



# LOS PADRES FORESTWATCH

PROTECTING WILDLIFE AND WILD PLACES ALONG CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL COAST

FRAZIER MOUNTAIN LOGGING • UPCOMING EVENTS • OFF-ROAD OUTLAWS • LEAST BELL'S VIREO • VOLUNTEERS • HAPPY CANYON  
BACKCOUNTRY JOURNAL • CONDOR'S HOPE VINEYARD • SISQUOC STEELHEAD • WILD & SCENIC FILM FESTIVAL

WINTER 2010



LIGHTNING OVER LOCKWOOD VALLEY, SEPTEMBER 2010

Photo: [www.derekgulden.com](http://www.derekgulden.com)





## BASE CAMP



As fall colors give way to the first dusting of snow in our backcountry, this is the season that many of us will sit down to give thanks for the things around us.

Jeff Kuyper,  
ForestWatch  
Executive Director

My staff and I are feeling very grateful - both for the wild places we live near, and for people like you who share a stake in their protection.

We've been able to accomplish so many things together because of the voice and support of our members, volunteers, donors, and advocates.

I'm thankful that we have these wonderful wild places right here in our own backyard, beckoning us to visit them on foot, horseback, bicycle, or vehicle.

I'm thankful that these lands provide solace and refuge when we just need to reconnect with the things in life that are most important to us.

I'm thankful that these lands provide clean water for our farms, and tourism dollars and jobs for our local communities.

And I'm thankful for condor and butterfly, steelhead and fairy shrimp, big-cone Douglas fir and California jewelflower, all for enriching our lives with nature's diversity.

Together, you and I – along with our hardworking Board and staff – have worked to protect our region's natural bounty. From stopping runaway oil drilling and harmful logging projects, to picking up the smallest bit of microtrash or removing a strand of old barbed wire fencing, we've all made our backyard wild places a little more wild, a little more protected, and a little more free.

Thank you again for your support.



Photo Jack Lindahl

## BOARD & STAFF JOIN US!

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Executive Director

**DIANE DEVINE**  
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**SUZANNE FELDMAN**  
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**MIKE SUMMERS**  
Wild Places Campaign Coordinator

### Carrizo Plain Defencing Day, January 22



Join ForestWatch for a day of removing miles of relic barbed wire fencing from the Carrizo Plain National Monument. These relic fences act as barriers to the movement of pronghorn antelope, inhibiting their escape from predators and contributing to their decline. Email Suzanne Feldman for details at [suzanne@LPFW.org](mailto:suzanne@LPFW.org)

### Benefit Art Show Reception, January 22



Saturday evening, January 22, come celebrate the opening of painter Robert Wassell's benefit art show for Los Padres ForestWatch. Stop in to admire the Wassell paintings of the beautiful Los Padres National Forest. Email Diane Devine for details at [diane@LPFW.org](mailto:diane@LPFW.org)

### Ojai Wild! Creekside Barbeque, April 2



Save the date for the return of our popular afternoon at the fabulous Diamond Hitch Camp at the Thacher School, details coming soon!

# LOGGING PROPOSED

Officials announce a commercial logging project for Frazier Mountain in the Ventura County backcountry

In September, the U.S. Forest Service announced a commercial logging project on Frazier Mountain in the Los Padres National Forest of northern Ventura County. In addition to the timber sale, the project also includes **removal of other vegetation totaling a combined 2,386 acres** from the summit to a camp-ground at the base of the mountain.

In response to the announcement, ForestWatch submitted comments to forest officials in October, urging them to carefully evaluate all impacts from the project in an Environmental Impact Statement, and to consider other alternatives that do not rely on commercial logging.

Frazier Mountain is one of the highest peaks in the Los Padres National Forest, rising to a height of more than 8,000 feet at the summit. It **contains large, old-growth and harbors a diverse array of plant and animal life**, many of which are considered rare. Frazier Mountain is also one of fifteen genetic hotspots for wildlife in southern California, highlighting the importance of protecting this sensitive area.

The current project involves a combination of commercial logging,

**mechanical vegetation removal, fuelbreak construction, and prescribed burns** between the primitive Chuchupate Campground and the summit. According to the Forest Service, the goals of the project are to reduce fire hazard, reduce wildfire risk, reduce bark beetle risk, maintain the health of mature conifers, and protect recreation

ForestWatch carefully reviewed the details of the project and submitted an 18-page list of technical and legal issues that forest officials will need to address before approving the project. Due to the high-intensity impacts associated with a commercial timber sale, **ForestWatch asked the Forest Service to evaluate ways to achieve project goals without relying on a commercial logging operation**. This may involve cutting trees and leaving them in place so that they can serve as wildlife habitat, replenish soil nutrients, and retain soil moisture. We also asked the Forest Service to focus its vegetation removal projects in the “defensible space” zone immediately surrounding structures and communities, instead of constructing a 300-foot wide fuel-break at least four miles from the Frazier Park community.

