

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/4/2020 6:23:16 PM

First name: Steven

Last name: Scheumann

Organization:

Title:

Comments: November 3, 2020

Huachuca Hiking Club

4024 S. Paiute Way

Sierra Vista, AZ 85650

Douglas Ranger District

Coronado National Forest

Attn: Doug Ruppel, District Ranger

1192 West Saddleview Road

Douglas, AZ 85607

Re: Chiricahua Public Access

Dear Mr. Ruppel:

On behalf of the Huachuca Hiking Club (HHC), I am responding to your Draft Environmental Assessment for the Chiricahua Public Access project, dated October 2020, regarding a proposal to construct approximately 2.6 miles of new road segments to restore motorized access into three areas of the Chiricahua Ecosystem Management Area. As background, the Huachuca Hiking Club, based in Sierra Vista, was formed in 1973. Over the years, our members have enjoyed a variety of outdoor recreational activities throughout Cochise County and southern Arizona, including hiking, backpacking, camping, and volunteering trail maintenance and trash cleanup. We rely upon the Forest Road System to access areas for camping, hiking, backpacking, and performing trail work events. Some of our most popular hiking and camping destinations are in the Douglas Ranger District, including the Chiricahua Mountains and Dragoon Mountains. We actively participated in the Douglas District's recent travel management process and are very interested in changes that would restore and/or improve public motorized access to the forest. We also actively participated in the recent Coronado National Forest Plan Revision and strongly support the objectives that were established in that document to improve public motorized access to the forest and to mitigate the lack of public motorized access caused by adjacent private property owners blocking roads that enter the forest. I might add that the lack of public motorized access into the forest is allowing large areas of taxpayer funded public national forest lands to become the de facto private backyard of adjacent private property owners. This is unacceptable and I hope the District shares our concern.

With regard to the proposal in your scoping letter, we fully support each of the proposed new road segments and believe they are located in appropriate areas. Some specific comments are as follows:

1. The proposed access into John Long Canyon from Forest Roads 42 and 356 will open up desirable hiking and camping opportunities along lower John Long Canyon. We have hiked along the Turtle Mountain Trail, Rak Trail, and a short section of upper John Long Canyon to make a loop hike. The proposal will improve our access to these trails while providing a new experience in lower John Long Canyon. It will also improve hiker safety by providing a closer exit route in case of a medical emergency. I mention this because we had to call Search and Rescue on one of our hikes in upper John Long Canyon when a hiker fell and broke his arm. The injured hiker had to hike down to Turkey Creek Road to meet the rescue team and ambulance. Motorized access into John Long Canyon will improve the choices for Search and Rescue volunteers to help rescue injured hikers in the upper reaches of John Long Canyon and surrounding areas.

2. The proposed access into the North Fork of Pinery Canyon from Forest Road 42 will open up a large area of the forest and improve hiking and camping opportunities for folks traveling from the west side of the Chiricahua Mountains. For example, it will provide hikers access to the Shaw Peak Trail, Beacon Trail, Whitetail Trail, and Indian Creek Trail east of the Chiricahua National Monument. Typically these trails have been infrequently used due to the large time required to travel to the trailheads. The proposal will save considerable driving along forest roads that otherwise would be required to access these trails.

3. The proposed access into Horseshoe Canyon will greatly improve hiking and camping opportunities along a large area of the forest traversed by Horseshoe Canyon. Hikers will be able to access the Pothole Canyon Trail, Burro Trail, and Horseshoe Pass. We have not had the opportunity to visit this portion of the forest and look forward to exploring these trails and gaining new experiences.

In summary, we fully support what you are doing to restore and improve public motorized access to the forest. Please extend our appreciation to all involved in this effort. If we can help in any way, please let us know.

Sincerely,

//signed//

Steven Scheumann
HHC President