



LOS PADRES FORESTWATCH

PROTECTING WILDLIFE AND WILD PLACES ALONG CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL COAST

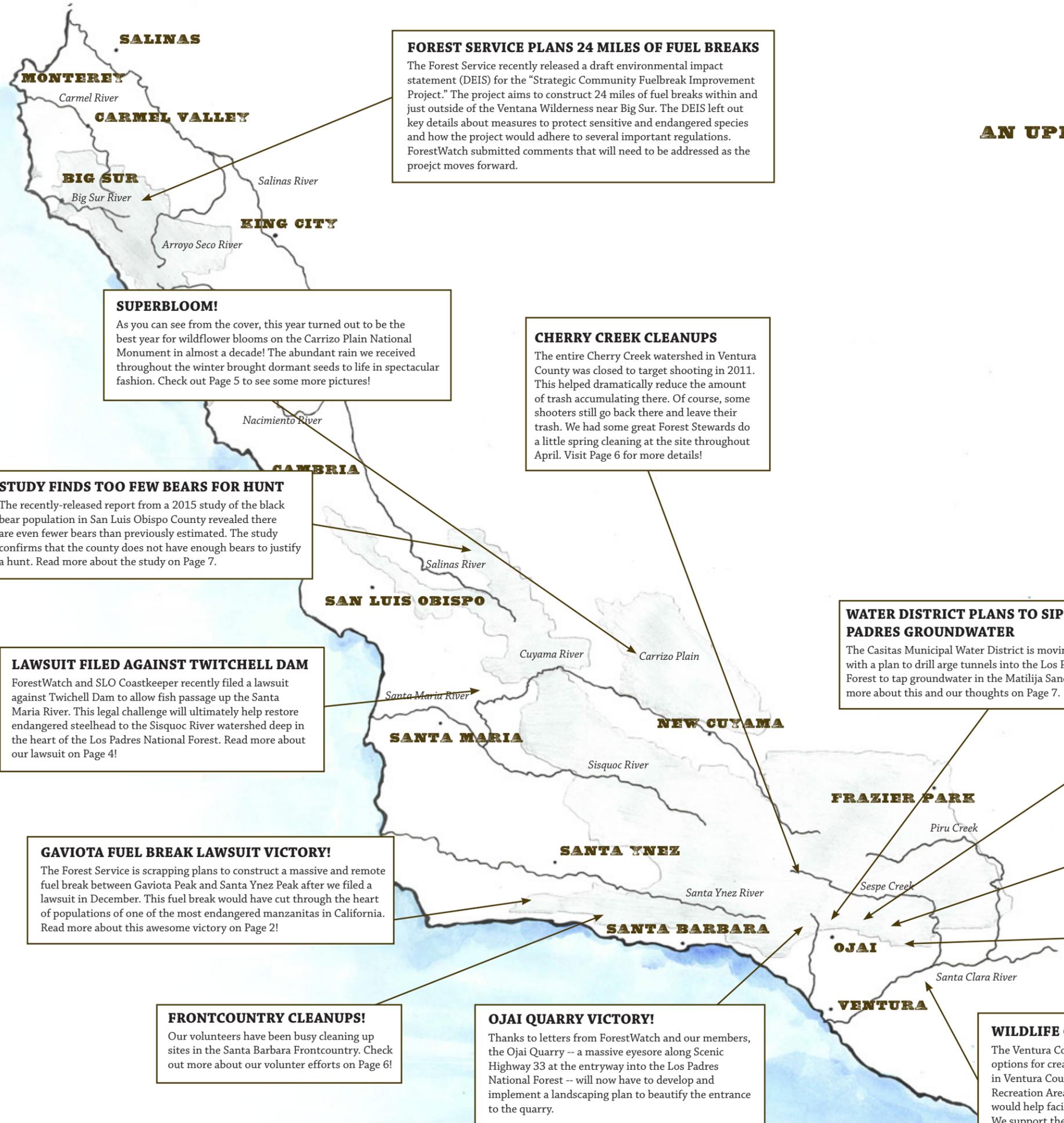
SPRING 2017



Superbloom on the Caliente Range, Carrizo Plain National Monument

Bryant Baker





FOREST SERVICE PLANS 24 MILES OF FUEL BREAKS
 The Forest Service recently released a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for the "Strategic Community Fuelbreak Improvement Project." The project aims to construct 24 miles of fuel breaks within and just outside of the Ventana Wilderness near Big Sur. The DEIS left out key details about measures to protect sensitive and endangered species and how the project would adhere to several important regulations. ForestWatch submitted comments that will need to be addressed as the project moves forward.

SUPERBLOOM!
 As you can see from the cover, this year turned out to be the best year for wildflower blooms on the Carrizo Plain National Monument in almost a decade! The abundant rain we received throughout the winter brought dormant seeds to life in spectacular fashion. Check out Page 5 to see some more pictures!

CHERRY CREEK CLEANUPS
 The entire Cherry Creek watershed in Ventura County was closed to target shooting in 2011. This helped dramatically reduce the amount of trash accumulating there. Of course, some shooters still go back there and leave their trash. We had some great Forest Stewards do a little spring cleaning at the site throughout April. Visit Page 6 for more details!

