Enclosure 1

Supplemental Information
Wilderness Stewardship Plan
Preliminary Draft Alternatives

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks
California

Background

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks (SEKI or parks) encompasses hundreds of thousands of acres of High Sierran country, of which more than 96% is designated or managed as wilderness. The California Wilderness Act of 1984 (PL 98-425) designated the Sierran Crest (located across both parks) as the Sequoia-Kings Canyon Wilderness. The Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (PL 111-11) designated the John Krebs Wilderness in Sequoia National Park, and expanded the Sequoia-Kings Canyon Wilderness to include the North Fork Kaweah and Redwood Canyon areas. Today, 808,079 acres across the two parks are designated wilderness, with another 29,500 acres managed as wilderness in accordance with National Park Service (NPS) policies. Since 1986, wilderness management in the parks has been guided by the Backcountry Management Plan (BMP) and Stock Use and Meadow Management Plan (SUMMP).

Purpose and Objectives of the Wilderness Stewardship Plan

The Wilderness Act (16 USC 1131-1136; PL 88-577) mandates public land agencies to manage wilderness areas "*for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and to provide for the protection of these areas and the preservation of their wilderness character* (sec. 2(a))." The Wilderness Stewardship Plan (WSP) will establish a framework for the management of wilderness within SEKI in order to preserve wilderness character and provide opportunities for access and use in accordance with the Wilderness Act and other laws and policies. The objectives of the plan are to:

- Preserve wilderness character;
- Provide opportunities for public use and enjoyment of wilderness in accordance with the Wilderness Act;
- Improve conditions in areas where there may be unacceptable levels of impacts to wilderness character; and,
- Protect the natural and cultural resources within wilderness.

What the WSP will Accomplish

The Wilderness Stewardship Plan (WSP) will provide direction for the management of visitors and administrative activities within SEKI's wilderness. The WSP will focus on providing visitors with opportunities for solitude and/or a primitive and unconfined recreation, managing the wilderness character impacts directly related to visitor use, and determining the administrative actions necessary to protect the parks' wilderness character.

Primary Stressors to Wilderness

It is important to recognize that the most significant threats to the parks' wilderness, such as air pollution and climate change, are global or regional in origin. The Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) has identified five factors that are affecting the long-term health of the Sierran ecosystem (SNEP 1996):

- loss of pre-Euro-American fire regimes
- introduced species
- air pollution
- habitat fragmentation
- rapid global climatic change

Although these ecosystem stressors may be beyond the parks' ability to control, they will be considered throughout the planning process.

Elements Common to All Alternatives and/or Statements of Intent

The following topics were brought forward during scoping, but may not warrant the development of alternatives. Some relate directly to existing laws, regulations, policies, and decisions made in the Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks General Management Plan (GMP 2007). Several address park resources and may be included as impact topics or related back to objectives and desired conditions. Other topics are operational in nature and too detailed to include in the WSP or may warrant separate planning efforts. Some may be included as appendices to the WSP.

- Resource Stewardship in Wilderness - SEKI is currently developing a Resource Stewardship Strategy (RSS) that will recommend science- and scholarship-based strategies to achieve and maintain desired conditions for the parks' natural and cultural resources. The RSS will be separate, but complementary, to the WSP. It will focus on ways to conserve natural and cultural resources in an era of rapid change and uncertain conditions. The RSS will apply to all areas of the parks, not just wilderness. The conservation goals outlined in the RSS will adhere to the law and the mission of the NPS and use the best available science to adaptively manage for the long-term. Strategies to conserve native regional biodiversity and ecological integrity, and to preserve cultural values, will be identified in the RSS.

  Each wilderness area's condition will be measured and assessed against its own unimpaired standard. Natural processes will be allowed, as much as possible, to shape and control wilderness ecosystems. Management intervention will be considered only to correct past mistakes, the impacts of human use, and influences originating outside of wilderness boundaries.

  Management actions, such as stabilizing altered fire regimes, controlling invasive species, recovering threatened and endangered species, and protecting air and water quality, would be attempted only when the knowledge and tools exist to accomplish clearly articulated goals. (NPS *Management Policies 2006*, 6.3.7)

- Science in Wilderness - The NPS is responsible for supporting appropriate scientific activities in wilderness and to use science to improve wilderness management. SEKI recognizes that wilderness can and should serve as an important resource for long-term research, study, and observation of ecological processes, as well as the impact of humans on these ecosystems. SEKI further recognizes that appropriate scientific activities may be critical to the long-term preservation of its wilderness.

  Scientific activities are encouraged in wilderness. Activities that involve a potential impact to wilderness resources or wilderness values, such as ground disturbance or the installation of equipment, will be allowed when the benefits outweigh the impacts. In order to assure that researchers use the minimum tool necessary to accomplish their objectives, the parks will evaluate all such activities using the minimum requirement process (NPS *Management Policies 2006*, 6.3.6.1).

