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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Ms. Reynolds,

Unfortunately, I support the No Action plan at South Fork even though some of the suggestions would benefit the area. I have also submitted a snail mail letter with documentation.

There has currently not been enough study on the impacts of Plan B to implement it in a responsible fashion. The development is inside a unique Zoological Botanical Area as well as a Birds of Prey ZBA. It also is part of Audubon's Chiricahua Important Bird Area. There has been no study on how threatened species such as the Mexican Spotted Owl or other important local species will react to the disruption of habitat.

Both South Fork and Cave Creek are rated as Outstanding Arizona Waters yet the EA admits that there could be increased erosion and sedimentation downstream of the construction. In a fragile riparian area, any concentration of people that a picnic area will encourage will degrade the surrounding habitat.

Most of the visitors come to South Fork for the spectacular scenery, amazing diversity of wildlife and the quiet, not for a general "recreation experience". The EA assessment that all of the development would increase visitor satisfaction is flawed. I see no documentation with specific numbers of visitors polled about what they expect when they visit Cave Creek. Increasing visitation and concentration of people as forecast in the EA is

will definitely be a negative impact to the area. There may be more facilities but there is no land area to accommodate increased people traffic.

None of the proposed construction is "replacement" as stated in the EA since it is not at the original site but instead in an area that will be newly developed.

There are already education facilities at the Visitor Center (VIC) so there is no need to duplicate services. There is also an existing but unmaintained trail near the VIC that could be adapted for handicapped access.

The disruption by adding a vault toilet is also unnecessary. Because the proposed area is in the flood plain it would be much better to follow NPS plans to build a pad with a handicapped accessible porta-potty surrounded by a wood visual barrier (see enclosed pictures). The porta-potty can be moved if there is a flood risk. This would also be cheaper and far less disruptive to the surrounding habitat. It would be possible to add such a structure with minimal habitat disruption at the berm where the existing trailhead is located. (It should also be provided at John Hands camping area which is in much worse shape because of the lack of ANY toilet facilities.)

Because of the reliance on monetary input by a local organization, the project is not sustainable. This organization indicates that they presently have decreased income. Although some of this may be because of lower visitation at the VIC during COVID it is also because the members of the local community have ceased to support them because of their "development" orientation as opposed to pursuing an environmental direction. If they were unable to maintain the facilities for the proposed 10 years and the USFS decided to come in to demolish what had been built, there would again be significant disruption in a fragile riparian area. The EA states that the development would increase the cost of maintenance at the site but then goes on to state that the local group may not be able to even continue covering the cost of renting the existing porta-potties. This is a red flag to the sustainability of the project.

It seems that are other possibilities for some of the "improvements" that should be explored without proceeding with the full scope of the project.

Linda Wadsworth