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Printed on 100% tree-free paper

February 25, 2014

Sequoia National Forest
Kern River Ranger District
P.O. Box 9
105 Whitney Rd.
Kernville, CA 93238
Attn.: Recreation Officer Tricia Maki
triciamaki@fs.fed.us

Dear Ms. Maki,

Sequoia ForestKeeper supports the efforts of the Kern River Ranger District and the community to restore the upper Kern River to a place of quiet beauty. I have watched the resource degrade over time with increased use and without any amenities to support the growing population of uninformed recreationists.

Dispersed camping along the Wild and Scenic Kern River has always been problematic as the 25' setback has rarely been defended. While we are disappointed that people of restricted means will no longer have convenient access to camping because of added fees, as the popularity of areas increase, we see the need to regulate use and prevent misuse.

The agency's first consideration should be to require the concessionaire to open the existing campgrounds to group camping before designating new group campgrounds. On many weekends dozens of people camp openly upriver because only the Headquarters Campground is open.

Many of our developed facilities are not used because they are not open; hard and fast seasonal closures of the developed facilities appear to create more problems. Developing new facilities will be far more expensive than patrolling for violators and opening campgrounds already in existence.

Restricting camping to existing developed (fee) campgrounds is one effective way to keep campers from impacting the wild and scenic river. Adding bear and raccoon-proof trash cans and permanent pit toilets every 5 miles for day users might help to eliminate the health hazard caused by the increasing number of uninformed users. An increased education program about the rules of camping must be part of the new plan.

Sincerely,

Ara Marderosian
Executive Director