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Comments: Thanks for the opportunity to comment on the "Sabino Canyon Visitor Center Reimagined" proposal, as described in the scoping letter dated July 11, 2024, from District Ranger Donato Delmastro.

The new visitor center would be a beautiful building, and there are many excellent features in the proposal. However, I feel compelled to comment on two items that may easily be overlooked, both of which have troubling implications.

1. Multi-purpose space: good facility, questionable uses

The scoping letter mentions a cleverly designed facility in the proposed new visitor center--"a multi-purpose space primarily intended for environmental education, training, and meetings." These are appropriate and worthwhile uses. However, the letter doesn't mention that Coronado National Forest intends also to make this space available, for a fee, to organizations unrelated to Sabino Canyon, and for private celebrations. As a consequence, a person arriving at the new visitor center could find that all or most of the eastern end of the building has been closed off and rented out for a wedding reception or a graduation party. Architectural plans include a catering area next to the meeting space, partly to support events like these.

Exclusive, paid use of a significant part of the Sabino Canyon Visitor Center for private purposes unrelated to Sabino Canyon would be entirely inappropriate. It would also add to pressure on limited parking facilities. To avoid such problems, Coronado National Forest needs to reconsider and carefully define permissible uses of the multi-purpose space.

2. Food services: creeping commercialization

The northwestern end of the curved visitor center building features what the scoping letter describes as "a small café with grab-and-go service." Inclusion of this café follows a period during which a "mobile coffee shop" was parked near the shuttle ticket booth, as a trial to demonstrate interest in a permanent facility. (This was a biased test: any purchase was in effect a yes vote, but there was no easy way to vote no.)

The scoping letter now tells us that in addition to the permanent café, one or two special use permits would be issued for mobile vending of "coffee, food, and refreshments." This additional vending would be "within developed recreation locations, primarily the visitor center and immediate area." That second quotation needs to be read carefully. The apparently innocuous word, "primarily," opens the door to mobile food vending not just at the visitor center, but also in Sabino Canyon itself. (Upper Sabino, the most heavily visited area in the canyon, may be the most likely place.)

The scoping letter goes on, "prior to the construction of the new facilities and beyond, these authorizations could be provided for mobile coffee or food cart vending services." These vending permits, which would last one to ten years, could be issued well before the construction of the new building. They could be issued this year or next.

This must never happen. Never before has there been commercial use of Sabino Canyon anything like this. And there is no need for any of it. There are already multiple food-vending businesses conveniently near Sabino Canyon.

A for-rent meeting facility, a permanent café, food and coffee carts--all these would contribute to an increasing commercialism at Sabino Canyon. Together, they represent a significant shift in Coronado National Forest's

management of Sabino Canyon. To see this trend in plans for the visitor center is discouraging. To see it in the canyon itself would be appalling. It would be incompatible with the very qualities--both natural and cultural--that make Sabino Canyon the place we all treasure.