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BLM preserving a rich area of San Pedro Valley

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and its potential use for education is fantastic," Rucks said.

"OK," she said, "you can interpret the whole occupation of human history of the Southwest in this area. Well, that's neat. But what's even neater is you can do it in an environmental context: how the local environment dictated just how this area was used and the whole interplay between man and animal throughout history."

BLM intends to cancel Fitzgerald's grazing lease as of December 1987, as it is allowed to do under the terms of the land exchange that brought it into federal ownership. The shady glen that shelters the century-old Rancho de Boquillas house and outbuildings, now occupied by Fitzgerald and his family, will probably become BLM project headquarters.

Cattle grazing in the area will be prohibited for at least 15 years, time enough for BLM to see what will grow there when cattle are not keeping the growth close-cropped.

"You're gonna miss these cows when the grass gets up to your navel," Campbell teased as he and Rucks looked over a park-like riverbank near Lewis Springs.

"We can live without the cows," Rucks shot back with a laugh.

"Yep," Campbell agreed, calling over the bawling of a nearby steer, "we can."

Campbell stopped walking down a broad wash just north of the old Charleston Road crossing. He squatted down to examine large tire tread marks.

"The boys and their four-wheelers have been here since the last rain," he said. "I can't wait until Kevin gets here. He just *loves* off-roaders."

Campbell was talking about Kevin Freeman, a BLM ranger now in California who soon will be assigned to the San Pedro project to enforce BLM's use prohibitions. Those prohibitions include off-road vehicles.

They also include the wildcat firewood cutting that has taken its toll on a nearby mesquite grove. Other activities, such as hunting, will be strictly controlled.

"This area is thick with jackrabbits and cottontails, too," said Jim Gacey. Gacey, another BLM biologist, was talking about a broad floodway near the Hereford Road bridge, lined on either side by towering Fremont cottonwood trees.

The cottonwoods are named after the general, John C. Fremont, who wrote about them in his journals and who was Arizona's first territorial governor.

The river, swollen with recent rains, rolled northward, 10 to 12 feet wide in places, the color of butterscotch. Graceful willows and walnut trees dotted the water's edge.

"You can also find skunks and badgers here," said Gacey, "and every variety of bird found in the area (258 varieties have so far been identified). Arizona State University is going to do a fishery inventory here later."

BLM is recruiting volunteers, mostly university students, to enumerate birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, fish and vegetation. Each survey takes several months to conduct.

"You know, 90 percent of all the animals found in this part of the state can be seen in riparian areas (waterside groves of trees and grasses); 70 to 75 percent breed and nest there," Gacey said.

Riparian growth, wildlife nesting and feeding places do not end at the clean rectangular boundaries of the BLM property. The proposed conservation area will have to be enlarged if the ecosystems Rucks mentioned are to be encompassed.

The House bill declaring the area a National Conservation Area originally limited the area to 60,000 acres. The BLM and environmentalists objected. The bill as passed contains no limit, but specifies that acquisition of additional land outside the existing boundaries will require separate acts of Congress.

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