

# Controversy *among the conifers*



Meetings will cover proposal to make sequoia groves a national monument

By Barbara E. Hernandez  
Times-Delta

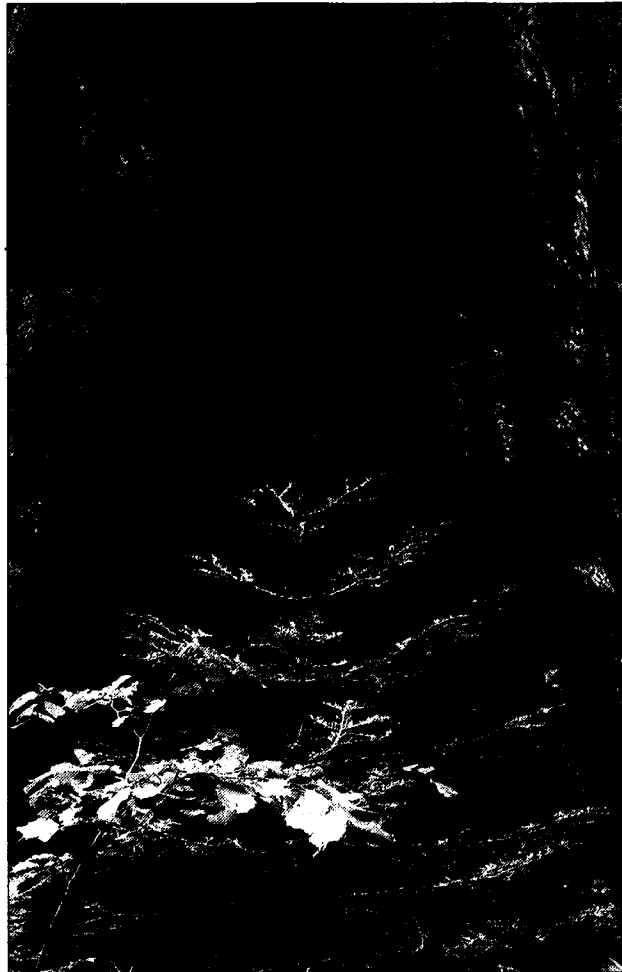
**SEQUOIA NATIONAL FOREST** — Controversial Clinton Administration plans for the future of giant sequoia groves in the Sequoia National Forest and their possible designation as a national monument will be aired at public meetings in Visalia and Fresno next week.

Even the way the meetings were scheduled was in dispute.

Initially, the forest service scheduled a three-day workshop in Visalia. That was cancelled, without explanation, and combined with a one-day meeting in Fresno.

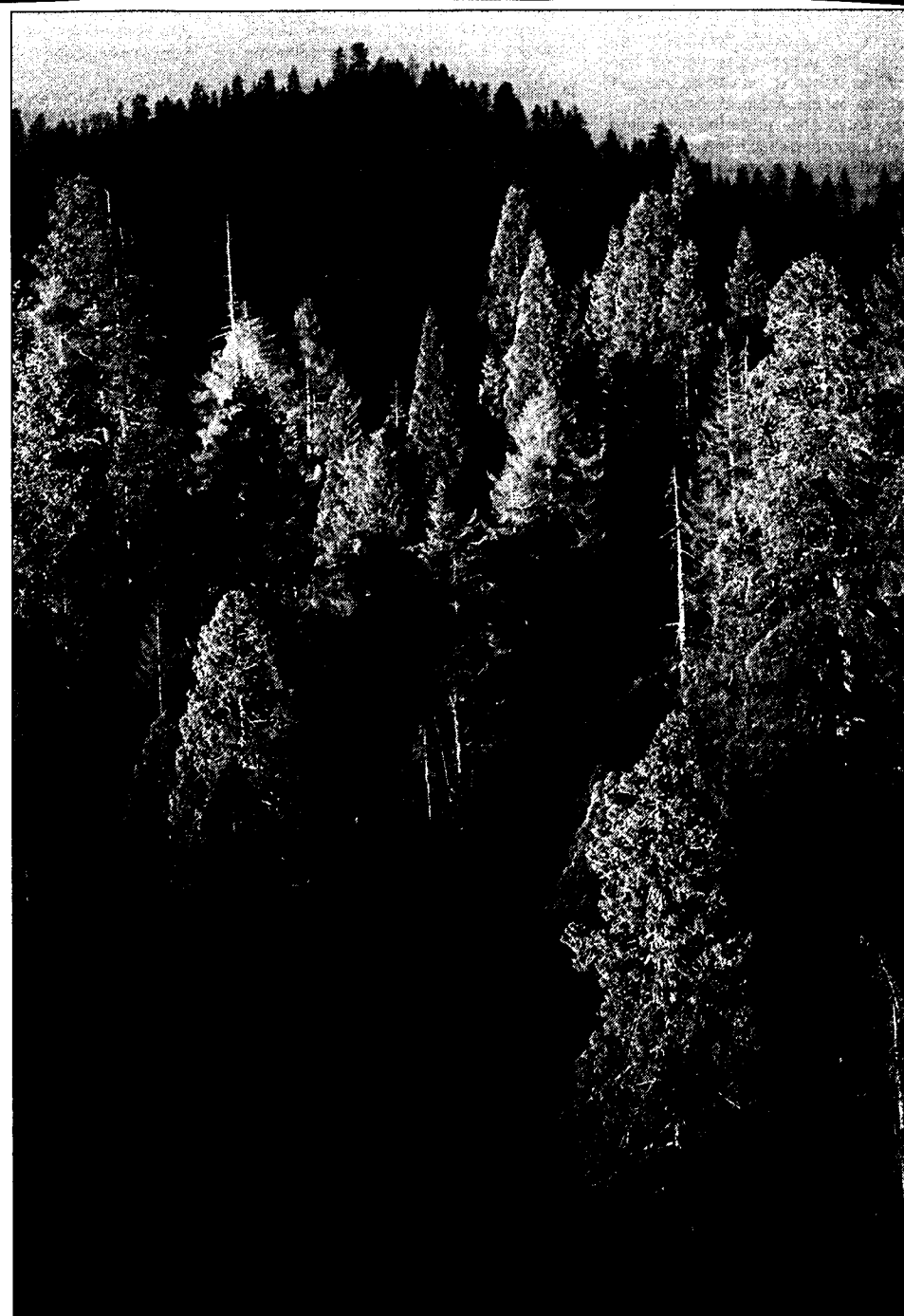
But after complaints from Rep. Bill Thomas, R-Bakersfield, and the Tulare County Farm Bureau, a one-day version of the Visalia meeting was rescheduled at the at the Visalia Convention Center.

