

LOS PADRES FORESTWATCH

PROTECTING WILDLIFE AND WILD PLACES ALONG CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL COAST

SPRING 2018



Laurel Sumac Resprouting in the Thomas Fire Burn Area
Bryant Baker



LOOKING ACROSS THE FOREST

AN UPDATE ON HOW WE'RE PROTECTING YOUR REGION

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FOREST SERVICE SEEKS TO WEAKEN LANDMARK ENVIRONMENTAL LAW
 To ring in the New Year, the Forest Service announced that it will seek to weaken its environmental review and public notice procedures under the National Environmental Policy Act, one of our nation's bedrock environmental laws. The move will affect how the agency studies and discloses the impacts of oil drilling, mining, and logging projects. ForestWatch joined a chorus of 83 land and wildlife conservation organizations from across the country in urging Forest Service officials to avoid weakening these important environmental protections.

LAWSUIT FILED OVER CARRIZO PLAIN REVIEW DOCUMENTS
 We filed suit against Trump's Department of the Interior for failing to respond to our Freedom of Information Act request for simple public records pertaining to last year's review of the Carrizo Plain National Monument. Our repeated requests went unanswered for over six months, leaving us no choice but to take the administration to federal court in order to obtain the public records and ensure government transparency. Read more about our lawsuit on Page 8.

VOLUNTEERS DE-FENCE THE CARRIZO
 ForestWatch volunteers removed a quarter mile of relic fencing from a property along Soda Lake that was recently purchased by the Carrizo Plain Conservancy and donated to the Bureau of Land Management to become part of the national monument. Thanks to their efforts, pronghorn will be able to run free on this piece of land. Read more on Page 6.

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SAN RAFAEL WILDERNESS
 This year we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the designation of the San Rafael Wilderness in the Los Padres National Forest. On March 21, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed an act that designated the San Rafael Primitive Area as a new wilderness area. This was the first time a primitive area was designated as wilderness. Read more about the anniversary of the San Rafael Wilderness on Page 7.

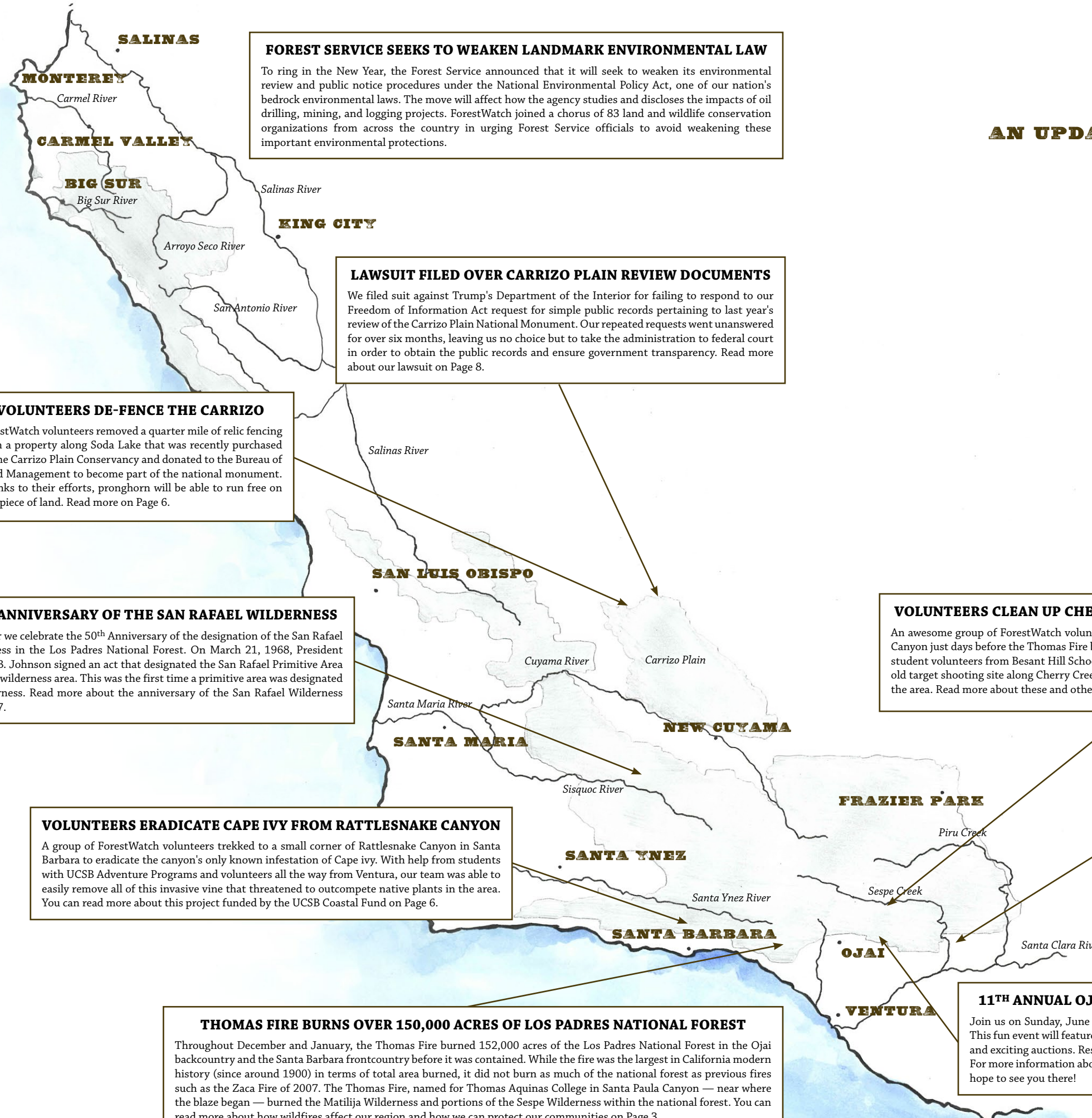
VOLUNTEERS CLEAN UP CHERRY CREEK AND SANTA PAULA CANYON
 An awesome group of ForestWatch volunteers removed trash from over eight miles of Santa Paula Canyon just days before the Thomas Fire broke out nearby. Around the same time, another group of student volunteers from Besant Hill School in Ojai cleaned up hundreds of pounds of trash from an old target shooting site along Cherry Creek in the Ojai backcountry before the Thomas Fire burned the area. Read more about these and other recent volunteer successes on Page 6.

