
Subject: FW: OBJECTION: South Fork Day Use Area Project

From: Wendy LaRiviere [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, July 27, 2021 6:10 PM
To: FS-objections-southwestern-coronado <objections-southwestern-coronado@usda.gov>
Subject: Fwd: OBJECTION: South Fork Day Use Area Project

From: Wendy LaRiviere [REDACTED]
Date: Tue, Jul 27, 2021 at 4:33 PM
Subject: OBJECTION: South Fork Day Use Area Project
To: <objections-southwestern-coronado@usda.gov>

1. Wendy LaRiviere, [REDACTED]
2. Signature available, if requested.
3. This is a single objection.
4. Proposed project: South Fork Day Use Area Project, Author of Draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact: Doug Ruppel, District Ranger, Reviewing Officer: Kerwin S. Dewberry, Forest Supervisor and Reviewing Officer, Coronado National Forest, Douglas Ranger District.
5. My concern when I posted my original Objection back on September 10, 2020 was that the proposed closure of the South Fork access road to vehicular traffic from March through June did not appear justified by habitat concerns and constituted a real burden on mobility-impaired or senior citizens, like myself, who will have to walk a much greater distance than previously to access the beautiful wilderness that is the South Fork. Allegedly. they would have to do this to protect habitat. Many would not be able to do this, and they would have to forego ever visiting the South Fork during these months.

There are several problems with the reliance on habitat protection to justify this drastic change. The 2021 Fish and Wildlife Service's Census of Endangered Bird Species published online mentions as among the birds of conservation concern now, three birds that have frequented South Fork in the past: the Spotted Owl, the Elegant Trogon, and the Yellow-billed Cuckoo. The census does not mention the Mexican Spotted Owl which is the subspecies that visits South Fork and has been seen to breed close to the proposed Day Use Project. I have not found any mention of the Elegant Trogon or any jeopardy it may face in the Draft Decision. The 2020 Census of Endangered Birds, also available online, does not mention the Elegant Trogon, leading one to suspect that it will be listed for the first time in the US in 2021.

Local surveys noted a severe drop in the number of Trogon visitors to the Chiricahua region in 2021. Just 4 birds (3 males and 1 female) were observed as having visited in 2021. See FOCCC newsletter on the effects of the drought from June, 2021.

Having studied these sources, including the Draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact, I have concluded that these 3 birds may have already been impacted by environmental change, but the specific cause(s) of the impact is very difficult to say. It is suspected that the 2014 flood had an impact. It is also thought that the extreme drought which has gone on for decades must have had an effect. Or is it simply that people driving their cars on the access road must be halted during prime birding season, March - June, every year hence?

The decision that has been made here is very harsh and unilateral. It does not seem to have been based on a thorough-going review of the evidence. Like others, I have protested it, but I hadn't seen any alternative proposal that made sense to me.

David and Audrey Fielding, joined by others, have suggested a remedy that does make sense. It is practical and seems likely to succeed: a permit system for automobiles, as used already in many federal parks. See their comments on behalf of a permit system at the end of their Objection posted on July 18,2021.

If it is discovered later that there is a problem that persists with harmful impacts on the environment due to vehicle traffic on the access road to South Fork, then the more draconian solution of closing the road to vehicular traffic some period of time during the year might make sense. It is very premature now.