



United States
Department of
Agriculture

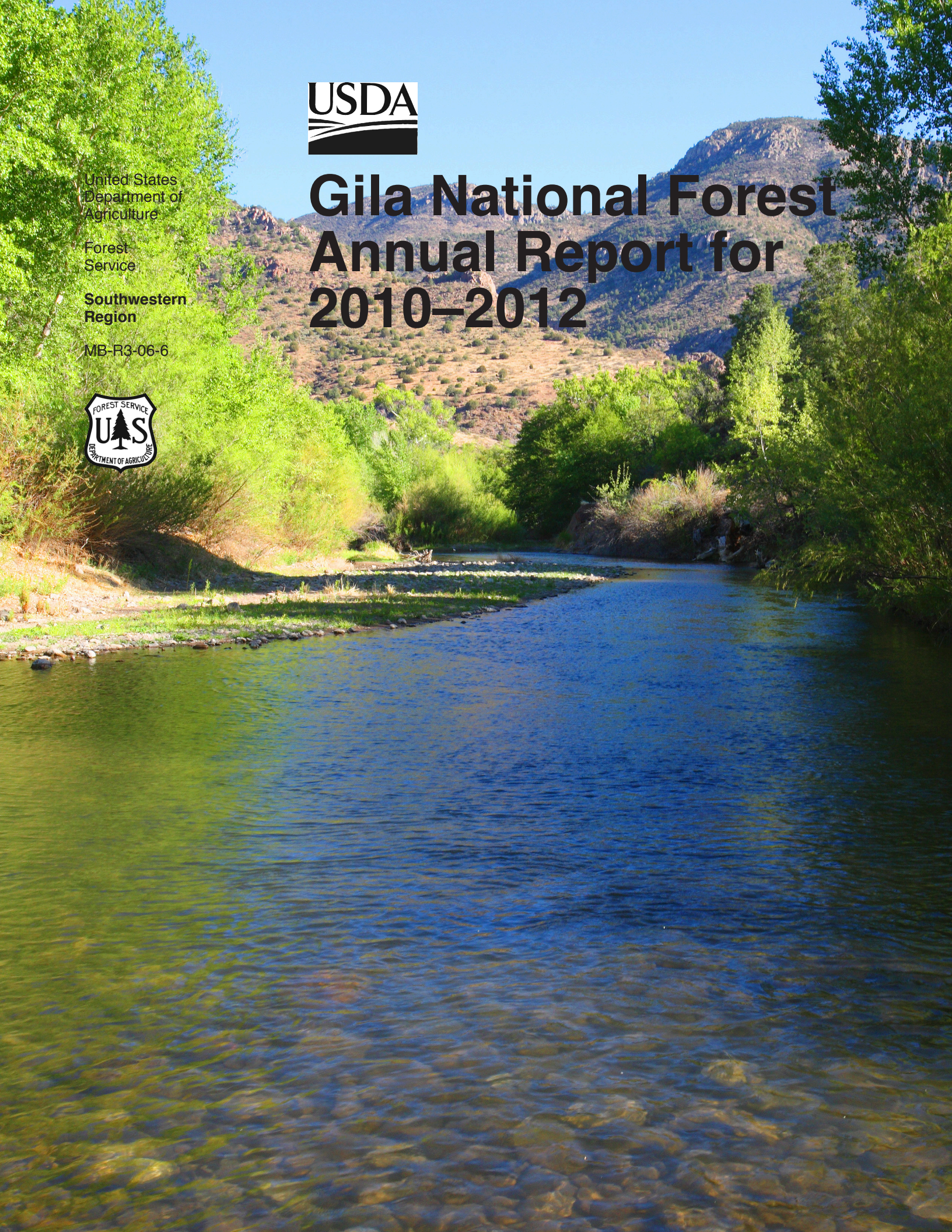
Forest
Service

Southwestern
Region

MB-R3-06-6



Gila National Forest Annual Report for 2010–2012





The Forest Service is a land management agency that manages public lands with a multiple use approach and sustainability for future generations.

To Our Stakeholders

Since my arrival in March 2011 to take up the post of forest supervisor for the Gila National Forest, I have been continually amazed at the high level of work that is accomplished here, both by employees and our partners. The Quail Ridge Fire in Silver City started the day after I arrived in town, which immediately acquainted me with the early fire season typical in the Southwest. The last 2 years really showed me how much the cooperative working spirit is alive and well in New Mexico. Without the assistance of local and volunteer fire departments, counties, and other local, State, and Federal agencies, we would not have been able to manage all the wildfires as effectively as we did during the past 2 years.

Despite the long fire season, the forest was also able to do some great work with prescribed fire. The Gila has long had a reputation nationally for being in the forefront of managing fire since we know that, if managed correctly, fire can be beneficial both to the forest and the wildlife that lives there.

Additionally, prescribed fires reduce fuel accumulations in the forest which keeps wildfires from burning as hot and being as destructive as they might be otherwise.



Forest Supervisor Kelly Russell

The Gila National Forest is about more than just fire, though. We completed a number of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) projects which totaled \$6.2 million invested into local economies through private contractors and Youth Conservation

Corps work. Almost 200 temporary workers are hired each summer to assist with projects from everything to increasing wildlife habitat to documenting the history of those who used this land many years ago. We have 200 permanent workers typically on board each year that manage the forest's 3.3 million acres. These permanent and temporary employees live and work in local communities and bring along their families to strengthen their ties to the area.

Home to the first designated wilderness, the Gila Wilderness, the forest also contains the Aldo Leopold

Gila National Forest

and Blue Range Wilderness areas. These, along with the rest of the forest, serve to bring in tourists to the area, strengthening local economies as well as providing recreational and hunting opportunities to both residents and visitors.

Other programs that are a service to communities include an active timber program that provides wood for local mills as well as working with local ranchers to provide grazing land for their livestock. The firewood and Christmas tree programs also provide a service by having firewood available and continuing the tradition of harvesting the annual family Christmas tree.

National forests are public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, and all Gila National Forest employees take this charge to manage these lands while meeting the needs of the public very seriously. We love the Gila and want to continue to make it a place where not only you, but your great, great grandchildren can come and visit. From mastodon bones to petroglyphs, to towering canyons and scenic areas, the Gila National Forest abounds in diverse opportunities. Thanks to all our partners and volunteers who work so hard to keep the Gila National Forest one of the great places in New Mexico. We appreciate all that you do!

ARRA *Funded* Forest Projects

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 (Recovery Act) was signed into law by President Obama on February 17, 2009, in an effort to jumpstart the national economy. As a result of ARRA funding, local economically distressed communities benefited with creation of jobs, enhancement of job skills, and improvement of local economies through public work contracts. Benefits to the forest focused on trail maintenance, recreation facilities, hazardous fuels, and road maintenance projects.



Rehab and maintenance work on FR 150

Trail Maintenance and Construction

The forest received \$1,393,000 for trail maintenance and construction projects. This funding helped accomplish 476 miles of maintenance on back country and front country trails in Catron, Grant, and Sierra Counties; construction of 34 miles of the Continental Divide National

Scenic Trail on the Quemado Ranger District (RD); and 107 miles of trail maintenance on the Wilderness RD. A large portion of this funding (\$906,000) was used in partnerships with local and regional Youth Corps, e.g. Wellness Coalition and the Southwest Conservation Corps.

