Eastern Arizona Courier Feb. 11, 1987

Aravaipa plans are released

By Debbie Romano

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Safford District, has written a management plan for the Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness (ACW), which was designated by Congress in August 1984. The wilderness covers 6,699 acres in western Graham and eastern Pinal counties.

The draft plan identifies management policies and proposed management actions that will protect the wilderness as well as allow people to continue to use and enjoy the area.

The proposed action in the draft emphasizes preserving the wilderness character and resources of the ACW, while managing recreation and other use in a manner that will leave ACW unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as a wilderness.

Under the proposed action, recreation use of ACW would be subject to limits of acceptable change (LAC) standards and indicators that will be established for critical resource elements of the wilderness.

In addition to the proposed action, the following three alternatives have been considered: no action, resource protection and recreation enhancement.

Implementation of the proposed action would maintain and enhance the environment of the wilderness while allowing for recreation use to continue. Indeed, the implementation of the plan would have no significant impact on the policies currently being followed for the wilderness, according to the draft statement.

The primary management action to occur under the proposed action would be the establishment of the LAC. In the long run this action would result in stabilizing soils and reducing vegetation damage along trails, in campsites and at other visitor use areas. The implementation of water quality monitoring would provide data to signal any changes that would require corrective action.

This wilderness management plan establishes the objectives, policies and actions by which Aravaipa will be managed for the 10-year period through 1997. It also outlines a sequence for implementing management actions and provides for monitoring the accomplishments of the plan.

Aravaipa is located north of the Galiuro Mountains in eastern Pinal County and western Graham County. Its lies 90 miles southeast of Phoenix and 40 miles west of Safford. Access to the wilderness is available primarily by two county-maintained roads, the Aravaipa Road from the west and the Klondyke Road from the east. Permits are required.

Aravaipa Canyon has long been recognized for its natural qualities and significant ecological attributes. Aravaipa Creek flows all year round, supporting lush riparian vegetation.

The plan itself is available for review at the Safford District office. Written comments on the plan will be accepted through Friday, April 3. Comments should be sent to:

Bureau of Land Management
425 E. Fourth Street
Safford, AZ 85546

Comments received will be used in preparing the final management plan. A copy of the final plan will be provided to those who submit comments on the draft or request a copy.

IN REPLY REFER TO:

8560
(044)

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
SAFFORD DISTRICT OFFICE
425 E. 4th Street
Safford, Arizona 85546
(602) 428-4040

This draft Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness Management Plan is being distributed for your review and comment. Bureau of Land Management policy requires that a management plan be prepared for all designated wilderness areas on public land. The plan describes the proposed management direction for Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness. Information used in preparing the plan has been obtained from BLM and other federal, state and local agency sources and from interested individuals and organizations.

Written comments on the plan will be accepted through April 3, 1987. Your comments should be sent to:

Bureau of Land Management
425 East 4th Street
Safford, Arizona 85546

Comments received will be used in preparing the final management plan. A copy of the final plan will be provided to those who submit comments on the draft or request a copy. I appreciate your interest in Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness.

Sincerely,

Lester K. Rosenkrance

Lester K. Rosenkrance
District Manager

Enclosure

ARAVAIPA CANYON WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT PLAN

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT

Summary of Issues

The ranchers were concerned with the impact of wilderness management on maintenance of livestock facilities and use of vehicles to manage their operations. Other persons felt livestock should not be permitted in either the canyon or the wilderness because of their impacts on the visitor and the resource. Trailing cattle in the canyon was a concern because of impacts on the visitors' and because the visitors could panic the cattle disrupting the cattle drive.

Issues

1. How will livestock facilities be maintained?

2. Will ranchers be permitted to use motorized vehicles for maintenance of range facilities and placement of salt?

3. Can ranchers continue to use jeep trails on the tablelands within the wilderness?

4. Livestock should not be allowed in the canyon or the wilderness due to impacts to people and the wilderness values.

5. Trailing cattle (about 2 times per year) through the canyon impacts the visitors' experience.

6. When cattle are trailed through the canyon, contacts with visitors may panic cattle disrupting the livestock drive.

7. BLM should make a greater effort to keep livestock out of the wilderness.

8. Livestock cause a greater impact to Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness (ACW) than the 50 people per day.

USAV-00005546

WATER

Summary of Issues

All comments addressed preservation and maintenance of water quantity and quality. Specifically comments addressed water quality standards and measures BLM should use to achieve desired quality and quantity standards.

Issues

1. BLM should manage the waters of ACW to a potable water standard.

2. BLM should manage the waters of ACW to the highest possible water quality standard (chemical and biological). Avoid the use of the word "potable".

