

CHIRICAHUA REGIONAL COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER

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P. O. Box 480
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AS THINGS STAND

We devote this issue of the Newsletter mainly to an analysis of letters from the public concerning the Draft Cave Creek Canyon Recreation Concept Plan, and to other matters related to land management. Although most if not all the CRC's Directors will be known to our members in the Chiricahua region, we have included thumbnail sketches to acquaint you better with them.

But first we introduce our new Manager: The CRC has contracted with Alan Craig to do our day-to-day managing chores. Michael Julian, who had earlier undertaken this task on a volunteer basis, found that his job left no time to spare and had to resign. Filling this position will, among other advantages, keep us better in touch with the land management agencies and with our members. After a career as a wildlife biologist with the California Department of Fish and Game, Alan with his wife Narca Moore-Craig moved to the Gray Ranch in late 1991. Here they worked as volunteers for the Nature Conservancy for a year, then worked on the Guadalupe Ranch in Guadalupe Canyon for a little over a year before settling in April 1994, permanently they hope, on the slopes of Portal Peak southeast of Portal. Alan's time with Fish and Game included several years of working with the Mendocino National Forest on a cooperative prescribed burning program in Coast Range chaparral, several years in the endangered bird and mammal program, and nine years managing a State wildlife area in the San Jacinto Valley of southern California.

PUBLIC VIEWS OF THE DRAFT CAVE CREEK CANYON RECREATION CONCEPT PLAN

With the cooperation of the Southwestern Research Station and the Forest Service (FOIA request), the CRC has obtained copies of all 83 letters from the public pertaining to the Draft Cave Creek Canyon Recreation Concept Plan and received by the Douglas Ranger District of the Coronado National Forest. What follows is a summary of opinion on the major issues. About a half-dozen letters were signed by two or three persons. Where numbers are given, these refer

to all individuals expressing the opinion.

An overwhelming majority, 77, opposed the proposed 40-unit Crystal Campground intended for a relatively undisturbed area of canyon bottom bordering the Southwestern Research Station. Most deplored the inevitable serious effects this campground would have on research such as has been conducted in the canyon during the past 40 years, though one person stated that the "plan is biased in favor of researchers, who are destroying wild life in order to put it under a microscope and birders

who build unauthorized trails and leave behind trash to be picked up by the Forest Service." However, many offered comments to the effect that the Forest Service should not only support such research but should encourage and assist it for many years to come. *None* of the letters spoke in favor of the Crystal Campground. Many objected to a campground of this size *anywhere* in the canyon, stating that small campgrounds were more appropriate for the Cave Creek setting and that they would be preferred by the vast majority of campers.

Fifteen individuals supported the Plan's proposal to add campsites in the Sunny Flat campground area to replace those in streamside situations, and 13 supported a new (or replacement) camp near the Visitor Center. One Portal resident opposed the development of the latter area as a campground in close proximity to Portal residences, and another, while regretting the noise and congestion such a campground would produce, thought additional camping there would be preferable to developing a more nearly pristine part of the canyon.

Running a close second to the number of comments opposing Crystal Campground were the 56 speaking in favor of leaving Cave Creek very much the way it is. Many commented that there is little if any evidence of a need for more camp sites or other recreational facilities in Cave Creek Canyon, and a few specifically doubted the FS estimate of 70,000 annual visitors to the Canyon. Many spoke eloquently of the spectacular beauty, the unique biological resources that draw nature admirers from all over the world, the solitude, and nearly pristine nature of much of the canyon, so unlike many other National Forest

areas.

Seven people commented that the Plan was contrary to the intent or at least the spirit of the Cave Creek Canyon Protection Act passed by Congress in 1993. One figured this law had been deliberately forgotten during Plan preparation.

The question of appropriate expenditure of predictably meager FS funds led 16 individuals to state that it would be better to spend money on maintenance of roads, trails, and existing campgrounds rather than on new developments. One person summed it up: "In a time when we are desperately trying to balance the budget, this concept plan proposes spending a lot of money, most of it doing exactly what the public has already said it did not want."

Twelve respondents criticized the makeup of the committee that worked on the Plan on the grounds that some user groups or interest groups were either not represented, under represented, or were over represented. For example, several commented that the bird watchers, who make up the largest group if not the majority of visitors to the Canyon, were not specifically represented on the committee.

Only a few commented on the proposed closure of the South Fork Road to vehicular traffic. Of those who did, seven were in favor, saying that it should reduce human impact on the riparian habitat in South Fork by spreading use over a longer stretch. Four were opposed because of difficulty for the elderly, handicapped and children in reaching the favored region above the existing picnic ground. [District Ranger Brian Power tells us that if and when the road is closed to general

public vehicular access, it will remain open for at least several years to vehicles of handicapped persons and tenants of summer homes as well as to service vehicles.]

