

[DRA] Campaign underway to turn Sierra National Forest into national monument | Sierra Star

Saturday, September 17, 2016
8:08 PM

Subject	[DRA] Campaign underway to turn Sierra National Forest into national monument Sierra Star
From	DRA
To	DRA
Sent	Saturday, August 27, 2016 9:12 AM
Attachments	 ATT00390

The Constitution does not bestow a land grabbing power on the federal government, and it may not be granted by legislation (the Antiquities Act), only by constitutional amendment. Unless the sovereign states stand up to challenge federal usurpation, the king will steal all our public lands and resources. We will be back to the days of Robin Hood. And therein lies the problem. For the most part, state governments have diminished to the point of being mere federal lap dogs, not our representatives, just as we see happening to the subjugation of Europe's nations with their federalization into the EU, controlled out of Brussels. We certainly did not give the federal government the authority to bribe the states, nor to subjugate our country into being just one member of a larger regional government, itself under the UN. Trump is right. We are deciding whether we will even be a country. ###
<http://www.sierrastar.com/news/article96900372.html>

Campaign underway to turn Sierra National Forest into national monument

A campaign is underway to change the 1.3 million-acre Sierra National Forest to Sierra National Monument between Yosemite and Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

Proponents say the change would bolster outdoor recreation and tourism, while better preserving the landscape. They want to see the elimination of commercial logging and mining, and the phasing out of grazing.

Under the current proposal, all recreational activities now allowed would continue – including boating, four-wheeling, horseback riding and hunting. Target shooting wasn't included in the project platform, but it is in discussion among some monument supporters.

The proposal has garnered many supporters and opponents since [Sierra National Monument Project](#) director Deanna Wulff started the grassroots campaign in fall 2013. Dueling Facebook groups – [Unite the Parks](#) vs. [Stop the Sierra National Monument](#) – represent hundreds of people on both sides of the issue.

National monuments are created by presidents using the Antiquities Act – [more than](#)

[130 have been designated this way](#) – or Congress can pass legislation. Wulff has contacted White House staff about the proposal, and a handful of state representatives from the Bay Area and Southern California have officially pledged support. Locally, more than 100 businesses and organizations based near the forest have signed on, and the project is supported by an [advisory board](#) of community leaders.

Opponents are most concerned with how a monument could change outdoor recreation and forest management practices. Among those in opposition is Rep. Tom McClintock, whose 4th District includes Sierra National Forest.

Nearly 1.5 million people annually visit the expansive Sierra National Forest, which begins at around 1,000 feet in elevation and rises to nearly 14,000 feet, and includes 469 lakes – many of them popular recreation areas, like Bass Lake and Huntington Lake.

More than 2.5 million acre-feet of water annually flows from the forest into countless streams and the Merced, Kings and San Joaquin rivers, which fill 11 reservoirs that send water and hydroelectric power to the central San Joaquin Valley and state.

Wulff says [Sierra National Forest](#) is also a “paradise – I just don’t think everybody realizes that.”

Differing views about forest management are behind much of the controversy. Wulff talks about the dwindled logging industry compared with decades past in advocating for a monument.

For more than 20 years, only about 3,000 acres of the 1.3 million-acre forest have been logged each year, says Sierra National Forest Supervisor Dean Gould. Logging is not permitted in more than 40 percent of the forest that is designated as wilderness, and Gould says no more than one-third of the forest may be suitable for logging. Part of that is due to available funding and staff – U.S. Forest Service officials select which trees can be cut down by contractors. Commercial clear-cutting – removing large swaths of trees – hasn’t happened in the forest since the 1970s.

I’m not offering a new mill. I’m offering: ‘Let’s just embrace what we have, which is incredible beauty.’

Deanna Wulff

Still, logging contributes to the livelihood of people like Larry Duysen, a forester and logging superintendent of Sierra Forest Products in Terra Bella. The sawmill south of Porterville, which employs about 130 people, is the only one remaining in the region. He says the Sequoia National Monument designation in 2000 was a big part of why the Sierra Forest Products’ sawmill in Dinuba closed. He adds the forest is choked with trees and in dire need of thinning. Otherwise, giant fires will be the result. Wulff wants more funding to go toward prescribed burns, but supports some thinning for ecological reasons.

