

## René Voss – Attorney at Law

15 Alderney Road  
San Anselmo, CA 94960  
Tel: 415-446-9027  
renepvoss@gmail.com

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Sent via e-mail to:  
[objections-pacificsouthwest-sequoia@fs.fed.us](mailto:objections-pacificsouthwest-sequoia@fs.fed.us)

Kevin Elliott, Forest Supervisor  
U.S. Forest Service, Sequoia National Forest  
1839 South Newcomb St.  
Porterville, CA 93257

cc: Ara Marderosian  
Joe Fontaine, Alison Sheehy  
Carla Cloer, Rick Stevens  
Stephen Montgomery

**Subject: SFK and SC Objection of the Tule River Reservation Protection Project**

Sequoia ForestKeeper (SFK) and the Kern-Kaweah Chapter of the Sierra Club (SC) submit this objection in accordance with the requirements of 36 C.F.R. § 218. This is an objection of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Draft Record of Decision by the Western Divide Ranger District, Sequoia National Forest, to proceed with the “**Tule River Reservation Protection Project**,” (TRRPP) as published in the Porterville Recorder on August 8, 2014. The Responsible Official who will issue a decision on this project is District Ranger Rick Stevens. SFK and SC object to Alternatives 2 and 3 (proposed action), but would be supportive of Alternative 3.

**I. Eligibility, Background, and Support for Modified Project**

A. SFK and SC are eligible to file this objection, and it is timely

Objectors SFK and SC have been involved in management actions within and around the TRRPP area for decades, and even submitted specific comments with regard to the proposed project prior to scoping, as early as April 24, 2007 (*see* Exhibit A - Letter from Sierra Club’s Sequoia Task Force Chair Carla Cloer to the Forest Supervisor, expressing concerns about the proposal). SFK and SC then submitted two scoping comment letters on September 24 & 25, 2008. During development of the project, on September 10, 2010, SFK and SC also communicated with the Regional Office via FOIA request to seek additional documents and correspondence between the Forest Service and the Tule River Tribe. Later, on July 22, 2013, SFK and SC informally wrote to the then-new District Ranger, Rick Stevens, to provide the various comments provided by SFK, SC, NRDC, and the California Attorney General’s office, to ensure that he would consider the various concerns from the environmental community in developing the project. After SFK and SC requested a Field Trip with the District, on August 9, 2013, SFK and SC representatives participated in the field trip, which included a visit to the project area with Forest Service staff, including the Forest Supervisor, as well as local residents and Tule River Tribal representatives. Finally, on June 9, 2014, SFK and SC provided extensive comments on the TRRPP Draft EIS. We are therefore eligible to file this objection.

This objection is timely since it was filed within 45 days of the August 8, 2014, when the legal notice was published in the Porterville Recorder.

## B. Background and Introduction

In its comments, SFK and SC asked the Forest Service to address the following issues, which are summarized in the following list, but do not include additional issues, which we raise below:

- Threats to Black Mtn. Grove have not been adequately addressed, inconsistent with the Mediated Settlement Agreement (MSA)
- Questions and concerns about the effectiveness of shaded fuel breaks
- Diameter limits should be lowered from 12 to 8 inches
- The cumulative effects analysis must include specifics about the actions on the adjacent Tule River Reservation, effects from related or similar fuel reduction/modification projects, and the effects from two significant past logging projects
- New studies suggest that Pacific fishers avoid thinned areas, and these studies and their conclusions must be analyzed in the DEIS
- Support for No Tree Removal
- Support for treatment of old harvested units/plantations
- Support for shaded fuel breaks along main roads (21S12 and 21S25) but not along spurs that traverse plantation units (end of 21S25 & 21S25A-D)
- Decommissioning spur logging roads and converting these roads to trails
- Clarification needed of features or circumstances unique to the Tule River Tribe on Monument lands in the TRRPP, as required by the 2004 Tribal Forest Protection Act
- TFETA concerns
- Drift Fence along Tule Reservation boundary
- Continuing Error in p. 45 GSNM with Errata Carried forward in DEIS p. 12
- Update the quality of the maps so they are readable and useful

## C. Resolving the Objection: Support for a Modified Project that Addresses Spur Road Issues, Plantations, and Adopts an Eight Inch Diameter Limit

We would support a modified project decision, which addresses a number of key issues that we raised in our comments.

