



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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ForestWatch Files Suit to Protect Forest From Oil Drilling

Continuing to lead the charge against the expansion of oil development in our region's natural treasures, ForestWatch filed a lawsuit in April challenging a drilling expansion plan for the Los Padres National Forest. The lawsuit follows a devastating oil and wastewater spill earlier this year that coated three miles of mountain stream.

The suit seeks to overturn a 2005 oil drilling plan for the Los Padres that opened 52,075 acres in **Santa Barbara and Ventura counties** to potential oil and gas drilling, including more than 4,200 acres of infrastructure. The drilling plan would harm endangered California condors and other rare wildlife, pollute the



air, and interfere with forest recreation, while producing less than a day's supply of oil for our nation.

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ATTACK OF THE KILLER MASTICATORS!

Panic has swept across the countryside as vicious chaparral-eating Killer Masticators have escaped from an experimental government program, embarking on a rampage of wanton destruction!

It may sound like a bad science fiction flick from the 1970s, but this scenario is playing out in real life on the Los Padres National Forest, where thousands of acres of chaparral have been turned to mulch by heavy machines called "masticators" - giant tractors fitted with lawnmower-like attachments that grind up brush and trees.

While forest officials hail the masticator as being a "light on the land" approach to clearing areas for fire protection, the land left behind tells a much different story – churned soil and erosion, barren streams, invasive weeds, broken limbs, damaged trees, and loss of habitat. Areas cleared of vegetation become magnets for illegal off-road vehicle trespass.

Despite these impacts, the Forest Service is proposing to use the giant masticators across thousands of acres of forestland.

(Continued on page 7)





Jeff Kuyper is the Executive Director of ForestWatch.

While camping recently along the **Big Sur Coast**, it finally sunk in. In a short amount of time, ForestWatch really has become one of the premier conservation forces in our region, bolstered by you and more than five hundred other dedicated members who support our forest protection work.

It hasn't been easy, and at times it's been downright challenging (but that's what weekend getaways to Big Sur are for, right?). But with long hours, a small budget, and a big vision, we've been able to protect more than 20,000 acres from development. Add to that all of those smaller victories that are measured not in acres, but in value. Victories like **seeing an endangered condor fly overhead**, or a rare kit fox scurry through sagebrush. Watching a mountain stream flow freely through a canyon.

Enjoying the solitude of our local wilderness, or simply marveling at the forest's scenic vistas from town.

Meeting our members gives us an opportunity to share in the triumph of our victories and to plan ahead for future challenges. In April, many of you stopped by the ForestWatch booth at **Earth Day festivals** in Ojai, Santa Barbara, Ventura, and San Luis Obispo. Others we've met at a **house party in Arroyo Grande**, or at a recent **happy-hour fundraiser in Santa Barbara**. And some of you even got your hands dirty, helping us clean up more than 150 pounds of microtrash that was finding its way to a nearby condor nest.

We're the only organization working day after day to protect and safeguard the Los Padres National Forest. **We couldn't do it without you**, and these events are our little way of saying "thanks." We look forward to seeing all of you at more events planned throughout the year. Or, even better, maybe we'll see you in the forest, enjoying those special places we all work so hard to protect.

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ForestWatch Welcomes New Board Member, Opens Office

Join the ForestWatch Board and Staff in welcoming our newest Board Member!

Ruth Lasell lives in **Ojai**, where she's involved in the Ojai Library, the Ventura Library Adult Literacy Program, and the Ojai Music Festival education program. Ruth received her M.D. from Yale and completed her residency in adult psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh. She practiced psychiatry and taught residents for 25 years. Now, she enjoys hiking with her family in the Los Padres National Forest.

hometown. We thank Jen for her service and wish her luck in life's new adventures.

Thanks to the support of several generous donors, ForestWatch recently moved into **our first office space** in Santa Barbara, at the base of the Santa Ynez Mountains. Just minutes from the Los Padres National Forest, it's a modest office space that will accommodate an additional staff person and volunteers – and it sure beats our first office space (a spare bedroom in a house!).

