

local wells, with only a few short interruptions, since the early 1980's. Reese hopes to begin work soon in both Sonoita and Harshaw Creeks to restore more natural water movement and retain additional surface water below ground. He is also discussing a partnership with Borderlands to create a restoration and monitoring plan for the riparian area on the TNC land contiguous with the Native Seed Search farm. The Preserve often provides a field site for graduate studies, university research, and local research.

An example of TNC stewardship that Reese hopes to develop is a partnership between TNC, the Patagonia Firewise Community, and the Patagonia Fire Department to reduce fire fuel on TNC and other local properties that pose risk to the local community. Job one is reducing the tree density and ladder fuels on the Cemetery Trail property.

Reese is particularly interested in activities that promote a conservation ethic. A great example is the building of a new trail to link Audubon's Paton property with TNC's Geoffrey Platt Trail. A new entrance into the Preserve will be created directly across Blue Haven Road from the Platt Trail so that local residents and visitors can walk on trail from Patons to the Preserve. Chris Strohm, an experienced trail designer, is leading the volunteer effort to build the new trail. It will be completed before the February 2016 50th birthday celebration.

The Preserve has brought back guided bird walks every week. They are being led by several of our community's most experienced birders. Reese is also looking for opportunities to partner with schools and other nonprofits to expand conservation education programs for children and adults.

The 50th anniversary provides an impetus to fuel these and other ideas. TNC is looking to actively involve local residents in setting priorities for all their Patagonia properties as well as helping plan a birthday bash worthy of a 50 year old! Call Luke Reese at (520) 394-2400 to offer suggestions and/or sign on to help.

Forest Service Withdraws Approval Of Sunnyside's Drilling Project

PRT Staff

The Sunnyside Drilling Project, proposed by Regal Resources, a Canadian company, was given the go ahead by two federal agencies back in September. This astonished local environmentalists as the area is rich in wildlife and there are several endangered species who live or pass through the area.

Because of their concern, Patagonia Area Resource Alliance (PARA) and Defenders of Wildlife filed a lawsuit claiming the federal agencies' approvals violated environmental laws and posed a threat to endangered species and the safety of

drinking water for local residents.

Then came the unexpected news from District Ranger, Mark Ruggiero, that he was withdrawing his Decision Memorandum and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was withdrawing its letter of agreement. Ruggiero's official letter, addressed to "Interested Parties" did not indicate what had caused this change, but it did indicate that there would be consultation among the departments and that a new decision would be forthcoming.

According to Steve Spangle of U.S. Fish and Wildlife, under Section 7 of the Endangered Species

Act, a federal agency has to complete a review for each species. In this case, he said, "a new species came in." This meant that a review was required. Spangle seemed to think the matter would be cleared up quickly. He said the law suit by PARA and Defenders of Wildlife did not bear on the decision to withdraw the approval.


PARA's Wendy Russell said she is pretty sure that the Sunnyside Project will be given the green light again in which case the law suit will go forward.

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