

CHIRICAHUA REGIONAL COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER

NO. 17
December 2004

P. O. Box 16480
Portal, AZ 85632

In this issue: Two upcoming local meetings/lectures and one in Douglas, all of interest to our members; Rustler Park closed; Chiricahua National Monument Fire Plan proposals; marble mining in the Dragoons runs into a snag; gabions appreciated.

BUDGET CUTS CLOSE RUSTLER PARK CAMPGROUND. Due to recreation program budget cuts, the Forest Service plans to close campgrounds in the Coronado National Forest that are more remote, and hence more expensive to maintain in relation to the income they generate. The intent is to concentrate limited funds on maintaining and improving campgrounds located closer to areas where maintenance personnel are based, and thereby provide a better quality experience at those campgrounds.

Rustler Park campground is already closed, probably for at least two years, not just for the winter. The gate near the restroom and small parking area just below Rustler Park is locked, requiring a relatively short hike to Rustler Park but a much longer hike to the Long Park area. Drivers of four-wheel drive vehicles can easily bypass this gate and some of them cause signif-

icant damage in the Rustler Park area, particularly by driving donuts in the meadow, principally when snow is present. The FS is considering sites for a new gate some distance down toward Onion Saddle, at a location where both sides of the road would be too steep for vehicles to bypass the gate. According to Douglas District Ranger Doug Hardy, the new gate will be open during the birding season, allowing tour groups and others to drive to within easy walking distance of Rustler Park. But for some enthusiasts the birding season is unending.

DRAGON MTNS. LIMESTONE/MARBLE DRILLING PROPOSAL ON HOLD. In a letter dated November 22, 2004, Forest Supervisor Jeanine Derby advised that the Dagoon Mountains drilling proposal (see Newsletter 16) "is on hold, pending further review of the issues and concerns that arose during the

initial scoping for this project." The letter goes on to say that "there is insufficient information on the quantity and quality of the marble for the Forest to consider the mining proposal at this time."

Alpha Calcit Arizona, Ltd., has completed one exploratory drill hole to date. The Forest has requested additional exploratory drilling, the results of which would be used to determine whether or not mining will be authorized. Questions or comments concerning the mining proposal may be directed to Forest Geology and Minerals Program Specialist Beverley Everson in the Tucson office at 520 388-8428, or to: comments-southwestern-coronado@fs.fed.us.

BILL RADKE TO SPEAK IN PORTAL.

Chiricahua Regional Council has invited Bill Radke, Manager of both the San Bernardino and the Leslie Canyon National Wildlife Refuges, to speak at the Portal Fire Station at 7 p.m. on Monday, December 13, 2004. Those who have heard Bill speak know that we are in for a treat. We can look forward to learning much about what has been done on these two refuges to manage endangered fish and other species, what unexpected facts the Fish and Wildlife Service has learned about the lives of such critters as the Green Rat Snake, and maybe even how long hydrologists now believe it takes for snow melting high in the Chiricahuas to filter down to the San Bernardino Valley. Hope to see you at the Fire Station classroom on December 13!

MALPAI SCIENCE CONFERENCE.

The Malpai Borderlands Group Annual Science Conference will begin at 9:00 a.m. on Monday, January 3, 2005, at the new Visitor Center in Douglas. The Center is near the old train station along Pan American Avenue at 345 16th Street, directly north of the Police Station and just a short distance south of Highway 80. At this one-day, open-to-the-public conference, Malpai Borderlands Group will be celebrating its 10th anniversary. A series of invited speakers will summarize results of 10 years of research and the application of science-based management practices in the Borderlands region. An intriguing list of talks, covering a wide range of natural and physical science topics, is on the agenda. Further information may be obtained by e-mailing mbg@vtc.net or calling (520) 558-2470.

FOREST PLAN REVISION MEETING.

