

[https://www.taosnews.com/public-safety/forest-service-discusses-rainbow-gathering-approach/article\\_834004e2-d6d7-11eb-9b8b-13a17730b70a.html](https://www.taosnews.com/public-safety/forest-service-discusses-rainbow-gathering-approach/article_834004e2-d6d7-11eb-9b8b-13a17730b70a.html)

## Forest Service discusses Rainbow Gathering approach

Will Hooper  
Jun 26, 2021

---



Rainbow Gatherers settle into a spot off Forest Road 76.

Courtesy photo

---

The Forest Service discussed their plans for handling the Rainbow Gathering event that is gaining momentum as it heads into its July 4 culmination. Employees of the Carson National Forest and a Type III incident management team that have been brought in to take lead for the happening spoke to the public Thursday (June 24) to explain their plan of action and provide general information about the gathering.

Various members of the Forest Service spoke to issues such as management, size, physical impact, water usage, permits and many more that have come since the group chose Forest Road 76 near Tres Ritos and Cerro Vista as their gathering site.

“We're managing this rainbow national event similar to any kind of fire,” said Carson National Forest supervisor James Duran. He said communication so far with the group has been mostly positive, and said they are working to provide for the best possible outcome. He reminded the event is still in the early stages, and said they will adapt as it progresses. Their overall plan involves helping to “minimize the impacts to the land and also the adjacent communities.”

Though the event will be smaller than normal 10,000 person gatherings due to COVID, Duran was upfront in acknowledging that “there will be impacts” from the congregation of an estimated 2,000 to 5,000 people this year in the Carson National

Forest this year. “Some of those will be beneficial positive impacts – folks coming to town will spend money, – but it also brings some of the negative impacts,” said Druan.

Russell Harris, incident commander for the Type III National Forest team handling the event, has prior experience with Rainbow Gatherings, and is leading the Forest Service's response to the event for his third consecutive year. Harris said one of his main objectives is to “make sure that we leave the community here as close to as it is now.”

Russell said at the time of the public meeting, approximately 500 people had entrenched themselves near Cerro Vista on Forest Road 76. He explained about 75 to 100 acres were expected to be occupied by the Rainbow Family, and said they plan to monitor environmental impacts with “resource professionals [who] monitor water quality, any impacts to the sedimentation factor, whatever might take place there that we need to address.”

Natural resources staff officer for the Carson National Forest, Jack Lewis, explained because the group has no distinct, leader, it's nearly impossible to get anyone to sign for a special use permit – what would normally be required for gatherings of over 75 people in any National Forest.

This is how the Rainbow Gathering has gotten around permitting issues for years, and it appears to have worked yet again. “We haven't been able to have a dialogue here. There's no one that's taking responsibility for the group, no individual is coming forward. So we're in a tough spot where we don't have a permit to put together.”

Regardless, Lewis said they have worked out a relationship where “the normal things that we would ask a permit holder to take care of if we had a sign permit, we ask the rainbow group to take care of as well.” Due to this lack of a permit, no special fire mitigations will be allowed, and the Stage I fire restrictions will be enforced. 

Lewis said specialists will be brought in to “look at everything that we're going to need to fix later and everything we're going to ask the rainbows to fix before they leave.”

Duran added that water usage will be monitored carefully and the New Mexico Environmental Department will be on sight to help keep track of water data. “We're out and about kind of making sure that we're assessing... where they're using water, how much water, all that kind of stuff,” he said, mentioning hydrologists and other scientists will be on site.

“Normally the group tends to, you know, plumb lines, small lines, from live water sources to be able to collect water. So once that occurs, we'll definitely kind of engage and kind of better understand what they've got in place,” said Duran.

Carson National Forest’s recreation and lands program manager Amy Simms explained the Forest Service’s approach to both unnatural and natural human waste. “The term you'll hear is slit trenches,” she said, referring to the Rainbow Gathering’s traditional method of exposing human waste. Simms said the trenches will be monitored, and they have been incorporated into their resource protection plan.

Speaking to the trash that has been left behind in gatherings past, Amy\* said it’s the Forest Service’s expectation that “not only do they manage their trash during the event so that trash is not accumulating and becoming a concern for wildlife, but also before they leave.”

Simms said what their team has learned from previous forests that have harbored that gethins is that “as most participants leave, there are a group that stay behind and make sure that the rehabilitation is done and that the trash is removed. That will be our expectation.”

The Rainbow Gathering will gear up for it’s main event on July 4, when all of the gatherers will pray silently for world peace – an idea Duran said is “we can all agree... is not a bad thing.”

**Will Hooper**

Reporter