“You have mills leaving, and this kind of emptiness in places like North Fork where they are looking for their new heart and soul,” Wulff says. “I would really like it if they were like, ‘The new heart and soul is that we have this incredible wildlife and natural area that is great for you to explore.’ ... I know it’s not the same, but it’s

something that could last.”

Making monuments

The Antiquities Act defines a monument as land including “historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest.” Each monument plan is different, and monuments are managed by a number of federal agencies. They vary, from icons such as the Statue of Liberty to vast wilderness.

Wulff says years of extensive travel to beautiful natural places throughout the country has helped her advocate for Sierra National Forest’s unique and remarkable beauty. Among its special features: the forest’s sequoia groves, [Nelder Grove](#) and [McKinley Grove](#), along with wildflower-graced [Hite Cove](#), which are some of the most popular areas with more than 10,000 visitors each year.

The forest is home to a number of endangered and threatened species, and Wulff says its [many geographic wonders](#) include [Fresno Dome](#), [Piyau Dome](#), [Shuteye Peak](#), [Iron Lakes](#), [Star Lakes](#), [Arch Rock](#) and [Globe Rock](#). Many areas also hold special spiritual significance to American Indian tribes.

Among President Barack Obama’s most [recent monument designations](#), in February, were the Mojave Trails National Monument, Sand to Snow National Monument and Castle Mountains National Monument, encompassing 1.8 million acres in Southern California.

Wulff says Sierra National Monument would honor and build upon early U.S. conservation efforts that started in the Sierra. President Abraham Lincoln protected Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias with the [landmark Yosemite Grant Act of 1864](#), which led to the creation of the national park system. The Sierra National Monument Project trumpets the slogan, “Unite the Parks” – advocating for the monument as a better bridge between Yosemite and Sequoia & Kings Canyon national parks.

It’s this opportunity to celebrate and renew that conservation legacy that started here and has been carried forward.

Deanna Wulff

Proponents wouldn’t have to start from scratch in crafting connections. There already is a famous path between the parks: The iconic [Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail](#). About 20 miles of it runs through Sierra National Forest.

The proposed monument boundary includes areas that conservationist John Muir wanted protected within Yosemite, including the south fork of the Merced River and a trail that leads to the long-closed [Hite Cove](#) that once produced gold.

It helps people get jobs, keep jobs, and make an area nice.

Deanna Wulff

Wulff says a monument would increase tourism and jobs. Some studies have shown that to be the case, including [one recently released that was commissioned by the Small Business Majority](#). The study evaluated 10 areas near national monuments from 2011 to 2015 that drew an estimated 3.9 million people. The authors reasoned that non-local visitors, most likely drawn to the areas because of nearby monuments, spent about \$129 million, and local visitors spent about \$51 million.

“I would just say that you can create a new economy,” Wulff says, “and that economy is based on doing the right thing.”

But while a monument designation could lure in more or different visitors, there’s no guarantee a monument would receive more funding than a national forest.

Kevin Elliott, forest supervisor for [Sequoia National Forest and Giant Sequoia National Monument](#), says after more than 328,000 acres was carved out of Sequoia National Forest to become a monument in 2000, which prevented commercial logging in and around the sequoia groves, his agency received an additional \$300,000 check that was used to build restrooms and change signs.

“Some folks thought by designating the monument, surely that will bring some additional funding to address those objects of interest, and that didn’t happen and I don’t see that happening, to be honest,” Elliott says.

A grassroots campaign preceded President Bill Clinton’s decision to designate [Giant Sequoia National Monument](#). Carla Cloer, a driving force behind its creation, thinks the monument should be under the jurisdiction of the [National Park Service](#).

“The Forest Service has not shifted gears sufficiently from the old management paradigm for me to feel that the forests and the sequoia groves are indeed protected inside the monument and that real restoration will be allowed to occur,” Cloer says.

“Even though an area is protected as a national monument, the wording of each proclamation can be ‘translated’ or misinterpreted by an agency if it is determined to not change.”

Wulff says Sierra National Monument could remain under Forest Service control.

Gould, with Sierra National Forest, says a forest plan revision in 2001 shifted management practices “from timber industry support to a more holistic ecosystem restoration and maintenance objective.”

To advocate for a monument, Wulff talks about boosts to tourism, recreation and jobs, but her motivation comes from a more personal place.