First, the project must eliminate the shaded fuel breaks along the old road spurs that are planned for future conversion to trails. These proposed fuel breaks along the old logging spur roads traverse most of the old harvest units, which are now plantations, located in the western part of the Black Mtn. Grove. Instead, we suggest a greater emphasis on reducing the density of the old harvest units, which are currently too dense to safely reintroduce fire. This density reduction should be even more effective in slowing fire through the area than creating shaded fuel breaks along the various spur roads. We would support shaded fuel breaks along the major roads in the project (21S12 and 21S25), but creating fuel breaks along the spur roads (end of 21S25 & 21S25A-D) makes little sense and is likely to be ineffective.

Second, the project must adjust the diameter limit of trees proposed for felling down to 8 inches from the current 12 inches. The Forest Service can achieve all the goals of the TRRPP project with this reduced diameter limit, which will also reduce project costs, reduce the amount of

activity fuels that increase interim fire risk, and reduce potential air pollution concerns from burning. If any trees greater than 8 inches in diameter near large giant sequoias constitute a ladder fuel, these concerns should be averted by limbing high up the trees so flames do not reach into the canopy rather than felling the tree. This is the protocol in the Boulder Burn project on the Hume Ranger District. The Boulder Burn protocol should be followed here rather than felling any trees larger than 8 inches.

Third, before issuing the Record of Decision, the District and Forest need to formalize its proposal to eventually close and convert these spur roads within the Black Mtn. Grove to trails. *See* DEIS at 32 (“A proposal is currently being initiated, as a separate project, to decommission or convert some sections of the roads in the TRRP project area to non-motorized trails.”). This formal proposal can take the form of either (1) a scoping notice to interested parties that this proposed action is being initiated, or (2) inclusion of this proposal on the October 1, 2014 Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) with a schedule for analysis and implementation.

#### D. Request for Objection Conference

We formally request a telephonic objection conference to discuss these and other issue with the decision-maker. Please contact René Voss to schedule this conference.

## II. Objection Issues

### A. Failure to Consider Foreseeable Future Cumulative Actions and Effects

In our DEIS comments, we stated clearly that the cumulative effects analysis must include specifics about the actions on the adjacent Tule River Reservation. As such, the FEIS failed to consider the Tule River Tribe’s 2014 Integrated Resources Management Plan and Environmental Assessment in the cumulative effects analysis.

To our surprise, just prior to submission of this objection, we received a notice in the Porterville Recorder that the Tule River Indian Tribe had received a go-ahead from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to proceed with their 2014 Integrated Resource Management Plan (IRMP) for the Tule River Reservation. *See* Exhibit B – Notice; Exhibit C – FONSI for IRMP Environmental Assessment. The FONSI states that the plan includes management proposals for forest, woodland, and riparian vegetation; wildlife and fish habitat; and wildland fire management, including managing timber and firewood harvest. These various foreseeable management activities must be considered by the Forest Service in the TRRPP’s cumulative effects analysis. The Tule River Tribe’s actions are very specific and can be analyzed in the FEIS, since the Regional Director of the BIA “decided to proceed in implementing specific actions and projects associated with the Preferred Alternative in the Tribe’s IRMP ....” *Id.* at PDF p. 6.

In response to our cumulative effects comments, there is no mention of this plan or these specific actions and projects anywhere in the FEIS. The only response to activities on the Reservation was that:

The Reservation has been working on a similar project on Tribal lands immediately south of this project. The original request for the TRRP project submitted by the Tribe under the authority of the Tribal Forest Protection Act of 2004 recognized that it could be complementary to their project. The Reservation has been treating fuels along the forest and reservation boundary for the past several years. Their work, combined with fuel treatments in the national forest, would create an effective zone for stopping a wildfire originating from either side of the mutual boundary (FEIS, p. 119).

