

3035 N. Farris Avenue
Fresno
California 93705

29 Nov 66

John Preston, Wilderness Hearing Officer
c/o Superintendent
Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks
Three Rivers
California 93271

Dear Mr. Preston:

Regarding the National Park Service's wilderness proposals for Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. I request that the following statement be made a part of the hearing record.

CI speak as an individual. I have traveled throughout many parts of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks during the past fifteen years. My activities have ranged from technical climbing, backpacking, ski touring, and snowshoeing to hiking and general sight-seeing.

OIn general, I feel that the Park Service proposals are good ones, and I support them in all except two respects.

PThe first exception pertains to setbacks and buffer strips. In general, these seem to be excessive and serve no purpose other than one of administrative convenience. Failure to provide protection to these strips of de facto wilderness inevitably will result in pressure for "development", with a resultant erosion of esthetic values in the adjacent statutory wilderness.

PIn the Cedar Grove area I recommend that the wilderness boundary follow the base of the cliffs, except between Roaring River and Bubbs Creek it should be extended to the South Fork of Kings River. Tramway and other objectionable proposals would otherwise be inevitable in time.

VBetween Generals Highway and the canyon of the South Fork of Kings River the wilderness boundary should coincide with the park boundary. The Sugarloaf Creek area should be included at this time to avoid the necessity of initiating a separate action at a later date. The terms of the Wilderness Act seem to permit this.

The wilderness boundary should approach Generals Highway much more closely on its east side, although I would not presume to recommend its exact location. The proposed setback is far in excess of reason and would open this area to unwarranted developmental pressures.

The proposed "buffers" on the west side of the Hockett Wilderness and on the south side of Dennison Ridge should be eliminated for the same reason. The setback in the vicinity of Cleugh Cave appears to be excessive.

The second objection I have pertains to the proposed Disney development at Mineral King. Although outside the park, I feel that this development bears very directly upon the proposals for wilderness within the park. I am firmly opposed to Mr. Disney's plans because of their adverse effect on nearby park lands. I feel that the Park Service should do everything within its power to keep the character and size of the Mineral King development compatible with its location.

It should be remembered that Mineral King is an artificial "inholding" essentially surrounded by the park, and that the only reason for its exclusion when the park was created was because of the possibility of mineral resources. Since these never materialized, Mineral King should logically have been incorporated into the park. Because this action was not taken, the adjacent park lands are now in jeopardy.

The magnitude of the proposed development would be so great that irresistible pressures would be exerted against the adjacent park lands, with resultant erosion of wilderness values. The number of visitors Mr. Disney is planning for is so great that they could not possibly be entertained in the limited space at the bottom of Mineral King's valley. Multiple tramways and lifts would have to carry the masses of people out of the confines of the valley and onto the nearby ridge crests where the present park boundary lies. Mr. Disney's proponents tell us that it will be necessary to withdraw some land from the park in order to provide space on the ridge crests for mass recreation facilities. Additionally, they state that a non-wilderness buffer will have to be carved out of the proposed Sierra Crest Wilderness. In their own words, Disney's proponents have told us that his Mineral King development is incompatible with the presence of nearby park lands. They propose to resolve this conflict by destroying a portion of the park.

C Has either Mr. Disney or the U. S. Forest Service so much as looked at the topographic map of Mineral King, and compared it with that of Yosemite? I have, and I find the comparison most enlightening. Yosemite Valley is about seven linear miles in length, with an average width of about a half mile, giving an area of approximately 3.5 square miles. The valley of Mineral King is about 2.5 linear miles long, ranging from one-eighth to one-quarter mile in width, giving an area of approximately three-eighths of a square mile. The area of Mineral King's valley is approximately one-tenth that of Yosemite Valley!

P We are told that Yosemite has 3.7 million visitor days per year. The unfortunate effect of the impact of this much usage is all too apparent to anyone such as myself who sees Yosemite Valley throughout the year. The National Park Service itself seems to be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem created when a huge number of people is poured into a limited area such as Yosemite Valley, and drastic measures apparently will be required to cope with the problem.

Y Are Mr. Disney and the U. S. Forest Service oblivious to the situation in Yosemite when they propose putting 2.5 million people into Mineral King the first year, with an increase to four million projected? And this in an area only one-tenth the size of Yosemite Valley. As for the Forest Service, we can only speculate as to their reasons for encouraging such a crime against the natural resources under their control, and against the adjacent National Park lands as well. It is, however, hardly necessary to speculate as to Mr. Disney's motivations.

