



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

October 10, 2007

Ms. Phyllis K. Fong
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S. W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Inspector General Fong:

As members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior and Environment, we write to you with a request to look into a matter concerning logging projects in the Giant Sequoia National Monument (GSNM). We are concerned that despite the Presidential Proclamation creating the Monument, which stated that “no portion of the monument shall be considered to be suited for timber production,” logging occurred in the Monument that may violate this directive.

More specifically, we are interested in learning more about the logging projects in the Giant Sequoia National Monument (GSNM) conducted in the Trail of 100 Giants that may have been in violation of laws, and may have also harmed the natural ecology of the sequoia forest ecosystems. In your review of this issue, we call to your attention verbal and written testimony of the Agriculture Department and the Forest Service to the House Interior and Environment Appropriations Committee in hearings in 2006 and 2007 and material provided by Forest Service in response to questions submitted for the record on the GSNM logging project.

As you know, the GSNM was created by Presidential Proclamation in 2000 for the express purposes of restricting new road building and logging projects in order to protect the sequoia forests. However, in 2004 and 2005, a large logging project was conducted in the premiere tourist destination in the GSNM, the Trail of 100 Giants; the very spot where President Clinton proclaimed the Monument. This logging project apparently resulted in a number of centuries-old trees being logged as “hazard trees” and sent to the local timber mill as prime saw timber. In September of 2007, the Forest Service implemented another project which used chainsaws to cut into small pieces several hundred feet of the downed trees that had been left on the ground in the trail area for two to three years.

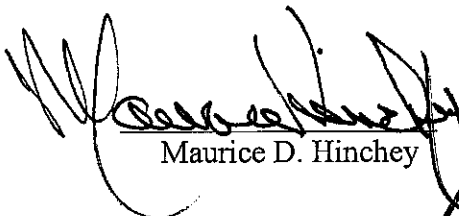
Several conservation groups maintain that these logging projects violated one or more laws, including NEPA, NFMA, and the APA. We have enclosed papers that

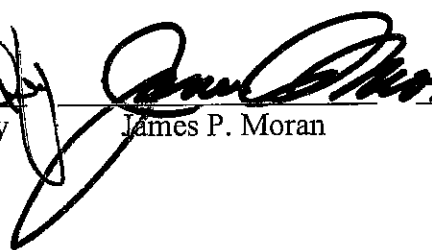
documents these alleged violations which include failure to: 1) provide adequate public notice; 2) provide an adequate public comment period; 3) perform adequate environmental reviews; 4) conform to Best Management Practices provided for in the Sequoia LRMP (Land and Resource Management Plan; 5) conform to the Sequoia LRMP's Mediated Settlement Agreement; and 6) follow Hazard Tree Guidelines for Alternatives. The conservation groups maintain that the Forest Service inappropriately applied categorical exclusion and arbitrarily segmented the project.

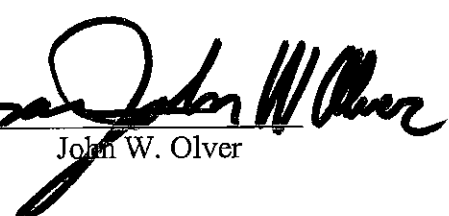
We would appreciate your careful review of these papers and look forward to receiving your comments as to the veracity and substance of the allegations they identify. The Giant Sequoia National Monument contains approximately 50 percent of the world's remaining sequoias, which are the largest trees on earth and are found naturally nowhere else on earth. If these allegations prove true, it raises some fundamental concerns about public confidence and commitment of the Forest Service to properly manage these national resources.

We thank you for your consideration of this request and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


Maurice D. Hinchey


James P. Moran


John W. Olver

Enclosures