Recreation Facilities

The forest received \$220,000 to improve recreation facilities on two ranger districts. The project at the Aldo Leopold Vista, Glenwood RD, included replacement of an existing vault toilet building, the addition of a new toilet building, reroofing of pavilions, laying new concrete sidewalks, and improvement of interpretive signing.

The second project took place on the Wilderness RD and consisted of a new toilet building at the district office, improvement of erosion control features at Upper End Campground at Lake Roberts, and

installation of new picnic tables and campfire rings at campgrounds and picnic areas throughout the district.

Hazardous Fuels

A total of \$565,000 was received for hazardous fuels treatments in Grant and Sierra Counties. The project in Sierra County took place adjacent to the community of Poverty Creek located about 16 miles east of Beaverhead. The project was designed to protect communities from wildland fire by maintaining pre-established fuelbreaks in the wildland-urban interface by crushing dead and down trees, as well as resprouted juniper.

Also designed to protect communities from fire, the Grant County project took place in three different locations. Approximately 300 acres of previously established fuelbreaks were maintained by crushing resprouted juniper in the Little Walnut Picnic Area and Pinos Altos area. Approximately 700 acres of fuels reduction thinning also took place in the Burro Mountains adjacent to the Oak Grove Subdivision.

Road Maintenance

The forest's largest ARRA project—at \$3.6 million—was for rehabilitation and maintenance of



Forest Road (FR) 150. The project improved approximately 45 miles of road between NM State Highways 35 and 59. Approximately 40 miles of this road is on the Wilderness RD with 5 miles on the Black Range RD. This road bisects the Gila Wilderness and Aldo Leopold Wilderness and is traveled by a variety of users including recreationists, hunters, cyclists, private landowners, utility companies, and Forest Service employees.

Project work included clearing the route of encroaching vegetation, improving or replacing drainage structures, e.g. culverts and leadout ditches along the route, development of engineering designs for three bridges, and road surfacing with aggregate base course material.

To complement the FR 150 project, the forest received an additional \$380,000 to reconstruct a fish barrier (a structure, either natural or manmade, that prevents the upstream movement of fishes and aquatic organisms) at Black Canyon. This project improved the existing barrier including watershed structures, riparian (water dependent) woody plants, stream channel structures, and drainage of the adjacent dispersed camping area.



Aldo Leopold Vista restrooms

Gila National Forest

Conservation Education *Active* in Forest Communities

For over 6 years, the Gila Conservation Education Center (GCEC) and the Gila National Forest have been achieving common goals via a cost-share agreement to promote conservation in southwest New Mexico through diverse community educational programs to children and adults in Grant, Catron, and Hidalgo Counties.

One of the GCEC's primary methods of providing conservation education has been through the development and implementation of "Discovery Trunks." Presentations are designed to inform students about forest related conservation education topics through hands-on exploration. Trunk topics include watersheds, wilderness, apex predators (predators with no predators of their own, residing at the top of their food chain), river ecology, birds, archaeology, fire ecology, fire safety, native plants, and solar energy.

Another community event is GCEC's sponsoring of the annual "Children's Water Festival." Designed to meet 4th and 5th grade science standards, this popular event takes place on the Gila River and highlights hands-on

stations where students are engaged in exploration of grade appropriate water resource topics such as hydrology, water quality, macroinvertebrates, native plants, watersheds, mineral resources (e.g. gold panning), and riparian biodiversity.

Thanks to the partnership with the forest, GCEC has maintained a strong presence in local communities and continues to encourage children/youth and their families to visit the forest, enjoy it, and experience it as a learning lab.



Above: GCEC local youth at Gila River Water Festival

Left: GCEC sponsors water quality workshop with local students

GCEC Web site: www.gcecnm.org

Timber Sales in Catron County

Timber sales for Fiscal Year 2012 (October 1, 2011, through September 30, 2012) in Catron County total five sales awarded to local county timber mills. These include the Deer Timber Sale, Pine Lawn Salvage Timber Sale, Wallow Roadside Hazard Tree Removal/Salvage Sale, Black Timber Sale, and Wallow Salvage Sale.

Objectives of the Deer and Black Timber Sales are to improve forest health (increase tree vigor, reduce impacts from insects and disease), increase wildlife habitat, reduce fuels, and increase forage (plant material consisting mainly of plant

leaves and stems eaten by grazing livestock).

With assistance from the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, the Pine Lawn Salvage Timber Sale was prepared to salvage dead trees from the Pine Lawn Fire that burned the summer of 2011.

The Wallow Roadside Hazard Tree Removal/Salvage Sale is a result of the 2011 Wallow Fire. This sale contained hazard trees that were cut down for public safety and which were located along county roads, State highways, and forest roads.

The objective of the Wallow Salvage Sale, also a result of the Wallow Fire, was to enhance natural regeneration that covered areas outside of existing roadways.

The forest is also working in partnership with the Cibola



Timber skidder pulling cut trees to the landing

National Forest to share forestry personnel in preparing timber sales. The New Mexico Forest Industry Association and Alamo Band of the Navajo Nation were successful in obtaining a Collaborative Forest Restoration Project grant to train students in timber marking. As a result of this, and since October 2012, the Alamo Navajo crew has conducted timber marking on two forest projects.

Three new forestry personnel positions have also been filled on the forest; two positions are located on the Reserve Ranger District and one on the Quemado district. These positions help meet an increasing demand for additional fuel treatments and supply of materials to local mills.



Timber from Pine Lawn Salvage Timber Sale

Timber Sale Awarded	Ranger District	Hundred Cubic Feet (CCF)	Awarded to	Date
Deer Timber Sale	Reserve	5,724 CCF	RC Forest Products (Reserve)	December 2011
Pine Lawn Salvage Timber Sale	Reserve	324 CCF	Agritree Holdings (Luna)	January 2012
Wallow Roadside Hazard Tree Removal/Salvage Sale	Quemado	762 CCF	Kellar Logging (Reserve)	February 2012
Black Timber Sale	Reserve	5,000 CCF	Kellar Logging (Reserve)	July 2012
Wallow Salvage Sale	Quemado	1,509 CCF	Timber Tramp Logging (Quemado)	August 2012

Gila National Forest

Habitat Improvements *Benefit Forest Wildlife*

Progressive management among agencies such as the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Gila National Forest continue to improve habitat conditions for diverse forest wildlife and fish species. The integration of wildlife management and fire management resource programs has provided opportunities to improve wildlife habitat while minimizing fire impacts and protecting important habitat areas.

Due to cooperative management efforts, wildlife enthusiasts including hunters and anglers, enjoy a diverse forest landscape. Definitely a favorite among wildlife is the majestic Rocky Mountain elk; large in size but ever so graceful! The elk roam in

significant numbers, ranging from the lower elevations of piñon and juniper forest up into the aspen high country.

Other species benefiting are mule deer and the Sonoran whitetail or “Coues” deer. Pronghorn find forage in grassland areas and black bear, Gambel’s quail, and turkey are also found throughout the forest. Javalina prefer to live in the warmer parts of the forest, while Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, introduced in 1964, are sometimes seen in the area southwest of Glenwood, along the San Francisco River, and in the Turkey Creek area.

