



Ojai Chapter

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SAN DIEGO COUNTY (NORTH)
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT



Wheeler Gorge Visitor Center

Los Padres Forest Association

The only official 501(c)3 non-profit cooperating association for the Los Padres National Forest

Protecting and preserving our National Forest resources and heritage for future generations, through education and service

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Scouting - BSA

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John Bridgwater
District Ranger

Charlie Robinson
Recreation Officer

Heidi Anderson
Wilderness Trails Manager
& Assistant Recreation Officer

Los Padres Forest Association

Jason Beckstrand
President

Jan 31, 2007

Attn: Gary Kaiser

This letter addresses the concerns of our organization regarding the expanded heavy truck traffic that would result from the approval of the Diamond Rock Sand and Gravel Mine in the Cuyama Valley.

We, the Los Padres Forest Association, operate the Wheeler Gorge Visitor Center under a special-use permit. As partners with the Los Padres National Forest we have an understanding and commitment that safety is our number one issue. We strive for safety in our volunteer trail service, conservation efforts and in running our programs at our visitor center.

Our visitor center is located directly across highway 33, from the very popular Wheeler Gorge Campground, which is heavily used during the summer. Our concern is for the safety of campers and their children when they cross the highway to visit our center. The campers make up the majority of our visitors.

Many of our programs are offered on the lawn of our center and with the noise of the current traffic of trucks and other vehicles, we were forced to purchase an outdoor PA system to help our audience hear our presentations. Some participants have remarked that it is much quieter in their city than up in the mountains! Isn't having some quiet time one of the main reasons that we leave the city to visit the forest?

Trucks also make additional noise from "Jake Breaking" at the end of the grade near the Wheeler Gorge Nature Trail - only 1/2 mile from our center. That kind of noise can and does travel for a mile or more in a canyon or gorge.

And then there is the issue of additional pollution from exhaust. Will we issue protective face masks next year for our visitors?

Mike Havstad - President, Ojai Chapter, Los Padres Forest Association
2276 Larch Street, Simi Valley CA 93065

I concur with other voices that "an alternate route to Santa Maria, Highway 166 to a trailhead seems a less impacting route that would be able to serve the entire coastal market for sand and gravel".

I invite you to come to our visitor center and experience Wheeler Gorge. I will personally take you on a tour of the campground, visitor center and the beautiful nature trail. This is an issue which requires a visit to understand the impacts on this unique and beautiful location.

If you have children or grandchildren, bring them along and see through their eyes. We are saving all of this for them and their children. We owe it to them!

Sincerely,



Mike Havstad
President, Ojai Chapter
Los Padres Forest Association

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