

# Leave our burned trees alone, Smoky

## Burned, remnant trees important for forest health, bird species

by Bob Witzeman

*There is nothing more terrible to see than ignorance in action.—Goethe*

Rustler Park is a Mecca for wildlife enthusiasts who come from across the nation to witness a myriad of unique southwestern U.S. birds. It is the only accessible place in the United States for birders to see the Mexican Chickadee. Recently, Coronado National Forest officials released a proposal to log standing, burned trees just a few hundred yards from Rustler Park in the Chiricahua mountains. Conservationists at Tucson's Student Environmental Action Coalition-Southwest, Tucson's Southwest Center for Biodiversity, and from mainstream Arizona groups paid five dollars per standing, burned tree as logging fees to the Coronado National Forest Service to keep these trees from being cut. Many trees were logged even though conservationists bid on them. The money was not refunded.

Many people ask, why would conservationists willingly pay the forest service to save standing trees? The answer is that standing trees that are "unharvested," dead, and burned are a vital element in a healthy and dynamic forest ecosystem.

Standing, burned trees become smorgasbords for avifauna as these trees lose their natural defenses to insects.

Furthermore, the soft wood of burned trees makes it easier for birds to excavate invading insects and to build new nest cavities. Fire usually results in a mosaic burn-pattern. The interfaces of burned and non-burned areas are highly productive for wildlife. Birds and other wildlife converge upon the diversity of increased food sources in these "interface" areas.

Insectivorous birds are key health-care providers in the forest. They control insect pests associated with forest disease before

insect populations get out of hand. Forest Service fire suppression practices in the Southwest's heavily logged, even-aged

reptiles. Decomposing fallen trees provide nutrients and fertilizer for the next generation of trees and plant life.

Cutting burned stands of trees and hauling them away on logging trucks stands "forest health" on its head. Such actions are testimony to the outdated policies of the U.S. Forest Service.

Following Arizona's heavy wildfire season last year, Forest Service administrators are entertaining plans to log many of our recently burned areas statewide—including irreplaceable sky island ecosystems like Mt. Graham. They tell the public they need to log standing burned trees because they are a marketable commodity. They seem unable to think beyond a decades-old, narrowly focused extractive philosophy.

This extractive argument is illogical. Less than 10% of this nation's wood products come from our federal lands. Weyerhaeuser has said this nation's needs could easily be met from privately owned forests. But Weyerhaeuser says they will continue to use the federal forests as long as they are taxpayer subsidized, below-market hand-outs from Congress to the logging industry. Losses on logging sales on our public lands cost taxpayers \$398 million in 1995 according to the Wilderness Society. Ninety-five out of 109 of our national forests in 1995 lost money on their timber sales. Only Congress can stop the Forest Service from destroying the public's forests—our forests.

Here are some of Arizona's cavity-nesting avian "health care providers" now being adversely affected by "anti-forest health" practices in the Southwest: Impacted mammals and fish, and lost hunting and fishing opportunities are equally important.

American Kestrel, Barn Owl, Screech Owl, Whiskered Owl, Flammulated Owl, Pygmy Owl, Ferruginous Owl, Pygmy Owl, Elf Owl, Spotted Owl, trogons, Gila Wood-

pecker, Acorn Woodpecker, Lewis' Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, Williamson's Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Arizona Woodpecker, Three-toed Woodpecker, Sulfur-bellied Flycatcher, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Western Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, Violet-green Swallow, Purple Martin, Mountain Chickadee, Mexican Chickadee, White-breasted Chickadee, Red-breasted Chickadee, Pygmy, Plain Titmouse, Brown Creeper, House Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Western Bluebird, Mountain Bluebird, Lucy's Warbler.



Rattlesnake Timber Sale, Chiricahua Mountains, Arizona. Misguided Forest Service logging of burned trees removes the very components needed to provide for a healthy, dynamic new forest.  
—Bob Witzeman photo

forests have left few old growth trees, few incipient snags, and few actual snags. The reduction of both natural snags and dead, burned "snaglike" trees reduces the amount of bare branches for perching and foraging avian species such as woodpeckers, flycatchers, swallows, and thrushes. When the branches of burned trees fall or break off they additionally become valuable shelters for cavity using bats, birds, and other wildlife.

After a few years burned trees begin to fall. These disintegrating fallen trees provide shelter for mammals, bats, birds, and

In addition, burned trees, both standing and fallen, help reduce soil erosion. Fallen trees can interlace across hilly areas reducing soil loss and erosion. Logging standing burned trees, besides eliminating their erosion prevention function, also brings extensive soil destruction and erosion due to heavy logging machinery. The Forest Service also builds logging roads, further compounding this problem. Soil loss from erosion causes stream siltation and pollution, impacts sport fishing, diminishes native fish populations, inhibits groundwater recharge, and reduces the quality of drinking water.

# Bird lovers picket to protest sun-grown coffee

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THE TRIBUNE, FRIDAY, MARCH 12, 1999 A9

## Say shade makes for a better environment

BY GUY WEBSTER  
THE TRIBUNE

Bird lovers picketed Thursday in Tempe to say the type of coffee that retailers sell and consumers buy affects the survival of some types of birds that migrate between Arizona and Latin America.

