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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I strongly support Alternative 1, the issuance of a Special Use Permit for Camp Columbine on Mt Graham. After two years of construction, the first session was held in 1968, and the camp has been enjoyed by countless folks since then. I have been involved with the camp for 21 years, being vice-president of the board which operated the camp for the last 17. I was often the person who served as the on-site board representative (maintenance man) when the facility was rented to other users. I have witnessed folks grow closer to each other, the environment, and God during their time on the mountain.

This camp is a rarity, providing "civilized" amenities in a remote mountaintop location. The chance to be so isolated from the technological hustle-bustle of modern life is becoming a rarity, for both adults and children. I suspect many folks have not been to a place where the electricity (generator) is shut off at night, where cell phone reception is so spotty, and where the possibility of seeing nature and wildlife up close and personal is such a reality.

Other local camp facilities (Bible, Scout, or other) are decreasing in number. Huachuca Oaks (Huachucas) and Broken Arrow (Dragoons) were shut down for financial reasons, and Pine Canyon Camp (Chiricahuas) was removed due to flood concerns following the Horseshoe II fire. The opportunity for children to experience camping is becoming more difficult, an experience that can help shape their lives, and teach them to appreciate nature.

The camp was generally used by our group just two weeks a year, and was also available for rent by others. Some years it has been occupied for six weeks, some years not at all. Rental fees covered costs of a generator and fuel, plus liability insurance and necessary maintenance and supplies. This is certainly not a money-making operation! Despite damage caused by the fire, the camp is still a great place to spend time away from the usual activities of life. Time to slow down and appreciate the wild, natural world.

The camp has been used by religious groups, Scouts, family reunions, and groups of friends. It offered secure sleeping accommodations, hot and cold running water in the restrooms (with showers), a large commercial-grade kitchen, and a meeting hall that also serves as the dining area. The only "structured" recreation area was a sandy volleyball court. The campfire ring was always popular. Other activities took place in an open field or under the trees of the forest. Numerous hiking options are available nearby.

I realize there is concern for the Mount Graham Red Squirrel, especially after the Frye Fire. I have spent a lot of time on the mountain, but have seen only one Red Squirrel, and that was in a tree within 20' of the main building at camp. The facilities are not used enough to cause any great disturbance to them.

If the permit is approved, there isn't any need for much to change on site. Some buildings need roof work, maybe a coat of paint, plus some electrical upgrades, but overall it is a functional and easy-to-maintain installation.

Floods following the 2017 Frye Fire wiped out the water intake system, as the canyon it is in was a high-intensity burn area, which subsequently eroded over 12 feet deep and 40 feet wide. The water source is officially known as Bible Spring, and following the initial floods we did rudimentary work to re-establish it and get water flowing into the two 10,000-gallon storage tanks. This water is also available for firefighters or other needs.

Alternative 2, denial of the Special Use Permit, will result in the structures being removed. This will involve the use of heavy equipment to demolish the block buildings and their foundations, with dozens of trips up and down the mountain with large dump trucks. More importantly, it will remove yet one more opportunity for people to

enjoy the forest via group camping events.

For transparency: Our group, the Arizona Church of Christ Bible Camp, Inc, transferred ownership of the physical structures to another group, Camp Columbine. They were willing to step in and take over when things became too much for the ACCBC board to handle. They have spent large amounts of time and money to get this far in the permit process.