

Restoring Connections



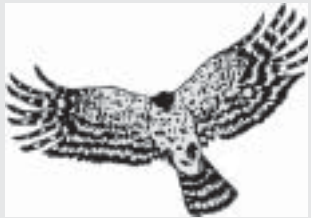
Quarterly Newsletter of the Sky Island Alliance

Vol. 6 Issue 1

Spring 2003



View from *Heart of Rocks*, Chiricahua Mountains, Arizona



Sky Island Alliance

**Protecting
Our Mountain Islands
& Desert Seas**

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Newsletter

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Front Cover

Photo illustration by G. Bodner.

View from *Heart of Rocks*, Chiricahua Mountains, looking over the Sulphur Springs Valley towards Cochise Stronghold in the Dragoon Mountains. Heart of Rocks lies within the Chiricahua National Monument profiled on page 7. The limestone mine described on page 4 would be visible from here, looking towards the north end of the Dragoons. If you were to turn around, you'd see Cochise Head, center of this issue's featured wilderness proposal. Walk south, and a tough hike would take you to visit Ben Onachila's South Fork Cave Creek (page 13) in this same range. A longer walk from there across the Sulphur Springs and San Pedro valleys would take you to Ben's Carr Canyon in the Huachucas. You'd have to walk North for several days to see the Taylors' bighorn sheep in the Mineral Mountains (page 10); you'd be hungry enough by then to sample the entire menu at Los Hermanos. Then you could take a siesta and read *Portal to Paradise*, reviewed on page 14.

Back Cover

Photograph of Cochise Head by G. Donald Bain. For Bain's panoramic views from this and other Sky Island sites, visit <http://www.virtualguidebooks.com/Arizona/CactusCountry.html>

Many Thanks to Our Contributors!

G. Donald Bain, director of the Geography Computing Facility at U.C. Berkeley Geology Dept.; Randall Herrin, San Diego Zoo; Neil Mangum, Chiricahua National Monument Supervisor; Steve Marlatt, SIA board member and highschool/junior high science teacher in Bowie, AZ; Ben Onachila, artist and gallery owner, Bisbee, AZ; Penny Pederson, SIA tracking volunteer; Kathy Pitts, flora and fauna columnist; Nancy Seever, tireless SIA volunteer for all occasions; father and son team Tom and Tomas Taylor, native fish enthusiasts with the Middle Gila Conservation Partnership, Tomas now activated to Marine Corps duty in Iraq; staff of the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, and, of course, the SIA staff listed below.

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photo by G. Bodner

Seeking SIA newsletter submissions:

Send us your poetry, your words of wisdom, your art!

As you've likely noticed, the quarterly Sky Island Alliance newsletter has expanded into a larger newspaper format. We want to keep it filled with inspirational, informative material, and we'd like your help! Do you write poetry? Draw, sketch, paint, or photograph? Like to address regional conservation issues? Review books or websites? Anything that relates to the Sky Islands region is fair game! We'd also like to start a Letters to the Editor section. Send us a note! You can respond to items in our recent newsletter, comment on your experiences as a volunteer or conference-goer, etc. Also, let us know if you'd like to be a regular contributor, e.g. with a column each issue. The deadline for our next newsletter is May 8, 2003. Material submitted after that date may be saved for subsequent issues. Please email submissions to Gita at gbodner@post.harvard.edu, or mail them to Sky Island Alliance attn: Gita, P.O. Box 41165, Tucson, AZ 85717. Resolution of digital images should be at least 300 dpi if possible, but we can work with some lower resolution images.

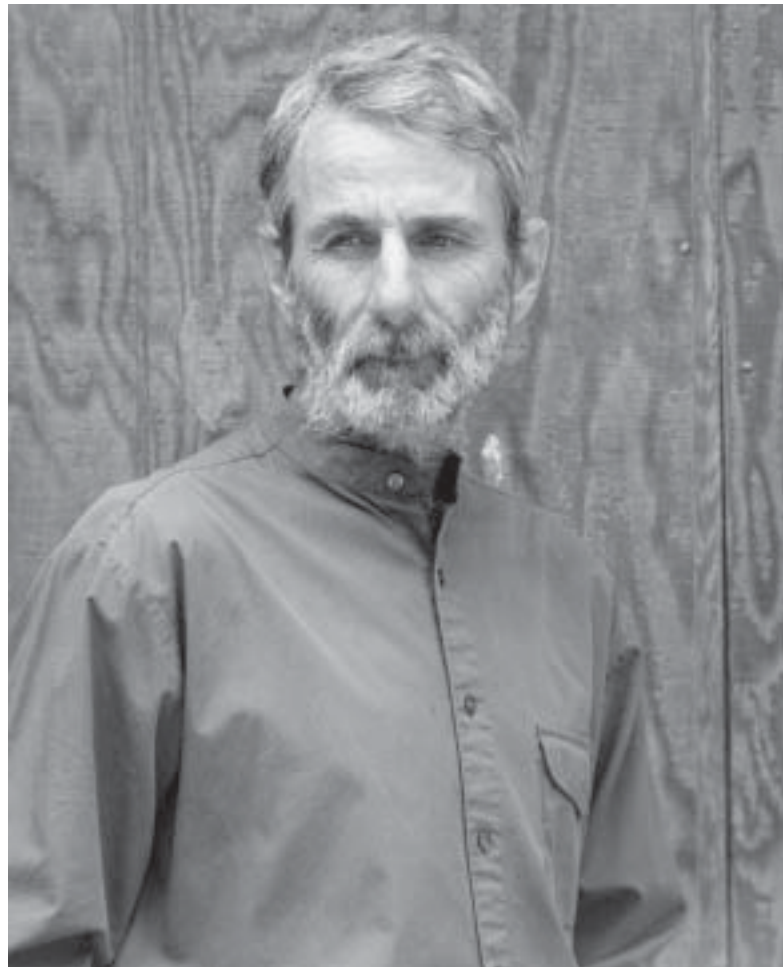
Long Time Conservationist and Wildlands Advocate Passes Away

Our beloved friend, mentor, and SIA board member Mike Seidman battled liver cancer late last year, passing to the lands beyond the rainbow on New Years eve...

Mike spent over 30 years of his life advocating for the protection of wildlife and the habitat they depend upon in the arid Southwest and Northern Mexico. He was instrumental in the reintroduction of the Mexican wolf and the black-footed ferret, and he worked tirelessly and advocated on behalf of the black-tailed prairie dog, beaver, jaguar, desert tortoise and other species of concern.

Mike served as the Conservation Officer for the Arizona Zoological Society and the Phoenix Zoo. He served on the Board of the Directors for the Arizona Wilderness Coalition and the Sky Island Alliance, and was a member of the Grazing Clearing House, Arizona Riparian Council, Middle Gila Conservation Partnership, and the Sonoita Valley Planning Partnership to name but a few issues and organizations he was involved with.

Mike brought knowledge, integrity and passion to every project, discussion, and debate. Whether one agreed or disagreed with Mike, he was highly respected for his unwavering efforts to protect places dear to all Arizonans.



Mexican wolf gets her puppy shots

"I'm going to miss you guys," he says

body dissolving, spirit
strong as always
perhaps clearer now, without
the clutter of a life's to-do-list

these days we walk the line together
between past and present
never more aware of the divide

stories of 'My Canyon,' I reach from
'My Trail,'

and suddenly "I'm going to miss you guys,"
triangulating on
the mystery of future

— gb, Oct. 2002

Mike's family has requested that those wishing to express their appreciation for Mike and his work may direct memorial contributions to the Sky Island Alliance at P.O. Box 41165, Tucson, Arizona 85717-1165.

TRIBUTE TO A MENTOR

for Rasta Mikee Seidman

"What is man but slowed down light."
—Mahatma Ghandi

From a lifetime away
the mental reality of decaying flesh
will be replaced
with fresh blue soul rising
from the white sand
and green of nature.

That world of confused reasoning,
stifling boxes and painful reflection
gives way to another:
one of sparkling pinpoints
in remote shadows,
a hallucinogenic garden
of freedom and forever-ness.

When you're walking one-way
through the canyon don't forget
to turn around at the last moment

Just before the last bend of granite
to finally observe all those strangers
you once knew, once were, once
touched

With your desert philosophy & words,
lift yr hand up to adjust yr dirty cap
with a nod of yr head & manage them
a smirk.

O brother
an intellectual

a blues / reggae purist
a desert environmentalist

the nature man
return to sand

Where saguaros march defiantly
creosote always smells of rain

Wolves run free thru the grasslands
and coatis wake you from your sleep.

—dp randahl dec 2002

"Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
a long way from home
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
and I'm almost gone
Sing freedom, freedom, freedom, freedom,
freedom, freedom"
— richie havens

Keeping the "Public" in Public Lands

Friends,

I trust that this finds you in good spirits in spite of these trying times. It is certainly tough to remain positive in the face of world events, the economy, and an administration in Washington which seems to behave as if we are still living in the 1950s. Previously I've talked about the Bush Administration's attempts at gutting environmental law under the guise of reform. I had hoped at some point, due to public outcry and the defeat of ill-conceived projects such as drilling in the Arctic, the administration would back off. This has not been the case; every day we receive another reminder of how bad things could be if these shortsighted people have their way. Why do these people think that citizens have less concern about the public's health and welfare than we did when these laws were passed?

If we are going to retain our right to clean air and water, protect our public lands and imperiled species, and retain our ability to participate in land use decisions, it will be because of private citizens such as you. Those of us that care about healthy landscapes must make our voices heard. For example, letters from concerned citizens can have an effect on

land management agencies. The Sugarloaf trail article (pg. 7) is a good example of public comment leading to a positive outcome. You will also read about a proposed mine in the Dragoon Mountains and Oil and Gas development on southern New Mexico's Otero Mesa. These articles contain information on how to comment on these projects as well as talking points to mention in your letters. We have been fighting for the last several years to protect your right to participate in land use decisions – please take a few minutes today and exercise that right.

As many of you know, we have developed a positive working relationship with local land management agencies. Unfortunately, in the case of the Forest Service, poor leadership in both DC and the regional office in Albuquerque, threatens this relationship. Much of the problem lies with a menagerie of unqualified managers that the President has appointed to oversee the protection of our public lands. Instead of appointing experienced land managers and biologists to leadership positions, he has made appointments such as Mark Rey, a timber industry lobbyist, as Undersecretary of Agriculture in charge of the Forest Service.