- Cultural Resources Stewardship – Cultural resources that have been included within wilderness will be protected and maintained according to pertinent laws and policies governing cultural resources management methods consistent with the preservation of wilderness character and values. Several historic structures in the wilderness of these parks are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and others are identified as eligible for listing. These include certain ranger stations and historic structures such as the Whitney Hut, the Muir Hut, and Shorty Lovelace cabins. The NPS recognizes that some existing trails or portions of trails could also be deemed of significant historic value. There are other multiple pre-historic and historic resources; including both documented as well as likely undocumented archeological and ethnographic resources located in wilderness. However, the majority of the wilderness acreage has yet to be surveyed. The NPS is continually updating preservation maintenance plans for the known cultural resources and refining its strategy to survey for and identify additional cultural resources in wilderness.

- Education – Education is critical to wilderness stewardship. A Wilderness Education Strategy will be developed as a part of the WSP and will apply to all alternatives. The strategy will promote public awareness of, and appreciation for, wilderness character, resources, and ethics.

- Visitor Capacity – The WSP will include a system to manage the number of visitors in wilderness in order to reduce and control visitor impacts. The current system of daily trailhead quotas will be continued and adapted based on the effects visitors have on both biophysical resources and wilderness character. Each of the preliminary draft alternatives would result in different capacities for visitor use.

- Trails – A Trails Management Plan will be developed in conjunction with the WSP. This plan will identify the types of trails in SEKI and their associated levels of maintenance and supporting facilities. SEKI will adopt a variation of the trail classification system established by the United States Forest Service.

  A "trail class" is a description of the level of development on a particular trail. Classes range from 1 (minimally developed) to 5 (highly developed). Trail classes 4 and 5 are often found in front country or urban settings. These trails have wide, smooth tread surfaces (usually gravel or pavement), use signs and railings, and include trailside amenities, such as interpretive displays, benches, and picnic tables. These two classes are not appropriate for use in SEKI's wilderness. SEKI is only considering trail classes 1, 2 and 3 for wilderness. These trail classes are described below.

  Class 1 (minimally developed): These trails are essentially routes. They are indistinct, difficult to locate, and may require route finding skills to follow. The trail surfaces are rough, and logs, brush, and limbs would be cleared infrequently. Structures, such as walls and water bars, are essentially absent. There are no bridges on Class 1 trails. Signing will exist only at junctions, and route markers will consist of cairns or old blazes where the trail is not otherwise evident. Examples of Class 1 trails include: Kennedy Canyon, Blue Canyon, Milestone Basin, Cartridge Pass, and Glacier Pass.

  Class 2 (moderately developed): These trails are constructed and maintained so that the tread is continuously visible and can typically be followed without route finding skills. Trail surfaces may be rough and include substantial obstacles. Logs and fallen rocks are cleared periodically. Structures, such as walls, water bars, and causeways, are of limited size, scale, and quantity, and water crossings are typically without bridges. Junctions will be signed, and regulatory/resource protection signing may be present. Examples of Class 2 trails include: the Middle Fork of the Kings River, the State Lakes Loop, and the south side of Colby Pass.

  Class 3 (developed): These trails are constructed and maintained so that the tread is continuously visible. The trail surface lacks substantial obstacles. Logs, fallen rocks, and encroaching vegetation are cleared regularly. Structures, such as walls, water bars, and causeways, are common. Bridges exist where they are needed to protect resources or provide appropriate access. Junctions are signed, and regulatory/resource protection signing is common. Examples of Class 3 trails include: the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, the Paradise Valley Trail, and the High Sierra Trail.

- Stock Use – The GMP for SEKI established that stock use, both recreational and administrative, is proper in the wilderness of these parks. The GMP provides for continued administrative, commercial, and private stock use under current NPS policies. It also calls for improved management through expanded use of controls on stock party size, regulation of dates and locations, designation of areas, and appropriate closures. Use of stock is authorized to continue, both as a way for visitors to access wilderness and for the administration of wilderness.

[*Note*: Commercial use in wilderness, both for stock and other commercial services, will be assessed and an "Extent Necessary Determination" will be completed as part of the WSP.]

- Climbing – Technical rock climbing within SEKI's wilderness is relatively common. The WSP will not explore alternatives for this activity, but may provide guidelines for its management. The NPS is currently updating Director's Order 41 (Wilderness Management), which will address climbing in wilderness. When enacted, SEKI will use it to guide the management of climbing activities, such as the placement of bolts and the use of power drills, in wilderness. A Climbing Management Plan may be developed in the future.

