

[c. 1962]

## **THE SUPERSTITION MOUNTAINS**

### **What Future Use Will Best Serve Arizona?**

A Special Report  
By Rep. Morris K. Udall

The population of Arizona is increasing by some 60,000 people every year -- equivalent to the 1960 populations of Flagstaff, Prescott, Yuma and Safford combined. By 1970 our population will move well beyond 2,000,000. Additional land for commercial and residential purposes will be required. Existing facilities for every public need, including recreation and parks, will feel increasing pressures.

Those of us entrusted with present day leadership in Arizona affairs ought to peer ahead now and then, as best we can, and take a long-range view. This report is an attempt to fulfill part of that responsibility.

The press of population and our nation's diminishing recreational resources throughout the country have made Congress and the President anxious to undertake a long-range program of resource planning. If Arizona has any aspirations and needs in this field, the next few years will be the time to act. I expect that more new national parks, monuments and recreation areas will be created in the next 5 years than in the last 30. By 1964 a new National Recreation Area will come into being around Powell Lake behind Glen Canyon Dam. The 87th Congress has established Cape Cod National Seashore; it is considering and will probably establish new national parks at Point Reyes, California, Padre Island, Texas, and the Utah Canyonlands within the near future. The Wilderness Bill, a central part of this bi-partisan effort, has already passed the Senate and should pass the House before adjournment.

For the past 30 years I've admired from car and airplane the rugged and mysterious Superstition Mountains as they block the horizon east of Phoenix. I've noted with interest and satisfaction the recreational development near Roosevelt Dam and the chain of lakes below. This seems to me a proper moment for Arizonans to take an objective look at these areas and to decide together what -- if anything -- this generation can do to ensure that these beautiful and irreplaceable resources will survive the potent population pressures and serve future generations in their highest and best use.

While I haven't found anyone who wants to turn the Superstitions over to subdividers, there has been a great divergence of opinion about how we should go about preserving them, and about what conservation and recreation uses they best can serve.

#### Recent Discussions

Several months ago I suggested in letters to Governor Fannin and various county and state officers and civic groups that consideration should be given to the long-term use and status of the

Superstition Mountain area. Since that time, I have had replies from Governor Fannin and the Arizona State Parks Board. In addition I have had personal discussions with the Pinal County Board of Supervisors and have collected a good deal of newspaper comment. On December 4, 1961 I had a most productive meeting at Apache Junction with a large group of government, business and civic leaders, and interested citizens. At the meeting we attempted to explore in a general way possible alternative courses of action.

Following the Apache Junction meeting I decided in January 1962 to ask the Regional Office of the National Park Service for an informal evaluation of the present and potential park and recreational values of the area. The Region Three office made a field trip and responded to my request. This informal response or "report" is referred to below. Since then I have had several dozen letters from representatives of the cattle industry, conservation groups and various interested individuals.

The lands involved are partly in Maricopa County, and the entire area is directly adjacent to the Phoenix metropolitan area. Any major change in status of the Superstitions would affect a major part of our population. No change should be considered unless there is a substantial degree of agreement among the congressional delegation, conservation groups, user groups and interested citizens; I find no such measure of agreement.

#### One Immediate Recommendation

Because there is no clearcut consensus at this time, because opinions are sharply divided, because a great number of unfounded fears have been expressed, and because much misinformation has been circulated, I make only one relatively minor recommendation at this time:

Legislation should be sought in the immediate future authorizing the federal government to grant to Pinal County or appropriate municipal governments a 300 to 600 acre local park site comprising some of the attractive desert scenery at the base of Superstition Peak east of Apache Junction. This proposal will be discussed in more detail below.

#### What Are the Areas Involved?

First, let us make an inventory of the resources under discussion. These lands can be logically divided into two separate areas:

1. The Mountain Wilderness Area. This consists of about 132,000 acres of Tonto National Forest Service land lying south of Apache Trail. Included are Superstition Mountain itself plus Weaver's Needle, Miner's Needle and other mountainous areas lying somewhat north of the Apache Junction-Superior-Miami highway. The entire 132,000 acres was designated by the National Forest Service in 1939 as the "Superstition Wilderness Area". This area would eventually be included in the "National Wilderness System" under the Wilderness

Bill, S. 174, which passed the Senate during the 1961 Session and is now pending before the House. There are no roads into this area, and access is limited to those willing to hike or ride horseback.