The Forest Service anticipates releasing a draft environmental document for this project sometime in 2011, at which point there will be an opportunity for the public to review the document for 30 days and provide comments. ForestWatch will continue to track this project, review environmental documents, and work with local scientists and other experts to

**ensure the best possible outcome for Frazier Mountain.**



Photo: Joel Robinson, [www.naturalist-for-you.org](http://www.naturalist-for-you.org)

areas. The agency claims that the mountain's forests have become too dense due to decades of fire suppression, and are therefore at risk of catastrophic wildfire and bark beetle infestations.





## CRITTER CORNER

Least Bell's vireo is a federally endangered migratory songbird, breeding entirely within California and northern Baja California. There has been an important 10-fold increase in the population in Southern California since its listing as endangered in 1986, however numbers remain dangerously low on the Los Padres National Forest. The only breeding population on the Los Padres National Forest is centered around the upper end of Gibraltar Reservoir. It currently comprises less than 12 pairs (down from 55 in 1980).

The Bell's vireo has great coloring for protection from predator's eyes both above and below - dark on top with underparts nearly pure white. They eat almost exclusively insects, foraging in dense brush and tree tops. They build nests in large shrubs or low trees, usually in a horizontal fork of a branch (about the size you can make by forming a 'V' with your index and middle fingers). Clutch size is 3-5 eggs which have an incubation period lasting 14 days. Once the chicks hatch they are tended by both parents, remaining with the adults for approximately a month.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a Spotlight Species Action Plan for the Bell's vireo in 2010. One of the main goals of the document is to create a "source population" of the least Bell's vireo in the Santa Clara River watershed as it is already occupied by a small number of the species and will easily promote vireo expansion back into the central valley and central coast drainages. Historically the northern area of its range supported 60 to 80 percent of the population!

Los Padres ForestWatch will work with key stakeholders on the recovery plan for the least Bell's vireo while fighting any proposed projects that would cause more harm to this species already teetering on the brink.

## OFF-ROAD OUTLAWS

ForestWatch works to curb illegal off-road vehicle trails in protected areas of the Los Padres.

ForestWatch recently discovered **more than twelve miles of illegal off-road vehicle trails in the Los Padres National Forest** near Santa Barbara, and is working with forest officials to reduce the amount of off-road trespass in this area.

West Camino Cielo Road extends along the ridgeline of the Santa Ynez Mountains, from Highway 154 to Refugio Canyon Road – providing travelers with commanding views. It's unpaved, windy, narrow, and fifteen miles long, but those who are daring enough to traverse this unmaintained road are rewarded with breathtaking scenery in all directions.

But these scenic views are being degraded by at least 38 illegal trails that crisscross this scenic area, **scaring the landscape and contributing significant amounts of erosion into the headwaters of our coastal creeks**. Even worse, they traverse areas hit by the Gap Fire of 2008, hindering the recovery of these fire-ravaged lands. Several

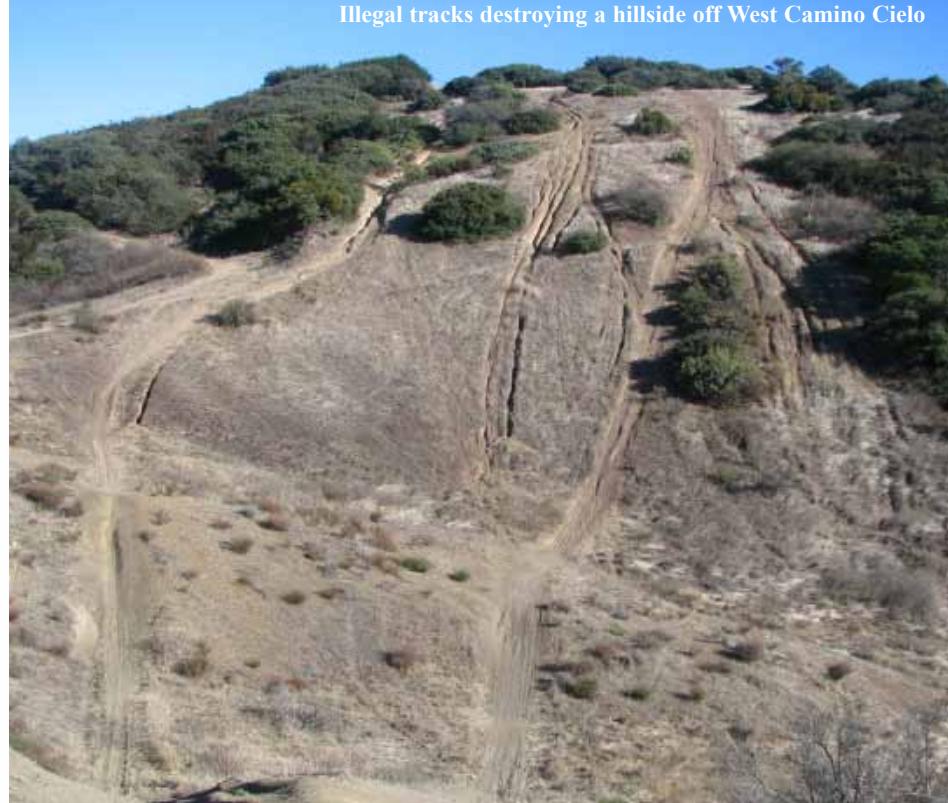
plants classified by the Forest Service as "sensitive" are found in this area, including Santa Ynez false lupine, Refugio manzanita, late-flowering mariposa lily, and Ojai fritillary. In addition, many of these routes travel through the Condor Point and Tequepis Inventoried Roadless Areas – areas that are supposed to be free from roads and motorized vehicles.