I would like to share a story which illu-

minates the thought process of much of the upper echelon working in federal agencies these days. Recently, due to management concerns, Sky Island Alliance filed an appeal of a project on the Coronado National Forest. When the appeal was complete, it was sent to Regional Forester Harv Forsgren via electronic mail with return receipt requested; receipt was confirmed the following day. Several days later I received a phone call from Pat Jackson, the Regional Appeals Officer. He indicated that the Forest Service was dismissing SIA's appeal due to the fact it had been submitted via electronic mail rather than the US Postal Service! It did not matter that they had a copy of our Appeal in their hands; as far as Jackson was concerned, I had not sent it. I reminded him that this is 2003 and email is an accepted form of communication; that we had sent many documents to the Forest Service via email and his concerns had never been raised by anyone else; that nowhere in the regulations are



email submissions prohibited; and regardless, he and the regional forester had discretion to utilize a little common sense. Trying to reason with Jackson gave me a more enlightened understanding of "talking to a wall," than I had previously achieved. I realized then that the mission of the "New" Forest Service is Delay, Deny, and Obfuscate. These attempts to shut the public out of public land management can only lead to a more contentious future and threatens the current positive direction of management in the Sky Islands. Sky Island Alliance remains committed to working with all land-use agencies to affect positive outcomes but these types of petty, arbitrary decisions make it more difficult.

—David Hodges

Sky Island Watch

Local Residents Join Sky Island Alliance in Opposing Openpit Mining in Dragoon Mountains

by Rachel Kondor, SIA Ecosystem Defense and Policy Director

The US Forest Service has proposed to approve an openpit mine in the Dragoon Mountains above the small town of Dragoon. Alpha Calcit, Inc. plans to reopen and expand an old quarry on the Coronado National Forest adjacent to the town in order to remove limestone for sale in the United States and abroad.

The mine would be authorized under the General Mining Law of 1872, an archaic statute that allows anyone to establish mining claims for the removal of certain materials from public lands.

"If approved, this mine will destroy the quality of life of my town," said Dragoon resident Wray Kephart. On April 2, Sky Island Alliance staff met with concerned residents in the town of Dragoon to discuss strategies for opposing the mine. Local residents are concerned that the mining operation will harm their way of life by degrading air and water quality, harming wildlife, and impacting public safety.

Alpha Calcit plans to conduct blasting in order to remove materials. The material would then be hauled to a crushing facility on private land several miles away. Loads of approximately 20-25 tons per truck would be hauled between the mine and the crushing facility every 12

minutes, eight hours a day, five days a week. The company currently plans to operate the mine for approximately 20 years.

As part of mine expansion plans, the road to the existing mine location would be widened and new road construction would take place. Alpha Calcit intends to blaze a new road into an inventoried roadless area. Inventoried roadless areas are afforded special protection under current regulations. These regulations prohibit new road construction in identified roadless areas on the National Forests. However, if the mining claim holders can show that they hold valid mining claims, then they possess what is called an "outstanding" or "existing" right, and may construct roads in roadless areas.

Representatives of Alpha Calcit and the Coronado National Forest recently held an open house in Benson to explain the proposal to residents and business owners. At the open house, plans for reclamation of the area after the completion of the mining op-

eration were revealed. Local residents were not impressed with the plans for clean up. Wray Kephart said, "The examples of reclamation they showed us took place in completely different environments, such as in forested areas in Germany and other countries. I am not convinced that they can adequately reclaim the mine in this arid desert environment based on their current plans."

The Dragoon Mountains, much of which are managed by the Coronado National Forest, are located approximately sixty miles southeast of Tucson and thirty-five miles northeast of Sierra Vista. Their mountain peaks tower 3,000 feet above the surrounding plains to an elevation of 7,519 feet. The range is strikingly beautiful, with mysterious rock formations, deep canyons, and outstanding vistas out across the valleys to other Sky Island ranges.

The Dragoons are steeped in history and rich in biological diversity. Cochise Stronghold was used by Cochise and his band of Apaches to evade capture from the US Government in the 1860s. The signing of a peace treaty between Cochise's people and the government

"If approved, this mine will destroy the quality of life of my town"

~ Dragoon resident Wray Kephart

was initiated in the Dragoons in 1872. In addition, the range provides habitat for many species of birds and other wildlife. Globally rare Arizona cypress forests are found there, as are fifteen species of threatened, endangered, and "special concern" animals and plants

Because of their proximity to Tucson and other smaller towns, the Dragoons are a popular place for many types of recreation such as hiking, rock climbing, horsebackriding, birdwatching, hunting, historical sites tourism, and camping. Dragoon resident Shirley Harris said, "Cochise County depends on tourism for a large part of its income. If this mine is approved, wildlife will be frightened away, and the birders and hunters who come to enjoy the scenery and recreate in the area will also stay away."

...continued on next page

Policy, Planning, and Fieldwork; the Big Burro Mountains

by Matt Skroch, SIA Field Programs Director

In the Big Burro Mountains of southwestern New Mexico, a collection of conservation-minded groups are rallying for the protection of critical resources that are now imminently threatened. In response to a lack of enforcement and management of the transportation system there, the Sky Island Alliance, Upper Gila Watershed Alliance, New Mexico Wilderness Coalition, and Republicans for Environmental Protection are calling for an economically and ecologically sound transportation system that incorporates the needs of wildlife, recreationists, and ecological processes.

The Burro Mountains, situated at the northeast fringe of the Sky Island region, are stepping-stones linking the Colorado Plateau with the sub-tropically orientated Sky Islands and Sierra Madre Mountains to the south. From a vantage point in the Burros, one can gaze south towards the spine of the Sierra Madres represented by the Peloncillo Mountains. In the northwest corner of the Burros, the Middle Box of the Gila River cuts through the mountains, where perennial water provides habitat for longfin dace, sonora and desert sucker, southwestern willow flycatchers, zone-tail hawks, and many other riparian dependant species.

In years past, a lack of transportation management has resulted in a profusion of user-created roads that criss-cross the mountains seemingly to no end. Valuable resources like springs and riparian areas are being increasingly trampled by off-road vehicles. There are numerous incursions into the relatively small roadless area that remains in the Burros – the only area now protected under the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Off-road groups have gone so far

as to construct, illegally, their own trail systems in the Burros – all without environmental review or planning. The Gila National Forest has shown signs of concern but is not taking initiative or responsibility in closing these routes. While we commend the agency for allowing closures of several routes (Restoring Connections Winter edition, pg. 5), the continued lack of enforcement against illegal activities in the Burros is alarming.

We must now call on the Forest Service to begin a comprehensive transportation

planning process. Not only will the ecology of the Burros benefit, so will also the users of this spectacular area. With recent regulations requiring transportation analysis, community interest and involvement, and the critical state of the ecology of the Burros, the stars have aligned to make this process happen soon. A concrete transportation plan will have numerous benefits, including:

- * A map that specifically shows roads and trails open to the public and what uses are appropriate on each road. This will lessen confusion among forest users, allow for effective enforcement, and add to the general appeal of visiting the Burros.

- * An environmental review of roads and trails within a context of impacts, benefits, and disadvantages of each route. This review will allow for a priority listing for closure and rehabilitation of roads as well as elucidating which roads should maintained to higher standards.

- * A review of the transportation system in the context of maintenance and reconstruction dollars available. As of now, the

Gila National Forest has a \$343 million backlog of needed maintenance and capital improvements—the highest backlog in the Southwest Region. These economic dire straits underline the need for removing considerable low-benefit mileage from the transportation system.

- * Community involvement and buy-in from interested parties. By involving the public in transportation planning, with

the goal of determining which roads to close and which to retain, users will gain “ownership” of the planning process and be more likely to respect the outcome. Non-motorized enthusiasts may highlight areas that are important for their enjoyment, while motorized users may delineate popular roads or trails they would like to see remain.

The days of free-for-all cross-country off-road driving in the Burros are soon to be over. With an exponential increase in off-road vehicles and user-created routes, the Burros can no longer withstand lax enforcement of transportation regulations and willy-nilly off-road use. Illegal, unneeded, unsafe, or damaging roads must be closed. It only takes a few passes from a vehicle to create a wildcat road—closing wildcat roads must become just as simple.

Poor planning pits users against one another. Scars from destructive free-wheeling and lack of refuge from motor impacts wears out the good will of non-motorized users, who then push for complete exclusion of motorized uses from entire regions. Lax enforcement also hurts responsible riders because it allows the relatively few irresponsible riders to undermine the reputations of all motorized users. And in the current situation, even riders who *intend* to ride responsibly have trouble telling which routes are legal roads and which are not.

Now is the time for the Forest Service, together with the conscientious users of the Burro Mountains, to hash out a plan that will ensure an economically and ecologically responsible transportation system.



Eroded and compacted soil of a wildcat road in the Big Burros

Mine, continued...

The Dragoons are a special place worthy of protection from the ravages of hardrock mining. Unfortunately, under current law, most of the range is still open for mineral exploration. The General Mining Law of 1872 allows the discovery and extraction of certain minerals from public lands in the United States. Anyone can stake a claim to mine for personal profit on federal public lands unless the U.S. Congress has expressly withdrawn the area from mining (such as in National Parks, National Wildlife Refuges, etc.).

In order to begin mining under the Mining Law, an individual or company must prove that the material to be removed from the land is both “locatable” and “marketable.” To qualify as locatable, the limestone that Alpha Calcit intends to remove must be at least 95% calcium or magnesium carbonate, and must be of sufficient quality to justify the costs of removing it from the ground. To show the material is marketable, a claimant must prove that the material would fetch a competitive price on an existing market. Thus far, Alpha Calcit has not shown that the material it plans to remove is a locatable mineral or that the material is marketable.

The Coronado National Forest is now in the process of analyzing this project under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA requires the agency to consider public input and address public concerns when choosing whether or not to approve a particular project. Public input can be especially effective in guiding decisions at this time.

The legal staff at the Sky Island Alliance will continue to vigilantly monitor plans for mining in the area and work with local residents to organize opposition to the proposal.

Send comment letters to:
Jennifer Ruyle
Team Leader, Alpha Calcit
Environmental Analysis
Coronado National Forest
Federal Building, FB-42
300 W. Congress
Tucson, Arizona 85701

Call for comment letters

Your input matters. Please write to Jennifer Ruyle at the Coronado National Forest by **April 30** and urge her to deny approval for the mining operation in the Dragoons. You may wish to emphasize one or more of the following points:

- * The mining company has yet to prove that its claim is valid. If they cannot show that the material to be removed is both locatable and marketable, their claim is not valid under the 1872 Mining Act.
- * The mine will diminish recreational opportunities in the area which will impact tourism revenue and lower property values of residents.
- * The mine will adversely impact wildlife by disrupting lifecycles and destroying habitat.
- * The air and water quality of the area will suffer. Noise, air and water pollution from the mine will be difficult if not impossible to remediate.
- * It is inappropriate to allow the mining company to blaze new roads in an inventoried roadless area. Roadless areas are important for wildlife and non-motorized recreation.
- * The expense of NEPA analysis should be borne by the mining claimant, not by the American public, especially in these difficult economic times.