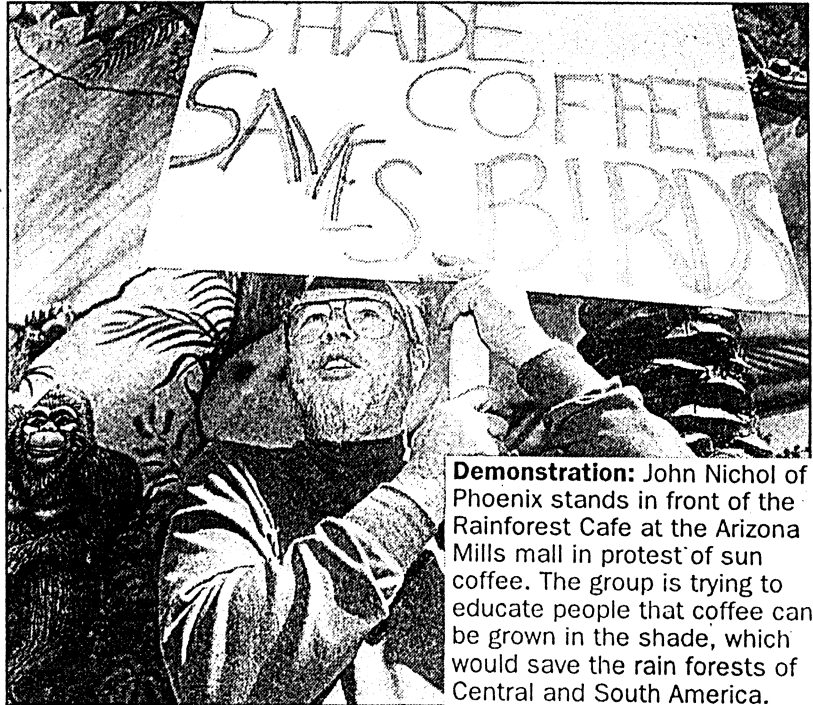
About 25 members of the Audubon Society and other environmental groups lifted placards outside Arizona Mills mall with messages such as "Sun Coffee Kills Birds" and "Rainforest Cafe: Walk the Talk."

Older-style plantations, where coffee grows in the shade of assorted tall trees, provide wildlife habitat that is being lost in much of Latin America by transition to full-sun coffee plantations, said protest organizer Robert Witzeman.

Rainforest Cafe was the immediate target of the group's call for selling shade-grown coffee, but the environment-themed restaurant defused the confrontation by announcing tentative plans to add shade-grown coffee in its 30 U.S. and international locations.

"We're appreciative of the Audubon Society for bringing this issue to our attention," said Gary Morrow, Rainforest Cafe vice president.

Summer tanagers, Bullock's orioles, yellow warblers and some other birds live in the Valley part of the year, but in winter months need tropical forest habitat, which full-sun coffee plantations are ruining, said



**Demonstration:** John Nichol of Phoenix stands in front of the Rainforest Cafe at the Arizona Mills mall in protest of sun coffee. The group is trying to educate people that coffee can be grown in the shade, which would save the rain forests of Central and South America.

BRAD ARMSTRONG/TRIBUNE

Arizona State University biologist Mark Hostetler.

The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, in Washington D.C., has promoted shade-grown coffee since 1996 as a way to counteract dwindling numbers of song birds.

"From Colombia north, on at least half of the coffee plantations, all or most of the trees have been removed," Smithsonian ornithologist Russ Greenberg said this week.

While much of Latin American coffee is still shade-grown, the only way to provide a targeted economic incentive to reverse the trend to sun coffee is to label shade-grown coffee and promote it, Greenberg said.

No mainstream supermarkets, coffeehouses or restaurants in the Valley sell a labelled shade-grown coffee, Witzeman said.

Specialty stores offering it include Wild Oats, Trader Joe's, Gentle Strength Cooperative and Phoenix Zoo's gift shop.

Trader Joe's began stocking it last year because customers were asking for it, said Jon Alber, coffee-buyer for the chain. Currently, it retails for \$6.99 per 13-ounce bag, while comparable quality coffee from unspecified growing conditions costs \$4.19.

Spokespeople for Starbuck's Coffee and for the supplier of Coffee Plantation said those chains might start selling certified shade-grown coffee if enough customers request it.

# Audubon group fights delisting of bald eagles

## Claims plan threatens Arizona's population

BY GUY WEBSTER  
THE TRIBUNE

Bald eagles could disappear from Arizona within 20 years if the federal government pushes ahead with plans to take them off the nation's threatened species list, a spokesman for a local Audubon group says.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has declared victory in saving bald eagles nationwide and wants to remove them from the list of threatened and endangered species.

But Maricopa Audubon Society members and others are saying that regardless of the eagles' status in the rest of the country, the population that nests in Arizona should remain listed.

Some bald eagles nest within 10 miles of Mesa and Scottsdale along the Salt and Verde rivers.

"The desert-nesting population is so small, if they are delisted, there's a good chance they will be gone within 10 or 20 years," said Tempe resident Herb Fibel, a member of the society's board of directors, on Wednesday.

Some of the opponents of the delisting will present their case during a Fish and Wildlife Service hearing at 6:30 p.m. today at the Burton Barr Central Library,

1221 N. Central Ave., Phoenix.

The birds that nest in Arizona rarely interbreed with eagles from other states, so saving the birds elsewhere would not substitute for saving the ones here, he said.

Chandler physician Ron Sell, who did field research on bald eagles in college, said, "There's so much competition for using water here, the bald eagle is always going to be endangered in Arizona."

Throughout the lower 48 state, loss of habitat and DDT poisoning had reduced the number of known breeding pairs of bald eagles to 417 in the 1960s, when they were first listed as an endangered species under the new Endangered Species Act. Helped by the protection of that law, their numbers have grown to more than 5,700 pairs nationwide. Their status was revised from "endangered" to "threatened" in 1995.

The number of bald eagle nesting sites in Arizona has grown from 28 in the 1980s to 40 now, said eagle biologist James Driscoll with the Arizona Game and Fish Department. This year, 36 pairs used those sites and raised 31 chicks old enough to leave their nests. Most years, the Arizona population produces about 20 chicks.

