



June 30, 2023

Michiko Martin, Reviewing Officer
Attn: Administrative Review Staff
USDA Forest Service, Southwestern Region
333 Broadway Blvd. SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Electronically submitted to: objections-southwestern-regional-office@usda.gov

**RE: Notice of Objection: Black River Landscape Restoration Project Final EA and Draft Decision
Notice/Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest**

Objector's Name and Address:

Arizona Game and Fish Department
5000 West Carefree Highway
Phoenix, AZ 85086-5000
623-942-3000

Dear Objection Reviewing Officer:

The Arizona Game and Fish Department respectfully submits the following Objections to the Environmental Assessment and Record of Decision for the Black River Landscape Restoration Project

ISSUE #1. The decommissioning of a quarter-mile two-track spur road west of the Department's PS Ranch. The EA does not authorize administrative access to this spur road.

PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED COMMENT: The Department raised this issue in its November 5, 2020 comment letter to the draft EA.

The EA in Section 1.45 at 25 (Transportation) states 28 miles of unauthorized roads "not needed for access" will be decommissioned to reduce resource damage. One of these spur roads is located west of PS Ranch, highlighted in red below:



azgfd.gov | 602.942.3000

5000 W. CAREFREE HIGHWAY, PHOENIX AZ 85086

GOVERNOR: KATIE HOBBS **COMMISSIONERS:** CHAIRMAN JAMES E. GOUGHNOUR, PAYSON | TODD G. GEILER, PRESCOTT | CLAY HERNANDEZ, TUCSON
MARSHA PETRIE SUE, SCOTTSDALE | JEFF BUCHANAN, PATAGONIA **DIRECTOR:** TY E. GRAY **DEPUTY DIRECTOR:** TOM P. FINLEY

This spur road is located on a former private inholding that was acquired by the Forest Service in the 2008 Black River Land Exchange project

The Department is responsible for the maintenance of the PS and Fite properties and their fences. This spur road is a primary route to access these fences, which have several water gaps spanning the west fork of the Black River. Proper maintenance of these fences is necessary to prevent trespass livestock from entering Department properties. The Department has an agreement with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to maintain these fences in order to protect designated critical habitat for the federally-endangered New Mexico meadow jumping mouse.

SUGGESTED REMEDY: The Department requests the addition of a footnote to Table 17 of the EA at 25-26 which states this spur road will remain open for administrative access.

VIOLATION OF LAW, REGULATION OR POLICY: The *Guidelines* for Wildlife and Rare Plants in the Apache-Sitgreaves Land Management Plan at 62-63 call for the needs of localized species such as the NMMJM to be provided for to ensure their limited habitats are not lost or degraded.

ISSUE #2. The EA has confusing text regarding loach minnow.

PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED COMMENT: The Department commented generally on loach minnow in its November 5, 2020 comment letter to the draft EA.

The EA at 116, Table 40 states that the Loach minnow is “not present” but the Notes state the species “occurs within the project and action area”. This language is potentially confusing to readers.

SUGGESTED REMEDY: The Table should state that critical habitat occurs within the project area, although loach minnow are not present.

VIOLATION OF LAW, REGULATION OR POLICY: Environmental impact statements should be written in a way that the public can readily understand its language. NEPA, 40 C.F.R. §1502.8

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Clay Crowder".

Clay Crowder
Assistant Director Wildlife Management Division

AGFD # M23-05225752