



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 Company Seeks Drilling Rights in Upper Lopez Canyon

The oil industry is secretly working behind the scenes to drill for oil in Upper Lopez Canyon, a remote area surrounded by the Los Padres National Forest northeast of Arroyo Grande in San Luis Obispo County. ForestWatch and landowners along Upper Lopez Canyon Road have joined together to oppose oil development in this remote, ecologically sensitive region that serves as a gateway to the surrounding **Santa Lucia Wilderness Area**.

An oil industry prospector has been knocking on residents' doors in the area, according to several landowners who live along the road. The oilman urges landowners to sign over their mineral rights to an Ojai-based exploration company that is a subsidiary of Pacrim Energy Ltd., an Australian international energy conglomerate.



Lopez Creek flows year-round along several scattered residences in this remote canyon, eventually feeding into Lopez Lake, a municipal water source for more than 45,000 people.

(Continued on page 6)

Zaca Fire Transforms Santa Barbara's Backcountry

On July 4, workers cutting a metal pipe at a ranch in the Santa Ynez Valley sent sparks flying into dry brush, and the Zaca Fire was born. Two months later, firefighters declared the wildfire fully contained after it had burned through 240,207 acres of chaparral and mixed conifer forests. Low humidity, triple-digit temperatures, extremely rugged terrain, and century-old vegetation combined to make the Zaca Fire the second-largest fire in California recorded history, transforming much of the San Rafael and Dick Smith wilderness areas and the **upper Sisquoc and Santa Ynez River** watersheds in the Santa Barbara backcountry. New vegetation has already emerged after recent rains in the area, and the process of recovery has begun.

It was the second large wildfire in as many years on the Los Padres. Last year's Day Fire

(Continued on page 4)

TOWN MEETING: EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF THE ZACA FIRE

On Wednesday, Oct 10 at 7:00pm, view vivid photography and firsthand accounts of firefighting and restoration efforts. Faulkner Gallery, Santa Barbara Public Library, corner of Anapamu and Anacapa. Free!





Jeff Kuyper is the Executive Director of ForestWatch.

The Los Padres *National Park* — that’s what a California judge recently (and, I reluctantly add, mistakenly) called this special place. Surely these wild landscapes are worthy of national park status, with their rich biodiversity, pristine rivers, unique geology, and abundant recreation opportunities.

A national park has a nice ring to it, but the Los Padres National Forest is, still, a national forest. It’s an important distinction, one that goes to the heart of what ForestWatch is all about. While national parks are managed for preservation, national forests are managed for “multiple uses,” which include wildlife habitat and recreation but also logging, mining, oil drilling, livestock grazing, and other commercial resource extraction activities.

Land management agencies like the Forest Service often do a good job of balancing these uses, but sometimes interest groups, profits, and politics get involved and really muck things up. That’s where we step in — our goal is to bring a sense of balance back to our local forest, reminding our decision makers that “multiple use” includes important values like wildlife habitat, clean water, scenic views, outdoor recreation, and the preservation of wilderness. These concepts strike at the heart of our cultural heritage and quality of life as communities across the West are demanding a more responsible land ethic.

While you and I may never see a Los Padres National Park in our lifetimes, we’re already achieving great strides in restoring a preservation ethic to our local forest. We appreciate your continued support as we enter our fourth year of providing cutting-edge and *local* protection for our region’s natural treasures.

For the forest,

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Meet Zack Bradford, Our New Volunteer Coordinator!

ForestWatch has hired a new staff person to expand our volunteer program and to coordinate our outreach activities. Join us in welcoming Zack Bradford as our new Program & Outreach Coordinator! Originally from the base of the Jemez Mountains in New Mexico, Zack earned his Master’s degree from the Donald Bren School of Environmental Science and Management at U.C. Santa Barbara, where he specialized in Conservation Planning and studied blue oak woodlands in the Southern Sierra Nevada. Zack brings several years of experience working with other non-profits both prior to and during his studies at Bren. In his free time, Zack enjoys fly-fishing, hiking, surfing, and reading sci-fi novels.

Zack is busy coordinating with the Forest Service to identify volunteer projects like habitat restoration, trash cleanups, and other exciting projects. He’s also in charge of keeping our members informed through email alerts, building our computerized GIS mapping capabilities, and providing support for our forest protection efforts.

