

# SEEKING PUBLIC INPUT FOR THE FUTURE OF SEQUOIA & KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARKS

## General Management Plan • Newsletter 1 • Winter 1998

Dear Friends,

Sequoia and Kings Canyon are among the oldest national parks. These "crown jewels" have played significant roles in the evolution of the national park system for over a century. It is important that they continue to protect and preserve their magnificent natural and cultural resources while they meet visitor needs.

We need your help in planning for the future of these special parks. This year we are starting to develop a new general management plan for Sequoia and Kings Canyon. When it is completed, the plan will guide the parks' management policies and decisions for the next several decades. Your input in the plan's development is crucial.

The last comprehensive planning effort was completed in 1971, over 25 years ago. Think of all that has occurred during that time — population growth, increased pollution, even changing social ideals. Sequoia and Kings Canyon need a plan that protects the parks while addressing these concerns and attitudes.

The new general management plan will provide goals and a vision for the parks' future, as well as practical guidance in resource protection and management that will help us to achieve that vision. It also will identify how the parks may best provide for visitor enjoyment while protecting important natural and cultural resources. A well-devised plan will yield a realistic framework for making future decisions.

The planning process for Sequoia and Kings Canyon will take approximately three years. This newsletter provides information about the process and how you can get involved. Your participation will ensure a strong public voice as the future direction of these parks is determined.

National Park Service (NPS) general management planning guidelines focus on three questions:

- WHY were these parks established (what is their mission)?
- WHAT is the vision for their future (what kind of place do we want them to be)?
- HOW do we accomplish our vision (what actions are needed)?

Answers to these questions lead to a common vision for the parks from which a plan can be developed. The plan will then guide overall future park management, resource protection, visitor use, and facility development. The plan will not include specific facility designs, resolve all issues, or guarantee funding for the parks.

Michael Tollefson, Superintendent

## The Planning Process

There are typically three broad phases to producing a general management plan (GMP), with each phase consisting of various steps. During the first phase the planning team sets goals, identifies issues, and collects data related to these issues. Efforts during the second phase focus on defining alternative means for achieving goals and resolving issues. The last phase consists of identifying a preferred alternative. The planning team then compiles this information in a document known as an environmental impact statement. After public review, the team finalizes the impact statement and the parks implement the general management plan. Public involvement is critical throughout the process.

## The Role of Legislation

Many factors guide and direct park planning. The most important of these are the laws that created and enlarged the two parks, as well as the National Park Service's 1916 organic act. Additionally, parks must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, Threatened and Endangered Species Act, Wilderness Act, Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and other legislation and regulations ensuring the protection of resources and visitor services. Combined these laws define the sideboards which provide broad guidance and context for the planning effort.

## The Planning Team

A multidisciplinary team will lead this planning effort. The team will include park staff as well as natural and cultural resource specialists and landscape architects from the National Park Service's Denver Service Center. The center is the Park Service's planning, design, and construction group. The planning team will be supported by geographic information specialists, community planners, public involvement specialists, interpretive planners, editorial/ graphic staff, and others..

## How You Can Participate

Public involvement is critical to the success of the planning effort. During each planning phase you have the opportunity to participate in public meetings where you learn about the issues and offer your views. You can begin this feedback process by filling out the enclosed survey form and returning it to the parks. For more information about the planning process and park issues, contact the parks at (209) 565-3173 or e:mail the GMP coordinator at [david\\_graber@nps.gov](mailto:david_graber@nps.gov). You can also log on to the NPS park planning page at <http://www.nps.gov/planning>.

## Keeping You Informed

The parks will distribute newsletters, like this one, at each stage of the planning process. The newsletters will explain what has occurred so far and explain the next steps to be taken. They will supply information on how you can be involved in public meetings. The planning process chart summarizes when and how you can help in this process. A similar chart will be included in each newsletter, with the current step highlighted.

General Management Plan & Schedule		
Step	Planning Activity	Public Involvement Opportunities
<b>1</b>	<b>INITIATE PROJECT.</b> The planning team assembles, begins to identify the project's scope and issues, and customizes the planning process. In August 1997 transportation studies are scheduled to provide data on traffic use patterns and other information. (Summer 97)	<b>Read this newsletter and comment on the response form. Join the mailing list. Attend public meetings.</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>IDENTIFY PLANNING CONTEXT.</b> The team examines WHY Congress established the parks and reaffirms the parks' missions. Team members collect and analyze relevant data and public input needed for planning. (Fall – Winter 97/98)	<b>Participate in public meetings.</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>DEVELOP AND EVALUATE ALTERNATIVES.</b> The A planning team explores WHAT the parks' future should look like, and proposes and assesses a range of reasonable alternatives for the parks' future. Based on this assessment and public comment, the team defines a preferred alternative. (Spring – Summer 98)	<b>Read newsletters and send in your comments. Participate in public meetings.</b>

