

File Code: 1950

Date: September 7, 2000

To: Files

Re: Mormon Lake and Fulton Canyon Protection Project

**It is my decision to** implement site protection and rehabilitation projects in the Mormon Lake & Fulton Canyon areas for resource protection, area rehabilitation and recreation opportunity. The primary purpose of this project is to restore and maintain watershed conditions in the Mormon Lake basin, Fulton Canyon and its associated meadow. Associated purposes include better recreation experiences and management. Managed recreation will lessen negative impacts from off-road vehicles and human/wildlife interactions. It will also maintain wildlife in the area for wildlife viewing and hunting.

### **Decisions**

Write a legal closure order for the area bounded by FH3, FR90 and including the Fulton Canyon area. Map 1 shows the general location of the new order (slight refinements may be made when the order is created). Within the closure order area, motor vehicles (except snowmobiles) would be allowed only on designated open roadways. Administrative access to the power line or for other administrative needs will be maintained where needed. Open roadways include one in Fulton Canyon, and several on the north end of Mormon Lake. These open roads provide dispersed camping access and access to private property. Within the closure order area in certain areas vehicles may leave open roads for up to a distance of 100 feet in order to set up dispersed campsites. The roads where the dispersed camping rule applies will be signed as such. FR90, the paved road corridor around Mormon Lake, will remain open for vehicle travel.

The following actions correspond to the numbers on Map 2.

#### Fulton Canyon

1. Close and rehabilitate to natural conditions (rip and seed) the off-road vehicle tracks/roads in Fulton Canyon and its adjacent meadow. Close and rehabilitate motorized access points along the east side of Fulton Canyon. One primary road will be designated from FR90 into the area and maintained as open for passenger cars. Where the primary road ends, construct a small parking area. Construct a 3-rail pole fence along the east side of the primary road. Remove the cattle guard at the east/west fence line and replace it with a fence and walk-through for horse, foot and bicycle access. (A gate will be provided for management of the cattle grazing allotment.) From the walkthrough, construct a short trail to the pond and old railroad trestle in Fulton Canyon. Move the existing information board further away from FR90. Create environmental education/map displays about Fulton Canyon that include information that interprets

Mormon Lake, historic railroads, and meadow restoration. In order to encourage dispersed camping in the trees as opposed to in the meadow, remove a few small trees to create openings for dispersed campsites.

### Mormon Lake

2. In the area northwest of Mormon Lake Lodge and adjacent to FR90, provide a small parking area and walk-through for nonmotorized use. Redesign the entrance to this area for safe vehicle movement to and from FR90. From the walk-through convert the road leading to the 'island' into a trail. From the walk-through back to Mormon Lake Lodge convert the existing road to a trail. Between Mormon Lake Lodge and this parking area a fence is located down slope and parallel to FR90. This fence will be moved upslope and closer to FR90 in coordination with the Coconino County Road Department to comply with County standards. Scarify and return to a natural state all highly impacted land in this area.

There are sites along FR90 from Mormon Lake Lodge north to Montezuma Lodge where existing informal parking areas have been created. On the lakeside of the road, we have chosen three sites to designate as formal parking areas with parking boundaries delineated with pole fence. Walk-through for no motorized access into the Mormon Lake basin will be constructed at each site. These walkthroughs provide access for car-top boating, hunting, and wildlife viewing. In addition, impacted areas will be scarified and naturalized. These locations are:

3. Approximately 1 mile northwest of Mormon Lake Lodge
4. Approximately 2.5 miles northwest of Mormon Lake Lodge (Curly's Point).  
(Curly's Point itself will remain open for parking and non-motorized lake access.)
5. Approximately 3 miles northwest of Mormon Lake Lodge across from Montezuma Lodge.
6. Maintain the current road access to the Rockledge Summer Homes. Beyond the home sites, scarify and naturalize all road extensions. The road to the Rockledge Summer Homes will not be included in the 50 feet dispersed camping opportunities described above.
7. In the area on the far northwest side of Mormon Lake numerous roads are located between FR90 and the Mormon Lake basin. To provide private property access, dispersed camping opportunities and hunter access some roads will be maintained open to motorized vehicles. Some of these roads will be posted with signs that say that vehicles may pull off to camp 100 feet of either side of the road. Other roads will be obliterated and returned to a natural condition.
8. In order to provide pull out parking opportunities along FH3 (Lake Mary Road), the current Mormon Lake Overlook will be maintained. Additional pullouts will be created as a result of roadway maintenance in the area parallel to Mormon Lake. In coordination with the Coconino County Roads Department, I will select which pull outs will be

formally designated and maintained for long term public use. The pullouts that will be utilized will take into account eagle perches, wildlife viewing opportunities, safety and noxious weeds.

9. On the southeast corner of Mormon Lake there is a road leading from FH3 down into a small parking area and continuing along the edge of the lakebed. At this site, additional pole fencing will be constructed. Any other access will be by permit from the District Ranger.

### **Items to coordinate during implementation**

During implementation of these projects, equipment, vehicles and clothing will be cleaned prior to leaving areas infested with noxious weeds. In addition, equipment, vehicles and boots will be cleaned prior to working on interior fencing or road obliteration so as to not bring noxious weeds into the area from other parts of the forest.

