

Fossil Creek Wild & Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan Forest Service Proposed Action - *details*

March 28, 2011

Primary Goals of the Proposed Action

1. Maintain or enhance ORVs primarily by managing recreation impacts. Manage these impacts by controlling access, by implementing limits on the number of users at one time, by placing seasonal limits on the type of recreational opportunities available in the corridor, and by developing and hardening specifically identified recreation sites
2. **Improve visitors'** recreation experience while focusing on protection and enhancement of all ORVs.
3. Control the number of cars to address safety, resource damage, congestion, and lack of available parking areas.
4. Reduce impacts from dispersed camping (litter, fires, sanitation, violations, vegetation removal, etc.).
5. Protect water quality by allowing a limited number of day use-only visitors in Middle Fossil Creek from May to September, by providing toilets and other facilities at recreation sites that provide a vegetated buffer between the site and Fossil Creek, by rerouting portions of the waterfall trail, by paving, repairing, and potentially rerouting key road segments, by allowing a limited number of designated dispersed campsites outside of the riparian zone at Fossil Springs, by prohibiting campfires, and by implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs) on roads, trails, and at developed recreation sites.
6. Concentrate camping in areas and seasons that can support this recreation activity while protecting or enhancing the ORVs.
7. Develop a shuttle system that would allow continued and controlled recreation access that promotes protection of the ORVs.
8. Continue to maintain FS 708 from Strawberry to support administrative access and emergency response during the summer season.
9. Develop a phased implementation approach that provides immediate ORV protection and allows for development of planned facilities in a timely manner.
10. Actively monitor and learn from the system as it responds to changes in recreation use and resource management.
11. Respond to information gathered in public workshops.

Area Wide Management

- Institute year-round fees
- No glass containers would be allowed
- No campfires would be allowed
- Restrict vehicles to routes designated for motorized use and developed parking areas
- Develop creek access points with key information and visitor services
- Allow dispersed camping in all areas outside Wild and Scenic corridor unless specified otherwise in a closure order
- Phase implementation

Northern Wild Segment

Access / Management

- Access via existing trail network. No new trail development.
- Designate as Primitive ROS classification
- No fires allowed
- Allow camping year-round
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Fossil Springs Recreational Segment

Access

- Access via Fossil Springs Trail and Flume Trail (trailhead access: summer via shuttle, winter via private vehicle)
- Provide limited access controlled by a shuttle drop off system
- Allow for construction and maintenance of a helipad rescue site just outside corridor
- Designate as Semi-Primitive ROS classification

Camping

- Designate dispersed campsites outside of riparian zone; limited in number (~ 5 campsites)
- Provide two composting toilets; one on each side of creek
- Limit group size to less than 25 people
- Consider requiring permits for camping
- No fires allowed
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Old Dam to Waterfall Wild Segment

- Maintain wildlife habitat in a relatively undisturbed condition
- No camping (day use only) and no designated trails
- Recreation use not encouraged but not closed
- Emphasize fish, wildlife, geology and water ORVs in this area
- Designate as Primitive ROS classification

Middle Fossil Creek Recreational Segment

SUMMER MANAGEMENT (May through September)

Access

- Allow for day use only
- Provide access via shuttle system with shuttle hub staging areas at both ends- Fossil Creek Road (from Camp Verde) and Strawberry Road (between Fossil Springs TH and Strawberry – close to Strawberry would be ideal to reduce dust on road and provide a link to the community)¹
- Develop summer shuttle service to shuttle stops that offer toilets, shade, kiosks, tables, creek access and trash service
- Limit numbers of visitors through shuttle system. Limits may be placed at shuttle hubs and/or specific shuttle stops when capacities are reached. Guess of 500-1200 people per day with this option (further analysis will be conducted later). (In 2010, close to 1100 people visited Fossil Creek on some weekends)
- Allow personal vehicles access to the Childs area during shuttle season

¹ ****Feasibility of a shuttle system:** There is a question whether a shuttle would be financially and operationally feasible. So, at the same time we are analyzing the environmental effects of alternatives, we will also be analyzing the feasibility of a transportation operation (concession, contract, or government-run).

