



July 30, 2014.

Shalonda Guy, Deputy District Ranger
Coronado National Forest
5700 N. Sabino Canyon Road
Tucson, AZ 85750

Also submitted electronically to: comments-southwestern-coronado@fs.fed.us

RE: Draft Environmental Assessment: Authorizing Helicopter Use by the Arizona Game and Fish Department within Pusch Ridge Wilderness.

Dear Deputy District Ranger Guy,

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the document "Draft Environmental Assessment: Authorizing Helicopter Use by the Arizona Game and Fish Department within Pusch Ridge Wilderness." As members of the Catalina Bighorn Sheep Advisory Committee, we have a particular interest in this proposed action.

We view healthy native species populations as important to the ecological integrity of Wilderness areas and as enhancing the natural character of Wilderness. The current effort to restore a population of desert bighorn sheep in the Pusch Ridge Wilderness and Santa Catalina Mountains represents an opportunity to advance those goals.

We agree that important factors for the success of the desert bighorn sheep reintroduction effort include effective monitoring of the sheep population, timeliness of response to mortality events and addressing technological malfunctions of tracking collars. Many of these activities will likely occur in rugged backcountry and require a time-sensitive response.

We support the draft EA's Modified Proposed Action and its temporary and occasional use of helicopters and landings in the Pusch Ridge Wilderness as minimum requirements for the administration of the area in accordance with section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act. We encourage a conservative approach to the use of helicopters that accomplishes the most gain with minimum impact.

We particularly appreciate and support the design features of the proposed action which seek to minimize the potential adverse effects of this use on wilderness qualities and user experiences. In particular, from pages 20-21 of the draft EA, we appreciate and support that flight path designs, flight schedules, and landing area locations will be crafted to avoid Mexican

Spotted Owl Protected Activity Centers; to avoid or minimize use impacts to heavily used recreational trail corridors and high visitor use times (weekends and holidays); and to avoid or minimize vegetation disturbances or site contamination from equipment use.

We would appreciate clarity on Figure 2, Helisites map and page 18 of the draft EA discussing current and historical helisites (black dots and yellow dots, respectively, on the map). From our reading of the EA it is unclear whether landings permitted for this project would be restricted to the current (black dot) helisites, the historical (yellow dot) helisites, both, or neither. Relatedly, it is difficult to determine from Figure 2 and Figure 3 (Mexican Spotted Owl Protected Activity Centers) if any of the current or historical helisites are within Mexican Spotted Owl Protected Activity Centers; if so, we presume those sites would be eliminated from consideration. These are important points to clarify.

We also recommend that prompt complete records be kept for each use under this EA so that the public can form an accurate understanding of the scale and effects of the project and so that the project can be monitored and evaluated on ongoing and retrospective bases.

Thank you for your efforts to restore desert bighorn sheep to their historic range in the Pusch Ridge Wilderness. If we can be of additional assistance, please contact us.

Respectfully,



Mike Quigley
Arizona State Director
The Wilderness Society



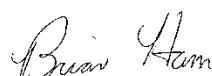
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