



HIGH SIERRA HIKERS ASSOCIATION

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Hikers' Group Challenges Exploitation of Sierra National Parks

San Francisco, CA — The High Sierra Hikers Association today filed a lawsuit in federal district court challenging the General Management Plan and stock management practices adopted by the National Park Service for the Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. High Sierra Hikers Association, a 600-member non-profit organization dedicated to improving management practices of the federal lands in the Sierra Nevada, is concerned that the plan allows excessive and harmful use of fragile park lands by commercial pack and saddle stock operations.

The hikers' group seeks to overturn the December 2007 management plan and to require that park management reform existing management practices regarding commercial stock use in the parks. Their lawsuit alleges that the Park Service has failed to conduct an adequate environmental analysis as required under the National Environmental Policy Act, and failed to comply with other federal laws to protect National Parks and Wilderness Areas.

The Park Service issues permits to numerous private enterprises, known as "packers," to provide saddle horses, pack mules, guides, chefs, and camping gear to their clients in a wilderness setting. The High Sierra Hikers Association contends that the Park Service has unlawfully allowed this excessive and harmful commercial activity in the parks.

"The Park Service's own rangers and scientists have for decades documented the extensive harm to these parks' meadows, trails, wildlife, and scenery caused by stock use," said Peter Browning, president of the HSHA. Browning added that "university researchers have documented pollution of once-pristine mountain streams caused by pack animals," and that "park meadows have been overgrazed, eroded, and invaded by non-native weeds because of excessive stock use."

In an internal e-mail, Park Service staff admitted as far back as 2004 that they had been "stalling" on complying with federal laws requiring environmental analysis of stock use. Despite repeated requests that the Park Service complete the required studies and adopt measures to prevent water pollution and excessive damage to alpine meadows, the Park Service has yet to change significantly the way stock use is managed in the parks. In the General Management Plan the Park Service once again postpones, until an unspecified later date, any serious review of these environmental issues.

“For years we have patiently articulated our concerns and implored the Park Service to take action,” said Browning, “but they either ignore us outright, or make promises that they fail to keep. They have left us no alternative but to now ask a court to enforce our Nation’s environmental and wilderness protection laws,” said Browning.

To view a copy of the legal complaint, see: <http://www.highsierrahikers.org/seki09.pdf>

The High Sierra Hikers Association, a registered nonprofit public benefit organization based in Berkeley, CA, has more than 600 members from 28 states. The HSHA seeks to educate its members, public officials, and the public-at-large about issues affecting the High Sierra, and seeks to improve management practices on federal lands in the Sierra Nevada for the public benefit.

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