



# LOS PADRES FORESTWATCH

PROTECTING WILDLIFE AND WILD PLACES ALONG CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL COAST

WINTER 2016



Backcountry Skier, Mt. Pinos  
*Russ Bishop*





**CORPORATE CAMPGROUNDS**  
 The Forest Service approved a new concessionaire permit in October that handed over management of 21 more campgrounds, day use areas, and trailheads to Parks Management Company, bringing the total number of campgrounds and other public areas in the Los Padres National Forest being managed by the for-profit company to 52. This exchange, which was implemented beginning November 1 of this year, saw a substantial increase in nearly all of the use fees for these areas. Many campgrounds that were free to use now have fees, with some existing fees increasing by 300%. Take a look at our more in-depth coverage of this development on Page 7.

**FORESTWATCH HALTS OIL DRILLING PLAN**  
 Last month, the Forest Service indefinitely halted a plan to expand oil drilling and fracking across 52,000 acres of the Los Padres National Forest in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. The move comes in response to an eight-year legal battle forged by Los Padres ForestWatch, Center for Biological Diversity, and Defenders of Wildlife to protect our forest from runaway oil development. Visit our website for more details on this breaking news. A tremendous victory!

**1 MILLION ACRES SAVED FROM DRILLING & FRACKING**  
 Back in September, a U.S. district judge overturned a federal plan to open more than 1 million acres of public land, including thousands of acres of federal lands adjacent to the Los Padres, Carrizo Plain National Monument, Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge, and Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge, to drilling and fracking thanks to a lawsuit brought by ForestWatch and the Center for Biological Diversity, represented by Earthjustice. The judge ruled that the Bureau of Land Management's plan to open these lands to drilling and fracking violated the National Environmental Policy Act by not considering the environmental dangers of fracking. Thanks to our work, the extraordinary biodiversity of these areas will be protected from the oil industry!

**NEW FUEL BREAK THREATENS RARE PLANT**  
 The Forest Service is planning a massive and remote fuel break between Gaviota Peak and Santa Ynez Peak. This unnecessary fuel break violates the National Environmental Policy Act and National Forest Management Act, and it will clear large swaths of the incredibly rare Refugio manzanita, a shrub that only grows in the mountains along the Gaviota Coast. ForestWatch recently filed a lawsuit aimed at halting the project in order to protect the Refugio manzanita and other rare plants. Read more about our lawsuit on Page 5!

**SANTA BARBARA WILD!**  
 On Sunday, October 23, over 200 conservationists gathered at the historic Riviera Park Gardens overlooking Santa Barbara to celebrate the Los Padres National Forest and raise nearly \$70,000 to support ForestWatch's important mission of preserving the Los Padres and other public lands! Check out more about this great event on Page 4!

