March 22, 2012

Dear Interested Party:

We are writing to inform you of actions that the National Park Service at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks (Parks) are taking that may affect fieldwork in the Parks this summer, specifically in regards to contracting with commercial pack stock outfitters.

The National Park Service has been constrained by a court ruling from authorizing commercial pack stock use in Wilderness areas of the Parks. This action will impact operations of commercial pack stock outfitters, and other groups that utilize commercial pack stock operations to support their activities in our Parks’ Wilderness. As soon as the court rules, we will inform you of the implications of the court order.

We understand that this may impact your scheduling of trips for this summer, if you utilize pack stock to support your Wilderness activities, and we regret the uncertainty that this situation presents.

As you may know, the High Sierra Hiker’s Association (HSHA) sued the Parks in September 2009, alleging that the Parks’ 2007 General Management Plan (GMP) violated the National Park Service Organic Act, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Wilderness Act by allowing excessive amounts of pack stock use, including commercial use, in the Parks. The HSHA specifically claimed that the Parks’ authorization of commercial pack stock use in wilderness areas of the Parks was unlawful.

On January 24, 2012, Federal District Court Judge Richard Seeborg ruled that, although the GMP did not violate the Organic Act or NEPA, the GMP did violate the Wilderness Act. The ruling states that the GMP did not make a specific determination “extent necessary” as to the extent that commercial pack stock operations were necessary to realize the wilderness purposes of the Parks.

The Parks and HSHA have a court-scheduled hearing on May 23, 2012, to address what remedial action should be taken to address the violation of the Wilderness Act. The remedy may
determine what amount, if any, of commercial pack stock use may be allowed in the Parks’ wilderness until the Wilderness Act extent necessary determination is completed.

Because the matter is still in litigation, if you have any questions about the court’s ruling or the litigation, please contact the attorney representing the Parks: Gregory Lind, Assistant Field Solicitor, Office of the Solicitor, and U.S. Department of the Interior, at (415) 296-3386. For any questions specific to research permits, please contact our Science Coordinator, Dr. Koren Nydick at (559) 565-4292.

We regret the uncertainty that this situation presents for our Parks’ visitors and partners.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Karen F. Taylor-Goodrich
Superintendent

cc: Commercial Services Program Manager, Pacific West Region
    Assistant Field Solicitor, Office of the Solicitor