Road Rattlings

by Trevor Hare

Looking back at the last Road Rattling's I see that I complained about almost everything a self-respecting conservationist should complain about. So digging deep into my tiny black soul I have found that this time I'd rather tell you all about the glorious sights and sounds we see and feel every time we go out. The sound of water! of native bees buzzing! of plopping frogs and flying bats! and the sight of that bat biting into my finger! of snow falling on saguaros! of a small green riparian area in a desert sea. The sounds of the big-horns trying to escape our approach in bat canyon, and the sight of them as we rounded the corner. The sight of a blacktail rattlesnake crawling through the fresh track of the mountain lion we were following. So many different, exciting, and amazing things to tease the senses, and to think this is all just from the first three months of the year! These sights and sounds will stay with the Sky Island Alliance volunteers and myself forever and when I am 100 years old sitting on my patio somewhere in Northern Sonora, beer in hand, with my great grandchildren at my feet, I can embellish even more my stories to them and dream. And hopefully the kids won't have to dream about these places as they will still be there waiting to be discovered again.

We began 2003 inventorying several places worthy of attention and protection. In January we had a great trip into the Mescal Mountains, a sliver of BLM lands jutting into the San Carlos Apache Reservation just west of San Carlos Reservoir and north of the Gila River. The existing Needles Eye Wilderness takes up the eastern third of the approximately 40 square miles of BLM lands bounded on the west by the Dripping Springs Valley. A group of almost 20 people showed up and we got the weekend's work done in one day and so we spent Sunday exploring Mescal Creek, a perennial stream flowing through the wilderness. There were frogs and fish, giant cottonwood and sycamore trees, very few cattle and even

fewer people. Access from the north to the Wilderness is through private property at the northwestern edge of the Wilderness, so is well protected. Access to the Wilderness from the south is still available from the Drippings Springs Valley, and we will be revisiting the area to inventory the roads southwest of the Wilderness.

In February we finished the road inventories in the Gila Mountains and on Turtle Mountain. The threats to these areas (and hence the need to have full information about them) are palpable. Phelps-Dodge is planning an open-pit copper mine smack-dab in between them, but BLM lands for tailings piles would need to be acquired. We and other groups are fighting this; we'll keep you posted. On Turtle Mountain we camped above Eagle



Saguaros in the Mescal Mountains

Creek and awoke to three a.m. rain. As dawn neared, the rain turned to snow. We had a cold and wet morning, but saw some great spots that I hope to revisit this summer, when the weather is decent for snakes and desert rats! By the afternoon it was gorgeous, of course, and we all had great hikes. On Sunday we walked down Eagle Creek, which makes up the eastern boundary of the former Turtle Mountain Wilderness Study Area (when the 1990 BLM wilderness bill gave permanent protection for some parcels, many like Turtle Mountain that were not included were "released," and no longer have formal protection). Virtually all of the 20-plus miles of Eagle Creek are owned by Phelps-Dodge. Public access

is downstream from the Morenci pumping station. Luckily the road is in pretty bad shape and has been washed out recently so we saw very little evidence of human abuses—except a plate of cookies wrapped in foil. Maybe Santa Claus dropped them?

Two weeks later in the Gila Mountains we found a beautiful place to camp on the east side of what was the Daymine Wilderness Study Area in a rugged canyon with saguaros all around and wildflowers starting to pop. Some phantom beasts (weird birds? pigs? *chupacabras*?) were singing in the night. The weather was

great, and the hiking was fantastic. Markham Creek was beautiful with the cottonwoods and sycamores budding out and lots of water in what must be a mostly dry stream. The road that used to run all the way up the left fork of Markham Creek was closed last time we surveyed in the area, and remains closed. Lots of recent road grading work has been done on the north and west ends, from the top of the creek all the way out to Fort Thomas on the Daymine and Burton Wash Roads. The ranchers in the area told me that they could support the Daymine Wilderness if they can get the road up Markham Creek open and connected to the Daymine and Burton Wash Roads to form a loop for their cattle operation.

At the end of February, long-time volunteer Robbie Hannawacker and I hosted an ecology class from St. Gregory's High School in the northern Tumacacori Mountains. We looked at the road system in the Red Springs Pass area, hiked a lot, got rained on a lot, and had a great time.

As the BLM and Forest Service road inventories wind down (yes we are almost done!) Sky Island Alliance will start to give our volunteer corps different opportunities. We still have a BLM road inventory weekend in the Aravaipa Canyon area on May 16-18, a Burro Mountains road inventory Memorial Day weekend in New Mexico, a week in the Campbell Blue June 27 - July 2 re-inventorying roads, and two riparian inventory weekends in the Canelo Hills/San Rafael Valley June 20-23 and July 11-13. We will continue to inventory roads, especially re-inventories in areas we did more than five years ago, we will also be having more riparian inventory trips, some wilderness boundary survey trips, more road closures and other types of restoration trips, plus some fun exploration trips. So stay tuned, stay involved, and make a difference.



High school students rest after a hike in the Tumacacoris.

Chiricahua National Monument

by Neil Mangum, Chiricahua National Monument Supervisor

Chiricahua National Monument may well be Arizona's best kept secret. Nestled in southeastern Arizona, the Monument is located in the northern portion of the lofty Chiricahua Mountains, which dominate the landscape for 50 miles. The Chiricahuas form the divide between the San Simon valley to the east and the Sulphur Springs valley on the western flank. Most of the Chiricahua Mountains lie within the Coronado National Forest. The exception is the nearly 13,000 acre Chiricahua National Monument administered by the National Park Service.

The Monument's signature icons are the rock pinnacles, spires, and mammoth columns—literally a rock wonderland. The formations are a result of violent volcanic eruptions that occurred more than 27 million years ago. After cooling, the ash fused into an almost 2,000-foot layer of rock called rhyolite. Then nature did its handy work. Water, wind, and ice sculpted the rhyolite into strange and bizarre shapes of towering rock columns, massive spires, and balanced rocks perched on tiny pedestals.

More than 11,000 acres of the national monument has been federally designated as wilderness area. Wilderness designation, together with the best air quality standards in the region, provides added significance to Chiricahua National Monument.



The Chiricahua Mountains are unique and stand in stark contrast to the surrounding Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts. Within the cool forests of the Sky Islands, as the Chiricahuas are known, reside many animals and plants. Because of the proximity of Mexico, many Mexican species are found in the Chiricahuas. Most conspicuous are the birds including the hepatic tanager, red-faced warbler, and elegant trogon, which make the Chiricahuas a haven for birders. The monument is home to a variety of animals such as

Chiricahua fox squirrels, mountain lions, coati-mundis, and peccaries.

Human history is also a primary element of the Chiricahuas. The Apaches



resided in the mountains ably led by leaders like Cochise and Geronimo. Driven out and forced to submit to reservation confinement, the Apaches were replaced by pioneer ranchers and miners. In the heart of the Chiricahua Mountains, along Bonita Creek, a Swedish immigrant couple settled and prospered turning the area into a guest ranch. Influenced by the natural beauty and geological oddities of the region, the area was made part of the US Forest Service. In 1924, the National Monument was transferred to the National Park Service. Development of the Park took off during the Great Depression. A CCC camp was established in the park. The handiwork of the CCC is still visible today. Visitors to Chiricahua National Monument enjoy more than 20 miles of trails carved out of the wilderness by the CCC. Capping off the CCC's efforts was the opening of an eight-mile

long tour road, which takes visitors to the summit of Massai Point and connects with the park's intricate trail system. The CCC also constructed a campground, which is still in use.

Today, more than 75,000 visitors a year visit Chiricahua National Monument. Nearby Fort Bowie National Historic Site is also administered by Chiricahua National Monument.

Watch future issues of *Restoring Connections* for profiles of Fort Bowie and their excellent grassland restoration work!

~editors

Sugarloaf Trail was reopened in September 2002. Sugarloaf had been closed for nearly two years following a rockslide that had clogged the trail with rocks and debris. Because most of the trail resides in the Wilderness Area, the park went through a series of environmental assessments and solicited information on ideas on how the trail could be reopened. We are happy to report that we avoided the use of any motorized tools or blasting that might be considered detrimental to wilderness management. As it turned out, the park's trail crew, using only hand tools, were able to reopen the trail in less than three days.

~Neil Mangum, CNM Supervisor

Epilogue - Sugarloaf Trail Repair, Chiricahua National Monument

National Park Service Modifies its Preferred Alternative in Response to Public Comment

by Jennifer Wolfson, SIA legal intern

Two issues ago, *Restoring Connections* reported on our participation in the decision-making process regarding how to repair a damaged trail in a designated wilderness area. We are pleased to report on a solution that has satisfied all parties involved.

In 2001, the National Park Service (NPS) closed the Sugarloaf Trail in the Chiricahua National Monument after a rockslide buried 30 feet of the trail with boulders and produced dangerous conditions for hikers such as cliff overhangs. The NPS drafted an environmental assessment (EA) including several alternatives to trail reparation. Its preferred alternative proposed the use of some mechanized drilling and blasting equipment. After the National Park Service issued a request for public comments to its EA last July, SIA responded with several suggestions (see Fall 2002 issue). Because the reparations would take place within a designated wilderness area, SIA suggested using a hand-tool only approach (the Wilderness Act prohibits the operation of mechanized

equipment in a wilderness areas except in extraordinary circumstances such as an emergency rescue).

Additionally, because the work was scheduled to take place near a "protected activity center" of the endangered Mexican spotted owl during its nesting season, SIA was concerned that the noise from mechanized equipment and blasting would cause stress to the owl during a crucial time in its yearly cycle. Therefore, our letter also asked the NPS to reschedule the reparations for a time other than the owl's nesting season.

Finally, we attempted to balance the needs of an endangered species and the mandates of the Wilderness Act with the needs of the NPS to efficiently accomplish their task by suggesting a completely different alternative as a compromise between the NPS' pre-

ferred alternative providing for the use of both mechanized drilling and blasting equipment and our preferred alternative allowing the use of hand tools only; we suggested that blasting equipment be used *only* where necessary to remove dangerous overhangs while drilling and other work be done *solely* by hand. We re-emphasized that whatever method was employed, the repairs should take place outside of the Mexican spotted owl's nesting season. This would minimize the amount of noise and disruption in a designated wilderness area while allowing Park Service employees to efficiently complete its task and ensure the safety of trail users.