Forest Planner Jennifer Ruyle of the Tucson office and Douglas District Ranger Doug Hardy are coming to Portal the evening of Thursday, January 20, 2005, to tell us all about the upcoming revision of the Coronado National Forest Plan and how the public can play an active part in the revision. Ms. Ruyle has worked on the Coronado Forest since 1990, as a District Ecologist until 1998, and since then in the Tucson office, where she is coordinating the entire revision process. This CRC sponsored meeting will be held at the Portal Fire Station at 7:00 p.m.

How the Forest Plan is revised will undoubtedly play a major role in how forest lands in the Chiricahua, Peloncillo, and Dragoon mountains are managed for many years to come. Even if you have to leave the inauguration ceremonies early on January 20, we urge you to attend this important meeting in Portal.

CHIRICAHUA NATIONAL MONUMENT FIRE PLAN. Alan G. Whalon, Superintendent of the Chiricahua National Monument, has announced completion of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the Monument's Fire Management Plan. The entire DEIS may be viewed at www.nps.gov/chir by following the links for "Management Docs," or at the Monument Visitor Center, or at public libraries in Willcox and Douglas. If you wish to comment on the DEIS, send a letter or an e-mail to Mr. Whalon by January 5, 2005. Please include your name with any e-mail. Addresses are: Chiricahua National Monument, 13063 E Bonita Canyon Rd., Willcox, AZ 85643 and CHIR_administration@nps.gov.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement addresses three alternatives. Under the No Action Alternative, the monument would continue to follow the 1992 Fire Management Plan (FMP). In the 1992 plan, wildland fire use, that is, allowing natural ignitions to burn under predetermined conditions, is permitted only in a small fire management unit in the center of the monument. Under Alternative A, wildland fire use is permitted throughout the

Monument's back country areas. Automatic fire suppression is required only in the canyon-bottom corridor that contains almost all park developments and burnable historic structures. Under the preferred alternative, Alternative B, the neighboring Coronado National Forest would be an active partner and both cooperative prescribed burning and wildland fire use could occur in an area extending out to the monument's natural watershed limits. Potential short-term adverse impacts and long-term beneficial effects of fire management are both discussed in the DEIS.

GABION POWER: Those of you readers who have seen the beautiful DVD movie *Harvest Rain* which was sent to paid-up and new members of the CRC this year need no introduction to gabions and similar structures. For others who may not be familiar with the term, gabions are loose rock structures typically held in place by some sort of wire mesh and placed across drainage channels. Simple barriers of loose rock not confined in wire baskets are a less elaborate form. Placed strategically across drainage channels, these devices impede the flow of water, reducing its power to erode and permitting more to sink in and contribute to the water table. In a climate like that of the Chiricahuas, where the infrequent storms may be violent and produce sudden flooding, a typical result of storms is deep erosion of stream channels. This is especially true where drought and human induced changes have

modified riparian vegetation, reducing its capacity to retain soil. Gabions have the power dramatically to reduce or even reverse the detrimental effects of stream erosion. This is seen on a large scale at Valer and Josiah Austin's beautiful El Coronado Ranch on West Turkey Creek in the Chiricahuas.

Closer to Portal, one may see a smaller but nonetheless impressive example on Silver Creek beside the Portal-to-Paradise road. Drive 3.2 miles west of Portal to where you can turn left down to a level spot often used as an ad hoc camping site. From there it is a few yards to the creek bottom. Here in the summer of 1999 the Forest Service installed a series of six gabions along almost 500 feet of streambed: one by the parking area, one downstream, and four upstream. The one farthest upstream is a single line of posts and fence wire, the others are more substantial structures of rock and gravel-filled, chain-link construction.

