

News Release

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Conservation Organizations' Objection to Hundreds of Helicopter Landings in Tonto National Forest Wilderness Upheld by Forest Service

PHOENIX, AZ—The Regional Forester of the USDA Forest Service upheld objections filed by conservation groups regarding a plan by the Tonto National Forest to allow hundreds of helicopter landings in five Wilderness areas on the Tonto National Forest, ostensibly to “manage” bighorn sheep. The groups contended that the action violated the Wilderness Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Forest Management Act, and that it would harm wildlife including bighorn sheep, as well as other wilderness values.

In a [letter](#) to the conservation groups, Regional Forester Cal Joyner stated,

“Based on my review, I find that the analysis presented in the EA and supporting documentation does not adequately address Forest Service responsibilities under the Wilderness Act and other guidance that requires coordination with States related to wildlife and fish management in wilderness.”

“As we noted in our objection, a plan to land helicopters in Wilderness areas for the next ten years is contrary to the very nature of wilderness,” stated Cyndi Tuell with Friends of Wild Animals.

“Wilderness areas are protected to allow for wild sheep and wild lands to go ‘untrammled.’ Had the Forest Service agreed to this project, there would have been major trammeling in five of our Arizona wilderness areas.”

Gary Macfarlane of Wilderness Watch stated, “This plan was an unprecedented assault on the national wilderness system. Bighorn sheep and predator numbers should be determined by nature, not heavy-handed management. And helicopters have no place in Wilderness except emergencies and truly extraordinary circumstances. We’ll continue to insist the Forest Service gets it right next time.”

“This is a great win for wilderness and its values. We are pleased that some of our spectacular wilderness areas -- Superstition and Four Peaks – will not be assaulted by the noise and the harm to wildlife and wildlife habitat that this project promoted,” said Sandy Bahr, chapter director for Sierra Club’s Grand Canyon Chapter. “Sierra Club supports having healthy populations of bighorn sheep and other native wildlife, but the best way to ensure that is to maintain and re-establish connected and healthy habitat not to invade wilderness with helicopters.”

Groups filing the Objection include Friends of Wild Animals (FOWA), Grand Canyon Chapter of the

Sierra Club, Wilderness Watch, WildEarth Guardians, and SPEAK (Supporting and Promoting Ethics for the Animal Kingdom).

Forest Service Letter is attached.

Friends of Wild Animals believes in the intrinsic value of wildlife and that they are entitled to live without significant human interference in their basic activities. FOWA also believes in the importance of balanced ecosystems with healthy predator-prey relationships and in the importance of preserving such ecosystems and wild areas for future generations.

Sierra Club's mission is "to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; and to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environments."

SPEAK is a Tucson-based grassroots organization interested in protecting animals.

Wilderness Watch is a national wilderness advocacy organization, dedicated to the protection and proper administration of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

WildEarth Guardians is an environmental advocacy organization working to protect and restore the wildlife, wild rivers, and wild places of the American West.

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