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August 17, 2011

SEQUOIA AND KINGS CANYON NP

Karen Taylor-Goodrich, Superintendent
Attn: Wilderness Stewardship Plan
Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks
47050 Generals Highway
Three Rivers, CA 93271

Dear Ms. Taylor-Goodrich:

I am writing in reference to the SEKI's Wilderness Stewardship Plan. I have just returned from a 6 day loop trip out to the Miter Basin, coming in over Cottonwood Pass and leaving via New Army Pass. I have also gone on annual backpacking trips into Sequoia and Kings Canyon, out of various trailheads off Highway 395.

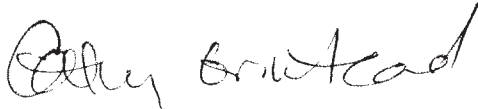
I have always been concerned about pack stock use in these parks, and in the Sierra in general. This year, as in every year, we have had to hike trails that are dusty, loose, and manure strewn, thanks to pack stock. We camped in sites where pack animals have recently defecated and urinated. We have seen beautiful meadows disturbed by the heavy feet of the animals, creating mud and destroying the fragile grasses and flowers. This year, as in many years, we were camped over 11,000', and there was still evidence of frequent stock usage. While we hiked in from the trailhead carrying our heavy packs, we encountered two different groups of pack animals carrying supplies for able-bodied hikers—one group had their packs carried in so they could continue on to hike and fish from the drop off site, and a second group had the packers carry their supplies to Soldier Lake so they could base camp from there. Both of these groups consisted of young to middle-aged men, who were clearly perfectly able to hike on their own. In prior years I have seen pack stock carry in chairs, large tents, coolers, and alcoholic beverages, creating a luxury camp environment which is inconsistent with a true wilderness experience.

I am concerned about all this from a variety of angles. Environmentally, pack stock are a disaster, destroying fragile ecosystems with their feet, contaminating water sources with their wastes, and potentially spreading invasive weeds and plants. Weed free feed should be used as well, for this reason. Stock should be limited to designated trails only, at low elevations, and smaller groups, and outfitters should be required to pay appropriate fees to mitigate the damage they cause. Feed should be carried in, so that fragile grasses are not consumed. Aesthetically, stock should wear manure catchers so that hikers don't have to hike through flies and piles of manure on the trails. Non-necessities and luxury items should be prohibited. From a fairness perspective, packers should not be allowed to avoid the quota system—permits should be granted to hikers via a single system, and once the permit is granted the hiker can contract with a pack company if they wish.

My father first took me backpacking when I was six years old, and instilled in me a true appreciation of the wilderness and the high Sierra. The wilderness experience at that time encompassed peace and quiet, beautiful meadows, and streams and lakes that you could dip your Sierra Club cup in and drink from. He taught me to value simplicity and ingenuity and to get along with only what you can carry on

your back. Now we have to filter our water, trudge through manure and muddy or dusty trails, and camp next to people who are sipping on a beer while sitting in their lawn chairs. It's time to get back to a pure wilderness experience, and limit the environmental and aesthetic disaster created by excessive pack stock in these unique and special areas.

Thank you—

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cathy Grinstead". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Cathy Grinstead, DVM