



Forest Watch

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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Oil Slick Spreads for Three Miles Near Condor Sanctuary

Last month, more than 200 gallons of crude oil and 2,100 gallons of wastewater spilled into a creek in the Los Padres National Forest. The oil slick spread for three miles before workers could contain it.



Workers use floatation devices, absorbent pads, and vacuum trucks to remove oil from a creek near the Sespe Condor Sanctuary in Ventura County.

The spill came within two miles of Sespe Creek, a federally protected Wild & Scenic River that provides critical habitat for endangered steelhead. The spill occurred in a remote section of the Sespe Oil Field, in Tar Creek. The creek forms the southern boundary of the Sespe Condor Sanctuary.

According to officials, no endangered species were directly harmed by the spill. However, officials remained concerned because of its proximity to the condor sanctuary and steelhead habitat.

The incident occurred after cold temperatures and possible internal corrosion caused a pipeline to burst. The pipeline was operated by Vintage Production, a subsidiary of Occidental Petroleum. Occidental is an international oil exploration company based in Los Angeles.

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Hundreds of Gravel Trucks Slated for Scenic Highway 33

Three new or expanded sand and gravel mines in the Cuyama River could add hundreds of haul trucks to Scenic Highway 33 through the heart of the Los Padres National Forest.

Combined, the mines could add more than 300 daily truck trips on California Scenic Highway 33, which connects the Cuyama Valley with Ojai. The winding two-lane road takes travelers through some of the most spectacular scenery of the Los

Padres National Forest.

The first mine slated for approval - and the largest of the three - is the Diamond Rock Sand and Gravel Mine, proposed for 133 acres in the Cuyama Valley near the Santa Barbara-Ventura county line.

Two other existing mines in the area have also applied to expand their operations.

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Three new or expanded mines could send hundreds of gravel trucks through the heart of the Los Padres.

A New Year's Message

It's going to be a good year for those of us who care about the future of the Los Padres National Forest.

It will be a good year because we now have the support of you and more than 500 others who share our concern about the fate of our local forest. Together, we'll become an even more effective voice on behalf of our region's wild places.

It will also be a good year because we're organizing several events and volunteer opportunities throughout the year. These events will be an opportunity for you — our members and supporters— to celebrate yesterday's victories while planning for the challenges of tomorrow. Look for special announcements and invitations soon.

And it's going to be a good year because we have a new Congress that better understands the need to protect our local forests. While it's far too early to tell what our new leaders have in store for our public

lands, and how these changes will affect us locally, we remain hopeful that new opportunities will arise to fix some of the bad decisions that have been made during the past few years.

But all of this good news doesn't mean that our work is finished. The sheer size of this newsletter — now twelve pages instead of eight — says it all. Oil spills. Haul trucks. Dams exploding. Wildfires burning. Lawless logging. Wilderness violations. And the list goes on.

Events like the recent oil spill demonstrate that we'll have to work harder than ever this year to return balance and accountability to our forest.

There may be even more surprises in store for the Los Padres in 2007, but one thing's for certain: thanks to your support, ForestWatch will continue to lead the charge to protect our local backcountry.




Jeff Kuyper is the Executive Director of ForestWatch.

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ForestWatch: 500 Members Strong...and Counting!

Last Fall, to celebrate ForestWatch's second anniversary, we launched our annual membership drive with a goal of doubling our membership.

We did it! In just two years, we've grown from a tiny group into an effective organization with a proven track record and more than 500 supporters from all over the region. Our members serve as the backbone of our organization, helping us serve as a powerful voice for your public lands. Thanks to your support, we'll be able to build upon these successes throughout 2007 and beyond!

Thank You to Our Recent Supporters!

We'd like to thank all of our new and existing members for your generous support during our Fall Membership Drive and throughout the holidays and New Year. Your support allows us to continue our important work in protecting your local forest.

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Patagonia's Salmon Run Benefits ForestWatch

In November, more than three hundred runners and walkers participated in the 13th Annual Salmon Run at Patagonia World Headquarters in Ventura, making it one of the largest and most successful events to date.

Special thanks go to Patagonia and its employees for organizing this event, and to Great Pacific IronWorks, Real Cheap Sports, and the many other event co-sponsors. Thank you!



This year, Patagonia donated all proceeds from the event to ForestWatch. The event raised more than \$10,000 to support our local forest protection efforts!

The 5k run/3k walk included awards for several age categories, and concluded with a raffle and silent auction featuring a beautiful painting of the Los Padres by local artist Whitney Brooks Abbott. Several nonprofit organizations set up information booths at the event.