For reason's best known to themselves, the proponents of Mr. Disney's Mineral King extravaganza are grossly overstating the area's scenic resources. I speak from personal experience, having visited and hiked in the Mineral King area, when I say that its scenery is not sufficiently outstanding to draw visitors from across the nation, and even from around the world, as Disney's proponents claim. To state that people will come from afar to marvel at the supposed grandeur of Mineral King is grossly dishonest, for their first visit would assuredly be their last. Tiny Mineral King, one-tenth the size of Yosemite Valley, has far less than a tenth of the scenic and esthetic resources of Yosemite. The vast bulk of the auto-oriented

sightseers would be profoundly disappointed in Mineral King if it were merely scenery they were seeking. The only way Mr. Disney could draw worldwide fame to Mineral King would be by developing it very intensively in an artificial manner. Mr. Disney has proven himself a past-master in the art of entertaining people, and there is no reason to think he would fail to do so in Mineral King. For an entrepreneur of his acumen it seems quite certain that he is aware that the auto-oriented tourist would be disappointed in Mineral King in its natural state. He realizes that the only way to appeal to the masses is by very intensive development of hotels, lodges, stores, gift shops, tramways and other recreational developments which have little or no relationship to the area in which they are located.

I have no quarrel with the various forms of mass recreation, for our expanding population certainly requires it. I do feel, however, that the people would be better served if mass recreational developments were located in areas less remote than Mineral King, and closer to major population centers. And the remote areas, in turn, should be developed less intensively (if at all) in order to put them to their best possible use. To pour huge numbers of people from southern California into tiny and remote Mineral King seems grossly wasteful of a resource which is in very limited supply.

C It should be remembered that a great many of the Southern Californians who are clamoring for "entertainment" immigrated to that part of the state by choice. They went there knowing full well that the area was not noted for either its mountains or its ski facilities. Now to insist upon the rape of another portion of the state in an attempt to gratify their insatiable demands is an act of intolerable greed. Many other Californians came to this state in order to enjoy its natural beauty and the unparalleled opportunities for relaxation and pleasure amidst the Creator's handiwork. To destroy these works and substitute in their place the works of man would be a profoundly ignorant act of sacrilege.

P I believe that Mineral King should be developed to some extent, with the emphasis being on making the best possible use of the natural resources of both this area and the adjacent National Park wilderness without impairing or destroying them. This would mean blacktopping and widening the access road in places and developing the essentially untapped potential for public camping. Trail improvements compatible with access to the adjacent wilderness areas are called for in some places, and a more extensive trail system could be developed locally for one-day hiking and horseback riding. A minimum investment in road, trail, and camping facilities could accomodate a large number of people, thus relieving some of the pressure on other areas. This would still be compatible with Mineral King's role as a wilderness threshold area, and would help to relieve some of the pressure on other back-country access routes by encouraging access via Mineral King.

V In view of the above considerations regarding the development of Mineral King, I strongly recommend that the wilderness boundaries be extended to, or nearly to, the present access road in order to preclude the building of a high-speed highway into Mineral King. The direct result of this would be to protect the valley of the East Fork of Kaweah River, including the redwood groves, from extensive scarification of a high-standard highway. The indirect, but even more important result of this boundary adjustment would be to keep the magnitude and character of the Mineral King development compatible with the wilderness values in the surrounding park lands.

In addition, I urge that the boundaries of the Sierra Crest Wilderness and the Hockett Wilderness along the ridge crests adjacent to the Mineral King Game Refuge be retained as presently proposed. This would minimize the possibility of hordes of people, and the facilities which would be required to entertain them, being placed within sight and sound of the wilderness.

If the Forest Service and Mr. Disney refuse to modify their grandiose plans, I recommend that proceedings be instituted to incorporate Mineral King into the National Park.

Sincerely,

George W. Whitmore

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3035 N. Farris Avenue
Fresno
California 93705

7 Dec 66

Frank Kowski, Superintendent
Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks
Three Rivers
California 93271

Dear Mr. Kowski:

I am interested in obtaining a copy of the record of the recent Wilderness Hearings held in Fresno. Could you please let me know the cost of this?

C I have one of the information packets distributed in connection with the Wilderness Hearings. I found the information given regarding visitor use in the proposed Sierra Crest Wilderness to be quite helpful, but was disappointed to find that comparable information was not given for the proposed Hockett Wilderness. Also, in order to form valid opinions based upon such statistics, it would be necessary to know how those figures are related to the figures for the two parks as a whole. The information I would like is ----

Annual Visitor Use (1965, or other available year)

Sequoia National Park	Kings Canyon National Park	Sierra Crest Wilderness	Hockett Wilderness (1966)
(Or combined, if it is easier)			
(to state it in that manner.)			

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Visitors	<u>877,270</u>	<u>848,891</u>	40,000	<u>3,251</u>
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Visitor Days	<u>1,214,603</u>	<u>1,117,076</u>	300,000	<u>19,506</u>
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Y I would assume that the totals given in the first two columns would include the figures given for the wilderness areas, unless you stated otherwise.

