

**WALNUT CANYON NATIONAL MONUMENT
SPECIAL STUDY COMMENTS
THROUGH AUGUST 2010**



**WALNUT CANYON SPECIAL STUDY
PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY
OUTREACH PERIOD FROM MARCH 22 – JULY 26, 2010
AUGUST 2010**

INTRODUCTION

On March 30, 2009, President Barack Obama signed into law the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (the Act) as passed by the United States Congress. The Act includes language directing the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special study on management options for an area within the Peaks and Mormon Lake ranger districts of Coconino National Forest (managed by the U.S. Forest Service [USFS]) and surrounding Walnut Canyon National Monument (managed by the National Park Service [NPS]). The study area (referred to as the Walnut Canyon Study Area) includes federal, state, and private land, and comprises approximately 30,000 acres, 10 miles south and east of Flagstaff, Arizona.

The USFS and NPS are jointly initiating a special study to explore management options for the Walnut Canyon Study Area. Coconino County and the City of Flagstaff are also partners in this study, which will focus specifically on the following management options:

- Suitability and feasibility of designating all or part of the study area as an addition to Walnut Canyon National Monument.
- Continued management of the study area by the USFS.
- Any other designation or management option that would provide for (1) protection of resources within the study area; and (2) continued access to, and use of, the study area by the public.

A newsletter was sent to the public; a project-specific Web site was established; and USFS, NPS, Coconino County, and the City of Flagstaff hosted a series of public open house events to provide opportunities for public input and discussion on development of the special study for the Walnut Canyon Study Area.

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of public comments received during this initial phase of public outreach. The comments will be used to develop preliminary management options, which will be developed with USFS, NPS, Coconino County, and the City of Flagstaff representatives, as well as other jurisdictional and land owner agencies. Once the initial management options are drafted, the public will be asked again to provide comment and input on the management options.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The initial public outreach period was from March 22 through May 26, 2010; however, requests were received for an extension and the period was extended to July 26, 2010.

Newsletters:

A newsletter was prepared and sent to the initial project mailing list via e-mail or U.S. Postal Service on March 22, 2010. The newsletter introduced the project and partners; described the Walnut Canyon Study Area, current uses of the study area, and the special study process; and how interested persons could submit comments. A comment form was included in the newsletter for the public to complete and return.

A project mailing list was developed from mailing lists provided by the USFS, NPS, Coconino County, and the City of Flagstaff. The initial mailing list comprised 753 entries. The mailing list is continually updated as requests and comments are received.

Web Site:

A project-specific Web site was developed and presented on-line. The Web site contained the same information as the newsletter, with additional maps and photographs, and an interactive page for submitting comments electronically.

Press Release:

Press releases were prepared to announce the project and public meetings and were sent to local newspapers, radio stations, and organizations totaling over 100.

Public Open Houses:

The USFS, NPS, Coconino County, and the City of Flagstaff hosted a series of open house events in April 2010, which were held at the following locations:

Date	Time	Location
April 19, 2010	4:00 pm to 7:00 pm	Kachina Village, Highlands Fire Station (Fire Station 21) 568 Kona Trail (Kmetko Center)
April 21, 2010	4:00 pm to 7:00 pm	Flagstaff City Hall Lobby 211 West Aspen Avenue
April 22, 2010	4:30 pm to 7:00 pm	Cromer Elementary School Library 7150 Silver Saddle Road

The open house events provided an opportunity for the public to engage in dialogue with the partner agencies; to learn about the special study (history, purpose, outcomes, etc.); ask questions; and discuss concerns. Opportunities were available for one-on-one discussions as well as to look-and-listen. The public was encouraged to provide input and comment in their own words, either at the open house events or at their convenience on the project Web site or on the comment forms.

