USDA Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

April 2026

Request for Expressed Interest for Campground and Related Granger-Thye Concessions

Peppersauce Campground

Santa Catalina Ranger District, Coronado National Forest



Figure 1. Photo collage of various sites included in the offering.

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Introduction

Providing recreational services and facilities is a key part of the Forest Service's mission. To fulfill this responsibility, the agency relies upon volunteer, organizational, and commercial partners to help expand the scope of opportunities for the visiting public.

The purpose of this Request for Expressed Interest (RFEI) is to determine:

- Whether sufficient competitive interest exists for the Forest Service to develop and release a prospectus

- Invite feedback regarding the offering and proposed recreational use of the sites

Submissions received from this request may demonstrate a need to issue a prospectus in the future. Submissions may also help shape the type of activities and the level of use allowed in a future solicitation.

Area Description

The Coronado National Forest spans sixteen scattered mountain ranges or "sky islands" rising dramatically from the desert floor, supporting plant communities as biologically diverse as those encountered on a trip from Mexico to Canada.

The Santa Catalina Mountains comprise one of the "sky islands" in the Coronado National Forest. From the desert floor to the upper slopes of Mt. Lemmon, biozones vary from Sonoran Desert to subalpine forest, with wildlife communities that are equally diverse.

The Santa Catalina Ranger District forms Tucson's northern boundary and provides a dramatic backdrop and orientation point for the sprawling desert city. The Santa Catalina Mountains are a popular year-round destination for residents and tourists alike, offering developed recreation, climatic relief, and wilderness opportunities.

Spring, summer, and fall seasons usually provide a repeated and expected weather pattern. April and May are usually dry with warm days and cool nights. June is usually the driest month, often with some high winds and the highest possibility for wildland fire. July and August comprise the main portion of the monsoon season with higher humidity levels and the possibility of afternoon thunderstorms. September cools slightly, with monsoon rains possibly through the end of the month. October through December typically feature calmer and cooler weather.

Business Opportunity

This opportunity is for Peppersauce Campground, which is currently a Forest Service owned and operated campground. With its picturesque vegetation and dramatic setting at the foot of 9,157' Mt. Lemmon in southeastern Arizona, Peppersauce Campground is an outstanding area for enjoying an afternoon picnic or a weekend campout. This year-round facility is a popular stop among off-road vehicle enthusiasts and families. Hunting, hiking and scenic driving opportunities are nearby. It is located 8 miles from the town of Oracle and 46 miles northeast of downtown Tucson, on the northside of the Santa Catalina Mountains.

The topography includes a mix of flat areas suitable for picnics and camping, as well as rugged terrains for hiking and exploring the nearby Peppersauce Cave. The area is also known for its scenic driving opportunities, providing a chance to enjoy the natural beauty of the region.

The following is a detailed description of the recreation facilities and government owned property included in this opportunity. See appendix 1 for maps and a detailed layout of the area.

Peppersauce Campground

Peppersauce Campground has one reservable group camping area for up to 35 people at a time. The group camping area is equipped with two vault toilets, seven picnic tables, 3 combination fire ring/grills, and one bear proof garbage bin (double). The parking area for the group site can hold

up to 10 vehicles. The group site is located across the creek and is often not accessible to all vehicle types. Additionally, 12 first-come first-served individual campsites are available. The individual campsites are equipped with a picnic table, parking spur, tent pad, and combination fire ring. There are also two small pedestal grills in the first come first serve campground, as well as two vault toilets, and one dumpster. There is one campground host site at the campground. The host site includes access to electricity, a land phone line and a small vault dump station.

Campsites at Peppersauce are spread throughout a creekside oasis of enormous Arizona sycamore and walnut trees that provide shade in summer and color in autumn. The campground sits at an elevation of 4,700 feet alongside Peppersauce Creek. The creek is normally dry except during heavy rains or the area's summer monsoon season. Portions of the site should be aware are prone to flash flooding during rain events.