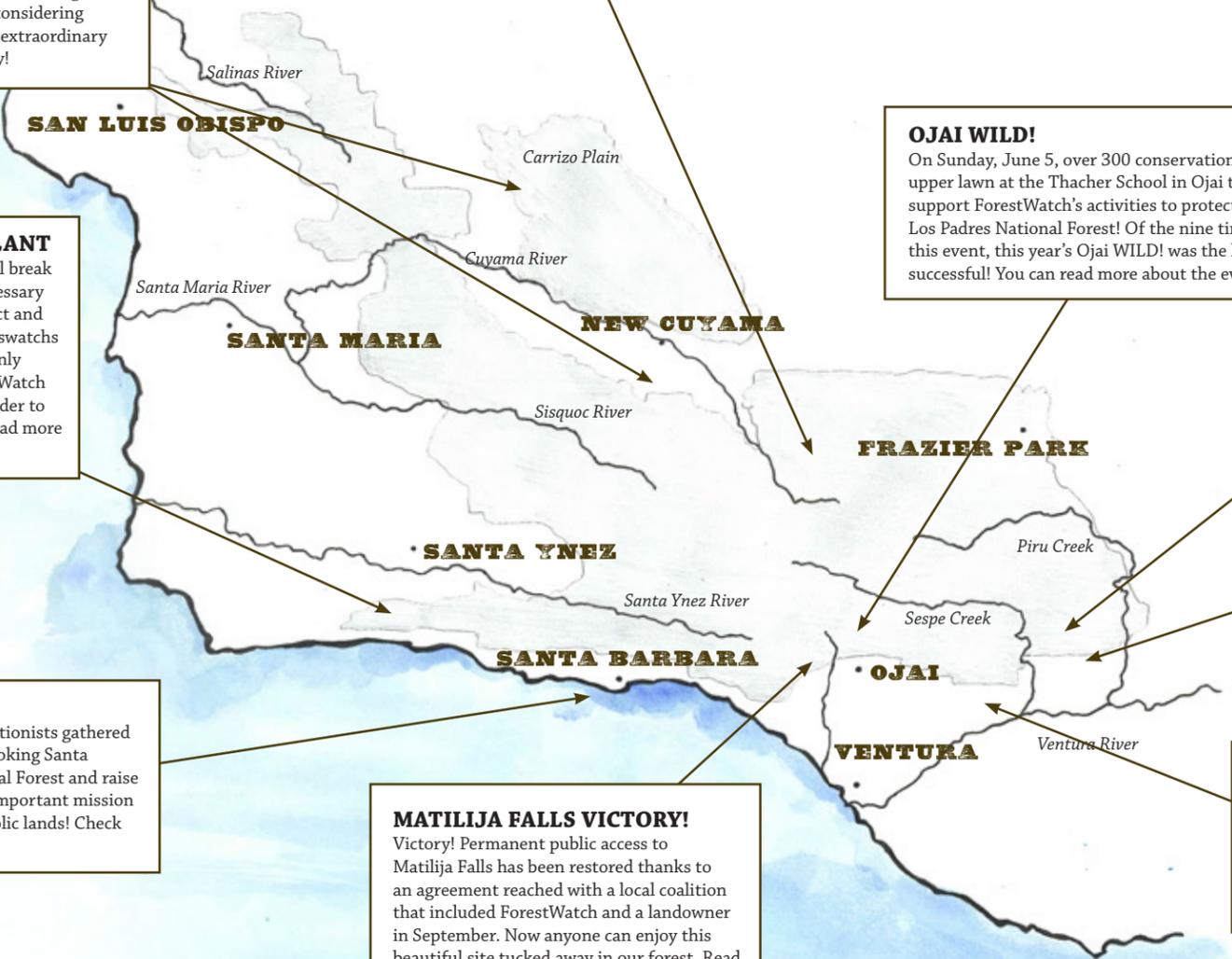
**MATILJA FALLS VICTORY!**  
 Victory! Permanent public access to Matilija Falls has been restored thanks to an agreement reached with a local coalition that included ForestWatch and a landowner in September. Now anyone can enjoy this beautiful site tucked away in our forest. Read more about this development on Page 2!

**OJAI WILD!**  
 On Sunday, June 5, over 300 conservationists packed the upper lawn at the Thacher School in Ojai to raise \$80,000 to support ForestWatch's activities to protect and preserve the Los Padres National Forest! Of the nine times we have held this event, this year's Ojai WILD! was the largest and most successful! You can read more about the event on Page 3!

**SANTA PAULA CANYON**  
 ForestWatch staff spent a couple of nights in Santa Paula Canyon in November to document graffiti, trash, and other issues the area is facing. We made it all the way to Jackson Falls and packed out three bags of trash found scattered around campgrounds and along the trail.

**OIL SPILL**  
 Yet another oil spill occurred near the Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge in October. Reportedly, a rifle shot caused a pressurized line to rupture and release one barrel of oil in an oil field before being fully contained. Though it was small, this latest spill highlights the continued risk of soil and water contamination from the rampant oil drilling in the area. Earlier this year, an oil storage tank on the refuge erupted in flames, placing nearby condors at risk.

**TAR CREEK CLEANUP**  
 Patagonia employees teamed up with ForestWatch to remove 150 lbs of trash from the Tar Creek area, which is located just outside of the Sespe Condor Sanctuary. This hardworking group of volunteers also removed illegal campsites and fire rings in this area that's off-limits to the public to protect endangered condors. Way to go!



# LOOKING ACROSS THE FOREST

**AN UPDATE ON HOW WE'RE PROTECTING YOUR REGION**

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# BASE CAMP



**Jeff Kuyper**  
Executive Director

We've spent a good deal of time reflecting on last month's election results, sifting through the rubble and sorting out what it means for places like the Los Padres National Forest, the Carrizo Plain National Monument, and other public lands throughout our region and across the country. It's going to take some time to make sense of it all. But right now, today, one thing's abundantly clear: we're ready to do whatever it takes to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

For the last 13 years, ForestWatch has served as a small but mighty force for the conservation of our region's public lands. We advocate for strong protections, demand accountability, educate our friends and neighbors about these special places, and offer opportunities for us all to get outside and get involved. With this momentum, we will use every tool in the toolbox to push

back against those who want to dismantle our nation's environmental progress.

