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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear U.S. Forest Service:

I live in Sandia Park because I treasure the Cibola National Forest more than I can readily put into words. I hope that the pandemic has made us all much more aware of just how important the peace and beauty of our forests are, for our individual and collective well-being. I know that I have weathered the pandemic in large part due to my daily walks on the forest trails and taking in all the tranquil magnificence that is the Cibola National Forest.

I am writing to comment on the proposal to develop a "Mountain Coaster" on Sandia Peak (Project #56985). I strongly oppose this project for a number of reasons.

Anyone who spends time in the Sandia Mountains knows that the area is under serious environmental duress. The coaster will only add to the environmental strains brought on by climate change. The dramatic increase in automobile traffic on the Sandia Crest Highway and the resulting emissions in the forest corridor, will only put further strain on the already challenged coniferous tree population. The Tram is too expensive for most visitors and it already runs at or near capacity on weekends when visitors are most likely. The Forest Service should be doing everything in its power to protect and expand the tree population. The coaster is the wrong decision on that score as it puts our trees in peril.

Weaker trees increase the fire hazards. The fire dangers in Cibola are unimaginably high. I still cannot believe that even during a mega-drought, visitors to Cienega Picnic Area are allowed to build fires in rings and grills. The coaster is similarly imprudent if not foolish in terms of increasing fire hazards. More people on the mountain, especially in the summer months, is courting a wildfire disaster. Why put highly fire-prone terrain at even higher risk? The public looks to the Forest Service to make decisions that move us away from fire hazards. The coaster moves us in the wrong direction.

I am exceedingly concerned about increased traffic up and down the Sandia Crest Highway. This road is an environmental and recreational resource. Motorcycles and other loud vehicles already generate noise pollution that erodes the quality of life for all creatures living in the area. The significant increase in traffic will bring additional noise and toxic emissions. Wildlife will be adversely impacted. Bicyclists will be at increased risks. The already alarmingly high number of traffic accidents on the Sandia Crest Highway will become even higher. Visitors to the coaster will leave trash and other waste up and down the Sandia Crest Highway. Again, the public looks to the Forest Service to help us protect our fragile eco-system. The coaster is decidedly at odds with this mission.

Finally, the coaster itself will generate noise pollution that will negatively impact wildlife. The associated noise will also be adversely felt by hikers, birders and bicyclists, all of whom seek the tranquility of the forest as respite.

In sum, I strongly oppose building the coaster. I understand that it is imperative to seek out economic opportunities. But these opportunities must not be at odds with protecting our environment in general and our forest in particular. On this score, the coaster is shortsighted.

Thank you for your consideration.