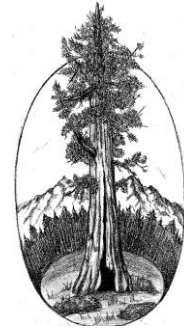




NEWS Sequoia National Forest
Giant Sequoia National Monument
Western Divide Ranger District



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Date: December 9, 2011

www.fs.fed.us/r5/sequoia

Forest Plans to Repair Trail of 100 Giants and Needles Lookout

SEQUOIA NATIONAL FOREST Two letters are being distributed to interested parties in coming weeks regarding both the fallen sequoias at Trail of 100 Giants and the Needles Fire Lookout Tower. These letters are the official notification to the public of a proposed action planned by the U.S. Forest Service and initiate the scoping process. A decision will be made by the District Ranger based on comments received in response to these letters. Currently, these project sites are inaccessible due to snow. A decision will likely be made over the winter months on how to proceed with these two projects and implementation could potentially begin next summer.

Trail of 100 Giants

On Friday, September 30, 2011, two giant sequoia trees fell side by side across the Trail of 100 Giants, a popular recreation site in the Giant Sequoia National Monument, Sequoia National Forest. These two sequoias are joined together at the base, appearing as one for approximately 30 feet. The trees were estimated at 280 feet tall and 17-foot in diameter. The Trail of 100 Giants was dedicated in 1989, and refurbished in 1997 to meet requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

After reviewing over 150 public suggestions and having Forest Engineers conduct a field review to assess feasibility, the Sequoia National Forest plans to build an elevated boardwalk that connects the trail from the remaining northern-most bridge on the south side of the fallen sequoias, to the existing trail on the east-side. This proposal would restore the ADA loop opportunity at Trail of 100 Giants, and provide a safe environment for the public to view and experience the fallen sequoias.

“A boardwalk will allow all visitors, including those with disabilities, to safely see and touch the fallen sequoias, and the hole left by the root system,” stated Priscilla Summers, District Ranger. “In the future, interpretive signs could be installed to describe what happened there, along with the history of giant sequoias and their ecosystem.”

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Needles Fire Lookout

On July 28, 2011, the Needles Fire Lookout was destroyed in a structure fire. The lookout and tower was constructed in 1937 and 1938 by the Civilian Conservation Corps atop the Needles rock formation at 8,245 feet. The lookout overlooked the Kern River Drainage, Mt. Whitney, Olancho Peak, Farewell Gap, and Dome Rock. The Needles Lookout was one of the most popular places to visit on the Western Divide Ranger District and provided a communication link with the backcountry, where cell phones do not work

The Forest Service proposes to construct a new lookout tower with the same “look and feel” as the original tower on the same site. The lookout will comply with current building codes and safety requirements, and be constructed out of durable materials. The living and working conditions of the lookout cab will be functional and efficient. All electronic equipment will be replaced with what is currently available, and provide communication for both firefighters and backcountry users.

“There has been strong enthusiasm from many members of the public to rebuild the lookout in its current location,” stated Summers. “The Forest Service has received approximately thirty-two letters and a number of phone calls regarding the lookout, nearly all in favor of replacing this nationally recognized site.”

Forest officials are working with our partners, the Giant Sequoia National Monument Association, Buck Rock Foundation, Sierra Club, and other cooperators in support of our efforts. To obtain more information or provide comment regarding either the plan to build a boardwalk at Trail of 100 Giants, or rebuild the Needles Fire Lookout Tower, please contact Anne Thomas via email at mariannethomas@fs.fed.us or call 559-539-2607 ext. 270. Comments are due January 9, 2012.

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