



# 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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## Lawsuit Filed to Protect Forest from Salvage Logging

The Day Fire of 2006 burned more than 162,000 acres of the Los Padres backcountry. The fire swept through parts of the **Sespe Wilderness**, leaving a patchwork of burned and partially burned trees while leaving other trees untouched or only lightly burned.



After the fire, these forests began their process of regeneration. The burned trees now provide habitat for cavity-nesting birds; when they eventually fall, the trees will release nutrients back into the soil and help maintain soil moisture. It's all part of the cycle of recovery following a fire, and it's important to allow this process to unfold in this fragile area with as little disruption as possible.

But logging companies have other plans. They've pressured the Forest Service to open up **Alamo Mountain** and **Grade Valley** to commercial logging, arguing that more than 1,430 trees must be logged without delay because the trees are a safety hazard to

*(Continued on page 10)*

## ForestWatch Puts Oil Companies on Notice

Last year's disastrous spill of oil and wastewater in the Los Padres National Forest demonstrated the need to step up our oversight of the oil industry, especially where it does business in ecologically sensitive areas of the forest. The spill also highlighted the importance of preventing the unchecked expansion of oil drilling into new areas of the forest. Unfortunately, these lessons were learned the hard way – the oil slick tarred three miles of stream in the **Sespe Creek** watershed, taking workers nearly a month to clean it up.

After a year-long investigation, ForestWatch uncovered numerous records indicating that last year's spill was not an isolated incident. In fact, several spills of oil and wastewater have occurred in this area, with serious consequences to clean water and wildlife.

Last month, ForestWatch demanded that these oil companies clean up their act or face a lawsuit under the federal Clean Water Act. We delivered this message in a

*(Continued on page 8)*





Jeff Kuyper is the Executive Director of ForestWatch.

ForestWatch is entering its fourth year of providing cutting-edge protection for some of our region's most spectacular wild places. In this relatively short amount of time, we've accomplished many victories on behalf of your public lands, victories that we wouldn't have achieved without you and the rest of our circle of supporters, who have been with us every step of the way.

The need for a local, independent, and *effective* advocate for our region's wild places is stronger today than ever before. We're standing firm against one of the largest oil companies in the world — a real-life David vs. Goliath story that will hopefully prevent more disastrous oil spills in our forest. We're also standing up against pressures to open our wild lands to a precedent-setting commercial logging operation. On these issues and many others, we're serving as the last (and often the *only*) line of defense for our region's backcountry wilderness.

In 2008 we'll also be expanding our habitat restoration projects and inviting you to exciting membership events. Our members and volunteers serve as the lifeblood of our organization. We hope to see you at one of our upcoming events, lending a hand, supporting our work, enjoying the outdoors, and sharing stories and strategies about how we can increase our effectiveness in this new year and beyond.

For the forest,

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## Comings and Goings...

Join us in welcoming **Louis Andaloro** to our Board of Directors. Louis graduated from UC Santa Cruz with degrees in Natural History and Biology, where he studied peregrine falcons and Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep. In the 1980s he worked as a wildlife biologist for the California Condor Recovery Program on the Los Padres National Forest. He later went on to become one of the first volunteers for the Los Padres Site Steward program, surveying and monitoring archaeological sites throughout the forest. For the past twelve years he's served as the caretaker of Jameson Lake in the headwaters of the Santa Ynez River. Louis enjoys bicycling, mountaineering, ski touring, backpacking, and hiking. Welcome, Louis!

ForestWatch is pleased to announce new officers for 2008. **Brad Monsma**, author of *The Sespe Wild* and professor of English at CSUCI who has served on the ForestWatch board for nearly three years, was recently elected President. **Michael Summers**, who previously held that post as one of the original ForestWatch board members, remains on the board. And **Pat Veesart**, caretaker of a historic ranch property on the Carrizo Plain National Monument and also an original board member, was recently elected Vice President.

And finally, we graciously thank board member **Michelle Tollett** for her two years of service. Michelle looks forward to volunteering for ForestWatch from time to time.



## Thank You to Our Recent Supporters!

We'd like to thank these new and existing members for your generous contributions since our last newsletter through the end of 2007. Your support allows us to continue our important work to protect our region's natural treasures.

