



ForestWatch

The Quarterly Membership Publication of Los Padres Forest Watch

FORESTWATCH is the only nonprofit organization focused solely on protecting our region's wilderness landscapes and wildlife in the Los Padres National Forest, from the Big Sur coast and the Santa Lucia Mountains to the Carrizo Plain and the majestic backcountry of Santa Barbara and Ventura counties.

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New EXPANDED edition!

Includes new features like Backcountry Journal, Member Profiles, and enhanced graphics. Enjoy!

Black Bears Win Big in Los Padres National Forest

Earlier this year, the California Department of Fish & Game announced a plan to allow hunting of black bears in **San Luis Obispo County** for the first time ever. Under the proposal, as many as 50 black bears per year could be hunted and killed in the county, primarily in the **Los Padres National Forest**.



After a short two-month effort, the bear hunt was cancelled, and ForestWatch was credited by the County's three major newspapers for leading the statewide fight against it. Because of our efforts and your support, black bears continue to have the freedom to roam, for now.

ForestWatch first learned of the proposal in March, and we immediately launched an investigation to determine whether the hunt was based on sound science. We quickly discovered that no one – not even the state's top wildlife biologists – knew

(Continued on page 8)

ForestWatch Recognized for Top Achievement

Our legal victory last year protected fragile burn areas on **Alamo Mountain** and **Grade Valley** from a commercial logging operation, and now it's being hailed as one of the top five environmental achievements in southern California. The *5th Annual Top Achievements of the Environmental Community in Southern California* report recognizes ForestWatch for setting an important legal precedent that extends to national forests throughout the state and the West, fundamentally changing how the Forest Service responds to the post-fire landscape.

(Continued on page 9)





Jeff Kuyper is the Executive Director of ForestWatch.

ForestWatch celebrates its fifth anniversary this year. It wasn't long ago that we were just a loosely-knit handful of local citizens gathered around a picnic table, discussing the fate of the Los Padres. We shared a deep appreciation for the wilderness landscapes and wildlife in our local backcountry, while also sharing a deep concern that our public land management agencies were favoring development and resource extraction at the expense of our wilderness and wildlife. And at the time, no organization was addressing these issues locally. Thus ForestWatch was born, and five years later, we continue to build upon our solid track record of success. We've come so far over the last five years and we wouldn't be where we are today without your support.

These are both exciting and challenging times for us and all nonprofits in the conservation world. With change in Washington D.C. we have new hope of not only undoing the past eight years of environmental rollbacks, but of also moving forward and advancing positive, proactive land preservation initiatives. Yet we'll be doing so amidst challenging economic times — exactly those times when nonprofits are needed most. The environment is usually the first to suffer with the economy turns sour, making our work — and your support — even more critical at this time. We will continue to see our public lands underfunded and understaffed, placing the responsibility of ensuring their protection squarely on our shoulders. We're counting on you to help us fill that need in every way you can.

ForestWatch has been preparing for this perfect storm for several months, and early this year we hired a new staff person to coordinate our membership and fundraising activities, allowing our other staff to focus more on our on-the-ground programs. It may seem counterintuitive to be expanding our organization at a time when most others are downsizing, but ForestWatch remains strong and we *must* continue to keep pace with the increased demands for our work. It is simply unacceptable to let our region's natural treasures suffer even more. ForestWatch is one of the most efficient and effective conservation organizations in our region — and with your continued support, we intend to stay that way.

For the forest,



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Meet Our New Membership & Development Coordinator

Join us in welcoming **Diane Elfstrom Devine** to the ForestWatch team as our new Development Coordinator! Diane is taking the reins of our membership and fundraising efforts, allowing our other staff to focus more on advocacy and program work. A critical addition to our team, Diane is excited to build our circle of support and expand our activities.

Diane comes to ForestWatch with over 25 years of experience in the non-profit world. Formerly with The Nature Conservancy, she spent twenty years focusing on the protection of **Santa Cruz Island**. Diane assisted in the development of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History's Sea Center before serving as the Executive Director for a small arts organization in the **Santa Ynez Valley**, where she and her family call home. Diane holds a degree in Zoology from U.C. Santa Barbara and a Development Officer Certification through Cal Poly and the Nonprofit Support Center. Her position is funded through a generous grant from the **Santa Barbara Foundation** and the **Hutton Foundation**.



