

Julie Lydick
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Fairfield, CA 94534



March 17, 2005

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

Dear Mr. Lockyer:

The Northern California Society of American Foresters (NorCal SAF) is a unit of the Society of American Foresters which represents over 15,800 professional foresters and related management professionals from all aspects of the forestry profession. The mission of the Society is to advance the science, technology, teaching, and practice of professional forestry in America; 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.

NorCal SAF believes that your lawsuit challenging the Giant Sequoia National Monument Plan is misguided and will lead to delayed and reduced protection to the giant sequoia groves and other forest ecosystems in the Monument. Court action is a poor substitute for a collaborative public involvement process and is the type of action that holds-up sound fire safe planning. The Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Commission Report, April 2004, made the conclusion that public policy makers at all levels of government need to muster the political will to put protection of life and property ahead of competing political agendas.

The Society of American Foresters believes that:

- 1) Timber harvesting is a reliable and responsible method of reducing fuel hazards and improving forest health by treating overly dense forests as part of a comprehensive silvicultural prescription.
- 2) Use of prescribed fire is appropriate where it can be effectively and safely used to restore and maintain desired forest conditions. Unfortunately, prescribed fire applied without pretreatment of fuel accumulations can pose unacceptably high risk to human life, property damage and resource values. We recognize that highly successful suppression practices implemented throughout much of the last century and some land-use practices have resulted in fuel accumulations that limit prescribed fire use and tree removal will be necessary.

The U.S. Forest Service estimates that 5.5 million acres of forest land in California are at risk of twenty-five percent or more mortality in the next fifteen years. This rate of mortality is due to overly dense stands that when stressed by drought and air pollution will experience high levels of tree mortality from insect and diseases. Over 60,000 acres with insect mortality was detected on the Sequoia National Monument in 2004.

We've seen the worst case scenario on the San Bernardino National Forest where trees have died on over one-half million acres due to the overly dense forest conditions. The fires of 2003 licked at the edges of this vast acreage of mortality. Federal and state government and companies like Southern California Edison have invested hundreds of millions of dollars since then to reduce the fuel hazard and dispose of dead trees.

The Giant Sequoia National Monument Plan recognizes that there are areas where it would be too risky to reintroduce fire without a mechanical treatment first. The Plan also recognizes the serious air quality issues in the southern San Joaquin Valley. It minimizes contributing to that problem by reducing prescribed burning and allowing forest thinning.

It is time to recognize that fuels and forest health issues cannot be managed only in narrow bands around communities. Dense stands left untreated will create more fuels as insects kill these stressed trees. The social benefits of managing our forests include providing wood products to consumers, employment opportunities, maintaining milling capacity in the state, and avoiding additional air quality impacts. These are benefits that the practice of forest thinning contributes in our effort to reduce fuels and manage the giant sequoias into perpetuity.

The financial and ecological impact of catastrophic tree mortality that occurred on the San Bernardino National Forest should not be repeated. The Giant Sequoia National Monument Plan provides a balanced alternative. NorCal SAF hopes you will consider withdrawing your lawsuit and put aside any political agenda for the sake of the future of our forests.

Sincerely,

Julie Lydick, Chair
Northern California Society of American Foresters

Cc: Governor Schwarzenegger