Open house attendance was as follows:

- Kachina Village 10
- Flagstaff City Hall 65
- Cromer Elementary 37

PUBLIC CORRESPONDENCE AND COMMENTS

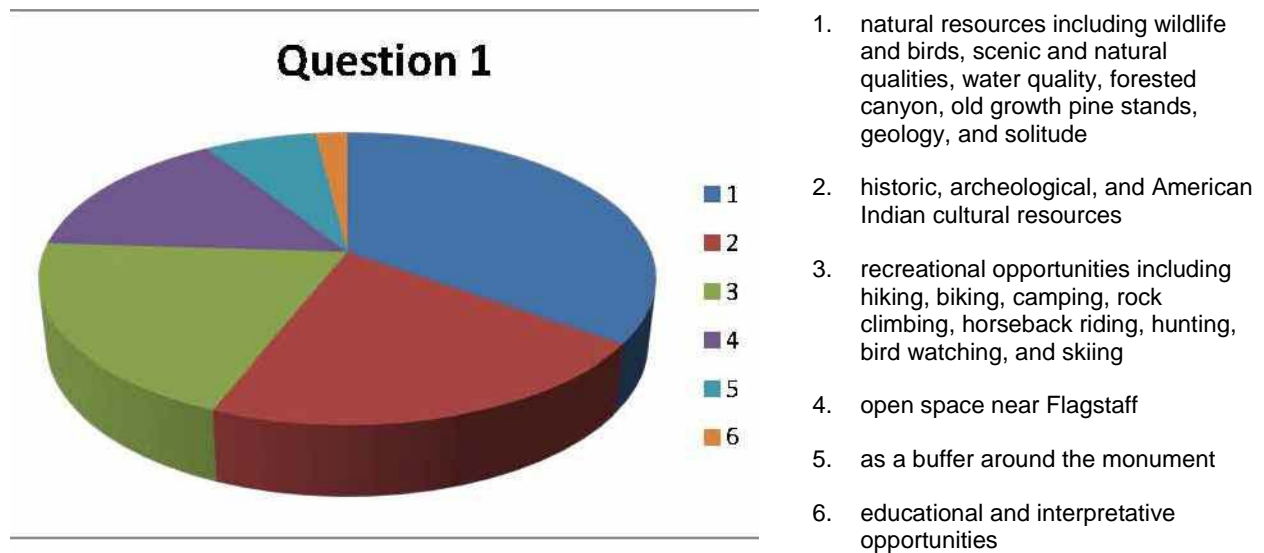
A total of 328 pieces of correspondence was received during the first public outreach period. All correspondence was read and analyzed for comments. Attachments to comment letters are in the project file for reference during the workshops. All comments were entered into an Excel database, and all comments and attachments will be distributed to the project team. Based on analysis of data and the input gathered during this public outreach period, the project team will participate in a workshop to develop conceptual management options. These management options will be assessed against criteria and methods for assessment of the management options (such as meeting goals and objectives, the benefits and impacts of management options, etc.).

COMMENT SUMMARY

The comment forms that were included with the newsletter and distributed at the public open house events contained four questions for the public to address. Commenters also submitted individually composed letters.