### NEW MEMBERS

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### MEMORIAL GIFTS

Mark Neely, in memory of Timothy Neely

## Protecting the California Condor – A Wilderness Icon

The condor, admittedly, is not the most charismatic of species. It grunts and hisses, feeds on dead carcasses, and has a hairless red head. But when you see a condor spread its 9-foot wingspan and



soar across the horizon, you come to realize that the condor is a truly majestic creature, an icon of our region's back-country wilderness.

During prehistoric times, the condor was found throughout the western and southern parts of North America, from British Columbia to Baja California, soaring over the heads of mastodons, giant sloths, and other large mammals. By 1900 the condor's range became almost exclusively restricted to California, a victim of shooting, habitat depletion, lead poisoning from bullet fragments in animal carcasses, and egg shell thinning from the pesticide DDT.

Recognizing these threats, in 1937 the U.S. Forest Service established the first protected area for the condor, near the headwaters of the **Sisquoc River**. In

*The condor was reintroduced to the Big Sur coast starting in 1997, where it has been observed feeding on whale carcasses and nesting in redwoods (below). To date, 24 condors have been released here. Photo credits: Daniel Bianchetta (above); Joseph Brandt/Ventana Wildlife Society (below).*



1947 a second sanctuary – the **Sespe Condor Sanctuary** – was established in the forest. In 1967, the condor was added to the na-

tion's first list of endangered species. Ten years later, protected habitat was formally established in these sanctuaries and other areas of the Los Padres, including **Hi Mountain** and **Castle Crag**s in San Luis Obispo County.

Despite these protections, condor populations continued to decline, and by 1986 the wild population was so low that the controversial decision was made to catch the remaining 9 condors and breed them in captivity. The last wild condor was captured in the Los Padres in 1987.

Five years later, wildlife biologists began to release condors back into the wild. Now, after two decades, more than 150 condors command the skies in the wild, including more than 75 flying free in California. Most condor habitat in California is in the **Los Padres National Forest**, highlighting the importance of protecting the forest's wide open spaces.

With the ability to fly more than 150 miles in a single day, and a penchant for curiosity, the California condor is particularly susceptible to human development. The condor continues to face a number of threats, including lead poisoning, micro-trash, oil development, collisions with power lines, and urban sprawl.

ForestWatch is dedicated to protecting the California condor and the wild habitat of this giant bird. Thanks to the support of our members, we're the only local organization working to stop the expansion of oil drilling in condor habitat. Last year, we filed a lawsuit challenging a plan to expand oil drilling dangerously close to condor habitat in the Los Padres, a case that is pending in federal court. We also successfully halted a proposal to drill two new oil wells in condor habitat.

## Volunteer Cleanups for the Condor

A team of dedicated ForestWatch volunteers is mobilizing across the Los Padres to eliminate one of the biggest threats to the survival of the California condor — “microtrash.”

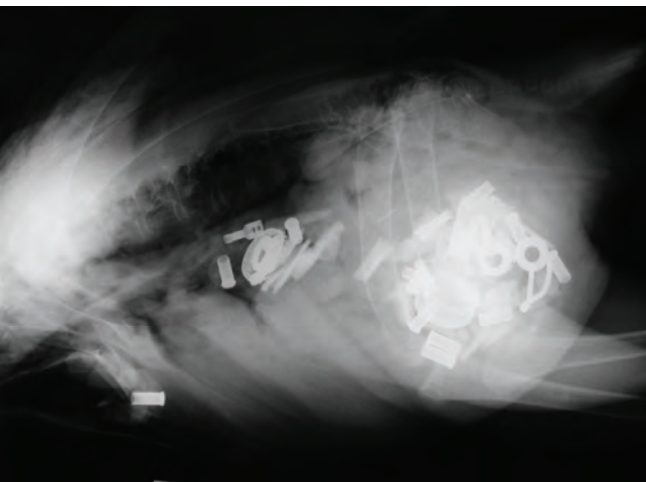
Microtrash is small bits of debris like bottle caps, rags, screws, bullet shells, glass, and other materials found in condor habitat. Condors, curious by nature, are attracted to microtrash and bring it back to their nests, where their chicks swallow the small pieces. Several condors have died or required surgery because they're unable to digest microtrash.

On January 12th, ForestWatch volunteers traveled through red rock canyons and maneuvered washed-out roads on their way to **Cuyama Peak**, where they removed virtually all microtrash from the area. With more than 351 pounds of microtrash cleaned up, the site no longer poses a serious threat to endangered California condors.

