

NEWS RELEASE



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BLUE RIVER PROPERTY ACQUIRED BY THE FOREST SERVICE

Springerville, AZ.... The Trust for Public Land (TPL) and the USDA Forest Service announced the recent purchase of a small parcel locally called the Smith Place within the Blue Range Primitive Area in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. Had TPL not acquired and held onto the property until the government could purchase it, the land might have been sold for second home development.

“The Forest Service has wanted to acquire this particular property for a long time,” said Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Supervisor Elaine Zieroth. “We are glad to add it to the Blue Range Primitive Area and are grateful that TPL was able to acquire this property and work with us to place it into Federal ownership. The people of the United States are the real beneficiaries of this purchase.”

The 15 acre property is part of the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area, a federal program to restore the federally listed endangered Mexican gray wolf, the rarest and most genetically distinct subspecies of gray wolf in North America. “Protecting wolf habitat is not only critical to the recovery of the nearly extinct Mexican gray wolf, but also to the people who backpack seeking wilderness experiences far beyond the end of the road.” said Charlie O’Leary, Arizona project manager for the Trust for Public Land.

The property is valued at \$150,000 and is located along the banks of the Blue River. It sustains a healthy stand of cottonwoods and willows making it ideal for wildlife.

In 2002 the Arizona Wilderness Coalition contacted TPL regarding the Greenlee County property. TPL acquired the property, the southern most private inholding in this ecologically sensitive area of the National Forest, to prevent residential development. Development in the Wolf Recovery Area would negatively impact the Mexican gray wolf recovery program as well as degrading the water quality and habitat area along the Blue River.

“I worked for more than twenty years with the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest as their wilderness program manager,” said Don Hoffman, executive director of the Arizona Wilderness Coalition. “I know that protecting this property is important to restoring the wolf population by keeping the area clear of development and vehicular traffic. I am thrilled to see it finally protected,” Hoffman continued.

The acquisition of the property was funded through the congressionally appropriated federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The fund, created by Congress in 1965, provides money to federal, state and local governments to purchase land, water and wetlands for the recreational benefit of all Americans. Lands and waters purchased through the LWCF are used to provide recreational opportunities and clean water, preserve wildlife habitat, enhance scenic vistas and maintain the pristine nature of wilderness area. The fund receives money mostly from fees paid by companies drilling offshore for oil and gas. Other funding sources include the sale of surplus federal real estate and taxes on motorboat fuel.

The Trust for Public Land, established in 1972, specializes in conservation real estate, applying its expertise in negotiations, public finance, and law to protect land for people to enjoy as parks, greenways, community gardens, urban playgrounds, and wilderness. TPL depends on the support of individuals, foundations, and corporations. Across the nation, TPL has helped protect nearly 2 million acres.

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