



Coconino National Forest
Red Rock Ranger District
8375 State Route 179
Sedona, AZ 86351
(928) 203-7500



Casner Canyon RNA and Hangover Trail Field Trip

Trip Date: May 18, 2012

Place: Casner Canyon and Hangover Trail

Purposes:

- Hike the social trail known as Hangover and evaluate it for potential adoption into the official trail system.
- Hike through the Casner Canyon Research Natural Area and review social trail construction and associated resource problems within this area.

Attendees:

Agency Personnel

- ✚ Francisca Adrian, Trails Coordinator, RRRD
- ✚ Travis Bone, Archaeologist, RRRD
- ✚ Jennifer Burns, Recreation Staff Officer, RRRD
- ✚ Eric La Price, NEPA Planner, RRRD
- ✚ Kevin Lehto, Assistant Recreation Staff Officer, RRRD
- ✚ Heather Provencio, District Ranger, RRRD
- ✚ Amina Sena, Hydrologist, RRRD

Non-Agency Personnel

- ✚ Tomas Robison, Local trail user
- ✚ Zack Greenfield, SMBC and local trail user
- ✚ Lars Romig, VVCC, SMBC and local trail user

Notes:

VVCC - Verde Valley Cycling Coalition
SMBC - Sedona Mountain Bike Community
Notes authored by Eric La Price

1.0 Summary

- There are several user-constructed trails (social trails) within the Casner Canyon RNA that connect between 89A and Schnebly Hill Road.
 - These trails are socially known as:
 - Killer Bee
 - Levitra
 - Damfino
 - Tomahawk

- Some areas of the social trails are in sustainable condition and other trail locations are highly eroded (Photographs 1 and 2).
 - Social trails damage sensitive biological soil crusts (Photograph 3).
- There is one official FS trail that is partly within the RNA, the Casner Canyon Trail.
- The Hangover trail is a very challenging trail for mountain bikers and hikers
 - It is highly prized by the mountain bike community for technical challenges – very strong desire to keep it
 - Maybe the top 1% of mountain bikers could ride this trail
 - Some mountain bikers travel to Sedona specifically for this trail.
- Scoping comments from hikers and bikers were favorable to keeping this trail.
- Use on Hangover has increased over the last 3-4 years.
 - There is widespread awareness of the Hangover due to the availability of internet and local information and magazine articles.
- Hangover is accessed from the popular Schnebly Hill Road and the Cow Pies Trail, which is also a popular trail.
 - The saddle that is accessed from Cow Pies is also spectacular for views and a favorite destination for many people.
- It was suggested by the non-agency personnel that making Hangover a one-way trail may be safer due to the limited sight distances on the trail and the speeds that can be achieved by mountain bikers.
 - There are trail conflicts on some trails – not every trail can accommodate every use
- Primary complaint from the mountain bike community is that Forest Service trails do not incorporate enough technical bike features.
 - It has been suggested that if the Forest Service builds more bike features into trails, the desire to construct new trails with features would be diminished.

2.0 Casner RNA Concerns

- The 565-acre Casner RNA was established in 1973 for its pure stands of Arizona cypress and the Supai (red rock)
 - The RNA contains both the smooth bark rough bark varieties of Arizona cypress
 - Arizona cypress is only found in a few locales in AZ.
 - Sedona has quite a bit of cypress.
 - Fossil records indicate that Arizona cypress once dominated the Sedona landscape.
 - Cypress are now found mainly on cooler slopes and drainages.
 - Cypress form pure stands that generally obtain closed canopies and therefore have very little else growing in the understory.
 - Because cypress branches start close to the ground, they make excellent ladder fuels and the stands are prone to fire.
 - Cypress only regenerate by seed.
 - Cypress cones remain on the trees for a long time until they desiccate (after years) or opened by fire.
 - Once the seeds are released, they gradually germinate over several months in clear openings (no shade) on the forest floor. Things that commonly kill cypress (besides canopy fires) include damping off fungi in seedlings, mistletoe (*Phoradendron juniperinum* sp. *Juniperum*), cypress canker, and cypress bark beetles.
- Research Natural Areas are areas where natural processes dominate and natural feature(s) are preserved for research and education.

- The 3 main reasons for preservation are:
 - As a baseline for comparison to non-protected areas
 - Provides sites to study natural processes in undisturbed ecosystems
 - They are preserved gene pools for plants and animals.
- The guiding principle is to prevent unnatural encroachments, activities which directly or indirectly modify the processes in RNAs.
 - Physical improvements (roads, trails, fences, building) are generally not allowed except those considered essential to proper research or education uses of the area.
 - Public uses which might contribute to significant modification of RNAs are generally discouraged.
 - Some agencies expressly prohibit uses if serious impairment of scientific or education values are threatened.
 - Agencies do not purposely encourage public use of RNAs, although peripheral trails/signs have been proposed or established.

