

For Immediate Release
March 23, 2004
Anderson Mesa Settlement
Arizona's Natural Treasure Protected

On March 22, 2004, United States District Judge, the Honorable Robert C. Broomfield, with his signature, endorsed the settlement of the lawsuit between the Arizona Wildlife Federation and the Coconino National Forest to protect the natural heritage of Anderson Mesa for future generations.

“The settlement agreement is a huge victory for wildlife,” said Rick Erman with the AWF. “We have maintained all along that the Anderson Mesa Wetland complex needed to be protected for the benefit of wildlife. All we have asked is for the Forest Service to follow their own forest plan in managing these wetlands and adhere to existing law while implementing new management plans.”

Western Environmental Law Center filed the lawsuit on behalf of the AWF in June 2001, because the Coconino National Forest refused to follow Federal Law and their Forest Plan, and all possible negotiations between the parties failed to find a solution to the dramatic and continuous decline in both wildlife numbers and habitat quality on Anderson Mesa.

Anderson Mesa is comprised of 200,500 acres of public forestlands that start near Flagstaff and expands southeasterly for 45 miles. It was renowned for its rich diversity in animal and plant species. At one time, Anderson Mesa supported Arizona's premier Pronghorn Antelope herd and its wetlands was responsible for producing 35 percent of Arizona's waterfowl along with providing for the habitat needs of a large number of other bird species, which are dependant on healthy, fully functional wetland habitats.

In the settlement agreement, the Coconino National Forest has agreed to abide by the timeframes set in the National Environmental Policy Act, and has agreed to protect the Anderson Mesa wetlands according to the Coconino National Forest Management Plan.

Remarking just how important the terms of settlement are to wildlife, Bob Broscheid, Acting Habitat Branch Chief for the Arizona Game and Fish Department, in recent department comments to an affected Anderson Mesa Grazing allotment wrote, “We appreciate the efforts of the Forest Service to improve the management of wetland habitats on Anderson Mesa. We believe these efforts will benefit pronghorn and waterfowl well into the future. We also strongly support deferring grazing in pastures from May 15 to July 15 that contain unfenced, semi-permanent or seasonal wetlands. This measure would benefit pronghorn fawns, waterfowl and ground-nesting songbirds by preserving adequate cover.”

“The settlement is a watershed victory for wildlife and wildlife habitat on Anderson Mesa and will play a role in how the Forest Service manages all of the public resource under its control”, said AWF's Don Farmer. “Our hope is now that these key wetland areas have been afforded some protection from cattle, the Forest Service will work towards restoring plant diversity and vigor that would occur naturally in a functional wetland.”