



# The Forest Watcher

*The Quarterly Membership Publication of Los Padres Forest Watch*

*ForestWatch is the only organization working to protect the entire Los Padres National Forest – from the Big Sur coast to the Sespe wildlands – from damage caused by oil drilling, off-road vehicle abuse, unmanaged livestock grazing, and other resource extraction.*

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## Logging Targets Old-Growth Trees on Figueroa Mountain

Earlier this month, the Forest Service released details about its logging plan for 665 acres of the Figueroa Mountain Recreation Area, including a popular campground and picnic area. The proposal now includes removing over 80% of the trees in the area. The agency is accepting comments from concerned citizens until March 31.

Officials will allow "selective logging" whereby some trees are cut and others are left standing. According to the agency, this would open up the forest and prevent a high-intensity wildfire from sweeping through the area. The agency would also use a machine called a masticator, a tractor with a giant lawn-

mower that grinds up oaks, manzanitas, and low-lying shrubs. After thinning the forest and clearing vegetation, the agency hopes to conduct controlled burns. Fire is

a critical component of this ecosystem and, according to the agency, years of fire suppression have caused this forest to become too dense and overgrown.

Officials first announced their logging plan in 2004 as part of the administration's ill-named Healthy Forest Initiative. Soon thereafter,



A masticator will shred trees and brush on Figueroa.

ForestWatch learned that officials planned to log trees 30 inches in diameter or larger. In fact, in some areas, the plan allowed the agency to cut down trees "of all ages and sizes," even ancient old-growth trees like ponderosa pines and big-cone Douglas firs. We also learned that the agency –

*(Continued on page 7)*



Oil drilling destroys habitat for the endangered bluntnosed leopard lizard. Photo © californiaherps.com

## ForestWatch Halts Oil Drilling Near Los Padres – Twice!

Oil companies have descended upon Western public lands at an alarming pace. The last few months have shown that not even our nearby forests are safe. But thanks to the vigilant support of our members, nearly 24,000 acres are now safe from development.

In December, the Bureau of Land Management announced

that it would auction nearly 20,000 acres of public land to oil companies. One-fourth of these parcels were located right along the national forest boundary in Santa Barbara County's Cuyama Valley, an area that federal biologists have called an "Area of High Ecological Significance" because there are so many

rare animals there. It also serves as a gateway to the forest's Dick Smith Wilderness Area.

Other parcels slated for auction were near the Carrizo Plain National Monument in San Luis Obispo County, the Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge, and Wind Wolves Preserve, the largest private

*(Continued on page 6)*

## Shrouded in Secrecy



Jeff Kuyper is the Executive Director of ForestWatch.

National forests are public lands, owned by you and me and our neighbors. All of us have the right to a forest with vibrant wildlife habitat, pristine mountain streams, and untouched landscapes.

We entrust federal agencies to protect these lands. When damage occurs—as it does all too often—the public is entitled to ask questions and get answers about who’s causing the damage and what’s being done to fix it. When our forests are not properly managed, we have the right to demand accountability.

ForestWatch works to do just that — to prevent damage and ensure accountability. One way we do this is by requesting documents from the agency. Free and open access to these documents allows us to help the agency better protect the forest.

But agencies don’t like to provide public access to their documents. They don’t want us to know what goes on behind closed doors. Our government, it seems, has shrouded itself in secrecy. There are things to hide, and special interests to protect.

Last November, we requested information from the Bureau of Land Management about plans to practically give away thousands of acres to oil companies. The agency said it would charge us \$1,502.60 for these documents, knowing full well that we couldn’t afford it.

We appealed this fee to Washington, D.C headquarters. The agency had twenty days to respond to our appeal. That deadline passed over a month ago without a peep. We’re now left with little choice but to take the agency to court—just to get access to *public* documents about a *public* auction of *public* land.

The Forest Service seems to be headed down the same path of secrecy. We requested documents from them in January. We still haven’t received a formal response from the agency, but it did indicate that it would not give us many of the records we had requested, and would take over four months to provide other documents. There’s no good reason for such delays from an open and democratic government, but unfortunately, they’ve become the rule and not the exception.