Over the last several years, the Forest Service has installed signs, fencing, and other barriers urging drivers to stay on the main road. But motorized trespass continues to occur, with vandals even removing signs and destroying barriers.

This is **one of the worst areas of motorized trespass** on the entire Los Padres National Forest. The forest has a long-standing rule that motorized vehicles must stay on designated roads and trails – it is illegal to travel cross-country. But plenty of careless motorized users violate the law along West Camino Cielo, and ForestWatch finally decided to do something about it.

Earlier this year, we requested a meeting with the Forest Service and the County of Santa Barbara, both of whom have jurisdiction over the road. We discussed many different ways to solve the continuing problem of off-road vehicle trespass in this area, and are working to craft a creative solution to **put a stop to this illegal activity for good**.

Illegal tracks destroying a hillside off West Camino Cielo



# VOLUNTEER WRAPUP

ForestWatch supporters improve habitat and have fun!

We'd love to have you on our next volunteer mission to create on-the-ground change along California's Central Coast. Stay in the loop by emailing [suzanne@LPFW.org](mailto:suzanne@LPFW.org)

## SEPTEMBER 2010

**What:** Microtrash Cleanup  
**Where:** Punchbowls near Santa Paula  
**Who:** 6 volunteers  
**Why:** 20 lbs. of trash removed

Punchbowls is one of the busiest trails into the Los Padres National Forest due to its easy access and lovely swimming hole awaiting those who make it up past Big Cone Camp. Sadly, you can be sure to stick on the trail by following the rocks and trees with graffiti spray painted on them! ForestWatch volunteers cleaned the trail all the way up to the Punchbowls and back. The results were substantial - more than 20 lbs. of microtrash.

Consider checking out this quick day-trip into the Los Padres sometime this holiday season (and pocket some trash on your way back to your car). To find Punchbowls, park along Highway 150 at Thomas Aquinas College and follow signs to the trailhead. It is about six miles roundtrip and a relatively minimal elevation gain.

## OCTOBER 2010

**What:** Defencing Project  
**Where:** Carrizo Plain  
**Who:** 8 volunteers, 2 BLM staff, and Cody the dog  
**Why:** 2 miles of fence removed

Fence removal is HARD work, but looking back over open plains at the end of the day is deeply satisfying - and the pronghorn antelope surely appreciate it. After a day of clipping and rolling wire, pulling posts, and inspecting interesting treasures found upon the Carrizo, volunteers out for October's Defencing Day enjoyed homemade pronghorn cookies at quittin' time. A well-deserved feast around the campfire was shared by all at Selby Campground in the evening.

Join us on our next Defencing Day on Saturday, January 22. The Carrizo should be a vibrant green, and we're hoping the ground might be a little softer for pulling out those fence posts!



Photo Jack Lindahl

Mary pulled literally *hundreds* of fence posts out of the ground, way to go!



## STELLAR SUPPORT

**THE CONNORS FAMILY**  
ForestWatch supporters since 2004

Hi, we're the Connors Family: Sonia, Kevin & Casey. We love spending time in the backcountry and love our own backyard ~ Los Padres National Forest. We enjoy hiking and backpacking and love the peace, freedom and beauty of remote places away from buildings and roads. After Casey was born, we wanted to continue to enjoy our passion for the outdoors, so since she was 1 she has backpacked with us all around California – she even enjoyed the John Muir Trail from our handy kid's backpack in the summer of 2007!

It was just by chance that we came across Los Padres ForestWatch just as it was starting up in 2004. Over the years, we've had fun joining LPFW defencing the Carrizo Plain, picking up microtrash in all kinds of scenic spots around Los Padres Forest and helping out at the annual Ojai Wild! Fundraiser.

We try to include our daughter (she's 7 now) in as many of these activities as we can, as we want to teach her the importance of caring for her wilderness and what she can do to protect the places she loves. Casey says: "I love the wilderness; it's like nature's playground. Helping with trash was fun because I found lots of cool treasures."