In mid September 2002, the NPS issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for its EA on the "Sugarloaf Trail Emergency Repair." The NPS responded to SIA's and other's comments by modifying its preferred alternative. The NPS decided not to scale cliff overhang areas, nor to use mechanized equipment in the wilder-

ness area. Additionally, the repair was rescheduled for a time after the Mexican spotted owl breeding season. Although a relatively small project, thanks to Superintendent Neil C. Mangum and the NPS, this is an important illustration of how the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 (NEPA) is supposed to work. Rather than providing lip service to public concerns, the NPS genuinely appreciated the public's thoughts and ideas and even changed its preferred alternative to reflect this input.

This project and outcome shows the fallacy of the Bush administration's recent attacks on the NEPA process as causing "unreasonable delays." This decision explicitly illustrates how NEPA is intended to work. NEPA provides an opportunity for collaboration between agencies and the public that ultimately leads to sounder decisions, better management of our public lands, and to a more positive relationship between land management agencies and the public.

Otero Mesa, New Mexico

by Nathan Newcomer, Otero Mesa Campaign Organizer for New Mexico Wilderness Alliance

Located in southern New Mexico, the Greater Otero Mesa Area is considered to be the nation's wildest and largest Chihuahuan Desert grassland remaining on public land. This rare network of grasslands, mountains, serpentine canyons, and rolling hills represents the only intact corridor between the Guadalupe and Sacramento Mountains for many species of concern, including the state's healthiest herd of pronghorn antelope. Unlike other herds throughout New Mexico, this herd is native to the area and has never needed reintroduction. More than 1,000 native wildlife species, including black-tailed prairie dogs, mule deer, coyotes, bald eagles, ferruginous hawks, mountain lions, and 250 species of migratory songbirds depend on Otero Mesa as the nation's last intact large-scale Chihuahuan Desert grassland.

Despite the fact that Chihuahuan Desert grasslands have received relatively little protection (Guadalupe National Park and the surface area of Carlsbad Caverns National Park, totaling less than 110,000 acres, represent the only protected Chihuahuan desert grasslands in the US), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is moving aggressively forward to expedite oil and gas development in Otero Mesa, by the beginning of 2004.

In many ways, the plans to develop Otero Mesa replicate those proposed for Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. They are designed to fool the general public into believing that oil and gas drilling would only leave a small "footprint" on the landscape and can be done in an "environmentally sound manner." In reality, the impacts of full-scale drilling would cause an unprecedented damage to wildlife and habitat, and would forever extinguish the potential for wilderness designation.

Industry argues that reclamation of the land would enable plants and animals to thrive after development ended. In such an arid region (compounded by our ongoing five-year drought), the term "reclamation" is simply industry jargon designed to placate the general public. Perhaps a better vision would be "restoration," a model that if fully implemented, would ensure that these grasslands would in time recover. Sadly, no real science has been able to show that reclamation or restoration can succeed in this harsh environment. In reality, industry is simply anxious to begin drilling. In supporting these plans, the BLM is capitulating to industry desires, under great pressure from the Bush Administration, while ignoring restoration science, the area's wilderness qualities, and the will of many citizens living in New Mexico.

Twenty-five years ago the BLM undertook a wilderness inventory of the Greater Otero Mesa Area. From records we have obtained, much of this inventory was done with aerial photos, supplemented with limited on-site reviews and inventories. In addition, these studies covered only about 15,000 acres of the area's more than one million acres. When the BLM completed this cursory review it recommended a mere 11,000 acres for intensive wilderness evaluation. In the end, the agency decided that



photo by Stephen Capra

none qualified. Would an assessor come to your home and judge its value by only inspecting your bathroom? This model does not work for your home and is inherently unfair for determining the wilderness potential of this great grassland.

By contrast, in the summer of 2001, The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance conducted a citizen's survey to document the wilderness potential of the area. Several months of comprehensive, "on-the-ground" fieldwork, that strictly followed the BLM Wilderness Handbook guidelines, led to the realization that more than 520,000 acres of the Greater Otero Mesa Area qualify for wilderness designation. Nevertheless, the BLM is attempting to accelerate development, without reinventorying the area.

The lead company that wants to exploit Otero Mesa for short-term gain is Harvey E. Yates Company (HEYCO), based out of Roswell, New Mexico. Recently, George Yates, the President of HEYCO, sponsored two \$1000-a-plate fund-raisers in southern New Mexico for Vice President Dick Cheney. George Yates has long been an enemy of conservation. He is a current board member and former chairman of the board of the Mountain States Legal Foundation (a group devoted to fighting environmental regulation and supporting unregulated off-road vehicle use) and is a former Chairman of the Board of Mountain States Legal. Yates is also the cousin of the President of Yates Petroleum, the first company to obtain a drilling lease in New Mexico. In 1982, it was Yates Petroleum that plowed a road into the Salt Creek Wilderness near Roswell. It took several weeks and a court injunction to

stop the drilling. Newspaper reports at the time show two people strongly speaking up in defense of the Yates operation. One was then Interior Secretary James Watt, and the other was a Congressman from Wyoming, Dick Cheney. Industry argues that there is no correlation between Otero Mesa and the fundraiser with Dick Cheney; we believe the connection speaks for itself.

Nevertheless, political winds do shift. Protection of Otero Mesa continues to be an uphill fight, but the election of Governor Bill Richardson just made the playing field a little more level. As we go to press, the Bureau of Land Management is in the process of compiling the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Otero Mesa.

There have been many positive developments in the past few months that give us serious hope for success on this controversial issue. First is the involvement of the governor. On February 18, he wrote Secretary of Interior Gail Norton and asked that the "designation of a significant wilderness area" be created in the Greater Otero Mesa Area. He went on to ask for a "new wilderness inventory" and to be part of any future negotiations involving the Greater Otero Mesa Area.

Recent scientific studies cast doubt on assumptions made by the BLM that this grassland can be restored if development occurs. Dr. Walter Whitford, a world-renowned grassland expert and former professor at New Mexico State University, wrote a paper on the grasslands of Otero Mesa, with the following conclusions:

"Chihuahuan Desert Grasslands are the most endangered ecosystem or plant community type in North America."

"Oil and gas development will require construction of many additional miles of roads that will increase both wind and water erosion and potentially affect the survival of local vegetation."

"Cleared well pads should be considered as irreparable clearings within the grasslands."

"The problem soils, commercial sources of seeds, and the potential genetic problems with reseeded rangelands combine to make the risk of inability to restore Chihuahuan Desert grasslands on Otero Mesa extremely high."

This report strongly supports our contention that industry, not science, is guiding the Final EIS on Otero Mesa. The science strongly suggests that this area cannot be restored if damaged in this way. But political pressure continues to push development forward. More expert reports are in the works that speak to hydrology, bird species, prairie dogs and pronghorn.

The Otero Mesa campaign is beginning to take on both a national and international

"The problem soils, commercial sources of seeds, and the potential genetic problems with reseeded rangelands combine to make the risk of inability to restore Chihuahuan Desert grasslands on Otero Mesa extremely high."

component. Several national groups have recently joined the coalition, including The National Wildlife Federation. Recently, the Otero Mesa issue was part of an international conference held near the Janos grassland in Chihuahua, Mexico.

In late March, Eco-Stewards, a faith-based conservation group, came from California to Otero Mesa for a three-day event to write a paper based on faith and preservation. Members of the New Mexico Council of Churches and members from parishes of all denominations also took part.

Now our campaign's focus is on New Mexico's Senators to gain their crucial support in our efforts to protect Otero Mesa. Senator Bingaman remains uncommitted. Both Senator Domenici and Bingaman are the ranking members in their respected parties on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, thus have tremendous power when it comes to protecting Otero Mesa. It is important that they hear from you! Ask them to delay implementation of the BLM's Final Environmental Impact Statement until the BLM conducts a new wilderness inventory of the Greater Otero Mesa Area, and sound science is factored into the final decision-making process. Ask them to join with New Mexico's governor in helping to protect this important part of New Mexico's conservation heritage. Finally, write the governor and thank him for taking a leadership role in protecting Otero Mesa. To learn more about this issue and what you can do to help, visit www.oteromesa.org and www.nmwild.org.

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Tracking the Trackers

by Janice Przybyl, SIA Wildlife Monitoring Program Coordinator

Welcome to the 15 new wildlife monitoring volunteers who completed their training at the beginning of December 2002. Joining our ever-expanding crew of citizen scientists are: Joan Calcagno, Marybeth and Roy Dawson, Mike Headrick, Susan Hess, Ron Hummel, Renee Janaway, Jane Kroesen, Bill and Ellie Kurtz, Judith Musick, Carol Powell, Renell and Ron Stewart, and Christina Tonelli. Welcome! We now boast a total of 50 active volunteers surveying 16 transects in three different project areas.

As of the last survey period in March, volunteers completed a year of surveying on the Drought/Whetstone project and now with the enthusiasm of the new volunteers we fortified the project by adding two new transects for a total of seven transects. We established a new transect in Clifford Wash about a mile west of where Smith Wash drains into Clifford. Late last year, volunteers on the Smith Wash transect documented four occurrences of mountain lions. On the new transect, during the very first survey in January, volunteers found a set of mountain lion tracks moving up the wash. We created this new transect with the idea of discovering how far west and how close to the road—SR-80—mountain lion activity occurs. Now we know a little bit more.

Our second new transect in this project area is located on Amerind property. For those of you unfamiliar with Amerind, the Foundation is a private, nonprofit archaeological research facility and museum devoted to the study and interpretation of Native American cultures and is located north of the Drought Mountains in Texas Canyon. There's a very interesting museum and gallery open to the public that I encourage you to visit. Anyway, Amerind property extends beyond Interstate-10 about a quarter mile north of the Texas Canyon rest area. This is a great opportu-

nity to start investigating wildlife movement from the Drought Mountains, across (or under) I-10, to the Little Dra-



With the Droughts as a backdrop, new volunteers Jane Kroesen and Joan Calcagno search for tracks in Stronghold Wash.

goons. Thanks to the director of the Amerind Foundation, John Ware, and volunteer coordinator Barbara Hanson, for inviting us onto the Amerind site to conduct our surveys.