A nest-watch project for the past 20 years gets much of the credit for the increase in Arizona's bald eagle population. Paid watchers monitor about a dozen nests each year from February to



ANDY SAWYER/TRIBUNE

**Bird watcher:** Herb Fibel of Tempe, a member of the board of directors of Maricopa Audubon Society, says that if bald eagles are not protected, they could disappear within 20 years.

May. They deter recreationalists from bothering the eagles and have rescued more than 50 chicks from life-threatening situations, such as falls from nests or entanglement in fishing line.

Nest-watching and other protection programs for Arizona eagles cost nearly \$300,000 per year. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Arizona Game and Fish Department say they intend to continue the programs after the delisting.

"I don't trust the government to do those things unless there's a law we can hold them to," Sell said.

# Sonoran park proposal is unique plan

## Unites 3 areas of valued habitat

Arizonans have a unique opportunity to protect, preserve and pass on to future generations a biologically priceless piece of Sonoran Desert habitat in Southwestern Arizona with the establishment of the Sonoran Desert National Park and Preserve.

The new park would be created out of three existing federally managed areas: Organ Pipe National Monument, Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge and the Goldwater Air Force Range. The area encompasses about 5,000 square miles.

The park proposal has received strong public support. A 1999 Rocky Mountain Poll showed 84 percent of Arizonans in favor of the proposal. The idea has been endorsed by environmental groups, businesses, newspapers and local governments, including the Pima County Board of Supervisors. Late last year, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., introduced legislation directing the Departments of Interior and Defense to do a park feasibility study.

Arizona's population is now pushing 5 million people and it is inevitable that the Sonoran Desert will attract more

MY TURN



CHARLES J. BABBITT

and more people in need of recreation and solitude. A recent study by the Nature Conservancy — which was reported in *The Arizona Republic* on April 29 — identified large areas within the proposed park area as urgently in need of protection. Parts of this fragile, vulnerable area are increasingly affected by off-road vehicle use, woodcutting, dumping, and other destructive human activity.

At present, the proposed park area is managed by three federal agencies — Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service and the Defense Department — all with different and sometimes conflicting management directives and goals.

Establishment of a National Park and Preserve would turn the area over to an agency (National Park Service) with a proven track record of balancing visitation and tourism with preservation and protection while guaranteeing the Department of Defense continued military use of the Goldwater Range

to train pilots.

Within the proposed park area's 3 million-plus acres are 13 mountain ranges, broad alluvial valleys and a stunning variety of landscapes and habitats that stretch along the Mexican border. The area contains over 600 species of plants, and is home to bighorn sheep, desert tortoise and the endangered Sonoran pronghorn antelope.

What makes the proposal even more attractive is that Mexico has established two large biosphere reserves south of the proposed park. The Pinacate Biosphere Reserve directly abuts it. It is a dry, harsh, wondrous landscape of extinct volcanoes, cinder cones, lava flows and steam blast craters which, in wet El Niño years, is ablaze with wildflowers.

The upper Gulf Biosphere Reserve includes the upper Sea of Cortez and Colorado River delta, an area where, prior to dam construction, jaguar and deer roamed immense gallery cottonwood and willow forests.

The Sonoran Desert National Park and Preserve can become a true international park with binational coordination of land protection, environmental planning and tourism. It would be the world's premier desert park, an international gold star for both the United States and

Mexico.

The park proposal is something that all Arizonans can support. It is not necessary to buy any additional land. The area is already owned and managed by the federal government. The plan would unify management of 3 million acres by combining several land managers into one, letting the National Park Service run the park. Mining, grazing and other public land uses will not be an issue because the area has long been withdrawn from those types of activities. Businesses will benefit. National parks are good for local and regional economies, providing long-term stable changes in the economic base.

Establishment of a Sonoran Desert National Park and Preserve is a bold, forward-looking proposal whose time has come. We owe it to future generations to seize this opportunity to preserve and protect this incredible natural area by adding it to our national park system.

Charles J. Babbitt is a Phoenix lawyer, past president of the Maricopa Audubon Society and a member of the Sonoran Desert National Park advisory board. Readers are invited to submit columns of up to 600 words. They will be selected for publication based on topic relevance and will be edited for length and clarity.

# Mt. Graham "found to be historic Apache site"

Mount Graham, Arizona (ICC)

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has declared Mount Graham is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a traditional cultural property under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of cultural resources deemed worthy of preservation.

Mount Graham, Dził' nchaá si'an or "big seated mountain," is sacred to the Western Apaches. USFS recently submitted a report to the Office of the Keeper of the National Register at the U.S. Dept. of Interior's National Park Service (NPS) agreeing with the petitions made by numerous Apache tribes, traditionalists, elders, anthropologists and many others since 1988.

Mount Graham has been a subject of controversy since 1988 when the University of Arizona (UofA), the Vatican and Germans constructed telescopes on this national public land. It was later revealed that former Forest

Supervisor Robert Tippeconnic - who was raised on the White Mountain Apache reservation - knew that Mt. Graham was sacred to the Apaches but suppressed that information. (See Dougherty, J., "Special Report - Star Whores," *Phoenix New Times*, June 16-22, 1993 at p. 26).

While the UofA telescope consortium now includes the universities of Ohio State, Minnesota, and Notre Dame, Italians and Germans, there is worldwide opposition to the telescopes being located on Mt. Graham. Furthermore, over twenty of the nation's leading astronomy institutions abandoned their plans for the Mt. Graham site after multiple studies showed superior quality viewing at sites elsewhere.