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The Forest Trade Alliance

We're pleased to announce the charter members of the Forest Trade Alliance, a group of local, sustainable businesses that care about the future of our local forest. Their generous donations help support our work.

Carol Gravelle Graphic Design
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Do you own a local, sustainable business? Do you work for one? Contact us at (805) 252-4277 or info@LPFW.org to find out how your company can join the Forest Trade Alliance with a tax-deductible donation to ForestWatch.

We encourage our members to support these local businesses. When you go, be sure to thank them for their generous support of our forest protection efforts!

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 today.

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

Defunct Dam Demolished to Benefit Endangered Steelhead

A crew recently demolished a dam on Horse Creek — a tributary to the Sisquoc Wild & Scenic River in the Los Padres National Forest — opening up more than five miles of critical habitat for endangered steelhead that has been blocked for nearly forty years.

The Horse Canyon Dam was built in the mid-1960s by Santa Barbara County Flood Control as an erosion control device following the Wellman Fire. The area behind the dam quickly became filled with sediment and by 1969, it no longer served its intended purpose.

Horse Creek historically served as spawning and rearing habitat for southern steelhead, an endangered fish that has become so rare that it is now protected under federal law.

With a crest of nearly 9 feet above the downstream channel bed, the dam was too tall for steelhead to jump, and completely blocked them from migrating upstream. A recent management plan for the Sisquoc Wild & Scenic River recommended removal of the dam as a way to restore this river system.

The "damolition" allows unobstructed migration of steelhead to the entire Horse Creek drainage and access to more than five miles of upstream habitat. Experts also hope that the removal of the dam will restore natural watershed functions and prevent downstream bank erosion and scour caused by the dam. The project was a cooperative effort involving several agencies and organizations.



The Horse Creek Dam Removal Project was a cooperative effort with the Community Environmental Council, American Rivers, NOAA Fisheries, U.S. Forest Service, Department of Fish & Game, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, CCC, and Stoecker Ecological Consulting. Below: Matt Stoecker, project coordinator, stands atop the Horse Creek Dam. Photos by Thomas B. Dunklin.



You're Invited to Tour the Carrizo Plain National Monument

On Saturday, March 24, travel with other friends of ForestWatch and the Wildling Art Museum in an air-conditioned bus from either Santa Barbara or Los Olivos to visit the Carrizo Plain National Monument, a unique desert-like ecosystem of some 250,000 acres adjacent to the Los Padres National Forest in southeastern San Luis Obispo County. The trip will include a stop at the Visitor Center where we will enjoy a picnic lunch, a visit to Painted Rock, "one of the more significant examples of Native American rock painting in the world," as well as a visit to the historic Goodwin Ranch, now managed by the Nature Conservancy, as well as unscheduled stops along the way for photographing wildflowers or other interesting flora and fauna. Bus departs around 8am and returns around 6pm. Cost is \$60 members, \$80 nonmembers and includes bus, picnic and assorted snacks and beverages along the way. To reserve your seat, call the Wildling Art Museum today at (805) 688-1082.



WILDFIRE TRANSFORMS THE SESPE

Last Fall, a wildfire burned for nearly four weeks through chaparral and scattered forests in the steep and rugged terrain of the Sespe Wilderness in Ventura County. During the month-long fire, officials issued evacuation notices to residents in nearby communities, shut down roads and highways, and closed large areas of the forest.

By the time the fire was contained, it had burned 164,000 acres, or 254 square miles — the fifth largest fire in state history, covering about one-tenth of the entire Los Padres. Ironically, the second-largest fire also burned near here — the 220,000-acre Matilija Fire of 1932.



Investigators have determined that the fire was caused by someone burning debris in the forest. The fire destroyed nine struc-

tures, including a modular home, a small cabin, outbuildings, barns, and trailers. As many as 4,788 personnel were assigned to the fire. ForestWatch thanks firefighters for their hard work in protecting nearby communities.

Fire is a critical component of this ecosystem, and many areas hadn't burned in more than 80 years. While the area will look remarkably different over the next few years, regrowth has already begun, and nearly half of the area inside the fire perimeter had a low burn severity or was not burned at all.

Extensive Damage By Heavy Equipment

After containing the fire, Forest Service officials turned their focus to studying the impacts of the fire and restoring areas that were disturbed by firefighting equipment. During the fire, bulldozers plowed 163 miles of fire lines around the fire. These dozer lines will be much more diffi-

cult to restore than hand-cut lines, since the dozers rip up plants from the roots.

The amount of chemical fire retardant dumped on the forest was astronomical—one official described it as “painting the hills with fire retardant.” Aircraft dropped at least 500,000 gallons of bright red retardant, of great concern because some retardants degrade into toxic compounds that can kill fish and other aquatic wildlife.