Free and open access to public documents, said the U.S. Supreme Court in 1978, “ensures an informed citizenry, vital to the functioning of a democratic society, needed to check against corruption and to hold the governors accountable.”

This same basic tenet still rings true today. Government transparency lies at the heart of our democracy. The Forest Service and BLM are about to learn a tough less lesson in Civics 101. In the meantime, our work continues. After all, we’ve got ourselves a forest to protect...

*“Free and open access to public documents ensures an informed citizenry, vital to the functioning of a democratic society.”*

## Introducing Our Citizens’ Forest Campaign

The Los Padres National Forest is one of the country’s most endangered forests, and it will take a collective effort to protect it. Our Citizens’ Forest Campaign is an innovative program designed to show you and other concerned folks how to help protect our national forest.

We kick off our campaign on March 30 in Santa Barbara. Join us for an inspiring and

educational evening featuring a short film titled *America’s National Forests*, followed by a photographic journey into our very own Los Padres National Forest. The night will conclude with a presentation by ForestWatch staff on the many ways you can help protect your forest, and a quick letter-writing workshop to protect the forests on Figueroa Mountain.

Everyone in attendance will receive a free copy of our new *Citizens’ Guide to Protecting Your National Forest*, and will have a chance to win a ForestWatch t-shirt featuring our new logo.

Then we’ll take our show on the road to Ventura and San Luis Obispo later in the Spring. Maybe you’ll even see us in a town near you.

### FOREST FORUM

Thursday, March 30  
7:00 to 8:30 pm  
Faulkner Gallery  
Santa Barbara Public Library  
FREE

Downtown, at the corner of  
Anacapa & Anapamu streets

## A Look Ahead to 2006

As winter snow gives way to abundant spring wildflowers, green hillsides, and rushing rivers, this yearly transformation gives us pause to look ahead and see what the rest of the year has in store.

We'll be launching our Citizens' Forest Campaign with a kick-off event on March 30 in Santa Barbara (see story on page 2). The evening will include a short film, slideshow, and workshop. Later in the Spring, we'll take our show on the road to a town near you.

In the fall, to celebrate our Second Anniversary, we're organizing an exciting event

for our members and supporters. If you would like to help make it happen with a donation of time and/or money, we'd love to hear from you.

And of course, we'll be busy defending our public lands from oil drilling, logging, illegal off-road vehicles, and unmanaged livestock grazing. The Forest Service will decide any day now whether to grant or deny our appeal challenging oil drilling expansion into 52,075 acres of the Los Padres National Forest. Five logging proposals – including Figueroa Mountain in Santa Barbara County, and Pine Mountain, Mount

Pinos, Frazier Mountain, and Mount Abel in Ventura and Kern counties – will determine the fate of these magnificent forests. The agency will begin implementing a new management plan for the forest, and will undertake a huge effort to analyze dozens of illegal off-road vehicle routes.

You can bet that ForestWatch will be at the forefront of all of these issues. We've already secured some tremendous victories for our forest. With your continued support, we'll be able to continue our success and take it to the next level!



Piedra Blanca in the Sespe Wilderness.

## New Members

Thank you to all of our new and existing members for their generous support since our last newsletter. Your contribution allows us to continue our important work in protecting the Los Padres National Forest.

<b>Cynthia Boche</b>	<b>Karen Merriam</b>
<b>Thomas Chadwick</b>	<b>Sherry Mueller</b>
<b>Carolyn &amp; Steve Conner</b>	<b>Tamara Napier</b>
<b>Matthew Curtis</b>	<b>Ken &amp; Jo Rogers</b>
<b>Laura Frank</b>	<b>Nancy Sandburg</b>
<b>Greg Frugoli</b>	<b>Stuart Sherman</b>
<b>Alexander Gagnon</b>	<b>Pete &amp; Suzie St. John</b>
<b>Peter Galvin</b>	<b>John Swanson</b>
<b>Matt Hayden</b>	<b>Paula Velsey</b>
<b>Tony &amp; Natalie Hernandez</b>	<b>Keith Zandona</b>
<b>Benjamin Hitz Jr.</b>	<b>Robert &amp; Katy Zappala</b>
<b>Thomas A. Hopkins</b>	
<b>Anna Huber</b>	<b>Thanks also to:</b>
<b>Ernest H. Jones</b>	<b>Vickie Hormuth</b>
<b>Donna &amp; Bob Jordan</b>	<b>Kathy Babcock</b>
<b>Noel Korten</b>	<b>Gloria Radley</b>
<b>Helene Kunsemiller</b>	<b>Prometheus Construction</b>
<b>Ruth Lasell</b>	
<b>Phil McKenna</b>	