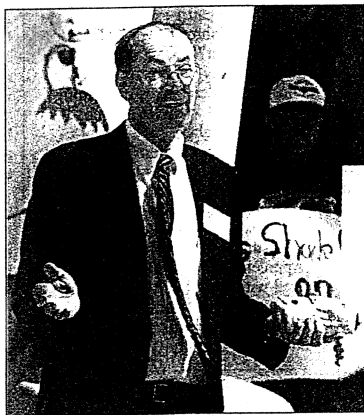
In 1996, the advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) found Mt. Graham likely to be an historic Apache traditional cultural and religious site. The ACHP also notified the Forest Service that the telescope project was not in compliance with historic preservation laws.

A federal lawsuit by Apache and conservation plaintiffs appealing a proposed 23-mile long high-voltage telescope powerline permanently scarring the mountain is currently in court.

Since 1990, numerous resolutions in defense of Mt. Graham and in opposition to the telescope compound have been passed by various national and international bodies. In recent years, the UA had Apache Wendsler Nosie, Sr., arrested for praying on the mountain. In a state court trial, Mr. Nosie was acquitted based on his First Amendment right to the free exercise of his religion. The UA has also demanded - unsuccessfully - that Apaches get permits to pray on Mt. Graham.

In 1992, Fr. George V. Coyne, S.J., the Director of the Vatican Observatory, issued a manifesto describing the alliance of conservationists and Native Americans seeking to protect Mt. Graham as "a kind of religiosity that must be suppressed with all the force we can muster."

## Retired physician honored for environmental work



Suzanne Starn/The Arizona Republic

Bob Witzeman leads a protest in March at the Arizona Mills Rainforest Cafe in Tempe against coffee grown on clear-cut land.

Calling Dr. Robert Witzeman! Perhaps it takes a retired Phoenix physician to treat a bleeding environment.

"Endless pressure, endlessly applied."

That's how Brock Evans, director of the national Endangered Species Coalition, described the formula for success that has sustained "Bob" Witzeman through four decades of environmental battles in Arizona.

Witzeman, 72, has played a key role in the state's major environmental confrontations. In the 1960s and '70s, it was stopping dams along the Salt, Verde, Gila and San Pedro rivers. In the '80s, he championed limits on telescopes on Mount Graham. This decade, he has promoted shade-grown coffee to protect migrating songbirds.

Witzeman on Saturday was honored with the first ever Lifetime Achievement Award for Environ-

**making a difference**

mental Excellence in the Southwest, presented at the Arizona Audubon Council's annual conference dinner in Sierra Vista.

The award was presented on behalf of Arizona's four most aggressive environmental groups: the Southwest Forest Alliance, the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity and the Arizona chapters of the Sierra Club and National Audubon Society.

An avid bird-watcher who moved to Phoenix from Ohio in 1958, Witzeman presents the unassuming and disarming air of an old man of little power. But his expressionless calm behind wire-rim glasses belies

the passion and enthusiasm with which Witzeman has infected new generations of Arizona environmentalists.

He helped found the Student Environmental Action Coalition at the University of Arizona, an organization that now has chapters on college campuses across the nation.

Shane Jimerfield, 35, a Tucson activist, is one of the original members of the coalition. He first met Witzeman nearly a decade ago, when Jimerfield was studying atmospheric science at UA.

"He always encouraged you to participate and get involved. You could pick up the phone anytime, and he'd have the answers," said Jimerfield, now the assistant director of the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity.

— Steve Yoziwiak



Grand Canyon Chapter - Arizona

# Canyon ECHO

## Tribute to Bob Witzeman

by Chris Gehlker

Those who know Bob Witzeman know he doesn't need any acknowledgment from the Arizona Sierra Club to bolster his environmental credentials. He has been the leading figure in Arizona environmentalism for longer than some of us want to admit that we remember.

Think of any important struggle of the last two decades—from Orme Dam to Mt. Graham—and Bob was leading the charge. But as important as his public position has been, Bob's most important role has always been as a friend and advisor with unerring judgment about how to best advance our cause. More important, Bob always seems to know the difference between reasonable compromise and giving away too much. Some will remember when Bob stood as the only voice for the environment on then Governor Babbitt's Orme Dam advisory committee. The committee had decided on a compromise that eliminated Orme but substituted a dam on the Verde that would still have inundated eagle habitat. The alternative was devised to

separate the enviros from their allies at Ft. McDowell and appeared to be the reasonable compromise. Because Bob alone stood up to pressure from the Governor and everyone else, the lower Verde flows free today.

Environmentalists have egos just like everyone else and volunteers sometimes become wrapped up in the movement to the point where the need for personal victories dominates their judgment. This has never been the case with Bob. He has always focused on what was best for the environment, while maintaining his honesty and his ability to be reasonable when subjected to personal attacks or unfair criticism.

On behalf of the Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club, the Arizona environmental community, and, yes, the Earth, we salute Bob Witzeman for being a beacon in what has sometimes been a pretty dark night. ▲

# To save forests, we must let fire be fire

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MY TURN



CHARLES J. BABBITT

Phoenix attorney

Perhaps no single factor has had a more adverse impact on forest health than fire suppression. For 80 years we have disrupted the natural fire cycle by aggressively fighting virtually all fires, big and small.

As a result, parts of our forests are overstocked with young trees and burdened with excess fuel.