Thank You for Helping ForestWatch Rise to the Challenge!

Last year, the **Earth Friends Wildlife Foundation** challenged us to raise \$50,000 by December 2008. They set the bar high for our small organization, but we were confident that our supporters would help us rise to the challenge, knowing that we're one of the most efficient and effective organizations in the region. To sweeten the deal, Earth Friends would give ForestWatch a significant grant if we met our goal, stretching the impact of every donation we received. Just five short months later, we did it, **generating more than \$80,000** that goes directly to our local forest protection efforts! We'd like to thank all of you for your support, and to recognize those who participated in this campaign with a contribution of \$100 or more. Thank you!

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Nancy & Brett Stearns
Pete & Susan St. John
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Philip Tseng
Pat Veasart
Marty Weiner
Dr. Robert & Katy Zappala

Member Profile



Doug & Lee Buckmaster
Santa Barbara, by way of Cambria

As the first ForestWatch members, it's not the first time Doug and Lee have found themselves on the cutting edge of land preservation in our region. "We support ForestWatch because it is a great answer to a serious need," say the Buckmasters, keenly aware of our unique niche. They grew up in Ventura County and got to know the Los Padres very well. "The need for protection was strong then, and even stronger now." Doug and Lee's favorite areas are upper and lower Sespe Creek for fly-fishing, and nearby summits for peak bagging "from which I am now retired," jokes Doug. After working tirelessly and successfully to preserve Cambria's East-West Ranch, Doug and Lee recently retired to Santa Barbara, where their middle son owns Island Seed & Feed, another ForestWatch supporter.

Ojai Wild! Membership Gathering at Diamond Hitch Camp



In April, more than 200 wilderness enthusiasts from across the Central Coast gathered amongst the oak trees with friends and family to celebrate ForestWatch's fifth anniversary. Our *Ojai Wild!* creekside benefit took place at **Diamond Hitch Camp** along the foothills of the Los Padres National Forest, with **Nordhoff Ridge, Chief Peak, Topa Topa Bluffs,** and the **Sespe Wilderness** providing a picturesque backdrop on a spectacularly sunny afternoon.

The day featured delicious hors d'oeuvres served with local wines and beer, followed by a gourmet barbeque under the oaks prepared with local and organic ingredients. Live bluegrass music filled the

air, and a spirited live auction rounded out the evening. We were proud to offer a **zero-waste, off-the-grid event**, and all materials were printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper.

It was our most important fundraising event of the year, raising more than \$22,000 for our forest protection efforts. Thanks to everyone who made this wonderful day possible, and to **The Thacher School** for generously hosting us. See you next year at Diamond Hitch!



ForestWatch presented the 1st Annual **Wilderness Legacy Award** to honor local heroes who have worked diligently to protect and defend our region's wild landscapes. This year's honorees are **Jim Mills** (right), **Fred Eissler**, and **Bob Easton** (posthumously) – three conservation legends whose efforts led Congress to establish the **San Rafael Wilderness Area** in 1968. Today, the San Rafael Wilderness remains the largest protected area in the southern Los Padres, providing wildlife habitat, backcountry adventures, and wide open landscapes.



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ForestWatch Demands Strong Protections for Carrizo Plain

The **Carrizo Plain National Monument** is a 250,000-acre expanse of grasslands and stark ridges in **San Luis Obispo County** adjacent to the Los Padres National Forest. The monument was established in 2001, and after years of delay, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in January finally released a draft management plan to guide all types of land uses in the area, including oil exploration and drilling, livestock grazing, and recreation. The draft plan also sets forth guidelines to protect rare wildlife and Native American sacred sites.

In April, a coalition of organizations including ForestWatch wrote to the BLM to demand a strong and enforceable management plan for this pristine area. We also submitted our own 16-page letter suggesting additional safeguards for oil drilling and exploration, which could seriously degrade the area’s sensitive ecology and sense of solitude.

