

Summary of volunteer events with AWC Wild Stew

Title: Exploration of wildlands on the Tonto National Forest parts I and II

Lead by: James Holderer

### **Trip One**

When: December 29-30, 2018.

Where: We surveyed unit 36A on the Mesa District of the TNF. It's tucked between the northern boundary of the Superstition Wilderness and Canyon Lake.

Volunteers: Two. Eileen Haney and Sadie Sarvis.

Summary: After meeting in Tortilla Flat, AZ we caravanned out to a campsite on the eastern side of the unit. After setting up camp, we sat down and discussed the context behind the volunteer event.

First, I explained what was going on internally at the Tonto National Forest regarding the Forest Plan. Next, I explained the wilderness recommendation process, and the work the TNF has done thus far within it. In this, I went over the wilderness characteristics per the Wilderness Act and how the TNF evaluates them. Then, I provided the volunteers with copies of the TNF's evaluation rationale, specific to unit 36a. We read over this rationale together, and discussed how these evaluations might be critiqued. They were also provided with maps of the unit boundaries, and we looked at Google Earth on my computer.

Following this discussion, we set out on a day hike along a large canyon, which drains into Canyon Lake. We were treated with complex geology, massive walls of welded tuffs, and the occasional pot-hole filled with water. This was an outstanding hike, aimed at exploring the scenery of the unit. Also, we were on the look-out for several introduced plant species, that the TNF stated detract from apparent naturalness, as well as thinking about where opportunities were found for solitude (which were basically everywhere).

The next day, we went on another day hike. This time we followed a small social trail, to the summit of Black Cross Butte. From here, we were provided with sweeping views of Canyon Lake, the Superstitions, and Four Peaks. Here, we discussed the northern unit boundary and the implications of motorized use along the adjacent Canyon Lake, in regards to wilderness character.

On the decent back to camp, the volunteers stopped atop a scenic view, and wrote narratives reflections of their time in unit 36a.

End first trip.





### **Trip One**

When: January 5-6, 2019.

Where: We surveyed unit 86 on the Cave Creek District of the TNF and unit 88 on the Mesa District of the TNF. They are both along the southern boundary of the Mazatzal Wilderness.

Volunteers: Nine. Eileen Haney, John and Sue Matteson, Mike Snodgrass, Kevin Simpson, Jordan Schutte, Laura Wilfong, Sadie Sarvis, Ethan Atkins.

Summary: After meeting at the Ballantine Trailhead on the TNF, we headed to our campsite, tucked between the boundaries of units 86 and 88. We set up camp.

First, we gathered around and I explained what was going on internally at the Tonto National Forest regarding the Forest Plan. Next, I explained the wilderness recommendation process, and the work the TNF has done thus far within it. In this, I went over the wilderness characteristics per the Wilderness Act and how the TNF evaluates them. Then, I provided the volunteers with copies of the TNF's evaluation rationale, specific to units 86 and 88. We read over this rationale together, and discussed how these evaluations might be critiqued. They were also provided with maps of the unit boundaries, and we looked at Google Earth on my computer.

Then we set off on a day hike into unit 86. We hiked along a power line access road, a portion of the unit boundary, until we came to an intersection with the AZT. Shortly after, we all sat down for lunch, searching for snowless rocks to sit on, in a small drainage, beneath pinion pines and junipers. We discussed whether or not the AZT should detract from apparent naturalness, and how it offers an (obvious) outstanding opportunity for primitive recreation. After lunch we continued along the trail. We approached a stockpond, and barbed wire fencing. These are two features the TNF says detract from naturalness. We discussed this, and documented these features. We continued forward to a small cherrystem, which we were to investigate. Everyone agreed that the extent to which the cherrystem excluded a motorized route did not make sense, as the route continued beyond the cherrystem to the town of Sunflower. We then engaged in a discussion about how perhaps the unit boundaries could be adjusted to accommodate this use. Finally, we all broke off into the surrounding hills, in search of solitude and possible points of interest. The goal of this day was to look at several human impacts, and their implications for wilderness character. This was not the most scenic part of unit 86, although it was still nice.

On day two, Mike Snodgrass, Laura Wilfong, and Jordan Schutte left early due to relentless rain. The rest of us set off into unit 88 along the Arizona Trail northbound. Having John Matteson along for the hike was excellent, as he is the trail steward for this passage of the AZT, and had a lot of insight on the locations of human impacts that he shared with all of us. This was a scenic hike, and provided ample opportunities for solitude. We traveled atop fallen sycamores leaves and tuff rock, along a steadily flowing stream, beneath several tiers of igneous cliffs. Kevin Simpson and I hiked off-trail, into dense fog, up and over a ridge-line saddle, and finally to an old stock pond and a rundown corral. We documented these features, which were stated as impacts to apparent naturalness.

We hiked back to camp. Volunteers are submitting reflections via email.

End trip two.