VOLUNTEERS ERADICATE CAPE IVY FROM RATTLESNAKE CANYON
 A group of ForestWatch volunteers trekked to a small corner of Rattlesnake Canyon in Santa Barbara to eradicate the canyon's only known infestation of Cape ivy. With help from students with UCSB Adventure Programs and volunteers all the way from Ventura, our team was able to easily remove all of this invasive vine that threatened to outcompete native plants in the area. You can read more about this project funded by the UCSB Coastal Fund on Page 6.

PLANS TO INJECT OIL WASTE INTO SESPE AQUIFER
 California oil regulators announced that an oil company was seeking an exemption from the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, allowing the company to dump its toxic oilfield waste into an aquifer underneath the Los Padres National Forest. The aquifer is less than a mile away from the Fillmore Groundwater Basin — the town's only source of drinking water. Read more about this proposal on Page 2.

THOMAS FIRE BURNS OVER 150,000 ACRES OF LOS PADRES NATIONAL FOREST
 Throughout December and January, the Thomas Fire burned 152,000 acres of the Los Padres National Forest in the Ojai backcountry and the Santa Barbara frontcountry before it was contained. While the fire was the largest in California modern history (since around 1900) in terms of total area burned, it did not burn as much of the national forest as previous fires such as the Zaca Fire of 2007. The Thomas Fire, named for Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula Canyon — near where the blaze began — burned the Matilija Wilderness and portions of the Sespe Wilderness within the national forest. You can read more about how wildfires affect our region and how we can protect our communities on Page 3.

11TH ANNUAL OJAI WILD! RESERVE YOUR SEATS TODAY
 Join us on Sunday, June 3 at The Thatcher School for our 11th Annual *Ojai WILD!*. This fun event will feature a gourmet dinner, local craft brews and wines, live music, and exciting auctions. Reservations are going quickly, so be sure to buy yours today. For more information about the event or to purchase tickets, visit ojaiwild.org. We hope to see you there!



BASE CAMP



Jeff Kuyper
Executive Director

On the heels of the Thomas Fire came the devastating flooding and debris flows in Montecito, Summerland, Carpinteria, and Matilija Canyon that claimed several lives and property. These communities continue to remove the mud, bucket by bucket, while those affected try to return some normalcy to their lives.

In difficult times like these, we can find solace in nature. Consider getting outside and taking a therapeutic opportunity to reconnect with loved ones while remembering what we have lost and all the things we still have that are worth fighting for. Find silence and clarity along a mountain stream, beneath an ancient oak tree, or atop a summit. Or simply take time to notice the clouds, the birds, or the wind on your skin. Come back with a clear mind, a rejuvenated outlook, and the wisdom needed to face a new day.

Much of the Los Padres National Forest will remain closed for the foreseeable future due to the effects of the Thomas Fire. However, much of the forest is still accessible. We encourage you to take some time to hit the trail and explore the beautiful places so dear to our own hearts.

Places in Santa Barbara County like Figueroa Mountain and the San Rafael Wilderness are still open and were relatively untouched by wildfires last year. Explore the bigcone Douglas-fir groves along the Davy Brown Trail or the spectacular scenic diversity of Manzana Creek — both just a short drive north of Los Olivos. Or perhaps the views of the ocean and Channel Islands from Gaviota Peak will enliven your day.