As BLM works to finalize the plan later this year, ForestWatch will continue to push for the highest level of protection for **“California’s Serengeti.”**



ForestWatch is demanding strong protections for the endangered blunt-nosed leopard lizard and other unique wildlife on the Carrizo Plain. Photo by Gary Nafis.

Investigation: Gap Fire Hydromulch Full of Litter

ForestWatch has learned that federal contractors spread contaminated mulch across hundreds of acres of the Los Padres National Forest that burned in last year’s Gap Fire near **Goleta**. Designed to stabilize the exposed soils in the burn area, the mixture of paper, wood fiber, water, and a plant-based binder was dropped by aircraft across more than 2,500 acres.

Citizens visiting the area the following spring discovered that the hydromulch contained “high levels of impurities including shredded hard and soft plastic, balloon-like rubber, waxed paper and foil (e.g. candy bar wrappers).” This was a troubling discovery, since the Forest Service had assured the public that the hydromulch was “all organic and very safe for people, animals and the environment” in several press releases.

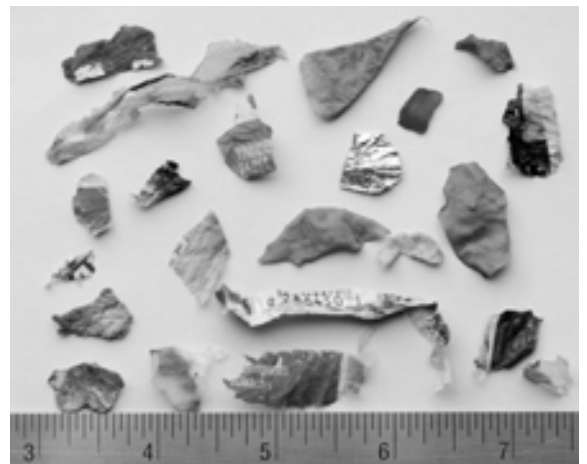
After investigating the complaints, the Department of Fish & Game concluded that quality control should be enhanced

to minimize impurities. The Forest Service also conducted an internal investigation, and in letters to the Environmental Defense Center and Santa Barbara Channelkeeper, vowed to specify 100% trash-free hydromulch in future contracts and to inspect the material “to ensure this does not happen again.”

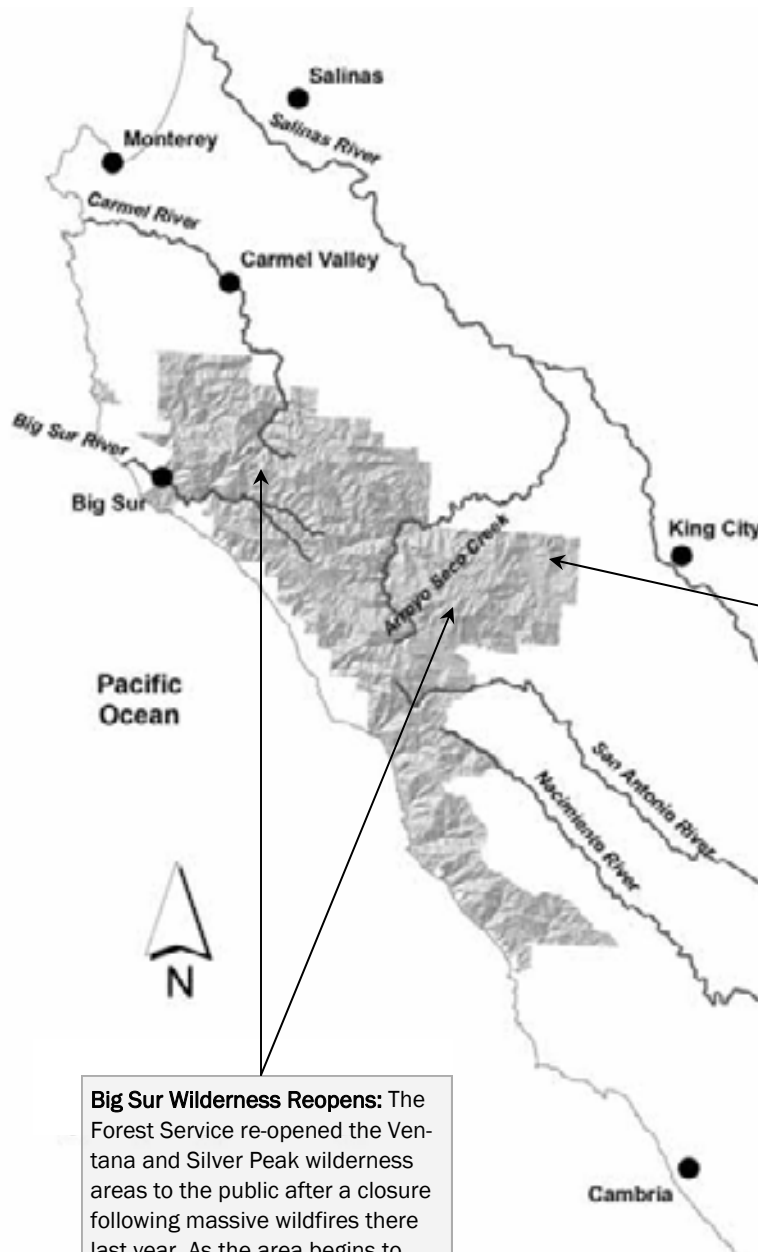
Why these precautions weren’t already in place for the Gap Fire hydromulch contract remains a mystery. The contract was issued to Aerotech, Inc., a federal contractor based in New Mexico that received \$8 million in taxpayer dollars to complete the project.

