

# Horse packers relieved to have work this summer

By Marek Warszawski, Fresno Bee

Pack station owners serving Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks in California are breathing easier this week after a federal judge allowed the parks to issue permits for commercial stock use effective immediately.

"We're going full-speed ahead," said Tim Loverin, owner of the Cedar Grove Pack Station. "It's going to be an early season because of the low snowpack, so now that we've got the permits we can finally get going."

Presiding over a 3-year-old lawsuit between the High Sierra Hikers Association and the National Park Service, U.S. District Court Judge Richard Seeborg issued a temporary authorization May 23 that set permits for commercial horse packers at 80 percent of use levels from 2007.

A final written ruling will follow as Sequoia and Kings Canyon officials prepare a wilderness stewardship plan that will establish the extent to which commercial services such as pack stock belong in wilderness areas, which make up 97 percent of the jointly managed parks.

Seeborg's previous ruling on Jan. 24 stated that the NPS violated the federal Wilderness Act because its 2007 general management plan for Sequoia and Kings Canyon fell short of doing so. This, in effect, halted all permits for commercial horse packing, threatening to cripple more than a dozen pack stations as well as other businesses that rely on stock use.

As an example, the Bearpaw High Sierra Camp canceled all guest reservations from June 15-30 due to the uncertainty over permits. The backcountry tent camp, which depends on pack

mules to ferry supplies and haul out trash, will open June 29.

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