Our kids will be the ones to protect our wilderness in the future. If they spend time in nature and the backcountry, they'll love it, and they'll go out and enjoy it and protect it when they're adults. Supporting LPFW makes caring for our own forest easy and fun. We hope to see you at a LPFW event or out in the backcountry!

## NORTHERN LOS PADRES



## SOUTHERN LOS PADRES

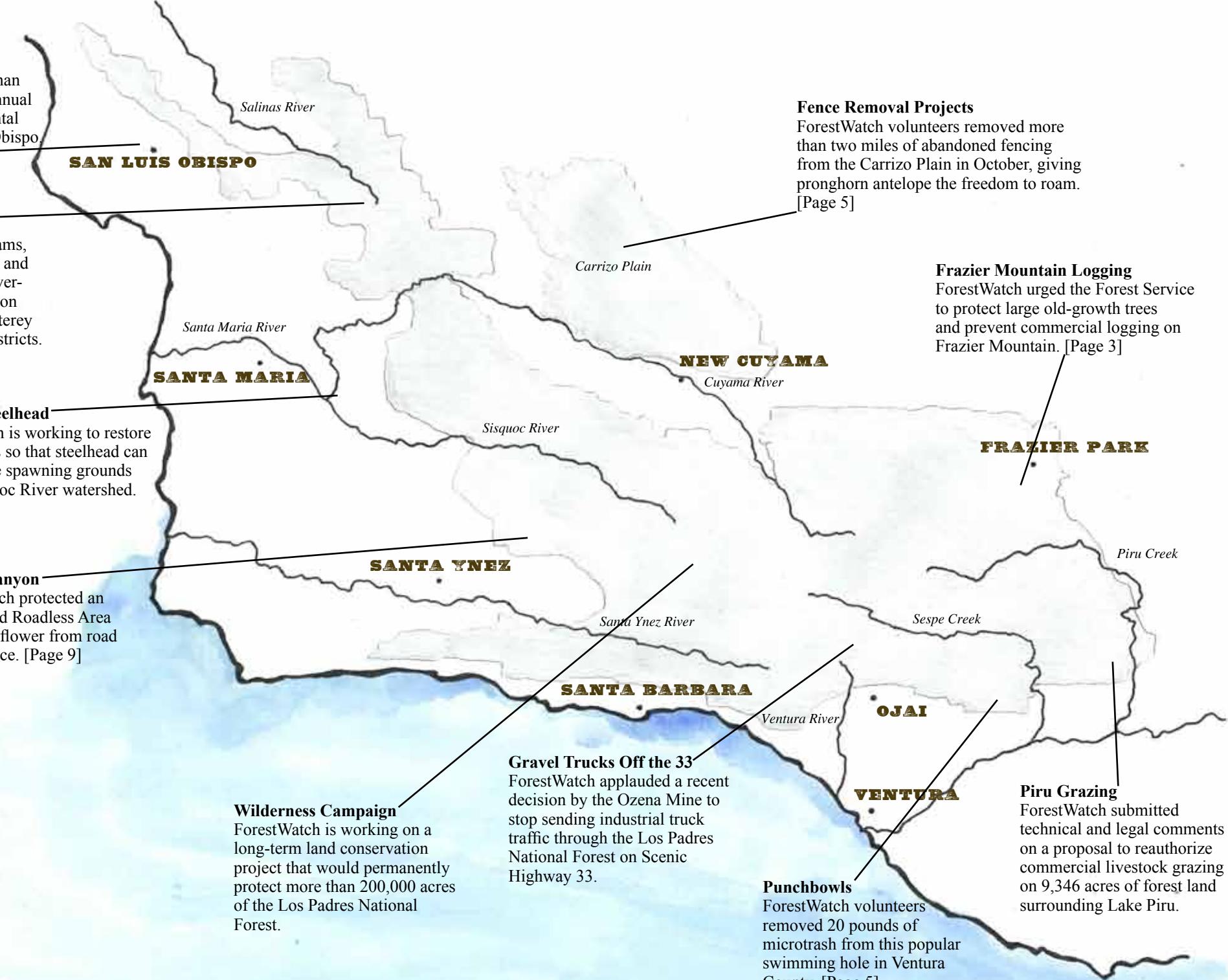
**Film Festival Success**  
ForestWatch thanks more than 350 attendees of our 3rd Annual Wild & Scenic Environmental Film Festival in San Luis Obispo. [Page 10]

**Clearing Halted**  
ForestWatch protected streams, endangered species habitat, and wilderness areas from an over-ambitious roadside vegetation clearing project in the Monterey and Santa Lucia Ranger Districts.

**Sisquoc Steelhead**  
ForestWatch is working to restore streamflows so that steelhead can reach native spawning grounds in the Sisquoc River watershed. [Page 11]

**Happy Canyon**  
ForestWatch protected an Inventoried Roadless Area and a rare flower from road maintenance. [Page 9]

**Wilderness Campaign**  
ForestWatch is working on a long-term land conservation project that would permanently protect more than 200,000 acres of the Los Padres National Forest.