In Ventura and Kern Counties, you can still access parts of the Sespe Wilderness and all of the Chumash Wilderness near Mt. Pinos. Explore the creek along Potrero John Trail off Highway 33 or hike the Alder Creek Trail corridor through the Sespe Condor Sanctuary near Fillmore. Venture through the large stands of pines on Mt. Pinos or the sparsely-vegetated Chumash Badlands below.

Take a trip to visit Big Falls in the Santa Lucia Wilderness near San Luis Obispo or hike the coastal trails of Big Sur. Every view is simply breathtaking in these areas in the northern part of the Los Padres.

No matter where you go, you can find solace in the comforting sights, sounds, and smells of the forest or your own backyard. Let yourself be renewed and reminded of why our corner of the world is so special — and so resilient.

Our community and our resolve remains strong. Together we will find ways to make a difference.

COMINGS AND GOINGS



CYNTHIA GRIER

We are excited to welcome Cynthia Grier as our new Events & Communications Manager. Cynthia has over 20 years of event planning and communications experience, and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Indiana University where she studied Interior Environmental Design, Environmental Studies, Marketing, and Social Psychology. She has spent much of her career working for environmentally conscious organizations focused on supporting manufacturers who walked the talk around sustainable practices. Cynthia grew up wandering the hills, forests, and streams of her family's 250 acre farm, which developed her desire for the freedom found in connection to pristine land and waterways. She assists ForestWatch in the protection of the Los Padres National Forest by planning two annual fundraising events, Ojai WILD! and Santa Barbara WILD!, along with other smaller events and communications throughout the year.



SERENA KELSCH

We were lucky to have Serena on our staff as the Director of Membership & Advancement for over two years, but we now wish her a bittersweet farewell. She has taken a new position with an international nonprofit that delivers shelters and tools to areas around the world hit by natural disasters in order to help affected families get back on their feet. We will miss her awesome work on everything from organizing events for our supporters and writing grant proposals to speaking at public hearings and helping with stewardship projects in the backcountry. During her time at ForestWatch, she helped raise critically important donations and grant funding that went directly to protecting the watersheds, wildlife, and wild places in the Los Padres National Forest and the Carrizo Plain National Monument that we all love. Though we are sad to see her go, we are excited for her as she starts a new chapter in her career making a global difference in humanitarian aid!



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SESPE AQUIFER THREATENED BY OIL

Plan to inject toxic oil and gas waste into Sespe aquifer met with fierce opposition

The California Division of Oil, Gas & Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) is considering an application from an oil company seeking an exemption from the federal Safe Drinking Water Act to allow dumping of toxic wastewater into an underground aquifer beneath the Los Padres National Forest. Texas-based Seneca Resources submitted the exemption request after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) discovered in 2016 that they and other companies were discharging wastewater from oil operations into protected water supplies throughout California.

If granted, the exemption would allow Seneca to continue using 13 active wastewater disposal wells in the Sespe Oil Field, and to possibly reactivate another 12 wastewater injection wells that are currently idle. Together, these 25 active and idle wastewater disposal wells have injected nearly 872 million gallons of produced water and fracking waste into the underlying aquifer. The exemption would pave the way for the expansion of oil operations in the Sespe Oil Field, including the controversial practice of fracking.

Overwhelming Opposition

DOGGR accepted public comments in October and November of last year. Approximately 98% were in opposition to the proposed exemption. Many of the comments were submitted by residents of Fillmore, a small town whose only source of drinking water comes from the Fillmore Groundwater Basin less than a mile away from the Sespe Aquifer in which fracking waste would be dumped.



Local residents attend a Fillmore City Council meeting to voice their opposition to the proposed aquifer exemption.

ForestWatch submitted a detailed letter opposing the exemption. We also retained a licensed professional geologist to review the highly technical proposal, who concluded that the aquifer may be hydrologically connected to Sespe Creek and drinking water supplies. We submitted his findings to DOGGR during the comment period.

The City of Fillmore submitted a letter opposing the proposed exemption. Assemblymember Monique Limón also submitted a letter to DOGGR. Several geologists, engineers, ecologists, and even former DOGGR employees submitted opposition comments as well. Farmers from the Fillmore area opposed the proposal, citing concerns over contamination of their only source of irrigation, many of whom also mentioned that the safety of private water wells close to the proposed exemption area are not being taken into consideration. Other groups such as Citizens for Responsible Oil and Gas, California Trout, Center for Biological Diversity, Keep the Sespe Wild, and California Wilderness Coalition also sent in comments opposing the proposal.

Only 18 comments supported the proposed exemption and nearly all of them came from people with ties to the oil industry, including retired petroleum engineers, an oil lobbying group, consulting firms with oil industry clients, and a fracking company.

