

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 8/31/2020 11:05:11 PM

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Title:

Comments: Re: South Fork Day Use Area Draft EA

I am a resident of Portal and have hiked in South Fork very frequently, and in all seasons, over the past ten years.

I oppose Alternative B (the FoCCC proposal) because it would result in a great increase in the number of visitors. Heavier use of the canyon, and the proposed developments too, would spoil the natural setting and drive away wild life, the very things that make the area worth visiting.

Here are my reasons for rejecting the main arguments for Alternative B.

(1.) FoCCC contends that it is trying to restore facilities that existed pre-flood and are still desirable. In the words of the Draft EA report (p. 11) "Since the 1930s, visitors have enjoyed a small developed recreation site in South Fork. People still want to spend time in this special place and the lack of amenities does not meet visitor expectations."

Unfortunately, the project would actually make it more difficult "to spend time in this special place" (the area beyond the berm). Alternative B would install a gate at the proposed new site, which would be locked during the tourist season. Visitors would then need to walk an additional mile and a half (round trip) from the gate to the berm, just to reach the wild area.

It is true that some people may crave "civilized" amenities but perhaps they should find them elsewhere. South Fork is not just another picnic spot. It is a unique biological and botanical area and our prime concern should be to preserve it as such. Ambitious developments of the kind proposed by FoCCC will detract from its character as wilderness and its suitability as habitat for wild life. That includes signage, information kiosks, benches and the like.

(2) A toilet is said to be necessary for the safety and health of visitors.

I disagree. I have been visiting South Fork since 2010 and have seen practically no waste of any kind, except for garments and backpacks discarded by illegals. As for bathroom facilities, even before the installation of port-a-potties, people managed without harming the environment. At a public meeting a FoCCC member stated that a visitor became ill after drinking water from the creek. Maybe so, but people should exercise their common sense. In any case, even if we do build a vault toilet it will not make the creek potable. Animals and illegals will do as they must.

(3) FoCCC claims that the parking lot at the berm is not big enough and long vehicles cannot turn around in it.

I have never seen the parking lot full. It may have happened, but rarely. Even if it is true that we could use more parking, the FoCCC scheme would ultimately make the parking situation worse. As the EA report repeatedly states, the project would likely increase the number of visitors. More visitors means less parking and it is not difficult to imagine the new lot filling up. The problem would simply be kicked down the road. And as far as long vehicles are concerned, they can park at the junction of South Fork road and Forest Road 42.

(4) FoCCC has undertaken to pay the maintenance costs for ten years, thus saving the Forest Service the expense.

FoCCC is a volunteer organization that relies on donations and membership fees. The pandemic and shut downs have not helped its financial base. Most of its members are elderly and some will no longer be with us in ten years. Recruitment of new members is uncertain. Thus, the Forest Service may be on the hook for funds a lot sooner than expected.

Alternative B may be well intentioned but it is short-sighted. The best way of protecting South Fork now and for future generations is to limit, not increase, the number of people who visit it. I support Alternative A, preserving the status quo.