**Fence Removal Projects**  
ForestWatch volunteers removed more than two miles of abandoned fencing from the Carrizo Plain in October, giving pronghorn antelope the freedom to roam. [Page 5]

**Frazier Mountain Logging**  
ForestWatch urged the Forest Service to protect large old-growth trees and prevent commercial logging on Frazier Mountain. [Page 3]

**Piru Grazing**  
ForestWatch submitted technical and legal comments on a proposal to reauthorize commercial livestock grazing on 9,346 acres of forest land surrounding Lake Piru. [Page 5]

**LOOKING ACROSS THE FOREST**

AN UPDATE ON HOW WE'RE PROTECTING YOUR REGION

WINTER 2010

# BACKCOUNTRY JOURNAL

Stories from the backcountry that inspire the preservation of these unique wild lands

Personal stories instill a sense of place and help capture that wonder and excitement that we have all experienced when in an amazing natural setting. Share your personal accounts of time spent in the wild with us at [info@LPFW.org](mailto:info@LPFW.org)

## KEEP IT WILD

**Mike Splain, Development Director of the Ventana Wilderness Alliance, shares his amazing encounter with a mountain lion in the northern Los Padres National Forest.**



California Mountain Lion.

Just how long will it take her to notice me? And good God, why did I have to wear sandals? Standing here knee-deep in the brisk Carmel, my thoughts continually return to the nasty proposition of a fight - but then to run would be suicide. My right foot stirs the surface then awkwardly plants itself on a gravel bar. Eyes wide, ears twitching this way and that, tail writhing in irritation, the dangerously startled lioness crouches behind willow scrub to peer over driftwood from the opposite bank. It takes every ounce of determination I can muster to suppress an instinctive flight response. Stand your ground, they always say. With a death-grip on my trekking pole, I stand my ground.

And to think that just a few short hours earlier, I had brewed coffee in complete darkness, warmed the truck amid spell-binding phrases of Coltrane and piloted on down the ragged coast. Not a hint

of sunshine until this side of Laureles Grade, where the ranches of Carmel Valley spread far below, glowing faintly like waning lanterns. Starting out, I had carefully followed painted arrows marking the scarcely-used route. Soon I passed the last vestige of human habitation, save the very path itself. Time and again I'd stop to consult the map, convinced I'd strayed onto some narrow, slumping deer path, only to find that my concern was in vain, as the dotted lines, elevations and contours would testify. It must have been near eleven by the time a dilapidated sign beckoned a descent into the narrow gorge below. After the first three wet fords I'd thought better of boots and traded them for the relative convenience of these water-proof sandals, but how could I have known what lay ahead?

Eternal seconds pass and still we stare. She lies crouched, as if to pounce at a moment's notice. The river's incessant roar has since faded beneath the pounding of a nervous heart. I've achieved what recovering alcoholics reverently identify as a moment of clarity. Without the primitive places over which this mama cat presides, will this mountain lion be relegated to the realm of fantasy like so many of her extinct brethren? Will every remaining indigenous place be chewed up and spit out for the financial benefit of a few short-sighted generations? Or will we wise up and take steps to ensure that great wild creatures continue to

populate our forests and our dreams?

Abruptly drawn back into the present, the tension nears breaking point. She shivers with agitation, seeming certain that I will turn tail, but as I back away, using caution not to jostle or slip, she pivots, scans the slopes behind and beats a hasty retreat up the near vertical riverbank. It's as difficult to walk away as it was to stay put, but several hundred yards later, peaceful headspace returns and the gravity of what's just happened begins to sink in.

As dusk falls, I rendezvous with friends at our pre-appointed destination, a circle of ponderosa pines on the fringe of a sprawling mountain meadow. The spicy corn chili they prepare is a godsend. We laugh and cajole one another around a toasty fire and somehow I withhold my "war story" until dinner is gone and dishes are clean. No one is much surprised, really. It was bound to happen to one of us sooner or later.



Mike with Kandlbinder Peak, Ventana Double Cone & Big Sur River drainage in the background

# FORESTWATCH VICTORY



Photo Jeff Goddard

## Happy Canyon protected from continued degradation

The Santa Barbara Jewelflower is found only in the region where the Forest Service was allowing overgrazing and unauthorized roads. Hardly the protection this little beauty deserves - so ForestWatch took action.

Earlier this year, ForestWatch successfully **stopped a proposal that would have authorized 19 miles of roads in an area classified as an "Inventoried Roadless Area"** in Happy Canyon, near Figueroa Mountain in the Los Padres National Forest.

The Los Padres contains nearly 618,000 acres of lands that are formally classified as "Inventoried Roadless Areas." These areas were surveyed in the 1970s, and again in the 1980s, as part of a nationwide effort to identify all remaining unroaded areas in national forests. They represent the last remaining unprotected forest lands that are not accessible by motorized vehicle.

