



United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WUPATKI – SUNSET CRATER VOLCANO – WALNUT CANYON
NATIONAL MONUMENTS
6400 N. Highway 89,
Flagstaff, Arizona 86004



IN REPLY REFER TO:

January 14, 2011

To: AZ Game and Fish Commission

From: Diane Chung, National Park Service, Superintendent, Flagstaff Area Monuments

Subject: National Park Service Comments Arizona Game and Fish Commission Meeting

(Transcript of testimony to Game and Fish Commission meeting, Flagstaff, AZ, on the proposed Foster Ranch shooting range adjacent to Walnut Canyon NM)-

Madam Chair and members of the Commission:

First I would like to acknowledge the need for a shooting range in Northern Arizona, and we are very aware of the Department's frustration over the last 20 years to build a range in this region. And in fact, our own law enforcement staff needs a dedicated shooting range where they can train and qualify.

I would also like to acknowledge that the Department has been a great partner to the monuments for many years on great projects such as its research on pronghorn habitat fragmentation in the Wupatki area and wildlife corridor planning around Walnut Canyon.

As you continue to discuss this project, there are some things I think you should know about Walnut Canyon National Monument.

First, the National Park Service's mission is to provide for public enjoyment and to protect the unique cultural and natural resources within the National treasures that are owned by all Americans.

Walnut Canyon National Monument was established in 1915, to protect ancient cliff dwellings and associated resources of great ethnographic, scientific, and educational interest within Walnut Canyon. About 125,000 visitors per year come to Walnut Canyon National Monument specifically to experience the cliff dwellings and learn about the people who built and lived in them over 700 hundred years ago.

There are over 480 documented archeological sites within Walnut Canyon NM. All these sites are listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Additionally thirteen tribes claim cultural affiliation with Walnut Canyon and hold it as a very spiritual place. We are very concerned that

increased traffic and camping associated with the shooting range will make it more difficult to protect these irreplaceable cultural resources in areas nearest the Foster Ranch.

In 2007, the Walnut Canyon General Management Plan identified several specific management objectives that could be compromised by the range, including:

- Providing opportunities for our visitors to experience natural quiet and solitude.
- Implementing a new program of guided hikes in the eastern Walnut Canyon area that was part of the 1996 boundary expansion, and;
- Preserving the inherent biological diversity within Walnut Canyon by protecting habitat and movement corridors for a number of rare and declining wildlife species.

The sounds of nature are among the intrinsic elements that form the unique environment of many National Parks and Monuments. Our mandate is to preserve or restore the natural soundscapes associated with these areas. During the test firing at Foster Ranch, gunshots could be clearly heard at all of the visitor areas within the Monument. While the sound study indicated that the shooting noise was below ambient levels it was clearly discernable and for most of our visitors, hearing weapons fire at any level will degrade their experience while they are visiting the Monument.

Although the Monument was established to protect unique archeological resources, the canyon also provides habitat for a large number of wildlife species including Mexican spotted owl, peregrine falcon, northern goshawk, golden eagle, bald eagle, wild turkey, black bear, and mountain lion. The majority of these species reside in the eastern portion of the monument in Cherry Canyon nearly adjacent to the Foster Ranch and would be affected by gun noise.

In 2002, the Arizona Game and Fish Department's comments on our Draft General Management Plan recommended that a road not be developed along the northeastern canyon rim because it would "increase visitation and thus vehicle and human noise and disturbance to sensitive plant and wildlife species. This disturbance could affect all species on the canyon rim and within the canyon..." We find it disturbing that while the Department discouraged NPS road development along the eastern canyon, it is disregarding its own advice and plans to improve FR 128 just half a mile on the other side of the canyon to bring significantly more vehicle use into the same area.

In summary, we remain deeply concerned that noise from the Foster Ranch shooting range will impair our ability to meet our mission and management objectives, degrade public enjoyment of nationally significant archeological resources, and will impact many sensitive wildlife species at Walnut Canyon National Monument.

Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. I look forward to our continued partnership on many projects to benefit wildlife in northern Arizona. I would also like to extend a personal invitation to all commission members to visit Walnut Canyon and experience the uniqueness of your National Monument.

Diane Chung