Cuyama Peak is in the backcountry of the **Cuyama Valley** in Santa Barbara County, on the north side of the **Dick Smith Wilderness** in the Los Padres National Forest. It's prime condor habitat, nestled between the **Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge**, the primary release site for condors, and the **Sierra Madre Ridge**, an important condor flyway. The peak is also the site of a historical 1930s fire lookout tower, which has fallen into disarray, scattering broken glass across the top of the peak. With clear and sunny skies, the peak offered commanding vistas from the southern Sierra to the Channel Islands. But while the views were grand, the site was, in a word, a mess.



Pound for pound this was by far the most successful of ForestWatch's microtrash efforts, building on previous cleanups last year in other areas where condors are known to visit. After initial efforts on **Whitaker Peak** near the **Sespe Wilderness**, we have expanded our reach to include more remote backcountry sites throughout the Los Padres. One peak at a time, we're ensuring the condor's continued survival in the Los Padres National Forest.

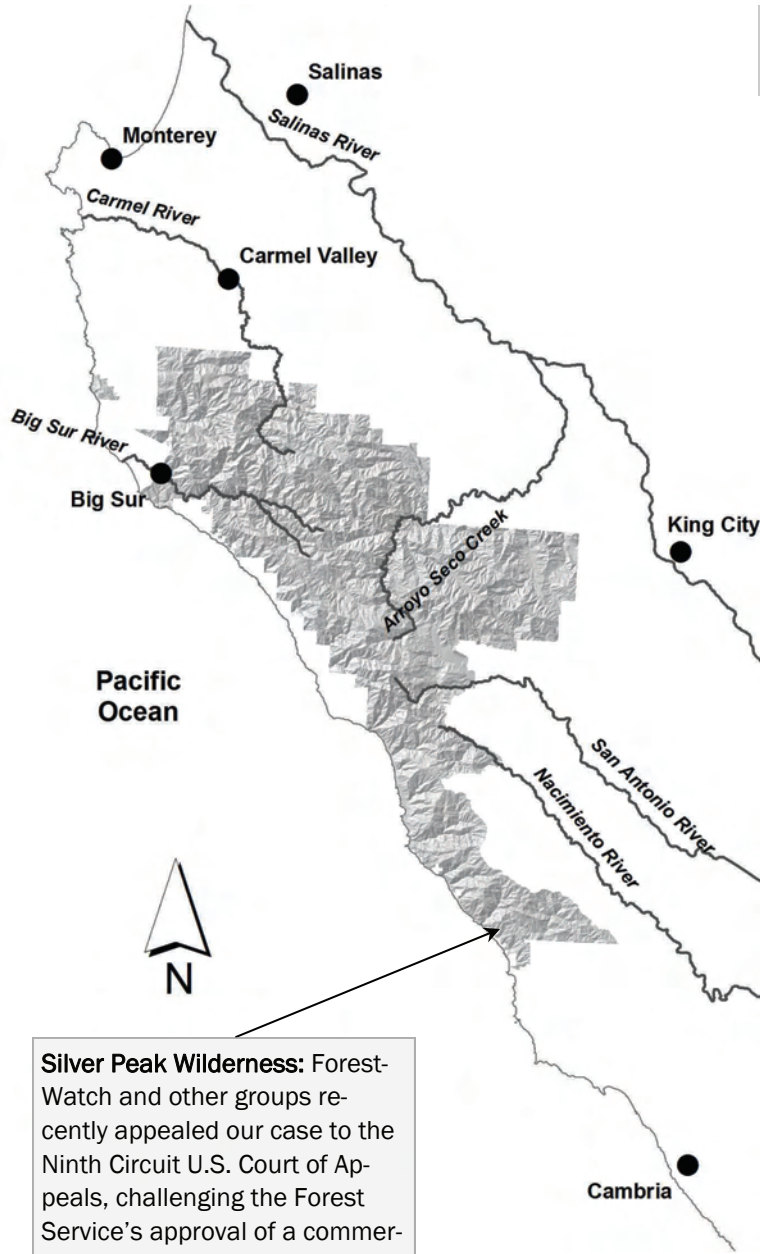


*An x-ray of a condor shows a harmful accumulation of microtrash.*

### The Condor Needs Your Help!

Do you want to help protect our local wildlife? Looking for an excuse to spend a day outdoors? And possibly see a condor in the wild? ForestWatch is looking for dedicated volunteers to help with microtrash cleanups. Call Zack, our volunteer coordinator, at (805) 617-4610 or email [zack@LPFW.org](mailto:zack@LPFW.org) to help save the condor!

