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**PROTECTING
NATURAL
RESOURCES**

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Sent via email to: comments-pacificsouthwest-sequoia@fs.fed.us

Alfred Watson – District Ranger
Rachel Smith – Acting Forest Supervisor

cc: Ara Marderosian
Alison Sheehy
Penelope Shibley
Stephen Montgomery

Subject: Request for Definitive Timeline regarding the Piute Mountains Travel
Management Analysis and EIS

Mr. Watson and Ms. Smith,

Sequoia ForestKeeper (SFK), the Kern-Kaweah Chapter of the Sierra Club (the Club), and other interested parties have now been waiting for over eight years since we submitted scoping comments for the proposed Piute Mountains Travel Management Plan (TMP). *See Exhibit A* (SFK & the Club’s Scoping Comments, submitted on March 21, 2011, exhibits excluded).

This process, however, started much earlier, and according to the Project web site:

The travel management planning process for the Piute Mountains area of the Sequoia National Forest was put on hold after the Piute Fire burned through the area in July 2008, in order to evaluate site conditons [sic] and allow this area to recover. The Forest Supervisor decided in August 2010 that sufficient reforestation and road reconstruction had occurred to initiate the Piute Mountains Travel Management Project. The project is currently on hold while data is being gathered.

See <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34119> (last visited on May 16, 2019).

The project was initially scoped as a part of the 2007 Sequoia TMP, but has now been “on hold” since 2012 (the date of last posted document to project website).

The Piute Mountains TMP is required by the 2005 Travel Management Rule, which is a carefully crafted Forest Service rule adopted through formal rulemaking provisions that was issued after decades of public discourse and involvement. It reflects sound judgment by the agency and implements Executive Order 11644, as amended by Executive Order 11989.¹ The Travel

¹ President Nixon issued Executive Order 11644 in 1972 requiring the Forest Service to “establish policies and provide for procedures that will ensure that the use of off-road vehicles on public lands will be controlled and directed so as to protect the resources of those lands, to promote the safety of all users of those lands, and to minimize conflicts among the various uses of those lands.” E.O. 11644, § 1. The need for this Executive Order was

Management Rule requires the Forest Service to designate specific areas and trails open to off-road vehicle use; remaining areas are to be closed to motorized use. Designations are made through site-specific travel planning, and must be based upon protection of public lands resources, promotion of the safety of all users, and minimization of environmental impacts and conflicts among uses. The rule provides a national framework to make motorized designations at the local level, with public involvement, and allows the agency to strike an appropriate balance in managing all types of recreational activities.

With respect to the Piute Mountains TMP, the Sequoia National Forest has not complied with the Travel Management Rule. After nearly 15 years since the rule was finalized, this delay is unreasonable. The agency's compliance delay is particularly concerning due to the abundance of motorized roads and trails in the Piute Mountains, as well as continued allowance of motorized trails in a semi-primitive non-motorized area, which is also eligible for Wilderness designation (the Woolstaff Inventoried Roadless Area). Failure to consider whether to continue allowing motorized travel in the Piute Mountains of the Sequoia National Forest is not sound policy and flies in the face of the agency's own regulations, rules, guidance, and best available science. It is also unlawful. 5 U.S.C. § 706(1).

We strongly urge the Forest Service to restart the planning process, and we request that you provide us with a definitive schedule for its completion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'René Voss', with a stylized flourish at the end.

René Voss – Attorney at Law

due to the large number of off-road recreational vehicles being used on public lands that were “in frequent conflict with wise land and resource management practices, environmental values, and other types of recreational activity,” which demonstrated the need for a “unified Federal policy toward the use of such vehicles on public lands.” Id.