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**Subject:** South Fork Day Use Area

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**From:** David Fielding [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, July 16, 2021 4:38 PM  
**To:** FS-objections-southwestern-coronado <[objections-southwestern-coronado@usda.gov](mailto:objections-southwestern-coronado@usda.gov)>  
**Cc:** Fielding Audrey [REDACTED]; Dave Rorick [REDACTED]; Brown Tom [REDACTED]; Donna Kay LeCzel [REDACTED]; Wendy LaRiviere [REDACTED]; Denvir John [REDACTED]; Miriam Rokeach [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** South Fork Day Use Area

USDA-FS  
South Fork Day Use Project July 16, 2021

Dear Sir/Madam:

In April, 2020, my wife and I filed objections and comments to the proposed South Fork Day Use Area project. These objections are a follow-up to that earlier comment. A number of other persons with similar concerns are signing in support of this objection to the current Draft Decision and Notice. We are continuing to raise objections similar to those we raised before because the current Draft Decision Notice and Finding fails to even mention, much less respond, to our concerns. I and each of the signors below are members of a group of naturalists and birdwatchers who have visited the South Fork of Cave Creek Canyon many times over the past 35 years. We have donated to and support the Friends of Cave Creek Canyon. These objections and alternative proposals to the current "Draft Decision Finding of No Significant Impact for the South Fork Day Use Area Project" reiterate and expand upon our earlier objections.

These objections are brief and straightforward, but for us, they are extremely important. If the Forest Service fails to address our concerns, we shall in essence be denied use of our beloved South Fork Trail. Please consider the physical hardships we face if the proposed closure of the access road to the South Fork Trailhead from the day use area is implemented.

We make the following objections and offer the following alternatives.

**1- A "Finding of No Significant Impact" is unjustified and in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).**

The proposed day use project is apparently designed, in part, to avoid potential disturbance to flora and fauna. To accomplish this, one element of the proposal provides for limiting vehicle traffic on the access road to the trailhead of the South Fork Trail for multiple months of what is a key migratory birdwatching season. However, both the plan of limiting disturbance to flora and fauna and the plan of gating and closing the access road to vehicle traffic have potentially significant impacts that require a full EIR. In particular, the gating and closure of nearly a mile of the access road to vehicles will have a major negative impact on the ability of seniors and others who are of an advanced age or have physical challenges to access the South Fork Trail. Indeed, the plan's immediate effect will be to deny to a large number of such stakeholders the opportunity to continue enjoying the South Fork Trail as they have for the past 90 years. The negative impact on a core group

of stakeholders is an impact that requires a proper EIR. Similarly, the lack of data or evidence regarding the plan's effect, positive or negative, flora and fauna require a proper EIR.

**2- There has been a lack of notice of the “Draft Decision Notice and Finding” to those who previously have identified themselves as stakeholders interested in the design of the project.**

Those of our group who specifically commented on and objected to the earlier draft design which contained a proposed gate and closure of the access road to the South Fork trailhead have not received any notice from the Forest Service or USDA of the current draft decision. We have only learned by chance of the current draft decision and of an apparent July 31 deadline to comment or object. It would be improper to proceed to any acceptance of the Final Draft without starting over and notifying all known stakeholders, including all those who commented or objected to the earlier draft proposal for the South Fork Day Use Area.

**3- As currently designed, the proposed gate closure during multiple months of the year would have the effect of denying access all together to many stakeholders to the South Fork trail.** Every member of our group and many others who are older adults would find the distance to the trailhead from the closed gate to be too great to manage, particularly since the primary goal is typically that of hiking and birding the South Fork Trail. As it is, the new ¼ mile of newly developed trail from the current end of the road to the beginning of the traditional South Fork Trail is enough of an added challenge. A walk on the access road would in no way compensate for the loss of the ability to enjoy the grandeur, the shade and the abundance of flora and fauna, including the extensive bird habitat, of the South Fork Trail itself.

**Proposed alternative to closure of the access road:** There exists a perfectly acceptable alternative way to minimize disruption to flora and fauna along the access road. That alternative would be to require those who wish to use their vehicle to get to the end of the access road to obtain a permit. The permit system can be used to educate and encourage conduct by visitors that minimizes their impact. Obtaining the permit would offer an opportunity to warn visitors of the sensitive nature of the road. The permit itself could contain (or be accompanied by a flyer that contained) notice of speed limits, dust and other concerns about vehicle use of the road. The permit could be provided at no charge or for a small fee to help defray the cost of related day use expenses. The permit could be required on the dashboard of the vehicle. It could be made available at numerous locations, including the current ranger station, the Portal Store, the Cave Creek Ranch, etc.

In conjunction with this alternative, special signs could be installed along the road itself: E.g. a sign giving notice of the requirement of a permit to enter, a sign limiting speed to 10mph, a sign advising of the sensitive nature of the area (“wildlife” or “bird nesting area” etc.).

Permit requirements have been used successfully throughout the national park system for years. They limit excessive use and provide both an opportunity to educate visitors and to remind them of how to act responsibly on forest service lands. It should also be obvious to all concerned that historically, abuse of the South Fork Trail area, let alone of its access road, has been next to non-existent by visitors of the type who have typically visited the trail over the past 90 years of its existence. Indeed, the use of the road did not inhibit the Trogon's arrival to the area years ago, nor their continuous presence along the South Fork Trail.

In conclusion, we respectfully urge the Forest Service to use common sense in this situation by acknowledging that Trogons and Spotted Owls have “shared the road” by coming to the area and nesting without apparent incident for years. Please don't close off access to the South Fork Trail to us and to so many others who would be unable because of age or physical limitations to add a mile of walking just to get to the trailhead that they have visited for years. If this plea to the Forest Service falls on deaf ears, perhaps we would all benefit from a more formal Environmental Impact Review.

Sincerely,

David Fielding

Audrey Fielding

David Rorick

Thomas Brown

Donna Kay LeCzel

John Denvir

Miriam Rokeach