

A jewel befouled

Oct. 11, 2007 12:00 AM

The newly restored jewel of Fossil Creek is being destroyed by irresponsible visitors.

They're turning this rare ribbon of water in north-central Arizona, near Strawberry, into a garbage dump. A trash bin. An outdoor toilet.

Their impromptu trails and campsites are cutting permanent scars into the fragile landscape, leading to erosion that threatens water quality.

The U.S. Forest Service is woefully short of the money, staff and legal authority to stop the destruction.

But the damage must stop.

Arizonans must insist on adequate protection for this treasure.

A crucial step is for Congress to give Fossil Creek the legal safeguard of designating it as a wild and scenic river.

Arizona Public Service Co. took a historic step two years ago when it returned the full water flow to Fossil Creek, which had been diverted for nearly a century to run two hydroelectric plants.

Now, the stream is restocked with native fish, rebuilding its colorful travertine formations and re-creating a whole web of water-dependent life.

But even as APS threw the final switch to restore the water, the risks were obvious. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., noted in a statement at the time that there was "a critical need" for additional protection, adequate staffing and management.

Already, there was clearly a problem with unregulated camping and recreation on the banks of the creek.

Now, the critical need has turned into crisis.

Volunteers from Friends of the Forest, a Sedona-based group, deserve credit for their heroic cleanup efforts. But they return the following week to find another mess just as large as the one they picked up.

While most of the Fossil Creek area is in the Coconino National Forest, part is in the Tonto (which adds a jurisdictional complication). In September, nine environmental groups appealed to the supervisors of both forests to issue an emergency order limiting recreational use at Fossil Creek.

The groups want a ban on overnight camping, portable toilets installed at key parking areas and signs that spell out the law prohibiting littering and dumping. These are sensible steps that could bring some immediate relief without a large investment.

The national forests are reluctant to impose rules without the resources to enforce them. Jason Williams, regional director of the Arizona Wilderness Coalition, points out that the U.S. Forest Service can reprogram money at the national level. Fossil Creek, where there is a potential health risk from contaminated water, should be a priority if any funds are available for reallocation.

The Wild and Scenic River designation, proposed for the creek's 14 miles between Fossil Springs and the Verde River, would provide a protective legal framework. Fossil Creek would have to be managed to protect its natural resources, including water quality and habitat.

While supporters say that there's no outright opposition in Congress, Rep. Rick Renzi's woes are a liability for a bill that he sponsored. Other members of Arizona's delegation need to give this a big push.

Education also needs a big push. Clearly, a lot of people don't know the basics of using public land. Including how to answer the call of nature without damaging nature. And a reminder to take your trash with you.

The Forest Service in conjunction with Northern Arizona University is convening a meeting of stakeholders next month to devise a strategy for safeguarding Fossil Creek while still allowing visitors to enjoy it. It's an opportunity for creative ideas. Getting back this jewel in our desert state was almost miraculous. It will take work, planning and money to hang onto the miracle.

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- [Bruno](#) | [Profile](#)
- Posted: Oct 11, 2007 at 6:52 AM
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It is mind boggling in this day and age that anybody would treat the environment this way. Use some sense, people! Adopt the Boy Scout way; "Leave No Trace" is their standard. Pack it in, pack it out. Clean up your messes. Don't spoil it for the ones that come after.

- [LisaCea](#) | [Profile](#)
- Posted: Oct 11, 2007 at 10:26 AM
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Its unfortunate the entire first congressional district (one of the largest in the nation) is for all intents and purposes unrepresented in Congress because the voters here choose to send the dubious Mr. Renzi to Congress instead of Ellen Simon who would have taken care of Fossil Creek by now. Let's hope the voters of CD 1 do not make the mistake of sending a GOP rubberstamp neo-con to Washington again. Its about time Arizona voters start putting the best interests of their state and country before party

- [david517](#) | [Profile](#)
- Posted: Oct 11, 2007 at 12:31 PM
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Sounds like the border with Mexico.

They're turning this rare ribbon of land in southern Arizona, near Mexico, into a garbage dump. A trash bin. An outdoor toilet.

Their impromptu trails and campsites are cutting permanent scars into the fragile landscape, leading to erosion that threatens water quality.

Yep, sounds like the border. (only changed two word)

- oldvet
- Posted: Oct 11, 2007 at 3:53 PM
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If we had reasonable immigration/geust worker rules and decriminlized drugs the border would not be trashed.Nice job of getting off the subject of

Fossil Creek though and ranting about them rotten greasers Dave.By all means,lets get the creek on the wild and scenic list.

- [margieann48](#) | [Profile](#)
- Posted: Oct 13, 2007 at 4:09 PM
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So what did you expect.The power plant was started in the early 1900's.My husband was raised there,I was raised there,My children and Grandchildren where raised there we have many wonderful memories.Then some one descided it had to go!Ruined it!For the last 100 years it was maintained by APS everything was kept clean and beautiful!

Everyone respected it and everyone there.

Now you are crying for help you are getting excatly what what you deserve.

You do not mention the fish you have killed the things you have destroyed and well as lives and memories you have destroyed It is heart breaking!Why couldn't you just leave well enough alone!It had been there 100 years why did you have to want to change it.You should thank APS and there familys for helping out all these years! The Jokes on you you should of left well enough alone!

- [margieann48](#) | [Profile](#)
- Posted: Oct 14, 2007 at 11:57 AM
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You act shocked by this.Why this is what you wanted.To take it back 100 years.People respected things then and other poeple! The past 100 years it has been taken care of and loved by the people who lived there and respected it and too care of it you are getting exactaly what youi deserve closing down thoseplants chasing poeple out of there homes.You should get down on your knees and thank APS for what the have done and how well they have taken care of this area for the past 100 years they didn't do it just for a paycheck they loved and live there it was HOME! So Ha HA to you!

- [margieann48](#) | [Profile](#)
- Posted: Oct 16, 2007 at 9:52 AM
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Me again I just can not believe you are shocked by this! This is one of the Most beautiful places in the state. The creeks the beauty of it all. But No you had to ruin it and now you want help HAHA!It breaks my heart as well as many many familys who have lived and loved it there Really you shooud Thank APS and there familys for keeping it beautiful until you stepped in and destroyed it..You really stepped in this one and are getting what you deserve and more!!!!

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