

Petrified Forest National Park (AZ)

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National Park
(AZ)

Fiscal Year:
2009

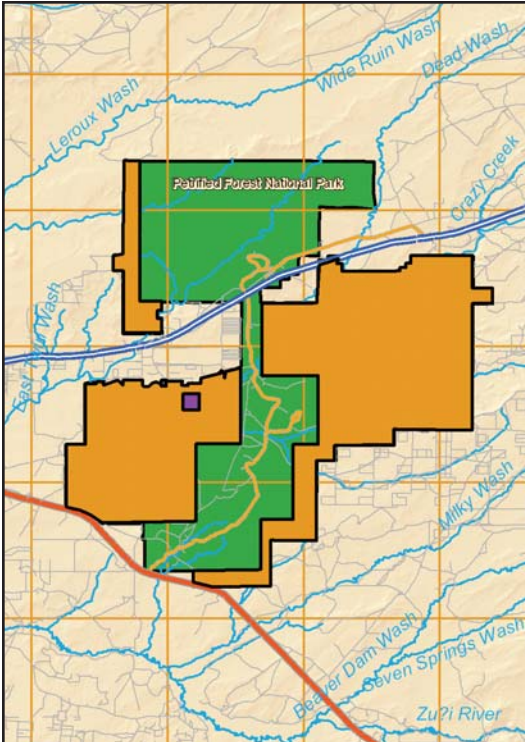
Acreage:
28,000

**Estimated Price
to National Park
Service:**
\$6,000,000

**Natural
Resources:**
Paleontological
resources,
petrified wood,
shortgrass prairie
ecosystem, scenic
viewsheds

**Cultural
Resources:**
Archaeological
sites, prehistoric
cultures

**Programmatic
Significance:**
Riparian
restoration,
wildlife habitat
preservation,
recreation,
outdoor education,
scenic viewshed
protection



In 1992, the Petrified Forest National Park General Management Plan (GMP) identified approximately 97,800 acres for potential inclusion in the park that, at the time, encompassed approximately 93,500 acres. Scientific research revealed that petrified wood was only one part of the globally significant record contained within the Chinle escarpment that the park was established to protect. The Chinle escarpment, which is the name given to the geologic formation containing the “mineralized remains of the Mesozoic forest” is now known to constitute the best record of Triassic period terrestrial ecosystems found anywhere in the world. In 1992, only six miles of the 22-mile escarpment was included in the park, with the segments of the greatest research and interpretive value located outside the park. Additionally, hundreds of important archaeological sites related to several prehistoric cultures were identified adjacent to park boundaries, many of which appeared to have significance equal to or greater than the sites known to exist inside the current boundary.

Most of the private lands adjacent to the park were managed as cattle ranches for more than a century. Although this land use preserved the scenic views from the park, cattle ranching is no longer viable because of serious droughts in the region and mineral exploration and mining operations have been increasing—including large-scale, mechanized petrified wood mining. These uses are incompatible with the long-term preservation of paleontological or archaeological resources. These resources are also seriously threatened by illegal activities, such as theft of petrified wood from public lands, pot hunting, and vandalism.

In 2004, a strong bipartisan effort resulted in passage of the “Petrified Forest National Park Expansion Act,” which authorized the acquisition of more than 125,000 acres of private and public land for addition to the park. This was a triumph not only for Petrified Forest National Park but also for the landowners, the local community and the members of Congress who worked so diligently to get the expansion authorized. However, four years after authorizing the expansion, Congress has yet to allocate any of the funds to buy the land.

Although there are multiple landowners motivated to sell or trade their property, some are quite rightfully getting tired of waiting for the government to supply the funds and may start to look elsewhere for a buyer. The Twin Buttes Ranch—one parcel among the 80,000 private acres to be acquired—is a good example. When a heavy drought devastated the owner’s herd in 2002, he quit the cattle business. Twin Buttes is included in the boundary expansion and the owner wants to sell to the Park Service. However, the longer the owner is forced to wait, the more he needs the money from the sale and the more attractive other offers become. Meanwhile, priceless artifacts go unprotected, scenic viewsheds are threatened, and a great accomplishment by Congress could go unfulfilled.

FOR SALE