

Giant Forest will burn this week to preserve Sequoia National Park health, expect delays

By Joshua Yeager

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Sequoia National Park officials will set fire to portions of the Giant Forest beginning today.

The 245-acre prescribed burn is necessary to prevent future, far-more devastating fire from scarring the iconic scenic landscape, park rangers said.

“Prescribed burns are of critical importance to effective land management,” said Kelly Singer, Sequoia National Park Fire Management Officer. “In California, it is not a matter of IF an area will burn, but of WHEN it will burn. Prescribed burns allow fire managers to manage risk by choosing the timing.”

The burn will begin today following consultations between park leadership and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The controlled fire may last through the weekend, depending upon conditions, rangers said.

Areas affected include Giant Sequoia groves located roughly half of a mile northeast of the Giant Forest Museum, spanning both sides of the Generals Highway.

During the burn period, park visitors should expect 30-minute traffic delays and "moderate smoke impacts" in the Giant Forest, General Sherman Tree and Lodgepole areas.

Access to the General Sherman Tree will not be limited by the burn.

Atmospheric conditions may play a role in determining acreage to be burned each day, or the number of days of ignitions, park officials said.

At night, smoke may be discernible in the parks' lower elevations and in Three Rivers. Visitors can learn more about air quality conditions at the Air District's website, www.valleyair.org.

A few trails that enter the burn area, including the Congress Trail, will be closed during ignitions and the burn-down period, and will be clearly marked, rangers said. Many other trails in the area that offer a comparable experience will be open without restriction.