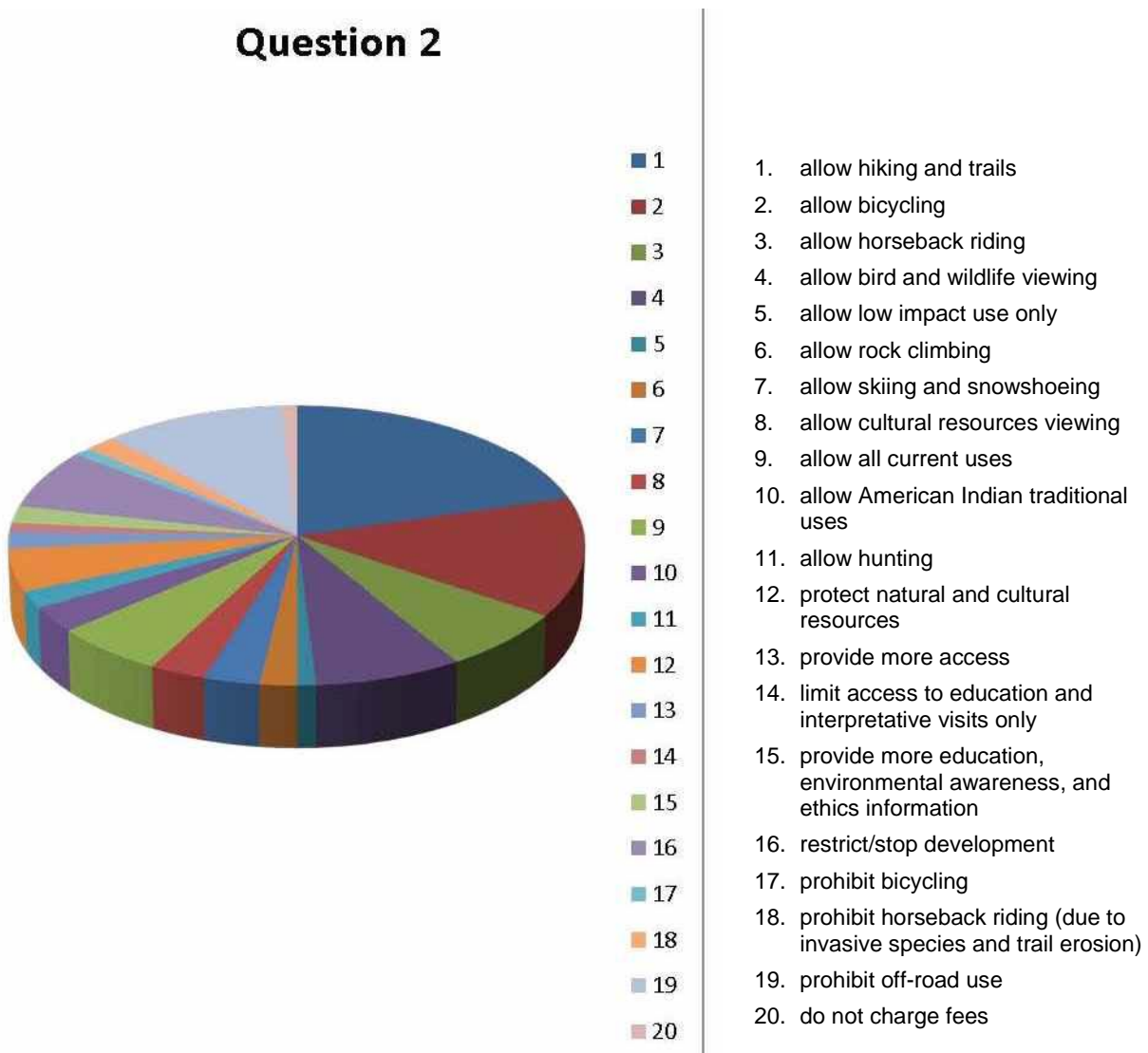
1. Why is the Study Area important to you and what makes it special?

Commenters felt that the study area and monument are amenities to Flagstaff and the state of Arizona. Many commenters indicated that recreational values were important to them, as was keeping the open space accessible and free. Others expressed a desire to keep the Walnut Canyon Study Area “in the most natural and wild state as possible.” The diversity of plant communities was stressed as an important feature of the study area, as well as the area as habitat for species of concern. Cultural resources and area history were also cited as important. Of the comments received that specifically answered this question, the majority of responses cited preservation of the resources and qualities important, as summarized in the chart below:



2. What recreational / visitor opportunities / uses do you think should be addressed by the Special Study and maintained in future options?

