

**Alia Selke**

August 28, 2011

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

Dear Superintendent Taylor-Goodrich:

I am writing to comment on Sequoia and Kings Canyons **Wilderness Stewardship Plan**.

I've been enjoying SEKI for more than twenty years. As a frequent backpacker, I've seen, first hand, the disastrous impacts commercial stock groups have had on the wilderness. However, with better park management, you can mitigate these dreadful effects, and keep the park unimpaired for future generations. Please concentrate your efforts on these areas of concern:

Excessive Group Size:

The size of commercial stock groups is far too large. It profoundly disturbs my experience when I am confronted with fifteen or twenty mules, and I must find a safe place to step off the trail to allow them passage. The longer the stock train, the more hazardous and unpleasant it is for the hiker (and camper). I suggest that the maximum stock group size be eight. This would adequately support a group of four or five customers, lightweight essentials, and a commercial wrangler.

Trails:

Hiking a trail that is slathered with manure, piss, dust, and flies is truly disgusting. In addition, stock animals churn up the trail with their hooves, detaching the soil. This leads to unnecessary muddy run-off during the next storm.

Water Quality:

During rain events, whatever was on the trail (manure, piss, mud, and dust) ends up downstream in creeks and lakes. Many times I've arrived at a "pristine" lake planning to drink and swim, but upon seeing the muddy manure and piss water flowing into it, I've angrily changed my mind. Would you want to drink from or swim in a contaminated water source?

Camp:

When I prepare for a backpacking trip I think carefully about what goes into my pack. I invest good money in lightweight gear and freeze-dried meals. When in camp, I sit on a log or rock and enjoy a Spartan meal cooked over a small flame. It pleases me to be unattached to the modern world. I enjoy the sights and sounds around me: the wildlife, wind, and water. I work very hard to free myself of Man's contrivances.

However, the situation is very different at my neighbor's camp. Their camp is cluttered with bulky ice chests, hefty pots & pans, unneeded chairs and tables, cases of beer, bottles of spirits, and even blaring radios. From the look of their gear, my neighbors might be at a parking lot tailgate party instead of deep within the wilderness.

The Wilderness Act states that commercial services must be limited to the extent necessary. Can you tell me, in all honesty, that all those luxury items are necessary? And how did my neighbors get all those contraptions into the wilderness?

It takes additional stock to carry all those luxury items—stock that exact a heavy toll on the resource. And because my neighbors have paid big money for their ride into the mountains, they often act as if they are “customers” on a catered vacation rather than visitors of the wilderness.

As customers, they want to get their money's worth out of all those supplies and gear. I've seen this attitude lead to loud, late night partying with blaring radios. How unfortunate for people like me, who hiked all this way for peace and quiet. The wrangler, who wants to earn a big tip, looks the other way when his clients behave inappropriately and break park rules.

If the park restricted the number of stock per person, then they'd only bring what's truly necessary and therefore have a wilderness-dependent experience.

Grazing:

I understand park rules concerning disturbing the fauna and flora. Therefore, I do not pick flowers or harm butterflies. But when twenty hooped, half-ton animals are set loose to graze in meadows, they trample fragile wetlands, eat flowers, and defecate & urinate on whatever hapless creatures are below. I suggest wranglers carry food for their animals and restrain them at night.

Other concerns about grazing: the prospect of horses trampling my camp at night, the annoying bells they wear, and the drift fences that I am expected to open and close as I pass through on the trail. These fences make me feel as if I am traveling through private property.

In addition, when stock animals eat in the lowlands and then travel in the park, they can spread invasive weeds through their feces. Horses should be quarantined for a few days

before a wilderness trip where they are given only seedless feed. This procedure would reduce the invasive weed problem at its source.

For these, and other reasons, grazing should not be allowed in the wilderness. Most national parks have “no grazing” policies.

Disabled Services:

Commercial stock outfitters claim that they serve people who are disabled. I find that claim doubtful. I founded an outdoor program for the disabled, and therefore I have a few questions about their practices: Are their wranglers trained in assisting disabled customers? Or do they require additional personnel for disabled clients? Do they have special insurance and waivers? How disabled is “too disabled”? Will they take anyone with any disability? I suspect that if I called them and requested a trip for a dozen disabled adults, they would refuse me.

To my eyes, the bulk of the people these outfitters carry into the wilderness are simply unfit and out of shape. But imagine if wilderness visitors actually trained for their backcountry experience. They would be the better for it.

Most often, commercial stock customers seem “out of their element” in the Sierra wilderness. Is this because they actually want a “guided horse-camp-out”? If so, that could be accommodated outside of wilderness.

Thank you for your earnest consideration of these issues and ideas. Please seriously consider them in your deliberations for your upcoming **Wilderness Stewardship Plan**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alia Selke".

Alia Selke