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News Release

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Tonto National Forest Urges Visitors Not to Cut Fences, Destroy Gates

PHOENIX, April 7, 2020 — For Immediate Release. Late last month, contract crews completed planned fence work in the Lower Salt River area of the Tonto National Forest. Ten miles of barbed wire, three miles of steel post and rail, and over 30 gates were installed to keep the Salt River Horses and livestock off of Bush Highway.

Recently, visitors have cut fences and destroyed gates in the area between State Highway 87 (Beeline Highway) and the Pobrecito Recreation Area. This area sees heavy traffic, high speeds, and has limited sight visibility in some areas; horses being allowed onto the Bush Highway presents a serious danger to motorists and horses alike. A dozen Salt River Horses made their way onto the Bush Highway early Sunday morning through a cut in the fence suspected to be done intentionally to let the horses out. The Salt River Wild Horse Management Group, a contractor for Arizona Department of Agriculture, was able to respond and get the horses back inside the fence and repair the damage.

"Our volunteers are trained to move horses off the road, but this was a terrible situation, and extremely stressful; it is disheartening to see that someone would do something so reckless that endangers the lives of horses and the public," said Simone Netherlands, president of the Salt River Wild Horse Management Group.

"There has not been a horse related traffic accident on Bush Highway since last fall when fence construction began," said Matt Lane, Mesa District Ranger. "Ensuring horses remain in the established area to protect motorists and the horses remains our priority"

The Tonto National Forest, Arizona Department of Agriculture, and the Salt River Wild Horse Management Group are asking for your help in reporting any suspicious activity in the area. Cutting, removing, or damaging the fence or gates is against the law. Violators will be prosecuted per *16 USC 551*; *18 USC 1361*; and *36 CFR 261.9(a)*.

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