**CIBOLA NF PLAN REVISION COMMENTS - 2ND PHASE - 9-2015**
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Comments on the necessity for protecting and conserving additional wilderness within the Cibola National Forest:

- The first section of this commentary should consider a definition of wilderness, as I see it. There is a legal definition, but there is also a definition that should come from my heart. I have been reading various nature writers as I was considering what I wanted to say about wilderness and its place in the Cibola National Forest, and I have found a writer named Robert Macfarlane from Great Britain who has a definition of wilderness and wild places in his collection of essays, "The Wild Places", (@ 2007) that works well for me. On page 30 he writes, "Wildness…is an expression of independence from human direction, and wild land can be said to be 'self-willed' land. Land that proceeds according to its own laws and principles, land whose habits - the growth of its trees, the movements of its creatures, the free descent of its streams through its rocks - are of its own devising and own execution. Land that, as the contemporary definition of wild continues, 'acts or moves freely without restraint; is unconfined, unrestricted'." In a history of the concept of wilderness, on page 31, he compared Beowulf's antagonism for wild places with the Celtic monks' embracing of wild places. "The Old English epic poem 'Beowulf' is filled with what the poet calls 'wildeor" or 'savage creatures'…It is against these wild places and 'wildeor' that the civilization of Beowulf's tribe, the Geats - with their warm and well-lit mead halls, their hierarchical warrior culture - sets itself…Parallel to this hatred of the wild, however, has run an alternative history: one that tells of wildness as an energy both exemplary and exquisite, and of wild places as realms of miracle, diversity and abundance."

- There are many places in the Cibola National Forest that are appropriately managed for multiple uses, and only a few places that could be managed as wilderness. Because many users of the forest are passionate about having the particular way that they use the forest, whether it is for hiking, riding horses, ORV, motorized, or mechanized use, hunting or angling, or extraction for personal, cultural, or community uses, be available to them in any part of the forest, there is a great deal of pressure on the plan revision process to make all of these uses available on all of the forest. What this pressure does not take into consideration is the intrinsic value of wild and isolated places within the forest to provide habitat for common and rare native plants, animals, insects, fish, and other types of wild life. It does not consider the importance of corridors for both plants and animals to be able to migrate, both seasonally, and over large blocks of time because of these decades of drought and centuries of climate change. As Robert Macfarlane writes on pages 306-307, "So few wild creatures, relatively, remain in Britain and Ireland: so few, relatively, in the world. Pursuing our project of civilization, we have pushed thousands of species towards the brink of disappearance, and many thousands more over that edge. The loss, after it is theirs, is ours. Wild animals, like wild places, are invaluable to us precisely because they are not us. They are uncompromisingly different. The paths they follow, the impulses that guide them, are of other orders. The seal's holding gaze, before it flukes to push another tunnel through the sea, the hare's run, the hawk's high gyres: such things are wild. Seeing them, you are made briefly aware of a world operating in patterns and purposes that you do not share. These are creatures, you realize, that live by voices inaudible to you." And often the best place for all forest users to encounter these creatures and plants is in the wilderness. Seeing bear scat every 30-40 feet in the Magdalenas and San Mateos is an edgy experience, to be sure, but

still one that I value highly. Finding mountain lion prints in the Zunis and hearing wolves howl in the Gila reminds me of how small my own place is on this earth, but how sweet that place is when I can be in wilderness with these large creatures. Watching the endangered Zuni Bluehead Sucker dart after water striders is an experience I will never forget, even if is not in the cards for me to climb down into that canyon again. Hugging a +40" in diameter Blue Spruce, corny as it sounds, makes me feel as old and alive as the mountains in which it grows.

