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News Release



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Draft decision released on Soldiers Pass motorized use proposal

Sedona, Ariz., Sep. 16, 2016, For Immediate Release — A draft decision has been made by Coconino National Forest regarding the Soldiers Pass motorized use proposal, which seeks to reduce the volume of motorized traffic in the area and bring use of the road into compliance with Forest Plan direction.

Based on the Environmental Assessment (EA), Finding of No Significant Impact and comments received during the public comment period in April, Coconino National Forest Supervisor Laura Jo West has issued a draft decision notice, which includes a modified version of Alternative B. This would allow motorized use by Red Rock Western Jeep Tours, the Forest Service and emergency responders. No other motorized use would be allowed.

“As the popularity of motorized recreation increases, so do concerns over impacts to other recreational uses and to the quality of life in adjacent residential areas,” said West. “I believe moving in a direction such as this modified Alternative B represents a balanced approach and will reduce impacts to residential areas while still maintaining guided recreational opportunities for motorized travel on a four-wheel drive road.”

The project was co-funded by the City of Sedona and Coconino National Forest in response to public concerns about the effects of increasing motorized use and impacts along Soldiers Pass trail.

Soldiers Pass trailhead is surrounded by private homes, located northwest of Sedona and the trail totals 1.2 miles of Forest Roads 9904, 9904B and 9904C. The EA considered four alternatives in detail:

- Alternative A was the “no action” alternative, and would continue current management.
- Alternative B restricted motorized use of Soldiers Pass Road to an outfitter/guide service and adjusted the outfitter/guide use authorization to improve consistency with other motorized outfitter/guide use on the District.
- Alternative C was the proposed action, which would have adjusted the outfitter/guide use authorization to improve consistency with other motorized outfitter/guide use on the District and established a free permit system to limit public use to 12 permits per day.
- Alternative D would have closed Soldiers Pass Road to all recreational motorized use.

These alternatives were developed with the help of public involvement over the last several years. The EA contains additional information about these alternatives, the project's background, and analysis of the potential effects of implementing these alternatives.

Preparation and circulation of a draft decision notice with the EA document enables the Responsible Official—Forest Supervisor Laura Jo West—to notify the public of the intended decision and the rationale for that decision. In turn, any individuals who submitted comments during the April comment period are provided with an opportunity to raise any concerns with the decision before it is signed, as part of the administrative review process. Objections from eligible individuals and organizations will be accepted for the next 45 days, through October 31, 2016.

For more information or to submit a comment, please contact Julie Rowe, recreation special uses program manager for the Red Rock Ranger District, at 928-203-7516 or by email at jrowe@fs.fed.us. Project details, maps and additional information are available at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=38555>.