



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Sequoia & Kings Canyon  
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## Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks

### Walking Through Giant Forest with an Eye for the Next Generation



*Sapling sequoias from the 1988 Congress Rx with the House Group in the background.*

NPS photo by Deb Schweizer

It is impossible to walk through the Giant Forest without being awestruck by the beauty of the great giants: General Sherman, McKinley, the Parker Group, and the many others people have come to know and love. A joy and a peace can be found while wandering through the sequoias that is unlike anything else.

Yet another wonder can be seen throughout the parks' sequoia groves. Whether walking through the East Fork Grove, Redwood Canyon Grove, or in a variety of locations in Giant Forest, you can spot crops and thickets of sequoia saplings and adolescents with a trained and observant eye.

Young sequoias are distinctive in their bright green and scaly needles. They often grow in dense clusters near streams, wet meadows and sunny gaps in the forest canopy; testament that this is a thirsty and sun-loving species.

These young trees are all the products of prescribed fire (Rx) projects completed over the recent years: Tar Gap Rx (2002), Hart Meadow Rx (1981) Giant Forest Rx (1996), Quarry Rx (2005), Congress Rx (1988), Bearhill Rx (2001), and others.

The odds are long that a sequoia seed will germinate and grow to maturity. Observe the extensive seed scatter after the Crescent Rx this year, yet many of these seeds will not even take root. A very small percentage does, however. Those that do still have a lot to contend with. Droughts, overgrowth of the forest (and the resulting competition for water and nutrients), floods, and fire all take a toll on these trees as they grow. Of the dense clusters of saplings that can be seen ten years after a fire, very few of the trees will actually last into the coming years. They cannot all survive if one is to survive.

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*These saplings just west of Crescent Meadow are the result of prescribed fires in 1984 and 1996.*

NPS photo by Deb Schweizer.

Consider the 1977 Redwood Canyon Rx. This fire burned relatively hot and produced an amazing crop of sequoias. However, this area has not seen a fire since and the trees, densely grown together, are becoming stunted through competition.

The natural processes in the Sierra Nevada wean out the weaker trees - those with less sunlight or less access to water sources. This can be noted as trees of the same age are already varying in size. General Sherman is the largest but not the oldest sequoia; the tree's size can be attributed to the luck of having its seed fall in an excellent location.

Walk along the Congress Trail and enjoy both young and old sequoias. While stopping to admire the youngsters, try to determine which will be survivors. Which of these saplings will live through the droughts

and the fires? Which will grow tall, drop its lower limbs to help protect it from subsequent fires, and drink deep of the mountain waters? Somewhere out there is the next General Sherman Tree.

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