Impacts to Rare Wildlife

The fire burned through half of the Sespe Condor Sanctuary, an area set aside to protect the endangered California condor. However, no condors were harmed during the fire, according to federal biologists.

A population of Nelson's bighorn sheep also resides in the burn area. Biologists spotted 28 bighorns after the fire, and the fire may benefit them by opening up new areas for foraging and reducing vegetative cover for mountain lions, their predators.

The fire also burned habitat of other protected animals, including arroyo toad, red-legged frog, and steelhead, mainly in the Sespe Creek watershed. Biologists remain concerned that winter rains could add excessive amounts of sediment into creeks, affecting breeding areas and other habitat for these rare animals.

Public Closures Continue Through Spring

During the fire's peak, officials closed all forestlands in Ventura and Kern counties and portions in Santa Barbara county.

The size of the closure area has been reduced, but the public is still barred from entering the burn area. Officials want to protect the fragile burn area through winter and have concerns about public safety due to a serious mudslide risk. Visitors may be able to return to the area later this Spring to witness the return of the wild Sespe backcountry as it regenerates from ashes.



After the Burn: A New Day in the Sespe Wilderness

by Brad Monsma

I've been through this before. Smoke riding hot winds and catching in the back of my throat. Vague news reports naming only the Los Padres or The Sespe Wilderness when I want to know which mountains, which drainages. Phone conversations with friends who know the backcountry, the canyons and streams and quiet places that hold the creatures we love. These places hold our hearts, too, and when the fire goes big our imaginations flare up with it.

When the Wolf Fire burned north of Rose Valley in 2002, I went through the whole cycle of emotions, and maybe that prepared me for the Day Fire. But the fire this time was of a different scale. I followed the maps as the Day Fire moved through the territory I knew best. I rehearsed everything I knew about chaparral fire ecology and wondered whether the truisms about the benefits of fire still hold in something this big. Once the fire was out, the maps didn't prepare me to stand on the ridge looking down toward Sespe Creek. Dried up streams creased black folds in the naked hills, a few unlikely patches of brush surviving to make the contrast shocking. Dust storms kicked up on the wind, casting a haze over the whole valley.

Down below, the Sespe flowed clear as ever, lined by healthy sycamores and cottonwoods, waiting for the rains to bring down startling amounts of sediment. The rain so far has been relatively gentle this season, but even so I suspect my favorite trails are returning to the angle of repose. It may soon be harder to move through the backcountry. The Sespe just got a little wilder.

Still, earlier fires have taught me that the view from above has its limits. You need

to take a closer look. Everywhere out there soft shoots of chamise are rising from blackened nubs. Scrub oak is root sprouting and giant wild rye is coming up along the creek banks. It's easy to miss the beginnings of new life when looking over miles of burn. But it's there.

The fire changed the Sespe, and the change will continue. Now we have the chance to watch each season's new growth, to chart the river's response to sediment, to track critters and look for steelhead in deep pools. Maybe we'll have the chance to help rebuild a trail or to collect the trash laid bare by the burn. The news might not be all good, but it's certain to be the show of a lifetime.

Author Brad Monsma is a ForestWatch board member and author of The Sespe Wild: Southern California's Last Free River.



Clockwise, from top left: (1) a helicopter takes off from Thorn Lookout; (2) a dozer line along Nordhoff Ridge; (3) an unburned area inside the fire perimeter; (4) new growth sprouting from the ashes; and (5) a barren hillside.



ForestWatch Protects Figueroa Mountain from Lawless Logging

In a precedent-setting decision, officials have agreed to scale back a logging plan for the Figueroa Mountain Recreation Area. The agreement comes after ForestWatch, the Center for Biological Diversity and dozens of local residents expressed concerns about the fate of the mountain's majestic old growth forests and wildlife.

Figueroa Mountain is one of our region's most popular forests. Rising above the scenic Santa Ynez Valley wine country, it's a place of ancient big cone Douglas firs and ponderosa pines, mountain streams, a campground, and nature trails surrounding a picnic area. Winter brings an occasional dusting of snow; springtime heralds dazzling displays of poppies and lupines.

Officials have been concerned about the health of this forest, citing decades of fire suppression that has caused the timber stands to become overgrown. If a wildfire hit the area, officials feared that it would burn too intensely for any trees to survive. But these good intentions translated into a very bad – and very big – logging plan.

An Environmental Assessment

The Forest Service eventually disclosed that it planned to cut trees as large as thirty inches in diameter – trees so big that it would take two people holding hands to wrap their arms around them. In all, 80% of the trees on Figueroa Mountain were slated for removal – hardly something that would promote a healthy forest. Even worse, the agency announced its intent to approve the logging without preparing an Environmental Assessment.