## Volunteer Spotlight—Carol Gravelle

After 1 1/2 years of providing cutting edge protection for the Los Padres, we decided that a logo was long overdue. Professional graphic designer Carol Gravelle of Camarillo came to our rescue. Carol has created logos for outdoor companies like Camelback, Diamondback, and Giant Bicycles, and her creativity and inspiration were the perfect fit.

“My family and I treasure our national forests, and we feel strongly that these public lands should be protected for future generations,” she says. “I admire the work that ForestWatch does to safeguard the Los Padres, and enthusiastically donated my time in support of their efforts.”

The logo highlights the quintessential landscapes of our national forest – the rolling hills, the majestic peaks, the Pacific Ocean, and an oak forest on the valley floor. It also incorporates the role that we all play in watching over and safeguarding our national forest.



All of us at ForestWatch extend our warmest gratitude to Carol. She can be reached at Carol Gravelle Graphic Design, PO Box 2777, Camarillo, CA 93012, by telephone at (805) 383-2773, or online at [www.carolgravelledesign.com](http://www.carolgravelledesign.com)

## Trustees of the Forest

Trustees of the Forest are our visionary supporters who contribute at least \$1,000 annually in unrestricted support to ForestWatch.

These dedicated individuals ensure that we have the ability to confront environmental assaults on our public lands and to achieve vital protections for our most precious landscapes.

Make a difference that will last lifetimes. Join the Trustees of the Forest.

For more information, contact us at (805) 252-4277 or [info@LPFW.org](mailto:info@LPFW.org)

## THE FIVE FOREST THREATS

The Los Padres was recently ranked as one of the most endangered forests in America. Here's a closer look at what's threatening our public lands.

### Oil Drilling & Development

The federal government last year approved a record number of drilling permits, giving away more than 40 million acres of our public lands to oil corporations. Oil companies have now set their sights on the Los Padres, California's only national forest with commercial oil drilling.

Over 240 wells are pumping oil from the Los Padres, mostly in the Sespe Oil Field in Ventura County. This is right next to critical habitat for the California condor, one of the world's most endangered birds.

Last summer, the administration released a plan to expand drilling across 52,075 acres of the forest – for less than a day's supply of oil, according to the agency's

own data. The new drilling areas are next to some of the most sensitive areas of the forest, like the Sespe Condor Sanctuary, the Hopper Mountain Wildlife Refuge, and four wilderness areas.

Oil drilling requires a vast network of infrastructure and development that fragments wild areas and scars the landscape. Oil drilling is a chemical-intensive process, and oil spills can inflict long-term damage on fragile streams. It also releases hydrocarbons, ozone, nitrous oxides, particulate matter, and other smog precursors, threatening public health.

The Los Padres already provides its fair share of oil to the nation. Our efforts focus on ensuring that no new drilling occurs here, and that oil companies clean up their act.



An oil tank field near the Sespe Wilderness Area.

### Illegal Off-Road Vehicle Abuse

Off-road vehicles (called "ORVs" for short) are motorized dirt-bikes and ATVs that travel off roadways and through meadows, forests, and streams. The widespread damage caused by ORVs has long been recognized. In 1979, the White House Council on Environmental Quality stated that "off-road vehicles have damaged every kind of ecosystem found in the United States." A quarter-century later, the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service has called unmanaged ORV use one of the four biggest threats facing our national forests.