In addition, fences will be located to avoid populations of sensitive plants. Initial surveys show that small populations may exist in the project area. Avoiding the plants will preserve these plants and the resulting fence locations will meet project objectives as described above.

Recreation use, informal parking, roads and trails on the west (non-lake) side of FR90 are not part of this decision.

### **Public Involvement**

On March 20, 2000 the proposed action and an open house invitation were mailed to a 45 person mailing list. Addresses included local residents, agencies and organizations. Press Releases were sent out to local newspapers and radio stations.

An open house held at the Mormon Lake Fire Department on April 22, 2000 where the proposed action was presented along with a slide show. Public comments were solicited. Approximately 53 people attended the open house and participated in discussions. Letters and notes from the open house are located in the Project Record. Approximately 10 letters and several phone calls were received after the open house with comments about the proposed project.

A second open house was held on August 5, 2000. An invitation letter was mailed to a 180 person mailing list including local residents, agencies, organizations and recreation residence owners. The Mormon Lake Bugle Newsletter helped advertise the open house. Approximately 46 people attended. Public comments were solicited.

The draft Categorical Exclusion Decision Document was sent to all members of the public who had expressed interest in this project by coming to a public meeting or contacting the Forest Service by letter or phone call. Approximately 5 letters and one phone call were received with comments about this draft Categorical Exclusion document.

### **Reasons for the Decision**

Being the largest natural lake in Arizona, Mormon Lake is very important habitat for wildlife. It provides fresh drinking water and food for deer and elk and is the home of many bird species. Fulton Canyon is a grassland meadow leading down into Mormon Lake. Meadows are important components of the watershed providing plant diversity, water capture, absorption and

transfer. Mormon Lake depends on healthy watershed conditions. Both the Mormon Lake basin and Fulton Canyon provide recreation and scenic enjoyment for people. Many recreation activities are linked to the landscape and wildlife located here.

Current uses are destroying meadow and wetland environments and promoting extensive soil erosion and bare soil areas. This current condition does not meet the National Forest mission of healthy, natural landscapes. The lakebed is a myriad of ATV and off-road vehicle tracks/roads. Fulton Canyon is becoming devoid of grass and is covered with ATV and vehicle tracks/roads. The intensity and type of recreation use is also negatively affecting wildlife by destroying the grass they graze upon and frightening them away from their source of drinking water and living habitat.

I am making a choice to manage this area to Forest Service public land standards in a way that balances the high levels of recreation use with resource protection.

### **A Note on Motorized Access**

In the past, actions were taken to limit impacts to Fulton Canyon and the Mormon Lake basin while providing ATV and vehicle access around its perimeter. Previously closed roads have been re-opened and new pathways have been created by informal recreation.

When the Mormon Lake area had fewer residents and recreational users, the combined motorized and no motorized use of this area was not in conflict. However, as the total number of people using the site has increased, the presence of vehicles, along with hikers, hunters, horses and mountain bikes has placed too many activities in one small area.

Although hunters and recreationists may no longer drive into the Mormon Lake basin or Fulton Canyon except along designated open roads, walking access opportunities will be available from any point on National Forest land including parking areas.

There are many driving opportunities on forest roads outside of the Mormon Lake basin and Fulton Canyon areas.

### **Findings**

These actions fall within the intent and direction of the Coconino Forest Plan.

The following categories are located in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15. The road and trail maintenance, road obliteration and converting roads to trails, are actions similar to those described in categories 31.1b(4) and 31.2 (1). The parking reconstruction including pole fencing will occur on existing roadbeds and therefore are similar to actions described in 31.1b(5). The closure orders are an administrative decision similar to actions described in 31.1a (5). Scarification and seeding is similar to actions described in category 31.2(5). Each site is independent of the other so that the total number of acres of ground disturbance at any one location is small and fits within the categories described above. There are no extraordinary circumstances that cause a significant environmental effect. These actions, when implemented together, do not cause a cumulative negative effect. These projects are therefore excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement.

A cultural resources survey and clearance report for the projects in this decision is documented in the clearance report. American Indian tribes have been consulted regarding traditional, cultural values.

A biological evaluation is complete.

Implementing these projects together does not cause a cumulative negative effect to the area. The Schedule of Proposed Actions has been reviewed to identify any cumulative actions. The Mormon Lake portion of the Arizona Trail is proposed for areas west of FR90 and effects of the trail will not combine with the Mormon Lake Fulton Canyon Project to create negative cumulative effects. Instead, there is an overall beneficial effect to wildlife habitat of more active road, trail and recreation management throughout the FR90 corridor.

### **Implementation and Appeals**

This project is not subject to appeal per CFR 215. This project may be implemented immediately.

### **Contact Person**

For more information contact Bruce Greco at the Mormon Lake Ranger Station, 4373 S. Lake Mary Road, Flagstaff AZ 86001, (520) 774-1147 or Connie Moen at the Peaks Ranger Station, 5075 N Hwy 89, Flagstaff, AZ 86004, (520) 526-0866.

Sincerely,

BRUCE GRECO  
Mormon Lake District Ranger