We will stop them the way we always have: by building a powerful network of folks throughout the Central Coast who care about our region's natural treasures. We will pack their meetings, flood their mailboxes, jam their phone lines, defeat their legislation, take them to court, and VOTE in the next election, which won't be here soon enough. Our commitment to wildlife, wilderness, clean water, and healthy communities is unwavering. And as we do everything we can to prepare for the next four years, I am calling on you to help us rise to meet this challenge. Volunteer. Renew your membership. If you already renewed, double down and renew it again. If you're not already a member, become one. Donate to a special project, or donate to our core support fund so that we can keep the lights on and keep our momentum going.

Your support, and your voice, will ensure that we have the resources necessary to confront and defeat what will surely be a flurry of attempts to develop, privatize, and plunder America's legacy of public lands that has been a century in the making. Now let's get to work.

## COMINGS AND GOINGS



JIM BALSITIS

We are excited to welcome Jim Balsitis to our Board of Directors! Jim is currently the Director of Facilities at the Old Mission in Santa Barbara, where he is responsible for the care, maintenance, and preservation of the famous 200 year-old structures overlooking the city. Jim also owns Trail Prints, a Santa Barbara-based map publishing company specializing in the development and publication of day hike trail maps. "I'm originally from Southern Illinois where the forests are dense and very green. After moving to California and discovering the chaparral of the Los Padres I fell in love with this very different and varied landscape. I yearned to learn more about the forest both from a naturalists and an activists point of view. Eventually, I discovered ForestWatch and knew that it was important for me to become a member and support the organization to help protect the forest from a variety of threats."



BRYANT BAKER

Bryant joined ForestWatch in October, bringing over eight years of experience in land and water conservation, community outreach, and soil and water research. He holds a Master's in Environmental Science and a Bachelor's in Environmental, Soil, and Water Science from the University of Arkansas. Bryant previously led efforts at a nonprofit conservation organization to help private landowners and public land managers voluntarily adopt land and water conservation practices in the watershed of a large drinking water source in Arkansas. He also worked as a Research Associate at the University of Arkansas, conducting biogeochemical research in streams and reservoirs. Bryant lives in Goleta and enjoys hiking and camping in the rugged Central Coast landscape with his dog, cycling around Santa Barbara, and learning to surf. We are excited to welcome him to the team!



TANNER YOULD

Tanner joined ForestWatch in 2014 as a Conservation Intern before becoming the Conservation Associate in 2015. While at ForestWatch he put together several volunteer events in the Los Padres National Forest ranging from invasive plant removals to illegal shooting site cleanups and updated our website, print newsletter, and monthly e-news. Tanner has moved on to work at another local conservation nonprofit, Channel Islands Restoration. We wish him the best of luck and thank him for all of his contributions to ForestWatch!



## FORESTWATCH BOARD

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Executive Director

**SERENA KELSCH**  
Director of Membership and  
Advancement

**BRYANT BAKER**  
Conservation Director

# UPDATE: ACCESS RESTORED!

Back in September, the Keep Access to Matilija Falls Open (KAMFO)—of which ForestWatch was a founding member—reached an agreement with a landowner to restore permanent public access to the popular recreation destination, Matilija Falls. The agreement also launches a process to negotiate the purchase of an 80-acre parcel along Matilija Creek for eventual transfer to the U.S. Forest Service.

In 2009, the public was discouraged from using the Matilija Falls area by an adjacent landowner. After years of failed negotiations, KAMFO filed legal documents in January 2015, asking a judge to declare a permanent public easement through the property so that the public could continue to access the falls in perpetuity. Based on longstanding California law dating back to the 1850s and affirmed several times by the California Supreme Court, a public right-of-way exists if five or more years of continuous public use can be shown predating 1972.

The agreement—signed by the landowner and KAMFO and filed in Ventura County Superior Court in September—will result in permanent public access, trail improvements, and a possible transfer of property. Specific provisions include:

- The landowner will record a deed establishing permanent public access to Matilija Falls. The Ojai Valley Land Conservancy will be the easement holder. This deed was formally recorded with the County of Ventura on Sept. 8, 2016.



Even back in 1910 people were enjoying hiking to these beautiful falls.

- The landowner will negotiate the sale of 80 acres along Matilija Creek to a land trust for eventual transfer to the U.S. Forest Service. Once transferred, the land will become part of the Los Padres National Forest and will automatically merge with the adjacent Matilija Wilderness.
- KAMFO will reconstruct approximately one mile of the trail along its historic location east of the creek, install signage at three locations along the route, and remove illegal campfire rings on private property outside of the trail easement.
- KAMFO will dismiss the legal action seeking a declaration of prescriptive easement based on historic public use.

