

Kerwin Dewberry, Forest Supervisor
Coronado National Forest
ATTN: Objections
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objections-southwestern-coronado@fs.fed.us

July 30, 2021

Dear Supervisor Dewberry,

Please consider this objection regarding the South Fork Day Use Area on the Douglas Ranger District of the Coronado National Forest. I also commented (within the prescribed period) during the Proposed Action Public Comment Period.

Also please note that this is my personal comment, separate from the one submitted by me as President of Chiricahua Regional Council (CRC).

It seems to me that Hurricane Odile, COVID-19, the increased risk of wildfires, and the growing popularity of Cave Creek Canyon have left Coronado National Forest with two primary and perplexing issues:

(1) Degradation of habitat:

~ Numbers of visitors to Cave Creek Canyon and South Fork specifically are increasing and expected to continue doing so.

~ South Fork must have a bathroom. Because of insufficient restroom facilities, evidence points to people's use of creek beds and bushes. Yet hydrology studies indicate there cannot be one at the "berm."

~ The proposed Day Use area is within the South Fork ZBA and therefore, according to the USFS's own plan, ineligible for development as it would degrade habitat by removing trees.

(2) Deleterious effect on protected wildlife:

~ The proposed Day Use area is smack in the middle of the area used by a pair of Mexican Spotted Owls for their fledglings (information the F&W Service didn't have during the assessment).

~ Closing South Fork Road in an attempt to alleviate pressure on the owls is likely to backfire, imposing more harm on them.

Possible Remedies

South Fork is a globally unique area and merits deep thought, collaboration, and consultation. Habitat, wildlife, and people have equal importance in this issue, and they all have conflicting needs and desires. The best remedy is to stop the process, take a deep breath, and start over, using the local extremely well-informed and engaged community to work out a solution that will allow this precious area to remain undamaged — yet still be enjoyed by the public.

There ARE solutions — but it will require a considerable investment of time and energy to hammer it out.

South Fork is worth the effort.

Please consider the following options:

- Remove the port-a-potties at the berm, and replace them with a vault toilet and 2-3 parking places at the intersection of FR 42 and South Fork, an area that according to the Forest Plan IS eligible for development. Include a warning sign that lets users know there are no restrooms beyond this point.
- Do not close the road for nesting season. Instead, install water bars that will slow floodwaters — and motorists, thus reducing dust, noise, and the likelihood of accidents.
- However, if the road has to be closed, please consider a coded gate. Cabin owners, handicapped/elderly users, and (well-organized) hikers could get the code ahead of time online.
- The central area of Sunny Flat Campground has an established history of recreation: Early Portalites used to play baseball there. Clear the scrub, and add two shade pavilions/picnic tables with a couple of parking places each.
- The handicapped trail that had to be removed from the proposed Day Use area for safety reasons could be established behind Campsite #10 in Sunny Flat and incorporate the current Nature Trail.

Supervisor Dewberry, as you know, South Fork is a much-loved area. Let's work together to make sure it isn't loved to death.

Many thanks for your consideration,

Wynne Brown