We've put a lot of effort into beefing up the project area along the I-19 corridor. Volunteers are now surveying three new transects in the Santa Cruz project hoping to document wildlife presence between the Tumacacori and Santa Rita Mountain ranges. Cottonwood Wash flows southwest out of the Santa Rita Mountains and into the Santa Cruz River.

We created a new transect along this drainage starting about a quarter mile from the river. The sandy substrate along the bottom of this wash produces nice crisp tracks. Last June, while on horseback, volunteer Birdie Stabel saw a long set of black bear tracks headed toward the river. Now that we have an official transect I hope she finds some more!

Two volunteers from Tubac are adopting their second transect on a dirt road that runs perpendicular to Cottonwood Canyon and a number of other drainages that empty into the Santa Cruz River. This survey line creates a net effect and hopefully we'll "catch" any wildlife activity traveling up and down these drainages. A third transect was created in Toros Wash. On our exploratory trip, even though we found evidence of cattle, the substrate looked good. We found old sign of coyote and many other critters, but no focal species... yet. Toros Wash is a possible wildlife conduit as it flows northeast from the Tumacacoris toward Sopori Wash.

We did not add any transects to the Cienega Corridor Project (what used to be called the Missing Link), though we formed a new track count in Saguaro Park East as part of the training workshop. On the last day of the workshop new volunteers got the chance to put their skills to good use. Working with NPS biologist Don Swann we located three transects along the Hope Camp Trail at the end of Camino Loma Alta. This new track survey may provide additional supportive data that the Cienega Creek area is a critical wildlife corridor. In addition, the three park transects are located on heavily used hiking trails and data collected over the long term may reflect the effects of increased usage as private lands south of the National Park are further developed.

We are now in the midst of our fourth training workshop. We recruited another great batch of volunteers to help us achieve the overall mission of Sky Island Alliance, part of which is to use our data to "guide local and international management decisions related to the preservation and restoration of bio-regional connectivity." That's a mouthful and now, thanks to our volunteers' hard work gathering that data, we recently had a few opportunities to do precisely that.

At the end of January, I submitted a comment letter to the environmental planner for an Arizona Department of Transportation project. The Marsh Station overpass and the railroad bridge are being altered to increase clearance. In fact, a new bridge is being constructed 50 feet west of the existing bridge. Our concerns include possible disturbance to wildlife activity in Cienega Creek and its associated drainages. I was able to cite the work Sky Island Alliance volunteers are doing in the area and our documentation of black bears and mountain lions in these drainages.

Also, Santa Cruz County is in the process of revising their comprehensive plan. Matt Skroch, SIA field program director, submitted comments on the land use and character area maps and, with the help of UofA landscape architecture student Michelle Rudy, compiled a list of talking points for Sky Island Alliance members attending the public meetings. Our main concern with the process is the lack of identified wildlife corridors between the Tumacacori and Santa Rita Mountains.

I am now Sky Island Alliance's representative on the Cienega Corridor Conservation Council—you know the area formerly known as the Missing Link. Our first meeting was in January, which Roseann Hanson (Sonoran Institute) spearheaded. We are continuing to work out the details of the Charter, defining our mission and goals to protect and conserve the natural resources of the area. In March, Arlan Colton, formerly with the State Land Department, gave a brief overview of state trust lands prompting discussion and explorations into what we can do to protect state lands in Cienega Corridor.

All this would not be possible without our hard-working, fun loving volunteers. I can never say enough about the importance of the work they do nor voice loudly enough my appreciation for their dedication. By the end of May 2003, we will have more than 60 wildlife monitoring volunteers, and I—who have never been good at names—know each one of them personally, and yes, I know their names. They sure have made an indelible impression on me.



SIA in the News

On March 14, the Associated Press published *American Indian and Environmental Groups Put Telescope Project on Hold*, a story on the appeal of the Veritas Telescope Project. Sky Island Alliance, the Tohono O'odham Nation, the Center for Biological Diversity and To All My Relations appealed this project in the Santa Rita Mountains. We will have details of the Veritas Project and appeal in the next issue.

On March 19, the *Arizona Daily Star* published *Owl-habitat Land Swap is Blocked*. This story concerned a land exchange (BLM for private) that is being facilitated by former Interior Secretary and Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt. Sky Island Alliance has

been involved in the negotiations on what lands would be exchanged and is working to ensure an honest process.

On April 5, the *Arizona Daily Star* published *List Two More Desert Fish as Endangered, Feds Asked*. This reports on a petition submitted to the US Fish and Wildlife Service asking that they consider listing both the roundtail and headwater chub, under provisions of the Endangered Species Act. Formerly occurring throughout the lower Colorado River basin, the roundtail chub is now limited to 19 small tributaries of the upper Gila, San Pedro, Salt, and Verde rivers in Arizona and New Mexico. The headwater chub is presently limited to 13 small streams in the Gila, Salt and Verde watersheds.

Bighorn Sheep in the Mineral Mountains, Pinal County, AZ

by Tom and Tomas Taylor, father and son team of native fish enthusiasts with the Middle Gila Conservation Partnership

Desert bighorn sheep! We couldn't believe what we heard. Later we could hardly believe what we saw. We heard big horn sheep were sighted near Superior, Arizona, on the side of Picketpost Mountain. Later we saw a photograph of the sheep. Staff from Boyce-Thompson Arboretum had sighted the bighorns and were able to capture a clear photo of them.

The photo was included in a discussion at a Middle Gila Conservation Partnership meeting in Florence, Arizona. John Windes, the Arizona Game and Fish Wildlife Manager for Unit 37-b, had brought a slide show and information regarding this flagship Sonoran Desert species.

The significance of discovering bighorn sheep in the Mineral Mountains is multiple. First, although this Sky Island range is a historical habitat, the last time they were viewed there was during World War II, by an old hardrock miner (personal communication with Pete Villaverde, resident of Martinez Canyon, 1975). Secondly, of obvious significance, is their need for landscape connections! Just like the title to the SIA newsletter, *Restoring Connections*, these individuals have restored connections to historical habitat! Speculation is they travelled from the Supersition Range, crossing Highway 60 to end up on the south side of the busy road to be sighted near Picketpost. Third, the Mineral Mountains just happen to be the most significant range for desert bighorn sheep in the Tuc-

son, Arizona Game and Fish (G&F) region. (personal communication with John Windes, unit 37-b game manager). Coincidentally, a reintroduction was "in the works" for this species. Now for Arizona G&F, they have merely retitled it as an "augmentation" effort for the Mineral Mountains! We had completed a field survey in February, 2000, and sent a proposal to Arizona G&F to reintroduce bighorn sheep into the Martinez Canyon Area. We are involved with a native fish effort and became well aware of the attributes that the Mineral Mountains offer. We received a personal letter from Raymond Lee, big game supervisor, in appreciation of this proposal.

The augmentation of the desert bighorn sheep could occur as early as the Fall of 2003. The herd population will be translocated from the Eagle Tail Mountains and released into the Mineral Mountains. Earlier this year we guided some members of the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society into Martinez Canyon to scout for tinajas of water. At the peak of the drought

we found numerous *tinajas* of varied sizes holding water! This fact, as well as rugged peaks, escape routes and plentiful vegetation give the Mineral Mountains its reputation for good bighorn sheep habitat. One of the members we guided commented that "the sheep will think they died and went to heaven, there is so much vegetation to browse!"

The Mineral Mountains include a series of rugged canyons that run from Highway 60 in the north, south to the Gila River. The canyons and bajadas have plenty of native wildlife for its biodiversity. There are mountain lions and bobcats, coyotes and foxes, Gila monsters and rattlesnakes, Sonoran mud turtles and native fish species. The surrounding area, the *bajadas* that leave the Sky Island, are prime desert tortoise habitat.

The Mineral Mountains are within an area of interest of a group called the Middle Gila Conservation Partnership. This is a group of interested individuals and agency people, who through a collaborative effort, make recommendations

for different projects to the land management agencies, municipalities, and county governments. Our native fish effort for Martinez Canyon went through the process of the group review. The big issue "just around the corner" will be recommendations we will make from a "route" inventory in progress. This could include permanent or seasonal closures of roads. Please join us to get these critical decisions made for wildlife and wildlife habitat.

For meeting dates or any other information concerning the Middle Gila Conservation Partnership, please contact the authors at (480) 964- 6482 in Mesa. Also you can contact us via email at arizonadeserttom@aol.com, arizonadeserttom@aol.com, and whiptailizard@aol.com.



Painting on bone by Tom and Tomas Taylor

Eating Out and About

Vamos a Los Hermanos: Your turn, not U-turn

by Tom and Tomas Taylor

The waitresses are named Fran and Flo. Now if those names aren't classic Arizona waitress names, wait til you visit the establishment they adorn. We're talking good substantial Mexican food, with depressed prices to match the depressed mining town economy. Next time you are in Superior, or passing through to your favorite Sky Island, be sure to stop at Los Hermanos, right on Highway 60. This family owned restaurant is east of milepost 226, or west of the junction of Highways 60 and 177, close to the base of Picketpost Mountain.

Los Hermanos (the brothers) is a trinity of pleasure. The trinity being cantina, restaurant, and dance floor. The dance floor on the second level is used for special celebrations such as weddings or quincineras. The cantina, separated from the restaurant with a wall, is a stronghold of bilingual beer and bilingual music. The Mexican beers sell for \$2.00 each, the domestic beers \$1.25 each. On weekends add 25 cents to these prices. The Mexican beers include Corona, Dos Equis, Pacifico and Tecate for us "old schoolers". The domestics include Bud or Coors. The music ranges from the Steve Miller Band to Vicente Fernandez, from the Dixie Chicks to Dr. Hook. On some week-

ends when we are in the Mineral Mountains south of Superior monitoring our native fish effort, we frequently leave the wildlife of these mountain canyons in exchange for some "wildlife" in the cantina. Now we're not talking rowdy wildlife, rather you may see a couple, cheek to cheek, holding each other up, dancing to some juke box bilingual song!

But it's the Mexican restaurant that brings this mom and pop establishment into the center of your satisfaction. This isn't waitressing of "get em in, get em out" like the hustle culture of Phoenix or Tucson restaurants. This is small town older Arizona rhythm. Heck Fran or Flo may

even finish a conversation with the cook or a customer, or a cigarette before they take your order.

This is a restaurant where the chips must be ordered. And are these chips! They are so thick and sturdy that if ice forms on your windshield while dining in "slow mo" rhythm, take one to scrape the ice! The food selection is classic Southwestern Mexican food including red or green chili beef (\$5.50), chili relleno plate (\$6.00), machaca dinner (\$6.00), albondigas soup (\$5.00), tacos and tamale combo (\$5.75 - \$6.00). There are also "American" food items such as chicken fried steak (\$5.50), roast beef dinner (\$5.00) and pork chop dinner (\$5.75), should your taste buds require. The salsa is *picosa* (some bite) and is served the old classic way, in a squeeze bottle.