- The anti-wilderness sentiment does not value the experience of the forest as a place for solitude and the enjoyment of a wilder experience than the groomed and overused trails and roads in the rest of the forest allow. At my age, I am lucky to be able to hike into wild areas only for a few miles, but it takes less than a mile for me to feel like I am having a unique and unpredictable experience. And I would not say that I am a particularly adventurous person, but it is something that I want my and others' children and grandchildren to be able to have. As I was reading "The Wild Places" by Robert Macfarlane, I discovered the history and value of wild places, even in so settled and populated a place as the British Isles. About special, wild places, he wrote on page 236, "These were the markers, I realized, of a process that was continuously at work throughout these islands, and presumably throughout the world: the drawing of happiness from landscapes both large and small. Happiness, and the emotions that go by the collective noun of 'happiness': hope, joy, wonder, grace, tranquillity and others. Every day, millions of people found themselves deepened and dignified by their encounters with particular places." He also discusses the effect of wilderness on the human spirit by quoting Samuel Taylor Coleridge on page 209, "In the letters, poems and journal entries that Coleridge wrote over the course of those months, we can see him beginning to think out a new vision of the wild…Wildness, in Coleridge's account, is an energy which blows through one's being, causing the self to shift into new patterns, opening up alternative perceptions of life." If Coleridge can see the effect of wild places on the human spirit and MacFarlane can value such small pieces of wild places in the British Isles, surely we can set aside a few additional wild places for our own spirits in the relatively large confines of the Cibola National Forest.

- One of the arguments put forth by those who oppose identifying any more wilderness in the Cibola is that people who do not live in the immediate area of the land identified as eligible for inclusion in the wilderness inventory should not have equal standing with those who do happen to live in that area. These are federal public lands owned by all of the people of this country, including future generations who will benefit from their protection, and these lands need to be managed for the benefit of all of the citizens of the United States. The forest is also mandated to be managed for the benefit of the plants, animals, the watershed, and the scenic and historic areas contained in the forest. These have an intrinsic value that is not often mentioned by those opposing wilderness. The effect of forest planning on local communities is an important consideration, but only one of many considerations. As Macfarlane writes in The Wild Places on page 82, "In 1960, the historian and novelist Wallace Stegner wrote what would become known as 'The Wilderness Letter'…In it Stegner argued that a wild place was worth much more than could ever be revealed by a cost-benefit analysis of its recreation economic value, or its mineral and resources. No, he explained, we need wild places because they remind us of a world beyond the human. Forests, plains, prairies, deserts, mountains; the experience of these landscapes can give people 'a sense of bigness outside themselves that has not in some way been lost…But such landscapes, Stegner wrote, were diminishing in number. The 'remnants of the natural world' were 'being

progressively eroded'. The cost of this erosion was incalculable. For if the wild places were all to be lost, we would never again 'have the chance to see ourselves single, separate, vertical, and individual in the world, part of the environment of trees and rocks and soil, brother to the other animals, part of the natural world and competent to belong in it'. We would be 'committed wholly, without chance for even momentary reflection and rest, to a headlong drive into our technological termite-life, the Brave New World on a completely man-controlled environment'." While this can seem like a pessimistic viewpoint, if you consider the date of the original wilderness letter by Stegner, our current alienation from the natural world and obsession with technology, makes it apparent that this viewpoint is now more accurate than pessimistic. While nature is resilient, the effects of mismanagement, population increase, and climate change can cause the earth's ability to rebound to be compromised, perhaps irreversibly. On page 227, Macfarlane writes, "That margins should be a redoubt of wildness, I know, was proof of the devastation of the land: the extent to which nature had been squeezed to the territory's edges, repossessed almost to extinction. But it seemed like proof, as well, of the resilience of the wild - of its instinct for resurgence, its irrepressibility. And a recognition that wildness weaved with the human world, rather than existing only in cleaved-off areas, in National Parks and on distant peninsulas and peaks; maybe such a recognition was what was needed to help us end the opposition between culture and nature, the garden and the wilderness, and to come to recognize ourselves at last as at home in both…" If protecting these special places can be accomplished by our generation, that will leave our public lands like the Cibola National Forest and our world a richer, more diverse and resilient place for everyone.

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