# NORTHERN LOS PADRES



**Santa Margarita Ranch:** Forest-Watch is working to protect the Santa Lucia Wilderness from an adjacent mega-development. Last year, we submitted comments on the draft Environmental Impact Report. The County will release a revised EIR later this year.

**Upper Lopez Canyon:** Forest-Watch continues to work with rural landowners to prevent the expansion of oil drilling in this ecologically rich canyon.

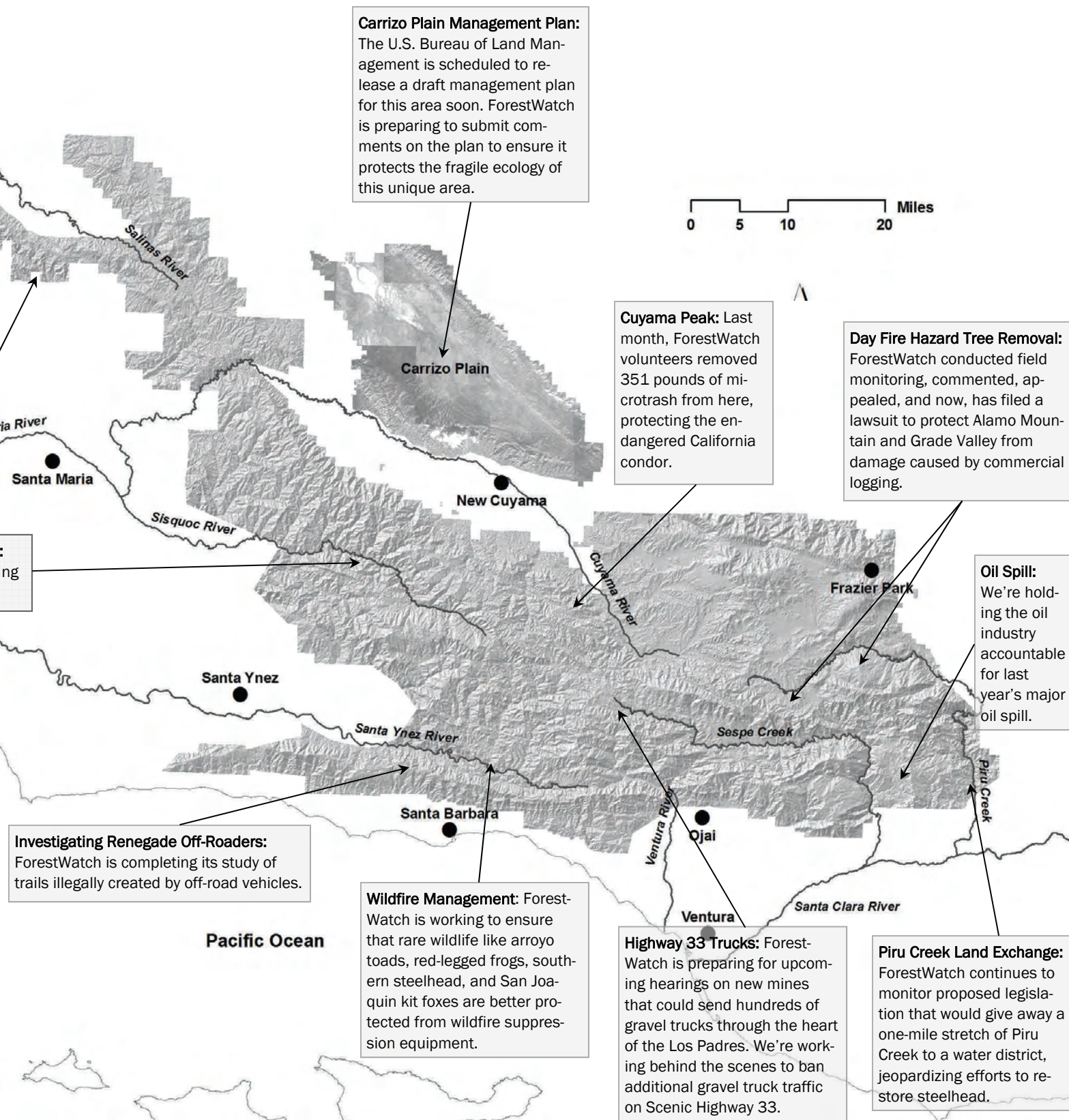
**Re-Wilding the Sisquoc River**  
ForestWatch is working to bring steelhead back to this river.