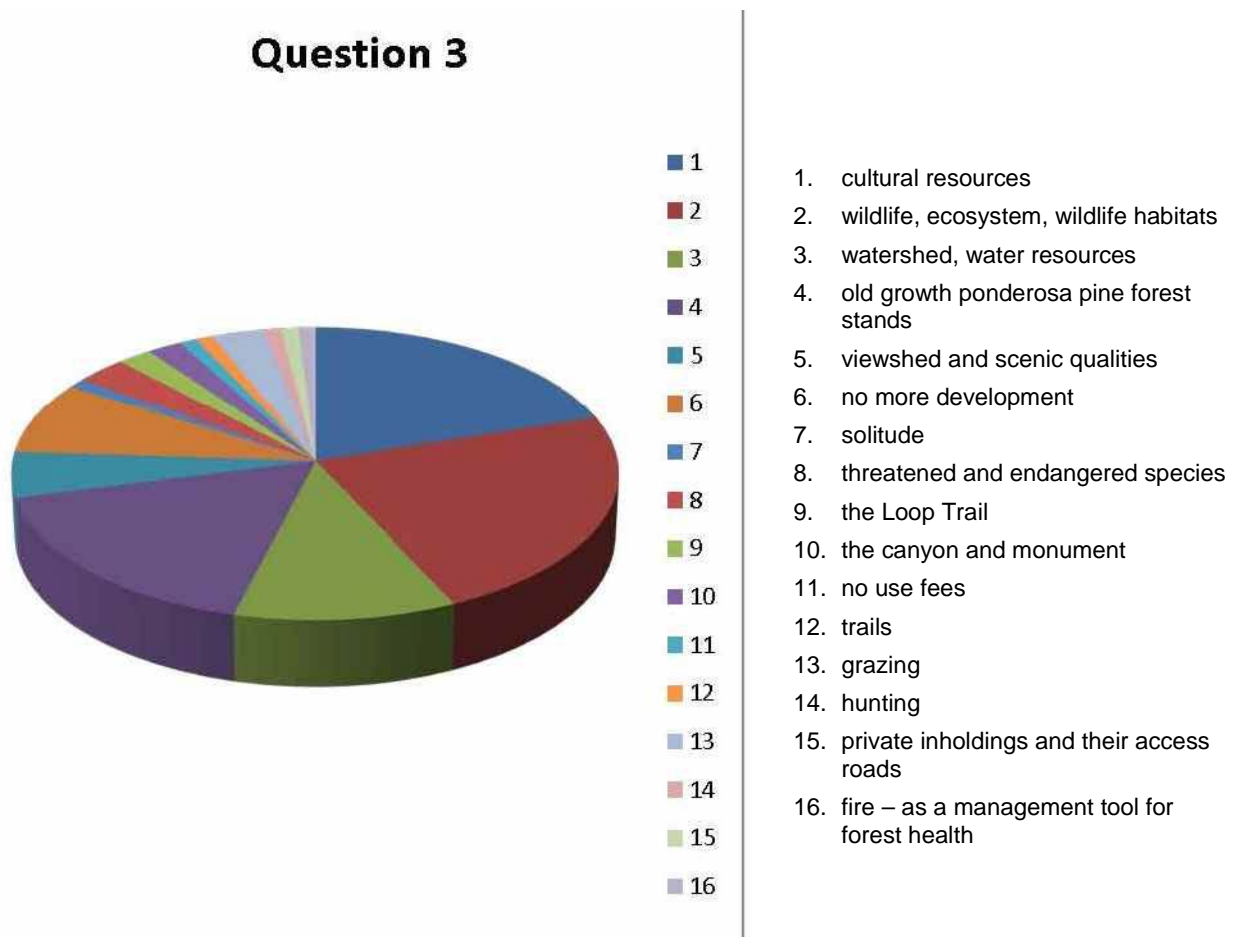
Many responders felt that hiking, mountain biking, dog walking, and rock climbing should be allowed to continue in this area. Concerns were expressed that personal livelihoods, economic benefits, and overall health of the community would be affected if additional restrictions were placed on grazing, concessions, mountain biking, dog walking, and access. Many commented that there should be multiple access points and access should be free. Some commented that access should be restricted to protect sensitive resources. Others suggested that permitting and day use fees be considered as a means to further develop activities and organized recreational opportunities. Those that commented on hunting generally supported its continuance for the health of wildlife, specifically elk, while some responders felt that hunting should be discontinued in the study area. Of the comments received that specifically answered this question, a majority advocated for maintaining uses summarized in the chart below:



Items receiving less than 1% of comments include allow camping, allow ATVs on designated roads, and prohibit any type of recreation.