2.0 Wildlife Concerns – Hangover Trail

- Peregrine Falcons may be an issue along the Hangover Trail
- From 1985-1994 there was good monitoring of Peregrine Falcons
- Since 1994, monitoring has been sporadic
- There have been no consistent sightings since 1993
- Use on this trail may displace Peregrine Falcons
 - Falcons generally avoid nesting where they are in sight of people
 - This behavior has occurred at Cathedral Rock – the falcons have been displaced.
 - **CONSIDER: If Peregrine Falcons are identified as a concern would any kind of seasonal closure alleviate the problem of displacement?**
- During the field trip, five areas of whitewash were observed in association with possible Peregrine Falcon nesting sites.
- A sixth area of whitewash was observed, but it looked like a perching area, and not a nesting area (Photograph 4).

3.0 Soils Concern – Hangover Trail

- The soils in this area have a severe erosion hazard.
- According to TES, the vegetation cover in this area is already less than what would be expected under natural conditions and needs to be improved.
- According to a strict interpretation of TES, this area is unsuitable for trails.
 - Several factors are mitigating some of the soils concerns
 - The Hangover Trail was built along a contour.
 - Mountain bike use has compacted and hardened parts of the trail.
 - People have been repairing trail damage.
 - This trail is in better shape than Damfino Trail
 - Although Damfino is also popular, adopting Hangover and closing Damfino would be a possible trade off to propose to the mountain bike community to protect resources.
- Several areas of the Hangover Trail are showing erosion problems.
- Parts of the trail were constructed improperly – the trail was curbed with rocks instead of being armored with rocks.
 - This has led to channelization of the trail.

4.0 Archaeological/Cultural Concerns – RNA and Hangover Trail

- There is at least one site along a user-built trail within the RNA that could be avoided if trails are added within the RNA.
- Biggest concern is a site along the cliff near the saddle
- There is a sinkhole that also has some bat concerns.
 - This is not actually on the trail, but close enough to warrant consideration
- Want to ensure we do not alter any remaining intact sections of the Wagon Road wall associated with the Old Munds Wagon Trail (which was used as a return trail for the field trip).

5.0 Agency Concerns with Proliferation of User-Built Trails

- It can be assumed with a reasonable degree of certainty that making a designated trail system does result in an increase in use in that area.
 - We do not want a situation that means whenever we adopt a trail, we also are doing a *de facto* adoption of all the social trails connected to it.
 - Will increasing use in this area result in the development of more social trails?
- Is it reasonable for us to dedicate our limited resources towards a trail that may serve only 1% of the mountain bike community? This trail is popular with hikers too and would likely become more of a hiking loop than a biking loop.
 - What kind of liability would we be open to by having a trail that the majority of bikers could not ride without risk of serious injury?
 - This might be something we can mitigate with signage.
- Where does it end?
 - There are already over 300 miles of trails around Sedona
 - There appears to be an unending demand for more and more trails
 - How can the Forest Service discourage/reduce the construction of user-built trails?
- Is it appropriate to adopt any of the user-built trails that go into the RNA?

Photographs



Photograph 1:
Erosion problems on Damfino social trail.



Photograph 2:
A very steep, unsustainable section of Damfino.



Photograph 3:
A social trail damaging sensitive biological soil crusts.
(dark soils in foreground right of center).



Photograph 4:
An area of whitewash observed on Hangover.

UPDATE

Notes from Janie Agyagos, Wildlife Biologist, regarding peregrine falcons nesting near Hangover Tail:

Janie Agyagos, District Wildlife Staff, and volunteer Rachael Greer, visited the Schnebly peregrines (site name = Valhalla) on June 27, 2012 to determine where the falcons nested this year in relation to the Hangover trail. After examining all the cliffs, it was apparent that all recent activity (nesting and roosting) was on one cliff face to the east of the Hangover trail (and east of the Anvil) and this was consistent with observations in 2011 by Janie Agyagos and volunteer John Felix.

On the following map, note the location of the nest marked 05, 11, 12 (which indicate the years the nest was occupied). It is important to note that the map shows the Hangover trail in red, when in reality, the portion of the red line from the east to the saddle is really the Cowpies trail and not the Hangover trail. In addition, Agyagos and Greer observed two adults and one fledged young flying on June 27, 2012, confirming successful reproduction this year (see attached photos).

Based on results of these observations, adopting the Hangover Trail and the resulting increased use of Hangover Trail should not adversely affect the peregrine falcons because:

1. The trail passes the nest cliff at such an angle that there is no direct line-of-site from the nest down to the trail below;
2. The trail passing the nest cliff is the portion of the Cowpies to Saddle trail that has been in use for years;
3. The peregrines successfully fledged young from that nest this year.