The trail reconstruction and other work will take approximately 18 months to complete. Land surveys are currently underway to

termine the precise trail location, in conjunction with the landowner, and skilled crews will be used to reconstruct the trail and install signage. Take a look at the map to see the area that will now be open to the public on their way to Matilija Falls thanks to this latest agreement.



Photo by J. Jones

## WILD THINGS

### Arroyo Toad

Arroyo toads (*Anaxyrus californicus*) have perhaps the most specialized habitat requirements of any amphibian found in California. This small toad was once found throughout coastal rivers and streams from Monterey to San Diego counties, as well as in Baja California. The toad hatches in a creek and begins to develop in water; as an adult, it lives on land, where it digs burrows on sandy terraces.

No more than three inches long, with a greenish-gray back and buff colored underside, the arroyo toad is found only in rivers that have shallow, gravelly pools next to sandy beaches. It has very specific habitat requirements and behaviors that make the remaining populations very sensitive to threats. The toads need shallow, slow-moving streams that are flooded on a regular basis, and breeding pools that consist of very specific-sized sand and gravel that allow tadpoles to dig in sediment to feed.

Arroyo toad populations have suffered throughout the twentieth century as watersheds in southern California have been dammed and polluted by siltation from development and other activities. The arroyo toad has lost more than 75% of its habitat in southern California. Because of these trends, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) added the arroyo toad to its formal list of endangered species in 1994. The toad's "endangered" status provided the highest level of protections under the federal Endangered Species Act.

However, the FWS proposed to change the toad's status to "threatened" in response to lawsuits from extractive industries, despite scientific data that showed the toads were still on the brink of extinction. Luckily, ForestWatch and the Center for Biological Diversity submitted a detailed critique of the proposal, and the FWS withdrew their plan to change the toad's status in 2015.

# WILD!

# TIMES

SECOND ANNUAL

# Santa Barbara WILD!



NINTH ANNUAL

# Ojai Wild!



Nine years running, 2016 was a year of changes for Ojai WILD!

Moving from the rugged beauty of Diamond Hitch, Thacher School generously loaned ForestWatch the use of their Upper Field with sweeping views of Ojai Valley nestled within the Los Padres National Forest. Outgrowing Thacher School's excellent catering, ForestWatch partnered with Seasons Catering to serve a delicious, local, organic supper. Recognizing the need for great entertainment, Ojai's own rock stars Todd Hannigan and Sleeping Chief set the tone for this fun event.

These changes led to spectacular results! Over 300 local conservationists joined together for a fun afternoon to raise over \$80,000! This is the largest attendance and most money we've ever raised to protect and preserve the forest!

And we couldn't have done this without the help of our great community. Guests sipped on chilled Casa Barranca and Saucelito Canyon wines, Figueroa Mountain Brewing Company beer, and ice cold Lori's Original Lemonade while perusing the silent auction and listening to great music. Seated at tables filled with the aroma of lavender from Ojai's Frog Creek Lavender Farm, citrus and herb grilled chicken, flat iron steak, a seasonal ratatouille from Earthtrine

Farms, and chopped salad sourced from Underwood Farms. We were in good hands thanks to our entertaining emcee, Geoff Green, who took the lead in our fun live auction with items like a culinary trip to Tuscany, Italy and private safari to Wild Wolves Preserve. Sound and power needs were supplied by Delicate Productions and DSR Audio, ensuring a smooth event. We wrapped up the event in the glow of the pink moment with tea and cookies from Ojai's very own Teamotions and Thacher Road Cookies.

Our amazing Leadership sponsors provided critical support to make this event possible: Patagonia, Quirk Law Firm LLP, Thrive Market, and our hosts at The Thacher School along with Dick and Marilyn Mazess. Carol Gravelle Graphic Design inspired all of us to participate in this event with masterfully-designed invitations, programs, and more. Our sponsors, donors, attendees, as well as our Board of Directors, the Event Committee, and our dedicated volunteers are the reason we accomplished this record-breaking goal. THANK YOU!

Because of our collective efforts, ForestWatch has grown to a strong and powerful voice for wilderness conservation in our Los Padres National Forest.

On October 23rd the Santa Barbara Community came together to put on our 2nd Annual Santa Barbara WILD! benefit to honor Congresswoman Lois Capps. With over 200 conservationists reserving a seat at the event, ForestWatch is thrilled to share that we beat our ambitious goal and raised nearly \$70,000!