ORV use is only allowed on official trails, and only in areas where it will not damage fragile areas of the forest. However, inadequate law enforcement, poor signage, and confusing

rules encourage illegal trespass into prohibited areas. The wheels on ORVs can carve deep tracks through fragile forest vegetation, causing erosion that flows into nearby streams during rainstorms. Noise and air pollution disturbs wild-

life, forest visitors, and neighbors alike and detracts from the tranquil forest experience.

ORV use is one of the fastest growing forms of outdoor recreation. The Los Padres provides 980 miles of designated ORV routes and other roads open to ORV use. Officials estimate that demand for ORV trails will increase by as much as 20% in the next fifteen years.

Already, irresponsible ORV enthusiasts have blazed hundreds of miles of illegal trails through fragile areas of the forest, ignoring "Keep Out" signs, vandalizing fences and gates designed to protect these areas, and ruining the landscape.

ForestWatch documents this illegal ORV trespass and reports it to agency officials. We also work to ensure that no new ORV trails are built until the agency can properly manage the existing ones.



Irresponsible ORV users destroy wetlands (left) and cut tracks through closed areas (right) in San Luis Obispo County.



## Unmanaged Livestock Grazing

Livestock grazing affects more acres than any other activity on our Western public lands. If improperly managed, livestock grazing can inflict lasting damage. Cattle waste pollutes water sources, and livestock is the greatest non-point source polluter of water in the West. Unmanaged grazing also poses the greatest threat to rare plants and animals. Already, it has led to the listing of ninety endangered and threatened species across the country.

Unmanaged livestock consume large amounts of native grasses, trample the soil, destroy streamside vegetation, and increase erosion into creeks and rivers on our public lands. The Los Padres supports over 860,000 acres of grazing and has more grazing allot-

ments than nearly any other forest in the country. Unfortunately, the Forest Service allows grazing in some inappropriate areas, including along the Big Sur coastline, pristine wilderness areas, and habitats of sensitive species such as the red-legged frog, steelhead, and the Smith's blue butterfly. Grazing allotments cover one-third of the protected wilderness lands in the Los Padres. Unmanaged grazing has also damaged several Native American cultural sites.

A recent study found that most (78%) of the grazing allotments on the Los Padres have not even been *studied* for their environmental impacts, the highest noncompliance rate of all eighteen forests in California. ForestWatch is working to improve the management of livestock grazing on our forest.



The banks of Rancho Nuevo Creek near the Dick Smith Wilderness have been stripped bare from overgrazing.



## Dams & Water Extraction

Most of the major rivers on the Los Padres are dammed. Many of these reservoirs provide important water supplies to nearby communities. Others – like the Matilija Dam (pictured) near the Ventura River – prevent steelhead from swimming upstream to miles and miles of prime fish habitat, and have become so filled with sediment that they are no longer useful. Over 150 small dams and 500 small water diversions are found on the streams and rivers in the Los Padres National Forest. Water is diverted and extracted from waterways for activities like mining, oil drilling, livestock grazing, and agricultural production, as well as for domestic water supplies. Sometimes, too much water is diverted from a single stream, harming fish and wildlife.

## Logging & Vegetation Clearing

Only 8% of the Los Padres is covered by coniferous forests – pinyon, ponderosa, coulter, sugar, and Jeffery pines, plus big-cone Douglas firs, white firs, the rare Santa Lucia fir, and the southernmost stand of coast redwoods. Because these forests are so scarce, industrial logging has not occurred here in recent history.

However, recent legislation, including the ill-named Healthy Forests Restoration Act, threaten to increase the pace of logging under the guise of “forest health” and “fire prevention.” The HFRA was supposed to protect homes from wildfires, but instead, it has facilitated aggressive logging across millions of acres of backcountry forestland, targeting old-growth trees miles away

from civilization. The HFRA also restricted the public's ability to participate in decisions affecting our forests, and eliminated the need to prepare environmental studies.

In 2004, Los Padres officials proposed their first logging project under this new “healthy forest” regime – 665 acres on Figueroa Mountain. Since then, the agency has proposed additional logging and vegetation removal across nearly 7,000 acres of the forest, including well-known areas like Mt. Pinos, Pine Mountain, and Frazier Mountain.