**Silver Peak Wilderness:** Forest-Watch and other groups recently appealed our case to the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, challenging the Forest Service's approval of a commercial livestock grazing operation in Big Sur coastal wilderness. The lawsuit alleges violations of the Wilderness Act of 1964.

**LOOKING  
ACROSS  
THE FOREST**

*an update on how  
we're protecting  
your region...*

# SOUTHERN LOS PADRES



**Carrizo Plain Management Plan:**  
 The U.S. Bureau of Land Management is scheduled to release a draft management plan for this area soon. ForestWatch is preparing to submit comments on the plan to ensure it protects the fragile ecology of this unique area.

0 5 10 20 Miles

**Cuyama Peak:** Last month, ForestWatch volunteers removed 351 pounds of microtrash from here, protecting the endangered California condor.

**Day Fire Hazard Tree Removal:** ForestWatch conducted field monitoring, commented, appealed, and now, has filed a lawsuit to protect Alamo Mountain and Grade Valley from damage caused by commercial logging.

**Oil Spill:** We're holding the oil industry accountable for last year's major oil spill.

**Investigating Renegade Off-Roaders:** ForestWatch is completing its study of trails illegally created by off-road vehicles.

**Wildfire Management:** ForestWatch is working to ensure that rare wildlife like arroyo toads, red-legged frogs, southern steelhead, and San Joaquin kit foxes are better protected from wildfire suppression equipment.

**Highway 33 Trucks:** ForestWatch is preparing for upcoming hearings on new mines that could send hundreds of gravel trucks through the heart of the Los Padres. We're working behind the scenes to ban additional gravel truck traffic on Scenic Highway 33.

**Piru Creek Land Exchange:** ForestWatch continues to monitor proposed legislation that would give away a one-mile stretch of Piru Creek to a water district, jeopardizing efforts to restore steelhead.

Pacific Ocean

## From the first page (oil drilling)



*Thousands of oiled water bugs were found dead on rocks after the spill, along with a dead oiled songbird and a dead oiled snake. Large pools of oil also came within 1.7 miles of water holes frequented by endangered California condors.*

“Notice of Intent to Sue” delivered to Vintage Production California LLC and its parent company, Occidental Petroleum. The notice gives the companies sixty days to implement sufficient safeguards to prevent future spills, including increasing maintenance and inspections, preparing adequate spill containment plans, and repairing and replacing pipelines near environmentally sensitive waterways.

Our notice also seeks to impose meaningful penalties to ensure that spills like this don’t happen again. Last month, the companies were fined more than \$350,000 in connection with 16 spills in Ventura County, including three in the Los Padres National Forest, since 2005. This amounted to little more than “pocket change” to a company that reaped record profits of \$5.4 billion last year.

The most recent spill was reported on January 30, 2007. The spill was initially reported at five barrels (210 gallons) of crude oil and 80 barrels (3,360 gallons) of wastewater, though officials later estimated that the spill was several times larger than initially reported. It took 80

workers more than three weeks to clean up the spill. During cleanup operations, a second spill occurred on the same pipeline, releasing even more oil.

Vintage has caused nine spills in the **Sespe Oil Field** during the past four years, including four that entered waterways. In 2006, Vintage reported discharging 200 barrels (8,400 gallons) of wastewater and an unknown amount of crude oil into **Four Forks Creek**. In 2005, Vintage reported spilling 15 barrels (630 gallons) of crude oil and wastewater into **Maple Creek**. And in 2004, Vintage reported spilling 35 barrels (1,470 gallons) of crude oil into Four Forks Creek. All three streams flow into **Sespe Creek**, a federally protected Wild & Scenic River that provides critical habitat for endangered steelhead.

The consequences of oil spills are widespread and long term. An investigation by state biologists concluded that the 2007 spill caused “significant” impacts, and that much of the sludge will remain for an extended period of time.

