

# STEWARDS OF THE SEQUOIA

Division of CTUC non profit 501c3  
PO Box 1246  
Wofford Heights CA 93285

August 2, 2017

Director Lisa Mangat  
California State Parks  
1416 Ninth Street  
Sacramento CA 95814

Dear Director Mangat,

I wanted to inform you of a situation in Red Rocks Canyon State Park requiring your attention.

Recently some of our Stewards of the Sequoia members and partner organizations voiced concerns over the temporary closure of Nightmare Gulch which surprisingly is still closed after four years, as well as the stonewalling they felt they were getting from Tehachapi Superintendent Russ Dingman over the past several years.

On 5/17/17 I talked on the phone with Superintendent Dingman to try to find out more about the 2013 temporary closure of Nightmare Gulch trail to motorized use-

He told me his office is going through planning process internally

He offered that there are the following issues-

- Public safety major washout
- Cultural resource species issues which he feels cannot be resolved unless there is strong support during planning to reopen the route
- Route may not be sustainability

That there is a Temporary Closure which has been reevaluated by himself and his staff each year, but he cannot provide copies of those re-evaluations since they are internal documents

They have Internal documents regarding the specific washout and species issues being looked at by department. These are not available to public.

I asked what the concern was that triggered the closure and he informed me it is not public information.

I asked what measures his office had taken to fix the problem and he informed me it was not public information.

I told him each of these items were public information and he again informed me there were internal documents that could not be provided to the public.

He noted they are working with regulatory agencies and OHMVR

He is trying to have a resolution

He is frustrated with process

The public is entitled to see the documents but the decision is above pay grade

He is trying to get general plan moving forward so documents can be released

I mentioned that Bakersfield Trailblazers and Ridgecrest Gear Grinders have repeatedly offered over the years to volunteer to fix any problems. He will pass information on to Matt Williams Ranger and Ivonne Houston Superintendant so they can tell us about other volunteer opportunities.

Neither Matt or Ivonne contacted us about volunteer projects after my phone call. At the 7/27/17 Public Roundtable Meeting in Ridgecrest Dingman asked if we had been contacted and told me that Matt would contact me and the Trailblazers about volunteering. We have heard nothing as of yet.

Both Trailblazers and Geargrinders have a past history of active volunteerism with other agencies.

Stewards of the Sequoia is the largest on the ground volunteer organization in the Sequoia National Forest. In 2015 we performed over 83% of all trail maintenance in the Sequoia. We have worked on over 3100 miles of trails over the past 13 years. For State Parks Management to not take advantage of our kind of resources is negligent.

I requested the documentation that Superintendent Dingman insisted was not public information from State Parks and it was provided to me on a CD four days ago.

The only closure order was the temporary one from 2013. There is no documentation indicating that Superintendent Dingman or his staff re-evaluated the closure or considered any actions to reopen the trail as he claims. Instead he repeatedly turned volunteers away.

It is certainly understandable and efficient to use boilerplate when responding to a large volume of the same type of request. However according to the documents we received Dingman chose to create boilerplate in order to respond to four people who emailed him asking the status of Nightmare Gulch over a period of 3 years (Joe Rodriguez, Jeremy Rowell, Mr. Steinbrucker & Chuck Neilsen). Dingman even provided the boilerplate to Officer Matt Williams and other staff to use. When responding to Bakersfield Trailblazers and Ridgecrest Geargrinders who wanted to provide volunteers Dingman could not be bothered with providing a personal email or current facts. State Parks needs to do better than this.

In his boilerplate Dingman continues to cite the Red Rocks plan (that has been in process since 1994) as what the public needs to wait for to resolve all issues, meanwhile he subverts the process by using closure as his preferred management tool. Closure is an admission of failure.

There is a note captured by Kathleen Franklin in her 26.March.03 e-mail which appears to be hearsay from a private individual claiming that one Desert Tortoise was crushed by vehicles on Nightmare Gulch trail. There is no other mention of harm to Desert Tortoises in the area in any of the documentation your office provided. It appears based on this one hearsay comment that State Parks initiated a \$48,000 study in 2013 which found the Nightmare Gulch area was unsuitable Desert Tortoise habitat being too dry and rocky. Surely State Park biologist must have known this without a \$48,000 study. It seems this study was grasping at straws by anti OHV staff trying to manufacture some type of justification for the prior closure of Nightmare Gulch. Meanwhile not a penny for repairing the trail.