ForestWatch was able to expand our staff at this critical time thanks to generous grants from the Ben & Jerry’s Foundation, the McCune Foundation, the Santa Barbara Foundation, and the Fund for Santa Barbara. If you’d like to sign up to become a ForestWatch volunteer, call Zack at (805) 617-4610.



Thank You to Our Recent Supporters!

We'd like to thank these 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

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) 617-4610 or info@LPFW.org


Renew Your Membership, Give a Gift Membership for Free!


Fall is the one time of year where we ask you — our closest friends and supporters — to renew your membership with ForestWatch. And if you renew before Thanksgiving, you'll receive a free one-year gift membership to give to a friend or relative! Now you'll be able to renew your support and help us expand our circle of friends who care about the future of our local forest.

In just three short years, ForestWatch has grown from a tiny group into an effective organization with more than 500 members and a proven track record of successful advocacy on behalf of local forests, mountains, streams, and wildlife. Our members are the backbone of our organization, providing critical support for all of our important programs. Your support has helped us grow into a powerful and effective voice for these magnificent lands.

There are three ways that you can renew today:

 **On our website**—Go to www.LPFW.org and click on the “Donate Now” button. You can safely renew your membership using our secure server. This is the fastest way to renew, and also the most efficient, saving us time and postage.

 **By mail**—Look for your membership renewal notice in your mailbox soon.

 **By phone**—We're happy to accept your renewal information over the phone. Just call us at (805) 617-4610 and we'll take care of the details.

We truly appreciate your continued support!



Zaca Fire (continued from front)

burned through more than 162,000 acres in and around the Sespe Wilderness in Ventura County.

Three weeks into the blaze, firefighters had declared the fire 80% contained, sending

home hundreds of crew to save costs or reassign them to other blazes in the West. With fewer crew and changing weather conditions, the flames eventually jumped the containment line and advanced towards remote and inaccessible sections of wilderness, where they would not be stopped until burning all the way east to **Highway 33** in Ventura County.

The fire was declared “contained” on September 3, sixty-two days after it began. Crews continue to put out a few hot spots burning inside the fire perimeter, and the fire will not be completely extinguished until significant rainfall occurs. More than three thousand personnel battled the blaze at a cost exceeding \$118 million. The ranch and two workers who allegedly ignited the fire have been charged with multiple felonies and are awaiting trial, facing possible jail time and fines to cover firefighting costs.

scattered residences inside the forest and along Highway 33. Thanks to the efforts of firefighters, no homes and only one outbuilding were destroyed. Crews saved historical structures like the **Manzana Schoolhouse** and the Santa Cruz, Doty, Dabney, South Fork, and Bluff (photo below) cabins by wrapping them with fire-resistant material.

During the fire, officials closed large areas of the forest. At one point, as many as 888,000 acres were off-limits

to public access, stretching all the way from Highway 166 southeast to the Frazier Park area. The forest closure is still in effect as of press time, covering most forest lands between Highway 166 and Highway 33, plus the **Pine Mountain** area.

Forest Service officials are recommending that much of the burn area remain closed through the winter so that this fragile area can begin to recover.

Rehabilitation Work Begins

While battling the fire, bulldozers carved more than 422 miles of fire lines – nearly five times as many roads that existed in the burn area before the fire. While some of these dozer lines have been partially rehabilitated, these scars will remain on the landscape for years, acting as magnets for illegal off-road vehicle use.

As part of the post-fire rehabilitation process, forest officials recently completed their Burn Area Emergency Response, a report that describes necessary precautions over the next five years to reduce erosion and prevent the spread of inva-



A HISTORY OF WILDFIRE IN THE LOS PADRES

Nine of the state's twenty largest recorded wildfires have occurred in the Los Padres National Forest.

Zaca Fire (2007, Santa Barbara)
240,207 acres

Day Fire (2006, Ventura)
162,702 acres

Kirk Fire (1999, Monterey)
86,700 acres

Highway 58 Fire (1996, SLO)
106,668 acres

Wheeler Fire (1985, Ventura)
118,000 acres

Marble Cone Fire (1977, Monterey)
177,866 acres

Wellman Fire (1966, Santa Barbara)
93,600 acres

Refugio Fire (1955, Santa Barbara)
84,770 acres

Matilija Fire (1932, Ventura)
220,000 acres



The fire prompted several evacuation orders as it advanced towards nearby communities in the Santa Ynez Valley, Paradise Road, and



sive weeds in the burn area. As part of this report, the Los Padres requested \$665,444 to implement emergency measures for the Zaca Fire, including the purchase and installation of closure gates and signs along Forest Service roads, patrolling to monitor for effective closure, pre-season drainage clearing on roads and

trails, protecting two Native American heritage sites from erosion, and conducting noxious weed detection surveys.