Causing the spill was bad enough, but the investigation also found that a spill containment structure was “non-functional.” Had it been functioning, it would have protected nearly two miles of streambed from the spill.

These spills will continue to occur until the oil industry takes significant steps to clean up its act. Our notice will serve as a wake-up call, sending a message to these companies that enough is enough.



*Crews worked for nearly a month to clean up last year’s spill in the Los Padres, but much of the spill was not recovered and will remain in the environment for some time.*



## Plans, Postmarks, and Politics: A How-To Guide for Quashing Public Input

How do you stop the public from providing input on a new management plan for the Los Padres National Forest? Well, if you're the Secretary of Agriculture, then you might consider denying a citizens' appeal signed by more than a dozen local, regional, and national organizations.

That's exactly what happened last year as ForestWatch and a coalition of conservation organizations fell victim to dirty politics.

It all began in 2001, when forest officials announced that they were in the process of completely revising the management plan for the Los Padres National Forest and three other forests in southern California. During the public comment process, a coalition of conservation groups presented a "Conservation Alternative," demanding strong protections for wildlife and wilderness based on sound science.

But officials did not adopt the Conservation Alternative, opting instead to ap-

prove a new plan that included vague standards, less accountability, and weaker environmental safeguards.

Because the Forest Service approved such a deficient plan, ForestWatch and the coalition filed an appeal to the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service in Washington D.C., asking him to improve the plans. The agency's own regulations gave us the right to file this appeal, and we had hoped that it would ultimately lead to much-needed changes.

Instead, the Chief of the Forest Service tossed out our appeal without even responding to it. The Chief claimed that our appeal was filed one day too late, and was sent to the wrong address, so he didn't have to consider it.

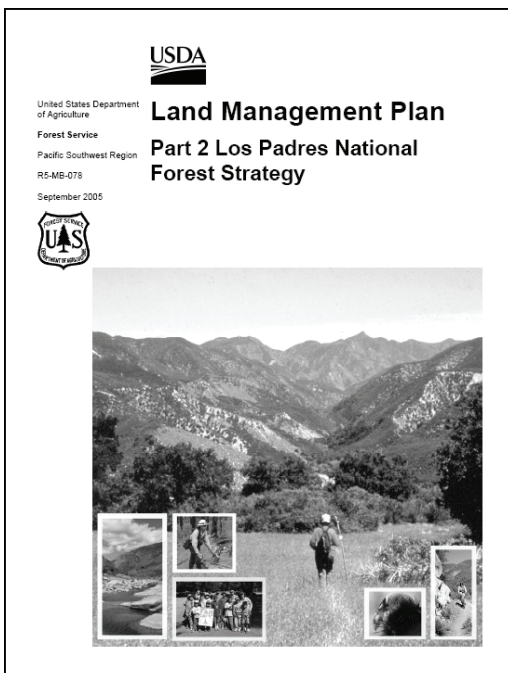
On the contrary, we had taken the utmost care to ensure that our appeal was postmarked by the deadline (which is all that the agency's regulations require) and that it was sent to the address specified in the public notice (which is also all that the regulations require). As it turns out, the agency printed an incorrect address in this public notice, then blamed us for mailing it to an incorrect address!

We formally asked the Secretary of Agriculture, who oversees the Forest Service, to reconsider this denial, but he too refused our request. At that point, our only option remaining was to file a lawsuit, asking a judge to order the Forest Service to simply accept our appeal and consider it on the merits. Late last year, the judge did just that, concluding that the Chief had unfairly singled us out.

The judge's ruling was clear, but rather than abide by the ruling, the Chief has appealed the judge's ruling to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. While the appeal is pending, we're doing everything we can to ensure that our voice — and the voices of the thousands of members of ForestWatch and other organizations — are heard.



*Undersecretary Mark Rey of the USDA is a former timber industry lobbyist who oversees the Forest Service .*





Many trees in the area survived the fire, such as this one, but they were incorrectly marked for removal anyway, in clear violation of the agency's own marking guidelines.

## Salvage logging challenged (from the front page)

those of us who travel along dirt roads and trails on our way to popular sites like **Fishbowls, Piru Creek, Mutau Flats, and Thorn Meadows.**

Recent studies have shown that salvage logging can seriously hinder the recovery of burned areas. Logging requires the use of heavy machinery on fragile soils, and can cause long-term damage by cable-dragging trees to loading areas.