3. What resources do you think should be addressed by the Special Study?

Specific species were cited to be addressed and include Mexican spotted owl, goshawks, black bear, wild turkey, and old growth ponderosa pine stands. One suggestion was to reintroduce endangered animals such as the pronghorn and Mexican gray wolf. It was mentioned that the area serves as a wildlife corridor to help animals pass across the Mogollon Rim and into the San Francisco Peaks area. The diversity of plant communities of the study area, water quality, and the watershed were also mentioned. Many commented on the need to preserve the cultural resources and history of the monument and surrounding area. Of the comments received that specifically answered this question, the responses are summarized in the chart below:



Items receiving less than 1% of comments include trail impacts, recreational uses, cost and impact to community, fuel wood gathering, and fire – urban interface.

4. What other management issues do you think should be addressed by the Special Study?

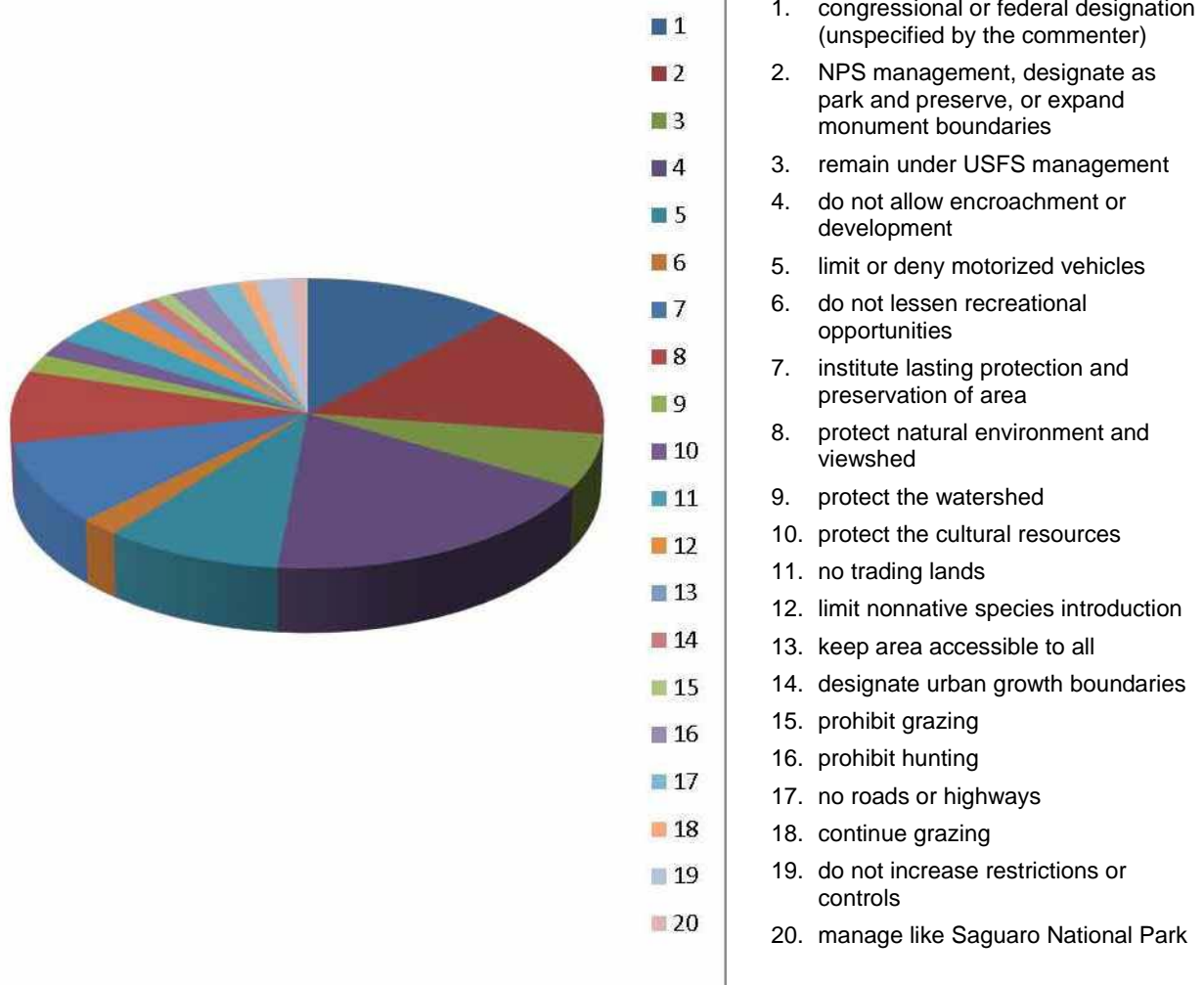
Some commenters expressed interest in the study area being transferred to NPS management and/or expansion of current monument boundaries. Some expressed that the study area should have the same protections as the current monument. Some felt that the monument should be made into a park. Other commenters preferred that the study area stay under USFS management and that current multiple uses should be allowed to continue. Some commenters supported transferring management to the National Park Service with conditions such as “existing land uses should be maintained; and access for the public should be maintained. Hunting, hiking, and mountain biking are some of the most important public values for this part of the Coconino National Forest, and that should not change if the land changes to NPS ownership.” Another commenter stated that the Flagstaff/Lake Mary Ecosystem Analysis (FLEA) Amendment addresses the main concerns for this management area.