Does a death row inmate still get a final meal choice? If so, we would likely opt for Los Hermanos menudo. This is menudo like it should be, *blanco* (white) with all the fat trimmed off the *panza* (tripe). It is simmered to the point that the *nixtamal*

(hominy) is perfectly *blandito* (soft). Squeeze in some of Los Hermanos salsa "*que muerde*" (that bites) and you got some "stick to your ribs" food that can carry you to the top of any Sky Island peak!

This establishment is a true mom and pop, family-owned restaurant. Two Tameron brothers have been in business for more than 29 years. Fran has seven years and Flo 12-plus years waitressing. Their classic Arizona waitress demeanor is included in the price of your meal!

Superior for the most part is a time warp, an Arizona town of old mining soul. Oliver Stone filmed his entire movie "U-turn" in and around Superior. From the scenes in the movie it looks like he didn't have to "produce" any of the setting, he used the town authenticity entirely. And recently Tony Hillerman's book *Skinwalkers* was made into a movie, featuring Superior scenes. Seems it was less expensive to do some filming in Superior, rather than the Colorado Plateau. However when was the last time you saw a Saguaro cactus on the Navajo res? Oh oh!

Evaluation of a Rattlesnake Relocation Problem

by Trevor Hare, SIA Conservation Biologist

For many years government agencies and contractors have participated in the relocation of “desert pests” including venomous reptiles at the request of homeowners and businesses. The relocation of these animals is perceived by home and business owners and the general public as a humanitarian way of dealing with the problems associated with natural habitat loss.

Over the past decade, a private fire department in Pima County, Arizona, has responded to tens of thousands of nuisance wildlife calls. In 1995, one station alone responded to more than 600 calls for snake removal, and 1996 over 6,000 snakes were picked up in the Tucson Area. The venomous snakes captured were being relocated in groups of tens and hundreds to less populated areas on the outskirts of the metro area.

The humanitarian motive ideally involves moving the animals away from an area where they are threatened (or pose some threat), to an area where they would be less prone to habitat loss or behavioral disruption. The success of this relocation practice had yet to be evaluated on a local level. Nor is there a consensus on guidelines evident in the world wide literature that would insure the success of such relocation programs.

There are obviously many unanswered questions regarding relocation of these snakes into intact habitats and into sometimes disturbed habitats. Snake survival or reappearance in populated areas is just one. Left unmonitored, the then current practices may have the potential to act as a vector for disease transmission, increased genetic stochasticity, increased individual snake mortality and increased incidence of snake-human encounters. Most dangerous is the false sense of having benefited the

animal or species in the absence of any scientific evidence to support this.

Two aspects of the translocation of rattlesnakes (*Crotalus atrox*, *C. scutulatus*, *C. tigris*, *C. molossus*) from human habitations and businesses at the urban-desert interface were studied. Movement levels and the risk of disease transmission were studied in a group of one hundred rattlesnakes moved by a private fire department as a service to their subscribers in unincorporated areas near Tucson. Activity ranges were documented in nine snakes implanted with telemetry transmitters. When compared to previously reported activity ranges for non-translocated rattlesnakes, six snakes showed increased size in their activity range. These increased levels of activity corresponded with the few published reports of translocated rattlesnake species. Twenty snakes were tested for the presence of the vipirid paromyxovirus, and no positive results were documented. All one hundred snakes were injected with PIT tags (Passive Integrated Transponders) before release for ease of identification in case of recapture.

Increases in activity ranges were sometimes quite large and could be attributable to many things, the search for prey and shelter in unfamiliar habitat, the search for a familiar area and increased inter- and intra-specific competition for space and resources. With the increased activity also

comes a increased chance that the animal will be caught on the surface by a predator. Disease transmission has been documented in many other translocated animals, including rattlesnake species and has caused considerable damage to some wild populations of different vertebrate species. This should be considered in any future translocations.

The following problems were addressed only briefly and are deserving of more study:

- Conservation education (adults and children).
- Venomous animal-human interactions.
- Habitat loss and fragmentation.

Other problems identified, but not addressed in the study include:

- Edge and habitat fragmentation effects.
- Genetic inbreeding in populations losing individuals.
- Genetic outbreeding in populations with individuals translocated into them.
- Altered demographic and behavioral parameters.
- Loss of locally adapted gene complexes or demes.
- Loss of Biodiversity.



Recommendations have been made to all agencies involved, that translocated animals be moved the smallest distance possible, hopefully right over the back fence of the home, that educational materials like *Living with Rattlesnakes* and *Living with Gila Monsters* by the Tucson herpetological Society (available at <http://tucsonherpsociety.org>) be handed out to homeowners, that snakes who must be moved should be held and moved in as humane and scientifically sound way as possible and that further study on these problems should be undertaken.

To date only the public fire departments in the Tucson Basin have codified our recommendations in their Standard Operating Procedures. Although the individual fire captains and firefighters from the large for-profit private fire departments have embraced our recommendations. Many thanks go to the men and women of the fire departments and other agencies who deal with wildlife as an urban issue and do the right thing!

Elegant Trogons, Glorious Visitors

by Kathy Pitts, Special to the Sky Island Alliance Newsletter

Who among us hasn't heard of “Arizona's own bird of paradise,” the elegant trogon? Considered something of a Holy Grail for American birdwatchers, this vividly colored, robin-sized bird draws hundreds of visitors to southeastern Arizona every year. The thrill of actually spotting one will become a treasured memory for a lifetime.

The excitement is partly the beauty of the bird. And no wonder—the trogon is a cousin to Central America's resplendent quetzal, the bird of ancient gods with its shimmering green-gold feathers and fantastic tail plumes.

But our elegant is more elegant than showy. In profile, dapper, with a hooked yellow beak and long tail held down in a tuxedo-ish manner. The male wears a hooded mantle of brilliant green that becomes copper-colored in the squared off tail. A white necklace separates the emerald cowl from a scarlet waistcoat, and his wings are gray. His mate is more modest, with a brownish cloak, light breast and rosy coloring confined to the undertail coverts.

The excitement of seeing them is also due

to their rarity. With the Carolina parakeet extinct and the thick-billed parrot considered extirpated in this country, the elegant trogon is the last exotically hued native to be seen reliably on American ground.

Trogon expert Richard Cachor Taylor has estimated that fewer than 50 breeding pairs summer in the U.S.¹ *Even fewer overwinter. The borderlands of Arizona, New Mexico and Texas are at the northernmost reach of these Neotropical birds, which can be found south to Costa Rica.*

On the other hand, their habitat requirements are so specific that adepts are able to predict to within an acre where they are likely to nest. Sightings have been reported in the Chiricahua, Huachuca, Atascosa and Santa Rita mountains.

Look for deep, well-watered canyons in

the pine-oak zone between 5,000 and 7,000 feet elevation. Then look for Arizona sycamores, the trogon's favored nest tree. Dead sycamores invite woodpeckers, often credited with excavating the initial hole, which is enlarged by flickers. Ah, now it is ready for a trogon family.

They begin arriving from Mexico in April. About June they will lay two to four whitish or bluish eggs in their unlined tree cavity. Both male and female will tend the young. Interestingly, the brood is said to split after fledging, with mom tending the girl chicks and dad tending the boys.

They eat a wide variety of flying insects and fruit, and are named after the Greek word for “gnawer” for the toothed bill by which they grasp food. From that bill they utter a loud and often hard to locate, “kof! kof! kof!” or “kum! kum! kum!” One observer described it as “undignified” and more akin to a hen turkey's gobble combined with a pig's grunt and a dog's bark.² Think small, yappy dog and you get the idea.

Never abundant this far north, elegant trogons have been subjected to loss of habitat through grazing and logging, and harassment through recreation and birdwatching. Yep. Camping, hiking, close-up photography and use of bird-call recordings to attract birds during nesting season are now considered some of the greatest potential threats to the species.

Must we give up the quest for the elusive trogon, because to love it is to kill it? Or can we honor the beautiful mystery of this bird by respecting its right to a peaceful livelihood when we are fortunate enough to catch sight of one? Responsible birders and hikers will keep their distance, refrain from the use of bird-calls, and help to educate others on the need for privacy during nesting.

Because to lose the trogon entirely would be heart-breaking.

1. Taylor, Richard Cachor. *Trogons of the Arizona Borderlands*, 1994.

2. Guterson, Ben. *The Natural Year: Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah*, 1994

Voices of the Movement

To Activists Everywhere: A Love Letter

I am crouched on the floor over two thick documents, deciphering the logic affixed to the latest Forest Service project: This is my position of resistance, where I first confront betrayals of confidence, of logic, and of the land. I am lonely with sadness at what can happen when the magic of the last wild places is trespassed. I want a forest of ferns and fast-moving streams and trees that have a history, where moss thickens on rock and each drop of water is registered, where the smell of earth and the presence of silence conspire and sudden wildflowers and bird calls catch my breath, where life can thrive wild and inscrutable. But there are holes bulldozed into these places and plans for more on these endless pages. Resistance might seem hollow except for you.

*This is a love letter to you:
You are the man, the woman, the child who acts on behalf of the forest.
You are the people I know and those I've never met
You are the letter writer, the hiker, the birdwatcher.
You stand in front of bulldozers and live in trees.
You are on the frontlines, enduring
You cook food, hold signs, organize.
You speak out
You learn the law better than them and spend countless hours calculating their crimes.
You read.
You take the job with no money because you care
You donate equipment
You type the newsletter
You come to protests when you are needed
You make time to send a check, write a good word, write a letter.
You are the only other person who comes on the hike
You are the old growth guru who stays in touch after all these years
You hold me when I cry
You write appeals*

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*You make signs, buy stamps
You hike the Sheltopee
You inspire schoolchildren, leave me notes
You feed me
You host meetings
You come to meetings
You are the person who works on other issues that matter
You volunteer
You play music
You say the difficult things first and inspire
You challenge the world view
You raise children
You are young, old, poor, rich, alone or in community
You despair, grieve, hope, celebrate, rage and endure.
You are my heroes, every one
My heart is huge with love for you
and this beautiful, wacky, stressed-out, courageous, visionary movement/inspired by you and driven by you.
You are perfect.
We should celebrate.*

—Chris Schimmoeller, Kentucky Heartwood, February 25, 2003.