STUDY FINDS TOO FEW BEARS FOR HUNT
 The recently-released report from a 2015 study of the black bear population in San Luis Obispo County revealed there are even fewer bears than previously estimated. The study confirms that the county does not have enough bears to justify a hunt. Read more about the study on Page 7.

LAWSUIT FILED AGAINST TWICHELL DAM
 ForestWatch and SLO Coastkeeper recently filed a lawsuit against Twichell Dam to allow fish passage up the Santa Maria River. This legal challenge will ultimately help restore endangered steelhead to the Sisquoc River watershed deep in the heart of the Los Padres National Forest. Read more about our lawsuit on Page 4!

GAVIOTA FUEL BREAK LAWSUIT VICTORY!
 The Forest Service is scrapping plans to construct a massive and remote fuel break between Gaviota Peak and Santa Ynez Peak after we filed a lawsuit in December. This fuel break would have cut through the heart of populations of one of the most endangered manzanitas in California. Read more about this awesome victory on Page 2!

FRONTCOUNTRY CLEANUPS!
 Our volunteers have been busy cleaning up sites in the Santa Barbara Frontcountry. Check out more about our volunteer efforts on Page 6!

OJAI QUARRY VICTORY!
 Thanks to letters from ForestWatch and our members, the Ojai Quarry -- a massive eyesore along Scenic Highway 33 at the entryway into the Los Padres National Forest -- will now have to develop and implement a landscaping plan to beautify the entrance to the quarry.

WATER DISTRICT PLANS TO SIPHON LOS PADRES GROUNDWATER
 The Casitas Municipal Water District is moving forward with a plan to drill large tunnels into the Los Padres National Forest to tap groundwater in the Matilija Sandstone. Read more about this and our thoughts on Page 7.

10TH OJAI WILD! ON JUNE 4TH
 On Sunday, June 4, conservationists will pack the upper lawn at The Thacher School in Ojai once again to support ForestWatch's activities to protect and preserve the Los Padres National Forest! Last year's Ojai WILD! was the largest and most successful, and we plan to make it even bigger and better this year! We'll also be celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Sespe Wilderness. See more information on Page 9!

SISAR CANYON ACCESS ISSUES
 A landowner recently closed and locked a gate across Sisar Canyon Road, restricting vehicle access to the canyon on national forest land. While those on foot and horse can still access Sisar Canyon, no permanent public access easement exists. We are working on securing an easement. Read more on page 7.

SANTA PAULA CANYON CLEANUP
 Volunteers helped remove trash in Santa Paula Canyon in January. This is one of the most popular areas in the Los Padres National Forest, so sometimes it needs a little love. Read more about the cleanup on Page 6!

WILDLIFE CORRIDORS IN VENTURA CO.
 The Ventura County Board of Supervisors voted to begin exploring options for creating wildlife corridors that would connect public lands in Ventura County such as the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and the Los Padres National Forest. These corridors would help facilitate safe passage for mountain lions and other wildlife. We support these efforts and will assist in any way we can.

LOOKING ACROSS THE FOREST

AN UPDATE ON HOW WE'RE PROTECTING YOUR REGION

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BASE CAMP



Jeff Kuyper
Executive Director

Small but mighty.

I'm not quite sure where we first heard the phrase, but it stuck with us and describes ForestWatch perfectly.

We have a no-frills office, a staff of four, and a budget that never seems like it's enough to get the job done.

But we persevere with the resources we have, and — with your support — we're accomplishing big things. Mighty things.

You'll read in this issue about a lawsuit we recently filed against a water district for sending endangered steelhead trout plummeting towards extinction. It's no easy task going up against big water interests, but we did it because it is the right thing to do. We cannot sit idly by as we watch one of our region's keystone species disappear forever. Our small but mighty

lawsuit will reverse this trend and bring steelhead back to our local forest.

Another case in point: the Trump Administration just announced plans to review the protections for more than two dozen national monuments in the West, including our very own Carrizo Plain National Monument. The review is a thinly-veiled attempt to open up these protected lands to oil drilling.

It's not our nature to just stand here, do nothing, and hope for the best. It's to stand up, prepare a strategy, take action, and let our voice — and the voices of communities throughout the Central Coast — be heard. We love our public lands, we want to see them remain protected, and we're willing to go the extra mile and do whatever it takes to defend them.

Small but mighty.

This philosophy extends to our volunteers as well. A few years ago, we stumbled upon a massive target shooting site in the Sespe backcountry littered with acres of abandoned trash. More than 80 volunteers attended our first cleanup, and removed 2.5 tons of trash. Now, just a handful of volunteers need to patrol the area, and the amount of trash is measured in bags, not dumpster-fulls. A small army has achieved mighty results.

You — our members, supporters, and volunteers — put the "might" in our small but mighty organization. You arrive at early-morning cleanups anxious to get your hands and boots dirty. You write letters to our decision makers. You send in your membership dues and extra contributions when they're needed most, knowing that we will use them wisely and effectively. You attend our events. And you send us hope and inspiration that we will continue to persevere against all odds.

And the stakes have never been higher.

We're in the fight of our lifetime over the next few months. It will take all of us, working together and working even harder, to protect and defend our region's public lands. Thank you for standing with us as we take on these threats with renewed might and determination as we work to secure a safer future for our region's precious landscapes, wildlife habitat, clean water, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

Together we will succeed.

