

100 Years of the Forest Service in Northern Arizona

The USDA Forest Service will celebrate its 100th anniversary on July 1, 2005. On this date 100 years ago, the Forest Service was created as an agency with a unique mission: to sustain healthy, diverse, and productive forests and grasslands for present and future generations. Three years later, the Coconino National Forest became part of the Forest Service when all of the San Francisco Mountains Forest Reserve, and parts of the Black Mesa, Tonto, and Grand Canyon Forest Reserves were consolidated. Since that time 100 years ago, the Coconino National Forest has seen many changes and has experienced heavy use from a multitude of different groups. Before becoming a national forest, the area that is now the Coconino was inhabited by Native Americans for thousands of years. But, in more recent history (around the turn of the century), writers, painters, and photographers have used the grandeur of northern Arizona forests to capture the imagination of the American public through their descriptive works. For many Americans, their image of the Southwest was largely fired by Zane Grey's Under the Tonto Rim, among his other western novels. The setting for this novel is along the Mogollon Rim and areas of the Tonto, Coconino, and Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. Grey believed that "Tonto" had a better phonetic sound than "Mogollon" so he substituted the word Tonto.

In addition to the Coconino National Forest's significance to artists, the Coconino was a large timber and grazing forest for much of the late 1800s and early 1900s. At least three major lumber companies built steam powered saw mills in the late 1800s and began railroad logging operations that ran up until the 1930s supplying the population booms in California and the mid-west with fresh lumber for construction. Grazing operations on the Coconino National Forest were just as large in scope as the early timber operations. The area above the

Mogollon Rim has been used for summer grazing, while a large portion of the Verde Valley takes winter grazing use making the Coconino National Forest an ideal location for year-round grazing operations back in the early days of settlement. Additionally, one of the most famous Arizona ranches, the Aztec Land and Cattle Company, ranged its cattle on lands that would become the Coconino and Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. The company began in 1883 and ran up to 60,000 head before going bankrupt in 1900. Also, because of the emphasis upon sustainability within the Forest Service, research has always been an important part of forest management. In 1909, the Coconino National Forest established the Nation's oldest forest experiment station, the Coconino Experiment Station, which is still operated today as the Fort Valley Experiment Station just northwest of Flagstaff along highway 180. The station was founded by G.A. "Gus" Pearson who had already directed research programs in the region for years. Over the past 100 years of Forest Service management, the Coconino National Forest has been an important part of the rich history of northern Arizona with grazing, logging, and art being only a small part of that history. Over the next year there will be several events to help celebrate the Forest Service Centennial and highlight the many different facets of our National Forests that endure the land to us all. The Coconino National Forest encourages all members of the public to keep an eye out for these events and to experience your National Forest directly by recreating on the forest and attending Centennial Celebration events in your community.

Fuels Reduction In Our Southwestern Forests

Over the past several years, forests in the Southwest have experienced catastrophic fires every summer. After these fires have been extinguished we often find that wildlife habitat has been lost, soils have been destroyed, large sections of forest have been completely burned, and local communities have lost valuable resources such as homes and portions of their watersheds. Unfortunately, these large fires have become commonplace in the southwest, but it hasn't always been this way. For thousands of years, plants and animals in the southwest evolved with fire as a natural part of this ecosystem. Prior to European settlement of the southwest, small lightning caused fires regularly moved across forest floors removing small pines and accumulated forest debris, never allowing large amounts of fuels to build up in the forests. However, early settlers did not recognize the important role fire played in the ecosystem. As more and more people began to live in the southwest, fires were aggressively suppressed, breaking the ecological cycle that kept forest fuels at a reasonable level and setting the stage for catastrophic wildfires. In more recent times, forest managers have had the benefit of a long-term view of southwestern forests and how the build-up of forest fuels has contributed to an ailing forest that is more susceptible to disease, insect infestation, and catastrophic wildfire. It is because of these threats to our forests and our communities that the Forest Service has

made forest restoration and forest health a key priority in the southwest and nationwide. The most effective methods for forest restoration used by the Forest Service are thinning and prescribed fire. Thinning is the process of mechanically removing trees from dense areas of the forest. Prescribed fire, which usually follows thinning, involves using trained crews to apply fire to an area in order to mimic the natural fire regime that had been present in our forests prior to settlement. When these two methods are used together, forest managers are able to reduce the accumulation of fuels in the forest while reintroducing fire into this fire dependent ecosystem. The result is improved forest health and reduced chances of a catastrophic wildfire starting in that part of the forest. Here on the Coconino National Forest, forest managers have been actively pursuing fuels reduction goals for many years now. Additionally, fuels reduction locally has placed a great deal of emphasis not only upon improving the health of the forest, but also upon protecting our communities from the threat of catastrophic wildfire. For the past four years 100% of our fuels reduction projects have taken place within the wildland-urban interface (WUI), which is the area where the forest meets the community. Every year for the past four years we have not only met our goals for WUI fuels reduction, but we have exceeded them by approximately 2,000 acres every year. This means that since 2001 the Coconino National Forest has completed over 60,000 acres of fuels reduction around local communities.

Much of the fuels reduction on the Coconino National Forest has been planned or completed with the input and approval of the Greater Flagstaff Forest Partnership (GFFP). Some of those projects include the Ft. Valley Restoration Project, Kachina Village Forest Health Project, and the Woody Ridge Forest Restoration Project. Each of these projects were collaboratively developed with the local community, GFFP, and the Forest Service, and are intended to improve forest health and reduce the chances of a catastrophic wildfire in the forests surrounding Flagstaff and its surrounding communities. In addition to the fuels reduction work being completed in the Flagstaff area, forest managers have also conducted fuels reduction for Oak Creek, Blue Ridge, Munds Park, and the communities near Mormon Lake and Lake Mary. Through all of these projects, our priority has been the improvement of forest health and function, as well as community protection. The importance of fuels reduction and forest restoration cannot be understated. That is why forest managers have made a commitment to continuing our fuels reduction and prescribed fire program and working toward healthier forests and safer communities. Due to the millions of acres of forest in need, forest restoration and fuels reduction is not something that can be accomplished overnight. But, with support from our local communities we will continue to steadily improve our forest's health and the safety of our communities.