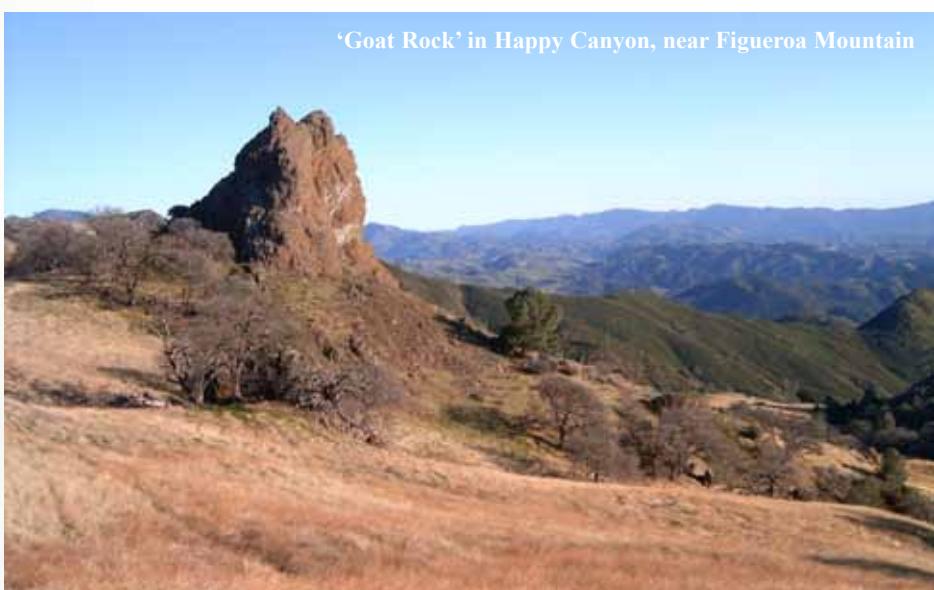
Today, three decades later, 318 miles of roads criss-cross these roadless areas on the Los Padres National Forest, 190 miles of which have never been formally approved as part of the forest's road system. **These roads ruin the primitive, roadless character of these areas, promote the spread of invasive weeds, cause erosion (they are not built to Forest Service standards), and scar the landscape.**

As part of a 2009 proposal to reauthorize livestock grazing on the Happy

Canyon Allotment, the Forest Service approved the maintenance and use of 19 miles worth of illegal, unclassified roads, right in the middle of the De La Guerra Inventoried Roadless Area. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule – issued in 2001 – specifically prohibits the maintenance of unclassified roads in Inventoried Roadless Areas. On no less than three occasions, we notified the Forest Service that the maintenance of these roads violated the letter of the Roadless Rule.

**When the Forest Service failed to make changes** to the project to comply with the Roadless Rule, and to protect the jewelflower, ForestWatch took the final step available to us as part of the public process – **we filed a lawsuit in federal court.** Shortly thereafter, the Forest Service revoked their approval of the project, and agreed to make changes to the project and conduct additional studies before proceeding.

Once again, with the support of our members, ForestWatch was able to uphold the rule of law on our public lands. We will continue to track this project to **ensure that this roadless area remains truly roadless.**



'Goat Rock' in Happy Canyon, near Figueroa Mountain



## CONDOR'S HOPE

Among blue oaks and chaparral, nestled at the foot of the Sierra Madre Mountains in the Cuyama Valley, lies a true gem of Santa Barbara County - Condor's Hope Vineyard.

Established in 1995, Condor's Hope is a four-acre dry-farmed vineyard. Owners Steve Gliessman and his wife, Robbie Jaffe, draw inspiration from the California condor to produce some beautiful high quality wines. Condors, which are released not far from the vineyard, can be seen soaring once again after returning from the brink of extinction, and the name, Condor's Hope, is meant to capture the hope embodied by the resurgence of these magnificent birds and the care of the environment needed for all of us to flourish.

Their traditional dry-farm method is both good for the environment as well as lovers of bold zinfandels and nuanced shiraz'. The dry dust mulch holds water in the ground and requires minimum irrigation, greatly conserving California's water.

Two years ago, Los Padres ForestWatch contacted Condor's Hope asking for their help with our annual benefit event, Ojai Wild! The good folks at Condor's Hope responded with generosity, bringing their fine wines for all to enjoy. Since then, Condor's Hope Vineyard and Los Padres ForestWatch have collaborated on a number of activities including a ForestWatch donor field trip and tabling together at the Earth Day and Wine Festival. Their support continues with donation of wines for our various outreach functions, and, most recently, naming us as the recipient of contributions received from their Wine & Wildflowers event held at the vineyard this spring.