THE HERD GROWS



WENDY DARLING

We are excited to welcome Wendy Darling as our new Events Consultant! Wendy brings her extensive experience in producing events for nonprofit and corporate organizations to help make our fundraising events bigger and better than ever. With a background in the education, entertainment, philanthropy, publishing, sports and technology sectors, Wendy offers a broad and unique scope of expertise. Crafting events from initial concept to fully realized run of show, her work includes conferences, launches for product, film, print and television projects, multi-location campaigns, workshop series and summits, as well as international cultural and educational group travel. As Events Consultant for Los Padres ForestWatch, Wendy organizes planning and implementation, volunteers, marketing and outreach for ForestWatch's annual Ojai WILD! and Santa Barbara WILD! fundraisers, membership gatherings and Condor Circle events. Raised in the Pacific Northwest with a lifelong passion for the outdoors, Wendy now lives in Ventura, drawn to exploring the naturally rich and scenic environment.



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VICTORY! GAVIOTA FUEL BREAK CANCELED

The Forest Service has canceled plans to construct a massive fuel break in a remote corner of the Los Padres National Forest after ForestWatch and the California Chaparral Institute challenged the project in federal court.

In early April, our organizations along with the Forest Service notified the U.S. District Court that the project has been canceled and requested that the lawsuit be dismissed.

The project would have removed native chaparral habitat across a six-mile long, 300-foot wide corridor along the crest of the Santa Ynez Mountains along the Gaviota Coast, one of the crown jewels of Santa Barbara County. The site was located far away from any structures, and contained some of the most significant stands of Refugio manzanita, one of the rarest and most endangered manzanita species in California.

The Refugio manzanita only grows in one place on Earth: along a narrow swath of land high in the mountains between Gaviota Peak and Santa Ynez Peak. The species is unlike many other manzanitas as it only resprouts from seeds that require infrequent fire to germinate. The fuel break would have cut through the heart of nearly all of the populations that occur on public land. The rest of the species grows on private lands where its populations are threatened by land clearing for development.

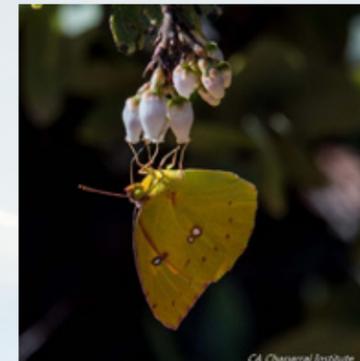
The Forest Service approved the project last September without preparing an environmental assessment and without proposing any measures to protect manzanitas and other rare plants and animals in the area. Forest Service officials exempted the project from environmental review by miscategorizing it as "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.

By filing the lawsuit last November, we hoped to protect the Refugio manzanita and other rare plants and animals in the path of the fuel break. The suit was also aimed at encouraging forest officials to focus their limited resources on reducing fire risk directly in and around communities.

The vast majority of fire ecologists agree that the best way to protect communities from wildfire is to create defensible space immediately around homes, and to retrofit structures with ignition-resistant building materials like fire-rated roofs, dual-paned glass, and screening. Clearing vegetation in remote areas, far away from structures, is a costly and often ineffective way to stop wildfires and protect homes.

We appreciate the Forest Service's decision to reconsider this flawed project, and we will continue to assist forest officials in identifying and implementing proven, cost-effective ways to directly protect homes from wildfire.

Our organizations were represented by Earthrise Law Center, the environmental law clinic at Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland, OR — one of the top environmental law programs in the country.



The Refugio manzanita's blooms are beloved by native butterflies. Photo courtesy California Chaparral Institute.



Like other manzanitas, this species has striking red bark. Photo courtesy California Chaparral Institute.



Photo by Jim Rorabaugh/USFWS

WILD THINGS

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

The southwestern willow flycatcher — a subspecies of the willow flycatcher — is a small songbird that is primarily recognized by its distinct "fitz-bew" call. It was listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act in 1995, and the bird continues to face conservation challenges.

The southwestern willow flycatcher's habitat and breeding range includes areas within the Los Padres National Forest such as the Mono and Indian Creek watersheds of the San Rafael Mountains. They can also be found in areas along Matilija Creek, Piru Creek, and the Upper Santa Ynez River.

Due to habitat loss and fragmentation primarily caused by water diversion, groundwater pumping and the spread of invasive species, critical habitat areas for the southwestern willow flycatcher were designated in the Los Padres National Forest by the US Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) in 2013.

In 2016 the FWS announced that it would consider a request submitted on behalf of the building industry as well as farming and grazing interests to remove the southwestern willow flycatcher from the list of endangered species. This petition to delist the southwestern willow flycatcher is based on an argument that the species is not a distinct subspecies of the more common willow flycatcher, a bird that is not on the list of endangered species. In 2015, the FWS issued a finding stating that the delisting "may be warranted," and they requested further information and research from the public and independent scientists.

A study in 2016 concluded that the plumage and song of the southwestern willow flycatcher is distinct enough to warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act. However, the FWS has not issued a final decision. ForestWatch will continue to monitor this issue and fight to ensure this unique species is fully protected.

