



July 5, 2017

The Honorable Ryan K. Zinke, Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We, the undersigned organizations, respectfully urge you to recommend keeping all protective designations made under the Antiquities Act in place for the 27 national monuments currently under review as directed by Executive Order 13792, including the Giant Sequoia National Monument designation.

Our organizations have been protecting, studying, and helping people enjoy the beauty and bounty of our natural resource lands for almost 250 years. This track record should convey the solemn authority with which we write in order to express our unwavering support for the designation of our public national monuments.

Specifically, our commitment to the forestlands in and around the Giant Sequoia National Monument goes back many years, and we assure you that this monument designation occurred after extensive scientific research and with strong public support. The collaborative process leading to its designation confirmed that the 328,000-acre Giant Sequoia National Monument is the smallest size necessary to protect this delicate ecosystem and local watersheds. Though this Monument is named after the giant sequoia found therein, the ecological condition of the surrounding forested landscape is critical to the viability of the protected sequoia groves.

Giant sequoias are the largest and among the oldest trees in the world, and this species – known around the globe – only grows in a narrow band along the western slope of California’s Sierra Nevada Mountains. Indeed, the Giant Sequoia National Monument preserves half of the remaining sequoia groves on the planet.

We would like to share some of the long-term benefits of the Giant Sequoia National Monument as currently configured:

Agricultural Industry and Family Farms

In 2016, Tulare County was ranked again as the largest agricultural producing county in the entire nation. According to the USDA 2012 Census of Agriculture, Fresno County has more than 5,600 commercial and family farms. And Kern County, which includes a small portion of the Monument, also has a strong agricultural economic base. These three counties encompass the Giant Sequoia National Monument and surrounding forestlands, which keep clean water flowing downstream to hundreds of small family farms and large agricultural enterprises in California's Central Valley. The Central Valley generates 8% of all food produced in the United States and contributes substantially to agricultural exports.

The 2012 Giant Sequoia National Monument Management Plan provides for cohesive land management, benefitting overall watershed health and protecting water quality and supply. While management activities could be improved upon and supported by increased funding, protection and restoration of these forests is water wise, which is important in drought-stricken California. The viability of the many Central Valley commercial and family farms depends directly on the clean water that is captured, filtered, stored, and flows downstream from these sequoia forests.

Tourism Economy and Community Importance

Local gateway communities, including Springville and Porterville, rely on the tourism economy for which the Giant Sequoia National Monument is the engine. According to a 2015 report conducted on behalf of nonprofit tourism promoter, Visit California, the tourism industry is a \$2.23 billion industry in the four-county Central Valley region, generating almost 24,000 jobs. In Tulare County alone, travel dollars generated \$37.8 million in local and state tax receipts. In Fresno County, total direct travel spending totaled \$1.37 billion. The Giant Sequoia National Monument brings thousands of visitors from around the country and across the globe to our local hotels, restaurants, and shops, and keeps four-season recreational outfitters in business.

Since the Monument's designation in 2000, local economic growth continued or improved across all indicators in the Giant Sequoia Region, according to data from Headwaters Economics. In fact, around the Giant Sequoia National Monument, jobs increased by 20%, personal income grew by 50%, and per capita income grew by 24% from 2001 to 2015. These increases in jobs and personal wealth stand out because they happened over the toughest economic years in modern memory when wages in other rural areas often declined.

The Monument provides important recreational, cultural, and economic resources to the Tule River Tribe, whose reservation is adjacent to the Monument. In addition, the Giant Sequoia National Monument is the closest access point for the 18 million people of the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area to experience these superlative forests.

Safety and Stewardship

The Monument offers a unique and powerful climate change mitigating benefit. As Save the Redwoods League researchers discovered, ancient giant sequoias and the related coast redwood forests store more climate-altering carbon per acre than any other forest type on the planet. Given projected climate change-driven impacts in California, strengthening the protection of these carbon-sequestering powerhouses is a wise investment in our future. Furthermore, as our climate changes and wildfire, hotter temperatures, and changing precipitation regimes affect the sequoia forests, the trees will require room to migrate, adapt, and survive. Reducing the boundaries of the Monument now could prove to be an existential threat to these ancient groves and the species that rely on them for sustenance and shelter.

We understand that the threats of wildfire and the need for active forest management are acute and that additional visitor-serving amenities are greatly desired by local communities. Unprecedented tree mortality caused by California's long drought and by pest infestation creates a high fire risk, especially at the wildland-urban interface where homes and businesses abut forestlands. In fact, the 2012 Giant Sequoia National Monument Management Plan specifically supports a number of fuels reduction activities, including prescribed burns; managed wildfire; fuel reduction by hand; fuel reduction by mechanical treatment (for ecological restoration or public safety); and removal of felled trees (for ecological restoration or public safety). Federal funding to support such activities is necessary. It is our hope that these significant issues can be addressed through a careful and collaborative process matching that which led to the Monument's designation in 2000.

This remarkable, ancient forest exists today because of over 100 years of public support and federal protections. Recommending anything less than maintaining the integrity of this extraordinary Monument would violate years of hard-fought protections won by the local community, undermine attempts to protect and restore these vital watersheds, and stymie the local economy. Most fundamentally, sequoia forests are truly spectacular, and in their stunning beauty and unimaginable longevity, they are inspirational icons of the American landscape.

We urge your support for the Giant Sequoia National Monument, its surrounding communities, tribes, and the thousands of people who visit it each year.

Sincerely,

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Citations

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“Redwoods and Climate Change Initiative Forest Network.” *SavetheRedwoods.org*. Save the Redwoods League, 2017.