ForestWatch greatly values their support and their care of the environment. Visit their website at [CondorsHope.com](http://CondorsHope.com)

# WILD & SCENIC FILM FEST

Over 350 environmental enthusiasts attended this year's 3rd annual Wild & Scenic Environmental Film Festival in San Luis Obispo back in October. Hosted by Los Padres ForestWatch, this film tour has become an eagerly anticipated annual event in the SLO community and along the Central Coast.

The Wild and Scenic Environmental Film Festival on Tour brings together a selection of award-winning environmental and outdoor adventure films in a spirit of inspiration, education, and entertainment. ForestWatch chooses a selection of films designed to attract a wide variety of viewers. From children to the diehard outdoor adventurer, there was something for everyone.



Through the camera lens, viewers traveled from the tops of the largest sitka spruce trees in Oregon to the beautiful Flathead River Valley in British Columbia, learned about the clash of oil drilling and private property rights, and witnessed firsthand how volunteerism and innovative thinking can really make a difference in the world around them. (A complete description of the 2010 film lineup can be seen at <http://www.LPFW.org/filmfestfilms2010.htm>).

The films for our Wild & Scenic Film Festival are chosen from among the favorites at the annual film festival held in Nevada City, California each January,

started by the South Yuba River Citizens League in 2003. The festival has grown to receive national acclaim for celebrating the spirit of environmental activism and has become the largest traveling festival of its kind in North America.

The evening began with an environmental fair, featuring information booths from our local sponsors and other environmental organizations, and patrons were treated to some tasty local wines, appetizers, and the opportunity to win some amazing raffle items.

A benefit for the work of Los Padres ForestWatch, this event helps support our local conservation efforts. Our sincere thanks to everyone who helped make this event possible. Watch for information on the 4th annual Wild & Scenic event returning to SLO – October 2011!

*ForestWatch is able to bring this wonderful film festival to San Luis Obispo through a generous grant from Patagonia. Local sponsors included: Mountain Air Sports, Pacific Energy Company, Ecotones Landscape Design and Installation, Robin's Restaurant, Pozo Organic Farm, Kenneth Volk Vineyards and Saucelito Canyon Vineyard. National Sponsors of the event included: Clif Bar, Sierra Nevada Brewing Company, Osprey, and Tom's of Maine.*



A shot from one of the films: *Flathead Wild*

## CRITTER CORNER



Bigcone Douglas fir is an evergreen conifer found only in the mountains of southern California, from the San Rafael Mountains in central Santa Barbara County south to San Diego. It gains its name by having the largest (by far) cones of all Douglas firs.

Bigcone Douglas fir typically grows from 60-100 feet in height with a collection of long branches giving it a sparse look. Bark is rusty red-brown and deeply ridged. Cones are from 4-7 inches long, with larger, thicker scales than those of other Douglas-firs. The seeds are actually so large and heavy that they are probably dispersed by birds or mammals instead of the wind. Trees start producing seeds at about 20 years of age, and live to be hundreds of years old (the oldest recorded Bigcone Douglas fir was over 600 years old!).

Bigcone Douglas fir is beat only by redwoods in its ability to recover from fire. Its thick bark and the presence of numerous adventitious buds on the upper side of the branches aid in its resistance - the trees will sprout from the burnt upper crown and the apparently dead tree becomes green again the following spring!

Since the 1940's the largest known bigcone Douglas-fir has been "Old Glory", located about 1/4 mile up Bear Canyon from Mt. Baldy Village on the Angeles National Forest. Various estimates put its height at approximately 200 feet tall with a diameter at breast height of 7.5 feet. Pay him a visit if you're in that 'neck of the woods'!

# SISQUOC STEELHEAD



Officials with the State of California have launched a long-awaited study of the Santa Maria River to determine how much water historically flowed in this river system. The data could one day be used to help endangered steelhead trout migrate upstream to historic spawning grounds in the Sisquoc River, deep inside the San Rafael Wilderness in the Los Padres National Forest.

The Sisquoc River and its tributaries **once supported the second-largest steelhead run in Santa Barbara County**. Early pioneers as far back as 1879 reported hundreds of steelhead in pools, so numerous that one could catch trout with their bare hands. A historic cabin along the Sisquoc River contains charcoal sketches of large fish, along with the dates and names of the anglers who caught them, some measuring more than 24 inches long. A newspaper article in 1941 reported that five steelhead were caught on a downtown Santa Maria street when the river overflowed its banks.

However, the construction of **Twitchell Dam in the 1950s effectively turned off the spigot**. The dam traps all streamflow during the winter and spring and slowly releases it during the summer. This schedule doesn't leave enough water for steelhead, which use streamflows as a lifeline between the ocean

(where steelhead mature) and spawning areas in the upper watershed, where they deposit their eggs.

The National Marine Fisheries Service – the top federal agency charged with protecting steelhead populations – recently released a draft Recovery Plan for southern steelhead. It lists the Santa Maria/Sisquoc River system as the highest priority for recovery actions, and recommends adequate streamflows. In addition, longstanding **California law requires that all dams provide enough streamflow to maintain downstream fish populations**.