The reclusive mountain lion, porcupine, bobcat, ringtail, coati, several species of bats, many small mammals, and almost

350 species of birds—including golden eagles, goshawks, and the great horned, flammulated, and Mexican spotted owls—add to the wildlife diversity. There are an additional 84 mammal species, 12 native fish species including

Note: The NMDGF has the overall authority and responsibility for hunting on national forests in the State, e.g. management of the trophy elk herd, game regulations, hunting seasons, etc. One of the department’s key objectives is to assure the Game Protection Fund and other fund sources are used wisely for the protection, propagation, conservation, management, and enhancement of the State’s wildlife and its habitat.

the Gila Trout and various nonnative species, 11 amphibians, and 44 reptiles.

The Mexican gray wolf is currently being reestablished within the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area. This area includes all of the Gila and Apache National Forests in west-central New Mexico and east-central Arizona. The wolf is listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Because of this designation, the wolf is NOT a game animal.



Successful elk hunt being packed out

Trail Enthusiasts Continue *Volunteering*

On a yearly basis, a portion of the Gila National Forest's trail system receives a facelift. Local, State, and national volunteer groups along with contracted trail workers and district trail and fire crews from the forest come together in partnership to enhance the trail system. The forest currently has over 1,500 miles of trails.

Trails have been either newly constructed, reconstructed, maintained, or received general trail cleanup. Installation of new trail signs and a new horse corral have also been accomplished.

Volunteer groups that continue dedicating time and energy on an annual basis to the enhancement of the forest's trail system include:

- Aldo Leopold High School, Silver City, NM
- American Hiking Society
- Backcountry Horsemen of America: Gila Chapter
- Boy Scouts of America
- Central Texas Trail Tamers, Austin, TX
- Continental Divide Trail Adopters, southwest New Mexico
- Montana State University, Bozeman, MT
- NM Volunteers for the Outdoors, Albuquerque, NM
- Southwest Conservation Corp, Tucson, AZ
- Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX
- Student Conservation Association
- Truth or Consequences High School (Bio-Club)
- University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA
- The Wellness Coalition in Silver City, AmeriCorps, and YCC
- Wilderness Volunteers, Salt Lake City, UT



Volunteer working hard on a trail surface

*“Caring for
the Land
and Serving
People”*

Gila National Forest

Travel Management Planning

The “Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Travel Management on the Gila National Forest” (DEIS) was released in January 2011. It designates a system of roads, trails, and areas open for motor vehicle use. A notice of availability was published on January 7, 2011, in the Federal Register. The DEIS was available for comment for 60 days with the comment period closing on March 7, 2011.

The forest received more than 2,000 comments after release of the DEIS. As the forest moves toward developing the final environmental impact statement (FEIS) and record of decision (ROD), review of each comment continues with consideration taken of the information provided.

The DEIS was distributed by various methods, including:

- Mailing approximately 200 hard copies and 720 CDs to individuals and organizations;

- Sending more than 15,000 emails to individuals and organizations;
- Advertising in 10 newspapers and posting flyers in and around various forest communities;
- Posting the DEIS on the forest Web site; and
- Hosting four open houses in the communities of Reserve, Truth or Consequences, Silver City, and Las Cruces.

Public Involvement in Travel Management

Prior to scoping the proposed action, from 2006 to 2007, the forest held 46 public meetings and open houses across the forest to introduce the Travel Management Rule and forest travel management process to over 900 participants.

In the fall of 2008, another 18 workshops were held and attended by more than 800 people. The workshops generated more than 2,000 public comments. These forums provided an opportunity

for the public to review maps and provide input. Over 380 individuals, including landowners, range permittees, outfitters, and guides were contacted. Forest employees also met with local motorized user groups, conservation groups, various local organized groups, local county officials, State and Federal agencies, and tribes.

Information from all of the public involvement meetings and comments was used to develop the proposed action. The forest supervisor published the proposed action on September 11, 2009. Publishing the proposed action marked the start of the scoping comment period, during which public comments were requested on the proposal. The proposed action was mailed to approximately 4,000 people with 10 open houses being hosted. In response, almost 16,000 letters and emails were received.

Expectations for 2013

The forest expects to release the final environmental impact statement and accompanying ROD in the spring of 2013.



*Travel Management Planning Web site:
www.fs.usda.gov/goto/gila/travel*

Fire Management

Fire Suppression

The fire seasons of 2010, 2011, and 2012 were slightly below average for total number of wildfires but increased significantly in 2012 in acres burned due to the Whitewater-Baldy Fire Complex. Person-caused fires increased in 2011 by over 50 percent and decreased in 2010 and 2012. In 2011, person-caused fire acres made up two thirds of the total acres burned due to the Quail Ridge Fire that burned south of Silver City and the Miller Fire in the Gila Wilderness.

The increase in acres burned involving person-caused fires in 2011 is partially due to an abundant amount of grass in the wildland-urban interface (forest areas adjacent to residences), a very dry spring, and from a careless hiker who left an abandoned campfire in the Gila Wilderness (Miller Fire).

The abundance of grass and dry fuels also creates conditions in private and public lands that are susceptible to accidental fire starts resulting from the burning of trash and dry grasses, leaves, and the use of equipment with internal combustion engines lacking adequate spark arrestors.

The Gila's fire management program has a strong tradition of using fire to help restore the forest's fire-adapted ecosystems. A wildland fire may be concurrently managed for multiple objectives, and those objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape encountering new fuels, weather, social conditions, governmental jurisdictions, etc.

A total of 23 fires in 2010 and 2011 resulted in the restoration of 9,980 acres of forest, brush, and grasslands. In 2012, the forest refrained from managing any lightning-caused fire for multiple objectives due to a dry winter in 2011 and the spring of 2012 that created drought conditions throughout the forest.

Benefits achieved by restoring natural fire to the forest include eliminating heavy fuels thereby



Prescribed fire burns a pocket of fuel

creating diversity among the plant life of the forest and improving wildlife habitat.

Forest fire managers will continue to allow fire to play its natural role on the landscape when conditions permit, coordinating with all other resource areas (wildlife, soils, air quality, watershed, and range). As the process of fire is allowed to be an integral part of the ecosystem, forest health will continue to improve.

Wildland Fires	2010	2011	2012
Total Number of Wildland Fires	108	257	56
Total Acres Burned	4,617	96,602	305,022
Person-Caused Fires	12	26	14
Person-Caused Acres	4	89,692	472
Resource Benefit Fires	2010	2011	2012
Total Number of Lightning Fires	82	222	42
Total Acres Burned	137	137	304,539
Multiple Objective Fires	14	9	0
Resource Benefit Acres	4,475	5,505	0

Gila National Forest

Fuels Treatment

For the past 3 years, the fuels program has focused on reducing fuels (dead branches, pine needles, small shrubs, etc.) across the forest with emphasis on forest lands adjacent to communities and private inholdings. Prescribed fire and mechanical treatments (chain saw use, brush hog, etc.) were used to accomplish reduction of fuels. Projects were designed to reduce hazardous fuels, improve fire prevention and suppression, increase public and firefighter safety, and restore fire-adapted ecosystems.

The forest accomplished the following hazardous fuel reduction from January 2010 through August 2012 due to the

successful coordination among ranger districts:

- 48,354 acres of nonwildland-urban interface (WUI) projects.
- 7,593 acres of WUI projects treated. WUI is an area where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland. In other words, rural and urban areas which are close to or adjacent to forest lands.
- 55,947 total acres treated primarily with prescribed fire, pile burning, and some mechanical thinning.