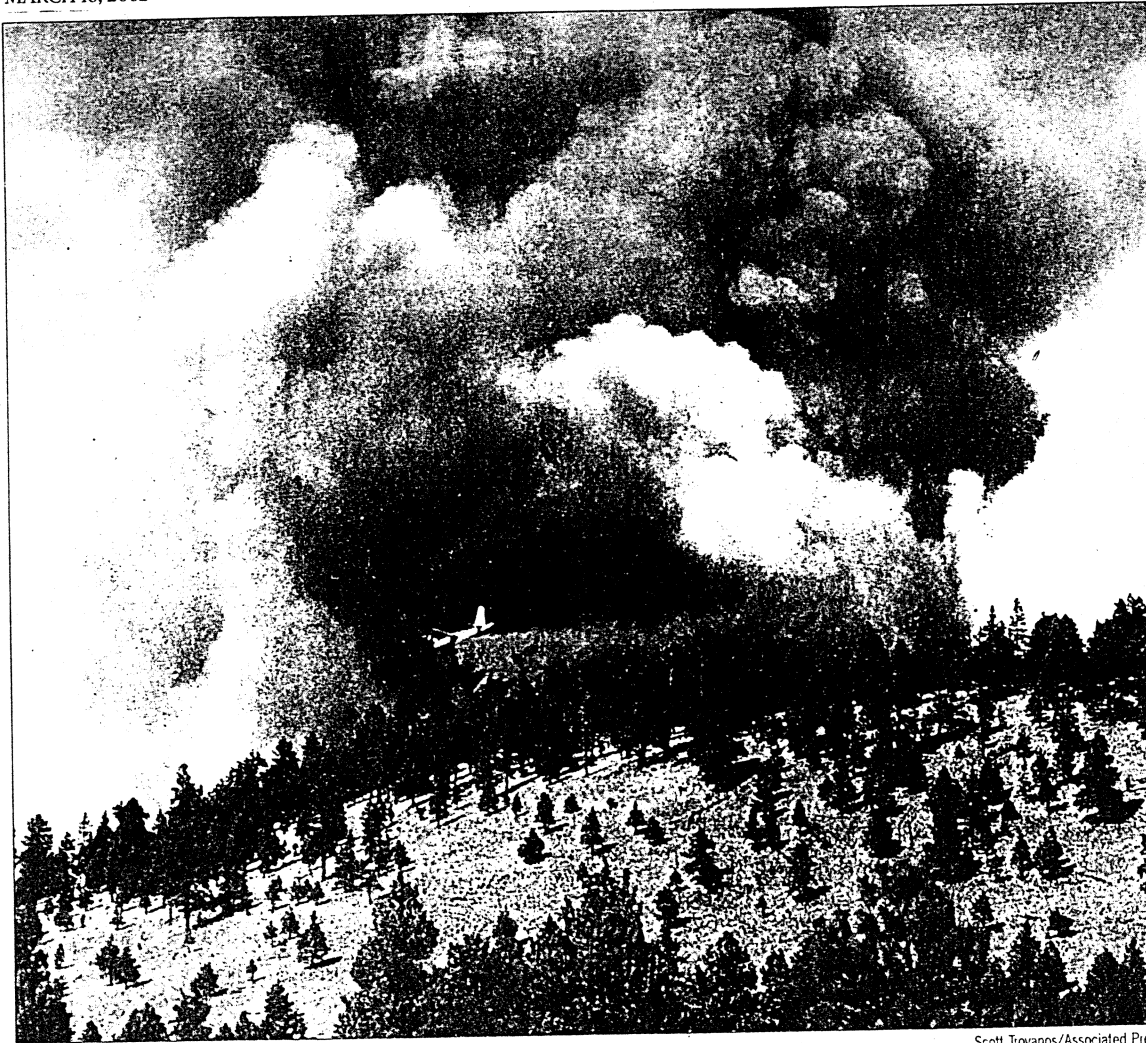
This year's exceptionally dry winter could set the stage for another active fire season in Arizona forests this summer.

Two years ago more than 6.5 million acres burned in the West including 85,000 acres in Arizona. The controversy created by those fires highlights the need to re-examine our current approach to fighting forest fires.

Arizona's ponderosa pine and higher elevation conifer forests have always had naturally occurring fires. Fires in the ponderosa pine forest were fairly frequent and of low intensity, while less frequent fires in the conifer forests often consumed entire stands of trees.

Fires thinned the forest and removed excess fuel. They also created openings for pioneer species like aspen and helped control disease and insects.

In spite of increased controlled burning and policy changes that allow some natural burns in wilderness areas, firefighters continue to jump on most wildland fires. Fires are still viewed by much of the public and media as catastrophes rather than naturally occurring necessary events. The "Leroux" and "Pumpkin" fires near Flagstaff the previous



Scott Troyanos/Associated Press

An air tanker drops fire retardant on the "Horseshoe" fire north of Flagstaff in 1996.

two summers are examples.

If we continue to suppress fires we can expect even bigger fires in the future as fuel continues to accumulate. We cannot mechanically thin forests and remove fuel over the entire Western landscape even if it were biologically desirable, which it is not. There is simply not enough money in

the federal budget. Instead, we need to stand back and let our forests burn.

Prescribed burns are fine but we must also accept the fact that we are going to have big uncontrolled fires. Big fires, though less frequent, are as much a part of our environment as hurricanes. They are usually a result of a combina-

tion of environmental factors that include a long period of severe drought, high winds, low humidity, and fire favoring topography.

It is these fires that have the vigor to significantly alter and regenerate our forests. Fires do not destroy forests, they change them. That is one of the lessons of the "Yellowstone"

fires of 1988.

Yellowstone and other big fires also teach us about the myth of fire suppression. Efforts to control and extinguish big fires are, by and large, futile. The Forest Service and other land management agencies falsely take credit for putting out big fires when in reality they go out only when there

is change in the environmental conditions that caused them in the first place.

It is not armies of firefighters and slurry-dropping planes that put out most big fires, but changes in wind, humidity, fuel and topography. That was the case with many of Arizona's big fires including the "Dude" fire (1990) just north of Payson, the "Lone" fire (1996) near Roosevelt Lake and the "Coon Creek" fire (2000) near Globe. The question is why do we waste millions of taxpayer dollars and risk the lives of firefighters trying to put them out.