Many commenters were not specific about which agency, yet offered other management strategies. One commenter suggested that ...”while the legislation guiding this work clearly states that the questions of significance and feasibility, which is used in evaluation possible new units to the Park System, be used in evaluating whether part or all of the study area be added to Walnut Canyon National Monument, it would also be useful to apply the normal criteria the Park Service has established for potential boundary changes.” Another commenter suggested that the land need to be surveyed for wilderness character under the Wilderness Act of 1964. Commenters expressed concern and want permanent protection from land swap and development.

Suggestions for alternatives were made including earlier proposals to expand the monument’s boundary and Sections 20 and 30 (Arizona State Trust Lands). Designation of the area as a National Conservation Area (NCA) was suggested; although while some felt this would provide the necessary protection and maintain current access and uses; others felt the designation would be “too inflexible and would disallow future noninvasive developments that could enhance usability and enjoyment.” A few comments suggested designation as a natural area (not a recreational area). Another suggested “designating the study area as Ponderosa Forest National Monument, with a designated mission to further scientific study and public education of this ecosystem and the efforts being made to restore it. This area at the edge of Flagstaff, so close to Northern Arizona University (NAU) with its forestry school and Ecological Restoration Institute as well as the Rocky Mountain Research Station, would be a perfect location for scientific investigation and equally important public education.”

Of the comments received that specifically answered this question, the responses are summarized in the chart below:

Question 4



Responses from American Indian Tribes

Hopi Tribe. This letter is in response to your April 5, 2010, correspondence regarding the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) initiating a special resource study to explore management options for a 30,000 acre area of the Coconino National Forest surrounding Walnut Canyon National Monument. The Hopi Tribe claims ancestral and cultural affiliation to the Sinagua prehistoric cultural group in Walnut Canyon National Monument and surrounding Forest Service lands. Walnut Canyon is an ancestral home of the Bluebird and Bearstrap Clans and a traditional cultural property of the Hopi Tribe.

Therefore, we appreciate the NPS's and USFS's continuing solicitation of our input and your efforts to address our concerns. The Hopi Cultural Preservation Office supports identification and avoidance of prehistoric archaeological sites and Traditional Cultural Properties, and we

consider the archaeological sites of our ancestors to be Traditional Cultural Properties. We understand this study results from an Act of Congress and involves a possible expansion of Walnut Canyon National Monument. We have participated in such studies previously. As Director of the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office, I will be the contact person regarding the Walnut Canyon Study. To set up a meeting with the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office to discuss issues of mutual concern related to the study.