Threats & Benefits to Wildlife

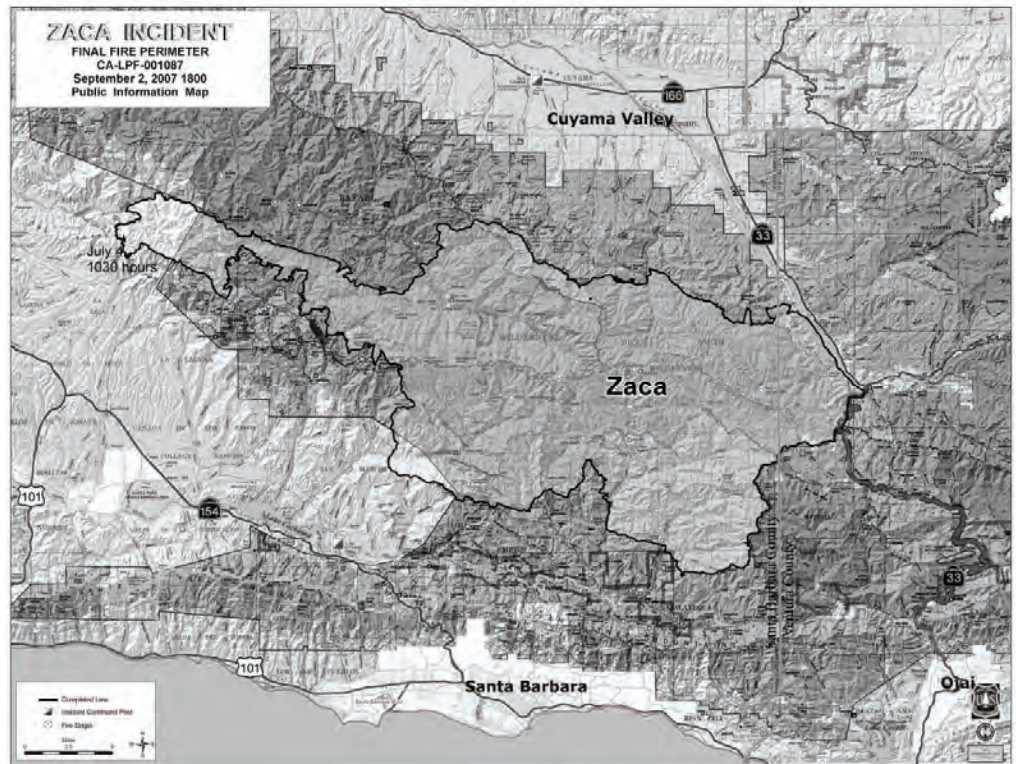
Chaparral ecosystems are adapted to fire, but the long-term effects of a fire of this size are unknown. The fire raced through old-growth chaparral that had not burned in more than a century, and some wildlife may now benefit from the open areas cleared by the fire. The fire created a patchwork of burned and unburned areas, creating a diverse mosaic that will bring an explosion of plant growth over the next few years. Officials estimate that 68% of the burn area experienced high or moderate burn severity, with another 18% characterized by low burn severity. About 14% of the area inside the fire perimeter burned very little, or not at all.

High-elevation conifer habitats (big cone Douglas fir, mixed conifer, and Coulter pine) mostly burned at moderate levels. Sixteen percent had high severity, while 44% burned very little or not at all. Unburned islands of conifer habitat are present throughout the fire area. Over the next few years, tree mortality in the high severity burn areas could reduce the amount of forest habitat on which the rare California spotted owl depends.

Some aquatic species could suffer from post-fire sedimentation. Emergency conditions exist for a number of wildlife species due to increases in sediment in riparian areas and the loss of habitat within the burned area. Specifically, steelhead habitat in the Sisquoc River, Santa Ynez River, and **Manzana Creek** could be affected if spawning areas are choked with sediment. Other rare wildlife that could be affected by increased sediment flows include red-legged frogs, pond turtles, two-striped garter snakes, and arroyo toads.