Fuels across the landscape continue to be treated. In the last 2 years, the emphasis for mechanical treatment projects has focused on WUI areas. Most of this work has been done primarily by mechanical treatment to remove accumulation of fuels around these areas. Secondary treatments may utilize fire to maintain the original fuel reduction treatment.

Large areas other than WUI areas were also treated to encourage fire to resume its natural role in the environment and provide for a healthier forest landscape.

Smoke can be an issue when it settles in a community. However, this has been the exception rather than the rule. Fire managers work closely with the New Mexico Air Quality Bureau and the New Mexico Smoke Management Program to register burn activities as required by State law.

Fire-adapted ecosystems are places where wildfires played an essential part of the ecology of many of New Mexico's biotic (living organisms such as trees, plants, etc.) communities prior to Euro-American settlement. Whether lightning caused or started by native peoples, wildfires were once quite common occurrences throughout the forests and grasslands in New Mexico and Arizona. These frequent fires maintained an open forest structure in the ponderosa pine forests and prevented tree encroachment into the grasslands.

Hazardous fuels are dry brush and trees that have accumulated and increased the likelihood of unusually large wildland fires.

2012 Whitewater Baldy Fire Complex

The Whitewater Baldy Fire Complex (WWB) started as two separate lightning strike fires near Mogollon Baldy and in the headwaters of Whitewater Creek in the Gila Wilderness east of Glenwood, NM. The two fires joined in extreme fire behavior on May 23, 2012. The fire severely burned a large tract of land across the Gila National Forest and Gila Wilderness, including the headwaters of Whitewater Creek, Mineral Creek, and Gilita Creek that drain directly into the communities of Glenwood, Alma, and Willow Creek respectively. The fire burned more than a dozen residences in the Willow Creek area, caused the evacuation of several small towns, and forced the temporary closure of the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument and Catwalk National Recreation Area above Glenwood, New Mexico.



Firefighters enroute to fire

Rain showers in mid-July helped firefighters reach 95 percent containment by July 23.

Fire Operations

The decision was made to not put personnel on the fire at that time due to safety concerns. When the Whitewater Fire was reported, initial attack fire crews from the Glenwood RD and the Silver City Interagency Hotshot Crew attempted to build fireline to control the fire but were unsuccessful because of the steep terrain and lack of adequate safety zones. On May 17, the New Mexico



Skycrane at work

Type 2 Incident Management Team (IMT) began managing the Whitewater Fire. On May 23, when the two fires joined, winds gusted as high as 51 miles per hour. On May 26, the Gila NF ordered a Southwest Type

1 IMT to manage the Fire Complex. Existing roads, trails, natural features, and fire scars from 2011 fires were used to eventually contain the fire at approximately 298,000 acres.

Wildlife

Gila NF estimates that 15 of the 101 Mexican spotted owl protected activity centers (PACs) that occur within the burn perimeter were compromised in terms of supporting successfully breeding Mexican spotted owls in the future. Forest monitoring suggests that the owls do not usually abandon a PAC that has been altered by severe fire but rather shift their nest location to

Gila National Forest



May 29, 2012, smoke columns form on the western part of the Gila Wilderness



Straw being hauled for mulch



Jay Hemphill

Regrowth in burnt aspens

nearby areas. Forty-two narrow-headed garter snakes were moved to mitigate negative effects from an increase in flow and debris. A number of Gila trout were translocated to either hatcheries or other streams.

BAER Efforts

Multiple rehabilitation strategies were undertaken to mitigate the very high potential for excessive erosion and loss of water control, including:

- Natural Resources Conservation Service purchased ALERT stations for flood warnings for communities.

- Levy stabilization and channel clearing activities in Whitewater Creek and Mineral Creek.
- Hazard tree removal along 18 miles of forest system roads.
- Removal of hazardous bridges, landings, and railings.
- Aerial seeding on 26,200 acres (547,105 pounds of seed

was applied); Gila National Forest is proposing to seed an additional 8,850 acres of high to moderate burn severity acres.

- Aerial straw mulching on 14,204 acres.
- Work on 45 miles of forest roads.

Visit www.fs.usda.gov/gila for more information on WWB Fire Complex

Shoes are Off

at the Black Range Ranger District

Shoeing horses is as much a part of the Southwest as are cowboys and tumbleweeds. The practice is so ingrained with the culture that horseshoes are considered good luck, throwing horseshoes is a popular game, and being a good farrier (someone who shoes a horse) is a well respected trade. Despite this, Shane Shannon, a self proclaimed “lifelong cowpuncher” and range technician on the Black Range Ranger District has decided to take the shoes off of his horses.

It began roughly a year and a half ago, when Shannon was contacted by Kris Goris, a horse foot care specialist who lives in Silver City. Goris explained that when a barefoot horse takes a step there is a compression and expansion of the hoof, causing blood to be pumped through the foot and the lower portion of the leg, which aides and improves the horse’s entire circulatory system. When you put a shoe on a horse, it doesn’t allow for this natural compression and expansion, which can lead to numb/tender feet as well as other foot, bone, and tendon problems like founder, laminitis, side bone, and ring bone.

For Shannon, a respected farrier, taking the shoes off of district horses was nothing short of sacrilege. The seed, however, had been planted. After doing some research, Shannon came to the same conclusion Goris had years before; that putting shoes on a horse can cause serious health problems, increase veterinarian bills, and shorten life expectancies. While still a little wary, Shannon was ready to take the plunge.

The horseshoes came off the horses in early 2011. Shannon said that within a few weeks he started to notice a real



Putting on the shoes

difference. He said he had a horse with side bone, a condition that can cause the horses foot to become very sore, and since removing the shoes, the horse has not taken a lame step. “I have actually used the horse several days in a row on numerous occasions and the inflammation caused by the side bone is basically gone. This is what sealed the deal for me,” said Shannon.

The horses have now been about 1 year without shoes. Shannon said his horses are healthier, happier, and more ready to work than ever before. He attributes the success to Goris’s passion for natural horse foot care and persistence. Goris attributes the success to a lifelong cowpuncher that cares deeply about his work and his horses.



Getting ready for shoes

Gila National Forest

Dragonfly Trailhead Provides Easy Access to Local Rock Art, Wildlife Viewing, and Birding

Located just outside Silver City, Dragonfly Trailhead is a popular 1.5 mile easy walk to view local rock art, birds, and wildlife. The trail leads hikers to rock art that features human and animal shaped designs plus geometric designs. The trail was named “Dragonfly” due to at least three different dragonflies depicted in the rock art; the largest dragonfly image measures about 3” x 5”.

Engineering Supervisor Mike Díaz and his equipment operator crew (Clifford Martínez, Donnie Gonzales, Edward Tovar, Funding for Dragonfly Trailhead was possible through the Southern New Mexico Resource Advisory Council (RAC) chartered under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000.



Background photo: Dragonfly petroglyph

Newly constructed Dragonfly pipe fence

Extinct Mammoths and Other Ice Age Mammal Fossils *Found on Gila National Forest*

A glimpse of what roamed the forest thousands of years ago was discovered during the autumn of 2010 when a local citizen found the tip of a Columbian Mammoth tusk sticking out of the ground. What would later prove to be a bone bed of many extinct Ice Age horses and bison, the discovery was exciting and offers huge learning possibilities to paleontologists who study prehistoric life.