The proposal to phase out summer homes elicited some controversy. Eleven individuals were opposed, pointing out that the tenants of these homes have for many years helped to protect the canyon and to keep it clean. Eight spoke in favor of phasing out the homes, perhaps reflecting the opinion stated by one that it is an inequitable situation.

In general, the tenor of the comments was as it has been in the past: The Forest Service should take care of what it has and avoid any development that, in the name of recreation enhancement, would endanger the values sought by most users of the canyon. We have a suggestion along those lines.

CARRYING CAPACITY

Carrying capacity--the number of people, cows, deer, what have you--an area can support without serious degradation is a concept that, so far as it applies to human users of the Canyon, appears to have had little attention from FS planners. All FS plans for the Canyon propose development to accommodate greater numbers of users but fail to address the ability of the region to absorb them without untoward damage. In view of this gap in the planning, we offer a proposal.

First, by recommending removal of camping from streamside sites so that riparian habitats may recover, the FS has acknowledged that to this extent at least the carrying capacity has been exceeded. Second, the best information we have is that on only a very few major holidays are

the campgrounds filled. Therefore, we propose that the present number of camping units be considered the carrying capacity and that no new units be built except to replace ones taken out of service. This regime would inconvenience very few would-be campers and, aside from building replacement units that might be needed, would allow the FS to concentrate its funds and energy on maintenance, renovation, research, and other non-destructive projects.

TIMBER SALVAGE

The FS has proposed a timber salvage operation on about sixty acres of burned over forest centered about one-half mile east of Rustler Park. No new roads will be needed, but skidding operations will no doubt be destructive. The plus side includes the removal of potential fire fuel and planned replanting with trees from Chiricahua stock.

NORTH END ACCESS

Those of you interested in hiking, birding or hunting in the north end of the Chiricahuas will be pleased to hear that the FS reports some progress in acquiring unimpeded access. The paper work for the land exchange to open up Wood Canyon (minor road building and a small trail-head parking area) is well under way and construction may begin this fall. Emigrant Canyon involves State lands, and this part is moving more slowly.

DOS CABEZAS WILDERNESS

The BLM has published its "Dos Cabezas Mountain Wilderness Management Plan" for a 12,000-acre area just north of the Chiricahuas. Interested parties may contact the office in Safford: BLM, 711 14th

Ave., Safford, AZ 85546; (520) 428-4040.

MEET THE DIRECTORS

The Bylaws of the CRC require that there be no fewer than three and no more than eleven Directors. The founding Directors at the incorporation of the CRC in March 1992 were Karen Hayes, Noel Snyder and Richard Zweifel (President of the Board). Ed Roos, Josiah Austin and Bill McDonald later joined the Board, enlarging it to six members. Mr. Roos resigned in December 1994, and Mr. McDonald in August 1995, while Mary Winkler joined the Board in January 1995. Mary Willy has served as Treasurer-Secretary since the beginning. (Need we say that Directorship and Treasurer-Secretary are voluntary, unpaid positions?) Brief profiles of the current Directors follow.

Josiah Austin is owner and operator of El Coronado Ranch and Cattle Company on the west side of the Chiricahua Mountains. He is particularly interested in land improvement with livestock management and in restoration of riparian areas.

Karen Hayes has lived in Portal since 1984, having moved there from central Florida when she married Alden Hayes, former area rancher and southwestern archaeologist. She is the mother of two grown daughters. Locally, Karen has participated in the Chiricahua Gallery in Rodeo, NM, showing and selling black-and-white and color photographs. Her interest in public land use in the Chiricahua

region began with helping to fend off a proposed open pit gold mining operation in the Cave Creek Canyon area and a Forest Service proposal to designate much of the Coronado National Forest as a National Recreation Area.

Noel Snyder is a wildlife biologist who lives in Portal and has worked on rare and endangered birds all his life. He first came to the Chiricahuas on his honeymoon 28 years ago and has had a special love for the area ever since. He helped lead the fight to keep gold mining out of the Portal area. Music is a second interest, and he secretly completed two undergraduate degrees at the same time while deciding between birds or cello as a career.

Mary W. Winkler grew up in Douglas and attended school there. She and her husband have owned a cattle ranch in the San Simon Valley for 25 years. At one time she owned and operated the Portal Store. Her husband, Richard A. Winkler, is a retired Superior Court Judge in Cochise County. They now live on their ranch near Rodeo.

Richard Zweifel has lived in Paradise since 1989. During his tenure as Curator of Herpetology at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, he and wife Frances visited the Chiricahuas numerous times (beginning in 1956, another set of honeymooners) for study at the Southwestern Research Station and on vacation. The Chiricahuas had no competition as their retirement site.