Backcountry Skier, Mt. Pinos
Russ Bishop
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!

OJAI WILD!

On Sunday, June 5, over 300 conservationists packed the beautiful site tucked away in our forest. Read more about this great event on Page 3!

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.

SANTA BARBARA WILD!

On Sunday, October 23, over 200 conservationists gathered at the historic Rivers 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!

MATILIJAA FALLS VICTORY!

Victory! Permanent public access to Matilija Falls has been restored thanks to an agreement reached with a landowner 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!

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. Helped it all the way to Jackson Falls and packed out three bags of trash found scattered around campgrounds along the trail.

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 campfires and fire rings in this area that’s off-limits to the public to protect endangered condors. Way to go!

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We've spent a good deal of time reflecting on last month's election results, sitting 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 our air has never been more urgent. Our mission to protect America's natural heritage has never been more relevant.

Our region is blessed with some of the most diverse, unique, and precious natural landscapes in all of America. Our public lands are home to a multitude of species that are on the brink of extinction. We have some of the nation's most precious and pristine forests, watersheds, rolling hills, wetlands, and ocean frontage. They are a gift to our region, and to all of California. They need our protection.

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. Jim is 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 forests both from a naturalists and an activist's 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 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 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 species removal to illegally forged into the water 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

ALLAN MORTON, President Santa Barbara
RUS RAMADO, Vice President Santa Ynez Valley
TERRI LANE, Secretary Oak View
PATRICIA KROUT, Treasurer Santa Barbara
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CHRIS COGAN Camarillo
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JIM BALSTIS Santa Barbara

ForestWatch Staff

JEFF KUPPER Executive Director
SERENA KELCH Director of Membership and Advancement
BRYANT BAKER Conservation Director

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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 Loi’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 Earthtime Farms, and chopped salad sourced from Underwood Farms. We were in good hands thanks to our entertaining emcees, Geoff Green, who took on 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, Quik Law Firm LLP, Thrive Market, and chopped salad sourced from Frutti and Ellwood Canyon Farms. McConnell’s Fine Ice Cream.

As the sun set onto our beloved Los Padres National Forest, 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’ banditria served alongside McConnell’s Fine Ice Cream.

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.
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 Service officials to focus on reducing fire risk where it matters most, directly in and around communities.

The Gaviota Fuel Break would clear-cut an entire coastal landscape. The rare manzanita species, up to 30 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 chemicals in smoke or charred wood, meaning it could resprout. The rare Refugio manzanita does not have a basal burl from which it can resprout following a fire. However, the Refugio manzanita does produce chemicals in smoke or charred wood, meaning it could resprout. Among the rarest manzanita species in the forest is the Refugio manzanita. This endangered species 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.

Nowhere in the forest is the Refugio manzanita more at risk than along the Gaviota Fuel Break. The Gaviota Fuel Break would clear-cut an entire coastal landscape. The rare manzanita species, up to 30 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 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 helps 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 clean, safe, 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; and attending local hearings and forest management 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. 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 in making 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 or calling 805-637-4610 x 3.

In this month’s newsletter, we feature the inspiring story of Sammi Butler, who has been a Forest Watch supporter since 2008 and has become one of our most active volunteers. Sammi is known for her tireless efforts to protect the Los Padres National Forest. She has organized countless volunteer projects; advocated for forest protection; and worked with 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 the Refugio manzanita and other rare plants and animals that may be affected by the fuel break. She has been representing 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.

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**PRIVATEZING PUBLIC LANDS: CORPORATE CAMPGROUNDS**

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 budget programs. 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 those 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 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.

### FEE INCREASES UNDER THE NEW PERMIT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trailheads</th>
<th>Current</th>
<th>New (per night)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alloro</td>
<td>$5</td>
<td>$10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Rock</td>
<td>$5</td>
<td>$10</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day Use Areas</th>
<th>Current</th>
<th>New (per night)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Falls</td>
<td>$5</td>
<td>$9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Crossing</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Live Oak</td>
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<td>Lower Otter</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mill Creek</td>
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<tr>
<td>Red Rock</td>
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<td>$10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandstone</td>
<td>$5</td>
<td>$10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey Flat</td>
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<tr>
<td>White Rock</td>
<td>$5</td>
<td>$10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willow Creek</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$10*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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* or $50 Annual Pass

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Campgrounds</th>
<th>Current</th>
<th>New (per night)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arroyo Seco - Family</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arroyo Seco - Group</td>
<td>$75</td>
<td>$125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballinger</td>
<td>$5</td>
<td>$20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Creek Gap</td>
<td>$15</td>
<td>$20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campo Alto – Group</td>
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<td>$100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campo Alto</td>
<td>$5</td>
<td>$20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cerro Alto</td>
<td>$20</td>
<td>$25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chumash</td>
<td>$5</td>
<td>$20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Camp</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chupacate</td>
<td>$5</td>
<td>$20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Datsby Brown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encinada</td>
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<td>$20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Figueroa</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fordyce</td>
<td>$20</td>
<td>$30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday - Group</td>
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<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirk Creek</td>
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<td>$35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Piana</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Pineso</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| McGill - Group   | $85 | $100 |
| Memorial Park    | $10 | $20 |
| Middle Lisa      | $5  | $20 |
| Nacimiento       | $15 | $20 |
| Navajo Flat      | $10 | $20 |
| NIRA             | $10 | $20 |
| Paradise         | $20 | $30 |
| Pine Mountain    | $5  | $20 |
| Plaskett Creek - Family | $25 | $35 |
| Plaskett Creek - Group | $50 | $150 |
| Reyes Creek      | $5  | $20 |
| Reyes Peak       | $5  | $20 |
| Royal Valley     | $5  | $20 |
| Sage Hill - Group| $91 | $125 |
| Upper Osos       | $20 | $30 |
| Wheeler Grove    | $23 | $25 |
| White Oaks       | $20 | $20 |

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

**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 WINDOW 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.

**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.

**Tell us about the goals and inspiration behind Solminer.**

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 keep 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.
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