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

Public lands face threats both new and old as our government changes

A new year and change is afoot. The political winds are rapidly shifting in Washington, D.C. as President Trump and a new Congress take the reins of our federal government, and a decidedly anti-public-lands agenda takes hold. Our parks and forests are now facing threats like we've never seen before, such as:

Privatization of Public Lands

One of the top priorities of the new Congress is to "immediately" pass legislation requiring federal agencies to give away our public lands to states, where they would be more vulnerable to development interests.

Bedrock Environmental Laws Weakened

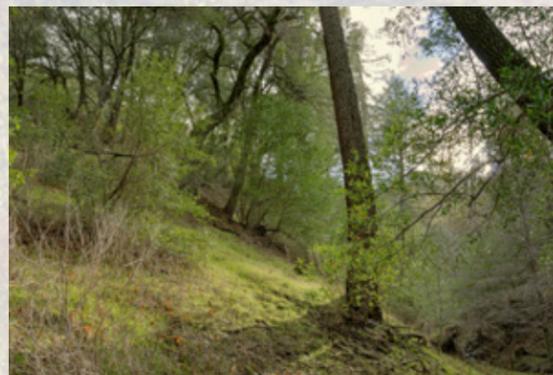
Legislation is already pending in Congress to dismantle our nation's longstanding environmental laws that protect clean air and water, safeguard wildlife, and secure open space for all of us to enjoy.

A Return to the Wild West

Legislation has been introduced to eliminate the authority of federal law enforcement officers to patrol national forests and monuments, leaving these lands even more vulnerable to vandalism, graffiti, dumping, fires, and lawlessness.

Attack on Science

The Trump administration has issued gag orders to agency scientists, removed critical information from official websites, and employed other intimidation tactics



We will continue to fight to keep our forests clean and protected!

to silence independent scientists charged with protecting our environment.

Can You Spare a Dime?

The Trump administration is threatening to slash the funding of land management agencies, jeopardizing basic services like campgrounds and trail maintenance.

Anti-Environmental Extremists

The President's picks to lead various land management agencies are raising eyebrows for their anti-lands rhetoric.

Rollback of Environmental Regulations

Congress is attempting to permanently revoke several environmental regulations pertaining to stream protection, land management planning, and methane leakage from oil drilling facilities on public lands.

OUR PUBLIC LANDS NEED YOU

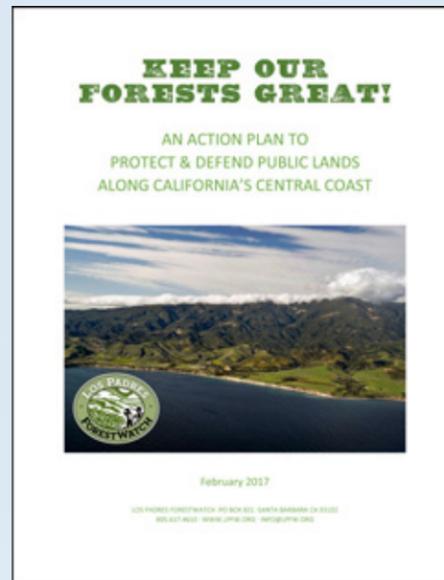
To prepare for this unprecedented attack on our public lands, we developed a comprehensive strategy that incorporates advocacy, collaboration, education, and legal defense, along with simple steps to remind ourselves of the beauty of our region's public lands.

ADVOCACY

We must show our elected officials that communities along the Central Coast value our public lands and want to see them protected. To do so, we will carefully track appointees to top posts in federal land management agencies, monitor regulatory and legislative threats to our public lands, and demand improvements to how our parks and forests are protected.

LEGAL DEFENSE

As the saying goes, sometimes the best defense is a good offense. If our leaders fail to listen to the voice of the people who care for our public lands, then when all else fails, we'll see them in court. Our nation's



Our action plan for the new political landscape. Read the full plan at: LPFW.org/keep-our-forests-great/

judicial system has always served as an independent arbiter of the actions of the President and Congress, and we will not hesitate to ask the courts to uphold the law when the new administration fails to do so.

EDUCATION

Our public lands are only managed as well as the public demands them to be. But the management of our natural resources has become so complex and technical that it is often difficult for members of the public to figure out what's being proposed or how they can participate. We will track new changes coming out of Washington DC and make it easy for the public to understand what's at stake and how our voices can be heard.

COLLABORATION

The stakes are so high that we simply cannot do this alone. We're a small nonprofit organization with limited resources. But with the support of the community by our side, we can reach out and collaborate with groups at the local, state-wide, and national levels to unify our voices and truly make a difference. As the only organization on the Central Coast focused solely on protecting our region's public lands, we're uniquely positioned to take a leadership role in bringing like-minded organizations together for the long haul.

Let's face it, there's much work to be done, and we can't let ourselves become overwhelmed and demoralized. To move closer to victory with a clear head, fresh mind, and renewed spirit, sometimes we need to step away, get outside, and experience and enjoy those very things which we are working to protect. Get out on your public lands to relax, renew, and inspire. We will prevail!

SAVING STEELHEAD: LAWSUIT FILED AGAINST DAM

ForestWatch and SLO Coastkeeper file lawsuit seeking water releases from Twitchell Dam to restore steelhead to Sisquoc River

In April, Los Padres ForestWatch and San Luis Obispo Coastkeeper filed a lawsuit in Superior Court seeking water releases from Twitchell Dam to prevent the extinction of Southern California steelhead in the Santa Maria River system. The legal action aims to ensure that steelhead are left with enough water to swim upstream to historic spawning grounds in the Sisquoc River, deep in the Los Padres National Forest.



