

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/25/2020 4:03:01 AM

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Title:

Comments: I support the plan to replace the missing amenities with suitable new ones in the South Fork Recreation area. However, I do not support the proposed road closure.

Three years ago my husband and I visited Portal for the first time. The Portal/Rodeo area captured our hearts and we bought our land on that very trip, and now we live here full time. The stunning natural beauty and excellent accessibility into pristine forest areas were exactly what we were searching for in our final hometown.

When I heard of the project to put a permanent bathroom at the South Fork recreation area plus a trash collection box, seating and a handicapped trail the plan made perfect sense to me.

Twice this year hiking in the Canyon, I've encountered human waste, including excessive toilet paper and female hygiene products - each time next to the creek. Almost every trip into the forest I have encountered a bit of food or packaging waste, as well.

I've been a dedicated litter remover since I was a small child. This year Covid concerns finally made me limit my trash clean up.

I've come to the conclusion that most people need bathrooms and waste collection sites in order to manage waste properly in nature. "Leave no trace" instructions only seem to work well in certain areas, like national parks that are mostly frequented by back-packers. Nature areas that have day-trippers, car visitors, bikers, RVers, and campgrounds seem to do better with basic facilities being provided. I highly support the inclusion of a permanent toilet in the plan.

The part of the plan supporting handicap access, educational signage, and seating areas are also welcome to me. Twice in my life I've had to recover from serious illnesses where I could barely walk for an extended period of time. Though I'm young and did finally heal, I came to deeply appreciate mobility-enhanced natural areas. They are few and far between and will never (and probably should never) become the "normal" way of designing nature trails. However, providing just one of these mobility-enhanced trails in the eastern side of the Chiricahuas in one of the best birding spots in the country - this is a very inclusive and forward-thinking feature.

As for the road closure, I don't know that it fits the stated objective of the ZBA designation. Reading the objective of this designation found in the FSM 2300 at section 2372.02, it seems like the goal is to encourage public use and enjoyment of this special area. Closing the road during peak birding times seems unnecessarily discouraging. I hope the Forest Service can come up with other ways to manage the road which will continue to encourage the good use and enjoyment of this special place by people with all levels of ability.