

## Erin Nelson

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**From:** Nike Stevens <stevenswildlife@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Sunday, May 21, 2023 6:51 PM  
**To:** Office  
**Subject:** Comment on Proposal for Commercial Helicopter operation in Bluff

We are opposed to a commercial helicopter tour operation in Bluff at the Desert Rose Resort or at the Bluff airport.

We have a lot and house across the highway from the Desert Rose and we do not want the increased noise and dust associated with helicopter takeoffs and landings. The noise and dust would impact our neighbors as well as everyone in town and especially those in the adjacent Copper Cliffs subdivision.

A helicopter tour operation would adversely affect our peace and tranquility which is a big reason we live in Bluff.

We are opposed to a commercial helicopter operation based at the airport. Where would the helicopter conduct aerial tours? The most scenic sites in our area of course. The San Juan River corridor is frequently mentioned. Other areas that would be attractive enough to attract commercial tours are Monument Valley, Valley of the Gods, Muley and Cedar Points, The Goosenecks of the San Juan River, Grand Gulch, and Arch Canyon.

These areas attract tourists and locals now and some are used to capacity during parts of the year now. Helicopter tours of these areas would degrade the experiences of visitors by increasing noise, disruption and negatively impacting solitude and feelings of wildness and isolation. All of these areas are beautiful and their enjoyment by locals and tourists would be marred by helicopter tours.

Currently many more people apply for permits to raft the San Juan River than can be accommodated while maintaining the wilderness quality of the experience. The BLM restricts permits and limits numbers to maintain a high quality wilderness experience and the opportunity for boaters to experience solitude in a magnificent setting. Helicopter tours in or above the river corridor would degrade the experience for the thousands of boaters that float the river yearly by increasing noise, disruption and degrading solitude and wildness. Helicopter noise is magnified in a steep walled canyon and tours could occur several times a day.

We have worked for the Navajo Nation for over 20 years on their bighorn sheep restoration program. The bighorn sheep in the San Juan Canyon are highly sensitive to helicopter noise because we have used helicopters to capture them. Commercial helicopter tours of the San Juan Canyon would adversely affect the bighorn sheep. The bighorn run and hide under rock ledges when they hear a helicopter. Helicopter tours in the San Juan Canyon between Bluff and Clay Hills would adversely impact bighorn sheep populations in the Canyon.

We are also doubtful that the Desert Rose would be good about following restrictions in a permit since they started building the heliport without a permit from Bluff or notifying their neighbors.

There is also a question here of who should profit from the beauty of our public lands. Should one family that is already wealthy become richer by degrading the experiences of the many who visit our area and residents? Allowing commercial helicopter operation(s) based in Bluff would irretrievably impact the experiences of visitors and residents in the future.

Helicopter flights use a lot of fossil fuels. A helicopter of minimum size for commercial use (pilot + 4 passengers) uses about 30 gallons of aviation fuel per hour. Helicopter tours are fossil fuel intensive recreation. Initiation of helicopter tours in Bluff is inconsistent with reducing Bluff's carbon footprint and impact on global warming.

Some have suggested that having a helicopter based in Bluff would benefit the town by providing emergency medical evacuation. That is very unlikely since there is already dedicated medivac service available and the use of private helicopters for medical evacuation is exorbitantly expensive. It is also likely the helicopter and pilot would not be available at the critical times.

We think that the city of Bluff should keep or pass an ordinance denying commercial aviation operations within the town with the exception of medical evacuations.

Nike and Dave Stevens

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