A young angler enjoys fishing along the Upper Sisquoc in 1979.

For more than 100 years, California law has required dam operators to release sufficient water to keep fish stocks in good condition. Yet since its construction in the 1950s, the Santa Maria Valley Water Conservation District has managed Twitchell Dam to prevent flows from the Santa Maria River to the ocean, severely limiting migration, and stranding endangered steelhead in a drying channel.

The Santa Maria River had the second-largest steelhead run in Santa Barbara County 70 years ago. By some estimates as many as ten thousand fish traveled up the watershed in wet years, with the Sisquoc River in the Los Padres National Forest being the most important spawning tributary within the stream network.

However, several large dams have since blocked historic steelhead runs along the Pacific Coast. Now, steelhead are one of the most endangered fish species in the United States. This unique form of rainbow trout is a keystone species for our region and an indicator of the health of our local waterways.

Twitchell Dam on the Cuyama River — the northern tributary to the Santa Maria River — has been identified as a major obstacle to steelhead passage, but not in the conventional sense. Steelhead have never migrated into the Cuyama in significant numbers. Instead, steelhead migrate to and from spawning grounds in the southern tributary to the Santa Maria River: the Sisquoc River. Rather than physically blocking fish passage, it is the operation of Twitchell Dam, limiting the timing and quantity of flow in the mainstream of the Santa Maria River, that prevents juvenile steelhead from reaching the Pacific, and mature ocean-dwelling steelhead from returning to their natal spawning habitat in the upper Sisquoc River.

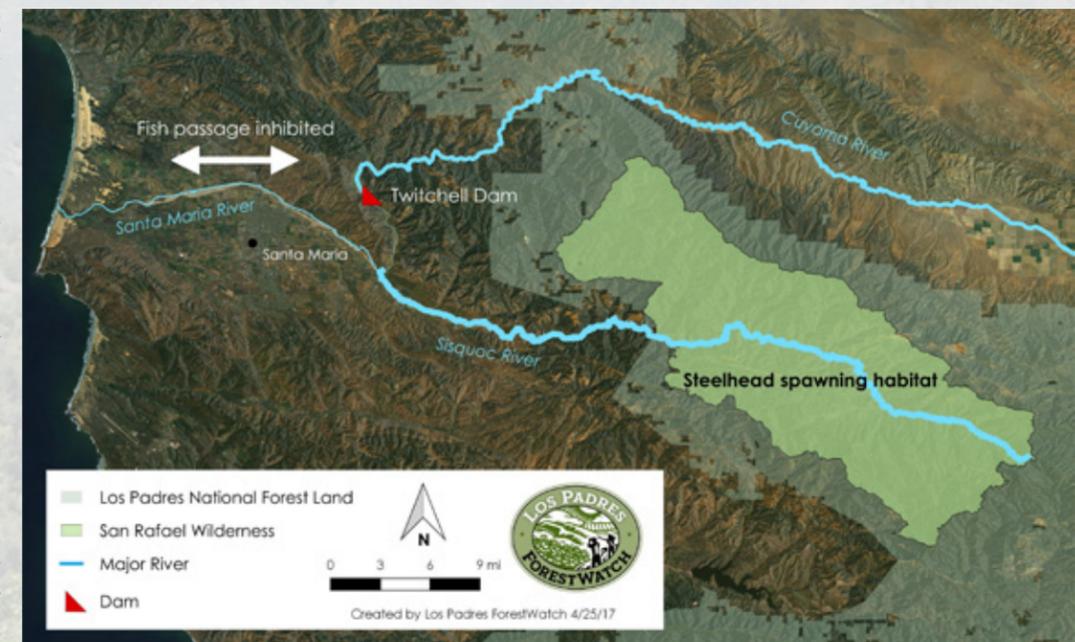
In 2007, the California Coastkeeper Alliance sued to compel state officials to initiate stream flow studies as required by law. The flow study for the Santa Maria River system was launched in 2010, and the resulting 2013 report by Stillwater Sciences recommended an improved flow regime at Twitchell Dam, yet the water district has failed to implement the recommendations.

Our lawsuit aims to implement the Stillwater Study's recommendations to improve the

flow regimes at Twitchell Dam and restore the endangered steelhead to good condition. Experts estimate that only 3 - 4% of Twitchell Reservoir water would be affected if enough water was released to allow fish passage along the Santa Maria River.

Southern steelhead, listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act in 1997, have nearly disappeared from river systems throughout the central coast due to dam construction and increased water usage. Several studies have identified the Santa Maria River system as a top priority for restoring steelhead fisheries throughout southern California, and they also identify insufficient streamflows from Twitchell Dam as the primary factor limiting steelhead recovery there. Our legal action seeks to restore one of our region's most prolific fisheries while maintaining reliable water supplies for our farms and communities.

ForestWatch is represented in this matter by the Environmental Defense Center, and SLO Coastkeeper is represented in this matter by Lawyers for Clean Water. The groups will present their legal arguments to the court later this summer as we work towards restoring one of southern California's most important steelhead fisheries.