This mountain wilderness area is a strikingly beautiful example of volcanic rocks with Superstition Peak (elevation 5,400) visible for great distances in every direction. Weaver's Needle and Miner's Needle are other outstanding features. The rocky prominences along the upper ridges are strongly similar to those in Chiricahua National Monument, though not quite as strikingly displayed. The area is associated with the legends and the violence connected with the famed Lost Dutchman gold mine.

2. Apache Trail -- Salt River Lakes Area. The second portion consists of about 88,000 acres of Tonto National Forest running along both sides of the Apache Trail and Salt River, including Roosevelt, Horse Mesa, Morman Flat, and Stewart Mountain Dams and their reservoirs. The 88,000 acres is not included in the Forest Service's "Wilderness Area" and is not included in the areas designated for wilderness under the pending Wilderness Bill. It is presently administered for recreation and other uses by the Forest Service. This area has not only the tremendous and varied recreation potential of the lakes themselves, but it has rugged and striking scenery.

President Theodore Roosevelt after driving Apache Trail on March 18, 1911, made these remarks in his address dedicating Roosevelt Dam:

"I did not, or never realized until this morning, what an extraordinary, beautiful and picturesque strip of country this is. I think that the drive from the beautiful city of Phoenix, especially the last few miles down the extraordinary gorge, then to see this lake and dam, I think is one of the most spectacular, best worth seeing in the world, and I hope our people will realize that I want to see them come in by the tens of thousands here just as they go to the Yosemite to the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone Park."

The two areas as a unit thus comprise about 220,000 acres. About 60 percent is in Maricopa County, 30 percent in Pinal and 10 percent in Gila. They are within an hour's drive from the Greater Phoenix area, two hours' drive from Tucson, and one to three hours' drive from Globe-Miami (depending on the road taken).

#### Present Commercial Uses

As noted, these two areas are entirely within the National Forest system. There is little or no privately owned land. Any change in status, which might eventually be considered desirable, would not require any expenditure for land acquisition. Official Forest Service information discloses these facts:

##### (a) LUMBER

There is no productive timber land in the area under consideration, according to the Forest Service. This eliminates one possible source of controversy.

(b) GRAZING

There are 8 range allotments on which grazing permits are active within the Superstition Wilderness area. Only one of them is wholly within the wilderness area, and less than half the allotted land is within the wilderness area. The total number of "cattle yearlong" head permitted on these allotments under present USFS administration is approximately 2,500, or about 1,250 for the portion lying within the wilderness area. Fees paid the Forest Service for the wilderness portion are approximately \$6,000 per annum.

(c) MINING

The Forest Service reports that "while a complete list of all mining claims...is available only from the records of the three counties concerned, it is estimated there are approximately 25 prospect claims within the area. However, only a few of them are being seriously worked.

### A Special Problem -- The Battle of the Bureaus

I undertook my review of this situation with no preconceived notions about what should be done -- nor with any idea about which federal agency should administer the area. However, I soon encountered the cross-fire of an old and well-advertised feud between the career employees of the Forest Service and those of the National Park Service. As Harper's Magazine, noted in its April 1962 issue: "...In Washington two rival bureaus are battling savagely for control of our outdoor recreation facilities...This rivalry is as grave a threat to field and stream, park and forest as were the predatory lumber, mining and cattle barons of the past. The principal adversaries are the Agriculture and Interior Departments".

In early 1962 I circulated for comment among a few interested people a rough, confidential, and very tentative draft of my preliminary findings and conclusions. This apparently reached the hands of a few individual Forest Service personnel. Within a short time thereafter I began to receive a whole series of letters from representatives of sheep and cattle associations, game protective groups and others. All of these protested "proposals" I had not made. Many of them had been informed that the Interior Department was working with me in some kind of imminent plot to seize all this Forest Service territory for a new National Park.