As this plan unfolded, ForestWatch attended official field trips, submitted detailed comment letters, and spent countless hours in the field inspecting the trees that were marked for logging. And what we found was alarming—more than 20% of the marked trees had survived the fire and did not even meet the agency's own definition of a "hazard tree."

We suggested numerous times that if the Forest Service truly had public safety in mind, then it could simply cut down the hazard trees and leave them in place, where they would provide soil nutrients and wildlife habitat. Our alternative would avoid the serious damage that comes from using heavy machinery in a commercial logging operation, while still allowing the Forest Service to achieve its public

safety goals.

But the Forest Service ignored our superior alternative throughout every step of the process. In November 2007, officials approved the logging without even conducting an environmental assessment. Such an analysis is critical to ensure that logging will not threaten any of the surviving yellow-blotched salamanders, a rare species whose populations in the Los Padres are restricted to **Alamo Mountain** where most of the logging will occur. Instead, the agency put the project on the fast track, dubbing it "routine" road maintenance so that the agency could avoid having to prepare an environmental assessment.

Having exhausted all of our options, ForestWatch filed suit in U.S. District Court this month, challenging the approval of this project. With the support of our members, we're doing everything we can to protect this fragile area as new signs of life continue to emerge after the fire.



© Gary Nafis



ForestWatch staff inspects an old growth conifer marked for logging on Alamo Mountain (left). The rare yellow-blotched salamander (above) is threatened by logging on Alamo Mountain.

## Salmon Run



The 14th Annual Salmon Run along the Ventura River was the most successful ever, raising more than \$12,000 for our local forest protection efforts, attracting a record 442 participants, and bringing 90 new members into the ForestWatch circle of supporters. The event marked the second year in a row that Patagonia selected ForestWatch as the beneficiary of this event.

We extend our deepest thanks to everyone at Patagonia, Great Pacific IronWorks, and Real Cheap Sports for making it all happen!

## Fire Ecology Series



Last fall, ForestWatch presented the first in a series of talks on *Fire Ecology in the Los Padres*. More than one hundred people packed the room to learn about wildlife in the aftermath of the Zaca Fire. The series continues in 2008 in conjunction with the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden. All events begin at 7:00pm at the garden's Blaksley Library, 1221 Mission Cyn Rd. Free!

**FEB 20: *Conifers and Wildfire*** featuring Dr. Bob Haller of the Botanic Garden and Mark Borchert of the Forest Service.

**MAR 18: *Chaparral and Wildfire*** featuring Richard Halsey of the California Chaparral Institute and author of *Fire, Chaparral, and Survival in Southern California*.

**APR 16: *Rare Plants and Wildfire*** featuring Dr. Dieter Wilken of the Botanic Garden, and Dr. Loyd Simpson of the Forest Service.

## Ojai Wild!



### A FUNDRAISER BARBEQUE

#### Thacher School's Diamond Hitch Camp

**Saturday, March 29, 2008**

ForestWatch hopes you can join us during this very special event at Thacher School's picturesque Diamond Hitch Camp in Ojai.

- ◆ Celebrate spring with friends & family
- ◆ Guided nature walk
- ◆ Barbeque under the oak trees with local wines
- ◆ Horse and carriage rides

Events are still being planned, so stay tuned for more details!

## *Backcountry Majesty*: An Art Show & Reception Benefiting ForestWatch

Join ForestWatch and The Oak Group on **March 28, 2008** for the opening artists' reception of *Backcountry Majesty*, an exhibition of landscape paintings of the varied and majestic backcountry of the Los Padres National Forest. The Oak Group is a collective of local artists who dedicate their work to the preservation of open space throughout the Central Coast. The exhibit will be on display on weekends from 11am to 5pm from **March 29 through April 27th**. Both the reception and exhibit will be held at the Marcia Burt Studio in downtown Santa Barbara, at 517 Laguna St. Proceeds from the sale of the artwork will benefit Los Padres ForestWatch.

Through both the sale of their artwork and increased public awareness of the threats to natural lands throughout California, The Oak Group, in its 20 years of existence, has raised nearly \$1.5 million for nonprofit organizations and helped preserve precious landscapes. We hope you will be able to join us for the reception on March 28th, and will find artwork that inspires the wilderness enthusiast in all of us.



## Field Notes: Winter in the Los Padres National Forest



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

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