Arizona cypress bark

Spring 2003

South Fork Cave Creek

*Among the party of Pine and Oak, Madrone and Cedar
the Sycamores shed their peeling bark
shyly exposing flesh colored limb and trunk
like a woman too long wrapped in white
Green eyelashes flutter in the breeze
while the men whisper among themselves
No one tipsy yet
but the reminders of overindulgence can be seen
The children present are spotless
with big top knots straight from Dr. Seuss
and out of proportion to their small limbed bodies
We walk through the foyer
a warm and inviting atmosphere offering itself
to sit and enjoy
But out there
the call of a distant quiet beckons*

*Footpath miles to the Land of Chinese Poets appears
Inch by inch we move across the sun warmed slope
to a promontory, pausing to stand in a tree top,
then down to cool water
and my feet, refreshed as any other roots*

~ Ben Onachila



Sycamores, Cave Creek, photo by Jack Dykinga

Carr Canyon

*Beneath the reef of the Huachucas
Carr Canyon
Painted with rich textures
Of a Maxfield Parrish landscape
God light brush strokes of sky and tree
Down to the smallest detail
Buzzards, like winged electrons,
Circling the moon as it sets in the morn-
ing
Nucleus of wonderment*

~ Ben Onachila



Carr Canyon waterfall, photo by Mark Thaler

Chiricahua Book Provides Fascinating History of a Unique Area

By Steve Marlatt, SIA board member and highschool/juniorhigh science teacher in Bowie, Arizona

Alden Hayes' book *A Portal to Paradise* is an historical account of one of our favorite mountain ranges. Starting with the early Native Americans and progressing through the early pioneers, Hayes has done his homework in thoroughly researching his subject. Although factual in nature, he tells the story in a narrative story telling format that makes it hard to put down. Hayes is no slouch at natural history either and includes many descriptions of the flora and fauna of the area.

The Chiricahuas have a wild and wooly history. From the shop keeper who killed his wife to keep her from leaving him to teach in a neighboring community to the story of a miner who was killed in a gunfight because he didn't have the right ammo in his gun, Hayes weaves an interesting tale. Many of the early settlers' saw the Chiricahuas as the Promised Land, although most of their dreams, from failed mining operations to land de-

velopment schemes, never materialized.

One of the things that I enjoyed most about the book was learning the background of many of the place names found in and around the Chiricahuas. Hands Pass, Jhus Canyon, Leslie Canyon, Rucker Canyon, and Fly's Peak all mean a little more to me now that I know some of their colorful history. Such famous outlaws as Ike Clanton, Johnny Ringo, "Blackjack" Tom Ketchum, and

the Apache Kid are also featured in the book, as well as many tales from the outlaw holdout Galeyville.

The life of Neil Erickson, one of the early pioneers and the first rangers in the newly created Chiricahua Forest Reserve, is covered in detail. With only a horse to patrol the entire range, and with few established trails, Erickson had his work cut out for him dealing with trespassing cattle, illegal woodcutters, and preparing surveys of the range. When he left his ranch in Bonito Canyon, his wife might not expect to see him again for a month or more.

If you've spent any time at all in this unique and beautiful area, I think you'll find this book very interesting. It informed me of much of its diverse past, inspired me to investigate many new places, and motivated me to work towards its long term protection.



Cochise Head, continued from back cover



photo by Fran Dostilo

Cochise Head unit. Although highly considered for wilderness designation in the past, this area still awaits permanent protection against degradations brought by mechanized uses.

Within the 31,133 acre unit, only three trails access the interior—Wood, Emigrant, and Indian Creek trails. Cochise Head, while a prominent peak and fascinating formation, attracts few visitors compared to other peaks within the Chiricahuas to the south and has historically been the least-visited major peak in Arizona. Thus, opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation abound. Visitors on horseback or foot can explore the many interesting side canyons, use their skills in orienteering among the twists and turns of the landscape, or test their hunting skills against the challenging terrain. There are multiple access points to the unit. Most visitors use the Emigrant Canyon road or enter at Wood Canyon, which has space for car-camping at the end of the road. West White-tail, Fox, and Triangle canyons provide additional access

points.

Bird watching, scenic viewing, and photographic opportunities also abound within this unit. The riparian areas mentioned above attract many raptors and rare subtropical birds that can't be seen elsewhere in the country.

While the Cochise Head unit is still wild, remote, and relatively undeveloped, now is time to designate its remaining roadless area as wilderness. Southern Arizona's human population continually ranks among the fastest growing in the country. The recreational demands on the Coronado National Forest grow with every year. Today, the public more than ever seeks undisturbed, wild landscapes. With more than 4,000 miles of roads on the Forest, undisturbed areas are quickly becoming more scarce. Wilderness designation in Cochise Head will help preserve in perpetuity, the history, beauty, and wildness of our natural and cultural heritage.

Inventory and Monitoring Volunteers Needed

The Sky Island Alliance is continuing its program to inventory, monitor, and restore populations of important species of animals in the Sky Islands of southeastern Arizona, northwestern New Mexico, northeastern Sonora, and northwestern Chihuahua. We are piloting this program with riparian inventories for native Ranid frogs and native fish.

Amphibians have experienced population declines worldwide due to habitat loss, pollution, and disease. The native Ranid frogs of the Sky Islands include the lowland leopard frog, the Chiricahua leopard frog, and the Tarahumara leopard frog. All of these species have experienced declines, from moderate to severe, throughout the Sky Island region. The Sky Island Alliance recognizes the importance of the dwindling riparian resources of southern Arizona and has decided to concentrate its Sky Island Vertebrate Inventory and Monitoring Program on these riparian-obligate species along with our native fish.

We are looking for volunteers who have experience or would like to gain experience in surveying for native fish, frogs, and other riparian-dependent species and can dedicate themselves to approximately 10 to 12 surveys in 2003. Volunteers should be in excellent physical condition, have experience in backcountry hiking, and be ready to get wet. We will be hiking and bushwhacking in remote areas throughout the Summer, so ability to deal with extreme conditions and temperatures is of paramount importance.

For more information, please contact Trevor Hare at (520) 624-7080; trevor@skyislandalliance.org.

More Volunteer Opportunities

In addition to our exciting and fulfilling field work opportunities, we have lots of volunteer jobs in the office. If you can help, contact Trevor (520/624-7080; trevor@skyislandalliance.org).

- **Newsletter Contributors**—Do you enjoy writing and sharing with others? Poetry, stories, art, commentary all desired for coming issues. Work can be done from home. See page 2 for guidelines.
- **Host a house party**—Help support Sky Island conservation work by hosting fundraising events at your home. Call Acasia for details, (520) 624-7080 ext. 208.
- **Data entry**—We need new volunteers to help us input field inventory data sheets into our database as well as new membership information at the SIA office. Time is variable, moderate computer skills necessary. This step is critical for turning all our fieldwork into on-the-ground conservation action.



Mystery Photo:

Do you know who this is? Visit us at www.skyislandalliance.org to see a whole photo.

The Sky Island Trophy bike race, originally scheduled for April 13, has been canceled due to logistical and bureaucratic problems with the Forest Service. SIA regrets any inconvenience this may cause anyone. For more details, visit www.skyislandtrophy.com.

Wish List

- Donated vehicles, in good working condition
- GPS units for mapping roads and wildlife sign
- Comfortable office chairs in good condition
- Table-top paper cutter, in good condition
- Office supplies: copier paper, postage stamps, etc.



Become an SIA Program Fund Donor

Stories in this issue and others have featured projects in our Rewilding Program: road inventory and restoration, wilderness work, wildlife monitoring and the Missing Link, our Dragoons Restoration Demonstration Area.

All the necessary road closures, tracking workshops, and wilderness advocacy relies on your financial support, so please consider a special donation to one of the following funds:

- Roads & Restoration,
- Wildlife Monitoring (Tracking),
- Missing Link
- Wilderness

- Mexico—the Chihuahua Research Station in Janos, and the Jaguar Program in Sonora.

Please make your check out to Sky Island Alliance, with a note in the memo line about which fund you'd like to support. We'll make sure your money goes to the programs that mean the most to you, and we'll send you reports!

Upcoming Field schedule

Come hike, find frogs, track mountain lions, survey roadless areas, and rip roads! For trip details, contact Trevor (520/624-7080 ext. 204; trevor@skyislandalliance.org) or Matt (ext. 202, matt@skyislandalliance.org).

May 3 - 4. Frog Training Weekend. We are looking for volunteers that have experience or would like to gain experience in surveying for native fish, frogs, and other riparian dependent species and can commit themselves to the program. We will be hiking and bushwhacking in remote areas throughout the summer months, so participants in this program must be able to deal with extreme conditions and temperatures. Location is yet to be determined. [Trevor]

May 10. Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve, joint work day with The Nature Conservancy. See article in our last issue. We'll see birds galore while fostering collaboration between the organizations. 1.5 hours from Tucson. [Trevor]

May 16 - 18. Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness Inventory. Join SIA in one of the most gorgeous areas of central Arizona. Fish! Frogs! More birds! Flowing Water! Non-use grazing allotments! Need we say more? 2.5 hours from Tucson. [Trevor]

May 23 - 26. Joint New Mexico Wilderness Alliance and Sky Island Alliance road inventory trip in the Burro Mountains (see article on page 5). Get your hands dirty and play a direct role in improving the ecological health of your public lands! [Matt]

May 30 - June 1. Annual Fort Huachuca Lion Track Count. This national, one of a kind event attracts some of the premier wildlife biologists from around the country. We will be tracking mountain lion and black bear on the Fort Huachuca Military Reservation in the Huachuca Mtns. No experience necessary. This is a great chance to learn more about tracking techniques, lion and bear natural histories, and using track counts on your own to monitor wildlife movement. [Matt]

June 20 - 23. Riparian Inventory and Monitoring Weekend. San Rafael Valley. Join the Sky Island Alliance's Riparian Inventory/Monitoring Program in a project to assess the San Rafael Valley as a site for the conservation and management of our sensitive riparian fauna. 2.0 hours from Tucson. [Trevor]

June 27 - July 2. Campbell Blue Roads Re-Inventory. Beat the heat and head north into cool conifer forests with us to monitor and inventory areas that had a high proliferation of roads when inventoried in years past. If you can't make the whole trip, come when you can. 4.0 hours from Tucson. [Trevor]

July 11 - 13. Riparian Inventory and Monitoring Weekend. San Rafael Valley. Join the Sky Island Alliance's Riparian Inventory/Monitoring Program in a project to assess the San Rafael Valley as a site for the conservation and management of our sensitive riparian fauna. 2.0 hours from Tucson. [Trevor]

Join Us Sky Island Alliance

If you received this newsletter and it's time to renew your membership, please send in your check! If you are reading a friend's newsletter, consider joining us! We rely on members for our basic operations. Contributions are tax-deductible; we are a 501(c)3 organization.