DOGGR also held a public hearing in Ventura with more than 150 people in attendance, including several families. After a long and highly technical presentation, DOGGR



The Sespe Oil Field in the hills above Fillmore, with the Los Padres National Forest in the background. Photo by Ronald L. Williams

leadership gave 42 members of the public an opportunity to voice their opinions on the proposal, but limited their speaking time to only two minutes each. During his brief testimony, ForestWatch Executive Director Jeff Kuyper explained the importance of the Sespe watershed to wildlife, recreation, and downstream water users, and urged the state officials to allow more time for the public to voice their concerns. Most people who provided testimony at the hearing were opposed to allowing an oil company to dump toxic wastewater in the Sespe aquifer. Again, nearly all of those who spoke in favor of the exemption admitted to having direct ties to the oil industry.

Before the hearing, our friends at Patagonia hosted a sign-making party at the Great Pacific Iron Works store in Ventura, just around the corner from the hearing location. The store closed early so that its employees could attend the hearing.

Next Steps

The proposal must be approved by DOGGR before they submit it to the EPA where it will be considered for final approval. No timeline for this decision has yet been established, but the process typically takes several months. ForestWatch will continue to fight aquifer contamination and expansion of oil operations in the Sespe Oil Field. Check our website for updates on the status of the proposal and how you can help protect water resources in and around the Los Padres.



Patagonia closed their store early so employees could attend the public hearing.

FIRE IN OUR REGION

What's normal, what's not, and how we can better protect our communities

From the southern stands of coast redwoods along the Big Sur coast to the chaparral-covered slopes of the Topatopa Mountains near Ojai and Ventura — the Los Padres National Forest and nearby public lands have an incredible diversity of plants and wildlife that can only be found in our region. These ecosystems and our climate also create a unique but often poorly-understood fire regime. There are some important questions that we want to answer with the best science:

Why does our area burn? Is what we are experiencing natural? What is fueling the frequency and intensity of the fires in recent decades? And how do we protect our communities?

Why Central & Southern California Burn

Much of the vegetation covering our mountains and foothills is part of an ecosystem called chaparral which, over time, has adapted to our Mediterranean climate. Chaparral consists of hardy shrubs like manzanita and chamise as well as other plants that can tolerate the long summers with no rain and constant sun. These species are adapted to drought, intense sun exposure, and infrequent but intense fire.

There are many misconceptions about the role of wildfire in chaparral ecosystems and how our communities should best prepare to live amongst this fire-prone landscape. Fire here plays a different role than it does in conifer forests, and it is important to distinguish the two ecosystems when considering what is natural and how communities can mitigate the damage caused by fires.



Chaparral is naturally comprised of dense shrubs. Photo by Bryant Baker

Natural Fire Ecology

We often hear that chaparral is “supposed to burn,” but that doesn’t tell the whole story. Before humans settled this area, we know from a variety of scientific evidence that chaparral burned on average every 30 – 150 years.

Once wildfires start in the chaparral-covered hills around our cities, they are naturally intense and burn every part of the shrubland community. After a wildfire blazes through an area, these shrubs immediately begin their post-fire cycle: “fire followers” quickly emerge, scrub oaks resprout from their root systems, many manzanita species resprout from underground burls, and ceanothus seeds germinate quickly in the charred soil. This is a process best left unaided as large burned areas are difficult to restore by planting shrubs and dispersing seed due to the precise species composition, timing, and conditions needed to restore an area with its native assemblage of plants.

Increased Fire Frequency

Some of the largest and most destructive wildfires that affected the Los Padres National Forest were started by human activity. As more people pack into our region, the chance for wildfires to ignite increases, and they are occurring far more frequently than they did centuries ago. Over 56% of the Los Padres National Forest has burned just in the last 20 years and many of those areas have burned two or three times in the last 50 years.

Fire is occurring too frequently for many of our native chaparral species to keep up. Species that only grow from seed following a fire are not given a chance to mature and produce more seed if another fire occurs in the area too soon. Eventually, areas that burn too frequently for too long will undergo “type conversion” — the permanent conversion of native chaparral to nonnative weeds and grasses. These nonnative plants do not stabilize the soil or provide food and shelter to wildlife nearly as well as chaparral species. And



The Thomas Fire burned over 150,000 acres of the Los Padres. Photo by Ronald L. Williams

there’s evidence that grasslands and invasive weedlands burn more quickly when wildfires do ignite, putting people and homes in their path at greater risk.

An often-recited myth is that wildfire suppression over the last century has caused an unnatural amount of vegetation to build up, increasing the likelihood of large and intense fires. This logic does not apply to chaparral and the latest science suggests that modern fires in our region are not outside of historical norms for fire size. Chaparral is naturally characterized by dense, dry shrubs. In our region, the myth that vegetation is too dense or that it is “decadent” or dead because of past fire suppression efforts can have real consequences on the management of ecosystems that naturally experience intense but infrequent fires.