FEIS, Appx. D at D-12. But the FEIS fails to provide an adequate description or analysis of the fuel reduction projects on tribal lands adjacent to the project area. Without an adequate description and analysis, it is not possible to understand the cumulative effects from these actions along with the TRRPP. This failure and the failure to consider any of the Tule River Tribe's specific actions and projects as proposed in their newly-approved IRMP renders the FEIS fatally flawed.

B. Failure to Consider an Alternative that Treats the Plantations within the Project Area Instead of Relying on Fuel Breaks along Spur Roads

The proposed action alternatives fail to adequately protect the Tule Reservation and fail to protect and restore the Black Mountain Grove because they do not address treatments of the planted stands.

The FEIS acknowledges the threats to the Black Mountain Grove and the Tule Reservation by summarizing the fuel conditions in the project area. However, none of the alternatives does anything to deal with the fuel risks in the plantations:

Planted tree stands within the project area are overgrown with brush, have tightly spaced trees, and limbs growing near the forest floor. The high level of surface fuels would continue to increase without actions to reduce these conditions. Under these conditions, current and future wildfires are expected to exceed capabilities of ground fire fighters to control the spread of the fire.

Without fuel reduction treatments, a wildfire burning in the existing conditions would be a high risk management incident. High risk fire management activities make it difficult to achieve multiple resource benefits for the ecosystem and the landowners. The safety risk for fire fighters and the public is high due to current heavy fuel loadings. The risk level would continue to grow in the future as fuel loading continues to increase with no treatment.

FEIS, p. 119. Even though this write-up is included under Alternative 1 (the no-action alternative), the action alternatives (2 & 3) propose little to solve the problems from fuel loading the planted stands. Alternatives 2 & 3 only provide fuel breaks to anchor future fire-fighting efforts or future introductions of prescribed fire into areas in project area outside planted stands, while doing little to reduce the fuel loading in the plantations, which the FEIS acknowledges as

one of the biggest problems in threatening both the tribal forests as well as the Black Mtn. Grove.

In our comments for the DEIS, we questioned and continue to question the effectiveness of a fuel break strategy, especially in the old timber sale areas that are predominated by planted stands. Moreover, we expressed support for “light thinning in these old, previously-thinned, plantation units, enough to safely restore fire to these areas.” SFK & SC DEIS Comments at 10. In response, the FEIS should have included an additional alternative that included treatments of these plantations so that fire can be safely introduced in the entire project area, including areas between plantations and the plantations themselves. We suggested that instead of creating shaded fuel breaks along the various spur roads that lead to and traverse the many plantations (along the end of 21S25 and spur roads 21S25A-D), fuel risks “would be better dealt with by implementing light thinning over those units to prepare them for periodic underburning.” *Id.* at 11. The response to comments section in the FEIS Appx. D fails to even acknowledge these suggestions.

Because the FEIS fails to consider such an alternative, and fails to even acknowledge our proposal to eliminate fuel breaks along spur roads and include a plantation thinning proposal under “**Alternatives Considered and Eliminated from Detailed Study**” (FEIS, p. 22-24), the FEIS analysis is fatally flawed.

#### C. Failure to Consider or Analyze an 8-Inch Diameter Limit Alternative

The FEIS fail to adequately respond to our request to lower the diameter limit from 12 to 8 inches, and the Forest Service should have considered and analyzed an 8-inch limit alternative to determine whether it would meet the purpose and need of the proposal.

In our DEIS comments, we urged that the diameter limit should be lowered to 8 inches, in order to “mitigate impacts to the grove,” “reduce activity fuels and greatly reduce air quality impacts during burning of slash piles and debris.” SFK & SC DEIS Comments at 6.

