U.S. Forest Service
Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests
30 S Chiricahua Drive
Springerville, AZ 85938

Media Contact: Steve Johnson
928-333-6280
stevenmjohnson02@fs.fed.us

WHITE MOUNTAIN APACHE TRIBE'S YOUTH CONSERVATION CORPS LEARNS ABOUT STREAM AND RIPARIAN HABITAT WITH THE APACHE-SITGREAVES NATIONAL FORESTS

Springerville, AZ – For Immediate Release, August 11, 2016 – The White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) spent the week of June 27th with Fisheries Biologists and Hydrologists on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests and participated in a variety of activities. On June 27-28, YCC members learned about the principles of the USFS Aquatics Program and how stream habitat is assessed and managed. They learned of the USFS Region 3 stream habitat monitoring protocol and applied it by collecting stream habitat and stream substrate data on Thompson and Stinky creeks. The habitat data collected by the YCC will be used by USFS staff for an upcoming analysis. Corps members were also taught how to use a GPS unit to take and record UTMs for mapping purposes, identify riparian vegetation, and assess the health of a stream system through interpretation of measurements and observation. During these two days, the crew also learned about Apache trout and projects that have occurred on the Forest to improve habitat for the species and about the stream water temperature monitoring program underway on the Forest.

Figure 1. Crew members Jah'nay Velasquez, Mariah Clark and Tyrell Clawson measuring stream habitat.

Figure 2. Mark Pisano, USFS Fisheries Biologist, explaining a rock V-wier and its function to the Tribal YCC Crew.

On Wednesday, June 29th, Fisheries Biologists and YCC members visited multiple aquatics projects across the Apache Forest to see a variety of habitat improvements or recovery actions. First was a fish barrier removal location at Lee Valley Creek where a failing fish barrier that was no longer needed was removed, the channel stabilized to prevent erosion and the stream restored. Next was Hulsey Lake where the Forest completed a lake restoration and re-design project last fall. The project was to improve the recreational fishery as well as the recreational experience. The crew next went to the Beaver Creek Aquatic Organism Passage project where failing culverts were replaced with a bottomless structure and the stream rebuilt and reconnected. The crew learned how the design of stream crossings can inhibit or promote aquatic passage, why we may want to do one or the other to protect listed species, and methods for improving aquatic passage.

The last project the YCC crew visited was the newly built fish barrier on West Fork Black River. The crew had seen different types of barrier designs throughout the week from rock-gabion to cement capped structures. The new fish barrier is solid concrete and of a different design than previously used on Forest. The barrier was built by Bureau of Reclamation and completed in June 2016 to increase miles of habitat for threatened Apache trout.

On Thursday, June 30th, the crew learned from Forest Hydrologists to assess how well a stream and its riparian area are functioning. The Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) assessment was completed on Burro Creek by looking at species of riparian vegetation, stream sinuosity, bank stability, and other factors that can impact streams. The crew walked the creek with fish biologists and hydrologists while discussing what the stream and riparian area looked like in relation to its potential. They also learned how to identify various sedges and flowering plants. While walking the creek, USFS staff capitalized on 'wildlife moments' that occurred such as finding frogs, garter snakes and fish that could be identified and discussed.

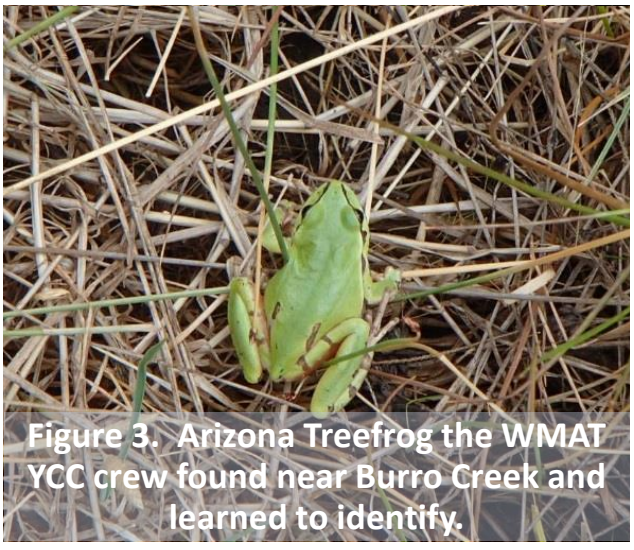

Figure 3. Arizona Treefrog the WMAT YCC crew found near Burro Creek and learned to identify.

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