

ROADLESS AREA STUDY

WET BEAVER CREEK

June 12-13, 1972

/Being the second in a series of field studies
conducted by the Saguaro Ecology Club on behalf
of the Wilderness Society/

/The purpose being the determination of wilderness
qualifications of selected roadless areas in
the state of Arizona/

STUDY TEAM:

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I. GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Wet Beaver Creek Roadless Area, a 10,720 acre tract lying east of Camp Verde, Arizona, consists of a central canyon formed by Wet Beaver Creek and several small, dry, nameless tributary canyons.

The landscape is dominated by monolithic escarpments perched atop rugged volcanic slopes rising sharply as much as 1000 feet from the boulder-strewn streambed. Along the length of the canyon, stretches are common where, twenty or forty feet above the canyon floor, the chaparral-clothed slopes yield to vertical sandstone bluffs, which, coupled with the volcanic cliffs, render entry impossible at all points but the extreme western and extreme eastern ends of the roadless unit.

It is due to its inaccessability that Wet Beaver has thus far escaped the damage from heavy recreational use and grazing which is so evident in the lower canyon of its sister canyon, West Clear Creek. Since only a few enthusiasts (or maniacs, whichever the case may be) are willing to swim the many deep, clear pools lying between the narrow sandstone canyonsides, the majority of the area is virtually unvisited by man.

Where the canyon floor broadens, the perennial springfed waters of Wet Beaver Creek nourish dense, entirely deciduous stands of the common low-elevation Southwestern riparian trees. Interestingly cottonwoods and sycamores are nearly absent within the boundries of the roadless area. The delicate streamside groundcover is completely untouched, with evidence of humanity limited to very rare pieces of litter.

Many songbirds find shelter in the riparian canopy, and a large variety of raptors, including bald and golden eagles, osprey,

and black and grey hawks frequent the canyon. Animal life is abundant, consisting, in part, of mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, deer, and bear. Native fish populations, with the exception of the Verde bonytail, have been decimated by the introduction of rainbow trout and the past chemical extermination of carp, which have since repopulated the stream.

II. OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

Private Land- occurs nowhere within the roadless area; however the 40-acre Wet Beaver Ranch is located two miles downstream of the western border. It maintains cattle which are impounded by a fence that runs alongside the border. Presently, it is of little consequence to the wilderness quality of Wet Beaver, but the possibility of further development must not be overlooked.

Mineral potential- is nil. No active claims are known.

Grazing- activity is present in the canyon only on the Wet Beaver Creek Ranch, although the surrounding desert flatlands are heavily grazed by Bar D Ranch cattle.

Access- as stated earlier, is limited to the canyon's extremities. On the eastern edge of the roadless unit, a large side canyon leads from the forested rim country to the dry streambed of Wet Beaver $\frac{1}{2}$ mile above the springs. The upper reaches of the side canyon are easily accessible by car, but descent is difficult and only feasible by foot. Three and one-half miles west of the roadless area boundary, at the Beaver Creek Ranger Station, two trails (Bell and Apache Maid) originate. Apache Maid is a jeep trail which leads to the rim, forming the border of the roadless area. Bell Trail follows the north side of the creek and is passable by car only as far as the USGS Gauging Station on the roadless area's western boundary. After the gauging station it turns into a footpath which winds along the canyon wall and crosses the stream about one mile upstream, from there leading ~~over~~ over the south rim.

Recreational Use- mainly in the form of fishing, is present along the stream, primarily from the public campground near the Beaver Creek Ranger Station to the junction of Bell Trail and the creek. Though there are gamebirds in the higher elevations, hunting

is light because of the extreme inaccessability.

Archeological Sites- several exist in the canyon, but none of any great size or importance are located in the area.

The Forest Service maintains an experimental watershed on the north rim of the canyon. As part of this program, Gambel's Oak and other "undesirables" are methodically defoliated. Because of this, numerous roads, and heavy grazing commitments, the majority of the land surrounding the canyon is judged ineligible for wilderness status.

Timber- there is no harvestable timber within the roadless area.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

Without a doubt, the Wet Beaver Creek Roadless Area meets every legal criterion for a wilderness designation. That alone is sufficient reason for such action, but when the social and ecological considerations are added to the weight of the argument, an unbiased judge would have no choice but to emphatically support the inclusion of this area into the Wilderness Preservation System.

Remoteness, pristine character, and inaccessibility promise to lure future adventure seekers and wilderness enthusiasts to this canyon sanctuary. Wilderness status would not only protect Wet Beaver Canyon for use by these people, but also from damage at the wake of their footsteps. Admittedly, fear of overuse or development is premature at best, but the course of the past few years has demonstrated that man's follifull capacity is not to be under-estimated. By compelling the Forest Service to manage this true wilderness as a Wilderness, we would assure that they will not lapse into laxness, a tendency often observed. (i.e. Mineral King, and in our own state, the San Francisco Peaks.)

Recreational benefits of the preservation of Wet Beaver Creek should not be allowed to overshadow its importance as a sanctuary for predatory birds, several rare species of which exist and possibly breed in the canyon. Sightings by our group include the black hawk, gray hawk, golden eagle, and osprey.

It is therefore the unanimous opinion of our group that the Wilderness Society should support a Wet Beaver Wilderness Area with borders following the rim of the canyon from the USGS Gauging Station east to a point near Harris Tank and including all roadless side canyons in the interim.

ADDENDA

I. SOURCES

The majority of our information, such as the presence of gray and black hawks, comes from observations made by our group during a two-day hike through the length of the roadless area, June 12-13.

Additional information was obtained through Forest Service publications and a lengthy interview, on June 9, with Beaver Creek District Ranger Robert Gillies.

II Wet Beaver Creek Roadless Area