I want to emphasize that the idea of restudying the Superstitions originated with me; that NPS has taken no position nor made any recommendations; its regional office only responded to my inquiry. In fairness, too, let me make it clear that the Regional officers of the Forest Service have treated me with complete fairness and courtesy, responding promptly to similar requests for information. I suspect that any misunderstanding has resulted from excessive zeal on the part of a few individual USFS personnel.

This development is related only to suggest that any decision which is made -- even a decision to leave the lands in present status, as many sincere people advocate -- should be reached only after full public discussion of all points of view. The future of the Superstitions is an important resource decision which should be made in the light of the national and public interest and without regard to inter-agency conflicts. For my part I hope this attitude will prevail.

## Alternative Development Proposals

In my original letters posing the problem to state and local officials, I suggested consideration of possible development by either (a) county and local governments, (b) The Arizona State Parks Board, or (c) the federal government. In the light of my study and subsequent developments, I would now make these general observations:

A. Major Development By Pinal County Is Not Feasible. The Board of Supervisors of Pinal County is of the opinion that an undertaking of this kind and size is entirely beyond its budget and staff capacities. The supervisors favor federal development and control. We can therefore exclude county development except for the small county park in the lower-westerly foothills of the "Mountain Wilderness Area" as described above.

B. Arizona State Parks Board Does Not Wish To Acquire Or Develop The Area. The Arizona Parks Board has reported that it is not in a position to undertake this large development. The Board's communication states in part:

"The U.S. Forest Service-administered Superstition Mountain Area has met all of the criteria for a State scenic park. It is most certainly of State park caliber and of Statewide significance. The chain of lakes on the Salt River have also met the Board's criteria as a State recreation area.

Both of these areas would be included in any long-range plan for park status. The Superstition Mountain Area could, in my opinion, meet National Park criteria, only if the Apache Trail and the Reservoirs on the Salt River were included as units of the park. All of the necessary components would then be present -- the wilderness aspect of the Superstition Mountain area itself, the dramatically scenic qualities of the Apache Trail, and the multiple and varied recreation uses of the Reservoirs. The Superstition Mountain area would not meet the criteria for a County park."

C. Federal Ownership And Development Seems The Only Logical Alternative. By this elimination process we are left with continued federal ownership, and development by some federal agency as the basis for any future policy. Federal development would not involve any land acquisition costs since all affected land is now federally owned.

### Three Forms of Federal Development

Federal development and administration can take one of three general courses:

Proposal One: Leave the entire area (both Mountain Wilderness and Salt River Lakes segments) in present status under Forest Service administration and development.

Proposal Two: Place the entire area (including both segments) into a new Superstition National Recreation Area to be administered and developed by the National Park Service.

Under Proposal Two the Mountain Wilderness Area would be left entirely undeveloped as at present (and if the Wilderness Bill is enacted would become part of the National Wilderness System). The NPS would develop the scenic and recreational potential of the Apache Trail-Salt River Lakes segment of the Recreation Area.

Proposal Three: Give the entire area National Recreation Area status and proceed with development of the Apache Trail-Salt River Lakes segment as in Proposal Two. In addition, however, the NPS would undertake a strictly limited development of the Mountain Wilderness segment opening it by perhaps one loop road in a manner similar to Organ Pipe and Chiricahua National Monuments.

One can advance many arguments in favor of and against, each of these proposals, and some are considered below. My mail is divided with considerable support for each.

## PROPOSAL ONE

### Keep The Present Status With USFS Administration

This course is favored by a resolution of the Arizona Conservation Council.

If no action is taken by Congress, the "Mountain Wilderness Area" would remain under Forest Service jurisdiction, and should the Wilderness Bill become law this portion of the overall area would undoubtedly become a part of the wilderness system. Roads or other facilities would be forbidden, and the area would be available only to those going in on foot or by horse. Many persons consider this a desirable situation; others object that such a result would deny the beauty and recreation potential to all but the young and healthy, etc. Much has already been done to improve and develop the Apache Trail-Salt River Lakes segment. With the limited personnel and resources permitted by its budget the Forest Service has provided some picnic areas, campgrounds, and beaches. Concessionaires have installed marinas, food and lodging services. The Arizona Fish and Game Commission cooperates in a fish stocking program. Maricopa County improved and paved much of the Apache Trail, and its County Sheriff cooperates with the Forest Service in law-enforcement responsibilities. Unpaid auxiliary deputies have assisted with weekend patrolling. Many private individuals and sportsmen's groups have volunteered services and materials needed for better facilities, and control. These commendable joint efforts have done much to meet the ever-increasing public use of this popular recreation area.

