

Forest Service Bushwhacks Giant Sequoia National Monument

by Bill Corcoran, Sierra Club Southern California Regional Representative

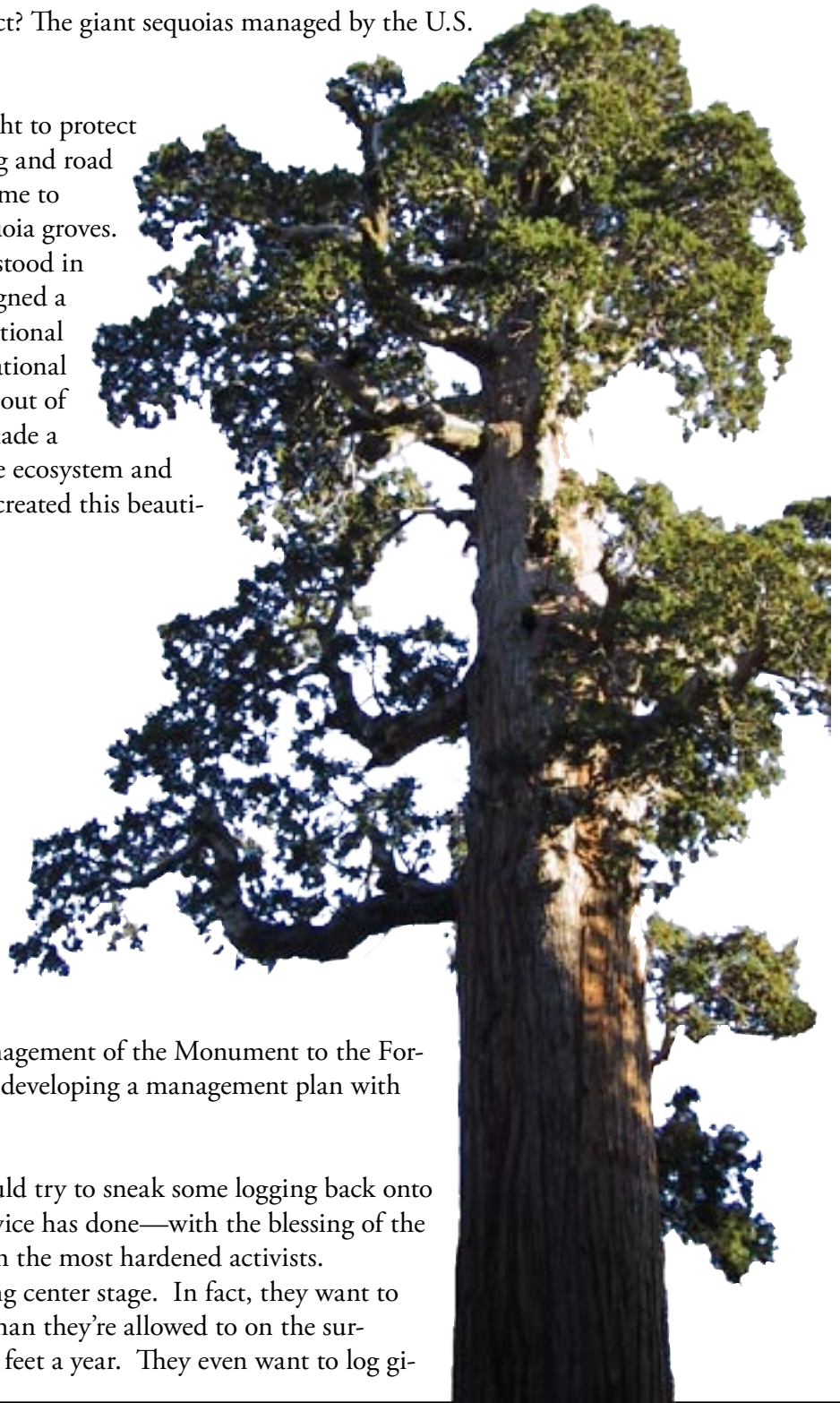
What's big and tall and get no respect? The giant sequoias managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

For years, Sierra Club activists have fought to protect the giant sequoia ecosystem from logging and road building on Sequoia National Forest, home to nearly half of the world's remaining sequoia groves. Three years ago, then-President Clinton stood in the shade of a giant sequoia grove and signed a proclamation creating Giant Sequoia National Monument, carving it out of Sequoia National Forest. Activists knew that they weren't out of the log yard yet, but felt that they had made a significant step forward in protecting the ecosystem and restoring the natural processes that had created this beautiful place.

