

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Notice of Availability of Draft Environmental Impact Statement, New Special-Use Permits for Recreation Residences on the Safford Ranger District, Graham County, Arizona

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of availability.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and the President's Council on Environmental Quality regulations, the Forest Service, Coronado National Forest, announces the public availability of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that discloses the potential environmental impacts of the issuance of special-use permits (SUPs) for recreation residences on the Safford Ranger District, Graham County, Arizona.

DATES: The DEIS will be available for a 45-day public review and comment period that begins on the date of publication of this Notice of Availability (NOA) in the Federal Register. No public meetings are planned to be held during the public review period.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the DEIS have been sent concurrently with publication of this NOA to interested parties and Federal, State, and local government agencies and officials. An electronic copy of the DEIS is also available for public review on <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/coronado>. Copies of the DEIS will be available for public review at the following locations:

*Safford Ranger District: 711 S. 14th Ave., Suite D, Safford, AZ and

*Coronado National Forest Supervisor's Office: 300 W. Congress St., 6th Floor,
Tucson, AZ.

Requests for copies of the DEIS as an electronic file, compact disk or paper copy format may be made by contacting Ms. Celeste A. Gordon, Recreation and Special-Uses Program Manager, Coronado National Forest, on (520) 388-8422 or by electronic mail at cgordon@fs.fed.us.

You may submit written comments on the DEIS by hand delivery, U.S. postal mail, facsimile, and electronic mail (email). Only comments received during the 45-day period following publication of this NOA will be considered prior to a decision on the proposed action. Only parties who offer comment during this period will be granted the right to appeal the decision.

Copies by postal mail should be sent to Ms. Celeste A. Gordon, Coronado National Forest, 300 W. Congress St., Tucson, AZ 85701. Hand delivery of written comments to the same address may occur between 7:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding Federal holidays.

Facsimiles may be sent to Ms. Gordon at (520) 388-8305, and email to comments-southwestern-coronado@fs.fed.us. Envelopes and the subject line of email and facsimiles should be identified as "Safford Recreational Residence DEIS".

Comments on the DEIS should be as specific as possible. It is also helpful if comments refer to line numbers, pages, and/or chapters of the DEIS. Comments may address the adequacy of specific analyses in the DEIS and the merits of the alternatives formulated and discussed in the document (refer to CEQ regulations at 40 CFR 1503.3).

Please note that comments received, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record of this NEPA review and will be available for public inspection upon request under the authority of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For information on the Forest Service Special Uses Program, please contact Ms. Celeste A. Gordon, Recreation and Special-Uses Program Manager, Coronado National Forest, at the above address, or by telephone at (520) 388-8422. Questions on the Forest Service NEPA process or FOIA requirements may be directed to Ms. Andrea Wargo Campbell, Forest NEPA Coordinator, at the above address, and by telephone on (520) 388-8352.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The U.S. Forest Service has offered a recreational residence program on National Forest System lands since the 1920's. The program was initiated with the objective of encouraging city-dwellers to enjoy the national forests by permitting them to construct vacation homes on specified plots. It expanded through the 1960's to encompass a total of 19,000 cabins nationwide before the program was discontinued.

There are now about 15,000 Forest Service cabins nationwide, each of which is maintained under the terms and conditions of SUPs issued by the managing Forest. Though some cabins have been traded on the open market, many are still owned by the descendants of the individuals who built them.

Eighty-eight (88) recreational residences are located on the Safford Ranger District of the Coronado National Forest near Safford, Arizona. Fourteen are found in an area known as Old Columbine, and 74 are found at Turkey Flat. The owners of these

recreational residences hold Forest Service SUPs that allow each unit to be occupied under specific terms and conditions.

The Forest Service's proposed action is to issue 88 new special-use permits for occupancy and use of recreation residences on the Safford Ranger District upon their expiration. There would be no change in the use of the residences upon issuance of a new permit. Each new permit term would be valid for a period of 20 years.

A DEIS was prepared to evaluate the potential impacts of the proposed action and three alternatives, which are summarized as follows:

*Alternative 1 (no action) would allow the recreational residences SUPs to expire and, in accordance with Forest Service policy, permits would be issued for a 10-year transitional occupancy period, after which permit holders would be required to remove structures and other improvements.

*Alternative 2 is the proposed action, which is to issue new SUPs for the all 88 Safford District recreational residences. Alternative 2 is the Forest Service's preferred alternative.

*Alternative 3 would authorize new SUPs for 74 Turkey Flat permit holders for a 20-year period, and the 14 permits for residences within the Old Columbine tract would be allowed to expire. Transitional permits would be issued to Old Columbine permit holders for a 10-year transitional occupancy period, after which structures and other improvements would be removed.

* Alternative 4 would authorize new SUPs for the 14 Old Columbine residences. The 74 permits for Turkey Flat tract would be allowed to expire. New permits would be issued to

Turkey Flat permit holders for a 10-year transitional occupancy period, after which structures and other improvement would be removed.

The NEPA review of the proposed action included public meetings, field reviews, and interactions with various local, state and Federal agencies. Issues identified during the scoping period led to the development of the alternatives analyzed in the DEIS. The DEIS discloses the results of an analysis of the potential for direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the action alternatives and the no-action alternative in detail. The alternatives, including the proposed action, were designed to conform to existing laws and regulations and to provide for resource protection.

Authorization: National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321-4346); Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR parts 1500-1508); U.S. Department of Agriculture NEPA Policies and Procedures (7 CFR part 1b), Forest Service NEPA Regulations, 36 CFR 220.

Dated: November 24, 2008.

/s/ Reta J. Laford

Reta J. Laford

Deputy Forest Supervisor

Coronado National Forest