

# High Sierra Hikers Association Requests Elimination of Pack Station Facility in Sequoia National Park

By Richard Cochran (CA), BCH of California High Sierra Unit Public Lands Committee

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, located in Central California, are presently engaged in developing a management plan and an environmental assessment for an area of Sequoia National Park named Mineral King. Mineral King is a high alpine valley in which the Walt Disney Corporation once contemplated building a massive ski resort. Mineral King, before it was brought into Sequoia National Park, at various times in the historical past had as many as four commercial pack stations and was the embarkation point for numerous private stock users.

The commercial pack station at Mineral King is not presently in operation. The previous operator of the station also operated a commercial pack station in the area of Sequoia National Park called Wolverton. That commercial pack station is also presently closed.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are presently in the process of working on a new management plan for Mineral King. In that regard, they have initiated and concluded public scoping on the plan. After the scoping period ended, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks published a report about the comments received by them from various individuals and entities. The comments received from the High Sierra Hikers Association (HSHA) are particularly disturbing to stock users. One of the comments made by the HSHA regarding stock use reads as follows:

*"It is our understanding that the MKMP [Mineral King Management Plan] will not include any action(s) related to the former Mineral King pack station. In brief, the High Sierra Hikers Association is very concerned that any action(s) to re-open or relocate the pack station, or to otherwise establish or re-establish commercial packing services in or near the Mineral King*

*Valley would create significant, adverse environmental impacts both in Mineral King and in the surrounding fragile wilderness areas."*

The HSHA, however, does not stop there in their request to SEKI. The HSHA comment goes on to say that SEKI should consider and adopt an alternative to remove all structures at the former pack station site. The comment also states that SEKI should not consider any action to reopen or relocate the former pack station. The comment states that there is no need for commercial pack and saddle stock services in Mineral King or surrounding areas. The comment concludes by stating that the easy thing for SEKI to do in its Mineral King Management Plan would be to raze the ugly, decrepit structures, and restore the former pack station site to natural conditions.

The HSHA has sued SEKI multiple times over stock related issues. The HSHA is presently involved in litigation with SEKI over its General Management Plan. That lawsuit is grinding along in United States District Court in San Francisco.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks commenced work on a Wilderness Stewardship Plan several years ago but stopped work on the plan. The parks have now started working on the Wilderness Stewardship Plan again and have commenced their scoping for the plan. It is expected that the HSHA will insist that SEKI consider, as an alternative for the Wilderness Stewardship Plan, an alternative that eliminates stock use. Stock use is less than five (5) percent of the use in SEKI.

In their effort to augment the administrative record in their lawsuit against SEKI regarding the General Management Plan, one of the documents the HSHA wanted added to the administrative record was a letter written by a hiker to SEKI. The letter complained that stock users in an



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adjacent camp were enjoying their use of the SEKI back country by bringing along a folding aluminum table, a two-burner Coleman stove, and cold beers.

## Note from Senior Advisor Wilderness, Recreation, and Trails Dennis Dailey:

Richard Cochran's article discusses the continuation of a problem that dates back a long time. Although we've run similar articles, we want to update our members and seek your involvement in this new effort to eliminate stock in these two parks. The Sequoia and Kings Canyon Parks have a long tradition of stock use dating back into the 1800s.