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Comments: July 27, 2021

Huachuca Hiking Club

4024 S. Paiute Way
Sierra Vista, AZ 85650

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:

On behalf of the Huachuca Hiking Club (HHC), I am responding to your letter dated June 16, 2021 regarding the draft environmental assessment (EA) for 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.

In response to your scoping notice of December 1, 2020, I submitted a comment letter dated January 15, 2021 and I continue to stand by those comments. Please include them in the record for this EA. After reviewing the EA, I am still in support of the project; however, I believe the EA is inadequate in two respects as follows.

1. Recreation and Public Enjoyment. The EA discusses a number of environmental impacts including impacts to threatened, endangered, and sensitive species; watershed; and heritage. However, the EA fails to discuss the immense benefits of this project on recreation and public enjoyment, i.e., the public will now have access to thousands of acres of national forest land opened up by the proposed project. This will benefit a wide variety of forest visitors who enjoy this land for diverse recreational activities. The EA should also highlight one particularly significant benefit of the project which is to restore motorized access to the Arizona National Scenic Trail where it traverses Meadow Valley and beyond to Red Rock Canyon and Red Bank Well. This motorized access is very critical, not only for recreational access to the trail, but also for trail construction and maintenance crews to keep the trail in good condition. In years past, our club performed those duties and used the roads that will now be re-opened to access the trail in remote locations for trail work projects. I would like to re-iterate the following comments I made in my January 15th letter. Start quote "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." End quote. For these reasons, I believe the EA fails to adequately characterize the importance and benefits of this project on dispersed recreation and the Arizona National Scenic Trail.

2. Private Access Road. The EA appears to show a proposed new private access road that goes west from

Forest Road 765 to one of the three private land parcels (see dashed line at figure 1 vicinity map, page 1 of the EA). However, the EA provides no information on why this road is necessary and who is paying for the road construction. It appears from the map that this parcel already has road access from the forest. If the property owner for this parcel had blocked public access to the forest, then it raises some serious concerns and questions. I would like to re-iterate the following comments I made in my January 15th letter. Start quote: "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." End quote. So, I believe the EA needs to provide more details and justification regarding this private access road or else delete it from the EA.

In summary, we fully support the proposed Meadow Valley Public Access Project and look forward to the opportunities it will open up for enjoying this important destination in the national forest.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,

//signed//

Steven Scheumann
HHC President