These rare forests on the Los Padres provide valuable wildlife habitat and unique recreation opportunities not found in most other parts of the forest. It is vitally important that the agency conduct all the necessary studies to reduce potential damage to the environment, and to direct scarce funds to target areas where wildfire protection is needed most – close to homes at the wildland-urban interface.



A forest on Frazier Mountain in Ventura County that was “selectively” logged.

## FOR SALE: The Los Padres National Forest at Bargain Prices!



*“ForestWatch would like to thank the Los Padres National Forest staff for listening to the concerns of local communities and removing the parcels from the sale list.”*

The administration plans to sell off 307,000 acres of National Forest lands across the country, including 430 acres of the Los Padres. If approved, it will be the largest land sale of its kind since President Theodore Roosevelt first established the U.S. Forest Service in 1905 and created the modern national forest system.

Due to public outcry, all of the Los Padres parcels have been removed from the list. The agency heard our cries loud and clear—our National Forest is NOT for sale!

While the Los Padres may be safe for now, others did not fare so well. California leads the pack with 79,362 acres that are still eligible for sale, mostly in northern California. This represents more than one-fourth of the total amount of lands that could

be sold under this plan. The forests in California that are hardest-hit include the Klamath (30,676 acres), Plumas (19,523 acres), Lassen (12,053 acres), and Shasta (5,237 acres).

The controversial sale is part of the administration’s proposed budget for fiscal year 2007. It wants to raise \$800 million by selling tracts of public lands across the nation. The proceeds won’t even stay with the federal treasury — instead, they’ll be funneled off to state governments.

The Los Padres lands removed from the sale include a 216-acre parcel in the Hungry Valley State Vehicular Recreation Area in Ventura County. Parcels in Branch Canyon and Bitter Creek in Santa Barbara County’s Cuyama Valley were also removed from the list.

While relieved that no Los Padres lands would be sold, ForestWatch and other conservation groups across the country continue to criticize the sell-off plan. There are far more effective ways to balance the budget than selling off our public lands to the whims of the real estate market.

A similar sell-off plan was defeated last November. Sneaky legislation would have practically given away vast tracts of public lands, including thousands of acres of the Los Padres. Public outcry defeated this proposal, too.

ForestWatch would like to thank the Los Padres National Forest staff for listening to the concerns of local communities and removing the parcels from the sale list.



The Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge in Kern County was acquired in 1985 to protect dwindling habitat for the condor.

## Oil Drilling Halted (from the front page)

nature preserve on the West coast. Both are along the forest boundary in Kern County.

Just days before the auction, ForestWatch filed an administrative

protest because the BLM did not properly notify the public about the auction. The agency also forgot to conduct any environmental studies to determine

whether oil drilling on the leased parcels would damage the environment.

The agency eventually cancelled the entire lease sale. With your support, we kept oil development away from nearly 20,000 acres of our public lands.

### Carrizo Drilling Cancelled

The 250,000-acre Carrizo Plain National Monument was established in 2001 to

protect one of the last remaining untouched tracts of land in the San Joaquin Valley. It also contains one of the largest concentrations of rare plants and animals in all of California.

Around the same time that the oil auction was announced, oil tycoon Richard D. Sawyer filed a Notice of Staking with the BLM. Sawyer planned to drill an exploratory well in Wells Canyon (pictured), approximately

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Logging (from the front page)

using a loophole recently passed by Congress – would approve the logging without first preparing an Environmental Assessment.

This seemed like lawless logging at its worst, and hardly something that would promote a healthy forest. In a letter to the agency, ForestWatch notified officials that this project did not qualify for the loophole, and that the agency would need to prepare an Environmental Assessment before allowing any logging. ForestWatch also provided evidence showing that if the agency cut down larger trees, it would increase – not decrease – the fire danger in the area. Larger trees have built up a strong fire resistance over their lifespan, and if they are logged, dry flammable brush grows in their place.

In response to our letter, officials agreed to prepare an Environmental Assessment. An EA requires the

Forest Service to look at ways to reduce the damage caused by logging – things like increased soil erosion and sedimentation in our mountain streams, interference with recreation, and impacts to rare plants and animals like the California spotted owl, the jewelflower, and blue oak.

