

Panel Reviews Sequoia Fire Management Program

At the request of Western Regional Director Howard Chapman, a panel of seven scientists familiar with either giant sequoia ecosystems or fire ecology conducted a review of the giant sequoia fire management program in the Sierran parks this past summer. The panel, chaired by Dr. Norman Christensen of Duke University, was asked to review the scientific basis and planning and operational procedures, and evaluate the adequacy of the monitoring program and research data base associated with the prescribed burning program.

The review, which started as an effort to fine tune an operational program that is commonly referred to as a model effort, became politicized when outside concerns were raised regarding the acceptability of fire scars and bark char created by prescribed burns. This conflict of ecological as opposed to basically aesthetic objectives led to much spirited discussion. An open review of the program, held at the Giant Forest Visitors Center, included a full day field trip through recently burned as well as unburned areas. It attracted more than 75 persons, including representatives of many conservation organizations. The public review was followed by site visits by Director William P. Mott.

The final panel report is expected momentarily. Briefing for the Director will be scheduled, followed by a decision on future management and research activities. National Parks Magazine will feature an article and evaluation of the program in their first issue of 1987.

Other panel members include Dr. Ron Wakimoto (U. Montana), Dr. Joe McBride (UC Berkeley), Dr. Phil Rundel (UCLA), Mr. Lin Cotton (independent landscape architect, Berkeley), Dr. Thomas Harvey (San Jose State University), and Dr. Robert Martin (UC Berkeley).