

**Date:** January 27, 2022

Sandra J Moriarty  
City of Sedona Mayor  
102 Roadrunner Dr.  
Sedona, AZ 86336

Dear Mayor Moriarty and Council members,

This letter is in response to your letter dated November 2, 2021, requesting that the Coconino National Forest implement a limited entry permit system for motorized use in the greater Sedona area. I do not believe that implementation of an areawide limited entry permit system for OHVs is feasible, nor do I believe that it would be the correct management action at this time in response to the complex set of motorized use issues that we are all invested in addressing.

I recognize and share your goals to minimize the impacts associated with increasing motorized use in the Sedona area and am heartened that the City is eager to engage and support these efforts. Coconino National Forest staff and I are dedicated to working with you, Sedona residents and our many stakeholders as we navigate a path toward a more sustainable motorized recreation program that may require new management approaches, site specific actions, and a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder planning process.

We are tasked to manage the Forest for multiple uses, grounded in our values of conservation, interdependence, and safety. We rely on guidance in the Coconino Forest Plan that was established with broad and rigorous public involvement and documents our commitments with a great diversity of Forest visitors and partners.

Motorized use is a legitimate use of national forest lands. The Forest Plan guides us to manage the areas surrounding Sedona for a desired condition that includes a network of primarily non-motorized trails, as well as opportunities for OHV recreationists, while helping protect fragile natural resources and community relationships.

Sustainable recreation management demands a careful approach to visitor management, for which there are many tools and methods. Applying a limited entry permit system should be a consideration. However, limited entry systems are burdensome to both visitor and manager, cannot be implemented without a substantial dedication of resources, and are not feasible in some areas or situations. Furthermore, limited entry systems often displace rather than decrease visitation, meaning that actions taken in one area are likely to affect other areas.

Over the last decade, we have worked directly with the City and citizens to address issues associated with rapid and ongoing increases in motorized recreation. Our work together has resulted in many useful solutions that have decreased private property trespass and impacts to forest resources. We have recently allocated resources to further address motorized issues including hiring a new motorized and non-motorized trail coordinator and partnering with a



variety of organizations including TreadLightly! and the Red Rock OHV Conservation Crew (RROCC) to seek solutions and funding.

We are committed to the following efforts in the coming years:

- Compete for State grant and RROCC funding in 2022 for OHV education and patrol rangers, road/trail maintenance, and restoration and education projects.
- Increase the OHV volunteer program with an emphasis on field education booths and events.
- Expand the camping and campfire prohibition west of Sedona to address impacts associated with dispersed camping. We expect the use of designated camping areas to reduce some of the traffic volume on roads in this area.
- Routinely meet with local law enforcement and emergency responders to assess accident and injury trends and identify actions to reduce these occurrences.
- Participate on the Diablo Trust Recreation Working Group, a collaboration addressing impacts of recreation (including motorized recreation) to find balanced solutions for all stakeholders.

I believe these efforts will make positive progress, and we will continue to share updates on these efforts with monthly communications regarding OHV management.

Additional site specific and broad, long-term efforts will also be necessary to meet our common goals, but the best action for each situation may differ based on the issues and Forest Plan direction.

For example, in the Broken Arrow area, short-term actions may include improvements to accommodate short term OHV staging to address trailhead congestion and idling and other impacts in residential areas. If these or other strategies do not resolve concerns, or as recommended through a large scale-planning process, a limited entry permit system may be reasonable in the Broken Arrow area where all motorized access could be managed with a permit.

While a similar limited entry permit approach was taken at Soldier Pass, the two areas have differing desired conditions outlined in the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan dictates that “The parking, staging areas, and main four-wheel drive road at Broken Arrow Basin should be managed for the recreation opportunity spectrum setting of ‘rural’ because of the area’s high level of use” (Forest Plan, p. 149). “Rural” areas are characterized as “a substantially modified natural environment” with facilities “often designed for larger numbers of people” (p. 232).

On the other hand, the Forest Plan dictates a lower level of development for the area that contains Soldier Pass Road. This area, designated as “Semiprimitive Motorized” is characterized by “opportunities for self-reliance and challenge, with a low concentration of users and high degree of interaction with the natural environment.” (p. 232). Also, limiting motorized access to the Soldier Pass route likely resulted in displaced use that is now affecting Broken Arrow and other nearby routes. These outcomes must be considered before limiting use in an area designated for higher use levels.

In west Sedona, based on involvement with the City’s Citizen Engagement Group, we designated OHV routes connected by main Forest Roads 525 and 152C. These solutions allowed for continued OHV use while reducing trespass and damage associated with driving off designated roads. Unfortunately, these efforts combined with other factors like drought, increase area OHV

rental businesses, and sharp growth in Forest use resulting from the pandemic have led to increased dust, noise and impacts to surrounding vegetation, grazing operations and residents.

Site specific actions such as installing speed advisory signs, more actively managing dispersed camping, and redesigning the OHV system to reduce travel on primary access roads, including near residential areas, may address some concerns. A limited entry permit system in this area would be exceedingly complex and expensive due to the large extent of the area, multiple access points, and multiple private land inholdings. Furthermore, due to current state laws, it is unlikely the Forest Service can selectively restrict the use of OHVs on Forest Service system roads.

These two areas highlight the complexity of the issues. I propose that we join in a collaborative planning process to comprehensively assess these challenges across the greater Sedona area. The intention of this effort would be to work side by side with other stakeholders to develop long-term solutions that reduce impacts while continuing to provide motorized access enjoyed by residents and tourists alike.

This effort, similar to the Flagstaff Trails Initiative, could improve sustainable motorized use opportunities, reduce conflict, increase user safety, and reduce resource damage. Support for such efforts is available through programs such as the National Park Service River, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program.

While this planning effort may take time and substantial resources, we would like to explore this or similar opportunities with your staff. Recreation Staff Officer, Brian Poturalski, will contact your staff to initiate this discussion.

In my discussions thus far, I can't help but notice so many shared values among the community and the Forest. It is on this common ground, respectfully discussing the issues and pursuing solutions, that we can address the impacts associated with motorized use while continuing to provide for the recreational access and experience that makes the greater Sedona area so special.

Sincerely,

LAURA JO WEST

Forest Supervisor