

# CHIRICAHUA REGIONAL COUNCIL

## NEWSLETTER

No. 6  
June 1996

P.O. Box 480  
Portal, AZ 85632

### WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH THE CAVE CREEK CANYON RECREATION PLAN?

Newsletter No. 5 summarized comments of CRC members and many other concerned citizens from around the world on the Douglas Ranger District's draft Cave Creek Canyon Recreation Concept Plan. We had hoped by now to receive the Forest Service reaction to these comments, most of which had been critical of some of the key features of the Plan. Most notable of these features was the 40-unit Crystal Campground proposed for a relatively undisturbed canyon bottom bordering the Southwestern Research Station.

Owing to staff relocations and reductions, government shutdowns, and most recently, being called upon to help fight early wildfires elsewhere, the Douglas Ranger District has yet to complete its responses to the public comments, and its recommendations to the Forest Supervisor, on the draft Concept Plan. Perhaps this is a case of no news being good news, at least for the near term.

Current thinking at the District level is that if money becomes available, it should first be spent on providing camping facilities near the Visitor Information Center. We are also told that even if funds become available to build the 40-unit Crystal Campground, it likely will be 20 years before the nearby summer cabins can be phased out, a necessary first step.

The District Ranger's final action on the Concept Plan, with his recommendations to the Forest Supervisor, will not be a National Environmental Policy Act document requiring circulation for public comment; such documents will come later if and when major features of the plan are proposed. We are assured, however, that at least one copy of the final concept plan will be made available for our review.

We will keep our membership posted. Meanwhile we have taken every opportunity to promote the CRC position, reflecting the comments of many members, to higher Forest Service levels. This position, based partly on the belief that the carrying capacity of Cave Creek Canyon for recreation use has been reached, is that limited funds should be spent on maintaining or revising existing campgrounds, roads and trails rather than on building new facilities.

Hikers in the high country will be pleased to find that many of the trail signs destroyed in the 1994 fire have been replaced and some effective trail repair has been accomplished.



## TIMBER SALVAGE

The salvage logging planned for 69 acres of timber almost completely killed by the 1994 Rattlesnake Fire near Rustler Park is still on hold. Due to the fire danger, Douglas Ranger District will not be issuing permits for salvage logging anytime soon.

The Southwest Center for Biological Diversity, which filed suit this past winter to stop the salvage sale, lost the first round in court but is appealing the decision.

Your Board of Directors, in a letter to the Forest Service, basically supported the planned salvage sale on the basis that it made the best of a bad situation. This letter should not be taken as support for timber salvage sales in general (the CRC does not comment on issues external to its defined geographic area of concern), or even as support for possible future sale proposals for the Chiricahuas. Any such proposals would have to be considered as individual issues with the results of the current project in mind. The following is quoted from the CRC letter:

"...two extremely critical management problems in the Chiricahua Mountain forests following the Rattlesnake Fire are the loss of soil, and the very heavy fuel load that remains.

"Logging skid trails will very likely cause some soil loss, and if stone gabions or other appropriate erosion control devices have not already been constructed in the drainage(s) immediately below the salvage area, we strongly urge that they be constructed before logging is permitted.

"...we believe the total soil loss from this site may be greater if it is allowed to recover naturally than if the salvage logging is completed as planned. This belief is based upon (1) the fact that no new roads will be constructed, (2) your requirement that dead trees under 6" in diameter be felled and staked parallel to slope contours, (3) your requirement that all living trees be left undisturbed as potential seed and shade sources, and (4) your plan to reforest the site with seedlings, of several pine species, derived from native Chiricahua Mountain stock.

"We can support your decision not to designate specific snags for retention, given the large number of dead trees surrounding the salvage sale site, the small area to be logged, and the likelihood that some of the dead trees within the site are not suitable for timber and will also be left standing. However, we strongly support Forest Service guidelines which generally require designation of snags, and in future similar operations we can probably find at least one or two volunteers within our membership who would be willing to assist with selecting and marking snags to be saved."

Several additional paragraphs discussed why and under what conditions the salvage logging would not be likely to impact Spotted Owls.

We closed the letter by encouraging the Forest Service to "consider other small sites where carefully planned salvage or thinning cuts, or

