

CHIRICAHUA REGIONAL COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER

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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