The three major rivers involved shown in blue, with their line thickness proportional to streamflow (thicker line = higher streamflow). Note that streamflow in the Cuyama River drops dramatically downstream of Twitchell Dam.



CARRIZO ON THE CHOPPING BLOCK

President Trump orders review of national monuments designated since 1996

In late April, the president signed an executive order instructing the Department of Interior to review all national monument designations since 1996, including the Carrizo Plain National Monument adjacent to the Los Padres National Forest in San Luis Obispo County. The Secretary of Interior, Ryan Zinke, said that he will consider whether up to 40 national monuments should be “rescinded, resized, or modified.”

The executive order, which will focus on national monuments at least 100,000 acres in size on both land and water, is likely due to the designation of Bears Ears National Monument in Utah, which President Obama designated in December, 2016 before he left office. Anti-public lands politicians and pundits have relentlessly attacked the establishment of Bears Ears since December of last year and wish to see the designation undone. The review could have lasting impacts on other national monuments and the way future monuments are designated.

Of the 10 national monuments found in California, seven would be subjected to this review, including our very own Carrizo Plain National Monument. President Clinton established this 206,000 acre monument protecting the largest intact grassland in California and large swaths of the Caliente and Temblor Ranges in 2001 before he left office. The Carrizo Plain is home to one of the largest concentrations of rare plants and animals in all of California, including the San Joaquin kit fox, burrowing owl, giant kangaroo rat, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, and San Joaquin antelope squirrel. The area is an especially popular destination during spring wildflower season when it bursts into fields of yellow, orange, and purple as far as the eye can see.

Secretary Zinke will have 120 days to report back to the White House about the review.

The Trump administration says that the review will be used to recommend changes to the Antiquities Act of 1906 — the legislation that gives the president the ability to designate national monument — to Congress who can make changes to the existing law with new legislation.



One of the best places to view sunsets and moonrises in California. Photo by Ron Williams

ForestWatch will oppose any effort that aims to diminish the ability of a president to designate national monuments. Our goal is to generate 10,000 letters expressing strong local support for the Carrizo Plain National Monument.

We consider this order an attack on public lands and an affront to millions of Americans who live, work, and play in these spectacular landscapes. We stand ready to defend the Carrizo Plain National Monument from any misguided efforts that would make these lands more vulnerable to development.

In fact, we recently signed a letter to the president along with 450 other organizations from across the country to President Trump, Interior Secretary Zinke, and Commerce Secretary Ross expressing deep concerns with the order to remove or decrease protections for national monuments.

We will continue to fight to keep this treasured land public and protected. Visit savethecarrizo.org for ways to get involved.



The Carrizo Plain National Monument features trails through the Caliente and Temblor Ranges. Photo by Ron Williams

FOREST STEWARD SUCCESS STORIES

Volunteers clean up trash throughout the Los Padres National Forest!



A great group of both two- and four-legged volunteers helped clean up Santa Paula Canyon!

Like everyone else in the region, we were overjoyed to see so much rain over the winter. All of that water — while desparately needed — made many areas inaccessible, and it seemed like every weekend welcomed a new storm from the Pacific. Yet we were still able to get out and clean up areas around the forest. Of course, flowing creeks and cold rain made for some interesting volunteer experiences. Read below for more stories on how our incredible Forest Stewards have been getting their boots muddy and their trash bags full so far this year!

Santa Paula Canyon Cleanup

On Saturday, January 14th, nearly 20 volunteers (and one dog!) from Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties came out to Santa Paula Canyon to remove trash from the immensely-popular Santa Paula Canyon. It was a perfect day for a cleanup hike along the creek leading to gorgeous waterfalls and swimming holes. Thanks to these awesome Forest Stewards who dedicated their time on a weekend to helping remove an estimated 200 pounds of trash from Santa Paula Canyon!

Gibraltar Road Cleanup

An intense early morning rainstorm on Sunday, March 5th wasn't enough to deter some hardcore volunteers from cleaning up trash near Gibraltar Rock, just north of Santa Barbara! ForestWatch sent a small team of volunteers from UCSB, Patagonia, and Boy Scouts in Troop 737 who came up all the way from Thousand Oaks to help UCSB Adventure Programs, the Santa Barbara Rock Gym, and the Santa Barbara Ranger District remove nearly 40 tires, a deep freezer, and a truckload of trash from the area.

La Cumbre Peak Cleanup

On Sunday, March 26th, a group of Forest Stewards spent their morning cleaning up trash on La Cumbre Peak near Santa Barbara. Due to its incredible views of the city, Santa Barbara Channel, and the Channel Islands, this area is a favorite spot of locals, tourists, and even a California condor that roosted below the peak for a night in 2015. The group of volunteers from as far as Camarillo removed an estimated 200 pounds of trash from around the peak!

Cherry Creek Cleanups

The entire Cherry Creek Watershed in the Los Padres National Forest was closed to shooting in 2011 due to a lawsuit filed by ForestWatch and other conservation groups. While this dramatically decreased illegal shooting there, some trash has accumulated over the years— so we focused our efforts to this area in April with three cleanups.