ForestWatch wishes to express our appreciation for the hard work and tireless commitment of retiring Board member **Jennifer Jackson**, who's moving back to her Ohio

We're still in the process of settling into our new space, and hope to invite our members to an **office-warming party** sometime this Fall!

Ruth Lasell



Thank You to Our Recent Supporters!

We'd like to thank all of our new and existing members for your generous contributions since our last newsletter. Your support allows us to continue our important work to protect our region's natural treasures.

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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



ForestWatch Receives National Recognition

Not that we need an excuse to eat some really good ice cream, but the **Ben & Jerry's Foundation** recently awarded ForestWatch with an \$11,000 grant to help us hire another staff person to accommodate our growing workload! This highly competitive grant will allow us to expand our outreach and volunteer activities, and highlights the nationwide importance of the Los Padres. Combined with recent support from the **McCune Foundation**, the **Santa Barbara Foundation**, the **Fund for Santa Barbara**, and the **Norcross Wildlife Foundation**, ForestWatch is preparing to hire our first Program & Outreach Coordinator this summer. ForestWatch also received recent support from **ESRI** to expand our GIS computer mapping capabilities. Thanks for your support!

Planning Process Resumes for Carrizo Plain National Monument



The Carrizo Plain is home many rare plants and animals, including reintroduced herds of pronghorn antelope (shown) and Tule elk.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recently resumed the planning process for the Carrizo Plain National Monument in **southeastern San Luis Obispo County**, adjacent to the Los Padres National Forest. After a series of delays and controversies, efforts are now underway to prepare a Resource Management Plan (RMP) to guide the stewardship of the monument for the next decade. The RMP offers a unique opportunity to produce a comprehensive long-range vision for this ecologically unique area.

Last month, ForestWatch joined a broad coalition of conservation groups in urging officials to adopt a strong and scientifically-based management plan. In addition, more than 3,000 concerned citizens recently sent letters to the BLM demanding strong protections.

The Carrizo Plain National Monument was established by Presidential Proclamation in 2001. The 250,000-acre area encompasses the largest relatively intact remnant of ecosystems that once characterized the southern San Joaquin Valley.

"Full of natural splendor and rich in human history," states the Proclamation, "the majestic grasslands and stark ridges in the Carrizo Plain National Monument contain exceptional objects of scientific and historic interest...providing crucial habitat for the longterm conservation of the many endemic plant and animal species that still inhabit the area."

Shortly after the monument was established, the BLM began preparing a RMP. However, bureaucrats thwarted these attempts, pushing for more resource extraction at the expense of wildlife, eventually leading the field manager for the Carrizo Plain to commit suicide on the Plain in 2005. A subsequent investigation by the Inspector General blamed a "breakdown in trust, communication and cooperation."

Towards the end of last year, the planning process headed in a new direction after ForestWatch and other groups voiced their concerns. In response, BLM agreed to provide additional opportunities for public input and scientific scrutiny. The BLM expects to release a draft RMP for public review in early 2008.



Photo by Michael Hansen, Windwalker Images

Mega-Development Threatens Santa Lucia Wilderness

The Santa Margarita Ranch is a 14,000-acre property nestled between the boundary of the Los Padres National Forest and the rural community of **Santa Margarita in San Luis Obispo County**. In January, the County released details on a development proposal for the ranch that included 112 residential lots, and an additional 402 residential units, golf course, guest ranch, lodge, bed and breakfast, café, amphitheater, crafts studios, galleries, shops, seven wineries with tasting rooms, three ranch/farm headquarters, one livestock sales yard, three churches, and a retreat center.

The property shares a boundary with the **Santa Lucia Wilderness Area** in the Los Padres National Forest, and such an intensive development proposal threatens

the wilderness character of the area. ForestWatch recently submitted a letter to the County, asking officials to address noise, air pollution, excessive visitation, and visual blight to the wilderness area; the effect of groundwater extraction on upstream water supplies in the Los Padres; the impact on recovery efforts for the endangered California condor (there's a condor release site just a few miles from the project); and providing an adequate buffer between development and the wilderness area.