Protecting Communities and Ecosystems

Many ideas on how to protect people and structures from wildfire in our region developed over the last century often involve constructing fuel breaks, clearing “brush,” and conducting controlled burns to thin areas of vegetation that may burn during a future wildfire. Despite the good intentions, many of these techniques are not effective in preventing wildfires or slowing their growth, and they can have significant environmental consequences. In fact, these methods are often adapted from use in the hardwood and coniferous forests found far north and east of our region. What may work in the Sierra Nevada or in Northern California is often not effective in the unique chaparral landscape found throughout the Los Padres National Forest and the surrounding area.

Real Solutions

So how do we protect communities from wildfire? This question has a complex answer with many possible solutions. First and foremost, we need to redouble our efforts to reduce the number of unnatural wildfire ignitions. For example, the 2017

wildfire season showed that we need to start thinking about underground power lines in high-fire areas. We also need to ensure that our firefighters have all of the tools and emerging technologies they need to quickly detect wildfires as soon as they start, and to mobilize initial attack resources even more quickly than they already do.

In addition to the need for reducing unnatural wildfire ignitions, we have long advocated for smarter development practices, thinking critically about where we build homes.

Development in the wildland urban interface, the area most affected by wildfires, is a growing side effect of urban sprawl in local cities. This puts considerable pressure on land managers to prevent fires from moving into these areas and threaten lives and property. Limiting the construction of homes and other buildings in areas of high fire risk can mitigate future wildfire damage.

For homes and structures that already exist in areas at risk of being affected by wildfire, defensible space is a first step to better-protecting your home. Fire scientists recommend clearing vegetation no further than 100 feet from your buildings. Removing 40% of woody vegetation immediately adjacent to structures while also ensuring



Clay tile roofing is a great example of fire-safe building material.

that other vegetation does not overhang or touch structures have been shown to be some of the best measures a homeowner can take.

During high-wind conditions, embers can be spread up to a mile or more, creating a dangerous situation where houses far away from the flames can ignite. Building or retrofitting structures with fire-safe materials can significantly reduce the risk of fire damage from embers. These steps include replacing roofing with non-wood materials such as fiberglass-asphalt shingles, or clay tiles. Vents should also be covered with screens to inhibit ember entry into your home. We also recommend installing double-paned windows to reduce the heating of indoor materials from a fire outside.

The Wrong Approach

Many of the ideas for how to protect communities involve vegetation removal in remote areas and large-scale landscape alterations such as prescribed fire, vegetation thinning, and fuel breaks — techniques that are often ineffective in chaparral.

Prescribed fire in chaparral only exacerbates the type conversion process as controlled burns would probably have to be conducted very frequently (every five years or less) in order to be effective. They would also have to be conducted during the winter or spring when many wildlife species are breeding and birds are nesting in the area. Prescribed burns during this time may heat up the moist soil to the point that seeds are damaged by the resulting steam as well. And there is always the risk of prescribed burns escaping and becoming full-fledged wildfires.

There is evidence that Native Americans used prescribed fire along the central

coast before Europeans settled in our region. However, scientists have determined that prescribed fire was being used to purposefully convert the dense chaparral to grasslands to allow for movement across the landscape, the creation of open hunting areas, and the selection of edible herbaceous plants — not to reduce the incidence of large wildfires.

Fuel breaks are another method commonly employed in and around the Los Padres. A study in 2011 showed that in the Southern California national forests — including the Los Padres — fuel breaks often do not stop wildfires, especially when weather conditions such as strong winds are present. The 2017 Thomas Fire and other large, wind-driven wildfires in our region easily jumped fuel breaks, highways, and other land features due to embers being blown far in front of the fire’s leading edge.

Despite the science, remote fuel break projects are still approved throughout our national forest. These fuel breaks are often built far away from communities at risk, and they involve initially clearing most mature vegetation and favoring regrowth of nonnative grasses and weeds. Fuel breaks can be as wide as a football field and several miles long, removing prime habitat for many plant species that are only found in small populations along ridges in our region such as the Refugio manzanita. These plant species provide food and shelter to native birds and insects that are critical for ecosystem health.

You can read a more comprehensive analysis of fire in our region on our website. We are also hosting presentations on this topic such as Fire Ecologist Dr. Jon Keeley’s talk on chaparral wildfires on April 26 in Santa Barbara. Visit LPFW.org/FireTalk for more information and to RSVP.

WILD THINGS: FIRE FOLLOWERS

Once areas in our region burn during a wildfire, a spectacular event takes place in the days, months, and years following. Specialized plant species responding to environmental cues like charred soil, smoke, and increased sunlight emerge from the soil in areas scorched by fire. These “fire followers” begin their growth cycle soon after the fire is out, especially once the rains come. Below are a few of the fire followers you may see in recently-burned areas along the Central Coast and the months in which they typically bloom. Be sure to avoid touching poodle-dog bush as it can cause a severe skin rash!