Last year Congress appropriated \$1.6 billion under the National Fire Plan to improve our firefighting efforts. Spending fire prevention money to protect communities at the urban-wildland interface is money well spent but it should not be spent on so-called forest restoration or other logging-in-disguise projects away from communities in an attempt to fireproof our forests.

Instead of looking for excuses to put out fires, we need to look for reasons to let them burn. Deciding when and where to fight fires is complex, but we must do a better job picking our fights with nature.

Last summer many people were concerned that the "Leroux" fire might mar the scenic beauty of the San Francisco Peaks. We must remember, however, that it is not nature's job to provide us scenic views.

On the other hand, go up to Escudilla mountain near Alpine next fall and marvel at the large stands of golden aspen on the high slopes and remember that it was a big forest fire in 1951 that made it all possible.

Charles J. Babbitt is a Phoenix attorney, board member and past president of the Maricopa Audubon Society and a former board member of the Southwest Forest Alliance. He is the brother of Bruce Babbitt, former U.S. Interior Secretary and Arizona governor.

## “Pre-settlement restoration” — the Trojan horse of the logging industry

by Bob Witzeman

*Every creature is better alive than dead—men, moose and pine trees—and he who understands it aright will rather preserve its life than destroy it.*

—Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)



The so-called Grand Canyon Forests Partnership located in Flagstaff announced this February that they would refuse to accept a 16-inch cap on their so-called “pre-settlement restoration” forest fireproofing programs now underway. This “restoration” project is the recipe of Professor Wallace Covington of the Northern Arizona University (NAU) School of Forestry. The year-2000 forest fire season became the foot-in-the-door for the timber industry and its supporters in Congress. The industry is delighted that Congress is considering “fireproofing” some 40 million acres in a \$10 billion restoration treatment over the next 15 years.

In “pre-settlement restoration,” logging companies “thin” the forest and remove “doghair” thickets. These thickets are one of the “laddering” fuels of crown fires and are the product of a century of livestock grazing and fire suppression. However, such “thinning” programs allow the logging industry to log off unspecified amounts of remaining mature trees and old-growth.

Analysis of the various northern Arizona “pre-settlement restorations” by environmental groups has shown why these fire-proofings are both environmentally and esthetically objectionable. To date, 73-88 percent of the pre-settlement project areas five to 15-inch diameter trees were cut, as well as 100 percent of all trees up to four inches. Since the Flagstaff area “restoration” sites have been logged a number of times in the past century, less old-growth remains there. Thus, if “restoration” removes almost all of the trees up to 16 inches, and if it is in an area where most of the large trees have already been logged, “pre-settlement restoration” essentially removes the “forest.” Visually, these test plots near Flagstaff are desolate, odd looking, and just plain ugly. These “thinned”

areas may now be park-like, but they are no longer forests.

The irony of the “pre-settlement restorations” is that they don’t actually fireproof the forest. They leave huge amounts of fire-prone slash. Controlled burns on some of these test plots left only charred skeletons.

Covington’s Mount Trumbull prescription

exemplifies why pro-logging Congressmen love “pre-settlement restoration” and what is in store for the little old-growth that remains in this nation.

Recently, I accompanied Maricopa Audubon President, Scott Burge, on a trip to the remote Mt. Trumbull site. It took four days to reach the site, photograph the logging operation, and

return to Phoenix. My wife, Janet, photographed logging trucks that were hauling off huge ponderosa matriarchs. On that site, we found and photographed the 18 to 30-inch old-growth stumps that matched the trees on the truck.

One problem with “pre-settlement restoration” is that in areas isolated from public scrutiny, like remote Mt. Trumbull, it becomes undisguised, old-growth logging under the pretense of fireproofing. If a tree falls in the forest, and no conservationist is there, would anyone hear (or report) it?

Another problem with “pre-settlement restoration” is that it perpetuates the “doghair” thickets created by cattle grazing. These crown fire “laddering” fuels are the very problem “restoration” was designed to eliminate. BLM has announced that they will continue to graze cattle some 80 percent of the time after “restoration.” This is not nearly enough rest time. “Doghair,” crown fire, soil erosion, siltation, water quality degradation, and exotic grasses and weeds will be just a few of their livestock grazing devils.

A better fireproofing proposal would observe these suggestions:

- limit thinning to forests adjacent to houses and communities,
- prohibit old-growth logging of trees larger than 16 inches,
- prohibit logging near Northern Goshawk or Mexican Spotted Owl nests,
- remove all logging slash after thinning,
- reintroduce fire,
- remove livestock grazing to allow for the establishment of native plants following treatment, and to reduce future “doghair” crown fire fuels,
- ordinances to require property owners to clean up and maintain safe their perimeters. ▲



Russell Burge measures a tree stump nearly the length of his yardstick at the NAU “pre-settlement restoration” site at Mount Trumbull. Pro-logging western senators hope to sneak through this old-growth logging scheme as “fire prevention.”

— photo Janet Witzeman

# Drought created this nightmare; it will end with patience, wisdom

**D**rought conditions in Arizona are worse than they have been in over 100 years. For the first time in 50 years, Salt River Project has had to shut down power generation at Roosevelt Dam because of low water levels in Roosevelt Lake. Lakes around Flagstaff and feeder streams on Arizona's creeks and rivers are dry or drying up.

In Arizona's high country, normally green mountain meadows are brown. Across the state, forests are starved for moisture, with trees getting dryer and more brittle with each passing week.

It is no wonder Arizona is experiencing a very active fire season. Since early spring, drought-caused fires have been breaking out statewide, from the north rim of the Grand Canyon to Nogales. Fires have been occurring with much more frequency and intensity across a wide spectrum of forest types, from mixed conifer, ponderosa pine and pinyon juniper in the north to mesquite and oak woodland along the Mexican border.

It is these same severe drought conditions that are the principal cause of and driving force behind the big "Rodeo-Chediski" fire, which has now burned more than 400,000 acres in east-central Arizona.

