

## Coconino National Forest Potential Wilderness Proposal

As part of their Forest Plan Update, the Coconino National Forest needs to address the need for additional wilderness. The last evaluation was done in the 1980's. When considering what areas should be considered they refer to the 1964 Wilderness Act:

"...An area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain..."

"...An area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions..."

First they did an inventory of all their lands and evaluated them based on three criteria:

*Capability:* The degree to which that area contains the basic characteristics that make it suitable for wilderness recommendation without regard to its availability for or need as wilderness. Characteristics include: Naturalness, Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation, Special Features and Values, and Manageability.

*Availability:* The determination of availability is conditioned by the value of and need for the wilderness resource compared to the value of and need for other resources. In evaluating availability, other resource demands and uses that the area under evaluation could satisfy will be described.

*Need:* Determine the need for an area to be designated as wilderness through an analysis of the degree to which it contributes to the overall National Wilderness Preservation System. The determination of need will consider public input, as well as regional factors, such as the geographic distribution of current wilderness areas and their representativeness of landforms and ecosystems.

As part of their process they must get public comment on their proposed areas. I attended the July 27th meeting at the Sedona Red Rock Ranger Station. Apparently the report has been out since June 26th, although I never saw a notice of it. The first notice of the report I was aware of was in the Bugle on July 15th, with a link to the plan. Public comment was to be received by August 2nd. I complained at the meeting that they were not giving enough time for groups and individual to respond but they said that their Leadership Team was meeting on August 11th and they needed public comments for them. But this will be a very long process and there will be other points at which to comment and of course you can always correspond with your Congress representative as it takes an act of Congress to establish a wilderness. So even though we have not made their August 2nd deadline, it would still be a good idea for the BCRC to make a comment on the plan. Here is a link to the Plan:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/coconino/projects/plan-revision/index.shtml>

There are 10 Wilderness Areas being considered. Of most interest to Beaver Creek would be the Walker Mountain, Cedar Bench and Black Mountain Wilderness as those comprise an area between the Wet Beaver Creek and the West Clear Creek Wildernesses. Although people from Beaver Creek may also be

interested in the Cimarron-Boulder, Hackberry and Davey's Areas as they comprise the area below Hwy 260 over to the Verde River and border on the Fossil Creek Wilderness. Then there is one up by Flagstaff and in Northwestern Yavapai County, and then two over by East Clear Creek. See attached maps. I will bring larger maps to the August 4th BCRC Meeting if you would like to look at these in more detail.

There were a lot of people at the July 27th meeting. Some recreationists, but many ranchers, as many of these areas overlap existing grazing allotments. There was a short Powerpoint presentations, about 25 minutes for questions, and then the rest of the meeting you were to go to the various stations for each proposed wilderness and write down any comments, questions or concerns on a large pad.

From the Powerpoint Presentation and some of the questions, this is what I could ascertain:

**What is allowed in a wilderness area:**

- camping and hiking
- grazing
- horses and pack animals
- hunting and fishing

**What isn't allowed in a wilderness area:**

- motorized vehicles, i.e., cars, trucks, ATVs, motorcycles, bulldozers, backhoes, etc.
- bicycles
- chainsaws
- dams or other water diversions

Checking on some of the stations and pads, it was obvious there is a lot of opposition from the ranching community. No new tanks or water diversions would be allowed. But the Forest Service was not clear on what would happen to existing tanks. It was clear that tanks would have to be maintained without mechanical means. No bulldozers or backhoes. The ranchers would have to come in with shovels, picks, wheelbarrows, etc. But it wasn't clear if all existing tanks would be allowed to remain. Many ranchers also use ATVs to round up cattle and those sort of activities would have to be done on horseback.

Bill Stafford attended and he was concerned about the ability to create new trails in the area. Apparently the Montezuma Rimrock Trails Coalition would like to develop the historic Hollingheads Trail that lies in the Walker Mountain area. Although it exists on the ground it has never been accepted into their trail system.

I really didn't hear anything from the OHV community that night, so maybe no one was there. Currently these areas also have wood cutting as an activity and some people may oppose for that reason.

What are some of the arguments for adding these areas as wilderness?

- Existing nearby wilderness areas: Wet Beaver Creek, West Clear Creek, Secret Mountain, Munds Mountain are being beat to death. So there clearly is a need for additional wilderness areas.
- Coconino National Forest does not ban OHVs anywhere at this time. Their future Plan may restrict areas in the future. But at this time the Wilderness areas are the only place you can recreate without having to deal with OHVs. Some people would like a quiet, natural place to camp and hike.
- There is a need to provide a refuge for those species that have demonstrated an inability to survive in less than primitive surroundings, or the need for a protected area for other unique scientific values or phenomena.
- Wilderness status could help protect archeological and historic cultural resources.
- Wilderness status could protect the watershed from degradation.
- Grazing will be allowed. The wilderness being proposed is a small part of current grazing allotments. For instance the V-Bar-V has a 71,000 acre allotment. The Walker Mountain area which falls in that allotment is only 6,378 acres and has five tanks. I'm not sure of the size of the M Diamond and Ward Ranch allotments. Those were the two other ranches represented at the meeting. Hackberry and Cimmaron-Boulder are much larger pieces. I'm not aware who owns that grazing allotments in those areas.  
I noticed that the Walker Mountain parcel was cut such that FR 214B is left outside the wilderness. I think this was to make access to tanks and loading areas easier for the V-Bar-V.
- There are plenty of places to gather firewood so I'm not sure that closing these areas will necessarily cause a hardship in that regards.
- Bull Pen Ranch has been carved out as an island so people can still drive down and camp in that area.

My own perspective is that Walker Mountain, Cedar Bench and Black Mountain could be brought into Wilderness and still support grazing, although the devil is in the details. If some tanks were decommissioned that might be hard on ranchers. I think BCRC should weigh in on this issue, but you should have the opportunity to hear from ranchers and other people who may have concerns. Perhaps having this issue on next month's agenda and inviting both Forest Service representatives and publicizing the meeting beyond the usual means. Maybe in the Bugle Events section. If you don't want to take a stance this month, I would at least ask that the BCRC protest the short public comment period.

If you would like to comment, please review the report, (link can be found earlier in this report).What they would like to hear from you:

- What do you value most about the Area? (identify which area) What type of activities do you enjoy there?
- Do you support this area being proposed as a Wilderness Area? (identify which area) Why or why not? Does the report accurately reflect the conditions on-the-ground in the area?
- Would this area contribute something unique or important to the overall National Wilderness Preservation System? Why or why not?

Send your comments to:

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(see map next page)

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