Fire Poppy
(*Papaver californicum*)
April - May



Large-flowered Phacelia
(*Phacelia grandiflora*)
February - June



Twining Snapdragon
(*Antirrhinum kelloggii*)
March - May



Poodle-dog Bush
(*Eriodictyon parryi*)
May - August

THIRD ANNUAL
WILD!
Santa Barbara

A BENEFIT FOR
LOS PADRES FORESTWATCH

Santa Barbara WILD! on Sunday, October 22 was a phenomenal success! With the support of our sponsors, guests, members, volunteers, and community, we welcomed 250 people and raised over \$120,000 to protect our region's iconic landscapes, nearly twice as much as last year!

Our sponsors and attendees make this unique event possible. Seasons Catering served a sumptuous dinner and delectable appetizers, and Ventura Rental Party Center provided the elegant tenting. Our event production needs were generously supported by Delicate Productions and Ed Kish. Geoff Green expertly emceed our event, auctioneer Jim Nye worked his magic, and The Bryan Titus Trio provided the perfect soundtrack for the day.

Our thanks also go to Figueroa Mountain Brewing Co., Beckmen Vineyards, and Solminer Wine. We are truly grateful to Carol Gravelle's stellar graphic designs and Ashley Lee's beautiful program, and contributing photographers Luke Butcher and Pete Davis.

Our impressive silent auction featured unique items from local vendors and

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**\$120,000
RAISED!**

ForestWatch gets WILD! with third annual fundraiser in Santa Barbara!

businesses. Highlights included a weeklong stay at an oceanfront villa in Mexico, a ski adventure in Park City, gear from Toad&Co and Patagonia, and a hand-crafted table by Keefrider.

Capping off the evening, our live auction proved to be a grand success! Fund-A-Need raised \$56,400 for our land conservation and advocacy programs, inspired by a matching challenge from an anonymous donor.

Our deep appreciation goes to our tireless event committee who contribute months of their time and talents to bringing our silent and live auction to life, and for making this event run smoothly and successfully — Sammie, Jim, Lyndsey, Steve, and Chris — we salute you!

And we are truly grateful to our volunteers who ignite the event with their enthusiasm, energy, hard work and willing contribution of their precious time. Santa Barbara WILD! would not be possible without them.

With the momentum generated at this event, we are prepared to forge ahead with even more might and determination to protect our local backcountry!



The Bryan Titus Trio provided the perfect soundtrack for the event (top) while attendees enjoyed local wine and auctions (bottom).
Photos by Pete Davis

**STELLAR
VOLUNTEERS**

Stewardship successes around the Los Padres National Forest and Carrizo Plain National Monument!

Carrizo Plain Fence Removal

A group of ForestWatch volunteers made the trip out to the Carrizo Plain National Monument to remove decades-old fencing from a 42-acre property recently purchased by the Carrizo Plain Conservancy and donated to the Bureau of Land Management.



These volunteers braved the heat to remove relic fencing from the Carrizo!
Photo by Bryant Baker

These incredible volunteers removed a quarter mile of three-strand barbed wire fencing during only two hours of work!

Thanks to these volunteers and to the Carrizo Plain Conservancy for ensuring that this land will be preserved for future generations to enjoy!

Piedra Blanca Cleanup Hike

Before the Thomas Fire hit, a group of 16 volunteers (and one dog!) ventured out to Piedra Blanca in the Los Padres National Forest to clean up trash. This awesome group of volunteers hiked three miles and removed more than 100 pounds of trash from along the trail and around a popular swimming hole on Sespe Creek!

Our primary focus was around a swimming



People of all ages enjoyed removing invasive Cape ivy!
Photo by Bryant Baker

hole along Sespe Creek not far from the trailhead — an area heavily visited during the summer. There we found the usual: bottles, cans, wrappers, and the occasional decaying sleeping pad. One volunteer even found a seemingly bottomless cache of broken bottles wedged between some rocks.

Thanks to all who participated in this cleanup hike!

Cape Ivy Eradication in Rattlesnake Canyon

An awesome group of seven volunteers from ForestWatch and UCSB Adventure Programs successfully removed the only known infestation of invasive Cape ivy from Rattlesnake Canyon just north of Santa Barbara.

The infestation was discovered within Los Padres National Forest boundaries (but on Santa Barbara city park property) by ForestWatch while surveying the canyon for invasive plants earlier this year.

After two hours of unwinding vines from tree branches and carefully pulling out the Cape ivy's roots, the group had successfully removed all of the invasive vine from the area. The collected plant material was hauled back out of the canyon in trash bags to ensure that the plant would not resprout from discarded plant fragments.

We would like to thank the UCSB Coastal Fund for providing funding for this project, UCSB Adventure Programs for sending some of their volunteers, and the City of Santa Barbara for granting access to the site.

