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Title: Director - Planning and Development

Comments: EL YUNQUE NATIONAL FOREST PROPOSED ACTION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Dear mister Cruz:

Greetings! The Puerto Rico Tourism Company (PRTC)¹ has received the above mentioned document for comments. El Yunque National Forest Proposed Action Management Strategies ("the document") is part of the process for developing a new management plan for El Yunque National Forest (EYNF). As you already know EYNF is an important component of Puerto Rico's tourism offer. Not only is EYNF Puerto Rico's second tourist attraction it also serves as an important landmark when promoting the Island as a tourist destination.

Taking into consideration the importance of EYNF to the tourism sector, the PRTC is very much interested that the new management plan will address the current challenges faced by the stewards and users of the Forest. We offer for your consideration the following comments;

- We are pleased that in "the document" the management strategies proposed not only considers the preservation and conservation of the natural environment but also the impact that the Forest can have in the social-economic conditions of surrounding communities. We agree with "the document" when it states that; "There is a need to better recognize and potentially enhance the role of El Yunque National Forest in supporting local economies through a service - based economy focused on recreation and tourism" (pg. 7). This shift in the focus of the management strategies recognizes that EYNF can be a catalyst for the improvement of the quality of life of the population that surrounds the forest.

- Throughout the document there are various instances where partnership with local government, not for profit organizations and private entities are proposed in order to address some of the challenges faces by EYNF. This is a wise course of action which not only can it meet areas of need not supplied by federal funding, but also fosters a sense of ownership of the Forest that is now lacking in the residents of communities, and even in policy makers in the region that surround the Forest.

There is a long history of collaboration between the US Forest Service (USFS) staff at EYNF and the PRTC. An example of this collaboration are the preliminary designs funded by PRTC for the redevelopment of the governor's stone house, the old aviary and the radar facilities at Pico de! Este.² The PRTC, as always, is ready to collaborate with USFS in all matters that are within our reach.

- We agree with the 2012 Planning Rules that the strategies in the final management plan must be sustainable in all aspects. This emphasis in sustainability is compatible with the policies of the Government of Puerto Rico such as; Article VI §.19 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Law No. 267 of September 10, 2004³, Law No. 276 of September 29, 2012⁴, among others.

Specifically, relating to tourism development, Law No. 254 of November 30, 2006⁵ established the advancement and development of a sustainable tourism sector as the policy of the Commonwealth and the PRTC. As such we are pleased to know that one of Puerto Rico's most important tourist attractions will be manage in a sustainable manner.

- Following the mandate given by Law No. 254, the PRTC prepared a Design Guidelines for Eco-tourism and Sustainable Tourism Facilities. The purpose of these guidelines is to advise developers and future operators of new tourism facilities on the best practices of sustainability. Though "the document" recommends the decommissioning of some roads and abandoned facilities, it also recognizes that there is a need to upgrade other facilities and create new recreational opportunities. We recommend that the USFS-EYNF review these guidelines and if it deems appropriate incorporate them as part of the strategies of the management plan for the remodeling or construction of new facilities. The Design Guidelines are available (in Spanish) at our Sustainable Tourism Office.

We look forward to reviewing the final product of this novel participatory planning exercise. Should you have any questions, you may contact planner William Pitre- Cipolla at (787) 721-2400, extension 2013.