

March 3rd , 2023

Lawrence J. Smith

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[REDACTED]

Ronald G. Hollis
District Ranger
Ozark-St Francis National Forest
Sylamore Ranger District
1001 E. Main St.
Mountain View AR 72560

Re: File code 1950 Fiber Optic Utility Corridor

Dear Mr. Hollis;

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project. The technological needs of the community are real and very important when it comes to communication. This project will help a lot of people.


I am writing in support of the project, but with a word or two of caution regarding future ramifications to the Leatherwood Wilderness Area (LWA). There are several in holders within the LWA that may wish to connect to this infrastructure if that is possible. These in holders own and operate a large horse operation and people from all over the U.S. come to the site to enjoy riding in the LWA. If their communication and power infrastructure can be increased, the resulting duration and volume of their use could be very detrimental to the LWA. Currently, there are miles and miles of de facto trails in the LWA made by the heavy horse traffic. While these trails can be used by foot, as I use them, they tend to be a maze and have no engineering to them at all. Much erosion has ensued at a number of locations as a result of the ad hoc trails. There has been a prior effort by the horse people to gain a power line right of way from the Big Creek side of the LWA, so I don't think my cautionary support of the fiber optic line is unwarranted.

Their use has not reached the point that would permanently damage the LWA, but their footprint is heavy, and the use is growing. One 20 or 30 person ride looks like a plow has run through the forest. I believe the horse people want to be good stewards, but their use results in a lot more impact to the landscape regardless.

I hope that the USFS will resist any future attempt to extend the fiber optic line or a power line into or through the LWA to the Caney Mountain horse facility.

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Sincerely,


Lawrence J. Smith