

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Witness Statement

Statement of Rep. George Radanovich

on

H.R. 4021, The Giant Sequoia Groves Protection and Management Act of 2000

Before the House Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

March 28, 2000

Thank you, Madam Chairman, for giving me the opportunity to speak before you today.

I also want to thank you for putting this hearing together on such short notice. It is an urgent issue in central California and you have gone out of your way to help the people of my district - not just on this issue, but on so many of our other challenges as well. You were good enough to come to Mariposa, my hometown, earlier this year where we had a very good hearing on the Sierra Nevada Framework and the Quincy Library Group. Your attention and concern for the people in central and northern California are much appreciated and I wanted you to know that many people in my district, including myself, have the highest regard for you. We will certainly miss your graciousness, your courtesy and especially your no-nonsense insight, in the House of Representatives next year.

The Nineteenth Congressional District of California, which I represent, is home to the parts of the Sequoia National Forest that are to the north, and just to the south of the Sequoia National Park. There are many Sequoia groves in this area, including a large privately owned grove called Dillonwood.

Madam Chairman, the people of my district - in fact everyone I have visited with - agrees that we should protect these majestic trees. The interesting part of this debate is that nobody is arguing about the goals. We all agree that the giant Sequoia groves are so unique that they must be preserved for the enjoyment of future generations.

Unfortunately, President Clinton and Vice-President Gore have determined that only a

monument can save them. They are working against science and they are jeopardizing sound forest management practices by attempting to draw an administrative line around these trees and limiting management flexibility.

I strenuously oppose a Sequoia National Monument designation because it could do more harm than good. It is a mistake for several reasons.

First, the Sequoias already have federal protection from logging. A 1992 Presidential Proclamation signed by President George Bush, which resulted from a 1990 Mediated Settlement Agreement, placed these groves completely off-limits to timber sales and prevents any timber harvest within 1000 feet of individual trees.

For several decades, the small timber businesses working in the Sequoia National Forest have done nothing more than forest thinning in the buffer zones around the groves. They take specially marked trees - not Sequoia - and there is no clear cutting. These activities support the Forest Service goal of reducing catastrophic fire hazard as well as protecting against pest and disease infestation that thrive in overly dense forests.

The President claims we need to "protect these trees." But far from protecting these trees, the Clinton/Gore monument may actually increase risks by limiting management tools for reducing these hazards around the groves. A catastrophic fire, that kills the trees and sterilizes the ground, or a bug infestation that wipes out entire groves, could destroy these groves forever.

Second, a Clinton/Gore monument contradicts science already accumulated by the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) on the best way to manage the giant Sequoias. In the SNEP report, the scientists advised against any additional limits on management flexibility. They said the best way to maintain forest health was through active management. They specifically recommended against creating a superficial barrier around the trees, such as a monument.

In addition, the Giant Sequoia Ecology Cooperative, which provides ongoing advice on best management practices to federal, state, tribal and private managers, advocates the need for flexibility above all else. The diverse character of the groves demands adaptive management strategies. A monument - the historic purpose of which is to preserve relics - would undermine the needed flexibility and reduce our ability to protect the groves.

In spite of the scientific progress on Sequoia groves, the Forest Service has done nothing to amend their Forest management plans. Nor have they made any recommendations for legislation that might be needed to accommodate scientific concerns. The fact is, the

science doesn't support a monument and the Forest Service doesn't need a monument.

Third, once again, election season is playing politics with our natural resources. The result will be a compromise in stewardship, both in terms of public benefits and of resource health. Monument decisions, because they are unilateral in nature, also often ignore their serious impacts to local economies, and the negative effects on multiple-use and recreational access. The three proposals I have seen for this designation will at best, eliminate over a hundred jobs in Tulare County, and at worst hundreds of jobs across the region. This in an area already plagued with abnormally high unemployment: Tulare County for example already faces 16 percent unemployment and Fresno County is over 12 percent. There is no mitigation plan in place to help those people.

All these jobs add up to over \$8 million in lost salaries if the multiple-use is restricted or eliminated on the proposed 400,000 acres. The multiple-use policy for these Forest Service lands allows for fishing, camping, grazing, timber harvesting and many other activities. This open access to public land - by the public - is now at the mercy of the President. And his track record for maintaining any reasonable use of the land within monuments is not good. Even the Forest Service has said they have no idea what form the monument plan will take. It will be a surprise for everybody. In the dark, is not a good way to make public policy.

With that kind of certainty, it is no wonder that people in the surrounding communities are so tired of the arrogance of these decisions to modify access to public lands. Monument designations, in particular, can cause profound economic turmoil in rural communities while offering absolutely no alternatives. This kind of inadequate public involvement is deplorable. I have received thousands of phone calls and letters from my constituents who are opposed to the designation, and they justifiably want answers to their concerns. These concerns should be addressed, but it is hard to know what to be concerned about when you don't know what the proposal is.

In order to respond to this dilemma, the sponsors of H.R. 4021 hope that the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) can provide the necessary independent scientific review and provide recommendations to the Forest Service of best management practices for the groves. During the period of the study, we believe any changes to administration should be delayed - particularly changes that might actually place the Sequoia groves at greater risk.

The Clinton/Gore monument is being set up as "the only way to protect the Sequoia groves." But Madam Chairman, it is important that we be informed what they're trying to protect them from! They are not logged. We aren't building any roads in the groves. We are not harvesting trees within a thousand feet of them.

This process really should be taken out of election season politics. The Forest Service already has the tools they need to amend the forest plan without a unilateral monument designation - it's called the regulatory process. It provides alternatives, as well as public and scientific input. The goal of the Mediated Settlement Agreement reached ten years ago was to complete a Forest Management Plan Amendment. If changes are needed, then they should be done through the regulatory process. At least that is open to **public** and **scientific** scrutiny.

The real risk here - the real threat to Sequoias - is that their genuine best interests will be sacrificed in the name of political expedience.

Thank you again, Madam Chairman, for giving me this opportunity to speak before you today.

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