Yet the Forest Service only responded by stating:

Since the TRRP Project does not include a timber sale, and the Black Mountain Grove inventory identified that “Trees less than 12 inches dbh are dominating much of the grove and, due to being suppressed and dying, make up the ladder fuels that lower the canopy base height in wildfire situations” (FEIS, p.49), there is a need to treat larger trees to reduce ladder fuels in the project area.

FEIS Appx. D, p. D-3. The Forest Service provides no real explanation why a lower diameter limit could not effectively be used to achieve the project’s purpose, and therefore this outright dismissal of lowering the diameter limit is arbitrary and capricious. Even if the grove is dominated by trees 12 inches in dbh and larger, that does not mean alternative treatments as we have proposed would be ineffective. The only way to make that conclusion would be to do the analysis.

Because the FEIS fails to consider such an alternative, and fails to even acknowledge our proposal to lower the diameter limit to 8 inches under “**Alternatives Considered and Eliminated from Detailed Study**” (FEIS, p. 22-24), the FEIS analysis is fatally flawed.

D. Decommissioning spur logging roads and converting these roads to trails

As we discussed in the introduction, and the Forest Service has agreed to verbally, a parallel formal proposal to decommission the various spur logging roads must be initiated prior to issuance of the TRRPP ROD to resolve this objection.

All spur roads created for logging in the old Solo and Gauntlet timber sales should be eventually closed and obliterated. Not only are the roads causing continued watershed damage, loss of soils, removed from forest habitat, etc., but road density far exceeds standards. Impacts of these roads as permanent roads were not analyzed in the original Solo and Gauntlet timber sales or the 1988 LMP and these roads were not analyzed in the GSNM Management Plan. The road densities in the Black Mountain Grove appear to be greater than in any other grove.

This direction is consistent with the agreement we reached with the Forest Service in the Mediated Settlement Agreement (MSA), as stipulated, which states:

*f. Regeneration of Cut-Over Sequoia Groves*

*(1) The objectives of regenerating cutover Giant Sequoia Groves will be to restore these areas, as nearly as possible, to the former natural forest condition.*

MSA, p. 27. More specifically, the proposal to decommission and convert these roads should include the following segments, which were constructed for the timber sales that cutover the Black Mtn. Grove. These road numbers represent those sections on the Forest Service’s current topo maps, but which may have been given different numbers in the Solo and Gauntlet timber sales.

- 21S25 – segment near end, after intersection with 21S25C as indicated on map
- 21S25A – second half of segment
- 21S25B – all of segment
- 21S25C – all of segment
- 21S25D – all of segment

Please see our DEIS comments for a map and additional details.

E. The TRRPP is Inconsistent with the MSA, which Still Remains in Effect to the Extent that Its Provisions Have Not been Incorporated into the GSNM Plan

The MSA allows mechanical entry within groves only for the limited and specific purpose of reducing the fuel load pursuant to a grove specific fuel load reduction plan and grove specific EIS. But it does not authorize the creation of shaded fuel breaks, as proposed in the TRRPP:

*“... the following mechanical/motorized uses only will be permitted inside an interim or final Grove boundary line:*

*(d) Management in accordance with approved fuel load reduction plans;*

*(2) Within this Plan period, the Sequoia National Forest shall begin to inventory and evaluate each Grove for its fuel load build-up. Based on this inventory and evaluation, Groves, or parts of Groves with risks of catastrophic fire and/or exclusion of new giant sequoia regeneration because of unnatural fuel load build-up will be identified and prioritized for fuel load reduction treatment, Pursuant to this prioritization, the Forest Service shall begin to address the Grove fuel load build-up problems during this plan period, with public participation and planning in accordance with NEPA.*