Dr. Gary Morgan, Curator of Paleontology at the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science in Albuquerque, identified the tusk as belonging to a Columbian Mammoth. The Columbian Mammoth is a relative of the Woolly Mammoth believed to have become extinct about 11,000 to 13,000 years ago. The



Mammoth fossils surface during excavation

forest proceeded to issue a permit to the museum authorizing the excavation which began the summer of 2011, and included a followup agreement between the forest and museum to properly curate all materials and make them available for public study.

A unique opportunity to assist with the excavation was afforded local youth from Reserve High School in Reserve, NM. “Roger Skaggs, high school science teacher, along with assistance from local citizen Grem Lee organized a field trip to introduce the students to paleontology, excavation techniques, and to enjoy the discovery of Ice Age mammals in their own backyard. Upon arrival at the site, Dr. Morgan provided an informative orientation on excavation findings.

Forest Zone Archaeologist Jeanne Schofer said of the field trip, “It did not take long for the students to get engaged in the digging. It was very quiet at the site which is unusual for a gathering of students! I could see why they were so enthusiastic and engaged, as measurable progress



Reserve High School students enthusiastic about excavation

was seen by the students in just a few hours. As the students sought to expose more bones, they dug with small trowels and screwdriver-like implements. More than once, I heard a student exclaim what they were uncovering which would then draw everyone’s attention for a few moments. During the excavation, several of the students commented they did not care anymore about getting back to town for the football game!”

As winter arrived with below freezing temperatures, excavation stopped but is expected to resume in the spring of 2012. To protect the site, the exact location remains anonymous.

The Ice Age’s (Pleistocene epoch) large land mammals that lived in North America include the mammoths and their cousins the mastodons, longhorned bison, saber-toothed cats, horses, camels, and giant ground sloths.

Gila National Forest

Pueblo Creek Crossing *Completed*

As of early November 2012, Pueblo Creek crossing on the Glenwood Ranger District has been completed. Work on the crossing included construction of a new culvert pipe that improves safe passage across Pueblo Creek during heavy rain showers and flooding. In the past, the former crossing was rendered impassable due to washouts or flooding. Concrete mats on the upstream embankments of the crossing were also installed.

The former crossing was an old Civilian Conservation Corps

(CCC) era bridge washed out in a big flood in 2006; this CCC bridge was then replaced by a low water crossing as a temporary measure, which is now replaced by the new culvert constructed by the forest's engineering construction and maintenance crew.

The creek crossing is used by visitors camping or picnicking in Pueblo Creek Campground, by backpackers hiking into the Blue Range



Forest engineers conduct survey of Pueblo Creek crossing

Wilderness located south of the road, and by road travelers crossing the state boundary.

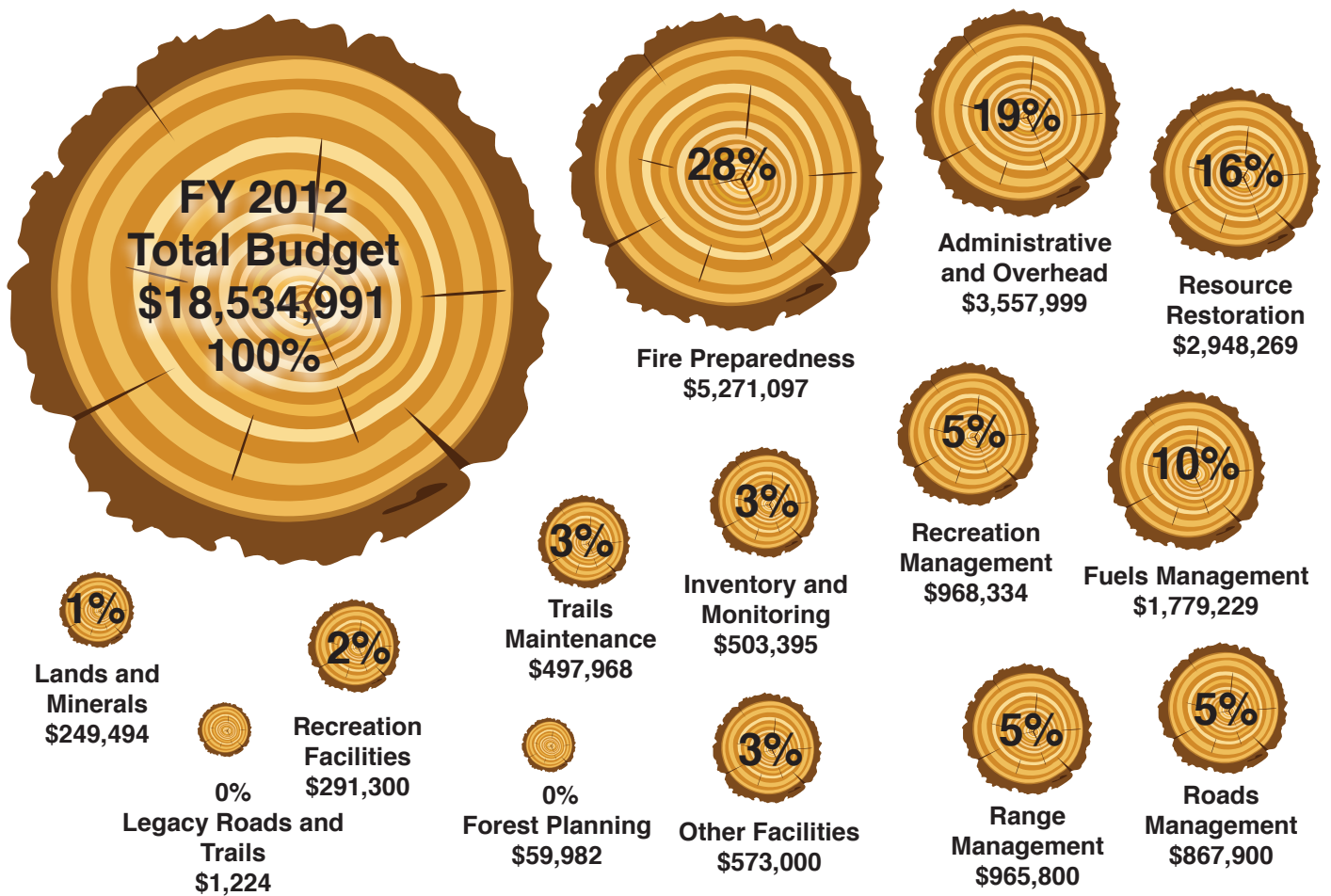
Funding was possible through the Southern New Mexico Resource Advisory Council (RAC) chartered under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000.



Pueblo Creek crossing before . . .

and after . . .





