetings around the country. The CRC sent a representative to the reinvention meeting in Phoenix.

So far the team has come up with several priorities. Ecosystem Management - maintaining the diversity and sustainability of the environment - is the goal first articulated by a large majority of participants. Beyond that, people want Forest Service decisions to reflect the public's views, want high quality customer service with decipherable information, and want legitimate respect for a diversity of perspectives and uses.

Certainly, none of this comes as a revelation. And it seems clear that some interest groups won't easily compromise.

In spite of all the obstacles, the Reinvention Team Taskforce has already shown that it will empowerishly value the viewshed and its infrastructure. Naturally, the CRC has weighed in with its own suggestions, among them the novel concept that the Forest Service ought to speak the same language as the rest of us.



## SKY ISLAND SYMPOSIUM

September 19 - 23. A conference on "Biodiversity and Management of the Madrean Archipelago: the sky islands of the southwestern United States and Northwestern Mexico" is to be held at the Ramada Downtown in Tucson. It will be sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service, the University of Arizona, the University of New Mexico, the Arizona Fish and Game Department, the National Biological Survey, and the Centro de Investigaciones Biologicas del Noroeste (La Paz).

The conference will discuss biodiversity, biogeography, botany, climate, conservation biology, cultural resources, dendrochronology, ecology, ecosystem management, fire, geology, limnology, soils, transborder cooperation, and zoology. This conference promises to bring together many different points of view on resource management in the sky islands. The proceedings will be published. For further information, contact:

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## NEW BOARD MEMBER

Josiah Austin, of El Coronado Ranch in West Turkey Creek has graciously agreed to serve on the board of directors of the Chiricahua Regional Council. He joins Dick Zweifel, Bill McDonald, Noel Snyder, Ed Roos, and Karen Hayes. Mary Willy is our treasurer.

## THE BAKER BURN

by Bill McDonald

In a year that will be remembered for fires, it seems ironic to write about the fire that didn't happen. However, the "Baker Burn" is not so much the story of a fire as it is about a process which is bringing people together to do something positive for the land.

In March 1993, thirty private landowners along the southern New Mexico - Arizona boundary met at Glen's Malpais Ranch to discuss the reintroduction of fire into the landscape. Years of fire suppression have been a big factor in shifting much of our historically native shrub-grassland habitat into sites dominated by shrubs.



The result of this "Malpais Meeting" was the creation of a map showing ownership boundaries and individual landowner preferences for the type of suppression action to be taken in case of wildfire starts. The private landowners also requested the public land managing agencies to coordinate with them on a fire management plan for the area.

After many hours of cooperative effort, a strategy is emerging which involves least cost suppression where appropriate, prescribed burning of specific sites, and, eventually, a natural fire prescription for the area.

Baker Canyon, in the southern Peloncillos, was selected as the first prescribed burn project. The reasons were that the canyon exhibits symptoms of a trend toward a shrub-dominated site and would benefit from fire, the landowner/permittee had purposely allowed for a buildup of fine fire fuels (grass), and the complexity of land ownership offered the ultimate challenge for a cooperative effort.

Involved were seven agencies in two states and four private landowners. Over sixty sensitive species were addressed as well as possible impacts on wilderness characteristics and archeological sites. In addition to public notice, twenty specific groups and individuals were notified and the Mexican Land Resources Department was contacted.

After seven months of herculean effort, Baker was ready to burn on June 1, 1994. Instead, it rained, right there and nowhere else. All was not in vain, however. A lightning start in neighboring Sycamore Canyon was monitored and burned itself out within natural confines. This impacted 2,400 acres. Overall, 70,000 acres burned in the Animas Valley and the Peloncillos from lightning starts this past season. Monitoring sites are established and we'll soon see the effects of fire's reintroduction into this ecosystem. As for Baker Canyon - well, there's always next year!

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#### MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME!!

True, you haven't heard from us in quite a while. Even so, we've been paying attention and expect to be a lot more active from now on.

We need your help. It's time to renew your membership. But that isn't enough. Please encourage your friends to join. They can use the extra form printed on the next page.