3. To maintain the quantity and quality of water in ACW, BLM should: study the sources of water for Aravaipa Creek; consider upstream sources on private land; consider a planning area that also includes the watershed outside ACW; and consider the concerns of local residents regarding the watershed study area.

4. How will water quality in ACW be protected and maintained?

5. How will water quantity in ACW be protected and maintained?

6. To maintain water quality, BLM should look closely at and understand the sources of Aravaipa Creek.

USAV-00005547

AIRCRAFT OVERFLIGHTS

Summary of Issues

The public is concerned with aircraft overflight above ACW. They are specifically concerned with the impacts of noise on the visitors and wildlife and the hazards of fuel spills or aircraft crashes. Most felt aircraft use should be limited or not allowed, except for search and rescue operations. The Air Force, however, expressed concern that their training routes in the area be maintained for continued use.

Issues

1. ACW should be identified on air sectional charts.

2. What is the extent of aircraft overflights of ACW?

3. How can BLM control overflights?

4. What is the impact of noise on visitors and wildlife?

5. BLM should control their own use of aircraft over ACW for recreation management, wildlife management, etc.

6. Aircraft overflights above ACW should be limited (military, private, and agency use).

7. Sightseeing tours and play should not be allowed.

8. Aircraft use for search and rescue should be allowed.

9. There are hazards of overflights including aircraft crashes, fuel spills, and noise impacts on visitor's solitude.

10. No aircarft activity should be allowed except search and rescue operations.

11. Can the actions the Grand Canyon National Park is taking in dealing with their aircraft overflight problem be used by BLM to limit this activity over ACW?

12. The Air Force trains in the vicinity of ACW (sometimes directly over the wilderness) and is concerned with the impacts wilderness management will have on the continued use of their training routes.

USAV-00005548

FIRE MANAGEMENT

Summary of Issues

All comments addressed the use of prescribed fire. They addressed its effect on wildlife and wildfire and its use as a resource management tool in place of allowing fire to play a more natural role in the environment.

Issues

1. Prescribed fire should be planned to consider the effects on wildlife, including non-game birds.

2. Fire should be considered as a management tool rather than simply letting fire play a natural role in the ecosystem.

3. Is there a need to use prescribed fire in ACW to keep fuel loading down and control wildfire.

USAV-00005549

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Summary of Issues

Only one comment addressed cultural resources.

Issues

1. BLM should place management emphasis on protecting cultural resources rather than on interpretation, excavation, or stabilization of sites.

USAV-00005550

WILDLIFE

Summary of Issues

Comments covered habitat manipulation, conflicts between visitors and wildlife, exotic species and predator control. Comments stated wildlife should be kept in balance with their habitat without man-made enhancements or manipulations that would degrade the wilderness. Possible conflicts between visitors and two wildlife species, bighorn sheep and black hawks, were identified. Comments focused on camping near critical water and nest trees, identifying seasons or periods when sheep and hawks are most susceptible to disturbance and educating visitors. Exotic species should be controlled or eradicated. Though doubt was expressed over the need control predators in the wilderness, any control should focus on individual animals.

Issues

1. Habitat manipulations should be permitted only where it will not degrade the wilderness resource.

2. Wildlife should be kept in balance with their habitat. It should be a natural situation, without man-made enhancements.

3. Should native species be introduced and habitat manipulated to increase numbers?

4. Should supplemental or artificial waters be built in the wilderness for bighorn sheep?

5. Construction of artificial water for bighorn sheep is contrary to the concept of wilderness. The sheep are doing fine without them.

6. Wildlife species should be managed rather than "allowed" to exist as a result of natural processes.

7. What conflicts are there between people and wildlife?

8. Are there conflicts between visitors and bighorn sheep lambing? Lambing can occur from February to April.

9. People camping where wildlife come to water can have a critical effect in drought years.

10. In dry years, water generally remains in Horse Camp, Virgus, and Booger Canyons.

11. If bighorn sheep are ever removed from ACW for transplanting to other areas, how will it be done?

12. What effect do visitors have on nesting raptors, particularly black hawks?

13. Visitors should be educated about the detrimental effects of camping or remaining near nest trees?

USAV-00005551

14. Visitors should be aware of black hawk distress calls.

15. Should visitors be asked to avoid certain trees or areas or would identifying specific trees cause people to go there, such as for photography, and inadvertently harass the hawks.

16. Black hawks are susceptible to being disturbed from May through June. Should visitors be informed of this?

17. Exotic species should not be introduced.

18. Exotic species should be controlled or eradicated. Visitors should be encouraged to pull up salt cedar.

19. Will there be a need for predator control in ACW? Is there any plan for managing predatory animals in the area?

20. Predator control should focus on individuals rather than species.

USAV-00005552

VEGETATION

Summary of Issues

The comments addressed the impacts of visitor use on vegetation and BLM manipulation of the riparian community.