She was introduced to the forest as a child, camping with her parents, and would return to it again as a young woman while working as a waitress at Tenaya Lodge and Big Trees Lodge (formerly the Wawona Hotel).

She packed up her belongings and drove into the woods after coming home one evening to a married couple she was renting a room from in Oakhurst and discovered them embroiled in a domestic dispute.

Alone in the forest, she was terrified at first. She slept with a cooking pot and canister of bleach, thinking if an attacker came, she would fill the pot and splash the bad guy in the eyes, then make a run for it. But no attacker ever arrived – just warm sunshine pouring through fragrant pine needles, singing birds, scurrying squirrels, and water flowing through a nearby stream. She decided to camp the rest of the summer – and stayed there the summer after that, and the summer after that.

Now a freelance technical writer, editor and project manager based out of Santa Cruz, she regularly visits Sierra National Forest. During one trip, she found large pine trees chopped down at a favorite camp spot – the catalyst for founding the Sierra National Monument Project.

“I have a real sense of – I don’t know what the word is – love, I guess,” she says of

the now-gone trees. “I love them. ... I think that’s why people got really emotional with the place names changing in Yosemite. It’s just a name, but I think there’s a lot of emotional attachment to the landscape. Maybe it’s irrational, but you can love a landscape, and a lot of people do.”

Support and opposition

Politicians in the Bay Area and Southern California have voiced their support for monument status: Rep. Mike Honda, Rep. Barbara Lee, Rep. Zoe Lofgren, Rep. Alan Lowenthal, Rep. Jackie Speier and Rep. Jerry McNerney (whose district surrounds Stockton).

McClintock says making a Sierra National Monument would be an abuse of the Antiquities Act of 1906, signed into law by President Theodore Roosevelt, which grants presidents the power to create monuments. The law was created with the intent of protecting Native American ruins and petroglyphs, not forests, McClintock says.

McClintock’s lack of support hasn’t deterred Wulff’s efforts. She says legislators behind many federally protected lands in Alaska and Utah, for example, live in other states.

Among the opponents are members of a “[Stop The Sierra National Monument](#)” Facebook group.

One member of the group, Paul Willingham of Fresno, dislikes that Sierra National Forest is under federal management, and sees monuments as advancing such control. He also believes a monument designation would mean the land is “pretty much off limits for people and businesses.”

Supporter Les Marsden – board director of Yosemite Gateway Partners, and the Economic Development Corp. of Mariposa County – says a monument would also provide stricter punishments for abuse of public land. He has seen a lot of that as a resident of Jerseydale, a small community near Mariposa within Sierra National Forest. (A monument wouldn’t change more than 100,000 acres of private land that exists in or adjacent to the forest.)

Marsden says some people illegally “decimated” an area near his home to build a jump for their vehicles – destruction that included repeatedly shooting a large oak tree, which has since died. Marsden says a property owner in his community also illegally diverted a watershed in the national forest.

“The preservation of those watersheds is critical,” he says, “particularly at this time in our history with drought.”

Marsden, also a National Park Service centennial ambassador, hopes a monument would help alleviate some congestion in Yosemite, Kings Canyon and Sequoia on busy summer days.

Wulff doesn’t want the kind of development that exists in many national parks, but improving the 1,300 miles of trails in the forest is a priority. She wants a trail system designed that is “thoughtful” – what might include converting some of 2,000 miles of rough graded roads, which exist in addition to nearly 400 miles that passenger cars can easily access.

“So, in other words, some downhill for mountain bicyclists, other areas for hikers and

runners, and that interconnectedness,” she says of her ideal trail system. She says a number of trails around Lake Tahoe have done an especially good job at this. “If you could get on a trail in Mariposa and hike to Oakhurst, that would be great.”

Helping the forest’s 300-plus species of animals and 1,400-plus species of flowering plants, conifers and ferns – plus more than 300 different mosses – is central to her motivation.

It’s very special in terms of its biological resources, and there are so many species beyond the (Pacific) fisher.

Deanna Wulff

“If you really want to protect species, you need to protect landscapes,” Wulff says, “and you have to create these interconnected areas where they can move. That’s what makes wildlife come back.”

Of the animals, 23 species are endangered, threatened or classified as sensitive by the regional forester. Endangered are the California condor, California bighorn sheep, Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog and Fresno kangaroo rat. Until April, the [Pacific fisher](#) – a furry brown mammal about the size of a house cat with short legs and a long body and tail – was a candidate for threatened status. It remains listed as sensitive.