UPDATE: Increased Trucking on Scenic Highway 33

In a stunning victory, ForestWatch convinced the County of Ventura to change course and prepare a detailed Environmental Impact Report before approving the expansion of the Ozena mine. The mine, located in the **Cuyama River** adjacent to the Los Padres National Forest, sends as many as one hundred trucks per day on Scenic Highway 33 through the heart of the forest.

Another mine — the proposed Diamond Rock Mine — was recently approved by the Santa Barbara County Planning Commission. After pressure from ForestWatch and Ojai's Stop the Trucks Coalition, the County agreed to adopt a ban on as many as 138 daily truck trips through the national forest. However, the ban is a "conditional" ban, meaning it could be

lifted in the future under certain conditions. The ban also lacks any meaningful enforcement mechanisms. ForestWatch continues to work to strengthen the ban and to ensure strong enforcement.

ForestWatch recently completed a comprehensive investigation into truck accidents on Highway 33, uncovering CHP records of 22 truck accidents along this narrow, winding stretch of highway. More than half of the accidents occurred in a ten-mile stretch of highway near the **Matilija Tunnels**. ForestWatch will continue working to prevent excessive truck traffic along this scenic highway.



VICTORY! ForestWatch Stops Drilling in Condor Habitat



Endangered condors perch on an oil well near the Los Padres National Forest.

Efforts by ForestWatch have indefinitely postponed a proposal to drill two oil wells along the edge of the **Sespe Condor Sanctuary** in the Los Padres National Forest.

Last year, Seneca Resources applied for permission to drill the two wells on a sliver of private land between the Sespe Condor Sanctuary and the **Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge**.

In May, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management concluded that the new oil wells would not harm condors, indicating that approval of the drilling was likely.

However, ForestWatch and several noted condor biologists disagreed. In a detailed letter, we notified the BLM that it could not approve the drilling because the associated noise and activity would disturb several nearby condor nests.

Weeks later, BLM officials announced that they would “indefinitely” delay approval of the drilling proposal.

Only 69 condors remain in the wild in California, including 26 condors in the vicinity of the proposed oil wells. For now, these condors—and their young chicks—are safe from further oil development.

Oil Drilling Lawsuit (from the front page)

The lawsuit charges that the plan violates the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Forest Management Act. Specifically, the plan harms rare wildlife like the condor by allowing drilling near the **Sespe Condor Sanctuary** and the **Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge**, areas that provide important nesting and foraging habitat. The decision also allows drilling immediately adjacent to **three wilderness areas** and beneath the Wild and Scenic Sespe Creek and **Piru Creek**.

Past oil and gas development has already caused significant harm to the Los Padres National Forest and nearby protected areas. On January 29, a subsidiary of Occidental Petroleum spilled more than 800 gallons of oil and 2,100 gallons of wastewater into a tributary of the federally protected **Wild and Scenic Sespe Creek**, along the southern boundary of the Sespe Condor Sanctuary. Civil and/or criminal charges may be filed against the oil company responsible for the spill.

Nearly a dozen other significant spills have occurred in this area since 2004, including a massive spill of 8,400 gallons of wastewater and an “unknown” amount of oil into the Sespe Creek watershed.

During the past few years, several condors have been observed perching on oil drilling equipment, fatally ingesting micro-trash (i.e. bolts, screws, wires, oily rags, bits of glass, and other items commonly found at oil drilling sites), and even becoming coated in oil.

The drilling plan for the Los Padres would produce **less than a day's supply of oil** for our nation, according to government estimates, placing our local forest at great risk for little benefit.

The lawsuit was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California, with the assistance of the Center for Biological Diversity and Defenders of Wildlife. The case could be decided later this year. Stay tuned!

Possible criminal charges may be filed against the oil company responsible for this year's disastrous oil spill in the Sespe Watershed.



Salvage Logging Proposed for Grade Valley and Alamo Mountain

Logging companies want to remove more than 770,000 board feet of timber from an area burned in last year's wildfire. It would be the first timber sale on the Los Padres National Forest in recent memory.