## PROPOSAL TWO

### National Recreation Area Status -- Development Of Apache Trail-Salt River Lakes Portion Only.

Under this proposal, legislation would be sought to create a Superstition National Recreation Area which would include both the mountain wilderness area, Apache Trail and the Salt River lakes. However, the "Mountain Wilderness Area" portion would be left in its present form with no roads or developments. The National Park Service would take over and develop the scenic and recreation potential along the Apache Trail and the three lakes.

In 1939 Senator Carl Hayden requested the National Park Service to investigate the Superstition area to determine if it could be considered for inclusion in the National Park System. After a field trip and study the Interior Department concluded that there was then insufficient justification for national park system status. Because State Parks Director Dennis McCarthy had suggested in August 1961 that the area would probably meet National Park System criteria, I asked NPS for another survey and opinion. I quote a portion of their February, 1962 report:

"In central Arizona, north of U.S. Highway 60-70 between Phoenix and Globe, lies a region of striking scenery and important recreational potential. This is the Superstition Mountains-Salt River Reservoirs complex, located in the southerly part of Tonto National Forest and approximating 220,000 acres in size. The significance of this region has long been recognized, but it is now coming into critical focus under the recreational pressures attending the burgeoning metropolitan growth of the Phoenix-Tucson area. Recently there has been interest in Arizona in defining the public needs and opportunities in the desert playground of mountains and manmade lakes, and in exploring some approaches to granting it park status....

"The proximity of an area like the Superstition Mountains to a teeming metropolitan-agricultural valley represents a remarkable contrast of desert range topography. In this case the relationship is an extremely fortunate one. The wild, rugged uplands of the Superstitions hold intrinsic recreational promise, so their value as a wilderness retreat for the populace of the cities crowding against their base is eminently high.

"Within a distance of a few miles, trails from all sides ascend the flanks of the Superstitions for 3,000 feet through perceptible changes of vegetative zoning. Giant saguaros and their desert associates on the lower slopes gradually give way to struggling colonies of pinyon and juniper. In the higher reaches the trails wander in solitude through a striking landscape of rocky prominences and pinnacles, Weavers Needle and Miners Needle being conspicuous features. Throughout the wilderness the trail traveler may observe in intimate detail the undisturbed work of natural processes that shape the mountain scene, and the fascinating world of plants that have learned to survive in this harsh environment.

"The Superstition Wilderness Area is serving its highest purpose when used as such. With timber and forage resources so sparse, with topography so rugged, and with access limited to trails, the area is unsuited to yielding the usual national forest products, but is ideal for wilderness hiking or horseback riding. However, water is extremely scarce, and trail users must prepare accordingly. Game populations are correspondingly limited and unvaried, but hunting is a compatible if relatively unrewarding pastime...

"The Apache Trail (State Highway 88) is the trunk artery for the Superstition-Salt River scenic region. This is the descendant of the old wagon road that was built at the turn of the century to serve the Roosevelt Dam project. Its winding alignment has changed but little, affording travelers a scenic experience not soon forgotten. Its appeal to motorists can scarcely be questioned, when a survey of a typical day's travel reveals that many, if not a

majority, of the cars on this road are from states other than Arizona. Eastern states are generally well represented in the count...

"The chain of reservoirs along the Salt River, so vital to the existence and the economy of the Phoenix metropolitan area, also provide it with a priceless recreational asset. They comprise the major water playground in all of Arizona except for the Colorado River reservoirs along its western boundary. In 1959 the U.S. Forest Service reported that over two million visits were made to the Salt River reservoirs. This can be translated into millions of hours of pleasure in boating, water skiing, fishing, swimming, picnicking, camping, or just sightseeing. While most of this use represents the Phoenix area, which is the closest and largest center of population, thousands of people from throughout the State and even from bordering states are attracted to these water areas...