Gila National Forest Fiscal Year 2012 Accomplishments

October 1, 2011 — September 30, 2012

Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management

Lake Habitat Enhanced	10 Acres
Stream Habitat Enhanced	19 Miles
Nonthreatened and Endangered Species Habitat Enhanced	4,892 Acres

Fire Management

Hazardous Fuels Treated	13,083 Acres
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Recreation Management

Heritage Assets Managed	1
Trails Maintained	63 Miles
Trails Improved	30 Miles

Engineering/Facilities Management

Facilities Maintained	127
High-clearance Roads Maintained	75 Miles
Passenger Car Roads Maintained	215 Miles

Resource Restoration

Noxious Weeds Treated	400 Acres
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Range Management

NEPA Documents Completed	2
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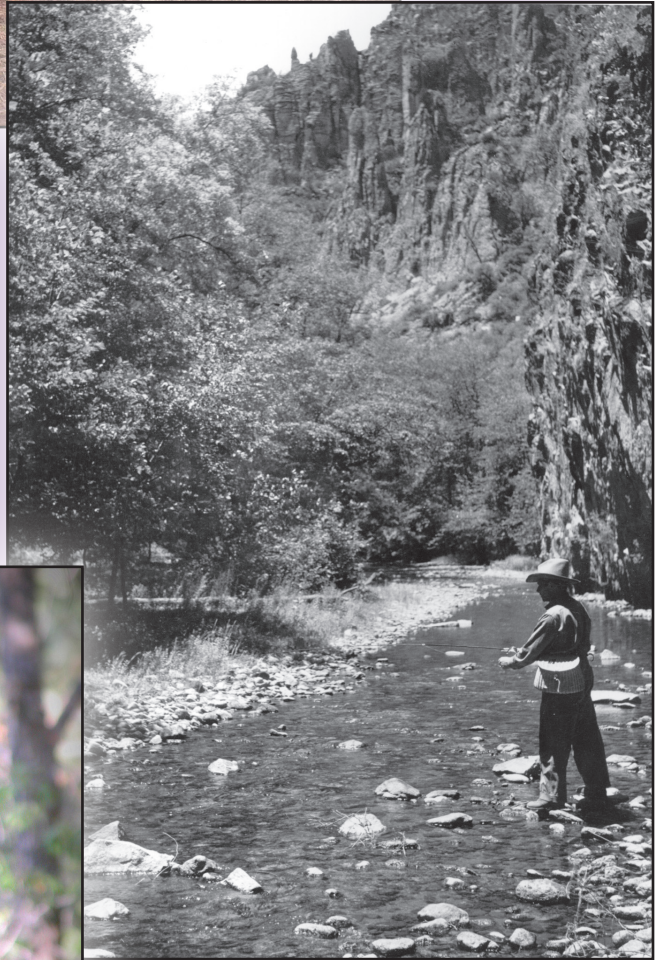
Timber Management

Timber Volume Sold	12,619 ccf*
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Gila National Forest



Barbara Torres



Clockwise from top: bull elk take a drink; trout fishing in the Gila wilderness, 1939; Mexican spotted owl; and pronghorn

Ladder Ranch *Partnership*

The Black Range Ranger District has a long history of partnerships with outside groups to accomplish needed work. Some of these partners have a particular interest and focus they wish to promote, and when this fits with district objectives, much good is accomplished. Others come along with broad and common interests and from those relationships, many objectives of mutual benefit can also be realized.

One such partner is the Ladder Ranch; the private ranch contains approximately 400,000 acres and shares about a 15-mile boundary with the district. Since wildlife, fire, and archaeology resources respect no boundary, having a partner is paramount to better management of these resources.

During fire season, the Ladder Ranch allows access to areas not easily accessible on the district and in this process, accommodates resource benefit fires (management of naturally ignited wildland fires to accomplish specific pre-stated resource management objectives in predefined geographic areas) that may move back and forth across our common boundaries. Management of threatened and endangered species, especially the Chiricahua leopard frog, would otherwise be more difficult to accomplish

without the proactive management and emphasis from Ladder Ranch. Future projects such as restoring Rio Grande cutthroat trout in Animas Creek will depend heavily on mutual partnership efforts.

Native peoples and historic activities occurred across the landscape for hundreds of years and without the willingness to allow a “look” over the fence; the picture is all too often incomplete. During the Gila archaeological projects sponsored each year by the district, Ladder Ranch has also

allowed students and staff from Howard University, Washington, DC, to use the historic and remote townsite of Hermosa as a base of operations, providing a unique experience to the students who will likely remember the experience for the rest of their lives.



Partnerships such as the Ladder Ranch are a win-win for all!!



Black Range Ranger District

Historic Cabin Gets an Overhaul



Monument Park Cabin before renovation (above) and after renovation (below)



Tucked away on the northeast corner of the Gila National Forest lies a relic of a time gone by. A historic Forest Service cabin lies in a serene, remote area near historic mining structures, a fire lookout tower, and the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. This cabin, named Monument Park Cabin, is recently restored and located east of Beaverhead and south of NM 59 off Forest Road 226.

The historic cabin is a testimony to the early 1900s when many such cabins were built by the Forest Service on national forests across the Nation. The cabins provided shelter for Forest Service employees conducting work in the back country and were also used as ranger

stations for administrative work. Architectural design for the cabins within the Rocky Mountains was predominantly log structures.

Summer/seasonal employees with the Black Range Ranger District conducted the restoration work. “Restoration of Monument Park Cabin was funded through the Southern New Mexico Resource Advisory Committee under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000. Without this funding, it would have been a challenge to conduct the needed restoration that offers significant historic value to the local area’s history of mining and early Forest Service days,” said Dennis Fahl, district fire management officer and acting recreation/trails district staff overseeing the restoration work.

Even though minor work remains to be done for the upcoming field season, the cabin is a beauty to see! Its historic value attests to the hardiness and motivation that individuals possessed at a time when life offered few comforts.

“Although the cabin is currently locked, we are looking to designate the cabin in the near future as a rental to the public. In the meantime, we ask forest visitors to view, enjoy, and help protect the cabin,” says District Ranger Larry Cosper.



Snare Mesa Wildlife Habitat Project

The Glenwood Ranger District is currently implementing the Snare Mesa Wildlife Habitat Project which is approximately 15,700 acres and adjacent to the Arizona state line. This project involves removing juniper and piñon trees from once natural grasslands; opening tree stands (area with a density of trees) to improve forage for deer, elk, and other wildlife; and maintaining wildlife cover by retaining trees within and on the outer edges of the project area.

Forest fire crews, contractors, and permittees have been working together on this wildlife habitat project. Through this cooperative effort, prescribed fire, mechanical thinning with chain saws and hand tools, and skidding with a bobcat-type skidder have been used to accomplish objectives.

Part of the project involves a stewardship contract with a local operator. This project provides firewood for sale on the local market, jobs for the operator and employees, and meets the project's wildlife objectives. Other wood suitable for use such as firewood has been made available to the public with a valid permit.



Snare Mesa cutters (above) and thinning results (below)



Glenwood Ranger District

Catwalk National Recreation Area . . . An Update

Currently (as of December 2012) 3/8 mile of the old Catwalk Trail and half of Whitewater Picnic Area is open now.

While we intend to fully reopen the entire Catwalk, it will take time as we go through the stages of several projects, including a safety analysis. The toilets must first be relocated out of the flood plain. This should be finished by early spring.