The logging would take place along more than forty miles of dirt roads and trails on the **Mt. Pinos Ranger District**, according to a proposal by the U.S. Forest Service. The area targeted for salvage logging includes **Fishbowls Trailhead, Alamo Mountain, Piru Creek, Mutau Flats, and Thorn Meadows**.

To preserve the visual and recreational values of this area, ForestWatch made it clear that a commercial timber sale is not acceptable. If trees need to be removed from the burn area, then official crews (not logging companies) should remove only the most dangerous hazard trees posing an imminent threat to public safety where people congregate – such as at trailheads and camps.

Even though some of the trees in this area burned during last year's Day Fire, they still serve important ecosystem functions, such as habitat for cavity-nesting species, preserving soil moisture, and enriching the soil with nutrients. Many areas affected by the fire are already showing new signs of growth. Recent studies have shown that salvage logging can actually slow the regeneration of burned areas. The Forest Service is accepting comments on this proposal until August 8.



More than 150 logging trucks would be needed to remove thousands of trees slated for removal.

Masticators (from the front page)

Officials are on the verge of approving a 51-mile fire break **from Lake Casitas to Upper Ojai**, with a maximum width of 2,000 feet – more than one-third of a mile wide. Officials have also started work on a 40-mile long fire break along East and West **Camino Cielo**, initially approved in 2002 as “wildlife habitat enhancement.” Other clearing is planned for 44 miles along **Sierra Madre Ridge** and 9 miles along **Gaviota Peak**. Recently, forest officials sought to double the amount of acreage masticated on **Figueroa Mountain**, only months after assuring concerned citizens that masticator use would be very limited in this sensitive area.

The California Department of Fish & Game and The California Chaparral Institute have also expressed alarm about increased masticator use on the Los Padres.

ForestWatch is currently working to scale back the proposed fuel breaks while retaining their effectiveness, encouraging clearing by hand instead of with heavy machinery.

As this year's fire season is in full swing, our communities' limited firefighting resources are best spent where they're most effective – **clearing defensible space immediately around structures, not deep in the wilderness**. Fuel breaks should be properly planned and designed to have the smallest footprint possible.



A masticated hillside south of Knapp's Castle on East Camino Cielo.

Field Notes – The Santa Lucia Wilderness Area

The United States Congress formally established the Santa Lucia Wilderness in 1978 to encompass more than 18,400 acres of land along **San Luis Obispo County's Santa Lucia Mountain Range**. Part of the Endangered American Wilderness Act of 1978, the Santa Lucia Wilderness was set aside for "watershed preservation, wildlife habitat protection, scenic and historic preservation, scientific research and educational use, primitive recreation, solitude, physical and mental challenge, and inspiration for the benefit of all of the American people of present and future generations."



A stream that flows yearlong through **Lopez Canyon**, lush streamside vegetation, and chaparral-covered slopes are the prime ingredients in this wild area that contains the headwaters of several other streams that eventually flow into the **Morro Bay National Estuary**. **Big and Little Falls** grace visitors with spectacular springtime waterfalls. Little Falls takes a 50-foot

plunge through a lush limestone-walled canyon, while Big Falls features a pair of dramatic 40-foot falls and an upper 80-foot waterfall.

The Santa Lucia wilderness lies at the heart of the range of the endangered California condor. Overlooking the wilderness is the **Hi Mountain Lookout**, a retired fire lookout tower along the 3,200-foot high crest of the Santa Lucia range that has been restored back to life.

Huff's Hole, a historic condor and peregrine falcon nesting site, is found in this wilderness. The area also contains

the **Black Butte Research Natural Area**, where groves of rare knobcone pine and Sargent cypress are scattered amongst the sensitive Santa Lucia Manzanita plant.

The Santa Lucia Wilderness contains sweeping vistas of the entire **Santa Lucia Range, Morro Rock, Seven Sisters, Santa Margarita Valley, and Pozo Valley**.

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

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