Increased Risk of Erosion

More than one thousand miles of streams and rivers flow through the burn area, including the Sisquoc River, **Mono and Indian Creeks**, Manzana Creek, Santa Cruz Creek, and **Rancho Nuevo Creek**. While much of the riparian vegetation along these waterways did not burn, officials are concerned about increased erosion, ash, and debris flows into these streams from adjacent hillsides. Erosion potential in the burn area is 38 times normal, with some watersheds like **Upper Mono Creek** and East Fork Santa Cruz Creek possibly exceeding 190 times normal erosion rates.



Forest Service May Close or Privatize Local Recreation Sites



The Forest Service recently announced plans to close certain campsites and trailheads, increase user fees, and privatize several other sites in the forest over the next five years, part of a nationwide effort affecting thousands of recreation sites.

The program promotes transferring campgrounds and trailheads to private "concessionaire" companies. Currently there are three sites in the Los Padres operated by concessionaires: the Santa Ynez Recreation Area in Santa Barbara County, Cerro Alto Campground off Highway 41 between Morro Bay and Atascadero, and Plaskett Creek Campground on the Big Sur coast. The new plan would privatize 13 more sites in Ventura County, including Rose Valley, the Gene Marshall-Piedra Blanca Trail, Chuchupate Campground at the base of Frazier Mountain, Campo Alto on Mt. Abel, Chula Vista Trail-

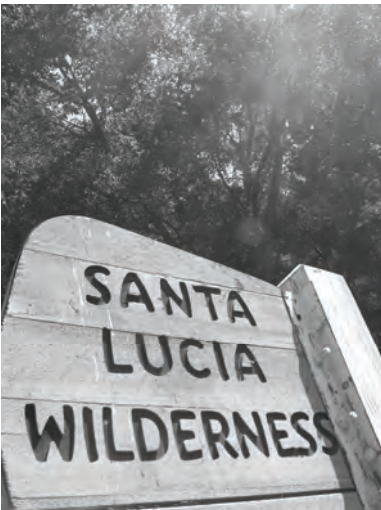
head at the top of Mt. Pinos, Reyes Creek Campground, and Grade Valley Road (including the Fishbowls and Johnston Ridge trailheads, and Halfmoon and Pine Springs camps). Three other camps are slated for permanent closure, and the season could be reduced up to three months at nine others. Fees would be added at another nine sites.

The news is not all bad, as officials are also proposing to install informational signs, upgrade toilets, add campsites and trailheads, increase staffing presence, and refurbish some sites. Other sites will have no changes. However, at the 38 sites faced with closures, increased fees, reduced seasons, and privatization, one thing is clear: those of us who enjoy recreating in our local forest must demand that Congress restore adequate funding to the Forest Service so that we can continue to enjoy our favorite recreation places.

Visit our website at www.LPFW.org to review a detailed summary of changes proposed to local recreation sites.

Lopez Canyon Oil Drilling (from the front page)

Lopez Canyon is a popular access route to Big Falls and Little Falls in the Santa Lucia Wilderness.



ple in the five cities region. **Lopez Lake** is also a popular recreation destination for camping, boating, fishing, and windsurfing. The canyon above the lake provides public access to the Santa Lucia Wilderness Area and popular hiking and equestrian trails to **Big Falls and Little Falls**.

"Lopez Canyon is one of San Luis Obispo County's natural treasures," said one canyon resident. "Turning our canyon into an industrial oil drilling zone would spell disaster for the area and for the families that call this place home."

This renewed drilling effort comes on the heels of a plan proposed by the U.S. Forest Service in 2002 that considered opening the federally-owned portions of Lopez Canyon to oil drilling. In 2005, the U.S.

Forest Service decided to prohibit any oil drilling on federal lands in this area, citing environmental concerns. A study commissioned by the federal government estimates that if drilling occurred in Lopez Canyon, it would likely produce 350,000 barrels of oil. This represents a **24-minute supply of oil**, based on current consumption rates for the United States as calculated by the Energy Information Administration, which tracks official energy statistics for the U.S. government.

People come to Lopez Canyon to marvel at the magnificent waterfalls and ancient oak trees in this remote canyon. It's not worth ruining this special place for a few minutes' supply of oil. ForestWatch is committed to preventing the industrialization of this pristine area.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

EXPLORING THE ZACA FIRE

Wed, Oct 10 at 7:00pm, Santa Barbara

Join us at the Faulkner Gallery in downtown SB for vivid photography and firsthand accounts of firefighting and restoration efforts. The event will include talks by Ray Ford, one of our region's most noted backcountry enthusiasts, and experts on the impact of the fire on our wildlife and watersheds. Sponsored by ForestWatch. Free for members!

