



Town of Payson
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Payson, Arizona 85541-4306

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March 20, 2014

Coconino National Forests – Plan Revision Team
1824 S. Thompson Street
Flagstaff, AZ 86001

Re: Comments on Coconino National Forests Proposed Land Management Plan and Programmatic Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)

Dear Sir or Madam:

The Town of Payson appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft update of the forest plan for the Coconino National Forest. Healthy and resilient national forests are very important to the Town of Payson in ensuring that a clean and reliable supply of water is available for the Payson and northern Gila County area. Proper forest management of the lands within the national forest makes that happen.

Within the draft update of the forest plan, there are many references to water supply, water quality and aquatic systems. Of particular importance to the Town of Payson (Payson) is the recognition of water supply and water quality as it relates to C.C. Cragin Reservoir as a municipal water supply for Payson and those served by the Salt River Project (SRP). Under provisions of the Arizona Water Settlement Act of 2004, the United States, acting through the Secretary of the Interior, accepted the transfer of title to C.C. Cragin Reservoir (referenced as Blue Ridge Reservoir at that time) for the exclusive use and benefit to the Salt River Federal Reclamation Project. Upon the transfer of title, SRP assumed care, operation and maintenance of the project pursuant to a 1917 agreement between the U.S. and SRP. In addition to the delivery of this water for use by municipal, agricultural and commercial users within the SRP water service territory, a portion of the reservoir storage was made available for municipal and domestic uses in Northern Gila County, in particular Payson and other Northern Gila County communities. A 2008 agreement between SRP and the Town of Payson and subsequent action by the Arizona Department of Water Resources resulted in a permanent surface water right of 3,000 acre-feet per year in C.C. Cragin Reservoir for Payson. Consequently, as part of the process in updating the Coconino forest plan, the watershed of the C.C. Cragin Reservoir should be designated as a municipal watershed.

Additionally, the public water provider for the Mesa del Caballo subdivision near Payson is in the process of establishing a water right in C.C. Cragin Reservoir. The provider has reached formal agreement with SRP on a C.C. Cragin water right and has reached formal agreement with

Payson to transport, treat and deliver the water supply to the subdivision. This will be the 400+-plus residence subdivision's principal drinking water supply.

Also, the Tonto Apache Tribe in Payson is engaged in formal discussions with the federal government and SRP to establish a surface water right in C.C. Cragin Reservoir for the Tribe's principal drinking water supply. Payson will transport, treat and deliver the new water supply to the Reservation.

Significant investment has been made by SRP and the Town of Payson to ensure the reservoir infrastructure, and management of such, will meet the needs of municipal and domestic water users in Payson and the Phoenix metropolitan area. The reservoir will be the primary drinking water source for Payson, and is anticipated to be the primary water source for many of the other communities located within Northern Gila County. It is imperative that the forest service manage and care for the C.C. Cragin watershed in a manner that protects human health and safety in relation to the reservoir water supply through watershed treatments, such as vegetation thinning or prescribed burns, to prevent catastrophic events such as wildfire that currently have a high probability of occurring.

Pursuant to the above-listed facts we respectfully request the appropriate inclusion of the C.C. Cragin municipal watershed and related purposes within the revised Land Management Plan and supplemental environmental documentation. These should include Background Descriptions, Desired Conditions (Watersheds, Water Quality, Quantity, and Aquatic Systems, Reservoirs and Lakes, Upper Clear Creek, etc.), and Objectives.

We appreciate the continued coordination with the Coconino National Forest and other partners to ensure resilient, functioning watersheds, and robust and clean water supplies for local and downstream communities, as well as for the benefit of the forest ecosystem. We look forward to discussing these comments in further detail as you move toward finalizing the Coconino National Forest Land Management Plan.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Debra A. Galbraith
Town Manager

cc. Town Clerk

Town of Payson
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Payson, Arizona 85541-4306

Received on Polly Haessig's
Desk 3/20/14 4pm

COMMENTS ON COCONINO NATIONAL FOREST PROPOSED LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN AND PROGRAMMATIC DRAFT
ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT (DEIS)