**Telephone interview of 9/30/2015** **re: Salt River Ecosystem and its Wild Horses, with Tonto Nat. Forest ranger Chandler K. Mundy, Ranger Program Lead.** [cmundy@fs.fed.us](mailto:cmundy@fs.fed.us). 2324 McDowell Road, Phoenix, AZ 85006. Tel. (602)225-5200/5251. [www.fs.fed.us](http://www.fs.fed.us). Mesa Ranger District directly covers here. Office address is 5140 E. Ingram St., Mesa AZ 85541. Tel: (480) 610-3300.

Points discussed:  
Area with wild horses is more or less bounded by Highway 87 (“Beeline highway”) & the Bush Highway.

Lower Salt River below Saguaro Lake is one of the most intensely used recreation areas of all America’s national forests. This is where the wild horses have been concentrated along the lower Salt River. He admitted it has a serious littering problem with a multitude of plastic, can, and other forms of waste being discarded by visitors. Though he said this is illegal, he said the enormity of the problem makes it hard to control, i.e. can’t monitor people 100% of the time and general disregard for littering laws.

The Goldfield area allotment has been closed to cattle since the 1980’s.

The Salt River wild horses display two migratory cycles within the year. During the hot season, July to September, they stay at the Salt River. After the summer monsoons, they range out a few miles into the uplands as the vegetation revitalizes, or “greens up.” As this vegetation is “used up” they then return to the Salt River. And again during the Spring, there is another green up of vegetation that allows them to range inland away from the river. When this vegetation diminishes, the horses again return to the river.

The Salt River is the legal boundary between the Tonto National Forest & the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community. This boundary is unfenced. However, a greater frequency of fences occurs in the uplands. The other reservation influencing the wild horses and their habitat is the Fort McDowell Yavapai Indian Reservation. Both have maps on their websites.

The Tonto National Forest Visitor map will not be again available in print until Nov. 2015, but it can be accessed and printed by going onto AVENZA website as two parts: the North sector and the South Sector. There is also a Recreation map available.

The Southwestern Region of the US Forest Service has not yet completed its TEUI environmental description of the area where Salt River occurs. This report should be out in four to five years. This is due to greater emphasis being placed by the USFS on areas used for timber harvest or livestock grazing.

There are broken down fences remaining along the old grazing allotment. Long-term goal is to remove them. They are often along the roads and highways [to prevent vehicle collisions with animal, etc.].

In relation to my suggestion for free recreation passes in exchange for picking up trash, Chandler said the Salt River Tubing company offers two free days if tubers agree to pick up litter. Large bins are also available and frequently removed.

There are two big groups, or subpopulations, of wild horses: (1) that of the lower Salt River & (2) that of the Saguaro Lake area. Basically wild horses occupy ca. 16 miles along the Salt River beginning lower down at the Granite Reef Dam and going upriver to Saguaro Lake. But the horses are extending their range upriver into the Goldfield area. Last year they were noted at Butcher Jones recreation area on the north bank of Saguaro Lake.

Tonto National Forest staff undertook an aerial census of the wild horses during July, 2015, and counted 65 individual horses. They estimated there were ca. 100 wild horses in total. [This is not a viable level genetically speaking. I could request another LightHawk census & habitat evaluation flight. – CD.]

There is a legal Wild Burro Territory higher up in the Tonto Nat. Forest, but no burros have been observed there for the past ten years. Probably there never were very many. Mundy said these are not as hardy as the wild horses [this is very doubtful, since burros are very adaptive to arid deserts]. He admitted there may be a few secretive burros surviving. When I asked him about illegal capture & killing of the burros, he said this was possible, but noted that coyotes & mountain lions also kill them.

He said the Goldfield livestock allotment has not been grazed for a long time & that the Sunflower livestock allotment has not been grazed since 2002. It is 40 miles long on the south end of the forest near the river & on the upper side of Saguaro Lake. He noted that this allotment is in the process of reallocation for cattle grazing, but that, if authorized, this grazing will still not be permitted along the Salt River, only in the uplands. [I have received a recognition of my objection to its reauthorization from Tonto N.F. supervisor Neil Bosworth. – CD]

Ranger Mundy said that bird hunting and fishing occur along the Salt River but that there are not many deer and no bighorn sheep. He doubts that much trapping occurs, though river otters occur near Burtlett (? spelling?), though are not reported on the Salt River.

Pets are allowed for recreationalists, but must be leashed.

Butcher Jones beach has had three recent tests for water purity, all showing high levels of *E. coli*. Ranger Mundy blames this on the wild horses. I told him it was more likely from people and their pets, as horse droppings are much cleaner as far as this and other pathogens goes. Nonetheless, he was adamant that it was the horses “pooping in the water” and said this beach was being closed to recreational use now until the situation improved. [There needs to be an independent investigation here.]

The Salt River Project (SRP) manages the flows from the dams controlling water in the Salt River. [Sometimes the flows are very low at other times very high depending on demand and storm activity. This can wreak havoc with the Salt River ecosystem. There should be a guaranteed regularity of flows to prevent harmful disruption of the ecosystem and its wildlife, including the wild horses.]

Mundy said historical documents indicate that all the Salt River wild horses were claimed by the Pine Maricopa tribe in 1971 & that consequently these horses do not qualify as legal “wild horses”. I told him this was not so, as many witnesses attested to the unbranded wild horses presence outside the reservation in 1971 at the passage of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (the criteria for wild horse or burro territory designation). I also told him that it was one thing to merely claim the horses and quite another to prove their claim, i.e. as through branding, registry, etc. This Native American reservation raises cattle &horses & has for generations past. Mundy said one document shows zero wild horses occurring along the Salt River in 1976. He said according to one document the horses have greatly increased & expanded since the 1990s when they were estimated at only 10 to 15 individuals, His voice took on a tone of alarm on this point, as though this were something totally outrageous.

He suggested I get a detailed forest map from the front desk or AVENZA & that I go onto the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community website as well as that of the Fort McDowell Yavapai Indian Reservation for further information. Front desk said the maps were not due til mid November & to try the AVENZA website. Ranger Chandler Mundy said to call him back if I had further questions.