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Neil Bosworth

Forest Supervisor

Tonto National Forest

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Dear Supervisor Bosworth:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Tonto National Forest Plan. I live near that Tonto and spend time on it regularly. To give back, I am an active volunteer on numerous projects including milkweed planting and watering, trail maintenance and Horse Ambassadors.

There are two primary topics I will address with my comments. First the need for a significant increase in law enforcement and second the choice of Alternatives.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

There is an unmet need for a significant number of LEO on the Tonto. There is little public information about how to behave on the Forest. That lack of information along with virtually non-existent law enforcement has created visitors who have little grasp of how to visit with respect. The plan needs to be strengthened to adequately address both the education and law enforcement shortfalls.

As you know, thousands of people visit the Tonto daily. That visitation is concentrated in different parts of the Forest based upon the time of year. Both the plan, and Tonto employees that I have spoken with, suggest that as long as people know how to make the right choice (for example with adequate trail signage) most people will simply choose to visit with respect and obey the law. The plan also suggest that permitting an area results in compliance. My observations do not support either of these ideas.

DEIS Volume 1 page 61 says, "Environmental effects and existing conditions common to other high-use recreation areas such as target shooting trash, abandoned campfires, user-created trails and associated soil erosion, and human-caused wildfires are less prevalent within the Bulldog Canyon OHV permit zone on the Tonto National Forest. No one who has seen the OHV destruction or the miles of user created horse trails in Bulldog would make such a statement. Permits do not decrease user created trails. Since 2008 when I first rode in the Goldfields I have witnessed most of the single track non-motorized trails turn into two track roads. OHV destruction is rampant in Bulldog and enforcement non-existent.

The DEIS Volume 1 also admits that dispersed recreation is inadequately patrolled. Page 60 states "In relation to the number of users, dispersed recreation areas are not patrolled by law enforcement officers or rangers as often as needed."

No city with thousands of people would presume that having well designed facilities and issuing permits would negate the need for a police force and the Tonto should not make that assumption either. Just expecting people to behave is not adequate.

Through years without law enforcement the Tonto has created culture of non-compliance among many users.

Without enforcement everyone, the compliant public, but especially the law breakers, understand that the Tonto really does not care about the rules and has no intention of enforcing them. Even organizations like the local chapter of the Back Country Horsemen, whose national organization promotes close cooperation with Land Managers, have lost track of the rules on the Tonto. Without training, they use chainsaws on the Tonto. They regularly do trail maintenance on non-system trails. Their flagrant violation of the law is passed on to all their snowbird members. Allowing such organizations to continue to volunteer tells everyone who understands what they do that the Tonto will not enforce the law.

With the increasing number of visitors to the Tonto, the number of people who fail to comply with the rules is also increasing. The combination of inadequate public education and the increase in visitation with the pervasive culture of non-compliance means that much more law enforcement is now needed to get a handle on non-compliance than might have been needed to stop the problem earlier.

After arrests have been made and/or fines issued, I believe that publication of these actions would quickly inform the public that the Tonto has become serious about visitors complying with the laws.

In US Cities, the average number of police officers is 17 per 10,000 residents. Given that a good share of the 5.8 million visitors to the Tonto are present on the weekends, a force of 50 LEO would just provide average coverage. 50 LEO should be considered a minimum number. Even more than average coverage is now needed to reverse the trends that ignoring these issues has created.

ALTERNATIVES B, C and D

In my opinion, the plan is written to present Alternative B as the only reasonable alternative. Alternative C is presented as too restrictive and Alternative D sounds like throwing "caution to the wind".

Alternative D is frightening! I work closely with TRAL, but they are the exceptions. In my experience, a large percentage of OHV users show little regard for the rules. Until OHV users start complying by staying where they are allowed to go according to Travel Management, opening any more of the Forest to their potential and almost immediate destruction is irresponsible.

Alternative C, protection of the Forest resources is my preference. However, I believe that it is highly unlikely that you will select Alternative C.

My second choice would be Alternative B. I urge the Tonto to get control of the resources and stop the destruction before opening the Forest further. Once open, the Tonto will struggle and likely not be able to regain even the little control that is now evident.

Thank you for considering my comments.