

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 4/30/2010 12:34:00 AM

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Comments: CNF Potential Wilderness Areas

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To: Erin Boyle, Assistant Forest Planner

I would like to comment on several of the potential wilderness areas outlined by the draft forest plan. First, many of them have a glaring omission in the "current use" section. Mountain biking is not mentioned as a current use in any of the documents. Yet, in some of the areas I would argue that mountain biking is a primary use -- even higher usage than hiking on some trails (specifically in the East Catalina PWA and the Samaniego Ridge PWA).

I have personally enjoyed numerous mountain bike rides in the following PWAs:

Dragoon Potential Wilderness Area  
East Catalina Potential Wilderness Area  
Mt. Wrightson Addition Potential Wilderness Area  
North Chiricahua Potential Wilderness Area  
Samaniego Ridge Potential Wilderness Area  
Tumacacori Potential Wilderness Area

I know of many other mountain bikers who enjoy riding in these areas, as well.

As a former wilderness ranger I have studied the wilderness act in detail and have visited many wilderness areas by foot. I also enjoy long bicycle rides and choose to live in Tucson due to the great opportunities for mountain biking in this area.

In my opinion, none of the 10 wilderness areas outlined by the draft forest plan are suitable for designation as wilderness. Roads criss cross many of them, and signs of mining and other human intrusion run throughout. Most are far too small to get any sense of being "out there" or any true sense of solitude, as intended by the Wilderness Act of 1964.

Further, I do not see the need for these additional wilderness areas in southern Arizona. Residents of metro Tucson already have sufficient access to Pusch Ridge and Mt. Wrightson wilderness areas, both of which

have areas where it is easy to get away from 'the crowds.' Adding in other regional wilderness areas to the picture gives a wealth of wilderness, foot-only opportunities.

Meanwhile, mountain bike access is already severely limited by current wilderness areas. One prime example is the Arizona Trail. Bikepacking (backpacking with a mountain bike) is becoming an increasingly popular activity. Bikepackers following the Arizona Trail must detour around wilderness areas (e.g. Mt. Wrightson and Pusch Ridge WA's), forcing them to ride on busy and unsafe highways. Wilderness areas cause a significant safety concern in this way. Traveling on busy roadways is also emphatically not the experience that bikepackers are looking for.

For these reasons, I trust that none of the outlined potential wilderness areas will be seriously considered or selected as preferred alternatives. I urge that the evaluations be updated to accurately depict current mountain bike use, as well.

Sincerely,

Scott Morris