Santa Paula Canyon Cleanup Hike

A big crew of 27 volunteers hiked roughly 8 miles to remove over 125 pounds of trash from Santa Paula Canyon in the Los Padres National Forest. The area is home to the most popular trail in the southern Los Padres due to its scenic canyon views



and the famous swimming hole known as the Punch Bowl.

This cleanup hike was also part of our ongoing collaboration with Figueroa Mountain Brewing Co. to clean up areas around the national forest with the help of members from their local Mug Clubs. Their taproom in Westlake Village promoted the cleanup and we were glad to have their Mug Club represented at the cleanup. They even gave each volunteer a voucher for a free beer at one of their taprooms (if they were old enough, of course)! And thanks goes out to Fig Mtn Brew for also giving us impenetrable malt bags to use at this and other cleanups. These bags have proven to be perfect for cleanup hikes through the shrubs that often tore open lesser trash bags.

Cherry Creek Cleanup

Days before the Thomas Fire began, a group of sophomore students from Besant Hill School in Ojai teamed up with ForestWatch to spend their morning removing nearly 500



The trash was no match for this group of students.
Photo by Bryant Baker

pounds of trash from along Cherry Creek in the Los Padres National Forest.

After only a couple of hours, this incredible group of students had collected nearly 500 pounds from three sites spanning an acre of land. We had a great time working with these young volunteers who worked nonstop through the chilly weather.

Upcoming Projects

You can stay up to date with our upcoming projects and learn how to join the by visiting

LPFW.org/volunteer

Russ & Barbara Radom
Thank you!



STELLAR INTERNS

Every quarter we are lucky to have great interns from local colleges. Since last summer, we have had five interns help work with us on a variety of important projects.

Elizabeth Chen - a graduate student in the Bren School of Environmental Science & Management at UCSB, Elizabeth served as our Conservation Intern during the summer, helping with a variety of research projects and invasive plant surveys.

Linus Lau - our Conservation Intern during the fall and winter, Linus helped write wildlife pages on our website and worked on an ongoing invasive Cape ivy removal project in Rattlesnake Canyon, all while finishing up his undergraduate degree at UCSB.

Julius Thomas - an undergraduate at Santa Barbara City College, Julius was our first ever Graphic Design Intern, helping us design new educational materials and promotional gear.

Annette Tran - another graduate student in the UCSB Bren School, Annette was our GIS Intern over the summer and fall. She helped put together over a dozen new maps that helped us with our Save the Carrizo Plain initiative and other projects.

Luke Williams - while finishing his undergraduate degree at Santa Barbara City College, Luke spent many weekends out in the national forest helping us document various issues as well as some of our volunteer projects as our Photography Intern.



50TH ANNIVERSARY: SAN RAFAEL WILDERNESS

Celebrating one of the crown jewels of the central coast

Some of the most remote, wild, and rugged landscapes of California's central coast region are found in the backcountry of Santa Barbara, in an area known as the San Rafael Wilderness. These lands, nestled deep within the San Rafael Mountains, were set aside by Congress in 1968, and today they remain permanently protected under the Wilderness Act for current and future generations to explore and enjoy.



The San Rafael Wilderness is full of geological wonders.
Photo by Bryant Baker

The area earned national fame as the first primitive area to be formally protected as Wilderness. In the 1960s, local residents worked with members of Congress and conservation groups in Washington DC to secure the strongest protections possible for this iconic landscape, laying the groundwork for future citizen-based wilderness initiatives throughout the country.

On March 21, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the San Rafael Wilderness bill into law, formally designating nearly 143,000 acres of the Santa Barbara backcountry as wilderness. During the signing ceremony at the White House, the President noted:

"I want so much to protect and extend the legacy of our land. I want so much to take the pieces of our birthright that we should never have lost—and reclaim them, restore them and return them to the American people. San Rafael is part of that work.... Wilderness parks should be a part of the America of tomorrow — the kind of America that we think we are building today. I am very proud to sign this bill. I believe that it will enrich the spirit of America."

Since 1968, the San Rafael Wilderness has been expanded two times. A small 2,000-acre chunk was added in 1984, expanding the area's northwestern boundary to include the West Fork Mill Creek watershed and other unnamed tributaries to Manzanita Creek.

In 1992, the Los Padres Condor Range and River Protection Act expanded the San Rafael Wilderness Area northward to include 46,400 of the La Brea Creek watershed located in the remote backcountry east of Santa Maria. The San Rafael Wilderness boundary has remained unchanged ever since.

In 2010, ForestWatch — along with The Wilderness Society and the California Wilderness Coalition — began working with local Congressional representatives on the third expansion of the San Rafael Wilderness. Most recently, Congressman Salud Carbajal and Senator Kamala Harris introduced the Central Coast Wild Heritage Act. That bill seeks to add approximately 66,000 acres to the San Rafael Wilderness as part of an overall effort to designate 250,000 acres of the forest as wilderness.

