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The Honorable Bill Lockyer
Attorney General
Attorney General's Office
California Department of Justice
PO Box 944255
Sacramento, CA 94244-2250

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

It has come to my attention that you have filed a lawsuit, dated March 3, 2005, against the USDA Forest Service Giant Sequoia National Monument Plan. It is my understanding that your rationale is that the 2005 National SAF Strategic Plan does not incorporate direction from the 1990 Mediated Settlement Agreement (MSA) of the 1988 Sequoia Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, to which you were a party. Apparently the MSA prohibited tree cutting in the Giant Sequoia Groves.

In my view and that of many of my colleagues, that is a very unfortunate decision on your part, not from a legal point of view, but rather from a scientific and ecological point of view, not to mention the safety of potentially hundreds of people and the protection of their homes.

Just this past Monday, March 7, I attended a presentation of Dr. Tom Bonnicksen, Emeritus Professor of Forestry at Texas A&M University, and currently a visiting professor of forestry at the University of California at Davis. The title of Professor Bonnicksen's talk was "Solving the Wildfire Crisis: Learning from History". In this talk (a version of which is available on a Power Point CD ROM obtainable from the Forest Foundation, a non-profit organization) Dr. Bonnicksen shows examples of the terrible destruction caused by the fires on the San Bernadino National Forest in 2003. In those fires 27 people lost their lives and over 300 homes were destroyed. In 1994 Dr. Bonnicksen and 27 other scientists had done many studies. Based on these studies they predicted that such destructive fires would occur, but they were ignored.

The Sequoia Management Plan was designed and approved to deal with these kinds of fire management issues. Faced with the fact that this monument has been categorized as having high to moderate fire susceptibility, this plan was designed to re-establish natural processes and structural forest conditions so as to allow giant sequoia and their mixed conifer ecosystems to be both stable and resistant to environmental change.

Although prescribed fire was selected as the preferred method of fuel reduction, mechanical methods of tree removal are permitted by the Plan to achieve ecological restoration and safety values. Air quality impacts were also considered and are to be minimized by the selection of mechanical tree removal as an alternative.

The Sierra Club is on record as saying that they support mechanical thinning of trees up to but not greater than 12 inches in diameter. Dr. Bonnicksen's studies show that mechanical treatments need to include mechanical removal of trees much larger than 30 inches on some sites to reduce the fuel loads and resist fires that reach temperatures in excess of 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit. With all due respect to the Sierra Club and their famous legacy, they simply do not have the scientific expertise to support their arguments when it comes to forest fire management. It is essential that well trained forest managers be involved in and listened to in this ongoing process.

Sincerely yours,

Timothy La Farge,
Communications Chair,
NorCal SAF

Cc: Julie Lydick, Chair
NorCal SAF

