

# CHIRICAHUA REGIONAL COUNCIL

## NEWSLETTER

No. 7  
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P.O. Box 480  
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### THE YEAR JUST PAST

With respect to activities bearing upon the preservation or restoration of the Chiricahua environment, 1995 was largely a year of waiting for bureaucratic shoes to drop. Nothing too terrible happened (unlike 1994, with its Rattlesnake Fire), and the status quo prevailed on many fronts. We present a summary of various activities (or lack thereof) that should be of interest to the CRC's membership.

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**The Well:** Several of our local members called attention to a well being drilled near the Cave Creek Ranger Station and Visitor Information Center (VIC) in the mouth of Cave Creek Canyon. The Forest Service (FS) gave two principal reasons in answer to our question why a new well was needed: 1) To provide a dependable water supply for the Sunny Flat, Idlewild and Stewart campgrounds (the present well being unreliable); 2) to provide a water supply in the lower canyon that would enhance fire-fighting ability. The FS has been considering building a 20-unit campground downstream from the VIC and acknowledged that if this comes to pass, the well would supply that campground.

**Road Paving:** Resurfacing another stretch of the Cave Creek Canyon road is one of those proposed actions that seems forever on the horizon, never at hand. According to the FS, the first priority is the damaged section below the VIC. Some of us accompanied District Ranger

Brian Power on a walk up the section upstream from Camp Stewart scheduled to be paved. We came away feeling that chances were good that the job would be done with minimum environmental damage, as exemplified by the earlier paving of the road in the lower part of the canyon. Possible problem areas include obtaining right-of-way and, in particular dealing with a seemingly intractable roadside boulder and drainage problem by the Southwestern Research Station (SWRS).

**Recreation Concept Plan:** The draft of this plan first made public almost two years ago created more than a little controversy, especially the proposal therein to build a large campground bordering SWRS. (See the CRC Newsletter, Special Edition, April 17, 1995.) Strong and widespread objection to that part of the draft was essentially stonewalled by the FS, whose only consolation to us was that there probably would not be enough funds in the foreseeable future for the construction.

Any major construction proposed in the concept plan, such as the new campground near SWRS and another in the mouth of the canyon, would have to go through the NEPA process, where public input should carry some weight. In the meantime, we wait for one of the more prolonged bureaucratic gestations to come to term.

② **Salvage Logging:** In May 1995 the FS proposed a salvage logging sale on two sites totaling 69 acres near Rustler Park that were burned over by the Rattlesnake Fire (the decision to implement the sale came in December 1995). Salient features of the proposal included: no new roads to be built; living trees to be undisturbed; smaller dead trees to be felled and staked parallel to slope contours for erosion control; reforestation with pines of local species from local stock.

The CRC Directors viewed this as a potentially valuable test case to see how such treatment might affect an area both seriously disturbed by fire and a candidate for additional damage through unchecked erosion. Our experienced ornithologists advised that the salvage logging would not cause significant loss of spotted owl habitat but might even, through reforestation, jump-start succession of the site to more suitable owl habitat.

The Southwest Center for Biological Diversity took a different view and sued to halt the proposed sale, garnering widespread publicity in the media. As a result, the first cutting (permits issued on a lottery basis) was delayed until September 1996. Come spring we will be back in the logging area to make a first assessment of results, based in part on photographs taken shortly after the sale was announced.

**Rucker Canyon:** Floods subsequent to the Rattlesnake Fire filled Rucker Lake with rubble and buried part of the campground. A FS recreation concept plan dealing with Rucker Canyon is in the works and may be ready early this year.

**Cave Creek Trails Plan:** Yet another FS plan, this one seeking grant support from the Arizona Heritage program. When this gets to the stage where we can see a draft, we will assess it and report to our members. One concern is that new trails might adversely affect riparian habitats.

**Long John Canyon:** Our long-time members will recall the controversy over the FS proposal (backed by the Arizona Game and Fish Dept. but opposed by the CRC) to establish road access, mainly for hunters, to this canyon north of Rucker Canyon. The latest information we have is that the project, if not quite dead, is moribund.

**West Side Plans:** The West Side Recreation Concept Plan is apparently itself just a concept. A recreation concept plan for the Dragoons may take precedence.

**Tour of El Coronado Ranch:** In October CRC Director Jo Austin hosted a tour of his El Coronado Ranch on West Turkey Creek sponsored by ????. His purpose was to demonstrate the effectiveness of erosion mitigation measures he has implemented over the course of several years, chief among them the construction of more than 2000(?) gabions--small, unmortared rockwork dams. The benefits in soil retention and conservation of runoff were unmistakable, and would have been so even without comparison to adjacent FS land ravaged by post-Rattlesnake flooding.

Numerous local ranchers as well as representatives of the FS, BLM, National Park Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and ??? attended the demonstration/tour. One question that kept coming up: How is it that virtually unlimited funds can be found for fighting forest fires, but almost nothing for pre- and post-fire erosion control?

**This Year's Fire:** It was a relatively small one on the Mahoney property, a private enclave in Cave Creek Canyon. The potential for serious damage was there, but fortunately the nearby SWRS swimming pool provided a source of water accessible to the helicopter, and the fire was controlled.

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Salvage logging: In May 1992 the FS proposed a salvage logging sale on two sites totaling 20 acres near Rustler Park that were burned over by the Rustler Park fire (the decision to implement the sale came in December 1991). Salient features of the proposal included: no new roads to be built; living trees to be undisturbed; neither dead trees to be felled nor stumps retained to slope contours for erosion control; reforestation with pine of local species from local stock.

The CRC Director viewed this as a potentially valuable test case to see how much treatment might affect an area both seriously disturbed by fire and a candidate for additional change through watershed erosion. Our experienced ornithologists advised that the salvage logging would not cause significant loss of spotted owl habitat but might even increase the area to more suitable owl habitat.

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West Side Plan: The West Side Recreation Concept Plan is apparently itself just a concept. A recreation concept plan for the West Side Plan is being prepared by the CRC to establish road access, mainly for hunters, to this canyon north of Rustler Canyon. The latest information we have is that the project, if not quite dead, is moribund.

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October CRC Director Jo Austin hosted a tour of his El Coronado Ranch on West Turkey Creek sponsored by FS. His purpose was to demonstrate the effectiveness of erosion mitigation measures he has implemented over the course of several years, cited among them the construction of new (and 1980's) gophers--small, unarmored rockwork dams. The benefits in soil retention and conservation of runoff were unmistakable, and would have been so even without comparison to adjacent FS land ravaged by post-Elizabetan flooding.