*(3) ...  
there shall be no new road-building, logging or mechanized/motorized entry (except for entry on existing roads) within the final administrative boundary of any Grove during the period of time in which the Sequoia National Forest activities are covered by the 1988 Land and Resource Management Plan. For purposes of this Agreement, prohibited logging shall mean any logging activity except logging conducted for the limited and specific purpose of reducing the fuel load in the Groves pursuant to a Grove specific fuel load reduction plan and Grove specific EIS. .... It is agreed that the methods to be used to remove specific trees from the Groves, as part of an adopted fuel reduction plan, shall be the most environmentally sensitive available. The objective of fuel load reduction plans shall be to preserve, protect, restore and regenerate the Giant Sequoia Groves...”*

MSA, p. 10 (emphasis added). Note that the 1988 LRMP is still in effect and has only been modified by amendment to incorporate the GSNM Plan. Thus, the creation of shaded fuel breaks in the TRRPP is inconsistent with this MSA requirement because these fuel breaks are not being implemented for the limited and specific purpose of reducing the fuel load in the Black Mtn. Grove, but are instead being implemented for the protection of the adjacent Tule River Reservation.

Moreover, the MSA requires the restoration of cut-over groves; and the Black Mountain Grove is a ‘cut-over grove:

*f. Regeneration of Cut-Over Sequoia Groves*

*(1) The objectives of regenerating cutover Giant Sequoia Groves will be to restore these areas, as nearly as possible, to the former natural forest condition.*

(2) *The Forest shall implement the regeneration plan required by the Stipulation for Entry of Judgment dated 12/27/89, in Sierra Club v. U.S. Forest Service, Case No. CVF-87-263 EDP.*

MSA, p. 27. And contrary to any assertions by the Forest Service otherwise, the Black Mtn. Grove has not yet been restored to the former natural conditions. In fact, the Forest Service has not yet even proposed let alone attempted any such restoration over the last 24 years.

As Carla Cloer summarized aptly in her 2007 pre-scoping letter:

If the Forest Service wants to begin the long over-due restoration of this grove, the grove and its components must be studied comprehensively, not in a piecemeal fashion; the requirements of the MSA must be met by completing an inventory of fuel loading in the grove, making public an ‘approved fuel treatment plan’ (grove specific fuel load reduction plan) and writing a grove specific EIS with the requisite public participation. Fire should be considered the primary management tool and mechanical treatment used only in those specific instances where fire cannot be used.

Exhibit A, PDF p. 6.

F. The TRRPP Does Not Meet the Requirements of the 2004 Tribal Forest Protection Act

1. Features and Circumstances *Unique* to the Tule River Tribe Have Never Been Enumerated or Adequately Explained

The entire foundation for the project is undermined by an inadequate explanation of the “*feature or circumstance unique to that Indian tribe (including treaty rights or biological, archaeological, historical, or cultural circumstances).*” 25 U.S.C. § 3115a(c) (emphasis added); *see also* Forest Service Handbook 2409.19, Chapter 61.17 (essentially the same).

The FEIS and its response to our DEIS comments are inadequate because they fail to specifically enumerate what treaty rights or biological, archaeological, historical, or cultural circumstances are unique in the TRRPP area. The response to comments simply states, without details that

There is no doubt that the archaeological, historical, and cultural circumstances are prominent in this project area, as evidenced by the discussion of the affected environment in the Cultural Resource sections of the FEIS. Our knowledge of cultural resources in the TRRP project area is derived from eleven archaeological surveys and ten archaeological sites recorded within the Area of Potential Effect (FEIS p. 33).

DEIS, Appx. D, p. D-14. But that is not the issue as it relates to the statutory requirement. The requirement is not that these circumstances are “prominent” but that they are “unique to that

Indian tribe,” here, the Tule River Tribe. Nowhere has the Forest Service ever attempted to describe the uniqueness of these circumstances to the Tule River Tribe. And no document has ever been identified by the Forest Service, which includes any feature or circumstance “unique” to the Tule River Tribe on Monument lands. Even the Cultural Resources Specialist report has not identified feature or circumstance “unique” to the Rule River Tribe.

