Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/18/2021 2:00:20 AM
First name: Stephen
Last name: Saway
Organization:
Title:
Comments: January 17, 2021

533 Suffolk Drive
Sierra Vista, AZ 85635

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

Re: Meadow Valley Public Access

Dear Ms. Reynolds:

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, I have enjoyed hiking, camping, backpacking, and off-highway vehicle riding in the Coronado National Forest over the last 32 years. The Huachuca Ecosystem Management Area and Sierra Vista Ranger District offer a diverse range of outdoor recreational opportunities and very scenic settings. A popular destination for me 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 Bank Well and Red Rock Canyon. Years ago I was the trail steward for this portion of the trail. Along with the Huachuca Hiking Club, we were responsible for maintenance of the trail in this area and frequently 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. I and other club members would drive our 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. The terrain is too remote and rugged to enjoy by foot travel alone.

Regarding public motorized access to the forest, I 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. I was disappointed that the District decided to close and decommission a number of roads that reduced public motorized access to large areas of the forest. I 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 my concern.

With regard to the proposal in your scoping letter, I strongly support the Meadow Valley Public Access Project including each of the proposed new road segments. I believe they are located in appropriate areas. However, given the history of the District's road closures which reduced public motorized access to the forest, I would encourage the District to continue to explore more opportunities to open up public access particularly where it is blocked by private property owners. For example, motorized access into Meadow Valley via Forest Road 4696 is also blocked by private property. I think the District should consider adding a bypass route to allow forest visitors to access Meadow Valley and Forest Road 4630 from the south via Forest Road 4696.

Though not discussed in your scoping letter, 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 my 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 Road 765.

In summary, I fully support and appreciate what you are doing to restore and improve public motorized access to the forest. Please keep me on your mailing list for this project.

Sincerely,

//signed//

Steve Saway