USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Red Rock Ranger District

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Dear Interested Participant:

I would like to take this opportunity to update you on the status of the Red Rock Ranger District's outfitter and guide program.

Each year, the Red Rock Ranger District receives numerous proposals from commercial outfitter/guides seeking opportunities on National Forest lands in the Sedona area. The lack of a clear management strategy has led to restricted issuance of new permits and limited opportunities for businesses to provide recreational services on the national forest. The District has recently completed analyses that have allowed it to create a management strategy for the outfitter/guide program. This strategy will allow the District to provide consistent and timely responses to new proposals, to minimize conflicts between different forest visitor activities, and to ensure that outfitter/guide uses are consistent with Forest Plan direction.

Background

In 2006, the District issued a draft Proposed Action for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the outfitter/guide program. It was subsequently determined that the District needed more data before performing such analysis. In 2008, the District published the Recreation Special Use Program Assessment. The assessment analyzed various aspects of outfitter and guide uses on the District.

After review of the Assessment, the District discovered some calculation errors. In 2009 it completed a Correction to the Assessment, as well as a Findings document, which applies the analysis results to future programmatic decisions. Both of these documents, as well as the original Assessment, are available online at http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/coconino/publications/index.shtml .

The Findings show that in the core Sedona area, most existing outfitter/guide use is at acceptable but maximum levels. It also indicates that there are four roads where use possibly exceeds capacity; however, additional use information is needed to make that determination. These roads are: Schnebly Hill, Vultee Arch (Dry Creek), Broken Arrow, and Soldier Pass. The District is developing a monitoring plan for these sites.

The analysis also identified several outfitter/guide activities that are needed, but currently not permitted. These are mountain biking, rock climbing, metaphysical services, wedding planning, transportation services, and short stops for tour buses.

Next Steps

Reissue existing permits: The District proposes to reissue existing outfitter/guide permits and convert them to priority status as required by agency outfitter/guide policy. The public will have an opportunity to comment on this reissuance through a letter sent to all interested parties.

Issue prospectuses: Due to competitive interest in obtaining permits for the additional activities listed above, the District will use the prospectus process for soliciting applications. This summer, the District anticipates issuing prospectuses for the following uses: mountain biking, wedding planners, and metaphysical uses. In 2011 it may issue prospectuses for rock climbing, transportation uses, and short stops.

In an effort to reduce costs and impact to the environment, the District would like to send future correspondence on these projects by email. If you received this letter by hardcopy, and if you wish to be notified of public scoping for the reissuance process or of any of the prospectuses, please provide an email address.

If you would like more information or have questions, please contact the Interdisciplinary Team Leader, Julie Rowe at (928) 203-2915 or jrowe@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,

/s/ Heather C. Provencio

HEATHER C. PROVENCIO
District Ranger