ForestWatch will work to ensure that any hydromulch used in the future is fully inspected to detect any impurities. We are also conducting our own investigation into this trashy disaster.

Trash gathered from hydromulch near Lizard’s Mouth along West Camino Cielo in the Los Padres National Forest.



NORTHERN LOS PADRES



Black Bears Win! ForestWatch led efforts to defeat the first bear hunt in decades in San Luis Obispo County. Up to 50 black bears each year could have been killed, primarily in the Los Padres. **PAGE 1.**

Ventana Wilderness: In response to a lawsuit brought by ForestWatch and Advocates for the West, the Forest Service has agreed to withdraw its 2007 decision to authorize livestock grazing on the Sweetwater Allotment, partially within the Ventana Wilderness, pending completion of an Environmental Assessment.

Sisquoc Tamarisk Removal: The Forest Service last fall agreed to embark on a comprehensive program to eradicate invasive tamarisk from the Sisquoc River watershed. The announcement came in response to a formal ForestWatch request. In October and November, ForestWatch volunteers spent 8 days surveying the entire watershed, finding more than 200 mature tamarisk plants.

Climbing Castle Crags: Scouting a route and nearly summiting the famous Castle Crags monolith in the Manzanita Creek watershed. Read the adventure in the inaugural essay of *Backcountry Journal*. **PAGE 10**

Big Sur Wilderness Reopens: The Forest Service re-opened the Ventana and Silver Peak wilderness areas to the public after a closure following massive wildfires there last year. As the area begins to recover, it's showing off a magnificent wildflower display.

Hydro
Fores
feder
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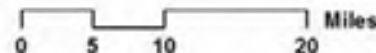
LOOKING ACROSS THE FOREST

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

SOUTHERN LOS PADRES

Chico Martinez: In January, the BLM proposed to auction off 700 acres in the Chico Martinez "Area of Critical Environmental Concern" just north of the Carrizo Plain. ForestWatch convinced the agency to protect the ACEC from any surface disturbance.

