



**SIERRA FOREST PRODUCTS**

**Sierra Forest Products**

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**Testimony of Sierra Forest Products**

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**Submitted to the Committee on Natural Resources,  
Ranking Member Westerman**

**Ranking Member Bruce Westerman**

**Committee on Natural Resources**

**U.S. House of Representatives**

## **Introduction**

Thank you, Ranking Member Westerman, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to testify regarding “Save Our Sequoias: The Impact of Catastrophic Wildfires on the World’s Most Iconic Trees”

I serve as General Manager for Sierra Forest Products and also I am a Licensed Forester in the State of California.

Sierra Forest Products located in Terra Bella is the most southern sawmill located in California. The company has been in operation for over 54 years. The mill is very dependent on Forest Service projects and sales. Our log supply comes from both the Sequoia and Sierra National Forests. In the 1980’s we worked on 3 or 4 Forest Service Sales that thinned the white woods from the Giant Sequoia Groves. When we finished the projects, the groves looked like a park. The Forest Service put seedlings back into the groves which included young giant sequoias. There was also natural regeneration that sprouted. From a personal perspective, it makes me sick to see the conditions of our groves, black and if they haven’t burned, so overgrown they are ripe to burn in the next fire.

## **Existing Situation of our Giant Sequoia Groves in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California**

Drought, bark beetle, and wildfire are the primary natural disturbance agents that have dramatically affected about 63 Giant Sequoia Groves with 85 percent of the total Grove acreage burned and about 20 percent of the Giant Sequoia trees killed since year 2015. Groves affected are in the Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks, the Sequoia National Monument, Tule River Reservation, Sequoia National Forest, and on private land.

Continuing drought 7 of the last 10 years has caused water stress in vegetation. Warmer winters and hot dry summers coupled with the water stress has led to increased bark beetle activity. The warming and drying have resulted in dramatically lower vegetation moisture during the summer months. Last,

overgrown forests that just keep growing has led to the combination of these factors driving the increasing size and severity of the wildfires in the Sierra Nevada mountains.

Actions must be taken rapidly to dramatically reduce or eliminate vegetation density in the understory in the Giant Sequoia Groves to reduce the risk of further losses due to drought, bark beetle, and wildfire.

### **The Need for Swift Action**

- Rapid reduction or elimination of understory vegetative density, removing all the small trees, brush, and intermediate size “ladder” trees that can carry the fire up the larger trees, and perhaps other larger non-Giant Sequoia trees. In short, make the unburned Groves look like a “Park” being made up of only large Giant Sequoia trees.
- Maintain understory over time using a variety of methods.
- Provide a ¼ mile vegetation treatment zone surrounding all the Groves for added reduction in risk to wildfire.
- Recognize the potential for Sequoia natural regeneration failure. Remove standing dead and down dead vegetation to reduce fuel loading and thereby enhance opportunity for remaining live trees to survive a future wildfire.
- If there is a fire start, the focus must be on Rapid, Aggressive Initial Attack to put the fire out.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

As Save the Redwoods League President, Sam Hodder, has said - "call this situation in the giant sequoia what it is: an emergency."

Three calls for emergency action are needed:

- Rapidly reduce or eliminate understory vegetative density in the Giant Sequoia Groves and in a ¼ mile vegetative treatment zone around each Grove. Follow with a vegetative maintenance plan and implement it.
- Adopt an aggressive initial attack fire suppression policy during the fire season to put any fire start out as quickly as possible.
- Recognize that much of the high severity burned Giant Sequoia Groves will need planting of Giant Sequoia seedlings. Remove standing dead and down dead vegetation to reduce fuel loading to enhance opportunity for remaining live trees to survive a future wildfire.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on this critical issue.

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