Big fires like the Rodeo-Chediski are fairly rare events, usually occurring under conditions of severe drought coupled with high temperatures, low humidity, high winds and fire-favoring topography.

## Plenty of fuel for the tinderbox

There has been much discussion about how excess forest fuel has contributed to the size and intensity of the Rodeo-Chediski fire. Arizona forests, particularly ponderosa pine forests, are burdened in places with excess fuel in the form of young trees.

These are a result of decades of fire suppression and overgrazing. While these condi-

tions exist in some places, they do not exist over the entire forest landscape and not in all forest types. While no one can say for sure, lower fuel loads probably would have made little or no difference in the size and intensity of this fire, given the extreme environmental conditions under which it has been burning.

Unfortunately, finger-pointing has started with environmentalists and lawsuits being singled out for blame. The same thing happened after the "Dude" fire in 1990 and the "Lone" fire in 1996. For an angry man whose house has just burned down, this might be understandable, but for elected officials it is inexcusable.

Lawsuits brought to stop logging and to protect old-growth habitat have nothing to do with this fire. Logging the forest, particularly big, fire-resistant trees, does not reduce the fire hazard especially with big uncontrolled fires. In 1990 the Dude fire erupted in mid-June under environmental and atmospheric conditions almost identical to those in the Rodeo-Chediski fire.

Virtually everyone agrees that fuel loads in parts of our forest need to be reduced to lessen fire intensity and restore forests to a more natural condition. The problem is one of economics. There is no commercial market for the young trees that need to be thinned, and there is simply not enough money in the federal budget to mechanically thin and remove fuel loads over large areas of the West.

## An essential force of nature

Which brings us back to fire. In spite of the hardship caused by this fire we need to remember that fire is an integral, vital part of our forests. We cannot have healthy, functioning forests without it. The last thing we need to do is try to fireproof our forests with large-scale, environmentally destructive logging programs.

On the other hand, we need to continue controlled burning, one of the cheapest and most effective ways to reduce excess fuels. We must resist the temptation to jump on and put out wildland fires that do not pose a threat to communities. Fires burning now mean less-intense fires burning 20 years from now.

We must also accept the fact that from time to time we will continue to have big uncontrolled fires like the Dude and Rodeo-Chediski.

This fire should not be used to stampede people into making ill-advised, short-sighted forest management decisions. Forest problems that have been decades in the making will take decades to fix. There will be no quick or easy solutions.

MY TURN



**CHARLES BABBITT**

Special for The Republic

Charles J. Babbitt is a Phoenix attorney, board member and past president of the Maricopa Audubon Society. He is the brother of former Arizona Governor and U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, whose guest column appears on Page V3.



# Bird habitat protected in SRP plan

Project may not cost utility's customers

BY ZARANA SANGHANI  
TRIBUNE

SRP released a conservation plan Friday that may allow it to use Roosevelt Lake, a significant source of water for the Valley, without raising customers' rates or trampling the habitat of a small, gray bird already struggling to survive.

Salt River Project would acquire about 1,500 acres from private owners around the lake and nearby rivers, according to the Roosevelt Habitat Conservation Plan. The utility company would protect and manage that land in such a way as to make it a suitable habitat for the endangered Southwestern willow flycatcher, which now lives in the dry parts of the lake.

The cost would be in the millions, but it would not affect customers' bills, said Paul Cherrington, manager of water engineering and transmission for SRP, which is the Valley's largest water provider.

Since the start of a drought in 1996, Roosevelt's water level has dropped continuously, exposing nutrient-rich soil. The lake is at 12 percent capacity.

Salt cedars, willows and cottonwood trees have grown tall and thick on two deltas — creating a great summer home for flycatchers when they migrate here in May.

JULY 20, 2002 **A5**

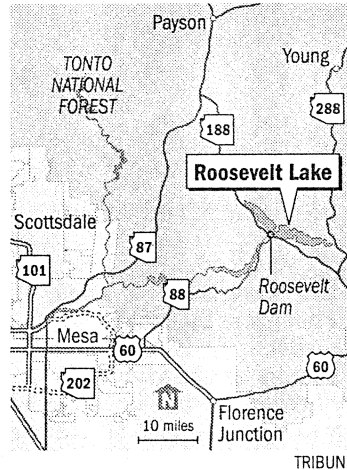
This winter when the flycatchers are in Costa Rica, SRP officials are optimistic that forecasted El Niño weather will bring runoffs and much-needed water to the area.

"It would not take a big (runoff) to fill the space enough to impact this habitat," Cherrington said. If SRP holds the water, "(The flycatchers) will come and find the tree they were living in last year is underwater."

Federal laws require SRP to provide a viable alternative for the flycatcher before filling the lake.

If SRP has to let the water go it could be costly, said Jeff Lane, SRP spokesman. The last few years have been some of the driest in SRP history, and Roosevelt can hold up to 80 percent of the company's reserves, he said.

