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Comments:

Huachuca Hiking Club
4024 S. Paiute Way
Sierra Vista, AZ 85650
January 15, 2021

Emily Reynolds NEPA Planner
ATTN: Meadow Valley Public Access
Coronado National Forest
300 W. Congress Street
Tucson, AZ 85701

Re: Meadow Valley Public Access #58624

Dear Ms. Reynolds:

On behalf of the Huachuca Hiking Club (HHC), I am responding to your scoping notice dated December 1, 2020 regarding a proposal to develop the Meadow Valley Public Access project. This project would develop an access route in the San Rafael Valley to provide legal public motorized access to national forest lands in the Meadow Valley Area of the Huachuca Ecosystem Management Area within the Sierra Vista Ranger District.

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.

One of the most popular destinations for our club has been the Arizona National Scenic Trail which traverses a large swath of the Coronado National Forest, including a very scenic portion of the forest in Meadow Valley and beyond to Red Rock Canyon. When our club was responsible for maintenance of the trail in this area, we drove into Meadow Valley before access was closed off. Motorized access to this area was critical to our ability to maintain the trail not only in Meadow Valley, but also beyond to the Red Rock Canyon area. In fact, club members would drive their four-wheel drive vehicles and camp out overnight near Red Bank Well and Red Rock Canyon in order to perform trail work in this remote area. The proposed access route into Meadow Valley is very important as it is the only motorized access route that would allow the public to access the Arizona National Scenic Trail in Meadow Valley and (via connecting roads) to where it continues north to Red Rock Canyon. There are no other public motorized routes that would enable access to this remote area without going through the Meadow Valley Area. The current lack of public motorized access deprives the public of enjoying nearly 32,000 acres of national forest lands, clearly unacceptable.

Regarding public motorized access to the forest, our club actively participated in the Sierra Vista Ranger District's travel management process and made recommendations 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 strongly support the Meadow Valley Public Access Project including each of the proposed new road segments. We believe they are located in appropriate areas. However, though not discussed in your scoping letter, we note that the Vicinity Map shows a proposed private access road in green going from Forest Road 765 west to a private property parcel where public access to the forest was closed off. This raises some serious concerns and questions. Why is the District providing or allowing a new access route on national forest lands for a private property owner who closed off access to the public? This needs further explanation and clarification. In our view, the District should not use taxpayer funds or national forest resources in any way to benefit a private property owner, particularly one who blocked public access to the forest. That particular parcel already has motorized access via Forest Roads 765 and 4689.

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.

Sincerely,

//signed//

Steven Scheumann
HHC President