

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/25/2020 10:37:56 PM

First name: Heidi

Last name: Fischer

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear South Fork Day Use Planners:

In his 1982 travel book *Blue Highways*, William Least Heat Moon included an entry about his visit to Cave Creek Canyon. The author described how he drove across the "flat, hot scarcity" of the Chihuahuan Desert, until he encountered a stockade of vertical rock columns with no obvious passageway in sight. Baffled, Least Heat Moon motored on when suddenly the road seemed to simply slip through the façade. Sunshot desert scrub gave way to a gallery forest of alligator juniper, sycamore and white oaks. Threading through the shade of the trees was a flowing stream, something that even seasoned desert dwellers might regard as nothing short of improbable here, miraculous even. From time to time the canopy opened to reveal ruddy pinnacles encrusted with yellow and green lichens. "How could this place be?" he asked himself, enchanted.

Least Heat Moon's description of his Cave Creek Canyon visit captures the delight that people typically experience when they enter this magical place. Their enchantment is due to several factors: the sense of intimacy that is contrasted with the soaring canyon walls; the sound of water in otherwise dry place; the rich diversity of wildlife that is drawn to water in desert places; the fullness of silence that allows visitors to hear birdsong, clicking beetles and trickling springs.

The heart of all this splendid diversity is South Fork. In the spring, the South Fork road provides prime opportunities for hearing and seeing an astounding diversity of birds. During the monsoon, it is world-class place for observing butterflies nectaring on the blooming plants that favor the sunny reaches alongside the road. The Forest Service has recognized this unique place with a designation as an outstanding botanical and zoological treasure.

But Cave Creek is a small and narrow canyon, and these experiences are under threat by increased visitation. In my years here, I have observed a greater incidence of roadkill from traffic on the narrow Cave Creek Canyon Road, from butterflies, bugs and squirrels to lizards and snakes. Birdsong is drowned out by the sound of cars. Speeding motorists threaten pedestrian safety.

For these and other reasons, I am writing to oppose the new development scheme proposed along South Fork.

I repeat: this is a small and narrow canyon. The addition of recreational developments such as picnic areas for group gathering is incompatible with the special character of South Fork. Besides, such opportunities already exist at the visitor center and three campgrounds. We should utilize and enhance the visitor resources in places that are already developed instead of building new infrastructure. I advocate limiting additional development to places that could benefit from enhancements such as the Visitor Information Center. For example, it is baffling to me that no public restrooms are available at the VIC. I am told that the reason is because the existing septic system is inadequate to handle water flows from toilets and that a septic upgrade is too expensive. Instead of installing waterless vault toilets on the pristine banks of Cave Creek, how about siting them on the grounds of the VIC, an obvious location and where it is desperately needed?

I applaud the plan's proposal for the seasonal closure of the South Fork road to vehicle traffic, allowing people with disabilities, photographers and nature lovers to safely and peacefully enjoy the wildlife viewing. However, I would urge an extension of the closure from March through August. The monsoon rains activate life in the canyon from bugs and reptiles to mammals. As someone who walks the road frequently during the monsoon season, I am appalled at the increasing incidence of roadkill. A road closure would reduce roadkill during the canyon's most ecologically luxuriant time of year. After all, a safe traverse is not meant for humans alone but also

for the creatures great and small that share the roadway-and the planet-with us.

I repeat: this is a small and narrow canyon. And South Fork is an ecological treasure in southeastern Arizona. Please minimize disruption to this unique place, both for the benefit of the plants and animals that inhabit its reaches and the people who love them.

Thank you for your consideration.

Heidi Fischer