SRP's conservation plan includes irrigation and protection of the 1,500 acres to encourage the type of vegetation and climate suitable for flycatchers, Cherrington said. The land includes areas along the Verde, San Pedro and Gila

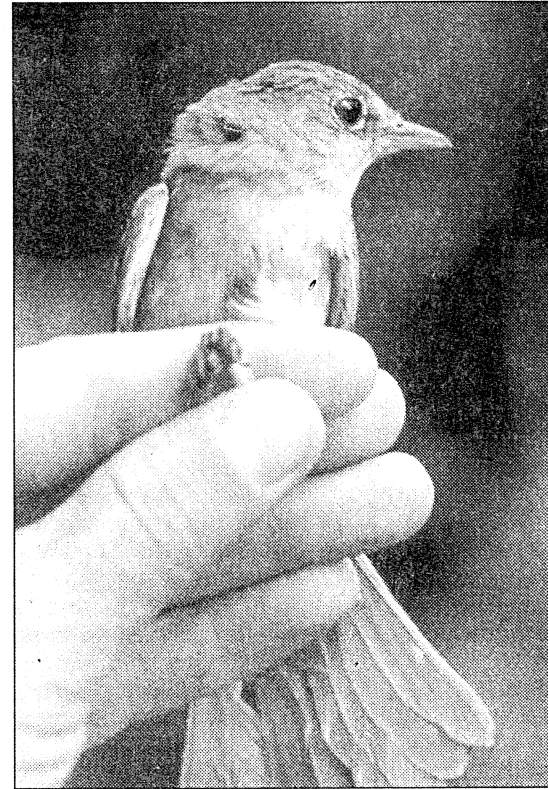


rivers, as well as at least 20 acres next to the lake.

Roosevelt boasts the state's largest breeding colony of flycatchers with 263 birds. Scientists also have seen one Yuma clapper rail, an endangered bird, and an unknown number of yellow-billed cuckoos, which may soon get on the endangered species list.

Cherrington said SRP's plan will provide alternatives for those birds as well.

Flycatchers began disappearing because Arizona was losing its riparian land, which is humid, well-vegetated areas lining slow-flowing waterways, said Robert Wietzeman, conservation chairman for the Maricopa Audubon Society. Protecting the flycatcher is about more than just the one species, he said.



The Southwestern willow flycatcher is an endangered species that nests along Roosevelt Lake.

COURTESY OF  
U.S. FISH  
AND WILDLIFE  
SERVICE

A flycatcher, "is very unattractive and drab," Wietzeman said. "But on the other hand, it is very ecologically significant and exciting."

Wietzeman said he has reviewed parts of SRP's plan and believes it is going in the right direction.

"Nobody knows whether you can artificially plant a habitat," Wietzeman said. "All humankind can do is try their best."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will give SRP a permit to fill the lake if it approves the plan. The public comment period has begun and will close Sept. 17. The public can view the plan at <http://arizonaes.fws.gov>, or get information by calling (602) 242-0210. A public meeting is scheduled for 6 to 9 p.m. Aug. 27 at SRP offices, 1521 Project Drive, near Galvin Parkway and Van Buren Street, Tempe.

# SALT RIVER Runoff helps Arizona

## Salt River's lost runoff helps state, after all

Mexico's windfall spares Lake Mead

FEBRUARY 5, 2005

By Shaun McKinnon  
The Arizona Republic

Storm runoff thought to be lost after it was diverted down the Salt River last month will be used to meet U.S. obligations to Mexico, reducing the amount of water that has to be drawn from Lake Mead.

The water, which has been flowing through the normally dry Salt and Gila rivers since late December, is being released from a flood-control dam south of Phoenix at a rate that will let Mexico accept it as it empties into the Colorado River at Yuma.

That means that even though Arizona couldn't use the water, it won't lose it. Every acre-foot of storm water delivered to Mexico is an acre-foot that can stay in Lake Mead, a critical storage reservoir that serves Arizona, Nevada and California. Leaving water in Mead eases the pressure on the drought-stricken Colorado River and further protects Arizona from shortages.

Runoff from the same storms is also spilling from the Bill Williams River, in northern Arizona, into Lake Havasu, allowing federal water managers to save even more water in Mead. The Central Arizona Project, which supplies water to Phoenix and Tucson, fills its canal at Havasu, as do several California providers.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers agreed to work with state and federal agencies on the timing of releases from two flood-control dams, Painted Rock on the Gila River and Alamo on the Bill Williams.

8 NEW TIMES JUNE 2-8, 2005

### RESERVOIR DOGGED

**Let the water flow:** Sarah Fenske calls Arizona's endangered willow flycatcher "congenitally" stupid because it can't stop cowbirds from laying eggs in its nests at Horseshoe Reservoir ("For the Birds," May 19). In reality, cowbirds weren't here until settlers brought cows and overgrazed and dammed Arizona's rivers.

Fenske quotes an SRP spokesperson who claims releasing water from the Verde River's Horseshoe Reservoir will cause 67,000 families to go without water. Fenske should read *New Times'* John Dougherty, who documented that metro Phoenix is "awash" in water ("A Chance to Focus Inward," December 9, 2004) and that letting water flow through Phoenix again would improve our "quality of life."

A major Arizona daily concurred with Dougherty and debunked SRP's lost Verde water scare tactic: "Every acre-foot of storm water delivered to Mexico is an acre-foot that can stay in Lake Mead, a critical storage reservoir that serves Arizona, Nevada and California."

Since Central Arizona Project water comes from below Mead, this shows the erroneousness of SRP spokespersons.

Agribusiness squanders 80 percent of Arizona's water yet returns only 1 percent of the state's income. Hay and other cattle feed consume almost half of Arizona's entire annual water budget. SRP's board of directors is controlled by agribusinessmen. *New Times* readers don't need SRP's anti-environmental, factual misrepresentations.

Bob Witzeman, M.D., Conservation Chair,  
Maricopa Audubon Society

***The Salt River Project (which operates 6 dams upstream of Phoenix) claimed 67,000 families would go without water if they couldn't flood out the three endangered birds (YB-Cuckoo, SW Willow Flycatcher, Bald Eagle) in Horseshoe Reservoir.***

***But the Arizona Republic proved SRP's water shortage scare-tactic erroneous, namely that no water would be lost to Arizona. Audubon Arizona complained to our chapter that this letter caused AA to lose a \$100,000 grant from SRP.***

***Our chapter is concerned that the public will perceive Audubon Arizona more interested in fundraising than in protecting endangered species.***