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Ken Anderson Red Rock District Ranger

Over the past year we have accomplished a great deal on the Red Rock Ranger District. Our accomplishments span all manner of projects and places from fuels reduction in Oak Creek to land acquisitions on the Red Rock front that help protect the area's natural beauty. One project that we are particularly proud of is the Fossil Creek Fish Restoration associated with the decommissioning of the Childs and Irving power generating stations. After years of planning and work, the non-native fish have been removed from the creek leaving only the native fish that originally inhabited Fossil Creek. In the upcoming year, we expect to replenish the natural flows of the creek and begin removal of the power generating infrastructure, including much of the water flume that has diverted the natural flows for years.

In addition to the Fossil Creek Project we are especially pleased with the increased services and benefits we have been able to provide on the Red Rock Ranger District with income from the sale of the Red Rock Pass. This year we have been able to have contact with almost 400,000 visitors in the Red Rock area and provide increased maintenance and improvement of recreational sites and facilities in the area. We would not have been able to provide the high quality of recreation facilities and trails, and visitor services without these funds.

Additionally, the Red Rock Ranger District has a large and dedicated corps of volunteers that are indispensable to our management locally. I would personally like to thank each and every volunteer for their work and dedication to our beautiful Red Rock country. It is their dedication, along with the hard work of our forest employees that insures the beauty of the Red Rock Ranger District for generations to come.

Larry Sears Mogollon Rim District Ranger

Here on the Mogollon Rim Ranger District we have had another great year with a number of projects being accomplished or moving through the planning processes. Projects being implemented include the Pack Rat Fire Salvage timber sale, antelope habitat improvement projects, tree thinning, and range management activities. The recent completion of the Anderson Mesa Landscape-Scale Assessment has provided us with a framework for better managing a wide variety of resources and activities on the Mesa. Other projects on the planning table include working with APS on options to improve

the reliability of electrical service in northern Arizona. But, two projects that have stood out include the approval of the Discovery Channel Telescope and our success on fuels reduction projects that will help protect local communities from the threat of catastrophic wildfire.

With the approval of the Discovery Channel Telescope, Lowell Observatory and northern Arizona will gain a world-class research facility. The location for this telescope will be near Happy Jack, which was chosen due to its exceptionally dark skies and clear viewing. Construction of this facility is expected to begin in 2005, and will take several years to complete.



Fuels reduction on the Mogollon Rim is equally exciting. During 2004 we have exceeded our target acreage for fuels treatments and completed approximately 6,400 acres of prescribed fire and mechanical thinning that will improve the fire protection for local communities.

These achievements on the Mogollon Rim Ranger District mentioned here are just a few, and we look forward to continuing to manage this precious natural resource for years to come.

Gene Waldrip Peaks District Ranger

The 2004 season was another big year for recreation on the Peaks Ranger District. One aspect of our job that we are very pleased about is the progress we are making with the twice-per-decade national Visitor use Monitoring Survey. This survey will take the Forest a year to complete, but it will be indispensable in allowing us to tailor our recreation program and budget to scratch where it itches and serve the public better. The San Francisco Peaks comprise one of the most important spots in



which we are taking this survey, and so far, it is going very well. Another major aspect of any modern recreation management program is how we create progress in concert with partners. The Peaks Ranger District enjoyed a fantastic example of this approach in 2004. Thanks almost entirely to the ceaseless and dedicated efforts of two vital partners, we completed a major part (over ten miles of new trail) of the Fort Valley Trail system northwest of Flagstaff. We also

added a vital third loop to the Campbell Mesa Trail system east of Flagstaff. Who were these fantastic partners? Our hats are off to the Flagstaff Biking Organization and the Coconino Trail Riders. Without the help of the folks who are the backbone of these organizations, we would not be able to report anything close to the progress we have enjoyed this past year.

Terri Marceron Mormon Lake District Ranger

On a national level, one of the major focuses of the Forest Service in our era is forest restoration. I feel that one of the premier places to actually see what forest restoration looks like is to visit the Mormon Lake Ranger District. Several of the projects we are either planning or implementing embody what is happening, and needs to keep happening, in forest restoration.

- **Kachina Village Forest Health Project** – Thinning work is moving along at a good clip in this 10,400-acre project area. So far, over 2,000 acres have been thinned, and District fire personnel began applying prescribed fire to some of the thinned areas this past fall. This restoration work was initiated in the portions of the forest that are closest to the communities of Kachina Village and Forest Highlands, where the threat of an uncontrolled wildfire poses the biggest threat to people's lives and property.
- **Lower Lake Mary Fuels Reduction Project** – This past year also saw MLRD complete thinning on the Lower Lake Mary project, which is another forest restoration project strategically designed to place an obstacle between a potential forest fire and some outlying communities southeast of Flagstaff.
- **Mountaineer Forest Restoration Project** – This project is still in the planning phases, and we expect to bring it completely through the planning by the end of 2005. What is notable about it is its high degree of collaboration. Although collaboration does take time, we believe we get a better plan at the end of that process. Like the other two projects I have highlighted, this project will also be instrumental in protecting homes from the threat of a hot burning forest fire for many years to come.