

TONTO National Forest— Arizona

The Tonto National Forest in central Arizona encompasses almost 3 million acres of land. This area, just slightly smaller than

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Connecticut, contains a wide variety of riparian and upland habitats subject to diverse climatic, grazing and political conditions.

The Tonto Forest has been grazed by domestic livestock since the mid-1800s. Intensive, unregulated grazing in the early years severely depleted uplands and riparian areas of native vegetation. This resulted in the familiar chain reaction of events leading to deterioration of watersheds and loss of productivity.

Grazing eventually was brought under better control, but watersheds and their riparian areas remained in a deteriorated condition.

In the late 1970s the Forest Service took aggressive steps to improve upland vegetation and encourage regeneration of cottonwood, willow and other vegetation in the largely denuded riparian areas.

Grazing strategies were designed to fit specific site potential and condition. A number of grazing allotments were switched from

continuous, season-long grazing to a five-pasture, rest-rotation system providing high intensity, short duration grazing and spring-summer rest two



Tonto Creek, 1982

out of every three years.

The 34,800 acre Sedow Allotment is at about 5,000 feet elevation. Precipitation is approximately nineteen inches per year, about 60% occurring in winter. Vegetation ranges from semi-desert grasses to chaparral-juniper. In 1978, riparian areas with potential for cottonwood and willow were characterized by a few large, decadent trees scattered along

otherwise bare creek banks. In one study area there were no cottonwoods or willows between 0.25 and 25.9 inches in diameter. The Forest Service

Tonto Creek, 1926.

"Tonto Creek was timbered with the local creek bottom type of timber from bluff to bluff, the water seeped rather than flowed down through a series of sloughs and fish over a foot in length could be caught with little trouble. Today this same creek bottom is little more than a gravel bar from bluff to bluff. The old trees are gone. Some were cut for fuel, many others were cut for cattle during droughts and for winter feed, and many were washed away during the floods that rushed down the stream nearly every year since the range started to deplete. The same condition applies to practically every stream on the Tonto."

— Fred Croxen, Senior Forest Ranger, Tonto National Forest, 1926