



TONTO AND COCONINO NATIONAL FORESTS

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For Immediate Release
February 28, 2012

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Portion of Fossil Creek Road (FR. 708)

Closure order extended until next year

Payson, Ariz. (February 28, 2012) – Tonto and Coconino National Forest officials announced today that a portion of Fossil Creek Road (Forest Road 708) will remain closed until next year.

The road is closed from 1/2 mile west of the Fossil Creek entrance to the Upper Fossil Springs Trailhead extending west and down canyon to immediately east of the Waterfall Trailhead (old Flume Trail Trailhead).

The original temporary closure began last November.

Forest officials have decided to extend this closure order in order to find solutions to the ongoing rock slides on FR 708, requiring temporary closures for repair, and to better manage the gridlock traffic conditions at Fossil Creek due to the exponential increase in recreational use over the past several years.

Access will continue to be available from the Camp Verde side off Highway 260; however, forest staff plan to limit access into Fossil Creek during high-use periods. Forest officials will be closing and staffing FR 708 on the Coconino/Camp Verde side as the area becomes saturated with vehicular traffic. A signing plan is being developed to direct public access and will be implemented as soon as possible.

“Five years ago, the summer season (Memorial Day – Labor Day) figures were approximately 20,000 visitors per year. Now there are approximately 90,000 visitors per season,” stated Angie Elam, Payson district ranger. “It results in a gridlock during high visitor use that makes emergency responses challenging or impossible. The gridlock threatens the health and safety of everyone. We need to figure out how to make this a safe and enjoyable recreation experience for our visitors and our employees who work there.”

Forest officials continue to assess the safety and maintenance issues of Forest Road 708 on the Tonto (Strawberry area) side due to ongoing rock slides. “Any time there’s moisture, this road becomes unstable. This is an ongoing safety issue due to the unpredictable condition of the road. More studies are needed to address this threat to public health and safety which will be included in the Comprehensive River Management Plan that should be finished in the next year,” continued Elam.

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Portion of FR 708 closed until 2013

A final determination for management of FR 708 on the Tonto side will be made through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process currently underway. For information on the status and progress of this analysis you may refer to the following link:

<http://redrockcountry.org/fossil/index.shtml> Completion of the NEPA process is expected this fall.

For further information, please contact the Payson Ranger District administrative office at 928-474-7900. The closure order is available on the Tonto National Forest website at www.fs.usda.gov/tonto.