Looking for a beautiful way to spend a springtime afternoon, head to the San Rafael Wilderness in Santa Barbara County backcountry to take in some of nature’s splendor. The drive to the hike and the hike itself are at their best during the spring wildflower bloom – late March into May. The trailhead can be reached off of Hwy 154 via Figueroa Mountain Road near Los Olivos or Happy Canyon Road a few miles east of Hwy 246. It takes about two hours hiking from the trailhead at Nira Campground. A mostly flat, yet wonderfully meandering trail follows Manzana Creek downstream as it makes its way to the Sisquoc River. The trail weaves in and out of the riparian canopy, underneath cottonwoods, alders, sycamores, and oaks, as it crosses Manzana Creek numerous times during the hike. The five mile (10 round trip) hike can be done in a day, but makes a great overnighter as well.

Afternoon sun will filter through immense oaks, throwing down shafts of light as you wander through the lush green grasses and myriad wildflowers of the valley floor. A soft breeze will often make the shafts of light dance across your vision - to experience a place as special and beautiful as this is everything, get out and enjoy your backcountry this spring!
**CARRIZO DE-FENCED**

Since 2008, ForestWatch volunteers have taken down almost 15 miles of relic barbed wire fencing on the Carrizo Plain National Monument. Along with other concerned groups, ForestWatch has made a significant dent in the amount of fencing strung across the Carrizo impeding the movement of pronghorn antelope — we now have only 30 miles left until all relic unused fencing is down or modified to be safe for pronghorn.

Large numbers of pronghorn used to roam the plain but the herds vanished with the advent of dryland cattle grazing and the network of fences associated with it. Ranching continues today, but much of the fencing no longer serves a purpose. Cows no longer graze the plain in areas still crisscrossed with miles of useless rusty fence. Besides the general eyesore factor, the main problem with these relic fences is that pronghorn antelope, the fastest land mammal in North America, become ensnared in them while traversing their historic range.

**BASE CAMP**

The Los Padres National Forest encompasses nearly two million acres of public lands right in our own backyard. It’s a big chunk of the California landscape, and you and I have the ability to shape these lands into whatever we want them to be. These lands are, after all, public lands. So, what do you want in your forest?

In my forest, I want a natural landscape where I can hike, ride, pedal, float, or drive. And on the days I don’t do any of these things, my forest is there to flourish for its own sake.

In my forest, I want wildlife, and I want a lot of it. I want condors and hummingbirds, fish and fairy shrimp, snakes and worms, mountain lions and chipmunks and the thousands of other species that make our region one of the most biologically diverse “hot spots” on the planet.

In my forest, I want free-flowing rivers that provide clean water to our local farms, clean water to our homes, and clean water to our oceans.

In my forest, I want redwoods and big-cone Douglas firs and mighty oaks that provide shade on a hot summer day. And I want healthy chaparral, sagebrush, grasslands, and crazy wildflowers that paint the hillsides purple, yellow, orange, red, and white.

And in my forest, I want the public to have a stake in how it’s managed. I want my friends and neighbors to volunteer their time in making the forest a better place, and to teach their kids why it’s so important to protect places like this.

These are the things I want in my forest. What do you want in yours?

Jodi Kuyper, Executive Director

**YOUR BACKYARD**

Carribo Plain National Monument, adjacent to the Los Padres National Forest, is located between California’s central valley and the coast at San Luis Obispo. State Route 166 passes the south entrance to the plain, and State Route 58 the northern entrance. Connecting them is Soda Lake Road, the only seemingly passable road through the plain (but even this may become impassable when it rains since the middle portion of it is gravel).

Often called “California’s Serengeti,” this dry open grassland is uniquely beautiful throughout the year but really turns on the magic in the spring as millions of wildflowers dot the landscape. To the west are the Celestine Mountains, rising 5,000 feet, and on the east the San Andreas Fault runs along the base of the Temblor Range. Although the fault runs through California all the way from Cape Mendocino to just south of Los Angeles, the Carrizo plain remains one of the best places to study its motion. Its motion has shaped the broad geographic features of the valley, creating the ridges and basins and cutting the paths of several creeks. Scattered along the valley floor are relics of earlier ranching and farming days, along with evidence of much earlier inhabitants as shown in the beautiful rock art sites of the native Chumash people. The confluence of the valley is Soda Lake, sometimes just a bed of sparkling white salt but during the rainy season a true lake providing habitat for numerous bird species.

