

Payson (AZ) Roundup

October 28, 2008

Forest Service needs saving from itself

The Forest Service wants help saving the forest.

And we're kind of groping for a metaphor here.

So did you hear the one about the guy who killed his parents and threw himself on the mercy of the court on account of being an orphan?

How about the one about getting Wall Street grifters to advise the federal government on how to dole out \$700 billion to, well, Wall Street?

So now the Forest Service, with great sincerity and community spirit, wants to set up an advisory group to help update and transform the current, nearly meaningless, quarter-century-old forest plan.

It's an urgent task — given the desperate and dangerous condition of the forest, almost entirely as a result of a century of Forest Service mismanagement.

Once upon a time, the Rim Country had rolling miles of ponderosa pines, grasslands and myriad streams. Harmless ground fires burnt through every five years and you could fish Pine Creek.

Then the Forest Service took over and started managing the forest as a great, money-losing tree farm. So now, instead of 50 trees per acre, we have 1,000. Instead of harmless ground fires, catastrophic wildfire threatens every Rim community. Instead of organics comprising 5 percent to 10 percent of the soil, they make up about half a percent. Instead of 1,000 miles of trout streams, we have dusty washes. Oh yeah — and the timber industry's gone and the ranchers are going.

Thank you, boys.

Still, the day-long session involving top Tonto National Forest officials and a heartening cross section of Rim Country agencies, organizations and leaders looks

like a great idea. The group must scale an Everest of talk and consultation — but the dedicated efforts of the participants could produce a dramatically improved plan.

Instead of endlessly pitting one group against another in court, the process might crawl, creep and stagger toward a plan that produces a healthy, sustainable forest. Such a forest could accommodate the carefully limited needs of loggers, ranchers, hikers, campers — and out-and-out forest lovers.

So we're all for it. We just had a little fit of irony there.

After all, the surge did kind of work.

We couldn't just let the credit markets convulse and die in a fit.

And that poor fellow probably really misses his mommy, now that he thinks about it.