14TH ANNUAL SALMON RUN

Sun, Nov 11 in Ventura

Runners, walkers and families are invited to join us for a 5K run/3K walk in Ventura. For the second year in a row, *Patagonia* has selected ForestWatch to receive all proceeds from this event! For more info, go to www.LPFW.org/salmonrun.htm, visit Patagonia's Great Pacific Iron Works, or call (805) 643-6074.



ForestWatch supporters gathered at EDC's courtyard in July for a Friday evening happy-hour with food and music.



The Grammy award-winning rock band Wilco raised more than \$1,000 for ForestWatch while performing at the Santa Barbara Bowl in August.

ForestWatch Volunteers Protect Condor Habitat

This summer, a dedicated team of ForestWatch volunteers removed more than 200 pounds of trash from Whitaker Peak, along the **edge of the Sespe Wilderness**. Small bits of trash called "microtrash" – screws, nuts, glass pieces, bullet casings, and rags – are quickly becoming one of the leading threats to the recovery of the endangered California condor. The curious birds are attracted to microtrash, often bringing it back to their nests where condor chicks swallow the small pieces. Several condors have recently died or required surgery after ingesting microtrash, causing nest failure for nearly one-third of the

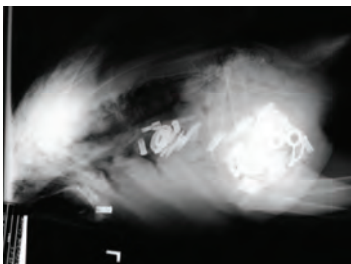
condor chicks that have recently hatched in the area.

The problem is particularly troublesome for one condor pair nesting at the nearby **Hopper Mountain Wildlife Refuge**. The pair had two previous nestings in which their chick was full of trash, and biologists know that the female condor frequents the Whitaker Peak area.

We thank the 30 volunteers who helped us clean up this site. ForestWatch will continue to monitor this site and schedule additional cleanups as needed.



ForestWatch volunteers pick up microtrash from condor habitat on Whitaker Peak (above). Microtrash accumulates in young condors (left) and is a leading cause of condor mortality.



condors have recently died or required surgery after ingesting microtrash, causing nest failure for nearly one-third of the

Field Notes – The San Rafael Wilderness Area

In 1968, four years after passage of the Wilderness Act, the U.S. Congress added 143,000 acres of the Los Padres National Forest to the national wilderness system's roster, making history as the first wilderness area protected after the original Wilderness Act of 1964. Additional lands were added to the San Rafael Wilderness in 1984 and 1992, and it now covers 190,968 acres of **Santa Barbara's backcountry**.

In signing the legislation that established the San Rafael Wilderness, President Lyndon B. Johnson proclaimed, "I want so much to protect and extend the legacy of our land. I want so much to take the pieces of our birthright that we should never have lost – and I want to reclaim them, restore them, and return them to the American people. San Rafael is part of that work. Wilderness parks should be a part of the America of tomorrow—the kind of America that we think we are building today. I am very proud to sign this bill. I believe that it will enrich the spirit of America."

Nestled between the crests of two parallel mountain ranges – the **San Rafael Mountains** and the **Sierra**

Madre Mountains – this wilderness includes the drainages of the 34-mile-long **Wild & Scenic Sisquoc River** and Manzana Creek, and the upper reaches of Santa Cruz Creek and **Indian Creek**. The Sisquoc River and Manzana Creek are important habitat for imperiled animals like the arroyo toad, red-legged frog, and southern steelhead.



The rugged and diverse terrain ranges from 1,160 feet near the confluence of **Manzana Creek** and the Sisquoc River to 6,593 feet atop **San Rafael Mountain**. Chaparral is mixed with forests of canyon live oak and bigcone Douglas fir, with mixed conifer and Jeffrey pines in the highest elevations. The wilderness contains remnants of historic settlements, remote cabins, and numerous exam-

ples of Chumash rock art. Dividing the drainages of the Manzana and Sisquoc is a ridge known as **Hurricane Deck**, a rugged 15 mile slab of steep escarpments, grassy potreros, dry plateaus, and wind-carved sandstone formations. The 1200-acre **Sisquoc Condor Sanctuary** is found deep in the wilderness, protecting these magnificent symbols of the wilderness spirit.

Editor's Note: The wilderness is temporarily closed to protect this area as it recovers from the Zaca Fire.

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

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