



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0523**

April 2, 2020

The Honorable Vicki Christiansen  
Chief  
U.S. Forest Service  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Chief Christiansen:

On March 17, 2020, the Sequoia National Forest (SNF) Kern River Ranger District terminated a volunteer service agreement with the Stewards of the Sequoia to perform trail clearing, maintenance, and related work in the SNF. It appears the termination of this volunteer service agreement is not based on the performance of the Stewards' trail clearing and maintenance work, but rather on unrelated issues, such as the Stewards' website and a policy disagreement over the 2010 Piute Motorized Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). Unfortunately, the Kern River Ranger District letter not only appears to impugn the integrity of my constituents, but also seems to indicate the U.S. Forest Service does not believe that the Stewards support the mission of the U.S. Forest Service nor is the work the Stewards do in the SNF in the interest of the American people.

I am forwarding you a letter I received from Mr. Chris Horgan, Executive Director of the Stewards. Per this letter, he feels the Stewards are being retaliated against for its disagreement with the Ranger District over the 2010 Piute MVUM and because of alleged differences of opinion the Ranger District has with postings on the Stewards' website, culminating in what he believes is a violation of his First Amendment rights. Mr. Horgan asserts the 2010 Piute MVUM was inappropriately developed by the U.S. Forest Service and that Sequoia Forest Order 06-09 is still in effect showing all non-system trails as open for use, which also is consistent with the 2011 Piute Travel Management Notice of Intent map produced by the U.S. Forest Service. However, Mr. Horgan has told me that once the Ranger District directed the Stewards to stop clearing non-system trails per the 2010 Piute MVUM, the Stewards complied but he maintains his concerns with the 2010 Piute MVUM. Furthermore, Mr. Horgan asserts the Ranger District did not give him an opportunity to make changes to his website – something the Stewards has done in the past at the request of the Ranger District – before the volunteer service agreement was terminated.

Termination of this volunteer service agreement has resulted in no large-scale trail clearing or maintenance in the Kern River Ranger District part of the SNF, as the Stewards were the primary group engaged in this work. I am told this comes at a particularly inopportune time as this is the best time of year for trail work due to the weather. In addition, the Ranger District's actions appear to be contrary to the 10-Year Trial Shared Stewardship Challenge, which is a U.S. Forest Service policy to increase trail work volunteerism in the national forests.

My staff has been in contact with both U.S. Forest Service Pacific Southwest Regional Forester Randy Moore and Mr. Horgan over the Stewards' voluntary service agreement. My understanding is that Forester Moore and Mr. Horgan are working to enter into a mediation process, something that is challenging given the COVID-19 shelter in place order in the State of California, to try to resolve disagreements between the Ranger District and the Stewards with the intention of ultimately reinstating the Stewards' volunteer service agreement. Accordingly, I respectfully request that you carefully monitor these discussions and work with your teams in Region V and the Ranger District to ensure this mediation process can be quickly established and completed, that the Stewards' First Amendment rights are not violated, and that the decision to restore the Stewards' volunteer service agreement is based on this group's performance of its duties under this agreement, not on policy disagreements or website postings that are unrelated to the volunteer service agreement.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kevin McCarthy". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

KEVIN McCARTHY  
House Republican Leader

Enclosures

cc: Mr. Randy Moore  
Pacific Southwest Regional Forester  
U.S. Forest Service