Carrizo Plain Management Plan: ForestWatch submitted a 16-page letter demanding strong protections from oil exploration and development. **PAGE 5**



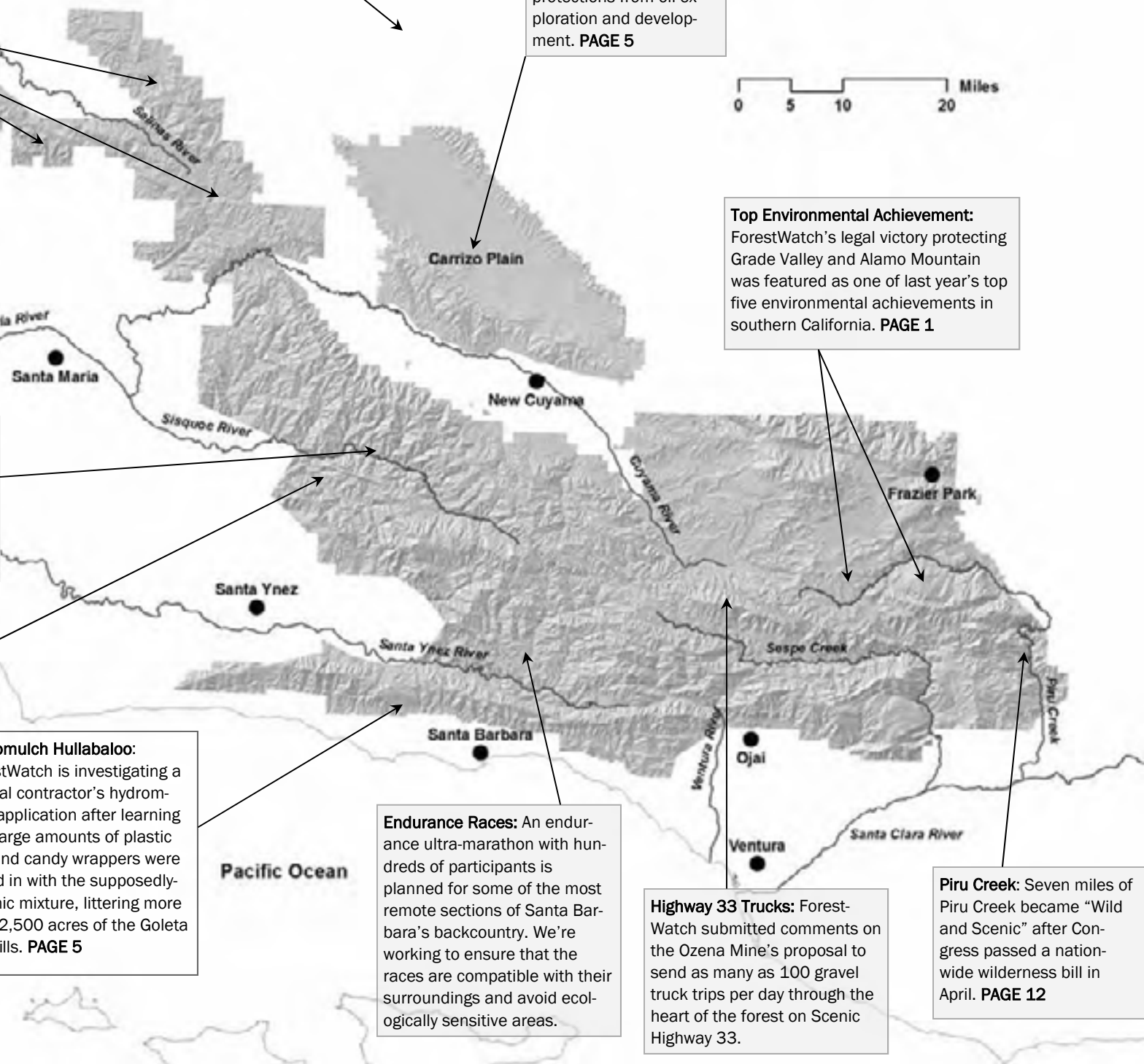
Top Environmental Achievement: ForestWatch's legal victory protecting Grade Valley and Alamo Mountain was featured as one of last year's top five environmental achievements in southern California. **PAGE 1**

Mulch Hullabaloo: ForestWatch is investigating a local contractor's hydromulch application after learning large amounts of plastic and candy wrappers were mixed in with the supposedly biodegradable mixture, littering more than 2,500 acres of the Goleta hills. **PAGE 5**

Endurance Races: An endurance ultra-marathon with hundreds of participants is planned for some of the most remote sections of Santa Barbara's backcountry. We're working to ensure that the races are compatible with their surroundings and avoid ecologically sensitive areas.