Held at the Riviera Park Gardens in a Spanish colonial revival style courtyard, guests spent a perfect October afternoon sipping local wine and beer from Figueroa Mountain Brewing Company, listening to Todd Hannigan and Sleeping Chief share their vibes, joining in our best-ever silent auction with local unique items, while connecting with other forest enthusiasts from throughout the region.

In a rose garden setting, volunteers brought the forest to Santa Barbara, decorating the event in native plants gathered from their own yards and the Santa Barbara Botanic



Garden. With the sound of a water fountain in the background, guests enjoyed good conversation and a delicious gourmet dinner with herb and scallion roasted salmon from Kanaloa Seafood, sumac and paprika rubbed grilled chicken, and Tutti Frutti and Ellwood Canyon Farms brightly colored roasted seasonal squash, served by Seasons Catering's talented staff.

After an outstanding gourmet dinner, the entertainment began! Auctioneer Jim Nye led our most successful auction ever, with fantastic items such as a week on the Mexican Riviera at a private estate, lunch with Lois Capps at Solminer Wine's vineyard in Los Olivos, and a retreat for 30 at Sonoma Broadway Farms.

And then came the star attraction, Congresswoman Lois Capps. In recognition of her years of dedicated public service on conservation efforts from California all the way to

Capital Hill, Rick Ridgeway of Patagonia presented the retiring Congresswoman with the prestigious Los Padres ForestWatch Wilderness Legacy Award.

As the sun set onto our beloved Los Padres National Forest, we concluded the evening with Nothing Bundt Cakes bundtins served alongside McConnell's Fine Ice Cream.

Our amazing presenting sponsor Deckers Brands, and leader sponsors Dick and

Marilyn Mazess, Carol Gravelle Graphic Design, Delicate Productions, Seasons Catering, Toad&Co, and The Towbes Group provided critical support to make this event possible. To our sponsors, donors, attendees, as well as our Board of Directors, the Event Committee, and our dedicated volunteers: thank you. You helped bring our community together at this fun, memorable event to make a difference by preserving and protecting our local National Forest today and into the future.



## WILDERNESS LEGACY AWARD: CONGRESSWOMAN LOIS CAPPS

Each year we proudly present the Wilderness Legacy Award honoring the legacy of our conservation heroes. This year we were thrilled to recognize Congresswoman Lois Capps, who has represented communities along California's Central Coast since 1998. Just look at her exemplary record: Capps' legislation encouraged the establishment of the Carrizo Plain National Monument, and she has introduced legislation to ban oil drilling in the Los Padres National Forest, to stop the Adventure Pass, to study the feasibility of a Gaviota Coast National Park, and to expand the network of wilderness areas and wild and scenic rivers in the Los Padres National Forest. She has been a strong ally on behalf of our environment, supporting land conservation initiatives and opposing misguided attempts to roll back America's bedrock environmental protection laws. These accomplishments and more earned the Congresswoman a 95% lifetime score from the League of Conservation Voters.

As Congresswoman Capps completes her last term in Congress, we thank her for ensuring that these lands—from the Los Padres National Forest to Washington DC—will continue to thrive for current and future generations.





Photo by Lynn Watson

# LAW SUIT: GAVIOTA FUEL BREAK

Forest Service proposing unnecessary fuel break that threatens an endangered plant

Earlier this month, ForestWatch teamed up with the California Chaparral Institute to file a lawsuit in U.S. District Court to protect the Refugio manzanita, a rare plant that grows in the path of a massive fuel break that was recently approved in a remote corner of the Los Padres National Forest. The suit is also an effort to encourage forest officials to focus on reducing fire risk where it matters most, directly in and around communities.



The rare Refugio manzanita can be found along much of the road that will be in the center of the new fuel break. Photo by Bryant Baker

The Gaviota Fuel Break would clear-cut native chaparral habitat across a six-mile-long, 300-foot-wide swath between Refugio Pass and Gaviota Peak, along the crest of the Santa Ynez Mountains. The site – located far away from any structures – lies at the heart of the Gaviota Coast, one of the crown jewels of Santa Barbara County.

Ironically, the Forest Service’s experts consistently state that the best way to protect communities from wildfire is to create defensible space immediately around structures, and to construct and retrofit homes with fire-safe materials. Remote fuel breaks, such as the Gaviota Fuel Break, are



More than 100 ft on each side of this road will be completely cleared for the new fuel break. Photo by Wade Sedgwick

considered to be costly and often ineffective at stopping fires.

