

Mining

Sequoia National Forest

Giant Sequoia National Monument



Early History

Gold was first discovered on Greenhorn Creek near the Kern River in 1851 by an exploration party sent out by John C. Fremont. This discovery led to the first Kern River gold rush. With the discovery of placer gold in the Kern River in 1854, miners came in search of a “strike” and signaled the start of small community settlements.

Mining Opportunities

Nearly all National Forest (NF) System land is open and available for prospecting and mining. However, most areas along rivers and streams have already been “staked” with placer claims. If your primary interest is panning for gold, you must make arrangements with the mining claimant to work on their claim. To determine if there is already a claim in the area of interest, you may refer to the computerized file of mining claims at: www.geocommunicator.gov. Mining claims may be found here under *Land and Mineral Use Records*, using the “LR2000” link.

In addition to valid mining claims, some areas have been withdrawn from mineral entry to protect resource values. This means they are not open to mining, prospecting, or mineral removal, which includes gold panning. Wilderness areas, Special Management Areas, and the Giant Sequoia National Monument are not open to mineral entry.

The North and South Forks of the Kern River are not open to dredging. Gold panning is allowed on the North Fork and on the portions of the South Fork that are outside of the declared Wilderness areas. No mining is allowed on the Kings River within the Sequoia National Forest (SQF).

There is a significant amount of private land within the SQF. These private in-holdings are not always fenced or marked on the ground. It is your responsibility to know if you are on private or NF land. Permission of the landowner is required for any use of private land.

Why file a Mining Claim?

United States mining laws provide a statutory right, subject to limitations of law, to enter upon public lands to search for minerals. The mining claim grants the locator the exclusive right to explore for and develop the

locatable minerals, plus the right to use the surface resources to the extent required for a mining operation.

Recording a Mining Claim

The claimant must file a copy of the location notice of the claim in the recorder's office of the county in which the claim lies and with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) State Office in Sacramento within 90 days of locating the claim. The claim must be on Federally administered land open to mineral entry. Once the claim is established, the claim owner must pay an annual maintenance fee to verify active interest in the claim, or perform labor worth an amount equal to the annual maintenance fee per claim annually if they qualify for the “small miners’ exemption.” The notice of annual assessment work (proof of labor) must be filed with the County Recorder and the BLM. The assessment notice must be received by the BLM on or before December 30 of each year. If the assessment work is not filed in a timely manner (even one day late) the mining claim will be determined to be conclusively abandoned.

What rules apply to suction dredges?

The use of dredges and other motorized equipment is allowed year round in the lower Kern River (below Isabella Reservoir), but may require a Plan of Operations (PoO) from the Forest Service. Contact the Kern River Ranger District for more information. Dredging is not allowed in the North or South Forks of the Kern River (or their tributaries), on the Kings River within the NF, nor anywhere within the Giant Sequoia National Monument.

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United States
Department of Agriculture



Forest Service
Pacific Southwest Region
www.fs.fed.us/r5/

Sequoia National Forest
www.fs.fed.us/r5/sequoia/

What regulations apply concerning placer and lode mining and the use of mechanized equipment?

A Notice of Intent to operate must be submitted to the District Ranger prior to conducting any operations that might cause a significant disturbance of surface resources. Depending on the degree of disturbance, a PoO may be required. Buildings and roads may not be constructed without an approved PoO. Gold panning is not considered to cause significant disturbance and does not require a Notice of Intent. It is always a good idea to check with the local Ranger District office for any special rules or policies applicable in the area in which you plan to pan for gold.

Before Purchasing a Mining Claim

The ancient adage of “Buyer Beware” is certainly true, because there are wide margins for errors due to general misunderstandings of the mining laws, and outright schemes and fraudulent misrepresentations by those less than honest. It is wise to contact your local Forest Service Minerals Administrator before making any commitment to purchase a mining claim.

When you acquire a mining claim, you are acquiring an interest in the mineral deposit only. The surface resources, such as timber, are still government property and subject to management and/or disposal by the Forest Service. Additionally, the public has the right to recreate (hunt, fish, camp, etc.) on the claim area, provided the activity does not interfere with the mining operation.

What other regulations apply?

Camping within the Forest is limited to 14 days in a 30-day period, or no more than 30 days in a calendar year. A campfire permit is required prior to building a fire or using a portable stove. The fire/stove should be in an area cleared of all flammable material for a radius of five feet. Campfire permits are available at any FS office.

All internal combustion engines must be equipped with an approved spark arrestor. Motorized cross country travel is prohibited.

PLEASE OBSERVE ALL RECREATION AND CAMPING RULES, AND REMEMBER, ALL STATE AND COUNTY ORDINANCES APPLY TO NATIONAL FOREST LANDS.

Think Safety Near Abandoned Mines

While exploring the forest, one may discover an old mine site. Abandoned mines can be intriguing, but they can also be deadly. Unsafe ladders, hidden shafts, pools of deep water and bad air are common features that can turn a day of exploring into a day of tragedy. **STAY OUT AND STAY ALIVE!**

For more information:

Forest Supervisor's Office

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559-784-1500
FAX 559-781-4744
TDD 559-781-6650

Kern River Ranger District

Kernville Office
105 Whitney Road
PO Box 9
Kernville, CA 93238
760-376-3781

Kern River Ranger District

Lake Isabella Office
4875 Ponderosa Drive
PO Box 3810
Lake Isabella, CA 93240
760-379-5646

Hume Lake Ranger District

35860 East Kings Canyon Road
Dunlap, CA 93621
559-338-2251

Tule River & Hot Springs Ranger Districts

32588 Hwy 190
Springville, CA 93265
559-539-2607

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