

NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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EASTER VISITORS ASKED TO CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE PLANS AS UPPER MADERA CANYON SITE RENOVATION CONTINUES

(TUCSON, AZ) February 13, 2004— Madera Canyon's popular picnic area and trailheads located at the end of Madera Canyon road are likely to remain closed through the Easter holiday, according to Coronado National Forest officials. However, Madera Canyon's lower elevation facilities will continue to remain open as they have throughout the "design-build" effort that began in May 2003.

"The Forest's contracting officer, Sylvia Nunez, has asked the general contractor to submit a progress schedule to assure that work at the new Mt. Wrightson Picnic Area and Trailhead is completed by April 1," said Stan Helin, Coronado National Forest Recreation Project Leader. "We apologize for any inconvenience the renovation has caused but once the site is reopened, we think visitors will agree that the new facilities are a vast improvement and much more compatible with the environment and use patterns."

Construction signs in the canyon had announced reopening of the new Mt. Wrightson Picnic Area and Trailhead in February 2004, based on the work schedule submitted by Pacific General, Inc., the general contractor in charge of site's redesign and renovation.

Helin said that although the reconstruction schedule coincides with the neo-tropical migratory bird breeding season and related visitation by birders in Madera Canyon, any additional time requested to finish renovation work would consider minimum timeframes and other ways to lessen impacts to both birds and birders.

New Features

The facelift for the end-of-the-road Mt. Wrightson Picnic area includes refurbishment of a dozen rock-walled picnic sites built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the mid-1930s with the addition of twelve new picnic sites that replicate the original CCC design. Other new features include wheelchair accessible picnic sites, new restrooms, bear-proof food storage lockers, and repaired access paths. After completion of the Mt. Wrightson Picnic and Trailhead facility, the Coronado National Forest will have approximately 167 parking spaces for cars and 3 oversized vehicle parking spaces available in Madera Canyon.

Opens in March

One newly rebuilt facility that will reopen soon is the Four Springs Trailhead located east of the Amphitheater Parking area. The trail will open near the end of March 2004, and provide hiker access to the Mt. Wrightson Wilderness.

(more)

Southern Half of Coronado National Forest Offers Alternate Easter Holiday Opportunities

Every year on Easter Sunday, the Forest Service turns away hundreds of visitors as Madera Canyon reaches maximum capacity early in the morning. As such, the Nogales Ranger District strongly urges traditional Easter holiday visitors to carpool, or reconsider picnic spots other than Madera Canyon as only 90 vehicle parking places are likely to be available. Parking fees are \$5 per vehicle per day or are included in the purchase of the \$20 annual pass.

Areas in the southern half of the Coronado National Forest available for holiday picnickers include:

- Whipple Recreation Area (13 picnic sites, 20 miles SE of Green Valley, Canoa Exit #56 from I-19; to Elephant Head Road then Mt. Hopkins Road)
- Pena Blanca Lake and Pena Blanca (undeveloped sites)
- Calabasas Group Area (south of the road to Pena Blanca Lake; open Easter weekend for general use instead of usual group use)
- Gardner and Fish Canyons (undeveloped sites on east side of Santa Rita Mountains)
- Rucker Canyon (west side of Chiricahua Mountains)
- Parker Canyon Lake (south on Hwy 83 from Sonoita)
- Reef and Ramsey Campgrounds (south Hwy 92 from Sierra Vista to Carr Canyon Road approx. 6 miles).

Birding and hiking opportunities include:

- Miller, Carr and Ramsey Canyons (Huachuca Mountains)
- Portal and Cave Creek (Chiricahua Mountains)
- French Joe and Dry Canyons (Whetstone Mountains).

Sanitation and Safety

The Coronado National Forest recreation managers allow picnicking and camping outside of developed recreation areas unless otherwise posted. Visitors must provide their own water and pack out their garbage. No alteration to undeveloped sites is allowed. Visitors who start wildfires may be held liable for suppression costs.

Public safety considerations on the Coronado National Forest include awareness and avoidance of wildlife that may inhabit the area; properly building, maintaining and extinguishing campfires and smoking materials; and possible encounters with illegal smuggling operations, especially near (but not necessarily limited to) areas in the vicinity of the international boundary with the Republic of Mexico.

Additional Information

Contact any Coronado National Forest business office from 8:00am to 4:30pm weekdays, or check the Forest website: www.fs.fed.us/r3/coronado