

For Immediate Release

**Arizona Elk Society
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Arizona Elk Society conserves important wildlife habitat

The Arizona Elk Society, in cooperation with the U. S. Forest Service, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and the local livestock operator have made major strides in setting aside over 73,000 acres of diverse wildlife habitat in the Coconino National Forest. The wildlife of the region includes socially and economically important game species such as Rocky Mountain Elk, Mule deer and Coues White-tailed deer, wild turkeys, bears, and several small game species. The elk population on this allotment represents one of the most important populations in the state and provides considerable use and enjoyment by the public, which in turn provides considerable economic benefit to state and local economies. This region is important to forest-dwelling avian species, with 13 species being identified as priority species in the Arizona Partners in Flight Bird Conservation Plan. This habitat is also key to recovery efforts for two federally-listed aquatic species, the Little Colorado River spinedace and the Chiricahua leopard frog. This area is home to many Mexican spotted owls, another federally-listed species.

In a unique approach, the Arizona Elk Society has used monies raised at their fundraising Banquets by sportsmen and women in support of elk conservation in Arizona, coupled with funds raised through the AES Habitat Partners of Arizona program, to compensate the grazing permit holder for waiving the grazing permit back to the Forest Service with a Memorandum of Understanding that those portions of the allotment with high wildlife value be managed for conservation purposes. Areas with low value to wildlife but suitable for livestock production may be made available for livestock production after habitat conditions have improved.

Approximately 96% of this allotment is contained within the East Clear Creek Watershed, which is one of the most ecologically unique regions in the Southwest. This area is topographically diverse with relatively flat areas dissected by a multitude of deeply incised canyons. Within these incised canyons, there are a total of nearly 66 miles of perennial or interrupted perennial streams that amplifies the ecological importance of the area. One of the key ecological components of this area are the sponge meadows that once existed in the area but have largely become dry, upland meadows. When these meadows were more functional than today, they acted as sponges, holding water which in turn flowed into streams and provided important riparian habitat for the plethora of species that call this region home. This project will help restore these sponge meadows which are important to the maintenance of stream flow which is vital to the diverse wildlife community of the region.

The partnerships developed between wildlife and habitat management agencies and the Arizona Elk Society will allow this special area to be managed for current and future generations to visit and enjoy. This action also serves as a model approach where outdoor sporting conservation groups, such as the Arizona Elk Society, work with livestock operators and agency personnel to conserve ecologically sensitive portions of Arizona's landscape.

For More Information Contact:

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