Highway 33 Trucks: ForestWatch submitted comments on the Ozena Mine's proposal to send as many as 100 gravel truck trips per day through the heart of the forest on Scenic Highway 33.

Piru Creek: Seven miles of Piru Creek became "Wild and Scenic" after Congress passed a nationwide wilderness bill in April. **PAGE 12**



Bear Hunt Shot Down *(continued from the front page)*

how many bears exist in San Luis Obispo County. Officials never conducted a bear census, and lacked the data to estimate, or even guess, how many black bears roam the county's hills, canyons, and wilderness areas.

Instead, biologists only know roughly *where* bears are located in the county, not *how many* actually reside here. The Department conducted a crude "bait study," hanging cans of fish from tree limbs in various locations throughout the county and returning each day to observe puncture marks or bear tracks. While these bait studies are good indicators of relative bear density (i.e., where bears occur), they do not provide actual numbers.

We asked the Department to conduct more accurate population studies, but the Department refused. So ForestWatch hired one of the state's top wildlife attorneys, and one of California's best conservation biologists. Together, we prepared a 94-page critique of the agency's hunting proposal, concluding that the plan could seriously jeopardize the county's bear population in violation of state law.

We didn't stop there. ForestWatch traveled more than five hours to attend a hearing in remote **Lodi, California** after the Department refused to hold a local hearing on the matter. We were the only ones at that hearing questioning the merits of the proposal. We also asked for copies of studies that the Department cited to conclude that the hunt would have no significant impact on black bears. After much delay, the Department told us we'd have to pay nearly \$140 to view the records, and

when we asserted our right to view them at no charge, they directed us to a location more than two hours away.

While this political theater played out, more than 40 organizations and 550 concerned residents voiced their opposition to the bear hunt by writing formal letters to Fish & Game. Several local elected officials formally opposed the hunt, including a majority of the County's Board of Supervisors.

On the eve of the Fish & Game Commission's April 21 vote, everything pointed towards unanimous approval of the bear hunt. But then, in a surprise move, the Department recommended that the Commission *not* approve the bear hunt, asking for more time to address concerns presented by the public. By meeting's end, the Commission had unanimously voted to table the issue until at least 2010!

Black bears are safe for now, but the Department made it clear that it will pursue the bear hunting proposal as soon as next year. In the meantime, black bears continue to roam across the wilderness landscapes of the Los Padres National Forest, giving us comfort that our local wild places are alive and well.

ForestWatch would like to thank Bill Yeates of the law firm Kenyon-Yeates for providing excellent legal representation on this issue, Dr. Rick Hopkins of Live Oak Associates for evaluating the scientific merits of the proposal, and to all other organizations and individuals who spoke out. We will continue to track this proposal, demanding the strongest protections for our region's wildlife.

Taking a Stand for Trees *(continued from the front page)*

The Day Fire of 2006 swept through a significant portion of the **Sespe Wilderness** in Ventura's backcountry. Shortly thereafter, the Forest Service announced a plan to use commercial logging companies to remove more than 1,430 old-growth conifer trees from a portion of the burn area. The Forest Service refused to prepare an Environmental Assessment before approving the timber sale, invoking a loophole that classified the project as "road maintenance" instead of "salvage logging." Such an interpretation clearly violated federal environmental laws, leaving us with little choice but to file a lawsuit in U.S. District Court.

The judge promptly ruled in our favor, concluding that the project was clearly "salvage logging" and directing the Forest Service to either prepare an EA or to dramatically scale back the project. Using the loophole for projects of this magnitude, the judge ruled, was illegal.

This ruling established a powerful precedent extending far beyond the Los Padres. Shortly after our case was decided, another judge cited our case — *Los Padres ForestWatch v. U.S. Forest Service* — in ruling against the logging of more than 15,000 large trees from the **Sierra Nevada**.

The report highlights the most significant successes in the environmental community in 2008, and is prepared each year by Environment Now, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit foundation.