Of the plants, several species only grow in or adjacent to Sierra National Forest, and 58 species are classified as sensitive.

Commercial uses in the forest

The proposal to stop commercial logging is among the monument project’s most controversial.

In 2015, there was about 4,800 logging truckloads of timber taken out of Sierra National Forest – or 24 million board feet of wood. That’s about half of what was removed around 20 years ago, and a sliver of what logging was a century ago.

“[A Sawmill History of the Sierra National Forest](#)” – published in 1941 before restrictions on logging – estimates that more than 4 billion board feet was harvested since the mid-1800s, then processed by 239 sawmills surrounding the forest.

Sierra Forest Products in Terra Bella is the last remaining mill in the southern Sierra.

There’s a number of reasons for that, but I would contend that the creation of the (Giant Sequoia National) Monument is one of those reasons.

Kevin Elliott

“I think it would be a travesty to make all of Sierra National Forest a monument,” says Duysen with [Sierra Forest Products](#) in Terra Bella. “I think ultimately what people are trying to protect, they are ultimately going to lose. Sooner or later, catastrophic fire will play a big role, and it’s important to keep the forest thinned out.”

He says Sierra National Forest is “overstocked.”

“In the early to mid-’90s, the harvest was greatly reduced, and in my opinion, it was to the detriment of the forest,” Duysen says. “Now there are so many trees per acre.”

Logging has increased over the past few years to remove dead trees killed by wildfire, drought and bark beetles, but those trees (the Forest Service estimates they

make up more than 350,000 acres) likely won't be harvested for long. Their value diminishes as trunks rot within a few years.

Trees are now only removed to help improve the overall health of the forest, reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, or eliminate hazards near roads and trails.

McClintock thinks more should be done. During [President Obama's Yosemite visit June 17-19](#), he told reporters awaiting the president's speech that along with protecting public access to federal lands, it's crucial the Obama administration help restore "sound forest management" practices in the Sierra, which would include more logging. He says research indicates a majority of pine trees in the Sierra are dead.

Wulff is advocating for more controlled burning to address the problem, what she says is the most "ecologically sound" approach, and thinning as a last resort. She says logging is costly and also leaves large piles of slashed vegetation behind, which actually increases fire danger, and that soil is damaged by the heavy machinery. On average over the past 10 years, about 3,000 logging truckloads of timber – or 15 million board feet – have been annually harvested.

Gould says the Forest Service isn't making a profit from timber sales: The \$38,000 that contractors paid for harvesting last year will go toward the vegetation management program. Prescribed burning is also used instead of logging about 30 percent of the time to help manage around 4,400 acres each year over the past 20 years.

Along with logging, monument proponents want to eliminate commercial mining (no commercial mines currently exist in the forest), and phase out grazing. There are currently 3,455 permitted livestock that can graze on about 775,000 acres via 19 permits.

Rancher Greg Harlan, owner of Harlan Ranch Co. based in Clovis, has one of those permits. For the past six years, he's had around 500 cows grazing in Sierra National Forest from March through September. He says being able to use the forest is "vital" to his business.

"If we lost those permits," he says, "the cows would either need to be sold or they would be taken out of state for the summer to summer-grass somewhere. Then you have trucking (and related costs)."

Monument supporters say grazing can negatively affect forest health, but Harlan says grazing done properly by working with the Forest Service can bolster the environment.

Wulff also sees the grazing program as wasteful. Sierra National Forest receives an annual allocation of \$140,000 for range permit administration, while fees collected to use the forest only totaled \$20,000. But Sierra National Forest's rangeland management specialist, Aimee Cox, says the forest is being managed in step with congressional direction and national policy, and that the Forest Service "has the obligation to contribute to the stability of the local economy by providing sustainable forage for qualified operators."

Wulff supports allowing the existing 283 mining claims to remain, which are each about 20 acres in size. Most are for gold panning. Gould says there is no active work

happening on these claims.

Ultimately, Wulff is looking to give the forest a future with a new vision. That future remains unclear, but Wulff hopes people will act “on the better part of their nature.” “It’s a contribution to this generation and future generations,” she says, “and I hope that people will think of it like that.”