On April 2nd a small but hardworking group of volunteers spent their Sunday morning removing illegal target shooting trash from the main shooting site along Cherry Creek. They collected everything from bullet casings to the remnants of a propane tank. Then on April 26th we brought a team of Patagonia employees from across the country who were in Ventura for a meeting to help clean up more than trash at Cherry Creek. A few days later on the last day of the month, another group of our volunteers went back to the site to clean up most of the remaining trash. Altogether our awesome volunteers removed over 1,250 pounds of trash from along Cherry Creek in April!

If you want to get involved with volunteering, email bryant@LPFW.org or visit our website at LPFW.org/volunteer/



These Patagonia volunteers came from all over the country!



STELLAR INTERNS

Each quarter we are fortunate to have incredible interns from local colleges help with conservation, legal, and GIS projects that ensure our public lands are protected. We want to highlight our interns from the past few quarters here:

Luke Eisenhardt - a graduate student in the UCSB Bren School of Environmental Science & Management, Luke worked on several GIS projects last fall relating to California condors and the Refugio manzanita.

Stephanie Tang - worked as our Conservation Intern in the fall while finishing her environmental studies degree at UCSB. Stephanie helped research several species unique to the Los Padres and helped with various projects.

Joe McManus - while finishing up law school at Pepperdine University in Malibu, Joe worked on legal research for a few projects such as our lawsuit over the Gaviota Fuel Break.

Wade Sedgwick - while finishing up his undergraduate degree in environmental studies at UCSB, Wade served as our Photography Intern over the winter. He worked on documenting Refugio manzanita near Gaviota Peak and graffiti in Santa Paula Canyon.

Jessica Hitchcock - recently graduated from UCSB with degrees in political science and environmental studies. While a senior, she helped us research endangered species, historical documents, and trail access issues. Jessica even continued interning at ForestWatch as our spring Conservation Intern.

These internships are supported in large part by the Coastal Fund of UCSB, a student initiative dedicated to the conservation of the UCSB coastline. The Coastal Fund has awarded ForestWatch a grant to fund multiple internship stipends and intern projects for several years in a row. We value this wonderful partnership, and we look forward to continuing to provide students with unique internship experiences!

NEWS FROM AROUND THE FOREST



UNBEARABLE: TOO FEW BEARS TO ALLOW HUNTING IN SLO

Scientists conducting a multi-year study of black bears along California's central coast have concluded that only 101 bears exist in San Luis Obispo County, approximately 90% lower than previous estimates used to justify bear hunting proposals by the California Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW) in 2009 and 2010. These earlier proposals to allow bear hunting in the county were met with intense public outcry, which prompted the population study.

The report — completed in 2015 and recently released in response to a series of public requests — documents the first comprehensive effort to estimate the number of black bears here. The study confirms what wildlife advocates have said all along: the county's black bear population is too small to support a sustainable hunt.

ForestWatch was an early leader in efforts to stop the proposed 2009 hunt, arguing that CDFW didn't know how many bears even resided in the County and urging state wild-

Black bears have a fairly low reproductive rate, breeding every 1-4 years with a lifespan of about 20 years. Photo by Norbert Rosing

life officials to conduct a scientifically-defensible population survey while organizing community-wide opposition to the hunt. The hunting proposals of 2009 and 2010 were both withdrawn by the CDFW, who then initiated the population study in 2013. We appreciate all of the work that went into conducting this study, and look forward to working with CDFW to ensure that the report's recommendations are implemented as soon as possible. The survival of bears along the central coast and throughout the state depends on it.



The new gate on Sisar Road. Photo by Jessica Hitchcock.

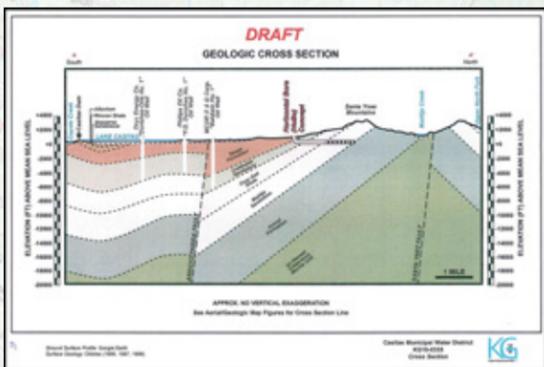
LANDOWNER BLOCKS VEHICLE ACCESS TO SISAR CANYON

In March, a landowner with property along Sisar Canyon Road just south of the Los Padres National Forest boundary closed and locked a gate to permanently restrict vehicle access of Sisar Canyon. This road has been used for nearly a century by hikers, horseback riders, and mountain bikers on their way to trails, campgrounds, and swimming holes along Sisar Creek and Nordhoff Ridge in the Los Padres National Forest.

The landowner bought the property, which covers over 100 acres along the southern border of the national forest and straddles Sisar Road, about a decade ago. They plan to convert a portion of the property to an avocado orchard. With the gate closed, vehicles are no longer able to pass onto Sisar Canyon Road, but those on foot, horse, and mountain bike can still access the area. A small parking area has been established along Sisar Road

closer to Hwy 150. There have been numerous complaints by the equestrian community about the current access corridor around the gate due to low bars crossing the path aimed at keeping motorcycles from passing.

We are working to secure an easement granted to the Forest Service and general public for permanent public access to Sisar Canyon and the many wonderful places beyond. People have been visiting Sisar Canyon since the Chumash had a nearby village called Sis'a, which is the origin of the name Sisar. We will ensure that the long legacy of access to this area is upheld.