The area became a National Monument in 2001, and an approved Resource Management Plan followed in 2010, providing direction to the Bureau of Land Management managing partners of the Monument along with The Nature Conservancy and California Department of Fish and Game.
The Camatta Canyon amole is endemic to California, in fact it is known from a single population located on the Los Padres National Forest. It is a perennial herb with long, linear leaves along the ground and a widely branching stem with purple flowers. It blooms in the spring, typically April-May.

It is threatened because of grazing, which has helped to diminish the threat of a wild fire; and hearty beers to wet your whistle.

**Roadless Victory**

ForestWatch lawsuit succeeds in protecting more than 600,000 acres of southern California’s national forests

The Los Padres National Forest will benefit from an agreement announced this winter between conservationists, the state of California, and the U.S. Forest Service to protect more than 600,000 acres of roadless areas in Santa Barbara, Ventura, San Luis Obispo, and Kern counties from development.

The deal resolves a federal lawsuit brought by ForestWatch and other conservation groups in 2008 challenging Forest Service management plans for four Southern California national forests.

The challenged plans opened up 900,000 roadless acres for possible road building or other development across the four forests, including 600,000 acres in the Los Padres. In 2009 a federal district court agreed with the groups, ruling that the plans violated the National Environmental Policy Act. After that ruling was issued, the parties agreed to negotiate a settlement.

The agreement mandates these follow-up key points:

- **By December 2012, the Forest Service will complete a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) in which they will propose rezoning 37 priority roadless areas as Recommended Wilderness, the highest level of protection set forth in the management plan.**
- **The Forest Service will identify and apply for federal, state, and private sources of funding to carry out priority decommissioning and restoration projects in the four forests.**
- **The Forest Service will establish a special interest area for the Camatta Canyon amole, and work to ensure that rare flower gets the proper protection that it needs.**

Critical habitat was designated in 2002 and the most recent management plan for the LPNF established a special interest area for the amole. Although a thorough population study has been conducted and no species management plan has been completed.

ForestWatch will continue to track the management of the Camatta Canyon amole, and will work to ensure this rare flower gets the proper protection that it needs.
Carrizo Plated

Cows moo-ed softly overgrazed

Ecological Reserve; State of California
to complete new Management Plan

The California Department of Fish and Game – the agency charged with managing the Reserve – issued the grazing lease in 2006, and renewed it in 2009, allowing 3,600 cows on the Reserve each year through 2012. The Department issued and renewed the lease without notifying the public or preparing any environmental studies, as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The lawsuit also alleged that the Department violated state law by failing to prepare a legally-mandated management plan for the Reserve.

Under the terms of the legal agreement, the grazing lease was terminated and livestock removed from the Reserve - no livestock grazing will be allowed on the Reserve until the proper CEQA process is complete. The Department must also make a good faith effort to prepare a Draft Land Management Plan for the Reserve by August 2011 and a final plan by March 2012.

Regional Roundup

From DC to The LP

A look at how people, policies, and politics are shaping our region’s public lands

Singing the Budget Blues

For years, federal land management agencies like the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management have suffered from dwindling budgets, inadequate staffing, and overworking workloads. They now enter their sixth month without Congress approving a long-term spending bill. Each day that goes by without a budget, Forest Service officials are wondering just how long-term funding they will receive, limiting the agency’s ability to hire workers and complete beneficial projects.

Anti-environmental fervor in the House is also reaching levels not seen in years. Proposals abound to decrease the Environmental Protection Agency (which protects clean air and water). Other proposals seek to eliminate the ability of groups like ForestWatch to recover their attorney fees when they successfully uphold environmental protection laws in federal court.

Restored Protection for Wild Lands

In February, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar restored the ability of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to temporarily protect wilderness-quality lands until Congress decides whether to formally add them to the National Wilderness Preservation System. This could result in interim protections for several thousand acres in the Carrizo Plain that are currently awaiting formal wilderness designation.

Draft Forest Planning Rules

Also in February, the Forest Service proposed a new set of regulations outlining how the nation’s 193-million-acre National Forest System will be managed in the future. Conservation organizations praised some elements of the new rules, but also expressed grave concerns because the new rules fail to spell out clear, strong standards for local forest managers to follow. The new rules are currently open for public comment, and when finalized, would replace standards that have been in place since 1982. It’s the agency’s fourth attempt since 2000 to revise the regulations governing national forests. Three previous attempts were challenged in court and thrown out because they did not meet minimum environmental standards required by law.

