



November 18, 2019

Mr. Cal Joyner, Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service
333 Broadway Boulevard SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Electronic Submission via email: objections-southwestern-tonto@fs.fed.us with subject: Travel Management Draft ROD, FSEIS #28967

Re: Notice of objection filed pursuant to Project Level Objection Process, 36 CFR 218.8 (A) (B) (D): Failure to comply with National Environmental Policy Act requirements to evaluate the environmental impacts to the Arizona Game and Fish Department and the public and to discuss possible conflicts with Arizona Game and Fish Department objectives in its plans and policies resulting from the draft Record of Decision and Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for Travel Management Planning on the Tonto National Forest.

Objector's Name and Address:

The 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 (Department) appreciated the opportunity to work closely with the Tonto National Forest (Forest) as a cooperating agency and interdisciplinary team (ID Team) member during development of the environmental impact statement for travel management planning on the Forest. The Department understands the Forest made the decision to address those issues and elements identified through 13 letters of objection to the DEIS and DROD in 2016, as those only needing additional analysis, identified by the Regional Forester's objection review. The Department also understands anything from the FEIS, not in the FSEIS would be carried forward and are considered settled issues.

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5000 W. CAREFREE HIGHWAY, PHOENIX AZ 85086

GOVERNOR: DOUGLAS A. DUCEY **COMMISSIONERS:** CHAIRMAN, ERIC S. SPARKS, TUCSON | KURT R. DAVIS, PHOENIX
LELAND S. "BILL" BRAKE, ELGIN | JAMES E. GOUGHNOUR, PAYSON | JAMES S. ZIELER, ST. JOHNS **DIRECTOR:** TY E. GRAY **DEPUTY DIRECTOR:** TOM P. FINLEY

The Department has presented detailed information during the course of collaboration as an ID Team member and Cooperating Agency on the effects of the Forest travel management plan on the ability of hunters to access the Forest to participate in regulated hunting, an activity fundamental to a significant segment of Arizona's population, and integral to the Department's ability to manage wildlife. Both the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 and the Federal Land and Policy Management Act of 1976 restrict federal land management agencies from affecting the State's jurisdiction and responsibilities.

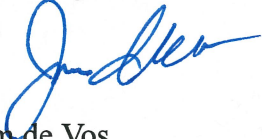
The Department would like to thank the Forest for bringing consistency with the Fossil Creek Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP; DEIS Fossil Creek CRMP, November 2018) to open route #708 to all vehicles that accommodates current industry standards for Utility Task Vehicles (Department Letter, April 2, 2019). Regrettably, critical issues raised by the Department about Cherry Creek Road have not been adequately addressed. The Department believes the Forest failed to provide an analysis or reasonable solution regarding Forest Service Road #203 - Cherry Creek Road identified by the Department as an important route for public access. The FSEIS analyzed impacts to Wild and Scenic Rivers and centralized on minimizing impacts to natural resources, but lacked alternative routes to maintain and/or improve public access. The Department reiterates that the Sierra Ancha Wilderness boundary designation was a vague topographical description and the Forest should perform a metes and bounds survey to resurvey the boundary alignment to address errors within the original survey. In an effort to further discuss the issues presented here, and explore opportunities to resolve this objection, the Department requests a formal meeting with the Reviewing Officer.

Similarly, the FSEIS stated Forest Service Road 393 would be an administrative use only maintenance level 2 road from where it crosses the Verde River near Bartlett Lake to where it intersects with route 3456 (approximately 4.3 miles); in this section it would be "closed to all motor vehicle use until such time as this route is no longer within the designated boundary of the Mazatzal Wilderness. When the route is no longer within the wilderness boundary or as otherwise authorized by Congressional action, it will be opened and designated as a maintenance level 2 road." It goes further to state administrative use would be provided for APS powerline maintenance and for species management. The Department requests that it be further clarified by including text after 'species management' that says, "or law enforcement activities by the Arizona Game and Fish Department". The Department recognizes the effort indicated in the FSEIS to provide potential routes that bypass the wilderness area to maintain public access and the Department welcomes further discussions on such measures.

Regarding the issues presented above, the FSEIS does not comply with NEPA or CEQ regulations by (1) failing to fully analyze impacts to the Department, wildlife resources, and the public resulting from this project and, (2) failing to consider and respond to the Department's special expertise, information, and requests required by 40 C.F.R. § 1501.6, § 1503.4, and § 1502.13. The Department hereby submits the objection pursuant to Project Level Objection Process, 36 CFR 218.8 (A) (B) (D).

The Department appreciated the opportunity to review and provide comments on the DROD, FSEIS. Please contact Clay Crowder at ccrowder@azgfd.gov with any questions regarding this letter.

Sincerely,



Jim de Vos
Assistant Director, Wildlife Management Division

Cc: Clay Crowder, Chief, Habitat, Evaluation and Lands Branch
Jay Cook, Regional Supervisor, Mesa
Ginger Ritter, Project Evaluation Program Manager
Kelly Wolff, Habitat, Evaluation and Lands Program Manager, Mesa

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