The Santa Catalina Mountains are known for their exceptional hiking. Hikers can find access to the Arizona Trail, which runs from Mexico to Utah, about 5 miles from the campground along Forest Road 38. Off-road vehicle opportunities are available on nearby road systems. The campground is approximately two miles Arizona Zipline Adventures and four miles from the Triangle Y Ranch Camp, operated by the YMCA.

Recreation.gov: https://www.recreation.gov/camping/campgrounds/233222?tab=campsites

Currently, the access road entering Peppersauce Campground is also utilized by the Sycamore Canyon Rite of Passage camp, and vehicles passing through the campground may be frequent.

Gross Revenue & Fees

In the past three years, the current uses at the described facility generated gross revenues as shown in table 1. Fees that have been charged at the sites for the last three years are described in table 2.

Table 1. Gross Revenue

	2023	2024	2025
Campground Total Gross Revenue	$18,150.20	$19,425.39	$9,676.00

Table 2. Camping and Use Fees.

Facility	2024 Fee	2025 Fee	2026 Fee
Peppersauce Campground			
Group Site	$50.00	$50.00	$50.00
Single Site	$15.00	$15.00	$15.00
Double Site	$30.00	$30.00	$30.00

*Additional reservation fees and taxes may apply.

Minimum Operating Seasons

The campground currently operates year-round, with a peak season of January 1st to March 31st.

Once advertised, applicants to the prospectus will need to propose the period in which they will operate the sites.

Future Investment and Services

The Coronado National Forest is inviting public and private entities to submit concepts and ideas that would improve visitor services and opportunities at the sites, as well as gauge interest for the proposed offering. The Forest would like to see what visions there are for the facilities, and how that vision could be achieved, aligning with the mission of the Forest Service. Some examples are listed below and may be included in the prospectus as an additional evaluation criterion.

Construction of Yurts or Other Enclosed Camping Structures

The Forest Service would consider proposals that include construction and operation of these types of temporary facilities and may include glamping opportunities. Permanent facilities would also be considered.

Campsite Improvements, Enhancements, or Conversions

The Forest Service would consider proposals that include adding amenities to campsites, such as power, water, septic, etc. for both host sites and customer sites.

Potential Sales, Rentals, or Services

Respondents may include willingness to provide a variety of necessities, convenience items, rental gear, and/or services at permitted recreation site locations. This list of potential sales, services, and/or fees below is not meant to be all-inclusive.

Sales

- Supplies (firewood, propane, miscellaneous camping essentials, food and drink, fishing, etc.)
- Passes and licenses (hunting, fishing, Interagency or Forest passes, etc.)
- Informational and interpretive materials (books, posters, guides, etc.)
- Vending operations

Rentals

- Camping equipment

Services

- Interpretive tours and programs
- Outfitter and Guide services or opportunities
- Yoga or other wellness programming
- Musical performances
- Wi-fi connection

Forest Service Concession Programs and Policies

Authorities

Government-owned concessions are authorized by special use permits issues under Section 7 of the Granger-Thye (GT) Act, 16 U.S.C. 508d, and implementing regulations at 36 CFR Part 251, Subpart B.

Restrictions

Some restrictions include but are not limited to gambling, adult entertainment, livestock use, federally illegal drugs, and associated activities. For a full understanding of restrictions please review US Code of Federal Regulations, US 36 § 251.

Other Pertinent Information

Applicable Forest Orders

Forest Orders may be issued to address a variety of management concerns on a particular forest. They may close or restrict the use of an area on the forest for safety reasons or to protect forest resources. Current Forest Orders are available on the Coronado National Forest webpage.

Actions Requiring NEPA Review

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) applies to a broad range of actions that may occur in a campground or day use area, including construction activities, facility and road maintenance, ground disturbance and vegetation management activities. These activities cannot proceed until the Forest Service has completed the required environmental review and approves the action or activity to take place. The Forest Service will expedite the environmental review process to the best of its ability however cannot be responsible for any loss of revenue due to delays resulting from the environmental review processes required by law.

Archaeological Resources

Any ground disturbing activity must be approved by the authorized officer prior to initiation to ensure compliance with the forests' heritage and NEPA requirements.

Electrical Power

Power service is currently provided to the host site by Bureau of Indian Affairs (San Carlos Irrigation Project).

