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Comments: September 9, 2021

Objection Reviewing Officer

USDA Forest Service Southwest Region

333 Broadway Blvd. SE

Albuquerque, NM 87102

Dear Objection Reviewing Officer,

We appreciate the opportunity to re-review the Cibola National Forest Plan Revision and Environmental Impact Statement. The Customer Support branch of the Environmental Division at White Sands Missile Range submitted comments on behalf of White Sands Missile Range in 2019. The comments provided are attached along with the confirmation from the website submission tool.

The final forest plan and NEPA documents were reviewed to see how our feedback was incorporated. I am not able to validate acceptance or consideration of our comments made in 2019.

I understand in the scheme of all forest activities that must be entertained in development of the management plan, consideration of booster drop zones (Mount Taylor and Magdalena Ranger Districts) and airspace (R[ndash]5123) might not seem important. From a military perspective the restricted airspace provides an opportunity for the U.S. Army and designated joint-use agencies the ability to drop boosters from missiles launched from Ft. Wingate. This capability is vital to national defense. This type of land use could have an impact to forest health and biodiversity. Furthermore, land use by the Department of Defense could draw public attention.

If land use by the Department of Defense is minimal in the relation to all of the other land uses considered, then that should be acknowledged. A comparison of land uses showing that military use is minimal would be value added to the analysis. A statement suggesting that the scope of the plan doesn[rsquo]t consider airspace or military use beyond Kirtland AFB therefore necessitating a separate review for booster drop zone management would be value added. Perhaps use of certain areas for dropping missile boosters will not change the decision to select Alternative C. Is there understanding of how boosters dropped on the two Ranger Districts influences fire risk, impacts soil erosion, or spread of invasive non-native plant species from recovery efforts? Would the public be reassured that boosters are inert; an opportunity to manage expectations? Disturbance patterns introduced by military activities could increase the need for restoration activities in planning efforts. Is that increase significant? This is not known, because it isn[rsquo]t discussed.

Sincerely,

Debbie Nethers

Ecologist

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