Shuttle stop locations:

- **Strawberry Road Staging** – shuttle staging location with large parking area, restrooms, shade structures, and information/interpretive kiosks. Also provides trailer parking for equestrian users.
- **Fossil Creek Road Staging** - shuttle staging location with large parking area, restrooms, shade structures, and information/interpretive kiosks.
- **Fossil Springs TH** – trailhead access (may limit number dropped off to reduce numbers accessing Fossil Springs), restroom, information kiosk, picnicking facilities, horse trailer loading and unloading zone.
- **Waterfall TH** – trailhead access to waterfall, restroom, information kiosk, designated creek access.
- **Irving** – footbridge across stream (allows ATV access for maintenance), restroom, picnic facilities, group picnic facilities, shade structures, information kiosk, designated creek access.
- **Tonto Bench** – restroom, picnic facilities, shade structures, information kiosk, designated creek access.
- **Bridge Area** – restroom, picnic facilities, shade structures, information kiosk, designated creek access.
- **Homestead** – restroom, picnic facilities, group picnic facilities, shade structures, information kiosk, designated creek access.
- **Old Corral** – restroom, picnic facilities, shade structures, information kiosk, designated creek access.
- **Sally May** – restroom, picnic facilities, shade structures, information kiosk, designated creek access.
- **Purple Mountain** – restroom, picnic facilities, shade structures, information kiosk, designated creek access.

Trails and Access

- Waterfall Trail – realign for resource protection
- Irving- add a footbridge to access recreation site and trail
- Improve Purple Mountain entrance to include a drop off
- Pave and repair roads in key areas
- Consider potential road re-route near Sally May to reduce sedimentation into creek

Camping and Group Sites

- **Irving and Homestead** – large group picnic sites
Camping available outside Wild and Scenic corridor during summer shuttle season

Potential Interpretive Center

- Potentially provide larger kiosk or small building at Irving or Homestead

WINTER MANAGEMENT (October through April)

Access

- No winter shuttle service will be provided
- Allow private vehicles to access area
- Allow parking only in designated sites
- Charge user fees

Camping

- Allow dispersed camping at developed recreation sites (no fires)

Southern Wild Segment

Access / Management

- Adjust wild boundary to the south to remove segment that contains a road.
- Access via existing trail network
- No fires allowed
- Allow dispersed camping year-round
- Designate as Primitive ROS classification

Phased Implementation Plan

Full implementation of the CRMP could take up to 3 years and would be dependent upon funding. A phased approach is necessary to begin implementation immediately upon finalization of the management plan.

Phase I - Immediate Implementation (first round implementation, design, funding sources)

- Implement Day Use Only policy immediately when plan is approved.
- Make campfire ban permanent.
- Institute fees after public involvement, presentation to Resource Advisory Committee, and approval (evaluate options as part of the CRMP process).
- Add entry gates and entry stations on the Fossil Creek Road (from Camp Verde) and Strawberry Road to control access and numbers of people (two people at all times at each gate). The purpose is to collect fees, limit user numbers when capacity is met, and provide information on the existing regulations and available parking locations (informational, not enforcement).
- Limit the number of people accessing Middle Fossil to the number of existing parking spaces (approximately 100). A large portion of the spaces are not where people traditionally recreate in the area.
- Add additional porta-potties, trash pick-up, and a few picnic tables (built to accessible standards) at key recreation sites.
- Improve signage for interpretation and protection of ORVs.
- Install composting toilets at Fossil Springs dispersed camping area.
- Delineate trails and improve access for ORV protection (cultural, wildlife, etc).
- Add footbridge at the Irving site and immediate amenities (toilet, picnic tables, etc.). This would be the first site for full development.
- Develop a shuttle pull off at the Bridge Area that could be used as parking during Phase I.
- Evaluate roads for immediate sedimentation and erosion controls needs and implement improvements and **BMP's** in order of priority.
- Pave/concrete the approaches to the bridges and add **other BMP's to control sediment**
- Explore different dust abatement and soil stabilizer options to reduce impacts to water quality (soil stabilizers, binders, asphalt, etc).
- Survey, design, and fundraise for desired improvements in construction (shuttle, shuttle stops, facilities, etc).
- Develop plans for low-improvement areas (places with minimal improvements or design).
- Pursue permits from ADEQ and other agencies, as required.
- Assess areas for first priority fuel treatments and implement as appropriate (protect immediate riparian corridor first, larger watershed second).

