



July 21, 2021

Emily Reynolds, NEPA Coordinator
ATTN: Meadow Valley Access Project
Coronado National Forest
300 West Congress Street
Tucson, AZ 85701

Electronically submitted to: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=58624>

Re: Meadow Valley Public Access Project

Dear Ms. Reynolds:

The Arizona Game and Fish Department (Department) has reviewed the recent Coronado National Forest (Forest) Environmental Assessment notice, dated June 30, 2021, and the supporting NEPA documents for restoring legal motorized access to existing National Forest System Roads (NFSR) on Forest managed lands in the Huachuca Ecosystem Management Area (EMA), Sierra Vista Ranger District.

Under Title 17 of the Arizona Revised Statutes, the Department, by and through the Arizona Game and Fish Commission (Commission), has jurisdictional authority and public trust responsibilities to protect and conserve the state fish and wildlife resources. In addition, the Department manages threatened and endangered species through authorities of Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act and the Department's 10(a)1(A) permit. It is the mission of the Department to conserve and protect Arizona's diverse fish and wildlife resources and manage for safe, compatible outdoor recreation opportunities for current and future generations. For your consideration, the Department provides the following comments based on the agency's statutory authorities, public trust responsibilities, and special expertise related to wildlife resources and recreation.

It is the policy of the Arizona Game and Fish Commission (Commission), in accordance with sound principles of natural resource management, to develop, maintain, or improve new roads, trails, or other rights-of-way (where the geophysical characteristics of the land and the costs of such development, maintenance, or improvement are not prohibitive, and are lawful) that will either connect existing roads/trails or provide new roads/trails that resolve access issues identified by the Department. The Commission places a high priority on conserving existing access and modes of access for hunting, fishing, trapping, shooting, wildlife watching, off-highway vehicle use, dispersed camping, and other responsible forms of outdoor recreation and improving access to areas of the State where access is currently difficult or nonexistent. As

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such, the Department has been directed to work with federal agencies and other entities to maintain access and promote wildlife viewing opportunities.

Thus, the Department supports the efforts of the Forest to restore motorized access to the Meadow Valley Area of the EMA. Based on the Department's evaluation of the selected alternative, the project will not have significant impacts to wildlife habitat. In addition, it will restore access to the Department's Bog Hole Wildlife Area, managed by the Department under a special use permit for waterfowl and other wildlife. The Bog Hole Wildlife Area is an important public interpretive site that is used for educating the public on habitat for waterfowl and other wetland-dependent wildlife species, as well as for wildlife viewing enthusiasts, and for waterfowl hunting. Additionally, the Meadow Valley area is popular for wildlife-related recreation and is noted for its exceptional Mearns' quail and Coues' whitetail deer hunting.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Meadow Valley Public Access Project. The Department looks forward to working with the Forest on this endeavor. For further coordination, please contact Matthew Walton, Region 5 Public Access Specialist, at mwalton@azgfd.gov or 520-628-5376.

Sincerely,



Raul Vega
Tucson Regional Supervisor

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