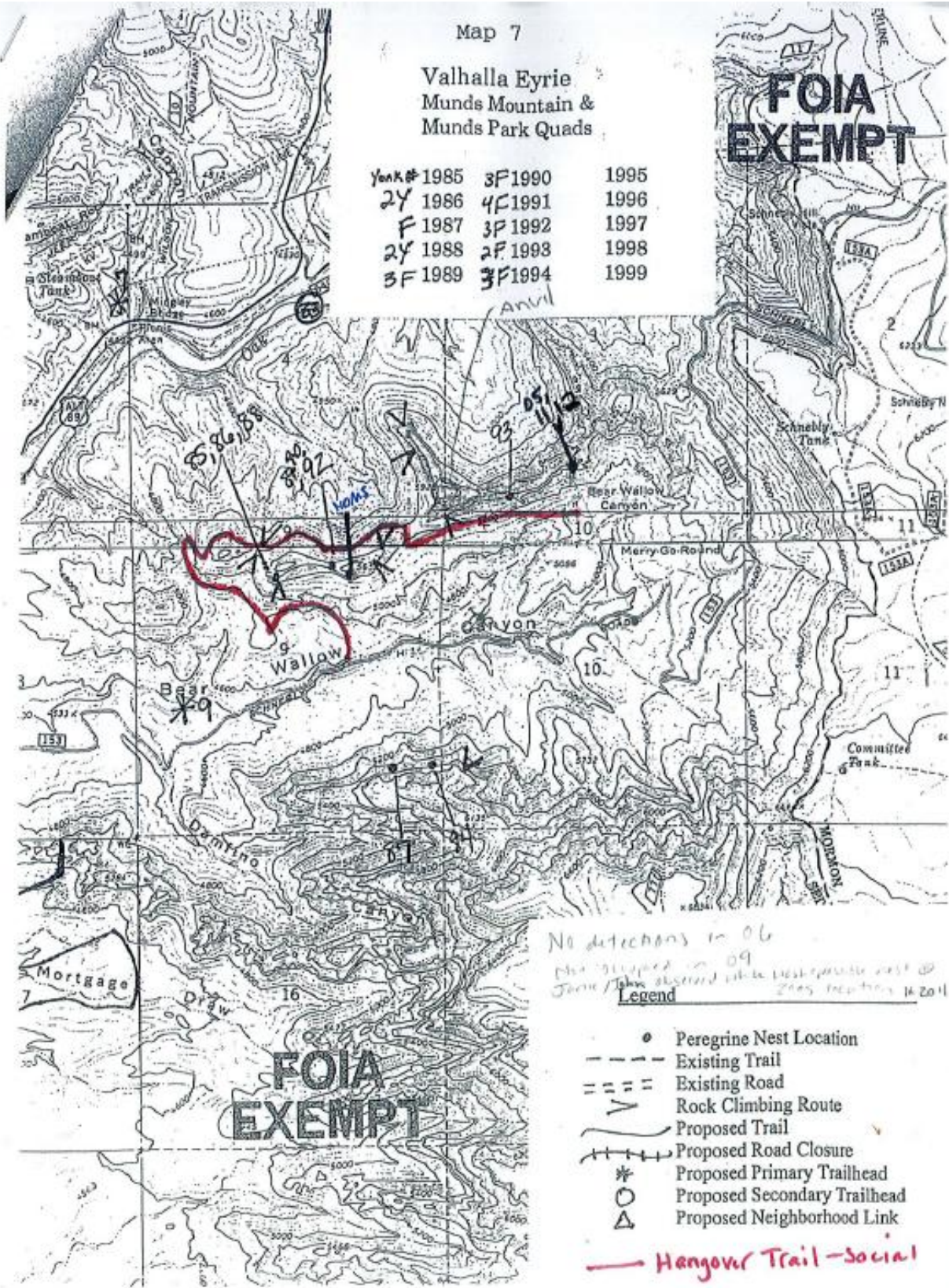
It is recommended that this nest site be monitored over the next several years in order to document nest location and nest success. Should peregrine falcons change their nest location to the west, near where the Hangover trail comes into line of sight of the nest, seasonal area closures may be necessary to prevent nest abandonment.

Map 7

Valhalla Eyrie
Munds Mountain &
Munds Park Quads

**FOIA
EXEMPT**

Year# 1985	3F 1990	1995
2Y 1986	4F 1991	1996
F 1987	3F 1992	1997
2Y 1988	2F 1993	1998
3F 1989	3F 1994	1999



No detections in 06
 No detections in 09
 Some birds observed with nest material at
 2005 location in 2011

Legend

- Peregrine Nest Location
- - - Existing Trail
- = = = Existing Road
- V = Rock Climbing Route
- ~ ~ ~ Proposed Trail
- +++ Proposed Road Closure
- * Proposed Primary Trailhead
- Proposed Secondary Trailhead
- △ Proposed Neighborhood Link

— Hangover Trail — Social