Responses from State Agencies

The Arizona Game and Fish Department wishes to respectfully submit the following regarding possible management options for the area surrounding the current Walnut Canyon National Monument (i.e., the Walnut Canyon Study Area, WCSA):

1. The Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) supports management options for lands within the Walnut Canyon Study Area that will ensure the protection of this area from development in perpetuity.
2. AGFD supports continued mixed recreational use with the WCSA, including hunting and other appropriate uses (e.g., wildlife watching). The department has determined that hunting, particularly on Coconino National Forest lands in those portions of the study area south and southwest of the current national monument, functions as an important tool for wildlife management and for minimizing urban human-wildlife conflicts in areas such as the neighborhoods adjacent to Continental Country Club. Hunting in the WCSA regulates the elk herds that regularly move into the Continental area, causing damage to the golf course and homesites and producing frequent and unpleasant close encounters with residents, which the department is often called to address.
3. The preference of AGFD would be continued U.S. Forest Service ownership and management of the greater WCSA lands outside current monument boundaries, though the department could also support NPS management provided continued support for items 1 and 2 above. In particular we would advocate for the continued allowance of hunting in the WCSA. Hunting is allowed in various other NPS units in the United States by federal statute, and can thus be compatible with a range of other recreational uses and aesthetic values associated with national parks if appropriately regulated.
4. AGFD encourages the Walnut Canyon Special Study to explore the idea of creating a Walnut Canyon National Conservation Area (NCA) or some comparable arrangement as a possible solution to management of the WCSA. This alternative was proposed to the department by a local citizen and has been used as a management model for many Bureau of Land Management lands. NCAs can accommodate hunting (e.g., Gila Box Riparian and Las Cienegas national conservation areas in Arizona) and ensure protection of the WCSA from development in perpetuity, and the department advocates that both of these conditions be included if National Conservation Area designation is pursued.
5. If a National Conservation Area or similar management alternative is considered, the AGFD advocates the possible inclusion of Arizona State Land Department (ASLD) sections within the WCSA as part of the NCA. In the aforementioned citizen's proposal to AGFD (see item 4), it was recommended that ASLD would retain all rights to its lands within the study area. However, the

department does not support the latter provision. AGFD views the potential for urban development on the included ASLD sections as one of the principal threats to the ecological integrity of the WCSA, and development on these sections could also lead to an increase in human/wildlife conflicts as described in item 2 above. Possible mechanisms for acquiring ASLD sections in the WCSA could include exchange for less sensitive USFS or NPS lands elsewhere, or reclassification for conservation purposes through the Arizona Preserve Initiative and subsequent purchase at ASLD auction.

6. AGFD supports managed OHV use in the WCSA, preferably as described in the Coconino National Forest revised Travel Management Rule. The revised TMR allows for the restricted use of OHVs by hunters for retrieval of downed and tagged game animals only, and does not permit general OHV access for scouting or hunting. The department is concerned that a total ban on OHV use would lead to a decrease in the number of elk taken by hunters and an increase in the elk population in this area, leading in turn to more human-wildlife conflicts as described above in item 2. AGFD would consider alternatives to TMR implementation for selected portions of the WCSA, if for example it were shown that OHV use presented the clear potential for damage to critical ecological and/or cultural resources there.

Organizations

Organizations providing correspondence and comments included:

- Flagstaff Biking Organization
- Coconino County Farm Bureau and Cattle Growers Association
- Sierra Club's Grand Canyon
- Friends of Flagstaff's Future
- Friends of Walnut Canyon
- Native River Guide (5th World Discoveries) NAU
- Progressive Democrats of Northern Arizona
- Puente de Hozo
- Willow Bend and A.C.E.
- PDNA
- South Oxbar Loop
- NACA
- ReGroup
- Arizona Elk Society
- Arizona Wildlife Federation
- Northern Arizona University
- Habitat Harmony, Inc.