



NEWS RELEASE

Sequoia National Forest and the Giant Sequoia National Monument
1839 S. Newcomb Street, Porterville, CA 93257

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Op-Ed – *Monumental Outlook Over the Horizon*

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Public Protection: French Meadow Closed

As part of the gold rush years mining in the Piute Mountains began in the mid-1800s. Kern County was created in 1866 with the county seat located in the now abandoned mining town of Havilah. In its beginning, Kern County was dominated by mining in the mountains and desert.

As part of the U.S. Forest Service mission, many surveys for abandoned and inactive mines were carried out from 1993-1999. During these surveys several mines in the Piute Mountains were found to have hazardous conditions due to past mining operations. The Claraville area had numerous active mines throughout the early 1900s.

Many history buffs, hunters and off-highway vehicle users seek adventures in the historic Piute Mountains. In particular, many visitors travel far to use the French Meadow dispersed fire exempt area for camping. However, on May 14, 2009, a Forest Order was written to close and gate 4.5-acres of the French Meadow Dispersed Fire Exempt Area through September 30, 2010.

The French Meadow camp site is located in the Piute Mountains and is adjacent to Forest Road 28S27 which connects the Piute Mountain Road with the Alaska Flat area. The presence of possible mine tailings, with elevated concentrations of arsenic, is widespread in the French Meadow Fire Exempt Area. The soil-like tailings have concentrations of arsenic significantly greater than what is found in local soils. Documents developed from studies of arsenic's effect on health and the environment recommend taking protective measures. Under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), the U.S. Forest Service has authority to protect human health and safety, and is required to institute controls, such as public health warnings and closure of the area, while a full evaluation for cleanup is completed.

At French Meadow, a review of mineral and archeological records for mining found no specific mining activity placed at, or adjacent to, the fire exempt area. However, in 2008, a suspicious pile of material was tested and showed high concentrations of arsenic. Additional samplings, with a special field device, revealed that arsenic was widespread throughout the area which led to a forest closure of the area for public safety and protection.

The summer season is upon us, and many visitors are out exploring our public lands. If you plan to venture out in the historical Piute Mountains, take your maps, your sense of wonder, and plan your adventure with safety in mind. Stop by the nearest forest office for information or visit our website at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/sequoia>.

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<http://www.stewardsofthesequoia.org/PDF/FrenchMeadowlosureMap2009.pdf>