But what is most troubling is that the original selection of the project under the Tribal Forest Protection Act authority failed to even attempt to make any kind of acknowledgement of this requirement and failed to provide even a general statement that it had been met. Words in statutes must be given meaning, and if the agency fails to adequately meet all the requirements of the legislation, then its actions are arbitrary and capricious and can be set aside. The FEIS and draft ROD fail to rectify this issue and are therefore fatally flawed.

2. The 2004 Tribal Forest Protection Act Cannot Be Used as Authority in the TRRPP Area Because “The subject land is [] already covered by an agreement or contract that presents a conflict on the subject land” in the form of the Mediated Settlement Agreement (MSA)

In the Court’s Order regarding the first GSNM Management Plan and Proclamation, Federal Judge Breyer found that “[t]o the extent that the MSA is not a part of the 1988 LRMP, it qualifies as a ‘valid existing right’ because its termination terms have not been met.” *California, ex rel. Lockyer v. U.S. Forest Service*, 465 F.Supp.2d 917, 930 (N.D. Cal. 2006) (“The MSA is part and parcel of the 1988 LRMP until that Plan has been revised in satisfaction of the terms of the MSA, which has not yet occurred.”).

But the Tribal Forest Protection Act does not allow the use of its authority if the subject land is already covered by an agreement, contract, or other instrument that may present a conflict on the subject land. *See* 25 U.S.C. § 3115a(c)(3) (“the agreement or contracting activities applied for by the Indian tribe are not already covered by a stewardship contract or other instrument that would present a conflict on the subject land ....”).

Here, there is an instrument in the form of the MSA, which creates a conflict on the management of the Black Mountain Grove because the GSNM Management Plan has not effectively dealt with the requirements in the MSA to restore the cut-over groves to natural conditions. *See* MSA, p. 27 (“The objectives of regenerating cutover Giant Sequoia Groves will be to restore these areas, as nearly as possible, to the former natural forest condition.”). Because this has not yet occurred, and in fact, has not even been attempted, there is a conflict on the subject land, and the Forest Service lacks the authority to use the Act in the Black Mountain Giant Sequoia Grove, which was cut over by the Solo and Gauntlet Timber Sales.

G. The FEIS Seriously Misrepresents the Findings in the Garner (2013) Report

The FEIS glosses over the findings in the Garner (2013) report by emphasizing only those findings that state the Pacific fisher can tolerate thinning when, in fact, the report concluded the opposite, that fishers completely avoid thinned areas. This misrepresentation of Garner’s findings fails to ensure the scientific accuracy and integrity of this report, in violation of NEPA.

Garner found that “when selecting microsites within their home ranges, fishers tend to avoid using sites within 200 meters of a treated [thinned] area.” SFK & SC DEIS Comments, Exhibit O, p. ii. Garner found that “as fishers are selecting foraging and resting sites within their home ranges (third-order selection), they tended to avoid treated areas in favor of sites within untreated forest, corroborating previous findings (Truex and Zielinski 2013).” *Id.*, p. 41.

On balance, the Garner report concludes that thinning treatments “have had a negative net impact on fisher habitat” (*id.*, p. 43), not “that fishers may tolerate treatments in their home ranges despite some short term and localized effects” as the FEIS concludes. This FEIS’ conclusion is completely at odds with the conclusions by Garner, who stated that his “findings indicate that the short term negative impacts of management action reported by Truex and Zielinski (2013) continue to have lingering effects on habitat quality beyond the one year term reported in their study.” *Id.* Therefore, the statements in the FEIS violate NEPA’s requirements to ensure scientific accuracy and integrity.

