



Giant Sequoia National Monument

A position statement of the Southern California Society of American Foresters

Position

The Southern California Society of American Foresters is strongly opposed to President Clinton's proposal to designate a large portion of the Sequoia National Forest as a National Monument.

Issue Statement

Land management decisions should be based on science and involve local public participation. The sequoia groves themselves are already fully protected from logging and development by the 1990 Sequoia Mediated Settlement Plan and by Presidential Proclamation in 1992. President Clinton's questionable use of the Antiquities Act of 1906 would reduce management options surrounding the groves, resulting in an increased risk of damage from catastrophic wildfire.

Background

Giant sequoia groves occupy 19,345 acres of the 1.1 million acre Sequoia National Forest. The 1990 Mediated Settlement Agreement to the Land Management Plan, which was signed by nineteen different organizations, provided for extensive mapping of the groves, and the creation of an additional 7,614 acres of buffers around the groves, for a total of 26,959 protected acres. The Mediated Settlement Agreement prohibits timber harvesting of all species within the groves, and the buffers that surround each grove, "except logging conducted for the limited and specific purpose of reducing the fuel load in the Groves pursuant to a Grove specific fuel reduction plan and Grove specific EIS."

President Bush visited the Sequoia National Forest in 1992 and by Presidential Proclamation reinforced the terms of this agreement by protecting all giant sequoia groves on National Forest lands from timber harvesting, mining, and development.

Commercial logging of the giant sequoia species has not occurred on the Sequoia National Forest for decades.

On February 14, 2000, President Clinton gave Daniel Glickman, Secretary of Agriculture, sixty days to study the feasibility of designating 400,000 acres of the Sequoia National Forest for National Monument status, using his authority under the Antiquities Act.

Recommendations

The groves are already well protected and should be managed by the Sequoia National Forest through a Giant Sequoia Management Plan with an Environmental Impact Statement for each grove, as stipulated in the Mediated Settlement Agreement. Natural resource policy decisions need to be based on the best scientific information available, not on unilateral political designations. We do not believe the "appropriate stewardship" President Clinton mentions would be accomplished by reducing or eliminating management on 400,000 acres surrounding the groves.

Scientists agree that the greatest threat to the groves is from catastrophic fire: for example, Nathan Stephenson of the National Park Service stated in the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project's Final Report to Congress "the goal of greatest immediate importance is to protect sequoia groves from unusually severe wildfires; the hazard of such fires has increased with the accumulation of forest fuels during a century of fire exclusion." The best way to control this threat is to reduce the buildup of fuels in the areas within and surrounding the groves through a combination of thinning and prescribed fire. A National Monument designation would greatly reduce the range of management options, thereby increasing the risks to the groves.

Social science is also an important component of the best available science. The economic and social concerns of local citizens need to be carefully considered when determining and implementing policy for our national forests. All provisions of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) need to be followed, including the use of public input throughout the process. President Clinton's proposal ignores this process and would result in reduced public access, elimination of jobs, damaged local economies, reduced revenue to counties and local schools, and a disservice to our children.

We feel that a declaration of this magnitude would be an abuse of Presidential power and would set a dangerous precedent for future resource management decisions. The Antiquities Act states that lands reserved for monuments "in all cases shall be confined to the smallest area compatible with proper care and management of the objects to be protected." Proclaiming special status for 400,000 acres is clearly not necessary for the protection of the groves, and would in fact increase the chances of catastrophic fire entering the groves from unmanaged surrounding areas.

Our national forests were created by Congress, and large withdrawals for wilderness areas, roadless areas, or monuments should be under their jurisdiction. The multiple-use strategy under which our national forests were created needs to be followed, since it provides the largest sum of social, environmental, economic, and spiritual benefits.

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Society of American Foresters, with about 18,000 members, is the national organization that represents all segments of the forestry profession in the United States. It includes public and private practitioners, researchers, administrators, educators, and forestry students. The Society was established in 1900 by Gifford Pinchot and six other pioneer foresters.

The mission of the Society of American Foresters is to advance the science, education, technology, and practice of forestry; to enhance the competency of its members; to establish professional excellence; and to use the knowledge, skills, and conservation ethic of the profession to ensure the continued health and use of forest ecosystems and the present and future availability of forest resources to benefit society.

The Society is the accreditation authority for professional forestry education in the United States. The Society publishes the Journal of Forestry; the quarterlies, Forest Science, Southern Journal of Applied Forestry, Northern Journal of Applied Forestry, and Western Journal of Applied Forestry; The Forestry Source and the annual Proceedings of the Society of American Foresters national convention.