"The two divisions of the area studied -- the Superstition Wilderness Area and the Salt River reservoirs -- are markedly different in their primary characteristics, but each possesses scenic and recreational resources that would be significant even if there were not one of the nation's future great population centers nearby that will need these resources desperately. In its own right, each of the two units merits protection and appropriate use of what it has to offer, and the attainment of such status for either one alone would be a great advantage. Yet, by virtue of their differences, they demand consideration together. By their distinctive qualities they complement each other, together offering a wide diversity of recreational pursuits. A full range of water-based activities on the one hand, wilderness adventure and exploration on the other, and a common ground of pleasures to delight the sightseer, the camera fan, the hiker or rider, the camper or picnicker. And the beautifully scenic Apache Trail is the unifying bond by which the two components are seen, interpreted, and related.

"The full recreational potential of the area will not be realized without a well-conceived and functioning recreational plan. It is badly needed now and will become more critical as time goes on. It would anticipate improved policies and measures for protection of the area and the people who use it, as well as a soundly planned and accelerated program of recreational development on the reservoirs. This would envision additional camping, picnicking, boating, and related facilities, with the means for new access, and a responsible program of protection and interpretation in relation thereto. The Superstition Wilderness Area would be preserved in its roadless state insofar as possible, with at most, construction of short spur roads leading to major points of scenic interest from junctions on the Apache Trail. Much could be done in providing overlooks and picnic and interpretive facilities in connection with these spurs, as well as on a greatly improved trail system."

National Recreation Area status for this area would have one important distinction from National Park or Monument status: in a National Recreation Area some multiple uses are permitted and existing grazing rights, etc., can be preserved. This is not true generally in National Parks and Monuments.

### PROPOSAL THREE

### National Recreation Area Status -

- Same Development As Proposal Two, Plus Limited Development Of "Mountain Wilderness".

This proposal would also require legislation to create a Superstition National Recreation Area including both of the two portions described above. In addition to developing the Apache Trail-Salt River Lakes portion as under Proposal Two, the National Park Service would develop the Superstition Mountain area in a manner somewhat similar to Chiricahua and Organ Pipe National Monuments. This would include perhaps one loop road reaching into the present wilderness area, traversing near Superstition Peak, Weaver's Needle and other points of interest, with perhaps one or two facilities for travelers along the road.

The principal advantage of Proposal Three is that it would make the beauty of the mountain wilderness area accessible to the general public. Opponents of this course urge that such development defeats itself by destroying the "wilderness" in order that people may see it.

Most of those who have hiked or ridden into the Superstition Wilderness Area are strongly opposed to any change in its present character. The National Park Service report takes the same view, declaring in part:

"Construction of a loop road into the Superstition Wilderness Area would seem to be ill-advised when weighed against the adverse effects of intrusion and the difficulty and cost of such a project. The existing opportunity for intimate contact with the terrain provided by the Apache Trail largely mitigates the argument that a new road in the Superstitions could be justified on the basis of allowing more people to see the mountains at close hand. However, if a loop road is yet considered desirable at some future time, it should be confined to the lower slopes in the northern fringe of the wilderness area."

### Conclusions

As indicated at the outset I am unwilling for the present to make any recommendation as among major proposals One, Two and Three. Of course, "Proposal One" is simply the present status quo, while federal legislation would be required to choose "Two" or "Three". Without broad bipartisan support among interested Arizonans for a change the present use and administration of these areas will continue. In my opinion such support does not now exist. If "One" is to be the course chosen I trust this will be a conscious decision of all concerned, made after full consideration of the alternatives. To this end I have taken the trouble to present this lengthy report.

On the positive side I do urge that legislation be drafted and sponsored so that the local park near Apache Junction can be obtained and established while land is still available. The Pinal County Board of Supervisors has suggested two potential sites, both in the western Superstition foothills. This type of day-use park containing picnic and general recreation areas has proven an invaluable community asset in Tucson Mountain Park and elsewhere. It could do much to relieve the pressure on facilities in the federally-administered area.

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This report will be circulated to all concerned. Comments are solicited and will be carefully considered.