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Giant Sequoia National Monument Could Be Reduced To Allow Logging

July 11, 2017 7:10 PM

By Devin Fehely

GIANT SEQUOIA NATIONAL MONUMENT (KPIX 5) — Majestic trees stand within one of the national monuments that President Donald Trump wants to abolish or dramatically shrink in [size](#).

The Giant Sequoia National Monument falls within Tulare, Kern and Fresno counties. It's one of several California sites in the cross-hairs.

Read more: [Trump May Open Giant Sequoia Nat'l Monument To Development](#)

Some are on board with the president's plan, saying it could help reduce fire risk in the area. The Giant Sequoia trees are some of the largest and oldest living things on Earth, towering giants with limbs stretching skyward 300 feet in the air.

But a battle brewing far below the majestic tree tops could determine the future of the Giant Sequoia National Monument. Tulare County Supervisor Steve Worthley said, "Locking them up in a monument and doing nothing — which is essentially what the Forest Service has done for the past 20-plus years — is not in their best interest."

The Trump administration is considering a plan to shrink the monument by more than two-thirds, from its current 328,000 acres to roughly 90,000, a plan that's found some unlikely allies. Tulare County Board of Supervisors Chairman Pete Vander Poel said, "I don't think anybody had an intent to destroy or diminish this treasure that we have in our backyards."

Vander Poel voted against the letter sent on behalf of the Board of Supervisors in support of reducing the size of the monument, a proposal so polarizing that only the three supervisors in favor of it would sign their names to it.

Supporters of shrinking the monument say a lack of management coupled with massive tree die-off after years of drought have left it worse for wear — weakened and vulnerable to wildfire. They say a smaller monument would be better managed and more protected.



17 July 2017



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But critics say the plan is not really about preserving or restoring a forest, as much as it is about resurrecting the timber industry. Environmentalist Mehmet McMillan said, "Taking any kind of designation from the few pieces of protected land — of intact habitat that we have — is a mistake."

The Giant Sequoia groves and the land surrounding them is currently protected from logging, but that could change.

There is little dispute that the estimated 8 million dead and dying trees, just in the monument alone, has increased the threat of wildfire but it's not clear if private companies would have any interest in bark beetle-infested wood, even if logging were to resume.

Worthley said, "I want to protect the Giant Sequoias too."

But critics say the answer is to increase funding, not to decrease the size of the monument. McMillan said, "By taking any kind of protection away — in any way — is basically a slap in the face." The Carrizo Plain Monument in San Luis Obispo County is another one of the monuments that could be scaled back as well.

On Tuesday, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle sent a letter urging the feds to protect monuments like these. The group is led by Republican Assemblywoman Catharine Baker from San Ramon.

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