

File Code: 1950-1/7720-1

Date:

Dear Friends and Neighbors of the Coronado National Forest:

I am writing today to inform you of a proposed Forest Service action to restore public vehicular access to National Forest System (NFS) lands in the High Creek area, which is located on the eastern side of the Galiuro Mountains on the Safford Ranger District, Coronado National Forest (Forest).

In 2003, private landowners installed locked gates at the entry point of High Creek Road [National Forest System Road (NFSR) 159] to and through their land. Since then, both High Creek Road and Forest land west of and contiguous with the private land have been inaccessible to public vehicular traffic. To restore access, the Forest proposes to maintain and reconstruct an existing NFS road, construct a new segment of road that will be added to the NFS, and decommission a user-created road in order to reconnect Harrison Canyon Road (NFSR 693A) and High Creek Road (see attached map). Proposed activities are described briefly below under the Proposed Action heading.

We are about to begin a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review of the proposed project by defining the scope of the impacts analysis. During scoping, we ask the public to help us identify issues and concerns related to the proposed action. Public input is vital because it is then integrated into our environmental impacts analyses and used in the development of mitigation and alternatives to the proposed action, as necessary. Information on how you can comment on this proposal or obtain further information is provided below.

Background

High Creek Road crosses private, State Trust, and NFS lands. Since the early 1900s, it has been the primary public and administrative vehicular access route to the High Creek area of the Forest. Until access was closed by private landowners, High Creek Road provided vehicle access to the trailhead for Forest Trail 290, a popular hiking and equestrian trail into the Galiuro Wilderness Area, and a wide variety of dispersed recreation activities.

Unfortunately, there is no documented legal access (written title) for any portion of High Creek Road that crosses private land either within or outside the proclaimed¹ national forest boundary. This lack of legal access to NFS land not only hinders the public from accessing recreation opportunities in the High Creek area, but it has also resulted in increased unauthorized public use of a non-NFSR road, and it has impeded fire and maintenance crews from performing their duties on NFS land.

In 2007, after several unsuccessful attempts by both the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) and the Forest Service to negotiate with the landowner for legal public access to High Creek Road, the AGFD relocated that portion of the road that lies outside the proclaimed

¹ Boundary was defined by Presidential proclamation.



national forest boundary (about 1/2 mile) from private land to State Trust land (see attached map). This project restored vehicle access from Sunset Loop Road to the proclaimed forest boundary; however, it did not resolve the access issue resulting from the closure of High Creek Road where it enters private land within the proclaimed national forest boundary.

Proposed Action

To restore access to the High Creek area, the Forest proposes (1) a combination of maintenance, reconstruction, and decommissioning of two segments of an existing authorized NFS road and (2) construction of a short segment of new road, all entirely on NFS land. The project would affect a total of about 3.4 acres over a distance of 2.7 miles. The following activities comprise the proposed action (refer to map):

- General (blading) and heavy road maintenance (drainages) on Harrison Canyon Road from Paddy's River Road (NFSR 693) to the Harrison Canyon crossing (± 0.9 miles over 1.3 acres) and at the beginning (± 150 feet on 0.04 acres) and end (± 0.21 miles on 0.26 acres) of an existing user-created road from Harrison Canyon Road to the High Creek Road;
- Reconstruction of Harrison Canyon Road where it crosses Harrison Canyon (± 0.03 acres);
- Decommissioning (± 0.56 mile on 0.8 acres) of a portion of the user-created road that has poor structural support during damp periods, from Harrison Canyon Road to High Creek Road;
- Construction of a new segment of road (± 0.7 mile on 1.0 acres) that connects Harrison Canyon Road to High Creek Road to provide greater structural support during damp periods; and
- Addition of the new route to the NFSR list.

The newly constructed road would be unsurfaced (native material) and configured to meet Forest Service Maintenance Level 2 standard, which applies to a high-clearance vehicle road. No import of surface materials would be necessary. Native vegetation (e.g., small manzanita, oak) would be removed from approximately 1.2 acres to construct the new road. Equipment and heavy machinery that would be used during the proposed project include a grader, loader, dozer, dump truck, and water truck (for compaction and dust abatement). All access to the project area would be on existing roads.

The proposed project is expected to take approximately two weeks to complete, including mobilization and demobilization, and would be implemented before the end of 2009.

We Appreciate Your Comments

The Coronado National Forest values public input during the NEPA review process. Your comments about this proposal may be submitted to us in writing by U.S. mail, facsimile, or hand-delivery; electronically by email; or in person at the District office. To be most useful in our

NEPA review, comments should be submitted to us within 30 calendar days following your receipt of this notice.

Our mailing address is Safford Ranger District, 711 14th St, Ste D, Safford, AZ 85546. Facsimiles may be sent to (928) 428-2393. Please include your full name and address and project title (High Creek Road Reroute) with your comments². Electronic (email) comments may be submitted to us at comments-southwestern-coronado@fs.fed.us. Please submit electronic comment as follows: in the text of your email; in a Microsoft Word (.doc) attachment; or in rich-text format (.rtf). Please include “High Creek Road Reroute” in the subject line.

Oral comments may be provided by telephoning Mr. Everett Phillips, at (928) 428-4150, from 8 a.m. through 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding Federal holidays, or by making a personal visit to the Safford District Office.

For additional information about this project, please contact Mr. Phillips by telephone and at epphillips@fs.fed.us. Questions about the NEPA review process may be directed to Forest NEPA Coordinator Andrea Campbell at (520) 388-8352, and awcampbell@fs.fed.us.

Thank you for your interest and participation in the activities of the Coronado National Forest.

Sincerely,

TONI L. STRAUSS
District Ranger

Enclosure: Project Area Map

² *Comments and personal information associated with them, such as names and addresses, become part of the Administrative Record of this NEPA review. As such, they may be made available to a third-party upon request under the authority of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Personally identifying information is protected by the Privacy Act. If you do not wish for your personal information to be released under the FOIA, you may choose not to include it with your comments. Alternatively, you may request an exemption from FOIA with your comment submittal. Should you choose the latter, you will be informed by the Forest Service as to whether or not your request qualifies for an exemption. If it does not, you would be afforded the opportunity to resubmit your comments without personal information or to withhold them altogether.*