Water System

Campground has four metal water pumps fed by well water provided by a Forest Service water system within the campground. The system continuously fills and shuts off on its own and has a storage capacity of approximately 20,000 gallons. Pump water is potable. No grey water is provided. Peppersauce is the only site served by this water system.

Below is a description of the maintenance responsibilities for both the permit holder and the Forest Service.

Permit Holder Responsibilities:

- Responsible for maintaining public water systems within the administrative areas of the permit, from the meter leading into the site.
- Will maintain a file on all maintenance performed which will be provided to the Forest Service or Water System Manager monthly, and/or upon request.
- Will repair leaks and maintain drains underneath the spigots.
- Permit holder will diligently and constantly monitor public use of water to ensure that it is utilized for drinking water only.
- In the event there is a disruption in the water service, the permit holder will notify the National Recreation Reservation System (NRRS) and Forest Service water system manager as soon as possible, as well as place signs at the entrance to the site where the water system is closed.
- In the event there is a disruption in water service, the appropriate protocols for repair, chlorine shocking, and flushing of the system will be completed.

Permit Term, Insurance, and Bonding

The permit term will be for up to 5 years, with an option to extend the term for up to an additional 5 years at the sole discretion of the authorized officer. The decision to extend the term will depend, in part, on sustained satisfactory performance of the permit holder.

The permit holder must have liability insurance covering losses associated with the use and occupancy authorized by the permit arising from personal injury or death and third-party property damage in the minimum amounts outlined in FSM 2713.32. Insurance policies must name the United States as an additional insured

The prospectus offering may require property insurance.

The authorized officer may require the holder to furnish a bond or other security for any of the obligations imposed by the terms and conditions of the permit or any applicable law, regulation, or order.

RFEI Submissions

Submission Format

The Forest Service asks interested parties to provide notice of their interest regarding this opportunity to determine the level of competitive interest. Please submit your response utilizing the form attached as appendix 2.

Expressions of Interest must be submitted in electronic form to the following email: sm.fs.coronado_su@usda.gov. The electronic copy must be prepared in a Microsoft Office program or a PDF that allows for copying and pasting of text. Any page with proprietary or confidential information must be noted with a disclaimer, however respondents should be aware that submissions are broadly subject to public disclosure pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (5 USC § 552).

Submission Criteria

The Peppersauce Campground Submission Form (appendix 2) will instruct you to include the following:

1. Your name, company, or organization, and contact information (phone, mailing address, email address)
2. Concept(s) for campground and/or facilities
3. How concept(s) support the mission of the Forest Service
4. Technical and financial capability
5. Any additional information or considerations relevant to the proposed concept or experience.
6. If there is a question or issue that is not listed in this RFEI that should be listed or considered, respondents are encouraged to include this in their response

DUE DATE: Submissions must be received by close of business **June 15th, 2026.**

Questions

Questions can be submitted until close of business on **June 1st, 2026**. All questions and answers will be posted publicly on the Coronado National Forest website.

Advertisement Period

If competitive interest in this opportunity exists, the Forest anticipates advertising a prospectus the end of 2026.

Notice

This document is not intended as a formal offering for the award of any legal authorization. Submissions will only be used to gauge public desire and/or need of the current infrastructure.

Respondents should not assume they will receive any preference in connection with any future solicitation should they choose to submit materials in response to this RFEI. The Forest Service reserves the right, at its sole discretion to withdraw or discontinue the RFEI in whole or in part; use the ideas or materials submitted in response to this RFEI in any manner deemed to be in the best interests of the Forest Service, including, but not limited to, the undertaking of the prescribed work in a manner other than that which is set forth herein. The Forest Service likewise reserves the right, at any time, to change any components, concepts or approaches of the RFEI. All costs associated with responding to the RFEI are the sole responsibility of the respondent and any such costs shall not be reimbursed by the Forest Service. Forest Service will not return materials submitted in connection with this RFEI. All materials submitted in response to this RFEI shall become the property of Forest Service.

Forest Service assumes no liability for the accuracy of the information provided in this RFEI.