What I am interested in determining is the relationship of auto-oriented usage to foot/horseback-oriented usage. In other words, auto usage versus back country usage. Possibly you could provide me with this information in some other form, if that would be more convenient for you.

Also, could you tell me whether you make any allowance for the fact that you probably have quite accurate data for automobile usage, while you are dependent upon visitor cooperation in obtaining back country usage data. (I know from personal observation that it is commonplace for hikers to ignore the trail registers.)

In the course of discussing the proposed Mineral King development, I find that most people assume that Disney will get what he wants regardless of any undesirable effects this may have upon the park. Since the outcome is a foregone conclusion, they see no point in discussing the matter further. I would greatly appreciate it if you

would let me know what the status of this development is. Have the decisions which affect the park already been made? Does any meaningful opportunity remain for private citizens to express opinions?

In particular, I notice that the Park Service is quoted in the newspaper as saying that a permit for access road construction is not dependent upon the outcome of the wilderness proposals, and could be granted at any time. Is this imminent? And, if so, what type of road standards will be authorized? Does any opportunity remain for citizens to express themselves on this? If so, where should letters be sent?

As for the proposed wilderness zoning within the park along the ridge crest boundaries adjacent to Mineral King, does the closure of the Wilderness Hearing record mean that there is no further opportunity for private citizens to express themselves on this? If this is not the case, could you please let me know where people should send letters?

Where should letters which pertain to the proposed use of Forest Service land within the Mineral King Game Refuge be sent, Or is this actually a closed matter on which further comment would be pointless?

I apologize for the inconvenience this letter will cause you, but at the same time would like to express my gratitude for your assistance.

Sincerely,

George W. Whitmore

P.S. While hiking on the South Fork of the Kaweah River last Sunday I observed very fresh cattle droppings and tracks upstream from Clough Cave. Does this cow(s) belong there at this time of year?

letter head

P. O. Box 485
Kingsburg, Calif. 93631

17 August 1968

Donald Livingston
Director of Planning
Fresno County Planning Commission
4499 E. Kings Canyon Road
Fresno, Calif. 93702

Dear Mr. Livingston:

Enclosed you will find a copy of a brief article I have written for the newsletter of the Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club. If you have any objection to this appearing in print, please contact the newsletter editor, Mark Massie, 1042 E. Pico Avenue, Fresno, 93704, (222-6340). The distribution of the newsletter is almost entirely to Sierra Club members, although a few copies are sent elsewhere. The Fresno Bee receives one.

I would like to be kept informed of meetings, etc. regarding the proposed Sierra Nevada and Sierra Foothills General Plan. You could substitute my name for that of Charles Cehrs on your distribution list, as Mr. Cehrs has simply been turning your mailings over to me.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

George W. Whitmore
Chairman, Conservation Committee

c/o P. O. Box 485
Kingsburg
California 93631

Editor
The Fresno Bee
1559 Van Ness Avenue
Fresno
California

9 September 1968

Dear Sir:

Your recent articles on recreation needs in the Sierra reflected Ron Taylor's usual bias in favor of mass recreation developments which, by their very nature, are commercially oriented and destructive of natural values.

I was surprised, however, to find your recent editorial and cartoon on the subject taking the same view. You state that "there is no need for a doctrinaire confrontation between conservationists and recreationists," and point out that there is "plenty of public land available to accomodate recreation without ruining wilderness."

Apparently you fail to realize that the conservationists agree wholeheartedly with this. For you proceed to attack conservation groups with the hackneyed propaganda phrase about wanting to "lock up" the mountains for selfish reasons; and in an attempt to prove your point you quote a Sierra Club spokesman out of context, distorting his meaning in the process. The more complete quotation in Taylor's article amply illustrates that your editorial has distorted the statement. And your cartoon showing smugly complacent conservationists keeping the forlorn recreationists from the wilderness exceeds the bounds of decency and common sense by agitating still further for the very confrontation which you (and the conservationists) agree is not necessary.

May I suggest that you take the trouble to acquaint yourself more fully with the Sierra Club's ideals, beliefs, and objectives? You would find that the club is waging a vigorous battle in defense of the public interest. Because the welfare of the general public frequently is in conflict with that of the commercial and industrial interests, the club has been subjected to continual attack by these commercial elements. It is most unfortunate that you have chosen to join in this harrassment, for it puts you directly in that camp which cries "the public be damned" as it presses its incessant quest for profits.

Yours truly,

George W. Whitmore

Chairman, Conservation Committee

(If you choose to publish the above letter you may use my name, but please do not identify me as being a Sierra Club member.)