<b>4</b>	<b>PREPARE A DRAFT DOCUMENT.</b> The team produces and publishes a draft general management plan / environmental impact statement that discusses <b>HOW</b> the alternative plans would attain desired future conditions. The draft document describes the planning context, management alternatives, and their impacts. (Fall 98 – Summer 99)	Read the draft plan and send in your comments. Participate in public meetings.
<b>5</b>	<b>PUBLISH FINAL DOCUMENT.</b> Based on public comment, environmental analysis, and other information, the team revises the draft general management plan / environmental impact statement and distributes it to the public. (Fall 99 – Spring 2000)	Read the final plan and summary.
<b>6</b>	<b>IMPLEMENT THE APPROVED PLAN.</b> (Summer 2000 and beyond)	

## You Should Also Know

Because the general management plan must focus on providing overall direction for park management more detailed plans are prepared to guide specific activities or plan the development of specific areas. These implementation plans supplement the general management plan.

In the past, several implementation plans were developed in support of the *1971 Master Plan*. Two are currently being revised. The first is a wilderness management plan. Over 82% of the two parks are designated as wilderness. This designation requires the parks to preserve the wilderness areas' pristine nature and provide certain types of recreational opportunities. The new wilderness management plan currently being developed will determine what strategies and techniques the parks will use to accomplish these goals.

The second implementation plan under development is a new fire management plan. Historical suppression of natural fires has resulted in too much downed timber and other vegetation that can trigger catastrophic forest fires. Controlled burns reduce this risk and keep forests healthy. Fires can create unwelcome smoke in adjacent areas. The new plan will examine these issues and seek ways to preserve the health of the parks' forests with as little impact on neighbors as possible.

Other existing implementation plans will be reviewed after the general management plan is completed, and will be revised as needed to conform with the new management plan. *If you would like more information on these plans, contact the superintendent's office at (209) 565-3101.*

## Changes Underway

Major changes are underway in the Giant Forest area. As called for nearly 20 years ago in earlier planning efforts, the lodges and other commercial facilities are being phased out. All will be closed by the end of 1998. Design work is now underway to prepare the area for its new role as the primary feature in Sequoia National Park for daytime visitors. At the same time, the parks are working towards opening new commercial visitor facilities at Wuksachi Village, 6 miles north of Giant Forest Village. These management directions, so important for the sequoias and the park's visitors, will continue and will become part of the general management plan.

Sound planning must resolve current challenges while also developing goals that guide present and future decisions. Public input is essential in achieving both. Please review the following issues and comment on their importance on the enclosed postage-paid response form. These issues are not all inclusive and are not in any priority order. If you comment, please refer to issues by their numbers (e.g., issue 6). Let us know if there are other issues you feel are important.

## Issues

- 1 WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS.** In 1984 Congress designated the north fork of the Kern, and the south and middle forks of the Kings River as wild and scenic rivers. The legislation also requires the National Park Service to develop regulations and management policies to protect these rivers and to ensure that the goals of the act are achieved over time. The planning process will address how the parks can best regulate visitors and manage natural resources according to the intent of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.
- 2 AIR QUALITY.** Although the Clean Air Act designates the two parks as a class I area, air quality in Sequoia and Kings Canyon has been deteriorating due to population growth in central California. It is now among the worst in the entire NPS system and affects visitors as well as resources. Scientific studies have demonstrated widespread damage to the parks' natural resources. Most pollutants come from outside the parks, some from as far away as the San Francisco Bay area. The planning process will look at what course the parks should pursue in attempting to limit these impacts.
- 3 CULTURAL RESOURCES.** Since the 1971 Master Plan, numerous historic districts and structures have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places and the service's List of Classified Structures. There are 27 historic districts / structures in Sequoia and 16 in Kings Canyon. Additionally, privately owned historic buildings in Wilsonia (Grant Grove area of Kings Canyon) have been nominated as a historic district. In some locations, such as in designated wilderness or in areas of critical environmental sensitivity, preserving cultural resources may conflict with preserving natural resources. The planning process will determine how cultural resources in the parks will be managed in relation to the parks' natural resources.
- 4 INTERPRETATION.** The 1971 Master Plan recommended expanding the parks' interpretive programs. Over the last 26 years, however, the parks' interpretive activities have been reduced by more than half. The planning process will identify what role interpretive services should play in the parks and what levels of service are adequate.
- 5 VISITOR EXPERIENCES.** Sequoia and Kings Canyon would benefit from clearer definition of what constitutes appropriate visitor experiences. Should the parks try to provide as broad a variety of experiences as possible, or should they focus on certain types of experiences and try to ensure that they maintain certain levels of quality? The plan will determine whether visitor experiences should be focused in certain areas, and if so, where.
- 6 VISITOR CARRYING CAPACITY.** Parks can absorb only a certain number of people before visitor experiences or park resources start to become degraded. Determining the number of visitors that the parks can support without diminishing visitor experiences or damaging resources is vital. The plan will address what constitutes a sustainable visitor carrying capacity.
- 7 CHANGING VISITOR DEMOGRAPHICS.** During the past quarter century, California demographics have changed, a fact represented in the nature of park visitation. The most obvious shifts are large increases in the parks' use by ethnic minorities and international visitors. The plan will address the issue of whether these changes in visitation will require changes in park facilities or services.
- 8 WINTER USE.** Winter use has changed significantly since 1971. Downhill skiing has been replaced by cross-country skiing, and the parks are now a regional center for that activity. Winter snow play, sledding, and snowshoeing are very popular and attract overflow crowds to Wolverton and Grant Grove on winter weekends. The plan will address the question of what types of winter activities are appropriate and where they should be centered.

