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First name: Lenard
Last name: Molina
Organization:
Title:
Comments: Helicopter Use in the Pusch Ridge Wilderness NEPA

July 31, 2014

Shalonda Guy
Deputy District Ranger
Coronado National Forest
5700 N. Sabino Canyon Road
Tucson, AZ 85750
comments-southwestern-coronado@fs.fed.us

RE: Comments in response to EA for Authorizing Helicopter Use by the Arizona Game and Fish Department within Pusch Ridge Wilderness

Dear Ms. Guy,

Please include this letter as my comments for the official record of the Draft Environmental Assessment that proposes Authorizing Helicopter Use by the Arizona Game and Fish Department within Pusch Ridge Wilderness.

I am a regular visitor to the Pusch Ridge Wilderness in the Santa Catalina Ranger District of the Coronado National Forest. I enjoy hiking there on a regular basis and plan to return regularly for hiking and backpacking in the coming year and for the foreseeable future.

Wilderness areas are some of my favorite places to visit, and I derive great personal and spiritual satisfaction from their unspoiled character. The Pusch Ridge Wilderness holds a special place in my heart due to its proximity to my home and the many wonderful experiences I have had there.

One of the most important characteristics of wilderness, to me, is the absence of motorized vehicles. Therefore, the use of helicopters for the bighorn sheep reintroduction project concerns me on several levels. On the most personal level, I detest the noise of helicopters and find it extremely offensive. The presence of low helicopter flights, hovering, and landing in the wilderness would drastically degrade my experience there.

In addition, I have great concern over the impact of the noise and vibration of helicopters on wildlife. Feeling like wildlife are under assault by helicopters also disrupts the experience that I seek in wilderness. Even if I never personally encounter a helicopter, simply knowing they are there undercuts my sense that the Pusch Ridge is a true wilderness area.

In addition, knowing that the entire purpose of the helicopters is to

harass, trap and collar bighorn sheep and facilitate hunting of mountain lions would decrease my enjoyment of the wilderness. Wilderness is meant to be wild, not an area where animals are intensively managed for vague goals driven more by single-species advocacy groups than true conservation need.

I also support the comments submitted by Friends of Wild Animals, the Sierra Club, and Wilderness Watch. I have serious objections to the entire Catalina bighorn sheep reintroduction program and to the Arizona Game & Fish Department's statewide bighorn sheep management plans, and am concerned that approving helicopter landings would exacerbate the cumulative impact of those programs' already substantial impacts on wilderness and wildlife.

I am also concerned that the Draft EA does not sufficiently consider alternatives. It is unclear to me under what authority the Forest Service authorized helicopter hovering without completing an EA or EIS, and I would like clarification on this point. Regardless, comparing only "helicopter hovering with no restrictions of location" to "helicopter landings with minimal restrictions on location" is disingenuous and insufficient under NEPA.

The Draft EA does not provide sufficient documentation to allow a Finding of No Significant Impact and therefore the project should be rejected or an Environmental Impact Statement prepared.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,
Lenard Molina
PO Box 1302
Tucson, AZ 85702