



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Coronado National Forest
Supervisor's Office

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Tucson, Arizona 85701
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File Code: 1950-1/2720-2

Date: April 4, 2008

Dear Friends and Neighbors of the Coronado National Forest:

I am writing today to advise you about an upcoming action proposed by the Coronado National Forest that would renew a special-use permit held by the University of Arizona (University) for operation of the Mount Graham International Observatory (MGIO). The MGIO, which consists of three telescopes, related facilities and structures, and an access road, is located in Township 8 South, Range 24 East (see attached map).

The University proposes no changes to existing facilities and the scope and intensity of authorized activities and operations at MGIO.

In 1988, the original permit for the MGIO was authorized by Congress in the Arizona-Idaho Conservation Act (AICA; Public Law 100-696). The AICA directed the Secretary of Agriculture to issue a special-use permit to the University to construct and operate the MGIO. Special-use permits for these types of facilities have a 20-year term according to Forest Service Manual 2710. The AICA also declared that the environmental compliance requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) were met at that time.

The AICA requires the Forest Service to renew the MGIO permit upon its expiration in April 2009. Before a new permit is issued for another 20-year term, the Forest Service will review the proposed action to determine whether or not there are any extraordinary circumstances associated with permit renewal that would result in direct, indirect, or cumulative environmental impacts to resources in the project area.

Potential Cultural Issue

The Pinaleno Mountains have a notable history and cultural significance. The whole of the mountain range was determined by the Forest Service as a Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) (*Dzil Nchaa Si'an*) for the Western Apache and *eligible* for the National Register of Historic Places, according to the criteria established in the National Historic Preservation Act. However, the TCP has not yet been *listed* on the National Register. The mountains themselves also have traditional religious and cultural significance among the Hopi, Mescalero Apache, Fort Sill Apache, Four Southern Tribes¹, and the Pueblo of Zuni.

According to the San Carlos Apache Tribe, the White Mountain Apache Tribe, and the Yavapai-Apache Nation, the mere existence of the MGIO has an adverse effect on the TCP. During the NEPA review of this proposed action, Forest heritage staff will continue consultation with the

¹ Gila River, Salt River Pima-Maricopa, and Ak-Chin Indian Communities and the Tohono O'odham Nation.



Western Apache and other tribes having traditional ties to the mountain to determine if there are options within the Forest's permit authority that allow permit stipulations to mitigate adverse to the TCP.

Opportunity to Comment

The Forest Service values public involvement in its NEPA reviews. You are encouraged to submit comments to us regarding the scope of the NEPA analysis of this project². To receive full consideration, your comments should be submitted to us by June 30, 2008.

Written comments may be sent by U.S. mail or hand-delivered to Ms. Celeste Gordon, Recreation/Special Uses Program Manager, Coronado National Forest, 300 W. Congress Blvd., Tucson, AZ 85701; by facsimile to "ATTN: MGIO Permit Renewal" on (520) 388-8305; and by electronic mail (email) to comments-southwestern-coronado@fs.fed.us, with "MGIO Permit Renewal" in the subject line.

Oral comments may be provided to Ms. Gordon by telephone at (520) 388-8422 or in person at the Supervisor's Office (address above). Comment forms are available at the Safford District Office, 711 14th Avenue, Suite D, Safford, AZ 85546 during regular business hours, which are Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., excluding Federal holidays.

Please contact Ms. Gordon for further information about this project.

Thank you for your interest in Coronado National Forest activities.

Sincerely,

/s/ Reta Laford
RETA LAFORD
Deputy Forest Supervisor

² Your comments and personally identifying information associated with them, such as names and addresses, become part of the Administrative Record for this NEPA review. As such, they may be made available to a third-party upon request pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). If you do not wish for your personal information to be released in response to a FOIA request, you may choose not to include it with your comments. Alternatively, you may request an exemption from FOIA with your comment submittal. Should you choose the latter, you will be informed by the Forest Service as to whether or not your request qualifies for an exemption. If it does not, you will be afforded the opportunity to resubmit your comments without personal information or to withhold them altogether.