Basic membership is only \$25, but if you add a little to that, here's a sampling of what your dollars can do:

- \$50 will help us survey 30 miles of roads.
- \$75 will sponsor volunteer training workshops.
- \$100 will close one mile of road.

Your Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ E-Mail _____

Thank you!

Sky Island Alliance

P.O. 41165
Tucson, AZ 85717



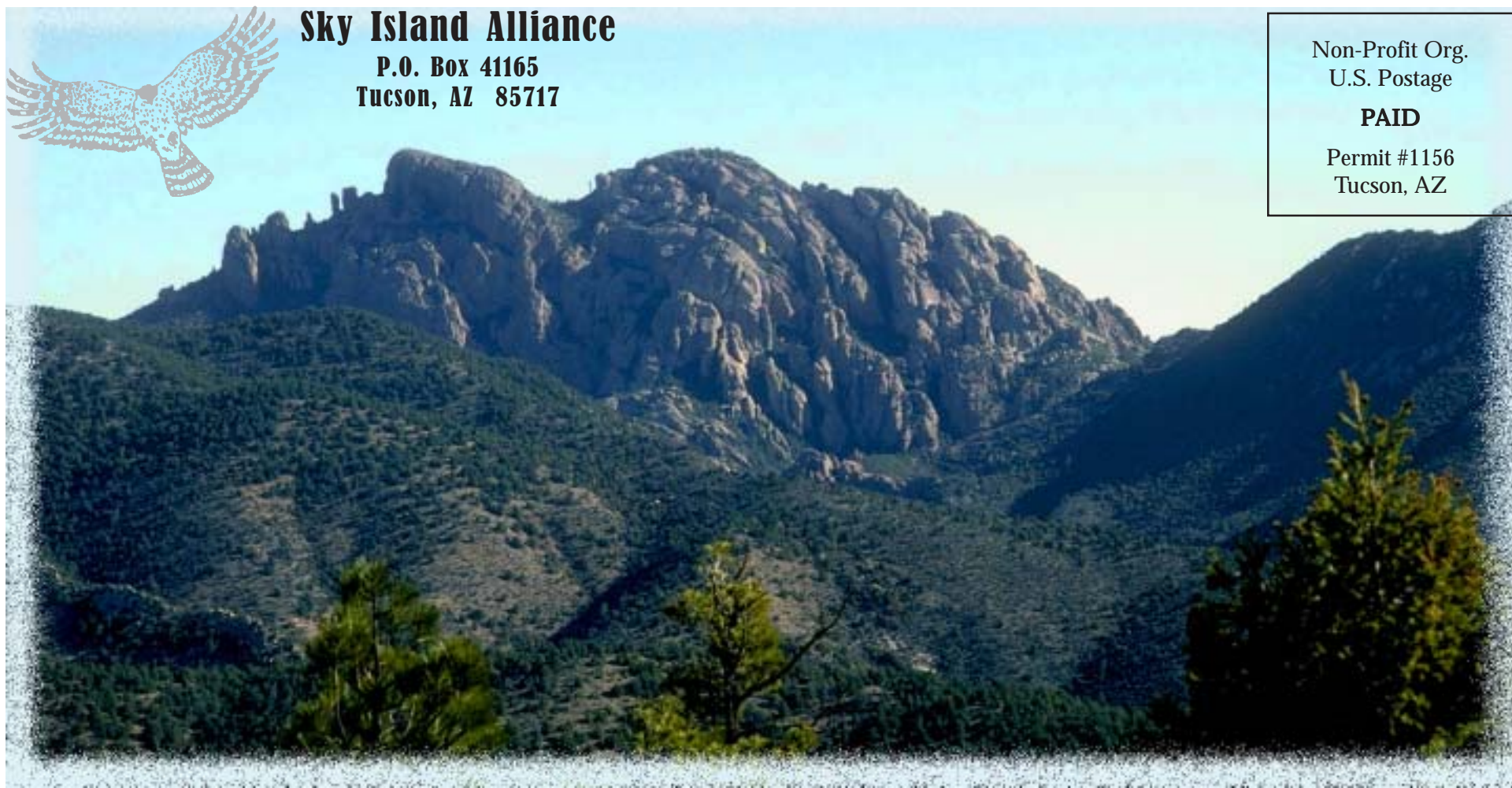
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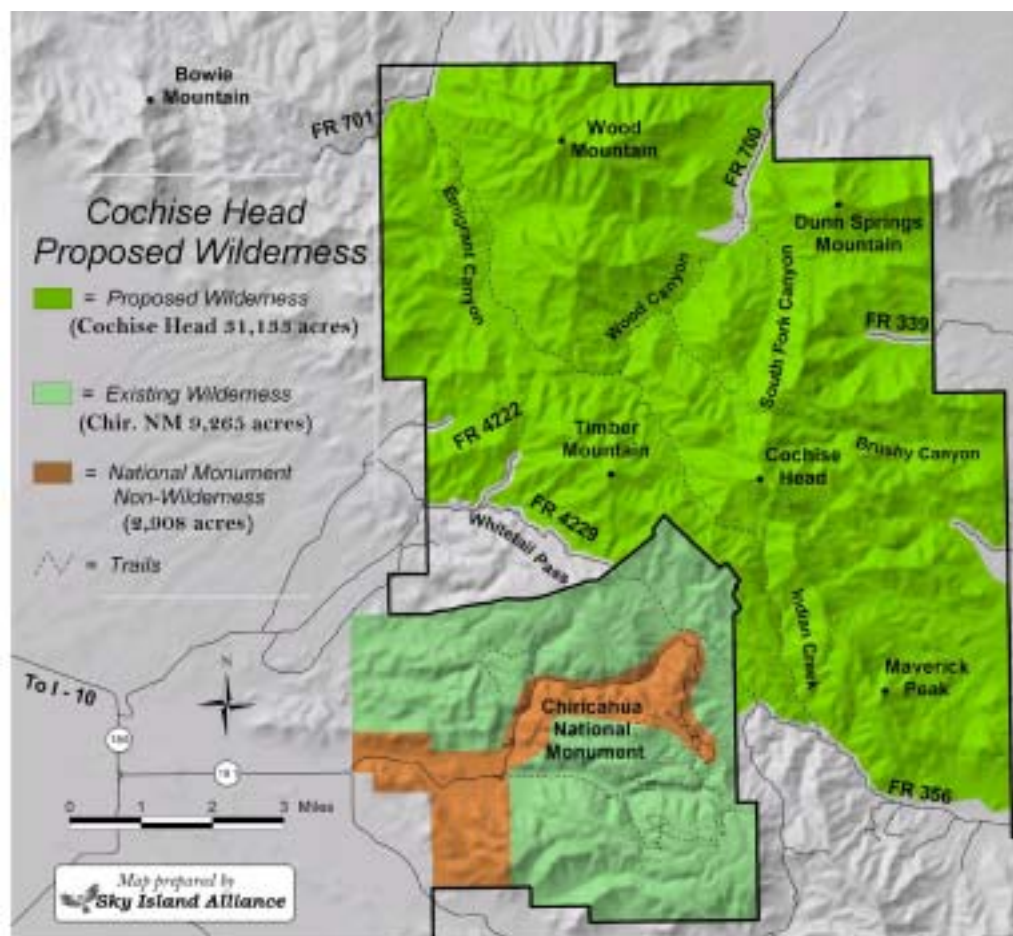


Sky Islands Wilderness

Cochise Head, Chiricahua Mountains

As part of an upcoming wilderness proposal for the Coronado National Forest, the Cochise Head region is the third major roadless area to be featured. Watch each issue for another gem in the Sky Island region's crown jewels proposed for wilderness designation. To learn more about our wilderness work, contact us at (520) 624-7080.

Towering a mile above adjacent valleys, the 8,113 foot Cochise Head rock formation is one of the most distinctive landmarks in the Sky Island region. This steep terrain rises from semi-desert grasslands to Ponderosa pine and mixed-conifer forests at the higher elevations, crossing a ring of encinal pine-oak woodland on the way and climbing through lush, shady creeks. The entire unit is extremely rugged, broken with deep grottos, natural arches, and towering cliffs. For many years, the famous Chiricahua Apache leader Cochise held one of his main rancherias just outside the proposed wilderness boundary. This unit overlooks Apache Pass (Puerto del Dado), the low-lying pass between the Chiricahua Mountains and the Dos Cabezas Mountains that channeled decades of both friendly and brutal encounters between Apaches, white soldiers and settlers, and Mexican troops.



The area surrounding Cochise Head is one of the most rugged landscapes in the 17 million acre Sky Island region, but towering views for hundreds of miles in all directions reward those who find their way to the top. The rock formations alone astound those new to the area; hoodoos, towers, spikes, ravines, and slot canyons are common. Never heavily visited due to its inaccessibility, this area appears in many ways as it did two hundred years ago. In lush canyons, maple and aspen trees turn the landscape into a shimmering array of brilliant colors in the Fall. Combined with ever-changing hues of sunlight on the many rock faces, this unit is a vibrant opportunity for remote recreation and adventure. Indeed, the proposed Cochise Head Unit contains all the requirements for wilderness and more.

Because of the premium habitat offered by the many rock

ledges and outcroppings, this area hosts one of the highest raptor densities in the country. The endangered peregrine falcon, prairie falcon, sharp-shinned hawk, Cooper's hawk, and northern goshawk can all be seen here. The rare and beautiful golden eagle also resides in Cochise Head, where up to three nesting pairs at once have been observed.

Rare and important riparian habitats are also present within the unit. Wood Canyon, Indian Creek, and Emigrant Canyon support lush populations of bigtooth maple, sycamore, cottonwood, and other riparian obligates. One of the biggest juniper trees in the US occurs in Wood Canyon. More than 23 feet in diameter and 75 feet tall, this tree is a testament to the ancient history of this area.

The Cochise Head unit lies north of the existing 10,290-acre wilderness in the Chiricahua National Monument and a short distance from the larger Chiricahua Wilderness. As a link to the Dos Cabeza Mountains and farther north the Pinaleno Mountains, this area acts as an important wildlife corridor for species traveling north-south along the string of mountains in southeastern Arizona. The ecological values protected under the existing wilderness areas to the south are currently unprotected in the

... continued on page 14...