ForestWatch notified the agency that an EA was required by law. Eventually, officials agreed to prepare a full EA for this project—a critical first step towards public disclosure and an improved project.

Our Forest Health Alternative

ForestWatch also suggested an alternative plan that we developed in coordination with experts in fire ecology. Our plan prohibited removing any trees larger than 12-16 inches in diameter (half the size of the Forest Service's original proposal). It would achieve all of the agency's forest health goals without all the incidental – yet serious – damage caused by an intensive clearing and thinning operation.

ForestWatch convinced the agency to consider our alternative alongside their original proposal. During the public comment period, 78 concerned citizens – including environmentalists, former firefighters, nearby cabin owners, and others – wrote letters to the agency, asking officials to scale back the proposal.

A Precedent-Setting Decision

Thanks to your efforts, the Forest Service has decided to impose a 12" diameter limit across most of the project area, and has agreed to other protections as well. What began as a plan to cut trees "of all ages and sizes" without any public disclosure or environmental review, now has an EA and dozens of protective measures. Not all our concerns were addressed, but the agency made enough improvements to convince us not to appeal the project at this time. ForestWatch commends local Forest Service officials for their willingness to work with us to make needed improvements to this project.

The decision to adopt strict diameter limits has forest-wide implications, setting a precedent for five other thinning plans covering more than 7,300 acres on Mt. Pinos, Frazier Mountain, and Pine Mountain. ForestWatch will continue to demand strong protections for our local forests. For now, though, we can all rest assured that the old growth trees that stand sentry on Figueroa Mountain will remain.



Oil Spill Covers Forest in Sludge (from the front page)

As many as 78 workers have been working for more than two weeks with earthen berms, suction trucks, floatation devices, and absorbent pads to clean up the spill. Officials predicted that cleanup efforts could take several more days.

After the spill occurred, we uncovered reports of dozens of spills in this area, including two in or near the Los Padres in the last two years alone. In November 2005, the company spilled more than 200 gallons of crude oil in the adjacent Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge. Earlier that same year, Vintage dumped more than 600 gallons of crude

oil and wastewater into Maple Creek, also in the Los Padres forest.

The company vowed to inspect all wastewater lines in the forest to determine whether they needed replacement. With your support, ForestWatch will continue to monitor the spill to ensure adequate cleanup, and will demand additional protections to prevent future spills.



Rocks along the creek bank are covered in sludge while globs of oil float downstream. Workers in hazmat suits use flotation devices, absorbent pads, and a suction hose to remove the oil from the creek.

ForestWatch Files Suit to Protect Big Sur Coastal Wilderness

The famed Big Sur coastline is the crown jewel of the northern Los Padres National Forest, stretching along some of the state's most dramatic shoreline. Highway 1 takes travelers on a winding journey by numerous trails that provide access to the Ventana and Silver Peak wilderness areas. Habitat abounds for steelhead and the endangered Smith's blue butterfly.

It's also the site of eight commercial livestock grazing allotments. For six years, conservation groups have made an earnest effort to work toward convincing the U.S. Forest Service to respect and follow the federal Wilderness Act and other laws as they pertain to commercial livestock grazing on these eight allotments.

Countless volunteer hours have been spent analyzing proposals and documentation, surveying the landscape, submitting public comments, and preparing no fewer than three administrative appeals, with assistance from the Center for Biological Diversity. In 2004, ForestWatch joined these efforts, urging the Forest Service to improve the management of these allotments.

In 2005, officials finalized their plans by denying our third appeal (the first two were successful), and the bag is mixed.

First, the good news: The Buckeye allotment in the Silver Peak Wilderness and the Twitchell allotment in the Ventana Wilderness have been officially dropped from the grazing system as a result of our concerns and vociferous input. This is an agency action that we applaud and support. Similarly,

the Torre allotment will not be stocked at this time, and must undergo further environmental review prior to any cattle use. Grazing will continue on the Gorda, San Carpoforo, Alder and Salmon Creek allotments under new guidelines.

But the issue isn't over just yet. One proposed allotment, the Kozy Kove in the Silver Peak Wilderness, is still in dispute. In September, ForestWatch joined forces with the Ventana Wilderness Alliance, Sierra Club, and Wilderness Watch in filing a lawsuit against the U.S. Forest Service for violations of the Wilderness Act and National Environmental Policy Act.

