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Tonto National Forest is a wide-open playground for the thousands of Valley residents who visit each week for Salt River tubing, off-highway riding and target practice.

But as the Valley's population swells, more human traces are being left behind: litter, dumping, habitat destruction, and even assaults and murder.

The heavily used forest hugs Cave Creek, Scottsdale, Rio Verde and the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, and its proximity makes it a popular destination for Northeast Valley residents.

It is becoming more difficult for the U.S. Forest Service to keep up with the Tonto crime, even with assistance from the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office and unarmed federal forest patrol officers, said Bo Acosta, the only federal law enforcement officer assigned to patrol a 440,000-acre district of the 2.9 million-acre forest.

The only way the Forest Service even begins to keep pace with the trash, Acosta said, is with the efforts of volunteers who regularly clean up tons of beer cans and shell casings, old refrigerators, used computers, construction materials and other trash.

"We get run pretty ragged,"



Photos by Nick Oza/The Republic

Bo Acosta is the only federal law enforcement officer assigned to patrol a 440,000-acre district of the 2.9 million-acre Tonto National Forest. At right, Neeko Flores, 11, looks for bullets after target practice with his brother and grandfather.

Acosta said. "You could be out here until 3 o'clock in the morning, and then your phone's ringing at 7 a.m."

Acosta stopped his Forest Service vehicle at one of his least favorite places in his district: Sycamore Creek, an isolated dry wash off the Beeline Highway used for throwing raves, dumping bodies, scrawling graffiti and getting rid of stolen vehicles, Acosta said.

"This place is a nightmare," he said.

#### Stay on the worn track

Near the wash, off-road vehicle riders have dug a series of crisscrossing paths more than 20 feet deep into the hills.

"See all those roads in the hills?" Acosta asked. "They

aren't supposed to be there."

Rich Smith of Tempe is part of Friends of Sycamore, a group of off-road vehicle enthusiasts. The group is working with the Forest Service to identify and map out sustainable trails that satisfy both the government and the riders.

"Like with anything, as more people start using it, some percentage of the population are not really respectful of the environment and the trails,"

In addition to scraping away the hills, some off-road vehicle riders inadvertently have destroyed historic ruins by riding off the designated paths, said Travis Bone, a Forest Service archaeologist.

People also pocket shards of



pottery without realizing they are disturbing ancient sites, Bone said.

#### Shooting in the pit

Target shooting is another popular forest activity, and makeshift shooting pits are scattered throughout the areas closest to the metro area.

In one pit near Sycamore Creek, a hill is used as a backdrop, and the surrounding vegetation is nearly all gone.

Thousands of multicolored bullet shells are scattered on the ground, and shooters often leave behind the junk they were aiming for: ladders, refrigerators, propane tanks — things that make distinctive "plink" sounds when hit.

Ron Moffet of Mesa has been

bringing his two grandsons, Javen and Neeko Flores, to a shooting pit near Sugarloaf Mountain in the Tonto National Forest for the past few years.

Earlier this week, the family had been using an empty propane tank for target practice, and they made sure to load the bullet-riddled tank into Moffet's truck before they left.

"People just leave junk all over," Moffet said. "That's why I tell kids to pick up the junk."

To curb some of the destruction, the Forest Service fenced off a designated area called Bulldog Canyon for off-road vehicles. Users have to come to the Forest Service's office to get the combination for the gates' locks.

2.9 million Annual visitors.

2.9 million Acres in the forest.

230,000 Tons of minerals produced annually.

26,000 Cattle that graze in the forest.

20,400 Average acres burned by wildfire per year.

8,730 Known prehistoric and historic sites.

900 Miles of trails.

330 Average wildfires per year.

220 Permanent employees.

101 Years of being a national forest.

59 Camping sites.

52 Trailheads.

26 Picnic sites.

21 Threatened or endangered species living in the forest.

18 Boating sites.

10 Fishing sites.

Source: U.S. Forest Service.

"Just by cutting access we saw a dramatic change in what's going on in the landscape," Bone said.

Since January, the Forest Service issued 1,474 permits to Bulldog Canyon.

## 8-unit housing complex on 12th Street touted as infill project

Developer hopes buyers will pay \$725,000 per unit

By Ken Alltucker  
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An eight-unit residential project will be built on land where a developer purchased and razed a house on 12th Street once owned by a

prominent Valley architect.

The "George" housing development, named for architect George Christensen, will include duplex-style homes wedged on a sliver of land at 5600 N. 12th St. between Camelback and Bethany Home roads.

Backers of the project are describing it as a classic infill project more commonly found in dense urban cities such as Chicago or New York. They

hope the urban cachet lures buyers willing to pay at least \$725,000 per unit.

Developer Ryan Spikerman broke ground on the project last month and expects to complete the units by fall 2007.

So far, three of eight units have been reserved by buyers who put down a small deposit. No sales contracts will be formally signed until the developer gets the necessary paperwork, called a state report,

returned from the Arizona Department of Real Estate. That could happen within 30 days.

"It's just incredibly cool, unlike anything else you'll see in Phoenix," said Bruce Graham, of Jarson & Jarson, hired to sell the units.

The project will include four buildings each with two 2-story units. Each unit will have three bedrooms, 2½ baths and a two-car garage.

Other touches include 9-foot ceilings, finished concrete floors and gourmet kitchens with European-style cabinets.

The developers describe the project as a modern urban housing project with floor plans that will appeal to professionals seeking an urban setting with the amenities of the suburbs.

Among those who've chimed in on George include Phoenix

Councilman Greg Stanton, who suggested that the project may appeal to families interested in moving to central Phoenix.

Phoenix architectural firm Studio Ma designed the project.

Other Studio Ma projects include the remodel at the Heard Museum, a trail at Tempe Town Lake and Arizona State University's main campus and downtown bookstores.