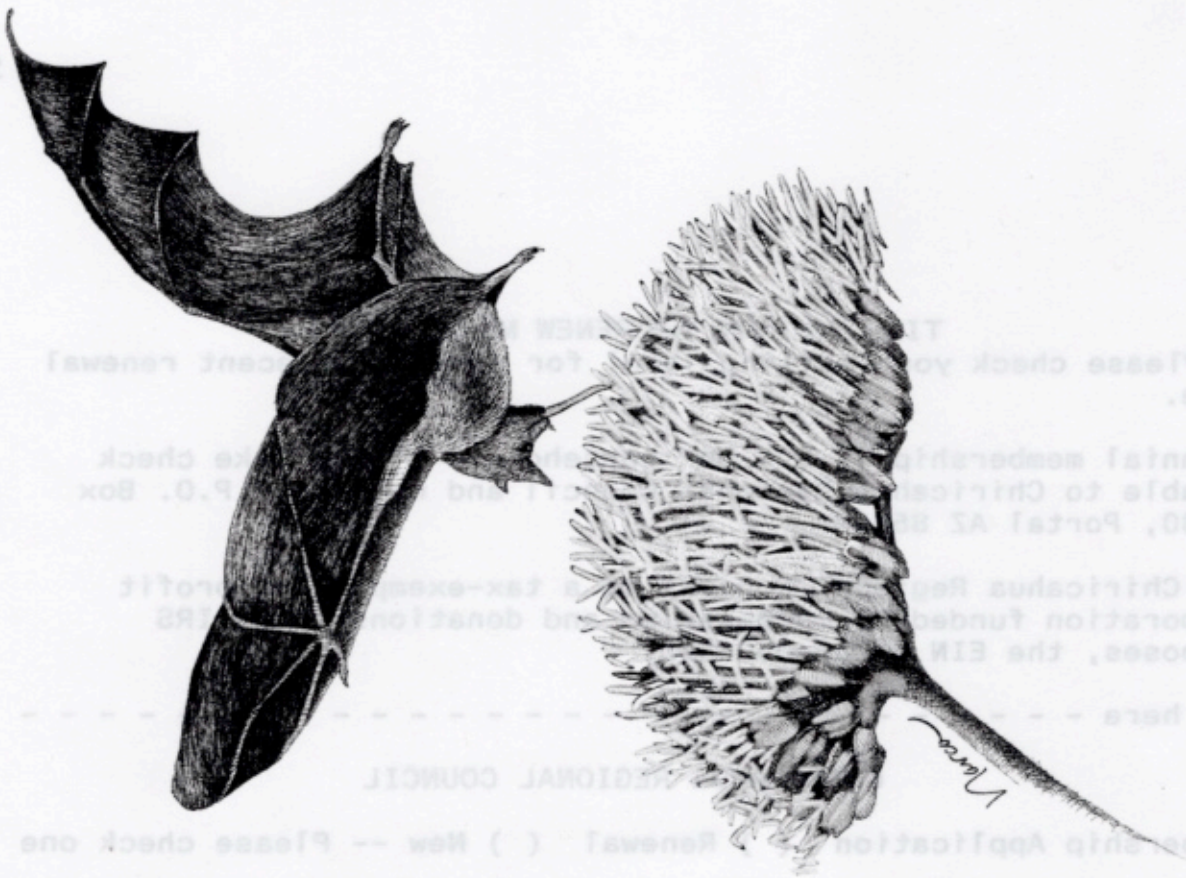
Work was under way by 29 July 1999 and by 7 August the most upstream one already was clogged to the top with sand and gravel. Severe storms followed and by 25 August two of the lower gabions were heavily

damaged. The Forest Service persisted, however, and the repaired gabions held.

When first built the gabions projected at least three feet above the creek bottom. By one year later three of the gabions were full of gravel to their spillways, the others nearly so. The summer of 2002 saw the upstream gabions essentially buried in gravel and the lower ones only slightly exposed on their downstream sides. This situation continues today, more than five years since the initial installation. Thus, erosion over this stretch not only was halted, but the level of the streambed was raised cumulatively several feet. Also, surface water has persisted downstream despite years of drought. Building structures such as these is labor intensive, but produces beneficial results that last. There is no shortage in the Chiricahuas of candidate sites for similar treatment.

Harvest Rain DVD's are still available for new members and for those who have not yet renewed. A reminder: the basic \$20 per household dues are now good for two years beyond the month and year indicated on your address label.

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Mexican Long-tongued Bat

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