"We thought it should go where it affects the most people and today we heard we're going to do it," said Jason Poblete, Thomas' press secretary. "The national forest reconsidered their position and they're doing to do the Visalia public meeting as well."



Teresa Hurteau/Times-Delta

A young redwood tree grows up next to a giant sequoia in Redwood Canyon in Sequoia National Forest in August 1999.



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## What's next

The new meeting forum will address a Feb. 14 President Clinton letter, which called for discussion on possibly making the groves a national monument.

The idea has been welcomed by environmentalists and condemned by property owners.

Joe Fontaine, a member of the Sierra Club's Sequoia Task Force, said environmental groups hope to propose their own national monument plan.

"We'd like to make a northern unit around the Hume Lake Ranger District and a southern unit south of Sequoia National Park," Fontaine said. "We think it'd be a mistake to have a national monument with a bunch of islands around it. Part of those groves should become national monuments as well."

Fontaine, a Tehachapi resident, said belief that the groves are already protected and managed in the national forest system is wrong. Most environmental groups, including Sierra Club and the National Resources Defense Council, fault the national

Public meetings to discuss the future of the giant sequoia groves will be from 5 to 10 p.m. Friday, March 17, at the Visalia Convention Center, 303 E. Acequia Ave. and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. March 18 at the Fresno County Fairgrounds Fine Arts Building, 1121 S. Chance Ave., Fresno.

forest for logging rather than prescribed burns to manage the sequoias.

"We are hoping it will be managed the way the national park manages their giant sequoia groves," he said.

But the groups do not propose ending all uses in the national forest. They believe livestock grazing, stock use and youth and church camps continue to use the land. Permit holders on federal land should have their rights respected as well as private land which would not be affected by the monument.

"If anything the national monument would enhance the value of property," Fontaine said.

Fontaine did say the group suggested old logging roads be used for four-wheel drive vehicles and motorcycles and trails left for hikers, cy-

clists and stock use.

"This will not be a wilderness area," Fontaine said. "You don't have to be a hiker

or rugged camper to see it." "Tulare County people now will have the opportunity to have their concerns

heard," Thomas said in a press release Thursday. "Past designations have had adverse effects on private

property and our area will be adversely affected if this designation is allowed to go through."



Teresa Hurteau/Times-Delta

**Top:** Redwood Canyon in the Sequoia National Forest has many sequoia groves and can be seen from a turnout along Generals Highway between Grant Grove and Giant Forest. The sequoias have rounded tops. **Above:** Nate Stevenson, with the U.S. Geological Survey, looks up toward the tops of sequoias in Sugarbowl Green in Redwood Canyon in August 1999.