Issues

1. What level of BLM manipulation should occur in riparian vegetation management?

2. Increased visitor use has affected vegetation. What impact does visitor use have on the vegetation/ecosystem?

USAV-00005553

RECREATION

Summary of Issues

Comments addressed many aspects of recreation use and management in ACW. Topics included length of stay restrictions, what parts of ACW the permit system should apply to, allocation of individual use vs. commercial use, and use of jeep trails within the wilderness. Other issues addressed livestock use, camping areas, hunting and trapping, campfire restrictions, and limitations on numbers of visitor. Finally visitor safety and the impacts of visitor use on adjacent lands (public and private) were also identified.

Issues

1. Will commercial use be considered in the determination of visitor carrying capacity?

2. BLM should consider camping areas that are not next to the creek?

3. The length of stay restriction (max. 3 days and 2 nights) should be extended for special purposes.

4. BLM should analyze which types of recreation activities that are appropriate in ACW.

5. BLM should develop an allocation philosophy or system for different types of uses.

6. BLM should give careful consideration to increased visitor use because all resource values and uses are closely related to visitor use.

7. BLM should address visitor safety in the management plan, particularly flooding, search and rescue, and firearm use.

8. Should hunters be included in the 50 person per day limit since they primarily use the tablelands and not the main canyon?

9. Should the 50 person per day limit apply to the entire wilderness or only the canyon bottoms?

10. There should be no limit on visitor use of the tablelands.

11. It would be difficult to limit use on the tablelands. Should there be a separate permit for use of the tablelands or no permit required at all?

12. Will hunters be permitted to use jeep trails on the tablelands within the wilderness?

13. How will BLM provide for visitors who don't have permits to use ACW? They now spill over on the Defenders of Wildlife property or adjacent public lands. Additional opportunities are needed for these visitors.

USAV-00005554

14. A camping area is needed for visitors who arrive the day before their permit is valid.

15. What horseback riding opportunities will be provided for in AWC?

16. The day use only requirement for horseback use should be maintained.

17. Will llamas be permitted in AWC?

18. Commercial use in ACW should continue as it is currently administered. There should be equal access for commercial uses.

19. Will there be designated camping areas to prevent or control environmental damage?

20. Hunting is not an appropriate use in the canyon below the rim because wildlife are not plentiful and it is dangerous to visitors.

21. Trapping should not be allowed in the canyon. Limit trapping to areas away from visitor use areas.

22. There are too many visitors in ACW. The limit should not be increased.

23. BLM should give consideration to camping restrictions including limits on nearness to the creek and limits on use of campfires due to the fuelwood supply.

24. There is some benefit to burning part of the driftwood carried down in the 1983 flood.

25. BLM should notify permit holders of hunting seasons.

26. Will existing road access be lost with wilderness management?

USAV-00005555

ADMINISTRATION

Summary of Issues

Comments dealt with personnel working at the canyon, enforcement of rules and regulations, identification of boundaries, the reservation system and fees, the West Aravaipa Road and visitor education. Concern was expressed about the effect of budgets cuts or increased visitor use on the rangers. Comments on enforcement authorities and penalties regarding violations of rules and boundaries were brought up. One comment addressed making the reservation system more convenient for the visitor. Another dealt with considering arrangements that would allow donations so that money collected could be used at the area. Residents at the west end of Aravaipa want BLM to encourage the county to improve or relocate the county road . Another comment addressed concern over hazards to visitors as a result of certain activities of others.

Issues

1. Will there be a need for additional rangers if use increases?

2. The area needs people to enforce rules and regulations. Personnel should be on duty in ACW 7 days a week.

3. In light of budget cuts, are there alternatives to staffing the area with rangers?

4. Volunteers or conservation corps personnel could assist in managing the area.

5. What enforcement authorities and penalties exist to deal with rule violators?

6. How are the boundaries identified, especially on the tablelands?

7. How is the use of vehicles within the boundaries enforced?

8. Can a better reservation system be found to eliminate the need for two phone calls to acquire a permit?

9. Do fees cover some of the costs operating? BLM could consider a donation box at the trailheads, so funds could stay with the area.

10. Will BLM remove the toilet in the canyon?

11. The West Aravaipa Road needs relocation or maintenance for visitor and residents' safety and continued use. BLM should encourage the county to get on with the work.

12. An effort should be made to educate people of the dangers of rolling rocks in the canyon and engaging in other hazardous activities.