Currently, nobody knows exactly how much water is needed to sustain a steelhead fishery. Due to this lack of data, the State of California has included the Sisquoc/Santa Maria River system as one of three rivers it will study in the coming years. The goal of the study is to determine how much water is needed to support a steelhead population. The study will be completed in 2012. It's a perfect time to **begin gathering data that will help all stakeholders make informed decisions about water use** in this system. Such measures may eventually include water conservation, periodic adjustments to the dam's water release schedule, or others.

ForestWatch attended the first public hearing on this study in November, and will continue to track the process to ensure that **steelhead can once again reach their historic spawning grounds in the Los Padres National Forest**.

**"The stream is full of mountain trout. I am confident that we saw in some places more than 500 at one sight. We...had no difficulty in capturing all we wanted with our hands."**

- Arlene Benson from *The Noontide Sun: The Field Journals of the Reverend Stephen Bowers, Pioneer California Archeologist, 1879.*

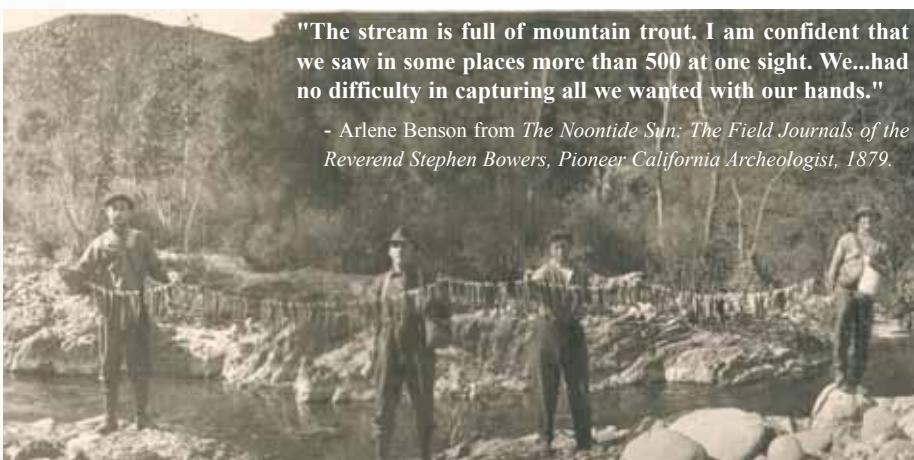


## YOUR BACKYARD

Frazier Mountain is one of the highest peaks in the Los Padres National Forest, rising to a height of more than 8,000 feet. The bulk of the mountain is in northeastern Ventura County, though its very northern edges touch into Kern County. An old wooden fire lookout built as the very first lookout on the Los Padres in 1917 greets you at the summit (though today it is dwarfed by communications towers that have taken up residence on the peak as well). Historically the mountain has been logged, providing timber for Fort Tejon in the 1850's, and there have been several mines in operation. The Ridgelite mine (now owned by TXI) at the western toe of the mountain is still quite active, with its operations visible from Lockwood Valley Road.

Frazier Mountain contains large, old-growth conifers like sugar pines, Jeffrey pines, ponderosa pine, single-leaf pinyon pine, and white fir. The mountain is a popular stop-over for endangered California condors, which roost in large snags to rest during long-distance flights. The mountain also provides refuge for seven wildlife species that the Forest Service considers "sensitive," including the northern goshawk, the California spotted owl, yellow-blotched salamander, and Mt. Pinos lodgepole chipmunk. In addition, Frazier Mountain contains at least 364 plant species, 147 of which are considered "rare."

Frazier Mountain is also one of fifteen genetic hotspots for wildlife in southern California, based on a recently published study in the journal, Biological Conservation. Vandergast et al. (2008) found that the Frazier Mountain area has high habitat diversity because it sits at the junction of five major ecoregions, is geologically complex, and includes three major faults!





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## FORESTWATCH ART BENEFIT WINTER 2011, VENTURA

For more than 30 years Ventura artist Robert Wassell has hiked the backcountry of Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties.

Known as the backpacker's artist, Mr. Wassell has documented the trails of this majestic wilderness with his striking and dramatic oil paintings. His work is a cross between realistic representation and the abstract, bringing his vision of pristine wilderness unspoiled by man to the canvas. He usually depicts his landscapes in the early morning or late afternoon, so he can take advantage of strong shadows.

He has been making serious art for over 40 years.



Mr. Wassell will be offering his paintings for sale to benefit the work of Los Padres ForestWatch at the Fox Fine Jewelry Gallery in Ventura from January 20-March 14, 2011, with an artist's reception on Saturday, January 22nd at 6-9 pm. Fox Fine Jewelry is located at 210 E. Main Street, Ventura (across from the Mission). Open to the public – come support the work of Los Padres ForestWatch and enjoy and purchase a Wassell painting of one of your favorite trails or spots in the beautiful Los Padres National Forest.

