

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

NPS
U.S. Department of the Interior

Sequoia and Kings
National Parks
California



ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT TO ADDRESS DETERIORATING WILDERNESS RANGER STATIONS AT LE CONTE, RAE LAKES, AND CRABTREE

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Environmental Assessment
to Address Deteriorating Wilderness Ranger Stations at Le Conte, Rae Lakes, and Crabtree

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks
Tulare and Fresno Counties, California

SUMMARY

This environmental assessment (EA) analyzes long-term options for three deteriorating wilderness ranger stations located at Le Conte Canyon, Rae Lakes, and Crabtree Meadow in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

The overall purpose of this project is to provide adequate support to ensure the wilderness resources of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are protected in accordance with the *Wilderness Act* and National Park Service (NPS) policies.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks' total designated wilderness area is 807,962 acres—approximately 93.4% of the parks' total acreage of 865,257. In addition, there is approximately 30,000 acres of proposed wilderness that is managed as wilderness in accordance with NPS policy. Because of the parks' size and remoteness, ranger stations have historically been used to allow rangers and other park employees to protect wilderness resources and provide visitor services, including education, emergency medical treatment, trail maintenance, and search and rescue, in the remote wilderness of the parks. Currently the ranger stations at Le Conte, Rae Lakes, and Crabtree are at or approaching the end of their lifespan. If these facilities are going to continue to be used for the administration of wilderness, replacement or repairs are necessary. The situation at Rae Lakes is particularly acute in that the wooden tent frame has deteriorated and is no longer functional.

The parks' 2007 *Final General Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* (FGMP/FEIS) provides direction for desired conditions and appropriate facilities in wilderness. Within the wilderness, efforts will be made to preserve a sense of remoteness and freedom from human-caused impacts. However, simple amenities, such as ranger stations, may be present to support administrative activities, reduce or control resource impacts, or provide for research and monitoring. Facilities used to support the administration and protection of wilderness, including backcountry ranger stations, may be provided. In accordance with the FGMP/FEIS, existing wilderness ranger stations will be assessed and replaced or rehabilitated as necessary.

The EA assesses three wilderness ranger stations that are deteriorating to determine if the stations should be replaced, to develop alternatives for replacement and/or rehabilitation consistent with the *Wilderness Act*, and to analyze the effects of the alternatives. The EA analyzes four alternatives, including the no-action alternative. Under the no-action alternative (alternative 1), the park would keep the existing ranger stations and perform frequent maintenance depending on age and initial design of the station. No construction work would occur under this alternative. Over the long term, maintenance would continue as necessary. However, it is likely that at least one of these stations (Rae Lakes) would have to be abandoned in the short term due to safety issues, and the other two stations would not be sustainable over the long term.

Under alternative 2, the parks would perform deferred maintenance and improve the existing stations at Rae Lakes and Crabtree Meadows. However, no improvements would be made to the Le Conte Station due to sensitive resources in the area.

Under alternative 3, the management-preferred alternative, the parks would replace the existing three ranger stations with new stations. These stations would be designed to provide more effective support of the parks'

wilderness stewardship mandate and to be compatible with the wilderness setting and the parks' *Architectural Character Guidelines*. The stations would be engineered for personnel safety, snow load, and weather, and would be specifically designed for this purpose to increase efficiency. The stations would be approximately the same size and, with the exception of Le Conte, would occupy the same approximate footprint as the previous structures. The Rae Lakes Ranger Station tent platform would be replaced with a hard-sided, log structure and the Le Conte Ranger Station would be relocated to avoid sensitive resources.

Under alternative 4, the ranger stations would be dismantled and removed and the sites would be restored. Patrol rangers and other park staff would no longer have access to and use of these administrative facilities in the wilderness.

Notes to Reviewers and Respondents

If you wish to comment on this EA, you may post comments online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/seki> or mail comments to Superintendent, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, Attn: Wilderness Ranger Stations, 47050 Generals Highway, Three Rivers, CA 93271, or email comments to SEKI_planning@nps.gov. This EA will be on public review for 45 days.

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we would be able to do so. We make all submissions from organizations and businesses, and individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety.

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