Big Sur Redwoods Saved

The Land and Water Conservation Fund is a federal program launched in 1964 to acquire land for the benefit of all Americans. However, in the nearly five decades since, the program has only been fully funded twice. Locally, LWCF has helped to protect the Los Padres National Forest acquire several private holdings along the famed Big Sur coastline. In November 2010 the redwoods were permanently protected.

The solution: internalize the market’s ‘costs of care’

Consider planting honeysuckle in your garden this spring, the vines are easy to grow, vigorous, heat-tolerant, and nearly indestructible. The flashy and fragrant flowers attract hummingbirds and butterflies. Honeysuckle is a native plant whose seeds will be managed in the future. Conservation organizations praised some elements of the new rules, but also expressed grave concerns because the new rules fail to spell out clear, strong standards for local forest managers to follow. The new rules are currently open for public comment, and when finalized, would replace standards that have been in place since 1982. It’s the agency’s fourth attempt since 2000 to revise the regulations governing national forests. Three previous attempts were challenged in court and thrown out because they did not meet minimum environmental standards required by law.

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DDT: A New Threat to Condors?

As if microtrash, power lines, anti-freeze, habitat destruction, and lead bullets weren’t enough, a new threat to California condors has emerged – DDT. Biologists with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Ventana Wildlife Society have been comparing the thickness of eggshells recovered from condor nests, and their preliminary results suggest that eggs from the Big Sur DDT “substantially thinner” because they fear on marine mammals with high levels of DDT. A one-year study is now in the works to determine the exact cause and extent of the eggshell thinning.

Grazing Fees Remain Low

Each February, the federal government sets the price of grazing cows, sheep, and other livestock on public lands. For the fifth year in a row, the BLM and Forest Service will charge a $1.35 per month to graze a cow and a $1.35 on public lands – the legal minimum, and a rate far below what it costs to graze on state and private lands. The fee will apply to BLM’s nearly 18,000 grazing permits and leases and more than 8,000 permits administered by the Forest Service, dozens which are on the Los Padres.

Conservation groups have petitioned the federal government to revise the way the grazing fee is calculated, but in January the agencies responded that they are too busy to change the grazing formula. A Government Accountability Office report found that the federal government’s grazing program cost taxpayers $315 million per year.

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Owner and Landscape Contractor, Greg Frugoli, a California native, moved to the Central Coast from Marin County in 1992, and began working in the landscape trade while attending Cal Poly. After graduation, his services were in demand, his knowledge of local climate and conditions invaluable, and his service philosophy: to deliver the highest quality possible, apparent in all his projects.

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ForestWatch is grateful for their commitment and dedication to our work and for their care of the environment in all they do. Visit their website at: www.creativeecotones.com.
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

KEEP IT WILD

Erik Feldman and a group of friends headed out on a backpacking trip in the Los Padres in summer 2009 that turned out to be more than most of them had bargained for.

Little turtle encountered in the creek

It had already been two days of fun backcountry adventure and we were due home—actually already four hours past when we said we’d be back. My wife was eight months pregnant with our first child and I had promised to be back in time on Sunday to set up the baby’s room. Every trip is an adventure and I knew with a kid on the way my time to dabble was rapidly decreasing. It just goes without saying what on earth I was thinking (or at least that is what I told my wife when I got home just a touch later than what I had originally planned.

So we were all exhausted when we came to the final cliff crossing only to remember the 5 mile uphill slog we had ahead to get back to our cars. Needless to say, I knew that my wife was at home with worry turning to anger and probably back again, and I knew we had to press on. The sun was sinking lower, hunger and aches were growing stronger, but still we hung back inspecting the route again and again. Finally one of the crew made those first tentative steps and we were all on our way, inching along the narrowest ledge I could ever imagine supporting my frame. Needless to say I was sweating. And shaking. And basically wondering what on earth I was doing. It just goes to show how adventure grows when nature is involved, there will always be something unknown or a surprise or a factor you hadn’t accounted for.

Even after reaching my limit, I felt privileged for the opportunity to get back to one of my favorite stretches of river. With each pristine bend we rounded we silently thanked groups like Keep Sespe Wild and ForestWatch who work to keep places like this open, free-flowing, and protected.