A cross section of the proposed horizontal bore. From the "Preliminary Water Security Project Analysis" published in late 2016.

WATER DISTRICT TO SIPHON LOS PADRES GROUNDWATER

Late last year, Casitas Municipal Water District (CMWD) approved a plan to explore the use of large horizontal bores that would siphon groundwater from underneath the Los Padres National Forest and into Lake Casitas. The bores would be drilled from CMWD property outside of the national forest boundary and extend horizontally beneath national forest land. The bores would only siphon water during long-term droughts according to a project analysis published by CMWD last November. In that analysis, the "Matilija Formation Horizontal Bores" plan was listed as the preferred option out of six alternatives and was the second most expensive proposal at \$5.5 million.

In a letter we submitted to CMWD, we discussed the potential impact the horizontal bores could have on surface water in the Los Padres National Forest. Groundwater supplies natural springs and streams such as Matilija Creek, which supports habitat for the endangered arroyo toad and many other rare species that make the Los Padres National Forest so unique. Additionally, mining water from beneath the Los Padres during drought years — when water levels are already at critically low levels — would place additional strains on the forest during prolonged dry spells. We also highlighted the need to explore alternative proposals that are not only less expensive but are also environmentally-preferable. We found that a substantial amount of water could be produced by combining several proposed projects for a total of only \$2.7 million. These projects would include retrofitting, repairing, and replacing existing infrastructure rather than building new infrastructure that could impact the Los Padres National Forest.

STELLAR SUPPORT: ENVIRONMENT NOW

ForestWatch has been a leader in efforts to stop scientifically-unsound logging and vegetation clearing projects in the Los Padres National Forest. We have ensured that large, old-growth conifers are protected, that fire-scarred landscapes are allowed to naturally recover on their own, and have emphasized strategic vegetation removal close to homes — rather than in remote areas of the forest — as the most effective and environmentally friendly way to protect our communities from wildfire.

Environment Now has supported us every step of the way. It's a family foundation based in Santa Monica created in 1989 by Frank and Luanne Wells. Frank Wells was a well-known corporate executive, mountain climber and adventurer as well as a man of high integrity, unafraid to fight for justice. Seeing many environmental problems in Southern California going unchecked, he established an action-oriented organization to do on-the-ground work and truly make a difference.

The foundation first awarded us a grant in 2007 to file a legal challenge against a post-fire logging project near Grade Valley and Alamo Mountain. That precedent-setting legal victory set the stage for our continued partnership in protecting places like Figueroa Mountain, Pine Mountain, Mt. Pinos, Cerro Noroeste, and Frazier Mountain. Most recently, their support helped us stop a 300-foot-wide, 6-mile-long chaparral clearing project along the Gaviota Ridge.

Environment Now has also twice recognized ForestWatch with its annual "Top Environmental Achievements of the Environmental Community in Southern California" award, and is a committed and ongoing sponsor of our annual

WILD! events. We recently sat down with Doug Bevington, their Forest Program Director, to share more about this effective partnership.

TELL US ABOUT THE MISSION OF ENVIRONMENT NOW.

Environment Now is a family foundation that funds conservation organizations that work on forest and water protection in California. We support forest-watch and water-keeper groups throughout the state that use public input and legal oversight to ensure the proper implementation of federal and state environmental laws.

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

As part of our network of grantees involved in monitoring the various national forests throughout California, Los Padres ForestWatch is Environment Now's key partner for protecting the Los Padres National Forest from inappropriate and harmful logging and chaparral-clearing projects. Los Padres ForestWatch is a rare example of a group that is simultaneously active in protecting the conifer forests and the native chaparral that are both important parts of Southern California's national forests.

WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES FORESTWATCH SUCH AN EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION?

We see ForestWatch as being a particularly effective organization because it is willing to be a clear and reliable voice for the native ecosystems of Los Padres National Forest. It works diligently with the Forest Service to ensure proper management of these lands. At the same time, when inappropriate projects threaten to harm public lands, ForestWatch is not afraid to apply the citizen suit enforcement provisions that were specifically included in our environmental laws to ensure that those legal protections would be properly implemented.



Environment Now recently helped us stop the Gaviota Fuel Break, which would have clear-cut a six-mile long, 300-foot wide swatch of land along the crest of the Santa Ynez Mountains near Gaviota Peak. The project was recently scrapped due to our lawsuit. Photo by Wade Sedgwick

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO SUPPORT SMALL, GRASSROOTS CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS?

Grassroots conservation organizations are often the boldest and most effective advocates for environmental protection, and are more likely to be willing to apply citizen enforcement legal tools to substantively protect our public lands. At the same time, grassroots groups are often quite cost efficient, producing big results on comparatively small budgets; in other words, they can offer the biggest bang for your buck. Los Padres ForestWatch exemplifies both of these advantages to supporting grassroots groups.

Thank you, Environment Now, for your steadfast support of our work protecting the native forests and chaparral throughout the Los Padres National Forest!



Environment Now supported our legal challenge of a logging project that would have unnecessarily removed trees near Grade Valley and Alamo Mountain following the Day Fire of 2006.

Thank you!



Environment Now®



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The Thacher School
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