"The Los Padres remains a role model, showing that national forests can be valued more for recreation, wildlife habitat, and clean water, rather than resource extraction."

Rep. Lois Capps, House Natural Resources Subcommittees on Forests and Public Lands

"Closing this loophole is an outstanding achievement because of the particularly destructive nature of logging after fire, which removes or disables resources vital to the process of ecosystem recovery and to biodiversity that uses burned forests."

Dr. Dennis Odion, an expert in wildlife severity and vegetative response at UCSB

"This is a classic tale of how a grassroots organization can influence federal forest policy, not only protecting our local forest, but also national forests throughout California."

Jeff Kuyper, ForestWatch Executive Director

Read the entire report at www.LPFW.org



Backcountry Journal: Climbing Castle Rock by Ted Cais

My wife and I first glimpsed this remarkable rock formation while hiking down the **Manzana Trail**. Castle Rock rears up at the western extremity of a spur leading off Hurricane Deck in the **San Rafael Wilderness** at the junction of the **Sisquoc River** and **Manzana Creek**. The area's great natural beauty inspired the famous sculptor John Cody to settle there and quarry serpentine nearby for his work. Hikers have long been attracted by the rugged challenge of Hurricane Deck, looming over sacred Chumash sites like **Pool Rock** and **Condor Cave**, but none have ventured on Castle Rock as far as we could tell.



It was surprising we found little recorded information on Castle Rock, other than another one by the same name above the **Lost Valley Trail**. Yet there is even confusion about the name as we heard variations like Castle Crags or The Crags from experienced hikers and rangers. Folks we met by chance from Cody's place in the shadow of the peak said they always knew it as **The Pinnacles**.

They are uplifted and vertically eroded from soft sandstone in a jagged profile extending maybe a half mile between eastern and western summits. A rock window known as The Eye of the Needle is a notable feature visible briefly from the trail. Normally thick chaparral prevents an easy approach through encircling foothills, but the Zaca fire cleared out the southern flank enough for us to attempt the ascent.

At first we thought it would be easy on what appeared to be open grassy slopes. Unfortunately the re-growth contains many annoying sticker plants and the ridges are steep enough to require careful route selection. We eventually made it level with the eastern summit but were unable to traverse the remaining short distance over the exposed southern rock wall that drops sheer for several hundred feet. The view from here is outstanding, encompassing **Zaca Ridge** to the south then **Hurricane Deck** and **Bald Mountain** to the north.

A final climb over some perched blocks put us on the crest where we disturbed a huge rattlesnake warming in the sun just feet away. We bypassed the snake den cautiously and headed east to the **Eye of the Needle**. The Eye proved inaccessible above a steep, fragile wall encrusted in lichen. So we backtracked along the ridge past the saddle hoping to reach the higher western summit at 2,409'.

We stopped short at the first of seven major rock towers bristling along the ridge. The shady northern side looked more reasonable but turned out to be an impenetrable labyrinth of slabs, ridges and gullies sweeping a long way down to the valley. We briefly thought about returning with rope and technical climbing gear but decided against damaging the soft rock with anchors. We had done our best and were satisfied at paving the way up on this landmark of the lower Manzanita.

*"Backcountry Journal" features stories about our local backcountry that instill a sense of place and inspire the preservation of these unique wild lands. ForestWatch member **Ted Cais**, a pioneer of bouldering in Australia in the 1960s, now lives in Santa Barbara where he explores the crags and rocks of the Los Padres National Forest.*

Forest Service to ForestWatch: “Stimulate *This!*”

In February, the U.S. Forest Service received \$650 million as part of a nationwide effort to **stimulate the economy and create millions of jobs**. The funds were to be used for “road maintenance and decommissioning, deferred maintenance work, abandoned mine cleanup, and other related critical habitat, forest improvement, and watershed enhancement projects. ForestWatch and dozens of organizations across the country had lobbied Congress to include the language regarding road decommissioning, critical habitat, and watershed enhancement projects, and we were pleased to see them included in the final bill.