We saw some beautiful landscapes on the trip for sure—the rock formations of this part of the Los Padres backcountry are truly magnificent. Faster than you can imagine your perspective changes; sometimes you are so dwarfed by the cliffs and boulders, scrambling around you begin to feel like an ant. Time starts to stretch and the infinite scale used to describe geologic process becomes conceivable…. or at least that is what I told my wife when I got home just a touch later than what I had originally planned.

The group heading out along Sespe Creek

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

JANUARY 2011
What: Microtrash Cleanup Where: Tar Creek Trailhead Who: 7 volunteers Why: 42 lbs. of trash removed

The Tar Creek parking area along Squaw Flat Road is one of our most notorious microtrash areas, and because of its proximity to the Sespe Condor Sanctuary we seem to be cleaning pounds of microtrash from it every few months. When Patagonia contacted us in January with a group that was willing to contribute half of their day with us, the Tar Creek parking area was the obvious choice. We spent the morning throwing bulb casings, shotgun shells, and bits of glass and clay pigeons into our buckets—estimated total of over 40 pounds by lunchtime.

ForestWatch is currently working with the Forest Service to implement a more long-term remedy for this important site. Stay tuned for updates and volunteer opportunities.

JANUARY 2011
What: Defencing Project Where: Carrizo Plain Who: 14 volunteers Why: 2.25 miles of fence removed Our volunteer group pulled down a record length of fence for a day for a group of our size! On Sunday, a day we typically leave open for exploring the wonders of the Carrizo, the group saw a herd of over 60 elk—there’s always something surprising on the Carrizo if you have the time to look.

March 2011
What: Defencing Project Where: Carrizo Plain Who: 10 volunteers Why: 2 miles of fence removed In March, as a special treat, volunteers were invited to a barbecue feast at the historic Goodwin Ranch following a hard day’s work. Good food, drink, and company was had by all around the campfire that evening.

Hello. We are the Baxley family, Lara and Greg and our kids Sander, 9, and Alejandra, 12. We love spending family time together exploring the outdoors. The kids, who have been hiking since they were quite young, have grown to appreciate how fun and peaceful it is to be away from computers and crowds and to discover natural treasures around us. We are very fortunate to live in a place where we are within easy reach of open space where we can bike and hike and experience the beautiful scenery.

Not only do we enjoy being in the outdoors, we also feel that it is very important to work to preserve and protect open spaces for animals to live and for people to enjoy. This is why, as a family, we support ForestWatch and other organizations that work hard to keep wild spaces wild and return former wild spaces to their natural beauty.

In addition to spending family time together hiking and camping outdoors, we also enjoy bonding as a family when we work together to help the land. Participating in activities such as beach cleanups, creek cleanups, removing non-native invasive plants, and removing barbed wire fence on the Carrizo Plain, not only allows us to help the environment, but it also gives us time to talk with each other and keep connected as our kids grow older. It also gives us a chance to visit some areas that we might otherwise not notice.

We would like to thank ForestWatch for the great work that you do!
Looking Across the Forest

An update on how we’re protecting your region

NORTHERN LOS PADRES

Monterey County Drilling
ForestWatch worked with local citizen groups to appeal the County of Monterey’s approval of nine oil wells in a rural undeveloped area east of the Ventana Wilderness. As a result, an environmental impact report will now be prepared, and Monterey County is considering leveling the playing field for citizen groups to challenge land use decisions countywide.

Piru Creek

Ventura River

Santa Ynez River

Sisquoc River

Santa Maria River

Salinas River

Monterey

Carmel Valley

Big Sur

Salinas

SANTA BARBARA

CARMEL VALLEY

SANTA YNEZ

NEW CUYAMA

FRAZIER PARK

VENTURA

Los Padres

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

It had already been two days of fun backcountry adventure and we were due home—actually already four hours past when we said we’d be back. My wife was eight months pregnant with our first child and I had promised to be back in time on Sunday to set up the baby’s room. Every trip is an adventure and I knew with a kid on the way my time to do things like this was limited. So, we were all exhausted when we came to the final cliff crossing only to remember the 5 mile uphill slog we had ahead to get back to our cars. Needless to say, I knew that my wife was at home with worry turning to anger and probably back again, and I knew we had to press on. The sun was setting lower, hunger and aches were growing stronger, but still we hung back inspecting the route again. Finally one of the crew noticed those first tentative steps and we were all on our way, inching along the narrowest ledge I could ever imagine supporting my frame. Needless to say I was sweating. And shaking. And basically wondering what on earth I was doing. It just goes to show how adventure grows when nature is involved, there will always be something unknown or a surprise or a factor you hadn’t accounted for.