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Clinton's proclamation assigned the management of the Monument to the Forest Service and charged the agency with developing a management plan with clear restrictions on logging.

Folks figured that the Forest Service would try to sneak some logging back onto the Monument, but what the Forest Service has done—with the blessing of the Bush administration—has surprised even the most hardened activists. The Forest Service plan would put logging center stage. In fact, they want to log more large trees on the Monument than they're allowed to on the surrounding forest, up to ten million board feet a year. They even want to log gi-



ant sequoias. All of this is based on the theory that if these trees aren't logged, catastrophic fires will destroy the Monument.

Yes, it's true—they say that they will log the forest to save it. They haven't gotten the message that it's their logging that has imperiled the forest.

More quietly, buried deep in their environmental documentation, they admit to wanting to save an object of interest unmentioned in Clinton's proclamation: the local sawmill. Commercial logging of the Monument, they write, "might make the difference between continued operation and closure of the one mill available to serve the Monument."

Kent Duysen, the general manager of that mill, is a big fan

of the Bush administration's "Monument to Logging" plan. He told the *Bakersfield Californian*, "I think the Forest Service is on target. My only question is, are we going far enough to hopefully prevent catastrophic fire?"

In other words, if the loggers and the Forest Service keep exaggerating the risk of fire, they can keep the mill open for a long time. Never mind that there's nothing stopping the Forest Service from thinning the forest near houses and businesses. They have always had free rein to protect people and property. Never mind that in meetings with Sierra Club activists, forest officials have acknowledged that giant sequoia groves are not at risk for catastrophic fire. And forget about pointing out that much of last year's fire on Sequoia National Forest burned brush, not trees.

In the same *Californian* article, George Woodwell, who served on the science advisory panel appointed supposedly to guide the Forest Service in developing its plan, pointed out that the only way the scientists were allowed to provide input was by responding to questions from

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Take Action!!!

- Contact Jim Whitfield, Team Leader, Giant Sequoia National Monument, 900 West Grand Avenue, Porterville, CA 93257 or email the Forest Service at GSNM_Public@fs.fed.us. Let them know that their preferred alternative (Alternative 6) is the worst they could have chosen and outrageously inconsistent with the presidential proclamation creating the Monument. Its reliance on logging undermines the purposes of the Monument and must be rejected. While flawed, Alternative 4 is much closer to the ecosystem restoration and recreational use articulated in the proclamation.
- Send a copy of your letter to your U.S. Senators and Representative at the following addresses:
Senator (Barbara Boxer) (Dianne Feinstein)
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510
Rep. _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
- Send a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. Most have a website where you can easily email your letter.
- Attend public meetings sponsored by the Forest Service in your area. For information see http://www.r5.fs.fed.us/giant_sequoia/

Join our email alert list by sending the message "Sequoia Alert" to carla.cloer@sierraclub.org.

To learn more about how you can help protect our National Monument, contact Bill Corcoran at bill.corcoran@sierraclub.org or (213) 387-6528 x208, Joe Fontaine at jfontaine@lightspeed.net, or Carla Cloer at carla.cloer@sierraclub.org.

See the George Bush tree at http://sequoianet.org/sequoiawild/freeman_creek_photos.html.

Visit the Sierra Club Sequoia Task Force website at <http://www.sierraclub.org/ca/sequoia/>.

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the Forest Service. Woodwell, founder and director of the Woods Hole Research Center in Massachusetts, said, "I have a personal view, which is that the [Bush] administration is advocating more roads and more timber cutting. That's not a sensible policy and certainly not necessarily in the public interest."

The impacts of this logging, not just to the giant sequoia old growth forest but also to wildlife, are potentially severe. Pacific fisher, California spotted owl, and many other ancient forest dependent species are barely surviving in the Southern Sierra. The return to the bad old days of logging may be the final blow to their viability.

Visitors to the Monument can check out the George Bush giant sequoia, named after the elder Bush, who made a campaign stop a decade ago and made a toothless proclamation to protect the giant sequoias. But then again, at least he felt like he had to make the gesture. His son's administration seems to have foregone even that. ❄️

