

Subject: 2010 National Rainbow Family Gathering

Key Issue: Forest Service expects Rainbow Family to gather on the Allegheny National Forest in northwestern Pennsylvania

Background:

The Rainbow Family of Living Light is a loose knit group of people who organize a gathering once a year on National Forest System lands. This year they have chosen the Allegheny National Forest (ANF) as the site to meet. The peak of the event is on July 4th and includes "counter-culture" ceremonies. They describe themselves as having no leaders or organization. At the peak of the event the Forest can expect to host between 10,000 and 15,000 visitors. The group's unofficial leadership begins to arrive several weeks before the event and a clean-up crew remains after the event. National gatherings occurred on the Allegheny National Forest in 1986 and 1999.

Challenges:

1) Traditional rural communities have seen both positive and negative impacts from the event. Businesses such as food markets and gas stations have seen increased activity. However in past gatherings there have been social impacts on local communities such as hospital indigent funds being tapped and minor criminal activity (e.g., shoplifting and drug use) increased. The Forest Service is working closely with local law enforcement and local government to prepare officials for the incoming visitors. Recently, thirty-five law enforcement officers met with local Forest Service law enforcement and line officers to discuss strategies for addressing anticipated challenges.

2) The Forest Service requires groups of seventy-five or more to apply for a Special Use Permit, and comply with the conditions of the permit. The Rainbow Family claims to have no leadership among its members, and typically participants in the gathering do not apply for the Non-Commercial Group Use Permit prior to gathering on National Forest lands, making the gathering an unauthorized event. The group claims the right to assembly per the fourth amendment.

The Forest Service manages the gathering regardless of whether a permit is granted or not, using an Incident Management Team, consisting of local Forest resource managers, and professionals in law enforcement, and the health and safety community. Local officials, organizations, emergency medical personnel and law enforcement are generally part of the daily briefings and coordinate closely with the Incident Command Team.

3) The Incident Management Team's focus areas are: keeping the public informed; managing for safe travel routes by enforcing road regulations; analyzing environmental and resource issues and mitigating the effects; coordinating with other Federal, state and local agencies; and developing a rehabilitation plan for when the gathering is over.

4) The Forest Service does not know the exact location where the gathering will occur on the Allegheny National Forest. Representatives from the Rainbow Family have met with National Forest line officers. Forest line officers provided information for a site that would meet the overall objectives of the Agency,

and Rainbow Family, and minimize the potential for resource damage. The site would be in a location with little to no oil and gas activity. The locations being discussed have had national and regional gatherings.

5) For the National Forest, financial and resource impacts have included: rehabilitating the site due to compacted soils as well as impacts near streams and water; addressing sanitation issues, fire and archaeological resource issues; working with local community and media interests; providing visitor information and developing agreements with local partners.

6) Law enforcement issues at previous gatherings have included: weapons; runaways, missing persons and fugitives from justice; sexual assault; stolen vehicles; alcohol and controlled substance violations; civil disobedience and motor vehicle violations.

The Forest Service has decades of experience in managing this annual gathering and is committed to work closely with local communities.

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