USAV-00005556

13. The values present in Aravaipa Canyon should be addressed in brochures.

14. The public should assist in identifying resource values.

15. Monitoring and plan revision should determine use adjustments rather than historical precedence.

USAV-00005557

OTHER ISSUES

Summary of Issues

A variety of other issues were identified. These comments addressed the effects of the current BLM/State Land Department exchange on visitor use and our management plan, natural history studies, the effects of flooding, changes in visitor use patterns, the UofA carrying capacity study, mining, and the effects of increased visitor use.

Issues

1. Will the State lands being acquired in the exchange around ACW be included in the wilderness management plan?

2. Natural history studies should be encouraged in ACW.

3. ACW is prone to flooding. This can affect what the area looks like.

4. ACW should not be open to mineral entry.

5. Changes in visitor use patterns will affect adjacent residents.

6. What will the University of Arizona study cover? Will it lead to more visitors?

7. Increased visitor use could lead to commercial development (goods and services) needed to support that use.

8. With completion of the BLM/State Land Department exchange in the Aravaipa Canyon area, will there be a significant increase in visitor use in ACW and along the county road to the trailheads at either end of the canyon?

USAV-00005558

ARAVAIPA CANYON WMP
SUMMARY OF ISSUES RECEIVED BY MAIL AND PHONE

Five letters and two telephone conversations in December and early January addressed issues regarding Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness (ACW) management. Issues ranged from topics on water resources, native fish and bighorn sheep to visitor use and use of llamas as packstock.

Al Haralson 12-04-85 Phone conversation

Llamas should continue to be allowed.

Overnight use of the canyon bottom with llamas as packstock should be allowed.

C. E. Leith 12-08-85 Letter

Manage ACW to retain the opportunity for a true wilderness experience.

Whittell Trust 12-11-85 Letter

The main focus of the management plan should be protection of the many exceptional wildlife values associated with the Aravaipa Canyon Area.

Further study native fish populations in Aravaipa Creek and tributaries.

Continue water quality analysis utilizing stream guaging stations at both ends of the wilderness.

Establish a weather station to faciliate management of wildlife resources through a clearer understanding of streamflow factors.

Establish a water quality measurement system to help protect important wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Continue detailed monitoring of the watershed and establish controls as needed on livestock, mining and recreation uses.

Continue assessment of visitor use impacts to wildlife values in the main canyon.

Assess possible reintroduction of bighorn sheep on the south rim of the canyon to establish a second lambing area.

Review water rights and filing for rights as needed to protect existing wildlife needs.

Continue efforts to facilitate more effective management of the area by BLM through land exchange with state and private landowners.

Arizona State Parks 12-16-85 Letter

The strongest protective measures should be implemented for the area's many natural values.

List Aravaipa Canyon on the State Natural Area Register.

The perennial water flow and its quality must be maintained as it is the primary element of this unique ecosystem.

Give special emphasis to enhancing riparian habitat and dependent wildlife species.

Give primary emphasis to protecting wilderness qualities by managing increasing visitor use.

Evaluate needed management changes due to acquisition of approximately 50,000 acres of state land adjacent to ACW.

Proper management of visitor use in tributary canyons may alleviate some impacts in the main canyon.

Expand wilderness management boundaries to include newly exchanged lands.

Develop intensive protective measures to enhance wildlife populations and wilderness characteristics in acquired areas.

Sierra Club - Grand Canyon Chapter, Rincon Group 12-24-85 Letter

Continue management without major changes.

Upstream sources of the creek should be closely monitored to assure a continued supply of good quality water. The perennial stream and associated riparian vegetation make Aravaipa Canyon unique in southern Arizona.

Exclude livestock from the canyon bottom. Fences may have to be extended to accomplish this.

The military's use of nearby airspace should not be allowed to encroach into the canyon itself.

The results of the carrying capacity study being conducted by the University of Arizona should be carefully considered when determining appropriate visitor use.

Hunting may not be compatible with other recreational uses in the canyon. Steps may have to be taken to keep the two uses separated.

Steve Williams 01-07-86 Phone conservation

The State/BLM land exchange should enhance and expand BLM's opportunities for sheep management.

Use of helicopters for habitat development and sheep management (retrieval of dead sheep, tracking radio collared sheep, transplants, etc.) should not be prohibited.

USAV-00005560

Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society, Inc. 01-09-86 Letter

The welfare of the desert bighorn sheep should be the primary concern. ACW should be dedicated to the conservation of the desert bighorn sheep.

The use of helicopters, motor vehicles, portable power tools, etc., for water development or other habitat enhancement projects within ACW should be allowed.

Arizona Game and Fish Department has established a precedence for use of aircraft in ACW to monitor radio-collared bighorn sheep movement by fixed wing and to conduct yearly surveys by helicopter for years. This use was well established prior to wilderness designation.

The use of aircraft should be allowed to continue for bighorn sheep management purposes according to Chapter II, B.5b. of the Wilderness Management Policy.

USAV-00005561