Phase II- Construction

- Construction and development of shuttle staging areas, parking, shuttle stops, facilities, trails, creek access points.
- Construction would be phased to avoid summer season (winter and shoulder seasons)
- Increase interpretation facilities

Phase III- Shuttle Implementation, Facility Construction

- Implement shuttle system for all summer (May – September) access.
- Increase interpretation facilities

Resource Components

Wildlife & Fisheries

- Continued maintenance of fish barriers allowed (encourage Bureau of Reclamation to continue when commitment lapses).
- Maintain ability to remove non-natives from the fishery through different measures (physical, chemical). Removal may be required from stock tanks and Fossil Creek.
- Maintain ability to treat noxious and invasive weeds (physical, chemical, and biological). Chemical treatment is within current NEPA allowances.
- **Establish closure orders to prohibit entry into areas identified as crucial for Threatened and Endangered Species habitat or life cycle processes.**
- Preserve/protect mesquite stands.
- Develop an emergency response plan to balance resource protection with emergency situations. Heli-spots, if required, need to be sited to avoid black-hawk nesting sites.
- Emphasize interpretation on aquatic invasive species at key locations (Bridge area, etc.).
- [Forest Plan] Prohibit felt-soled waders, encourage lug sole waders.

Water

- Support continued placement of water gage at bridge
- Support studies that investigate the indirect or cumulative impacts to the water quantity in Fossil Creek from groundwater pumping. Pumping could be from increased water demand in Strawberry and from facility use in corridor.
- Maintain Childs Road (FR 502) south of the Purple Mountain area to prevent sedimentation into the creek. Maintenance could involve paving a small section or rerouting the road,
- Support Gila County dust suppression measures (paving or other appropriate methods) for the Fossil Creek road between Strawberry and the forest boundary to reduce dust to residents.
- Maintain the ability to have a gauging station on the creek for monitoring.
- Consider adding a water quality monitoring feature to the gauging station.
- [Forest Plan] Proposals for development within the recharge area for Fossil Creek would require analysis for their impact upon water recharge to Fossil Creek
- Quantify federal reserved water rights needed to protect or enhance the ORVs.
- Install and maintain BMPs on roads and trails, recreation sites, and other areas of disturbance.

History and Traditional Cultural Uses

- Continue cultural inventory.
- Focus interpretation on cultural importance of Fossil Creek.
- Accommodate tribal ceremonial events and ceremonial gatherings in cooperation with federally-recognized tribes to the maximum extent possible.
- Encourage a site steward program on site.

Geology

- Support monitoring and research on travertine.
- Support research on the potential effects of recreation (swimming, kayaking) on travertine formation

Fire

- Priority treatments should occur where fire intensity and fire severity pose a threat to public safety.
- Treat within fuel types where potential fire severities may impact soil and water quality.
- Reintroduce low severity disturbance into pinyon-juniper woodland and ponderosa pine systems.
- Examine, design, and implement treatments to reduce or minimize the impact of wildfire to aquatic habitat in Fossil Creek.

Lands & Special Uses

- Prioritize the acquisition of water rights and property that would enhance and protect ORVs
- Develop a strategy for future communication site development (cell towers, etc.).
- Manage vegetation surrounding transmission and power lines to minimize risk of wildfire starts and provide access for regular maintenance while minimizing impact to ORVs
- Commercial photography would be prohibited in wilderness and wild segments unless wilderness dependent and necessary for wilderness administration.
- Commercial photography may be allowed in non-wilderness recreational segments

Livestock & Grazing

- Grazing allocations would be allowed following the guidelines established in recent grazing NEPA for Coconino NF.
- Water lanes and access to water would be negotiated with recreation use.
- Boundaries of the Tonto allotments would be adjusted to avoid unsuitable areas (steep slopes, feed, etc.) within the WSR Corridor.

Botany

- Maintain Fossil Springs Botanical Area and support plant surveys of the area.