After the legislation was signed into law, ForestWatch sent a letter to **Peggy Hernandez, the Supervisor of the Los Padres National Forest**, recommending a list of specific “critical habitat” and “watershed enhancement” projects for the Los Padres. She thanked us for our recommendations, but later, when we asked to see the final list of projects that the Los Padres submitted for stimulus funding, **Supervisor Hernandez declined**. So we proceeded to submit a formal request under the **Freedom of Information Act**.

Instead of processing our request, Supervisor Hernandez routed it to regional headquarters in Northern California, where FOIA requests **languish for months**, and in some cases, years.

Eventually, the Regional Office **denied our request**, claiming that the list was **“exempt from disclosure.”** Not only did the Forest Service seem determined to insulate the stimulus process from public participation, but it did so just days after **President Obama** ordered all federal agencies to “act promptly and in a spirit of cooperation” when responding to information requests to “usher in a new era of open Government.” Apparently, **old habits are hard to break**.

Now, three months after our initial request, we still have not received the list and to our knowledge, the Los Padres **has not received any stimulus funding**. So we enlisted the help of the Western Environmental Law Center to appeal the agency’s denial of our request and requested the involvement of our local **Congresswoman Lois Capps**. We’ll let you know how this **stimulating drama** unfolds.



“We call it the chaparral...”

by William Stafford, 1942

We called it the chaparral,
folded, easily draped and softly a comfort
over that land egg-beatered out of rock.
It lapped over our cliff
and rested like an evening of shade above
the breaks of the river;
a soft statement of greenness, down all
the hills,
in wide forgiveness, a layer of dew and night
that never moves on:

the dimension of life on that land.

Called chaparral:
in the night a deepness all over our land,
containing the sleeping birds and the
quiet deer,
reaching soft fingers of distance,
becoming a lawn on mountain shoulders
or a shagginess on the near slope;

gazed at by eagles and men.

The shaggy old pelt of our land,
worried by rain and by sun,
a shawl over **Little Pine Mountain**,
a pelt over **Cachuma Ridge**,
a help and a quietness as high as our heads
as we walked with pilgrim souls
toward the rocky hills,
those permanent gestures,
inland or toward the sea.

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of Los Padres ForestWatch

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

Where the Wild Things Are: Piru Creek

Thanks to April's landmark wilderness bill, **Piru Creek** became the newest "Wild and Scenic River" in the Los Padres National Forest, joining three other rivers in the forest that share this designation. The protected stretch begins just downstream of Pyramid Dam, flowing 7.25 miles through the **Sespe Wilderness**.

Piru Creek is one of the largest river systems in the Los Padres, beginning at a series of springs deep in the Sespe Wilderness and flowing 57 miles to its confluence with the **Santa Clara River**. Its upper reaches pass through wide open landscapes with stark contrasts of white and red soils amidst forested ridges and meadows. At the **Fishbowls** — a popular fishing and swimming hole — it flows through a series of deep potholes carved into the bedrock. Downstream of **Thorn Meadows**, early settlers panned, sluiced, and dredged for gold in the 1800s at the historic mining district of **Lexington**. Dredging is now prohibited on Piru Creek to protect endangered species and sacred sites.



Arroyo toads, spotted owls, California condors, southwestern willow flycatchers, least Bell's vireos, and remnants of landlocked steelhead populations seek refuge in the Piru Creek corridor. A series of steep rocky gorges exhibit some of the oldest rocks in the coastal mountain ranges, and faults cut through the creek corridor adding to the geologic uniqueness of the area. The Piru also offers remote kayaking for those with a sense of adventure to reach the put-in.

Plans to construct a dam in 1972 upstream of Pyramid Lake were ultimately scuttled due to environmental concerns. The watershed remains threatened today by off-road vehicles, commercial livestock grazing, downstream dams that block steelhead migration to and from the ocean, and invasive tamara risk plants. Last year, ForestWatch halted a logging proposal on **Alamo Mountain** and **Grade Valley** in the upper reaches of Piru Creek. ForestWatch will continue to work for permanent protection of this unique and primitive river system, seeking Wild & Scenic River protection for all remaining stretches of the river.