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SEQUOIA AND KINGS CANYON NP

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ASSOCIATION

PO Box 8920 So. Lake Tahoe CA 96158

## ACTION ALERT — Deadline August 31

***The National Park Service is writing a new Wilderness Plan for Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks. We need all members to submit comments by August 31.***

**Background:** Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks (SEKI) are the crown jewels of the High Sierra. These two vast parks (managed as a single unit) include 800,000+ acres of wilderness—Giant Sequoia groves, sublime alpine lake basins, and the highest peaks in John Muir's "Range of Light."

SEKI's existing "Backcountry Management Plan" and "Stock Use Plan" are nearly thirty years old, they were written before these areas were designated as wilderness, and they are woefully outdated and inadequate. The existing plans allow unlimited commercial services in the SEKI wilderness, and they place no ceiling on the number of stock animals allowed to graze, trample, and pollute SEKI's fragile alpine meadows and lakeshores. The Park Service has promised several times over the past twenty years to update these plans to place adequate limits and controls on stock use and commercial businesses—which continue to exploit SEKI for private gain—but the agency has never delivered.

**Current Status:** The Park Service has announced that it will now update the two old plans, and combine them into a single "Wilderness Stewardship Plan." Everything is on the table—limits on commercial enterprises, limits on maximum group sizes, whether grazing will be allowed at all, and how stock use will be limited and controlled to protect meadows, water quality, wildlife, and the experience of wilderness visitors. The first step in the planning process is called "scoping," whereby the Park Service is asking the public to identify the issues, and to weigh in on how each issue should be addressed. The agency is accepting comments **now through August 31, 2011.**

**What You Can Do:** The value of your personal comments cannot be overstated. The commercial outfits and stock interests are well-organized and exerting great pressure on the Park Service. A flood of articulate comments is needed from hikers to convince the Park Service to take bold action.

We need all members to do **THREE** things at this time. (If you don't have time for all three, start at the top of the list and work downward):

- 1) Write your own personal letter, and send it (postmarked) **by August 31**
- 2) Ask other like-minded hikers, family members, and friends to send personal letters of their own
- 3) E-mail your appropriate contacts, lists, and networks, urging them to respond to the Action Alert posted on our website at: [www.highsierrahikers.org/hiker\\_alerts.html](http://www.highsierrahikers.org/hiker_alerts.html)

**What to Say in Your Letter:** As always, we encourage our members to convey their own personal views. But to assist you in thinking about the relevant issues, below are some of the things that we will be saying. (Note: Please do not copy these points verbatim into your comments. Instead, mix up the order, and personalize your comments by stating your views in your own words. When possible, use examples from your own experiences to describe how encounters with stock parties and associated developments have affected your enjoyment of the wilderness.)

- Begin your letter by saying that you are commenting on SEKI's **Wilderness Stewardship Plan**
- **No grazing should be allowed anywhere within SEKI. Or, at the very minimum, grazing should be prohibited above 9,700 ft. elevation, as recommended long ago by SEKI's own scientists.** Stock users should be required to keep animals tied up when not in use and to supply packed-in "feed," as is required by many other national parks. This would protect meadows, prevent animals from stomping through hikers' camps at night, preclude the need for annoying bells, reduce the pollution of campsites and water sources by animal wastes, decrease the spread of invasive weeds, and reduce conflicts with wildlife such as the endangered Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep.

- **A network of "foot-travel-only" trails should be established** so hikers may enjoy a wilderness experience free of the dust, flies, and manure that litter and pollute trails used by stock animals.
- To minimize the size and impact of commercial groups, **commercial packstock services should be strictly limited to serving only those persons who are truly disabled (i.e., unable to hike or carry a backpack), and commercial packing outfits should be prohibited from hauling unnecessary or excessive gear and/or luxury items.** The Wilderness Act mandates that commercial services be limited to the "extent necessary." While courts have ruled that items such as camp furniture, boats, radios, ice chests, excessive food/beverages, and other luxury items are not necessary to enjoy a wilderness experience (and are often damaging to the experience of other wilderness visitors), SEKI unlawfully allows commercial outfits to cater to anyone and to haul anything that their clients may desire. This must end. You can help by listing and describing in detail your observations of the unnecessary items brought into the SEKI wilderness by stock groups, as well as any inappropriate behavior by such groups, and how it affected you and your wilderness experience.
- **All users should compete for wilderness permits on a level playing field, and where the general public is limited by trailhead quotas or other restrictions, commercial uses should be strictly limited or eliminated.** It's not fair that high-impact commercial stock outfits are guaranteed access when hikers are being turned away by trailhead quotas or other limits. Clients of the commercial outfits should not be allowed to "buy" access when others are being turned away. Tell the Park Service that all users should compete for wilderness permits via a single system, and then—only after obtaining a permit—should visitors be allowed to employ commercial services as needed.
- **Commercial stock outfits (and/or their clients) should be required to pay fees sufficient to defray the costs of repairing trail damage, monitoring stock impacts, controlling weeds, and enforcing regulations.** Commercial stock outfits pulverize and destroy trails, and the Park Service spends huge sums of taxpayers' money to fix trails, monitor meadows, track stock use, and control weeds. But the outfits pay paltry fees—about \$200 per year—even as they rake in hefty profits.
- **Stock animals should be required to stay on designated, maintained trails** (i.e., no off-trail or "cross-country" travel by stock animals should be allowed). Scientists have documented the many impacts of stock use, and recommended that stock animals be required to stay on designated trails.
- **SEKI's limit on the number of stock animals per group should be reduced from the current 20 animals/party to 10 or fewer animals/group.** Describe in your own words how encounters with large stock parties affects your wilderness/hiking experience, and state your opinion about the maximum number of stock animals that should be allowed per group.
- **All stock animals should be required to wear "manure catchers"** (i.e., diapers) to reduce water contamination from livestock manure. Manure should be packed out or disposed away from water.
- **Bells should be prohibited and all fences should be removed.** "Cowbells" placed on stock animals shatter the natural quiet and make sleep difficult for many backcountry campers. Fences ruin the scenery, giving the SEKI wilderness the look and feel of someone's private ranch.
- **SEKI should REQUIRE strict prevention measures to minimize the introduction and spread of invasive weeds**, including: 1) prohibit open grazing of park lands and require the use of weed-free feed by all stock users; 2) require that all animals be provided weed-free feed for at least two weeks before entering the parks (to allow time for the animals to excrete weed seeds before entering the parks); and 3) require all stock animal hooves & coats to be thoroughly cleaned before entering the parks—and require that all animals be inspected by qualified rangers to ensure that this is done. Stock users should be charged a fee to pay for such inspections. Without a robust and mandatory weed prevention program, SEKI will be increasingly stuck in a reactionary mode, relying on expensive, intrusive, and chemical-intensive weed control efforts that often fail.

**Send your comments, postmarked by August 31, to:**

Karen Taylor-Goodrich, Superintendent  
 Attn: Wilderness Stewardship Plan  
 Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks  
 47050 Generals Highway  
 Three Rivers, California 93271

**Together, we can make a difference !!!**