Ridgecrest Geargrinders informed State Parks Officer Matt Williams in writing on 10/23/13 and again on 1/28/2014 that damage to Nightmare Gulch trail was minimal and could be fixed by their volunteers, at no cost to State Parks, if only they would be given permission to. The Bakersfield Trailblazers also informed State Parks Officer Matt Williams in writing on 10/28/13 that they would be happy to repair the trail and that the work was not very significant. There is no record of State Parks responding in writing to either letter. Surprisingly neither the Gear Grinders or Trailblazer's letters of 2013 were included in the file to me from your office so I have attached them to this letter. Both groups followed up with emails and phone calls to Superintendent Dingman over a period of 3 years but he refused their help.

At the Public Roundtable meeting on 7/27/17 Dingman informed us that the 2013 temporary emergency closure of Nightmare Gulch was based on information from 1990 or 2000. I asked him if that meant State Parks waited 10-20 years in order to institute an emergency closure based on outdated information? A staffer from OHMVR cut me off and prevented Dingman from answering. Perhaps you can answer that. We find nothing in the documentation to justify the 4 year closure of Nightmare Gulch to historic motorized use.

There is a 5/23/17 email from you to Dingman about Nightmare Gulch, as well a 5/25/17 follow up from Karl Knapp in your office notifying Dingman that Jason Span is getting the following information together-

**From:** Knapp, Karl@Parks  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 25, 2017 2:30 PM  
**To:** Dingman, Russ@Parks  
**Subject:** Re: Nightmare Gulch

Russ,

I am working with Jason Spann to get an updated route inventory of Nightmare Gulch canyon. I

want to have updated conditions for our conversations. I am asking Jason to gather:

- slide size and extent
- if removed does this slide exacerbate future slide activity (removing slide toe etc.)
- GPS map location to overlay with our biological sensitive species data
- identify closest appropriate spoil disposal sites
- produce a route log

I am trying to get him on site soon so this information is available. Let me know if you can think of other inventory data that would be useful. He might need support to be shuttled, probably the best to park a rig at the south end and be dropped off at the gate on the north. Let me know your thoughts or if you disagree with this approach.

Thanks  
Karl

Dingman did not inform the public about this when asked if any mitigation work is being considered. Instead he just keeps saying the route is closed and his hands are tied, which is far from true.

Has Jason gotten this information together about ways to fix the trail? If so please provide it to us as it was not in the documents we received about Nightmare Gulch.

Motorized recreation like Nightmare Gulch is extremely important to local communities and tourism. State Parks needs to do everything possible to maintain existing motorized and other access to public lands under your care.

At this time we request that State Parks provide approval for volunteers to start work repairing Nightmare Gulch trail and reopen the route once repairs are completed. The public have been locked out of this important trail for far too long with no apparent justification.

We also ask you to replace Superintendent Dingman with someone who can reasonably manage the area using closure only as the very last resort, instead of the first and apparently only option. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Chris Horgan  
Executive Director  
Stewards of the Sequoia  
Division of CTUC 501c3 non profit  
[chris@stewardsofthesequoia.org](mailto:chris@stewardsofthesequoia.org)

CC: Brian Robertson, OHMVR  
Joe Rodriguez, Ridgecrest Geargrinders  
Jeremy Rowell, Bakersfield Trailblazers  
Ed Waldheim, Friends of Jawbone  
Amy Granat, CORVA  
Lorelie Oviat, Kern County Planning  
Supervisor Mick Gleason  
Congressman Kevin McCarthy  
CA Senator Jean Fuller

*"Since being founded in 2004, Stewards of the Sequoia continues to be the largest on-the-ground organization of volunteers in the Sequoia National Forest. Our crews have maintained over 3100 miles of trails and have planted hundreds of trees in reforestation projects. We represent in excess of 3000 members whose activities include camping, hunting, fishing, hiking, mountain biking, motorized recreation, boating, windsurfing, rock climbing and horse riding"*

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