We also provided the agency with an alternative plan that would truly restore forest health while preventing environmental damage. We urged the agency to avoid logging any trees over twelve to sixteen inches in diameter, and we also asked the agency to think about removing a few small trees and shrubs by hand, rather than cutting a swath through the forest using a masticator. Our alternative achieves forest health without the incidental, yet serious, damage caused by an intensive thinning and clearing operation that is inappropriate for this popular area.

The agency has since decided to consider one component of our alternative in more detail – no cutting of trees larger than 12” in diameter. This is Alternative 3 in the recently-released EA, and it’s a step in the right direction. We’ll continue to urge the agency to adopt other components of our plan.

Figueroa Mountain is a place known for its abundant fields of spring wildflowers, a place to enjoy hiking, bicycling, birdwatching, scenic driving, and winter snowplay. Because of these values, it is vitally important that the agency conduct any logging operations on an extremely limited basis, and in a way that is scientifically sound.

ForestWatch approves of the agency’s efforts to restore fire to this ecosystem, but the current logging plan simply targets too many big trees. With your support, we’ll continue to demand a plan that truly protects Figueroa’s majestic forest.



### **SEND YOUR COMMENTS!**

The agency will accept comments from concerned citizens until March 31. Tell them to protect all big trees on Figueroa Mountain, and send your letter to:

Santa Lucia Ranger District  
1616 Carlotti Road  
Santa Maria CA 93454

*Visit our website at [www.LPFW.org](http://www.LPFW.org) to view maps, to read the EA, and to quickly email your letter.*



*(from page 6)*  
one-half mile inside the monument’s southern boundary near the town of New Cuyama. Sawyer holds seven leases in the area totaling 3,500 acres. But there was a hitch—Sawyer had only four months to begin drilling before his leases would expire in March 2006.

ForestWatch worked to make sure that the oil company conducted all of the necessary studies before drilling would be

approved. It quickly became clear that the area was too fragile, and that there would not be enough time to begin drilling operations.

This month, the oil company cancelled its drilling plans, and the leases have since expired. These were the last undeveloped oil leases in the monument. Because of your support, there will be no new oil drilling here, ever.

## Forest Places—Figueroa Mountain

Figueroa Mountain has it all – wintertime snow, springtime wildflowers, year-round recreation, and endless views. It hovers 4,500 feet above the scenic wine country of the Santa Ynez Valley.



Within an hour's drive of Santa Maria, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Lompoc, the Figueroa Recreation Area is one of only a few developed recreation spots on the Los Padres. The

area provides opportunities for hiking, camping, bicycling, hunting, wildflower viewing, fishing, scenic driving, and winter snow play. Perched high atop the mountain is the Pino Alto picnic area with an easy self-guided nature trail.

The mountain is named after two brothers who homesteaded several acres here in the 1800s. In 1914, a blacksmith built a sawmill on the southern side of the mountain – an area now called Sawmill Basin. Today, the only developments here are grazing allotments, mining claims, recreational cabins, and a private inholding at Tunnel Ranch.

Figueroa's rich diversity of conifers includes big cone Douglas firs and ponderosas, some reaching

heights of over one hundred feet. Coulters, gray pines, and blue oaks dominate the lower elevations.

Springtime is a season of fantastic flower displays. March brings out the early bloomers like purple shooting stars. Later arrivals include blue lupines, chocolate lilies, golden poppies, and the scarlet Indian paintbrush. Tidy tips, popcorn flowers, hummingbird sage, winecup clarkia, and the gorgeous purple larkspur create dazzling displays.

Figueroa's summit forms a watershed boundary – rain falling to the north of the summit flows into Fir Canyon, Davy Brown Canyon, Manzana Creek (habitat for steelhead trout), and eventually into the Wild & Scenic Sisquoc River. Southern rains eventually flow into the Santa Ynez River and Lake Cachuma.

Get out and experience Figueroa in all of its glory. You'll be justly rewarded.



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**Protecting Our Public Lands  
Along California's Central Coast**