

Superintendent Taylor-Goodrich,

08/30/2011

I would like to comment on the SEKI Wilderness Stewardship plan. I have been backpacking in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks since I was 14 years old (I am now 60 years old). I've had some of the best experiences of my life in these parks and would very much like to see them protected for future generations.

A major concern of mine has been the impact of commercial stock animals in the parks. The stock animals cause many problems that I have noticed over the years. They tear up the trails and make them hard to hike on and very unpleasant because they are so dusty, they cause swarms of flies, create animal waste on trails and in campsites, use noisy bells, require fences in some areas which are unsightly, and trample wet meadows. I have had to get off the trail in dangerous areas because of large pack animal groups, I have had piles of fresh horse manure and urine in the middle of my camp site, I have seen sensitive wet meadows trampled into mud by stock animals that should not be allowed in the area.

There is also the issue of luxury in the back country. I have backpacked several days into "wilderness" areas only to end up camping next to a group with folding tables, chairs, wine, and gourmet food all brought in by commercial stock. These were young people in good shape who should carry what they need themselves. If someone requires that type of luxury in the park they can stay in a lodge. Just this last August in Sequoia at lower Soldier Lake there were two different groups that had their food and gear brought in by commercial pack animals which was completely unnecessary. One group of pack animals tore up the wet meadow that had a sign saying "no camping- sensitive area", and the other group of pack animals defecated and urinated in our campsite. Needless to say, my wife and I were not pleased. The people these pack animals were servicing were half our age and in good shape. The animals just allowed these people to arrive in their base camp nice and fresh without expending much energy.

Over the years I have seen piles of bottles and cans in camping areas in Sequoia and Kings Canyon, and I am sure that these piles of trash are from pack animal groups, and not from backpackers, as the items would be too heavy for a backpacker to carry. Some of these trash piles appear older in age, but I am sure the items were brought in by pack animals and should have been carried out by pack animals.

I feel that commercial pack animals should no longer be allowed into the parks, period. Times change and the impact of the pack animals is just too great. If they are allowed (for some reason) they should be restricted to certain trails and should be required to bring in their own feed. NO Grazing should be allowed- high elevation vegetation is just too sensitive to allow pack animals to graze. Pack animal groups should be very small to reduce their impact- 4 animals and 4 people maximum. Pack animals should be reserved for only those with physical disabilities, and the items carried in by pack animals should be pure camping necessities and no luxury items. Commercial pack animals should be subject to the same trailhead quota system as backpackers out of simple fairness.

If the decision is to allow some pack animals into the park there needs to be a trail system for backpackers only so they can enjoy the wilderness without all the flies, manure, and deep dust on the

trails. In addition, there should be a substantial fee paid to the park for each pack animal per trip to help pay for trail maintenance as the pack animals tear up the trails much more than a backpacker on foot.

There is also the issue of pack animals bringing in non-native invasive weeds on their hooves and in their feed. There needs to be some regulation that addresses this problem.

As you can tell, I have very strong feeling regarding pack animals in the parks. Over my 46 years of backpacking I have seen a lot of abused trails, meadows, and campsites caused by pack animals. I have hiked on many trails that had a layer 6 inches deep with dust, with swarms of flies bothering me which were caused by pack animals. I always wondered why this could possibly be allowed- it just isn't right. The want of a few people to make money with pack animals should not be allowed to have such a huge impact on the environment and wilderness hikers. These parks need to be protected for future generations.

I also have a suggestion for the maximum group size for backpackers, as group size for everyone is an important issue in the parks. I would suggest that backpacking groups be restricted to a maximum of 8 people. Any more than that is too large an impact on campsites and their camping neighbors.

Thank You,

James Nelson

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James Nelson". The signature is written in black ink and has a fluid, connected style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.