In rushing to approve this project, the Forest Service failed to take simple steps to protect one of the rarest manzanita species on Earth. The Refugio manzanita is considered “endangered” by the California Native Plant Society and only grows in a narrow band between Point Conception and Santa Ynez Peak along the south coast of Santa Barbara County.

The Refugio manzanita is too important to sacrifice for an ineffective, expensive fuel break that is far-removed from communities.

Our lawsuit alleges that the fuel break violates the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Forest Management Act, two of our nation’s bedrock environmental protection laws. The Forest Service approved the project without preparing an Environmental Assessment, and without proposing any measures to protect manzanitas and other rare plants and animals in the area.

Officials exempted the project from environmental review by miscategorizing it as “timber stand improvement” even though there is no timber in the area. This miscategorization eliminated the ability of conservation groups and scientific experts to formally object to the project and work with the Forest Service to address these concerns before the project was approved.

Our lawsuit asks the court to order the Forest Service to do the required analysis of the impacts of the Gaviota Fuel Break and to act consistently with the Los Padres Forest Plan by avoiding or reducing any potential harm to

Refugio manzanita and other rare plants and animals that may be affected by the fuel break. We are being represented by Earthrise Law Center, the environmental law clinic at Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland, OR – one of the top environmental law clinics in the country.

Check our website and future newsletters for updates on this lawsuit.

# BECOME A FOREST STEWARD

ForestWatch is starting a new volunteer program that we want YOU to join!

As you trek into the New Year, make a resolution for conservation: get out and do more. This concept is nothing new to ForestWatch supporters. Over the years we have hosted hundreds of volunteer projects that resulted in more than 15,000 pounds of trash hauled out of the forest, over 50 miles of streams surveyed for invasive plants, and more than 15 miles of old fencing removed from the Carrizo Plain National Monument. However, with all of this good work in the forest, ForestWatch has never had a formal program that organizes volunteers and recognizes them for their hard work. Welcome to the new Forest Steward Program!

The Forest Steward Program is open to anyone who is interested in getting out in the forest and getting dirty or staying in town and helping ForestWatch advocate – all keep the Los Padres cleaner, safer, and wilder than ever. There is something for everyone: boots-on-the-ground work, including removing garbage, graffiti, and invasive plants from our forest; digging into research, helping us map the forest and identify conservation projects; advocacy work and representing forest conservation efforts by attending local hearings and government meetings; and helping us take care of guests at our fun events.

Many of these volunteer opportunities are great ways to get out and explore the Los Padres. Have you visited Figueroa Mountain? Become a Forest Steward and help us clean up trash from a pretty spot overlooking the Santa Ynez Valley. Have you wanted to see the Wild and Scenic Sespe Creek, but never had the chance? Come out with other Forest Stewards and help us remove the invasive tamarisk along the Sespe streambanks. The Forest Steward Program is fun, adventurous, and effective. If you like camping, hiking, and conservation, then



you are already a Forest Steward. If you write letters to your local elected officials, you are already a Forest Steward. If you pour wine at our fabulous events, you are already a Forest Steward. Join this program and work with fellow citizens who want to enjoy our forest and make sure it is protected and preserved.



Volunteers help remove trash from Santa Paula Canyon while enjoying a nice hike.

Without volunteers like yourself diligently working in the forest, countless trash sites and other areas of concern would be left unchecked, posing a risk to water and wildlife. In an age where so many threats to our public lands exist, these volunteer activities serve as one of the best avenues for citizens to get out and give back.

If you are interested in joining us to make a difference, or you have a friend or family member who you know will make a great Forest Steward, visit our website and look under the ‘Get Involved’ tab, or contact Bryant Baker by emailing [bryant@lpfw.org](mailto:bryant@lpfw.org) or calling 805-617-4610 x 3.



Nothing like a day cleaning up an illegal marijuana grow site!



Photo by Luke Butcher

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Sammi Butler

Living on a ranch surrounded by the Los Padres National Forest, Sammi Butler is known for her upbeat attitude, friendly demeanor, and ability to organize a great party. Working with many businesses to set up Papyrus Fine Paper displays, Sammi is locally known as the avocado lady, and sells delicious avocados to local stores and restaurants, including The Nook. If you love to order avocados when you’re out on the town, there is a good chance you’ve had one of her creamy fruits.

An active member of Santa Barbara’s Graduates Club, Sammi became friends with ForestWatch, and introduced members of the club to our mission by helping plan a fun gathering one warm evening last April.

