

NVUM Survey seeks National Forest use information

By Chuck Jenkins

A few of us who are members of the Friends of the Forest have been trained to assist the Red Rock District of the Coconino National Forest in conducting National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) surveys during fiscal year 2010. The NVUM surveys are statistical samplings of information and opinions of visitors who are exiting the forest after having used the forest for various recreation activities.

According to the National Visitor Use Monitoring Handbook, "The information collected from forest visitors will be used by forest managers to make decisions. It will be used to better understand who our visitors are, why they come to the national forest, how satisfied they are with the facilities and services provided, and how much they spend on their visit." Red Rock District Ranger Heather Provencio states that she regularly refers to NVUM generated data when dealing with day-to-day issues she faces on the district. Forest usage data eventually is used at the Federal government level to provide more accurate budget inputs. The 2005 NVUM surveys indicated the Coconino National Forest to be the third busiest forest for recreation in the Southwest Region.

Survey sites and dates for 2010 have been randomly selected by computer from appropriate data bases for all Districts on the Coconino. Sites include everything from developed campsites and scenic overlooks to wilderness trailheads and swimming areas. The methodology used is provided by statistical sampling professionals and has been in use for a decade. Each National Forest conducts a year-long NVUM survey program once every five years. The Coconino last conducted the NVUM survey in 2005.

Forest Technician Charlie Armiger has the responsibility to have teams geared up to conduct surveys at the proper time and place on the Red Rock District. Charlie is a veteran of previous surveys and provided the training for Red Rock District personnel and the volunteers from the Friends of the Forest. Training included how to set up the survey site with an emphasis on signage and safety, how to talk to people, how to utilize the survey forms, and how to set up associated counters such as infrared counters for counting people using trails and pneumatic car counters for road use.

A large number of the surveys are being conducted by Neal and Laura, a retired couple who have specialized in doing Forest Service NVUM surveys on other forests for the last couple of years and who were hired to be the primary survey team for the Red Rock District. When the random computer selection of sites and dates has multiple surveys scheduled on the same day, Charlie Armiger must assign other employees or call on the assistance of volunteers to conduct the surveys.

I have enjoyed my opportunities to conduct NVUM surveys. I have talked to people from all over this country and from many foreign countries as well. The common thread of discussion with all these people is about the beauty of the Red Rock District. People come to this area to use the forest for many different activities from hiking, biking, and driving scenic roads to swimming, camping and, my favorite survey response, just plain relaxing and hanging out.

One of the primary goals of the Friends of the Forest is to provide volunteer manpower to perform routine tasks and thereby release uniformed employees to continue with their normal duties protecting and managing the forest.

If you are interested in making a difference, become involved with Friends of the Forest. For more information, visit www.friendsoftheforestsedona.org or contact the Red Rock Ranger Station at 203-2900.