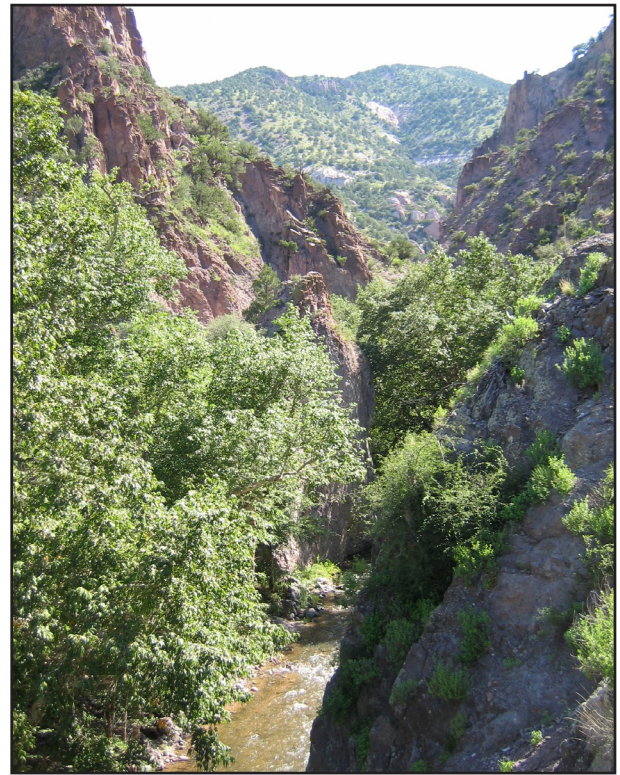
As soon as the first bridge is finished (scheduled for January), the rest of the picnic area and amphitheater can be reopened. With the bridge finished, the American Disabilities Act (ADA) trail can be cleared of rocks and other debris. The ADA trail will be reopened when it is safe to do so (planned for late January). The next stage will be to replace the tread and handrails on the suspended catwalk to the “hexagon” end of the ADA trail through Whitewater Canyon (planned for early March). The remaining trail will be opened in phases as maintenance and reconstruction are finished.

Reconstruction of the trail will depend on the results of the safety analysis, funding, and personnel availability.

The Catwalk Trail and Whitewater Picnic Area will only be open to the public when conditions are safe. During the next 3 to 5 years, a heightened risk to public safety exists due to higher than normal runoff expected from the Whitewater-Baldy Fire scar. During periods of potential flooding or flash floods, the Catwalk/Whitewater Recreation Site will be temporarily closed.

Information on the Catwalk status will continue to be posted

on the forest Web site with major changes also announced through news releases. Please check the Web site at www.usda.fs.gov/gila or call the Glenwood Ranger District at (575) 539-2481 for the latest information.



The original Catwalk was built in the early 1930s by the CCC and is a popular recreation site due to its CCC history, U.S. Army and Apache conflicts, trail access to the Gila Wilderness, and the striking beauty of the Catwalk attached to the canyon walls that overlooks Whitewater Creek with its sycamores, cottonwoods, and willows.

Large Scale Landscape Restoration

on Quemado Ranger District

In 2008, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) began discussions with the Quemado Ranger District (RD) regarding improving wildlife habitat conditions within the Slaughter Mesa area. What resulted was a large-scale, 31,000-acre ecological landscape restoration project: the Slaughter Mesa Restoration Project.

In the absence of fire, open timber stands and grasslands have grown in with a high density of trees on Slaughter Mesa. With the increasing density of trees, there was potential to isolate the existing

the pronghorn situation, several other areas were discussed for restoration.

- Mule deer browse in the Sand Flat area was declining.
- Grasslands utilized by elk are being encroached (making inroads) upon by tree species.
- Mexican spotted owl habitat south of Slaughter Mesa Tank was in danger from stand-replacing wildfire.
- Ponderosa pine used by a variety of species such as elk, turkey, and northern goshawk, etc., was becoming very dense.

With these concerns, both the NMDGF and Quemado RD selected the project area around Slaughter Mesa and completed analysis and planning in 2009.

Three years later, the Quemado RD reports that over 6,100 acres have been treated within the restoration project and things are just getting started! This restoration project was accomplished with the support of partners, grants, and U.S. congressional acts including:

- NMDGF – Big Game Enhancement and Habitat Stamp Program
- Forest Products Laboratory grant awarded to Southwest Piñon, Inc. (Datil, NM)
- Secure Rural Schools Act
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- Livestock grazing permittees

Pronghorn, elk, mule deer, Mexican spotted owl, wild turkey, and other small game and birds are benefitting from the restoration efforts by: creating a pronghorn migration corridor; restoring grasslands; improving watershed conditions by increasing grasses and other herbaceous plants; and at the same time . . . reducing the risk of large, fast-moving wildfires.



Grassland thinning

pronghorn population making them genetically isolated. If conditions remained unchanged, there would be subsequent loss of pronghorn and their habitat. While assessing



Ponderosa pine thinning

Quemado Ranger District

Proactive Actions Taken to

Minimize Adverse Impacts

to Livestock Industry During Wallow Fire

On May 29, 2011, the 538,000-acre human-caused Wallow Fire burned on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests in eastern Arizona and the northwestern part of the Gila National Forest in New Mexico. It was the height of the summer fire season and, subsequently, became the largest fire on record in the southwestern region of the United States. The extent and severity of the fire affected not only forest resources, but also impacted the lives and livelihoods of residents of Catron, Apache, and Greenlee Counties as well as residents across the region. Of the total acres, 15,400 burned in New Mexico.

After a wildfire, many of us see visible results on the ground such as burned trees, homes, structures, utility

lines, etc. But as with any national catastrophe, there are other affects that are not quite as evident. One of these “not as easily seen” affects are the burned pastures and grazing areas within an allotment that provide the necessary forage (plant material, mainly plant leaves and stems) for livestock, e.g. cattle, horses, and mules.

During the Wallow Fire, ranchers that lease forest lands for grazing (known as “permittees”) along with ranchers on private land, community citizens, local, State, and Federal agencies, and forest personnel worked together to assist displaced ranchers that had lost forage for their livestock on pastures and/or allotments.



2011 Wallow Fire

Forest Service staff compiled an extensive list of local, state, and Federal agencies that could provide financial or technical assistance to the displaced ranchers/permittees. This service provided several options for the livestock industry to lessen the devastating impacts of the Wallow Fire on their grazing allotments.

Catron County Has Formed

New Chapter of New Mexico Site Watch Program

Archaeologists with the Quemado and Reserve Ranger Districts have collaborated with the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division in Santa Fe to form the Catron County Chapter of New Mexico SiteWatch. The newly created chapter is up and running with a core group of eight trained and very dedicated, energetic local volunteers.

Training is provided to the volunteers for accomplishment of tasks that include monitoring archaeology sites—e.g. petroglyphs, caves, historic cabins, roomblocks (prehistoric architecture of rock walls that form rooms)—and archaeological districts (an area that has a group of sites that are similar, or may be

related in some way) on the Gila National Forest.

Additional training also includes orientation to each specific archaeology site, and training development on detailed data collection at a select group of sites.



New Mexico SiteWatch monitor discusses site conditions on Apache Creek Rock Art Trail

New Mexico Site Watch trains citizen volunteers to assist land management agencies and their preservation partners (including the Historic Preservation Division) in the protection of New Mexico's cultural resources.

*NM Site Watch Web site:
www.nmhistoricpreservation.org/programs/sitewatch.html*

Reserve Ranger District

Chiricahua Leopard Frog

Recovery

The CLF has a distinctive color pattern of small, raised, cream-colored spots on the thigh against a dark background with relatively rough skin on the back and sides and often green on the head and back. An adult leopard frog is typically 2–3" from snout to end of body (not including the legs).

Recovery actions for the federally “threatened” Chiricahua leopard frog (CLF) are continuing on the Reserve Ranger District. Within the last 25 years, this species has experienced massive die-offs across its habitat in New Mexico and Arizona. Project goals are to begin to repopulate recently destroyed sites caused by loss of habitat, nonnative predators (crayfish and bullfrogs) that eat leopard frog eggs and tadpoles and, most recently, disease.