Since that time, Sammi has become an indispensable and tireless ForestWatch volunteer. Joining our first-ever Santa Barbara WILD! Event Committee last August, Sammi became the Team Leader of the Silent Auction Committee, and then invited all of her friends to join in the fun! She and her hard working team of volunteers encouraged local businesses and friends of ForestWatch to donate to our silent auction. Through diligence, good organization, and a lot of fun, Sammi and her team put together our most fabulous auction ever, with amazing deals on over 150 local, fun, unique, and interesting auction items including custom made furniture, a private sailing cruise, exclusive bottles and tours of private wineries, and fun family outings. Their hard work paid off, setting a new Santa Barbara WILD! record, raising over \$14,000 in our silent auction alone!

Sammi’s good work confirms that there is more than one way to make a big difference and conserve our local National Forest. Thank you for your hard work Sammi, and showing us how to do with fun and flair!

## WILD THINGS

### Refugio Manzanita

The Refugio manzanita is restricted to a narrow band along a ridgeline between Gaviota and Santa Ynez peaks along the Gaviota Coast in Santa Barbara County. Refugio manzanita can grow to about 16 feet tall and 11 feet wide, and is characterized by 1.2-1.8 inch-long, heart-shaped, overlapping leaves. This endangered species can only be found at elevations between 900 and 2,700 ft.

As with the other rare manzanitas in the forest, Refugio manzanita does not have a basal burl from which it can resprout following a fire. However, the Refugio manzanita does produce seeds that are stimulated to germinate by chemicals in smoke or charred wood, meaning it can reestablish after a fire. The species is found in chapparal, sometimes mixed with woodland, in sandstone areas on south-facing slopes and ridgelines. Nearly all of the Refugio manzanita in the forest was affected heavily by the 1955 Refugio Fire, but the populations appear to have recovered well.

You can see this rare species along the Gaviota Peak Trail and along the ridge between Gaviota Peak and Santa Ynez Peak. Look for dense thickets – some with up to 1,000 individual plants – of the Refugio manzanita next time you find yourself enjoying the beautiful views in that area.

Photo by Wade Sedgwick



# PRIVATIZING PUBLIC LANDS: CORPORATE CAMPGROUNDS

Forest Service approves controversial plan to relinquish management of 52 sites

Despite a letter signed by ForestWatch and nine other Central Coast conservation and outdoor recreation organizations and hundreds of comments from the public, the Forest Service went ahead with a plan to relinquish management of dozens of recreation sites in the Los Padres National Forest to a private concessionaire. Starting on November 1, Parks Management Company, a for-profit corporation which owns and operates recreation facilities throughout California, took over management of 52 campgrounds in the Los Padres National Forest. As a result, fees for many campgrounds have increased, and Adventure Passes are no longer accepted at 32 sites in the forest. However, a \$50 annual pass for day-use sites is being offered by Parks Management Co.

## BACKGROUND

Los Padres National Forest officials began utilizing private company concessionaires to manage and operate campgrounds and day use sites in the 1990s in response to falling recreation program budgets. Recreation budgets have fallen 50 percent in the past 10 years, significantly impacting the agency's ability to provide maintenance, repair, and service at recreation sites.

## NEW PLAN

The LPNF has 131 developed campgrounds, day use sites, and trailheads. Of that number, 31 were previously managed by private concessionaires under six separate special use permits. The agency's new plan that was approved in October consolidated these into a single permit, expanding the number of sites under private concessionaire management from 31 to 52 (all or nearly all of the developed campgrounds and day use sites in the forest), and allowed fees to increase at most sites.

While fees are increasing, no improvements or operational changes will be made at these sites, leaving many to wonder where the additional fees go. In its September 2 letter (which most conservation groups



Kirk Creek Campground along the Big Sur coast will see a 40% fee increase. Photo by RalphTQ (Creative Commons)

did not receive), the Forest Service stated, "The context of the special use permit is operational and administrative and does not provide authorization for any ground disturbing activities, changes, or physical alterations to the recreation sites. The scope of operation and capacity of the recreation facilities would not change by this action." The increased fees would be retained by the private concessionaire, minus a percentage that goes back to the Forest Service. However, the concessionaire will offset this percentage with contributing in-kind labor and materials for certain projects.

The new plan resulted in fee increases at 47 sites, with some seeing increases of up to 300%. See below for a list of all fee increases. ForestWatch will continue to monitor the management of these areas to ensure that the concessionaire is held accountable.