H. The Tribal Fuels Emphasis Treatment Area has No Authority and its Designation in the GSNM Plan is Arbitrary and Capricious

Designation of the TFETA is arbitrary and capricious, without foundation or authority. The Monument should be managed to protect the Monument and objects of interest within, not adjacent lands outside the Monument. Nonetheless, the Plan includes treatment in the TFETA to “*protect the reservation, and its watersheds, but also its objects of interest* and watersheds in the Monument from fires spread from one to the other.” Map 3 on p. 49 of the GSNM Management Plan shows the TFETA extending as much as 5 miles from the Tule Reservation boundary without any rational explanation. The Plan lacks both explanation and scientific justification as to why these zones contain so much of the land area of the Monument, why the treatment prescriptions in them should take precedence over other land allocations designed to protect resources such as old forest emphasis areas, spotted owl home range core areas, or the Southern Sierra Fisher Conservation Area. The Forest Service has failed to demonstrate that its decision is based on the determination – following the best available science – that these management directives are needed to accomplish ecological restoration of the Monument resources and to protect the objects of interest in the Monument.

And because the TRRPP partially uses the TFETA as a justification for its authority, the TFETA designation is at issue in this objection. *See* FEIS, p. 108 (“The TRRP project is the first project proposed and analyzed in the Tribal Fuels Emphasis Treatment Area (TFETA).”). The Forest Service has never explained where it has derived the authority for this designation or how its standards are consistent with the protective provisions of the GSNM Proclamation.

G. The FEIS Fails to Adequately Address the Threats to Black Mtn. Grove, inconsistent with the Mediated Settlement Agreement (MSA).

As we stated in our DEIS comments, we believe the biggest threat to the Black Mtn. Sequoia Grove is the potential for large wildfires to move upslope from Highway 190 or upslope from the Tule River Reservation. The FEIS and the proposed actions do little to address these threats.

In fact, the largest recent threats to the grove from fires have come from the reservation side. Since the large 1928 fire that burned upslope from the Middle Fork of the Tule River,

The next largest fire to burn into the project area occurred in 2008 called the Solo 2 Fire which burned approximately 275 acres in the Monument ... [and which] started on the Reservation and burned into the Monument.

FEIS, p. 39. Since records were kept,

From 1910 to 1999, 103 of 146, or **70.5 percent**, of fires on the Tule River Reservation started down slope of the Black Mountain Grove in the South Fork of the Tule River. One notable fire, the Cholollo Fire, came within ½ mile of the Black Mountain Grove in 1996.

FEIS, p. 40 (emphasis added).

The ultimate management goal for the grove should be restoring natural fire so that surface fuel loading is low enough inside the grove that any fire coming from these external threat areas can be minimized and will not damage the grove and its monarch sequoia trees.

The MSA's intent was to look at the entire grove as a whole prior to taking action to reduce fuels within. The MSA and its restoration goals require a grove-wide plan to address threats to the grove. But the TRRPP is not a grove-wide management plan for the Black Mtn. Grove, which the MSA required before further entry. Instead, the TRRPP is a fuel reduction plan, intended to protect the Tule Reservation from fire that may start in the Monument. Activity fuels from thinning will actually increase surface fuels and create an additional threat to the grove and reservation until the slash and debris piles can be burned. The analysis has failed to disclose this short-term risk and the potential for problems associated with this additional fuel loading.

To protect monarch sequoia trees, before cutting and piling for burning anywhere near a large sequoia, the Forest Service should assess the threats to each large tree and do what is needed to protect each tree from fire. Moreover, the Forest Service should do as much as possible to protect smaller sequoias that were planted or grew on their own after logging in the 1980s.

For Sequoia ForestKeeper and the Kern-Kaweah Chapter of the Sierra Club,

Sincerely,



René Voss – Attorney at Law  
15 Alderney Rd  
San Anselmo, CA 94960  
(415) 446-9027



Ara Marderosian – Executive Director  
Sequoia ForestKeeper  
P.O. Box 2134  
Kernville, CA 93238-2134  
(760) 376-4434

Stephen Montgomery – Chair  
Kern-Kaweah Chapter of the Sierra Club  
2115 1st Street  
Bakersfield CA 93304-2707  
661-496-6585  
samonty@pacbell.net