Chiricahua leopard frog

To attempt to halt any further losses in the wild, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the CLF stakeholders’ group (which includes the Gila National Forest) have undertaken emergency action to attempt to place remaining wild populations of CLF left in New Mexico into captivity. These captive raised frogs

are held in “refugia” (Latin word meaning “refuge”) that serves as a protected, human-built habitat. If the subpopulation should disappear in the wild, wildlife managers can then breed them in captivity with the goal of someday releasing frogs back into the wild.

Since 2009, the forest has constructed three refugiums on forest land and assisted the USFWS in constructing another one on private land. All refugiums are stocked with specimens from wild groups still in existence; two are on the Wilderness RD, one on the Reserve RD, and the fourth is on private land in Cruzville, NM.

Forest restoration of the CLF is just one example of successful partnering of locals, private organizations, and Federal agencies.



Chiricahua leopard frog refugium tanks

Popular Picnic Area Receives Upgrading in Silver City Area

Within close proximity to Silver City, the popular Little Walnut Picnic Area used by many local citizens and tourists received significant reconstruction work in the fall of 2011. Forest engineering employees with the

construction and maintenance crew reconstructed two low water crossings, eliminating a safety hazard for vehicles within the picnic area and providing increased accessibility for forest visitors. Improvements featured adding

concrete sidewalks to a portion of the individual picnic area, a handicapped-accessible picnic table, and new gates for the two large group areas.

“The picnic area offers easy access to the much-used Gomez Peak Pavilion (a large group reservable area used for many family and social events) and the many popular trails leading to Gomez Peak at 7,275 feet elevation,” said Silver City District Ranger Russ Ward.

“During the reconstruction project that took about 2 ½ months, the public cooperated fully in abiding by the temporary closure and respecting safety signs posted in the vicinity of the construction site. As soon as reconstruction was

completed and it was safe for the public, the picnic area was reopened for use,” Ranger Ward added.

Funding for the Little Walnut Picnic Area was possible through the Southern New Mexico Resource Advisory Council (RAC) chartered under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000.



Little Walnut Picnic Area, Gomez Peak gazebo area (above) and the newly constructed water crossing (right)

Silver City Ranger District

Bear Creek Land Purchase

An important purchase of 1,293 acres of private land along Bear Creek located north of Silver City was finalized in the spring of 2010. The purchase amount was \$2.4 million. U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman was instrumental in acquiring the funding for this critical land acquisition.

The benefits of acquiring this land include providing additional access to forested lands, creating a wide range of recreation uses (hiking, camping, horseback riding, etc.), and protecting the property's riparian (water dependent) environment and natural beauty for the enjoyment of forest users. Riparian habitat along this creek consists of an excellent mix of cover habitat for a wide diversity of wildlife.

The Trust for Public Land (a land conservation nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving land for people as parks and other natural places) assisted the forest in negotiating the purchase of this tract of land. Funding was provided from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a Federal program established by Congress in 1964 to provide monies and matching grants to local, state, and Federal governments for the acquisition of land and easements for the benefit of all Americans.



Bear Creek (above) and Bear Creek waterfall (left)

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Firefighters Protect Archaeological Sites

During Miller Fire

Historic Cabins

As fires burned in the Gila Wilderness in 2011, strong winds pushed flames in the direction of a number of historic archaeological sites. This included two historic cabins (White Creek Cabin located north of McKenna Park and Prior Cabin, north of Woodland Park), historic trees, and archaeological sites within the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument (GCDNM) area.

To protect the cabins, firefighters covered them with an aluminized wrapping that reflects radiant heat away from the structures and prevents burning embers from igniting the roof. As an added measure, excessive vegetation surrounding the cabins was also removed. Due to protective measures taken by firefighters, no damage was sustained to the cabins.



Archaeological site at Cliff Dweller Cabin



Protective wrapping at White Creek Cabin during the Miller Fire



History of White Creek Cabin

Built in 1933 by the State of New Mexico as part of a fish hatchery, the logs were cut locally while other needed materials were packed in from Willow Creek. In 1937, the cabin was transferred to the forest, served as the ranger station office for the McKenna Park Ranger District (RD), and then was incorporated into the Wilderness RD in 1954. The cabin continues to be used today by wilderness trail, fire, and resource crews.

History of Prior Cabin

Built in 1955, also by the State of New Mexico, the log cabin measures 12' x 14' with pine flooring and a corrugated metal

roof. It continues to be used for forest administration of the Gila Wilderness and by the NM Department of Game and Fish.

Wilderness Ranger District

Peeled Trees

Other fairly unknown historic sites within the Gila Wilderness are the rare “peeled trees” attributed to the Athapascan (Apache and Navajo) groups that

inhabited the Southwest from the 1700s to the 1890s. During times of need, these tribes utilized mature ponderosa pine trees as a last resort food

source by removing the outer bark to get to the inner cambium layer. The cambium was then cut into thin sheets of paper, chewed on site, or transported with them as a quick and efficient mobile food.

Resource advisors specialized in identifying archaeology sites coordinated with firefighters to determine a strategy for saving the trees (sometimes mistakenly referred to as “papoose” trees). In response to this challenge, firefighters constructed a fire line around the base of each tree, thus protecting them from being burned.



Ponderosa pine peeled tree

Cliff Dweller Canyon

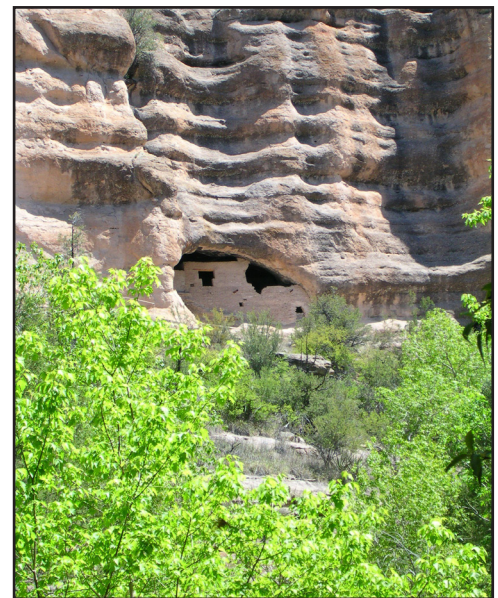
At the onset of the Miller Fire, the fire was approximately 9 miles from the canyon within the Gila Wilderness and located above the GCDNM. By early May, it was apparent that fire behavior and dry conditions were such that preparations needed to be put into place to lessen the potential for adverse effects to cultural resources within the canyon and adjacent areas.

Forest archaeologists worked with the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument to assess the risks and develop protective treatments to archaeology sites that were fire sensitive within the canyon.

Once sites were chosen for treatment, members of the Ft. Apache Hotshots and Missoula-based smokejumpers accompanied the archaeologists to begin site treatments. Archaeologists summed up their concerns, “We recognized that the Miller Fire might destroy

irreplaceable prehistoric Mogollon and Apache archaeological features in Cliff Dweller Canyon.”

Archaeology sites found in the canyon included rockshelters, cliff dwellings, and rock art. Treatments for the sites focused on removing fuels (trees, brushes, pine needles, leaves, etc.) within and adjacent to the sites and wrapping wood construction materials such as vigas and lintels (horizontal beam over a doorway) with wildfire structure wrap or aluminum foil. When fuels were cleared from the sites, the risk lessened for high intensity or long duration burning.



Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument

In May of 2011, archaeologists revisited the protected sites and found the prefire treatments had prevented damage to the canyon.