Campo Alto at Cerro Noreste saw a 300% fee increase due to the new concessionaire permit. Photo by Suzanne Feldman



# STELLAR SUPPORT: SOLMINER WINES

Solminer Wines is our featured Stellar Supporter this winter. Just this year they hosted a Spring in the Vineyard Party that raised more than \$2,500, offered to host a wine tasting and lunch with Congresswoman Lois Capps at their vineyard, collected donations for our silent auctions, and donated several bottles of wine to our Santa Barbara WILD! fundraiser in October. Located in Los Olivos, their vineyard is a stone's throw away from the Los Padres National Forest. We asked the winemakers, Anna and David deLaski, about their reasons for supporting ForestWatch and what they value about the forest.

## TELL US ABOUT THE GOALS AND INSPIRATION BEHIND SOLMINER.

We met and fell in love with Santa Barbara County and each other in 2009. In 2012, we started Solminer Wine with the intention to make organic California wine inspired by Austrian varietals. Our goal is to farm consciously, let the vineyard speak for itself and make the wine with as little intervention as possible.

## HOW DOES THAT FIT WITH YOUR PARTNERSHIP WITH LOS PADRES FORESTWATCH? WHY DO YOU SUPPORT US?

We love that the Los Padres Forest is the backdrop of the agricultural Santa Ynez Valley. We farm sustainably – our intention is to keep the soil and plants healthy without synthetic pesticides. We add compost to enrich the soil and we use sheep during the winter months to graze and fertilize the land.

It is our hope to leave the vineyard in a healthier and richer state for future generations.

We feel very fortunate to live close to the Los Padres Forest, such a big untouched protected area, where wildlife can roam, native plants can thrive and people can enjoy nature. We have a common goal in stewardship and respect ForestWatch's mission to protect these lands for future generations.

## WHY IS THE WORK THAT FORESTWATCH DOES IMPORTANT TO YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS?

We have plenty of sun in the Santa Ynez Valley to help us grow our grapes. The one resource that is scarce here is water. We use as little water as possible, and we time watering with the moon phases to optimize our water use, but we still need to supplement with drip irrigation. The Los Padres Forest is an important watershed for our farmland and we need to protect it and keep it clean.

## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PLACE IN THE LOS PADRES, AND WHY?

Grass Mountain. We can see it from our vineyard and it is very close to our son Linus' school, so we get to enjoy hiking there on a regular basis. In the spring it is covered with poppies in a beaming orange, which is breathtaking.



Thank you!



## FEE INCREASES UNDER THE NEW PERMIT

Trailheads	Current...New (per day)	Campgrounds	Current...New (per night)		
Aliso	\$5...\$10	Arroyo Seco - Family	\$25...\$30	McGill - Group	\$85...\$100
Red Rock	\$5...\$10	Arroyo Seco - Group	\$75...\$125	Memorial Park	\$0...\$20
		Ballinger	\$5...\$20	Middle Lion	\$5...\$20
Day Use Areas	Current...New (per day)	Bottcher's Gap	\$15...\$20**	Nacimiento	\$15...\$20
Falls	\$5...\$10	Campo Alto - Group	\$5...\$100	Navajo Flat	\$0...\$20
First Crossing	\$5...\$10	Campo Alto	\$5...\$20	NIRA	\$0...\$20
Live Oak	\$5...\$10	Cerro Alto	\$20...\$25**	Paradise	\$20...\$30
Lower Oso	\$5...\$10	China Camp	\$0...\$20	Pine Mountain	\$5...\$20
Mill Creek	\$0...\$10*	Chuchupate	\$5...\$20	Plaskett Creek - Family	\$25...\$35
Red Rock	\$5...\$10	Davy Brown	\$0...\$20	Plaskett Creek - Group	\$100...\$150
Sandstone	\$5...\$10	Escondido	\$0...\$20	Reye Creek	\$5...\$20
Turkey Flat	\$0...\$20 per night	Figuroa	\$0...\$20	Reyes Peak	\$5...\$20
White Rock	\$5...\$10	Fremont	\$20...\$30	Rose Valley	\$5...\$20
Willow Creek	\$0...\$10*	Holiday - Group	\$75-100   \$100-125	Sage Hill - Group	\$91...\$125
		Kirk Creek	\$25...\$35	Upper Oso	\$20...\$30
		La Panza	\$0...\$20	Wheeler Gorge	\$23...\$25
		Los Prietos	\$20...\$30	White Oaks	\$0...\$20

\* or \$50 Annual Pass

\*\* and \$10 daily parking fee at trailhead



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