

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/16/2020 11:08:35 PM

First name: Deborah

Last name: Johnson

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Comments pertaining to the project

South Fork Day Use Area #56779

As a resident of Portal, I was drawn to this area by the diverse wildlife and plant life in the Chiricahuas and the unlimited hiking trails. We spent many weekends hiking and birding in the area before buying one of the two forest lease cabins in South Fork. My husband and I used to look at those two cabins and say, "wouldn't it be great to live here?", so when we saw that one of the cabins was for sale, we felt it was meant for us and after buying it, we came from Tucson every chance we had to spend time in South Fork.

Owning that cabin and having the opportunity to spend days and nights in South Fork made us feel like we had won the lottery. We'd be awakened in the mornings in May by the croaking of Trogons and in the summer, we'd wake up in the middle of the night to the Mexican Whippoorwill calling. We watched the cascading waterfalls during heavy rains and the bats leaving their caves at sundown. South Fork is magical and when we'd have to return to Tucson, it was almost as if we were being punished, having to leave this unique place. We decided to buy a house in Portal so we'd be able to call Portal our permanent home. Having spent every season in South Fork, I realize the visitation importance to our local economy, but I support closing the road from January to June, with handicap access year 'round.

Today I walked up South Fork from the paved road to the cabins and I felt the serenity of that wonderful natural treasure. I was there early enough that no cars came by as I watched birds foraging along the creek and the road and had the pleasure of watching a Trogon family capturing insects and gleaning berries from plants within 10 feet of where I was standing. Once cars began driving by, the birds moved away from the road. That is why I fully support a closure of the road from January to June and length restrictions for vehicles. Closing the road during that time will improve the visitor experience more than picnic tables and kiosks and hikers will not be deterred by an additional 3/4 mile walk.

South Fork is a treasure and she has rearranged herself in spite of human efforts to keep her as she was in years past, but that is what nature is. It's a constantly changing, living thing and we are foolish to think we can control her.

I am sorry that there are only the two options offered in this plan. I could support the Plan B location with a smaller disruption to the peacefulness of South Fork. We can accommodate visitors with a vault toilet and a short nature trail with benches, and benches along the road to the berm would be welcome by those people who may not be able to walk that far without resting. In my opinion though, having picnic tables at this location will disrupt the peacefulness and serenity of South Fork for wildlife, as well as attract food begging by wildlife. And no matter how many trash bins are available, there will be trash from picnickers ending up in the creek and posing a threat to wildlife. I'd prefer to see the Forest Service re-open Idlewild and Stewart Campgrounds to allow for picnicking and family gatherings.

I am also concerned about the ability of FOCCC to financially support this effort if their revenues begin to decline.