Expect Change

We often think of parks as outdoor museums. Caretaking a living ecosystem, however, is very different than protecting unchanging objects.

Both natural features *and* human facilities may be different each time you visit Both are changing all the time. How we take care of those features and facilities may also affect your visit. You won't notice the ozone-monitoring equipment working 24 hours a day, but you will see other activities such as revegetation, road work, painting, or trail maintenance. Some activities may unavoidably affect you, such as smoke from a prescribed fire or campsite closures due to revegetation or bear activity.

The park staff uses these actions as tools to maintain the landscape and protect its inhabitants and visitors. Your visit gives you but a snapshot of the process of park management. Nature decides the timing of many of these actions, but they all share one goal: preservation of these parks for us all, now *and* in the future.

Fire: A Long-Lost Partner

Have you ever accused someone of something only to discover that you were wrong? In parks and forests nationwide, we have learned that an accused vandal is actually an important partner. That partner is fire.

Fire in the Sierra usually hugs the ground. Its low flames clear dangerous built-up fuels. Without this, the fuels would feed intense, hard-to-control wildfires. The natural burn pattern includes occasional hot spots. These leave important openings in the forest — the sunny, bare places where sequoia trees regenerate best.
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Years ago, we tried to banish fire from the landscape because we believed it was destructive. In sequoia groves, that meant putting out lightning-caused fires that naturally start as frequently as every 5 to 15 years.

As time passed, we saw unanticipated consequences for park resources. It turned out that fire suppression blocked important ecological processes and caused many problems. Two stand out:

First, sequoias were not reproducing. We learned that fires are critical to sequoia regeneration. They create a fertile ash seedbed and open the forest canopy, allowing sunlight to reach the seedlings.

Second, a vast accumulation of dead wood and small, dense white fir trees now increase wildland fire hazards. Natural fires used to burn away these excess fuels. Now, after fire's long absence, these fuels cause bigger blazes that are more dangerous for people, plants, and wildlife. They burn hotter and are harder to put out.

To protect human safety and benefit giant sequoia trees, the National Park Service has taken steps to end this misunderstanding about fire. For over 30 years at Sequoia and Kings Canyon, we have studied fire and its effects on the land. When and where it's appropriate, we ignite prescribed fires and allow lightning-caused fires to spread naturally and improve resource conditions.

We see strong evidence that working with this powerful natural partner is better than resisting it – we are successfully reducing fuels and stimulating sequoia growth with the help of fire.

Why is this important? The National Park System exists to conserve resources "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." Early rangers thought that aggressive fire suppression met this goal. A more complete understanding of fire tells us that excluding this important natural partner only hurts what we are trying to protect.

Big Snowpack = High Water, Snowy Trails

Last winter brought heavy snowfall late into the spring. The result may include several things to take into account:

- Rivers and creeks staying high and cold later in the season than usual. Be extremely careful!
- High Sierra trails staying snowy and slippery into July, especially on north-facing slopes. Ask a ranger about conditions before you go.
- An extra-long mosquito season. Protect yourself with repellent.
- A beautiful wildflower season. Enjoy!

WILDERNESS OVERNIGHTS

To preserve the wilderness environment and experience, each park trail has a daily entry quota for overnight trips. A permit is required for each party (including solo travellers). Permits are not required for park day hikes or for overnights in the Monarch and Jennie Lakes wildernesses in the national forest.

Get your permit at the park ranger station nearest your trailhead (see pages 8 & 9). There is a backcountry camping fee between mid-May and late September.

First-come, first-served permits can be issued the morning of your trip or after 1pm the day before. If the quota for your desired trail is full, you can choose another trail or another day to start.

Reserved permits must be picked up between the afternoon before and 9am on your day of departure. If delayed, call the ranger station or you may forfeit your reservation.

Permits are not issued late in the day as minimum distances must be reached before you camp. Camping in the park's "frontcountry" is permitted only in campgrounds; camping or sleeping in vehicles is not allowed in parking lots, pull-outs, picnic areas, or trailheads in the park.

Requests to reserve a trail-entry date are accepted starting March 1 and at least 3 weeks before your trip's start date:

Wilderness Permit Reservations
Sequoia & Kings Canyon N.P.
47050 Generals Highway #60
Three Rivers, CA 93271
1-559-565-3766
Fax 1-559-565-4239

Get a copy of *Backcountry Basics* at visitor centers or by mail for free details on wilderness, or see www.nps.gov/seki/bcinfo.htm.

BACKCOUNTRY LODGES

- **BEARPAW MEADOW CAMP (DNCPR) www.visitsequoia.com Reservations required: 1-888-252-5757. Open mid-June-September 5, weather permitting. This tent hotel is at 7800´ on the High Sierra Trail, an 11-mile hike from Giant Forest.**