

Subject: South Fork Day Use Area Draft Environmental Assessment (EA)  
Project 56779

Thank you USFS team for the time, energy, and money required to compose and compile a thorough Draft Environmental Assessment for the South Fork Day Use Area. I am a board member of Friends of Cave Creek Canyon and a full-time Portal resident. I use the forest at least four times a week walking, bicycling, birding, photographing, or hiking. My husband and I retired to Portal in 2001 because of the community and the forest.

**General Considerations.** This project has divided our community, my friends and neighbors. Their comments to me have increased my awareness of how much we all value the unique natural environment within the forest. As a consequence of the dissension, I reexamined what it means to me to be a board member and who I represent. My conclusion is that I represent all users, FOCCC members, the community, and foremost the forest who has no voice.

Sixty-six percent of FOCCC members are non-local. Over Labor Day weekend I counted license plates from 9 states parked at South Fork or driving through the canyon. The Forest Service has a tough job appealing to various interests: hikers of all ages; world-class birders and those of us not so; motorcyclists out for a joy ride; bicyclists; school children; researchers in a variety of fields; retirees and others who want nothing more than to sit by the creek and hear nature, to list a few. The Forest Service has listened and considered these various interest groups in keeping with your motto "Caring for the Land and Serving People."

Using the USFS as an example, I listen to my friends, my community, and FOCCC members. I set a high standard for myself so I will not spend FOCCC's money unwisely. We all love and appreciate our canyon but our considerations differ. Keeping these differences of opinion in mind, I have a challenging time deciding what EA options—or none—are necessary for the benefit of every visitor. The following comments represent a compromise for all interests. What I do not equivocate about is the necessity for a toilet.

**Toilet.** If South Fork is to remain open, it requires a toilet for sanitation and to protect the water quality of the creek. The location for it in Alternative B is the only agreeable solution. The berm option discussed at first is in a floodplain. The entrance to South Fork Road discussed at the March 9th meeting does not allow sufficient space. USFS told us that the two portable toilets at the berm now are not a long-term solution. I get it.

**Alternative B.** I therefore favor Alternative B with restrictions. I applaud and cheer keeping the forest's interests paramount with the closure of South Fork Road from March-June. There is much dissension about the closure. Residents feel that the road has always been opened and that as taxpayers they are discriminated against if the road is closed. Handicapped individuals feel discriminated against. And, the closure for birding interests is putting that above other forest uses. Another friend wants the road closed for 6 months to facilitate not only breeding birds but also insects and reptiles. The common denominator in what I'm hearing is the respect and love for our unique natural area. This closure will put its health above other interests.

**Staging Area, Handicap-Accessible Trail, Picnic Area, Trash Bin.** To limit the encroachment into the forest and ameliorate the ongoing brouhaha among residents, I feel that "less is more" so I oppose a "staging area." A handicap trail will be useful during the 4-month road shutdown. Three picnic tables are far fewer than what were in South Fork prior to Hurricane Odile in 2014; however, eliminate the bear-proof trash bin. Allow "Pack It In, Pack It Out" philosophy to prevail as at other picnic areas. This will also reduce maintenance costs.

**Benches.** With the road closure, it is important to place 2-3 benches along South Fork Road so walkers can rest, rehydrate, and rejoice.

**Kiosk.** It is vital to inform visitors about current trail status as well as information about the Fee Area. The design should be modest, perhaps one panel, front and back, or metal signs at waist level to avoid view obstruction.

**Road.** No enlarged pullouts for longer vehicles and no alterations to present parking areas along South Fork Road or at its entrance. Vehicles already park there informally and it works.

**Maintenance Costs.** Really \$10,000-\$15,000/year? I think this is an inflated figure with overhead costs and I know that FOCCC can do better. I would like to know how this figure was attained.

Rene Donaldson  
Board Member Friends of Cave Creek Canyon