- 9 CONCESSION SERVICES.** NPS policy allows commercial services within the parks provided by privately owned concessioners. There are many services that could be offered, and there may be some that are no longer appropriate. The planning process will address what levels and kinds of concession services and facilities should be provided within the parks and where.
- 10 TRANSPORTATION.** Transportation has changed greatly in central California during the past quarter century and even bigger changes are expected in the next several decades. Traditionally the parks have depended on automobile transportation. At the same time most of the parks' road system and parking facilities date from half a century ago, and many of these old roads and parking areas do not adequately support current uses. For example, large vehicles cannot safely negotiate the narrow, steep Generals Highway south of Giant Forest. As California continues to urbanize, and as it continues to develop public transportation systems, opportunities could arise for changes in transportation patterns within the parks. The planning process will explore the issue of transportation including the potential for developing public transportation systems and controlling the use of private vehicles on existing roadways.
- 11 DEVELOPED AREA GUIDANCE.** Sequoia and Kings Canyon have major visitor service developments at Ash Mountain, Giant Forest/Lodgepole, Grant Grove, and Cedar Grove. There are also many secondary development sites including Mineral King, Dorst, and South Fork. Within the plan's anticipated lifetime the new Wuksachi developed area will come into public use. Currently there are individual plans, some of them up to 20 years old, for each of these areas. However, no overall plan exists for how the areas should fit together to provide visitor service. Should each area have a distinctive role or are they interchangeable? The planning process will address the issue of what role developed areas should fulfill and how they should interrelate.
- 12 MINERAL KING AREA.** Recent controversies over the area's use have made it clear that the 1980 plan guiding the use and development of Mineral King Valley is no longer adequate. New general guidance must be developed that will define the future management of this area. The planning process will address and define the levels and types of visitor experiences that will be supported in Mineral King and what facilities will be necessary to support them. Major questions to be resolved include defining uses such as camping and picnicking, deciding how trailhead parking demands are to be met, and determining the future of privately owned, special use permit cabins on public lands.
- 13 SEQUOIA FOOTHILLS AREA.** The foothills region of Sequoia National Park has been within the park since 1890, but has only recently come to be seen as a special resource in its own right. Interest in and use of this area have grown steadily over the past decade, and the trend is expected to continue. To date, the parks have never prepared a plan for this area that defines its purposes and intended use. The planning process will address the future of this area and provide general direction for its future management.
- 14 ADJOINING FEDERAL LANDS.** Federal lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management surround nearly all of the two parks. These areas are managed under different missions and for different goals. For example, on adjacent Forest Service lands operating snowmobiles and harvesting timber are permitted. Visitors are often confused, and conflicts occasionally result. The planning process will look at how these relationships could be improved in ways that are compatible with existing missions.
- 15 REGIONAL PLANNING.** The region to the west of Sequoia and Kings Canyon is changing rapidly. The San Joaquin Valley is urbanizing and suburban sprawl is swiftly changing the nature of the adjoining foothills. These changes are making the parks less buffered than they were a generation ago. This affects the plant and animal life as well as visitor experience. The recently completed Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) provides useful information about the condition of natural resources that will be useful in regional planning. The NPS planning process will address what role the National Park Service should play in regional planning processes.

**16 GATEWAY COMMUNITIES.** Tourism generated by Sequoia and Kings Canyon plays an important role in the economies of several neighboring communities, including Three Rivers, Visalia, and Fresno. The community of Squaw Valley is also growing briskly. Park actions that affect tourism have a significant impact on these communities. The plan will address what role the parks should play with gateway communities.

**17 SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EDISON.** Southern California Edison Kaweah Hydroelectric Plant 3 is a unique feature in the Sequoia Park region. Congress authorized the plant early in this century, and it has repeatedly reauthorized it, most recently to operate through the year 2006. The plant and many of its related structures (buildings, dams, flumes, etc.) are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Many of these structures lie within the park's boundaries. The general management planning process will address whether the plant's operation is compatible with the park, and if so, under what terms and conditions it should continue to operate.

**18 OTHER ISSUES?**

**Informal Public Scoping Meetings**

**Meetings are scheduled for  
7:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M.  
at the following locations**

*Wednesday, February 25  
Three Rivers  
Three Rivers Union School*

*Thursday, February 26  
Visalia  
County Education Center  
2637 Burrel Street  
(corner of Woodland & Burrell Streets)*

*Friday, February 27  
Clovis  
Mountain View School  
Mountain View School  
(corner of Maple and Alluvial)*