



NEWS RELEASE

Sequoia National Forest and the Giant Sequoia National Monument

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Op-Ed – *Monumental Outlook Over the Horizon*

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Making Planning Easier and More Participatory for All Coming Closer Together on the Sequoia National Forest

Porterville, CA - Planners with the Sequoia National Forest and Giant Sequoia National Monument are experimenting with an approach that could make for profound changes to how people interact and communicate with land management agencies as it pertains to environmental documentation. “Multi-criteria decision support (MCDS) has the potential to make a big difference because it brings outreach and analysis into the same world” says Tina Terrell, Sequoia National Forest Supervisor.

On desktops and laptops, an interdisciplinary team of resource managers and planners uses multi-criteria decision support for the environmental analysis. On the web and in face-to-face workshops, the public uses it to test their values, understand the analysis, and comment directly “into” the tool. Having the public comment into the actual structure of the environmental analysis is more direct and arguably more powerful than commenting into a narrative that then must be translated and interpreted. A decision support system that incorporates public values creates a more direct and traceable feedback loop than generic comments.

Multi-criteria decision support has been around for over a hundred years. The Forest Service has looked at this decision support system before, but now because of computers and web tools off and on as this type of system provides several advantages:

- It does a great job of getting people to think about the many things that matter to them, not just the one or two that humans are capable of keeping in their heads.
- It automatically separates interests (criteria) and positions, which puts stakeholders on a good footing for interest-based negotiation. It’s the *Getting to Yes* matrix.
- It distinguishes between science and policy or values.
- It creates a clear and traceable record.

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Here's how the Sequoia National Forest and Giant Sequoia National Monument are working with a third party contractor (through the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict), in using Multi-Criteria Decision Support System on the Giant Sequoia National Monument Plan:

- The decision framework (<http://gsnmvibe.ecr.gov/df.html>) has been developed in collaboration with the public (and will continue to change and slim down with their participation).
- During general scoping, the Forest/Monument is asking the public to use the decision framework on the web to register their values (while also giving them some feedback for where the values might fall outside the Forest's decision space). The web application is called the "VIBE," the *values and interest-based explorer*. The public can see an example of the values gathering if you "weigh in" on the home page of the VIBE.
- During general scoping workshops, the public applied the decision framework to the proposed action and their proposed alternatives, thus generating (a) alternatives suggestions, (b) improvements to the decision framework, and (c) ideas about metrics for each decision framework element.
- In the development of the draft environmental impact statement the Forest/Monument hope that the public will be able to use something akin to the "test drive" with real alternatives and real ratings (the link to the test drive is on the home page).

Multi-Criteria Decision Support System will never take narrative comments away, whether they are submitted in writing, through an e-mail, a website, or fax. The Sequoia National Forest and Giant Sequoia National Monument is experimenting with improvements in those as well. The Forest is implementing a pilot called ePubPlus, through a contract with a company called Limehouse where the public can comment 24/7 on the Notice of Intent that was issued March 18. This notice of intent outlined the desired conditions for managing the Giant Sequoia National Monument. The Forest is interested in your comments. Log onto <http://gsnm-consult.limehouse.com/portal>. Comment now as the commenting period ends Monday, May 4.

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