

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/12/2020 1:27:18 PM

First name: Steve

Last name: Wolfe

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I'm a resident of Portal, a member of FoCCC, and one of the volunteer hosts at the Visitor Center. I've seen the number of people visiting the Canyon increase over the past few years (until Covid came along) and that the reasons for coming there is spreading beyond birding. For example, the number of hikers and overnights is increasing which means more campground usage and visitors staying at the accommodations in the area. When people come into the Visitor Center and ask for an easy hike I always recommend South Fork. So I believe, with the changes to the EA mentioned by the FoCCC board, especially getting rid of any mention of "The Wall" which is unnecessary and polarizing, the proposed plan could only be beneficial without turning the Canyon into a "tourist trap".

A question that has been mentioned, and a concern that I too have, is the gate closure from March to June. Seeing the Elegant Trogons, since they start coming to the Canyon around mid-April, is one of the main reasons why people -- not only birders but those who have heard of the ETs and come to see them specifically -- visit. And many of those visitors are elderly so they definitely would have problems walking the extra 3/4ths of a mile to the berm. And of course not all of the Trogons, and other birds there during spring migration, are in the area of the South Fork road below the closed gate. It's also unclear in the EA as to why the gate is even needed; if it's a problem with dust, then there are other ways to mitigate the problem without putting a barrier across the road. The gate closure would also mean more vehicles in the new picnic area parking spots, and along the road once those are filled, where the problem could be lessened with there being no gate and parking still available at the berm. It's my hope that this caveat, which is a major one, can be resolved and the EA become a reality.