- Minimum Requirement Analysis (MRA) Process –Through the WSP, SEKI will establish a process to accomplish effective minimum requirement analyses for management actions. Wilderness character evaluations will be integrated into the project review and compliance process. The MRA process first determines whether a proposed management action is appropriate and necessary for the administration of the area as wilderness. If the project is found to be appropriate and necessary, the second step is to determine the management method (tool or technique) that would result in the least amount of impact to the biophysical resources and experiential qualities of wilderness. (*The Wilderness Act* §4(c) and NPS *Management Policies 2006*, 6.3.5)

- Airspace and Soundscapes – Airspace is primarily controlled and managed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) with some authority delegated to branches of the military in certain areas. SEKI works cooperatively with multiple federal, state and local agencies and entities to ensure that airspace utilization is minimally disruptive to wilderness resources and values.

  Overflights: Approximately 95% of the airspace over SEKI is in Military Operations Areas or part of the R-2508 Military Special Use Airspace Complex. This large expanse of restricted airspace is of extremely high value to the armed forces for testing and training purposes. Because so much of SEKI is overlain with military airspace and its restrictions, the ability of general and commercial aviation to operate in the area is constrained. SEKI has and will continue to work cooperatively with regional military leadership to ensure that military aviation operations are minimally disruptive to the experience of wilderness users.

  Air Tours: SEKI has attempted to determine if commercial air tours are occurring over the parks, but has not found evidence of their existence. After the passage of the *National Parks Air Tour Management Act of 2000* (ATMA), two potential operators submitted their names for future consideration. At that time, SEKI had an Interim Operating Authority (IOA) for a maximum of 18 tours per year, established by the FAA. The ATMA was amended in 2012 to allow additional flexibility for airspace management over national parks. As a result of these changes, and because air tours can be disruptive to the national park and wilderness experience, SEKI is seeking to be permanently removed from the FAA list of national park units where air tours are allowed. The desired condition for SEKI wilderness is to be free of commercial air tours because of the potential disruption of the wilderness experience of park visitors.

- Cooperative Management – SEKI will continue to work closely with adjacent and nearby public land management agencies and parks, including the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the Bureau of Land Management, and Yosemite National Park. The goal of this cooperation is to ensure that wilderness management is consistent among agencies and easily understandable to the visiting public.

- Administrative Infrastructure - Radio Repeaters – Existing repeaters will remain in their current locations. However, as technology improves, less visible and more wilderness compliant technology will be considered. Wilderness is the last option for the placement of new repeaters. If new repeaters are ever deemed necessary in wilderness, separate analysis and compliance will be conducted. As offsite technology (e.g. satellite communications) is further developed and adopted, existing facilities will be removed as practicable.

- Wilderness Communications – Effective administration of SEKI's wilderness requires communication between managers and field staff. Communication is also necessary to provide for public and employee safety. The public may find that the use of hand-held (and other) electronic devices, such as personal locator beacons and satellite phones, impedes their ability to experience solitude and practice self-reliance. Currently, SEKI is not considering the prohibition of these devices. However, the parks encourage visitors to experience wilderness without the support of this type of technology.

- Winter Use – Levels of winter use are currently low enough not to require analysis through alternatives. Existing winter operations will remain essentially unchanged. If winter use increases significantly in the future, a separate Winter Wilderness Stewardship Plan may be developed.

- Wilderness Permits and Fees – SEKI will continue to require wilderness permits for overnight use. The current fee system may be continued or changed, pursuant to existing authorities, such as the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, or as provided for by future legislation and policy.

- Temporary Closures – SEKI will continue to use existing authorities to close areas, such as trails, meadows, and campsites, to public use when necessary to protect natural and cultural resources or the visiting public. Closures are conducted pursuant to Title 36 Code of Federal Regulations §1.5, the Superintendent's Compendium, and through park specific management directives.

- Inherent and Assumed Risk – Risks and hazards are part of wilderness, and park visitors are expected to accept wilderness on its own unique terms (NPS *Management Policies 2006,* Section 6.4.1). Accordingly, SEKI will promote education programs that encourage wilderness users to understand and be aware of certain risks, including possible dangers arising from wildlife, weather conditions, physical features, and other natural phenomena that are inherent in the various conditions that comprise a wilderness experience and primitive methods of travel. SEKI will not modify its wilderness to eliminate risk, but will strive to provide users with general information concerning possible risks, any recommended precautions, and related user responsibilities.

- Summit Registers – Summit registers are found on peaks throughout SEKI's wilderness. Many of these registers have historic value, with signatures dating as far back as the early 1900s. The WSP will inventory these registers and make decisions regarding their maintenance. It is possible that a cooperative agreement may be the most effective way to maintain these registers.