

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Witness Statement

Statement of Representative Cal Dooley to the House Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

Support of H.R. 4021

March 28, 2000

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Smith, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 4021, a bill that would authorize a study to determine the best scientific method for the long-term protection of California's Giant Sequoia groves. While I share the view of many that the Sequoia groves in the Sequoia National Forest are national treasures and merit special care and attention, I am concerned that President Clinton's proposal to establish a Sequoia National Monument has not received adequate discussion and examination during the ongoing 60-day comment and decision period. I support H.R. 4021 because it would provide additional time to adequately examine the proposal and consider the most sound scientific methods for protecting these great Sequoias.

On February 14, President Clinton directed Secretary Glickman to review and make recommendations within 60 days on proposals to create a Sequoia National Monument in the 12 million acre Sequoia National Forest. As you know, the President is authorized under the Antiquities Act of 1906 to make such designations after consultation with Congress and those affected by such designations. Because of the significant environmental, economic and scientific issues surrounding such a designation, I drafted a letter to Secretary Glickman requesting that an independent panel of experts with extensive knowledge of the ecology and management of Sequoia groves be appointed to study the issue and deliver an unbiased judgment based on sound science and careful consideration of the impact of the proposal. Though I commend the Forest Supervisor of the Sequoia National Forest for soliciting comment and opinion on the proposal from a wide variety of individuals and groups during this 60 day comment period, it is my believe that a decision of this magnitude should not be made without careful scientific examination of the best strategies to protect the Sequoia groves.

I would like to cite just some of the issues that need to be carefully considered before a

decision on the proposal is made. For years, humans and Sequoias have mutually flourished. Private loggers have helped reduce the threat fire poses to the Sequoia trees by removing dead, fallen and overstocked non-Sequoia trees in the area. By preventing the build-up of these trees and brush, called "understory," they reduce the fire risk not only to Giant Sequoias but also to neighboring forests and communities. We should not proceed with the monument designation until we understand the effect that the designation would have on this current practice. This issue is just one of many. The environmental issues involved in this proposal are numerous and various, and there simply hasn't been enough time to consider these factors in a scientific way.

Any proposal to create a Sequoia Monument also should include a plan to mitigate any economic impacts or undue financial burdens that may result from withdrawal of public lands from the current uses. Tulare County, which I represent and which contains much of the proposed designation area, typically has an unemployment rate ranging between 10 to 15, a rate three times higher than the national average. Individuals and organizations that would experience a negative economic impact from this designation need adequate time to develop strategies so that unemployment does not plunge even further in this economically distressed area. H.R. 4021 would provide an 18 month time period for private landowners and businesses to assess economic alternatives.

The legislation before you today, H.R. 4021, would ensure that a decision on the Sequoia Monument would not be made until a thorough review of all the scientific and environmental factors can be completed by the National Academy of Sciences. Though there have been numerous studies of the Giant Sequoia, there is currently no comprehensive report focused specifically on the most responsible method of preserving these national treasures. Simply put, this legislation would require a sound scientific study that would provide the best management strategies for the Sequoia National Forest and examine the potential effects of the monument designation.

HR 4021 does not invalidate the need to protect the Sequoia groves, but rather provides a bipartisan, scientific framework to move forward judiciously. I urge your support for this legislation.

Thank you Madam Chairwoman and Ranking Member Smith.

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