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We saw some beautiful landscapes on the trip for sure – the rock formations of this part of the Los Padres backcountry are truly magnificent. Faster than you can imagine your perspective changes; sometimes you are so dwarfed by the cliffs and boulders, scrambling around you begin to feel like an ant. Time starts to stretch and the infinite scale used to measure distance becomes conceivable…. or at least that is what I told my wife when I got home just a touch before? It’s crazy.

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**Little turtle encountered in the creek**

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**Who:** 7 volunteers

**Why:** 42 lbs. of trash removed

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**Who:** 10 volunteers

**Why:** 2 miles of fence removed

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The group heading out along Sespe Creek in the cool morning fog

It’s not only hard work making down barbed wire fence, it’s pretty fun too!
Carrizo Plain
Protected

Cows moo-ved off severely overgrazed Ecological Reserve; State of California to complete new Management Plan

ForestWatch, the State of California, and a livestock operator finalized a formal agreement in early 2011 that will protect the 30,000-acre Carrizo Plain Ecological Reserve from severe live-stock overgrazing. The legal agreement mandates removal of all livestock from the Reserve until environmental studies are completed, and calls for the preparation of a long-term management plan for the Reserve, which is located between the Los Padres National Forest and the Carrizo Plain National Monument in southeastern San Luis Obispo County.

The agreement resolves a lawsuit filed in February 2010 by Los Padres ForestWatch and the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club. The suit was brought after visitors to the Reserve witnessed and reported excessive livestock grazing and severe environmental damage. In some areas of the Reserve, improperly managed livestock had removed nearly all vegetation from hundreds of acres of wildlife habitat, trampled natural springs, and caused terracing and severe erosion on hillsides. In addition, fences were in disrepair, allowing livestock to enter areas specifically off-limits to grazing.

Singing the Budget Blues For years, federal land management agencies like the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management have suffered from dwindling budgets, inadequate staffing, and overworking work-loads. They now enter their sixth month without Congress approving a long-term spending bill. Each day that goes by without a budget, Forest Service officials are wondering how much long-term funding they will receive, limiting the agency’s ability to hire workers and complete beneficial projects.

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DE-FENCED

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These are the things I want in my forest. What do you want in yours?

Pronghorn do not jump fences but rather attempt to crawl under them, snagging their backs on the lowest strand. As a crew, volunteers will either remove an unnecessary fence altogether or modify a fence that is still in use by replacing the lowest strand of barbed wire with smooth wire at the proper height of at least 16” so the pronghorn can successfully maneuver beneath the fence.

To date about 50 miles of these fences have been either removed or modified. A team of 10 people can remove almost 2 miles of fence in a day with bolt cutters, pliers, heavy leather gloves, and a can-do attitude. The sites are the wide spaces far from the busy roads, with sun, sky, and the overwhelming quiet. The closer you look at the Carrizo the more you see, from baby rattlesnakes to kit fox skulls to the smallest, most perfect, little white flowers you’ve ever seen. There is a surprise around every fence post!

The Carrizo is a unique and interesting place (see sidebar at right) - think about joining us on our next outing to Carrizo Plain National Monument to help the pronghorn antelope!

The oldest fences used juniper branches as fence posts.
Looking for a beautiful way to spend a springtime afternoon, head to the San Rafael Wilderness in Santa Barbara County backcountry to take in some of nature's splendor. The drive to the hike and the hike itself are at their best during the spring wildflower bloom – late March into May. The trailhead can be reached off of Hwy 154 via Figueroa Mountain Road near Los Olivos or Happy Canyon Road a few miles east of Hwy 246.

It takes about two hours hiking from the trailhead at Nira Campground. A mostly flat, yet wonderfully meandering trail follows Manzana Creek downstream as it makes its way to the Sisquoc River. The trail weaves in and out of the riparian canopy, underneath cottonwoods, alders, sycamores, and oaks, as it crosses Manzana Creek numerous times during the hike. The five mile (10 round trip) hike can be done in a day, but makes a great overnight as well.

Afternoon sun will filter through immense oaks, throwing down shafts of light as you wander through the lush green grasses and myriad wildflowers of the valley floor. A soft breeze will often make the shafts of light dance across your vision - to experience a place as special and beautiful as this is everything, get out and enjoy your backcountry this spring!