Today, the San Rafael Wilderness is one of the crown jewels of the central coast, spanning more than 191,000 acres of some of our region's most remote and wild landscapes. While the area continues to retain its untrammeled wilderness character, it is also facing increasing challenges. Local residents, nonprofit organizations, and the U.S. Forest Service will continue working together to ensure that the wildness of the San Rafael endures for another fifty years and beyond.

Given the area's rich natural and cultural heritage, iconic landscapes, wildlife habitat, and free-flowing rivers, the San Rafael Wilderness will endure for generations to come. And just as they have over the last half-century, local residents and conservation advocates will continue to play an important role in determining the fate of this majestic wilderness. Let us all take a moment to celebrate this land and the people who have worked tirelessly to protect and defend our region's wilderness legacy.

Visit our website at LPFW.org/san-rafael to learn more about this unique place and about upcoming events commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the San Rafael.

LAWSUIT: CARRIZO PLAIN REVIEW DOCUMENTS KEPT SECRET

We recently filed suit against the Department of the Interior after the agency refused to provide us with access to public documents related to the federal agency's review of the Carrizo Plain National Monument last summer.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's national monument review was shrouded in secrecy despite the nearly 3 million Americans who commented in favor of keeping protections for 27 national monuments, including the Carrizo Plain in San Luis Obispo County. Missing an August deadline for issuing the final report for the review, Secretary Zinke finally released a report with limited information in December, including the administration's plans to shrink Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments in Utah. The report did not contain information specific to the Carrizo Plain.

In August, ForestWatch filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request with the Department of the Interior in an attempt to obtain documents related to the review of

the Carrizo Plain National Monument — why it was selected to be reviewed, agency communications on the future of the national monument, and public comments referencing the Carrizo Plain. The agency did not indicate whether they would comply with the request. After sending numerous inquiries to the agency over the course of six months, ForestWatch was still not told if or when the FOIA request would be fulfilled, leaving us no option but to bring the matter to federal court.

The Freedom of Information Act requires agencies to respond to requests for public records within 20 working days of receipt, and allows an additional ten-day extension for special circumstances. Our request has been lingering with the agency for more than six months.

A study released earlier this year showed 68 FOIA lawsuits pending against Zinke's Department of the Interior, the third highest of any federal agency and a 26% increase over the previous year. This is part of a greater



Photo by Ronald L. Williams

pattern of the Trump Administration failing to comply with FOIA. The lawsuit comes on the heels of a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing earlier this year where a group of bipartisan legislators expressed concerns about the lack of transparency under the Trump Administration and the rising tide of lawsuits that agencies are facing for failing to adequately respond to public record requests under the FOIA.

COMMERCIAL LOGGING NEAR MT. PINOS?

In March, Los Padres National Forest officials announced plans to fast-track two massive commercial logging projects near Mt. Pinos. These projects would involve removing trees of all sizes and up to 95% of sagebrush habitat along 12 miles of Tecuya Ridge and across 1,200 acres of Cuddy Valley between Lockwood Valley and the San Emigdio Mountains. In the announcement, the Forest Service indicated that it would fast-track both projects without environmental review.



Tecuya Ridg in the San Emigdio Mountains is home to trails through some of the Los Padres' only mixed-conifer forest.
Photo by Bryant Baker

The logging and clearing would affect nearly 4.5 square miles of some of the only truly forested land in the Los Padres as well as over 1,000 acres of the Antimony Inventoried Roadless Area. The area supports dozens of species of threatened, endangered, sensitive, and rare wildlife. So important is this area that we urged the Forest Service to recommend it for wilderness protection. The agency refused, and now we know why.

We worked with our own biologists to analyze four years of condor data, which revealed 14 roosting sites within the Tecuya Ridge project area and an additional 24 roosting sites within a half-mile of the project area. Roosts — ancient trees that condors use for rest and shelter during long flights across the landscape — are vitally important to the long-term survival of the species. The Forest Service's own standards prohibit intrusive activities within a half-mile of condor roosts. Over 65% of the Tecuya Ridge project area is within this half-mile roost buffer zone, yet the Forest Service does not plan to fully analyze how the

project will impact these critical sites.

California spotted owls — a species currently under endangered status review by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service — have also been known to occur around the Tecuya Ridge project area. These owls need dense, old-growth coniferous forests with multi-layered canopies to thrive.

The Forest Service's announcement also reverses the agency's previous commitment to prepare more detailed Environmental Assessments (EAs) for logging and clearing projects in response to our objections to six similar projects in 2005.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

The Forest Service will accept comments until they make a final decision about the projects. Visit LPFW.org/logging to easily submit a comment online. Let the Forest Service know they should prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement that explores alternatives to commercial logging as well the projects' potential impacts to wildlife.



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