

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/12/2020 11:22:34 PM

First name: Stephen

Last name: Durand

Organization: Saguaro Lake Ranch

Title: Owner and President

Comments: Dear Tonto National Forest planning team,

Saguaro Lake Ranch is a special use permittee of the Tonto National Forest. We are a guest ranch and resort that operates 25 cabins, serves meals and hosts weddings and corporate events, provides horseback riding, guided hiking, mountain biking, and a wide variety of water recreation activities including kayaking, tubing, and rafting. We are one of the oldest permittees in the Tonto and have been in operation since 1930. The opportunity to engage in Forest Service decision-making is of utmost importance to us and we appreciate the opportunity to review and comment on the new Forest Plan.

We would like to comment on the following:

- 1) We have noticed increased illegal cross country motorized recreation on sections off of and near the Bulldog Canyon trail. In fact, we have recently seen dirt bike tracks on some of our horse trails that seem to have come from entry points in that area. We believe it is important to find a way to limit motorized off trail activity and would recommend fencing and gating additional sections that help prevent this use as it degrades the experience for our hiking and horseback riding guests, not to mention the land scarring that can happen from this intensive use. We worry that if it is not stopped soon, that many new trails will be created and the land would start to change for the worse. In general, we strongly support the forest guidelines for illegal cross country motorized recreation and hope that the Forest Service will enforce these to an even greater extent.
- 2) We agree with the Forest Plan that the Salt River Horses should be managed appropriately so that there is a safe environment for both the horses and the public. In recent years, the herd size has expanded dramatically and this concerns us as it endangers the river ecology as well as the many motorists along Bush Highway. We applaud the recent changes including the new and additional fencing and cattle guards that will protect horses and the general public.
- 3) In recent years, we have bumped up against our 5,000 user day limit on horseback riding trips on the trails around the ranch and would like for this to be increased to meet the visitor demand.
- 4) We agree that it is important to continue efforts to minimize littering on the Salt River from the intensive summer recreation activities. We look forward to working with the Forest Service to educate our customers on the impacts of trash and litter in riparian areas and will encourage all our guests to "Leave No Trace". We believe that all permit holders and partners have an obligation to clean up any and all trash impact from their customers. Consideration could be given to a ban on disposable single-use containers.
- 5) We believe that the lower Salt River could offer an even better visitor environment if the on-river section from Stewart Mountain Dam to Blue Point Bridge were designated an alcohol-free zone. This would make it more family friendly and would undoubtedly decrease the litter and trash on this section.

In conclusion, we believe the Tonto National Forest planning team has done a great job in the initial planning stage. The plan is achievable and will work to the benefit of all public lands stakeholders. Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Regards,

Saguaro Lake Ranch

Stephen Durand, Owner and President

Justin Durand