



## **2019AZOHVC and ATR Tonto National Forest SEIS TMP comments #28967** **11/18/19**

### **Background**

ATR has worked with the Tonto National Forest since 1996 on the Cave Creek District planning with Forest Service staff to create a managed OHV plan while protecting Forest resources. AZOHVC was formed in 2005 as a 501c3 to write grants for projects for FS and wrote and ran the OHV Bill SB1167 to create the OHV fund that FS gets a large portion of their planning and project funding from.

We have worked with Tonto Forest Staff and commented on TNF plans and EA's since 2000. We have been Grant project Partners since 2008. Sadly, each time the forest starts a new plan.....comments and data is lost or plan contested and your partners and public have to start all over on planning comments.

We have worked with 6 different District Rangers and 3 Forest Supervisors since the start of travel Management and have spent years (over 20) commenting on TM plans and route inventories. And yet, we are commenting again on the same "planning".

### **Issues**

In those 20+ years, a tremendous amount of Forest service personnel and public time has been spent and wasted commenting on each of these EA's, EIS, SEIS plans..... just to have the data and comments lost or start over with a" new" plan. We do understand that this is not a Waste of Time for Forest.....unfortunately.....The majority of the public doesn't see it that way.

Since 2009 EA, there has not been a cohesive plan on what the Forest Service wants the OHV system to look like ( trail systems, staging areas, connecting routes between districts, Camping areas, connecting routes to adjacent BLM or ASLD lands)

After 20+ years of public comments, the public sees commenting on Forest plans as a waste of their time, which defeats the purpose of the public comment section of NEPA. This skews any data that you do get.

Additional problems occur as knowledgeable Forest Service employees that worked on the original plans 20 or 15 or even 10 years ago.....retire and Forest service does not allow those retiring employees to train their replacements.....This creates a disconnect with the past plans and no ties to your existing partners with new employees .....in many cases, the new employee doesn't know partners even exist. The public finds that the Forest personnel making

the decision to open or close a trail, has in many cases , never been to that trail or does not even operate an Off Highway Vehicle.....adding to the disconnect.

**2019 final SEIS comments.** This last round of comments for the Final SEIS ROD has gotten the worst response when our Organizations asked for comments. In some cases we received no comments at all from clubs that had historically commented on the trails in their areas of the TNF.

*AS for myself (Jeff Gursh) , 25 years as a Forest Service volunteer and project lead/partner for AZOHVC and ATR Forest projects and grants.....which includes going thru every route on every map in every TMP, EA, EIS and SEIS since the late 90's and collecting and writing all the comment letters.....I am burned out.*

*The truth is that your present partners and volunteers and people that comment on your plans were in there 40's and 50's 25 years ago.....and have spent some of the best years we had working with the Forest service.....and willingly doing so because we saw a need and a way to give back for the enjoyment we and the public got from public lands. Honestly, most of the dirt bikers I worked with doing inventory and trail work have passed away or can no longer rider a dirt bike.....Many will never see anything accomplished as far as a TMP for the Tonto National Forest.*

*US “old timers” just cant motivate the young folks to comment on plans that have been in the works for in some cases 25 years. In an age of instant gratification.....could we really expect the public to understand why we have been doing this over and over for 20 years?*

*In Closing, I am reminded of a conversation with a District ranger for the CCRD, we had been on one of our routine partnership patrols with FS. Kelly Jardine and found new dirt bike trails coming into the Forest from State Lands.*

*In a meeting with this district ranger talking about the new trails . She looked at me and said “YOUR PEOPLE ARE RUINING HER FOREST”.....not expecting that comment and being just a bit POed.....I replied*

*“NO, YOU ARE MIS-MANAGING OURS”*

*This is how it had been between Forest service and public, we have come a long way since then and I think most of us from both “sides” have great respect for each other and what we are trying to accomplish.*

*Don't let this be the end of working together, Please consider the time the public puts into these TMP plan comments and work we do with Forest service to make a difference on public lands.....*


*When you have Forest Service partnerships and Volunteers working together on Forest projects.....those Partners and volunteers take ownership and pride in the work and projects that they do WITH YOU.*

*Don't Loose this public support.....Reconnect with your partners.*


*Sorry for the soap box lecture.*

*See accompanying Comment document and maps as well as supporting documents.*

*Sincerely, Jeff Gursh and Don Hood*

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Name of proposed project: Final DROD SEIS Tonto National Forest #28967