Once an area is protected as Wilderness, grazing can continue there only if permits are in place at the time of designation, a provision which we respect. But on the Kozy Kove, no permits had ever existed and grazing hadn't taken place for well over a decade, and never under federal ownership. Initiating grazing there now, within the Silver Peak Wilderness, violates the spirit of the Wilderness Act. The Forest Service chose to ignore these facts even though they were fully explained to them in our appeals, so the only available remedy to protect wilderness is the courts.

Our complaint was filed in September in Federal District Court in San Francisco. A decision on the case is expected later this year. While we're hopeful that our disagreement can be settled, we're ready and willing to go the distance in defense of Wilderness. We're being represented in this case by attorney Pete Frost of the Western Environmental Law Center, and would like to thank him and his organization for all their help and concern.

Author Boon Hughey is a Director Emeritus of the Ventana Wilderness Alliance and a ForestWatch member. This article was excerpted from the VWA's Fall 2006 Ventana Wilderness Watch.



The Kozy Kove provides unique recreation opportunities in a coastal wilderness, as well as habitat for rare wildlife, including this mountain lion..



Highway 33—Scenic Highway or Industrial Haul Route? (from the front page)

The Ozena Sand & Gravel Mine, on Lockwood Valley Road just east of Highway 33, is seeking to double production. The other existing mine, operated by GPS River Rock Products, is seeking a ten-year extension.

Highway 33 is the only designated Scenic Byway in the Los Padres National Forest, and one of only four in all of southern California. It's a popular route for drivers, bicyclists, and motorcyclists, taking travelers from the Ojai Valley through the spectacular Sespe Wild & Scenic River gorge and cresting Pine Mountain Summit before descending down into the rural Cuyama Valley.

Currently, more than one hundred haul trucks pass through the forest on an average day. If approved, these proposals could increase truck traffic by 300%.

Such an increase would be incompatible with the scenic character of this corridor, and would interfere with visitors who come here to seek a quiet outdoor recreation experience. It would also interfere with efforts to protect an additional 12-mile stretch of Sespe Creek as a Wild & Scenic River.

With your support, we submitted a letter urging County officials to analyze the impacts to the scenic and recreational qualities of the Highway 33 corridor. ForestWatch also organized a town meeting in Ojai attended by more than 130 concerned citizens. The meeting featured speakers from several groups concerned about additional truck traffic, including the Ojai Chamber of Commerce, the Ventura County Economic Development Association, Ojai Mayor Carol Smith, Ventura County Supervisor Steve Bennett, the Ojai School District, Highway 33 residents, and Cuyama Valley farmers and landowners.

The Diamond Rock mine could come up for a vote as early as this Spring. ForestWatch will continue to demand strong protections for the scenic and recreational character along Highway 33.



Field Notes – Highway 33, the Jacinto Reyes Scenic Byway

The Jacinto Reyes National Forest Scenic Byway takes travelers through some of the most picturesque and diverse terrain in southern California. For 38 miles, the highway winds its way through the remote backcountry of the Los Padres National Forest, from the edge of the Ojai Valley through Sespe Gorge, over Pine Mountain Summit, and eventually descending into the upper Cuyama Valley.

When the highway first opened in 1933, it was called the Maricopa Road, providing a more direct route from the Central Valley to the coast. Today, the scenic byway is named after one of the first rangers of what is now the Los Padres National Forest.

Today, Scenic Highway 33 remains a two-lane road, serving as a popular access route to three wilderness areas – the Dick Smith, the Sespe, and the Matilija – as well as two designated recreation areas at Pine Mountain and Rose Valley. Hiking, biking, and equestrian trails lead from the highway to well-known areas like Cozy Dell, Middle Sespe, Potrero John, Chorro Grande, Bear Canyon, and Boulder Canyon.

At Wheeler Gorge, the road passes through three tunnels at the base of sharp cliffs along the boulder-strewn banks of North Fork Matilija Creek. The dramatic white sand-



stone outcroppings at Piedra Blanca come into view as the highway drops down into the Sespe Creek watershed. Sespe Gorge, a popular rock climbing area, is formally recommended for protection under the federal Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. At Pine Mountain Summit, the road climbs to more than 5,000 feet in elevation – nearly a mile high. Along the way, the landscape changes from lush riparian areas to chaparral and large old-growth Douglas fir and ponderosa pines before descending down into the Cuyama Valley.

We highly recommend *A Traveler's Guide to California's Scenic Highway 33...from Ojai to Cuyama*, written by E.R. "Jim" Blakely. Copies are available online at the ForestWatch Trading Post at www.LPFW.org/tradingpost.htm or we'd be happy to take your order over the phone at (805) 252-4277. Proceeds benefit ForestWatch's forest protection efforts.

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