

Kern Valley Sun (CA)

Travel Management meeting stirs up community

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Kern Valley Sun

Last Monday evening, the US Forest Service held a second meeting in the Kern River Valley to inform the public about the Sequoia National Forest (SNF) Travel Management Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The meeting, held at the Senior Center in Lake Isabella, was not part of the original series of five public meetings which were held in Bakersfield, Porterville, Ridgecrest and Kernville. Concerned about the somewhat limited community turnout at earlier meetings, Tina Terrell, Forest Supervisor decided to add two additional meetings, one in Lake Isabella and another in Castaic on March 24. If the 200 plus attendance at the Monday's meeting was any indication, Terrell got her wish.

In her opening remarks, Terrell reiterated her comments of previous meetings stating over the next several years, "All national forests in California will designate a system of roads and trails for motorized OHV use that will enhance quality recreation opportunities, promote public safety and protect natural resources." The DEIS is available on the web, on CD and in a 500 plus page document that the public can examine and comment on up until the March 31, 2009 deadline. The public were assured that all written comments with the necessary contact information provided will receive a written response from the USFS.

Chris Sanders, a Project Leader with the US Forest Service, then took the floor and gave a brief administrative history of Lake Isabella and the Lake Isabella Master Plan which was created by the Corps of Engineers in 1979. The plan though signed off on and in place has rarely been enforced during the 20 years since its development. Unlike the previous meetings which also dealt with Breckenridge, Greenhorn and the Piutes, Monday's workshop focused primarily on Travel Management surrounding Lake Isabella.

Terrell then fielded the plethora of questions from the public and responded to their comments. She reiterated over and over again that while she was pleased to address all comments, in order for them to be effective the public needed to write them down and



Brandon Muncy/Kern Valley Sun

Chris Horgan of Stewards of the Sequoias addresses a rather raucous crowd at the March 23 US Forest Service meeting held to inform the public about the Sequoia National Forest Travel Management Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

submit them either by using one of the cards provided at the meeting or by submitting them by mail, fax or email prior to the deadline date.

The majority of public comments were overwhelming negative about any proposed action on the part of the USFS. Concerns dealt mostly with potential economic impact, reduced access to the lake and possible imposition of fees at a later date. Terrell stated repeatedly that a plan must be implemented by law and that it is only the components of such a plan that are yet to be defined. Referring to the original Lake Isabella Master Plan Terrell stated, “This plan is only a starting point. When the land was given to the USFS by the Corps, the plan came along with it. It is my hope that we can take that plan and make it better; take some parts out and keep some in.”

During the public comment portion of the meeting, Chris Horgan of Stewards of the Sequoia, along with several other members of the on-the-ground volunteer organization displayed maps with trails and roads facing potential closure clearly highlighted in red. Horgan, stated that Stewards had developed the maps in an effort to assist the USFS in “their attempt to be transparent during the process”. He later stated, “It is clear that the public wants the access to remain open.”

When asked for his take on the public reaction to the meeting, Sanders stated, “We understand that people are very passionate about the lake. We realize that our (USFS) process is hard to fully understand. That’s why we felt it was important to give the community another opportunity to participate in that process.”

The public was then invited to participate in the Open House portion of the meeting and was encouraged to visit the various workshop tables and converse with Forest Service staff. Unfortunately, a large portion of meeting attendees chose to not engage in one-on-one dialogue with USFS representatives and did not take the opportunity to highlight provided maps with areas of concern.

For additional information on the proposed five DEIS alternatives, visit the United States Forest Service website at www.fs.fed.us/r5/sequoia/. Comments will be analyzed and responded to on an individual basis. E-mail should be sent to comments-pacificsouthwest-sequoia@fs.fed.us. “Travel Management Comments” must appear in the subject line. Written comments should be mailed to Chris Sanders, Travel Management Project, 1839 South Newcomb Street, Porterville, CA 93257

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Comments

5 comment(s)

R. Lambert wrote on Mar 26, 2009 9:56 PM:

" The ohv issue is just the an excuse the forest service is using to limit access to all public land. The enviornmentlist and lobbieist in DC are the problem. To bad we can't eliminate them like the forest service wants to eliminate our access. This idea is a stupid plan. And their timing with the current local economy will only lead to conflict. "

Chuck Stern wrote on Mar 26, 2009 6:58 PM:

" I agree that some off road vehicles are a hazard to nature itself. To a lot of us the lake is the only place we can go to have peace and quiet. Physical therapy if you will for many of us that are disabled or the elderly with limited motion. The lake is our only source of enjoyment or recreation. public access tho these shores must stay stay at all cost. "

Valley-ite wrote on Mar 26, 2009 7:26 AM:

" What this article doesn't tell you is that they want to stop all vehicles from parking at the lakeshore. Since our lake is so low, parking above the high water line means walking a mile to get to the water! Send your letters! Don't let them do this! This is OUR land, we the citizens own this property! "

Spencer Thompson wrote on Mar 25, 2009 6:28 PM:

" What I want to know is, who thought this up? They're supposed to be PUBLIC SERVANTS, but clearly the public doesn't want any of this, so who are they serving? Not us! "They" think there's too many off-highway vehicles buzzing around the lake: I happen to agree, so how about some ENFORCEMENT of existing laws? ONE ranger could do it, it's not that big, and once the word got out that there was some enforcement (instead of none), the OHVs would stay away. Instead they're swatting a fly with a sledgehammer. "

ART wrote on Mar 25, 2009 2:48 PM:

" Boy! Dont let the forest service get away with this! Fight fight fight! "