

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/19/2020 3:29:25 AM

First name: Steve

Last name: Saway

Organization:

Title:

Comments: U.S. Forest Service, Coronado National Forest

Douglas Ranger District

Attn: Doug Ruppel, District Ranger

1192 West Saddlevue Road

Douglas, AZ 85607

Re: Chiricahua Public Access

Dear Mr. Ruppel:

I am responding to your letter, dated October 9, 2020, regarding the opportunity to comment on a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Chiricahua Public Access project. The Douglas District proposes to restore or secure permanent legal motorized access to existing National Forest System roads in three areas of the Chiricahua Ecosystem Management Area. As background, I have enjoyed hiking, camping, backpacking, and off-highway vehicle riding in the Coronado National Forest over the last 32 years. The Chiricahua Ecosystem Management Area is one of my favorite destinations and offers a diverse range of outdoor recreational opportunities and very scenic settings. However, a big concern of mine is the lack of public motorized access to the forest which is blocking public use and enjoyment of a large portion of these lands. The terrain is too remote and rugged to enjoy by foot travel alone. I actively participated in the Douglas District's recent travel management process and offered comments to improve public access and recreation. I also actively participated in the recent Coronado National Forest Plan Revision and strongly support the objectives 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 my concern. With this in mind, I am very pleased to see the Douglas District's proposal in the Draft EA to bypass private property that is blocking public motorized access to the forest. During development of the 2018 Coronado Forest Plan, the need for additional permanent legal access routes to and within the Coronado National Forest was recognized as a key issue. It is encouraging for recreational visitors to see that the Douglas District is planning to implement the Forest Plan public access objectives and associated guidelines. I fully support and applaud your efforts here.

With regard to the specific proposed actions, I fully support each of the proposed new road segments and believe they are located in appropriate areas. I agree that the use of best management practices and relevant design criteria should mitigate any indirect impacts so that they are within acceptable limits. 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. There is a popular hiking route along the Turtle Mountain Trail, Rak Trail, and a short section of upper John Long Canyon which forms a loop hike. The proposal will improve access to these trails while providing a new hiking 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 a fellow hiker had to call Search and Rescue during a hike in upper John Long Canyon when a member of the hiking group 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. I 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, I fully support what you are doing to restore and improve public motorized access to the forest. Please extend my appreciation to all involved in this effort.

Sincerely,

//signed//

Steve Saway