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# Los Padres National Forest

*Land Management Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report for 2016*



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Los Padres National Forest Stakeholders,

I am pleased to present the Los Padres National Forest's (LPNF) fiscal year 2016 Monitoring and Evaluation Report. Included within the report is a summary of specific program accomplishments for the year, and evaluation of whether plans, projects and activities are implemented as designed and in compliance with the 2005 Los Padres National Forest Land Management Plan (LMP), as amended.

The LMP emphasizes and identifies monitoring as a key element in all programs to assure the achievement of desired conditions over time. Recently implemented projects are monitored as well as ongoing activities, programs, and resource status. Through monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive management, we aim to further increase management effectiveness and resource protection.

It is important to me to keep you informed of the results of our monitoring. If you are interested in becoming involved in a project or other planning activity, please see our national website <http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/>. Additional information and opportunities on the Los Padres National Forest may be found on our Forest website <http://www.fs.usda.gov/lpnf/>.

Sincerely,

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KEVIN B. ELLIOTT  
Forest Supervisor  
Los Padres National Forest

February 18, 2020

Date

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## Introduction

Monitoring is a means for confirming the sufficiency and adequacy of guidance in the Land Management Plan (LMP), and for tracking the status of and trends in changing resource conditions. It facilitates the process for adapting to change and documents the need to update, amend and eventually revise land management plans in order to achieve desired conditions while ensuring healthy National Forests exist for future generations. Monitoring requirements are found in all three parts of the LMP, and a summary of these requirements is located in Appendix C in Part 3 of the LMP.

Part 1 monitoring assesses resource conditions and movement towards desired conditions over the long-term. This is completed by measuring the change over time to environmental indicators and outcome evaluation questions identified in the LMP. The status of the trend relative to the desired resource condition serves as the basis for determining when a need for change in land management planning is indicated. Part 1 monitoring is completed at 5-year intervals, with the last assessment reported on June 15, 2012 for fiscal years (FY) 2006-2010.

Part 2 monitoring focuses on program implementation through accomplishments tracked in Forest Service corporate databases. The annual accomplishment indicators determine if the program areas are implementing the objectives and strategies established in Part 2 of the LMP.

Part 3 monitoring is conducted at the project or activity level in order to evaluate the effectiveness and application of design criteria established in the LMP. Projects that were completed or were in ongoing implementation in FY 2016 were selected for monitoring from representative functional areas and districts. Selected projects were then visited by an interdisciplinary monitoring team to review the application and effectiveness of the design criteria.

The FY 2016 LMP Monitoring and Evaluation Report documents the evaluation of selected projects and programs where activities occurred during October 1, 2015 through September 30, 2016.

## Part 2 Monitoring

Monitoring identified in Part 2 of the Southern California Land Management Plans is focused on program implementation including inventory activities. The National Forests currently use attainment reporting for tracking program accomplishments as discussed in Part 2 of the LMP. The attainment measures are linked to the National Strategic Plan and report accomplishments through a national reporting system. Although the system will evolve over time as management needs change, Table 1 represents the type of measures that are currently reported on an annual basis. These attainments are a reflection of current budget and staffing.

**Table 1: FY2016 Accomplishments**

Indicator	Units	2016 Accomplishment
Acres of Terrestrial Habitat Enhanced	Acres	2742
Miles of Aquatic Habitat Enhanced	Miles	17.5
Acres of Noxious Weeds Treated	Acres	157
Acres of Vegetation Improved (also see Hazardous Fuels Reduction)	Acres	484
Acres of Watershed Improved	Acres	N/A*
Acres of Land Ownership Adjusted	Acres	0
Number of Heritage Resources Managed to Standard	Number	20
Products Provided to Standard (Interpretation and Education)	Number	N/A*
Recreation Special Use Authorizations Administered to Standard	Number	116
PAOT Days Managed to Standard (Developed Sites)	PAOT Days	260,283
Recreation Days Managed to Standard (General Forest Areas)	Days	N/A*
Land Use Authorizations Administered to Standard	Number	271
Number of Mineral Operations Administered to Standard	Number	1
Manage Grazing Allotments	Acres	73,694
Acres of Hazardous Fuel Reduction	Acres	3,816
Miles of Passenger Car Roads Maintained to Objective Maintenance Level	Miles	119
Miles of High Clearance & Back Country Roads Maintained to Objective Maintenance Level	Miles	106
Miles of Road Decommissioned	Miles	0

\* Accomplishment indicator was not tracked for fiscal year 2016.

The indicators for the number of watershed acres improved, interpretation and education products provided to standard, and general forest areas recreation days managed to standard, were not tracked in fiscal year 2016.

### Part 3 Monitoring

Implementation and effectiveness monitoring for Part 3 of the LMP is conducted at the project level, and is completed for new projects and ongoing activities and sites. A sample of projects and ongoing activities are selected, evaluated for compliance with the LMP, and visited by an interdisciplinary team (IDT) to review the application and effectiveness of design criteria. If the LMP design criteria are determined to be ineffective, then the IDT recommends possible corrective actions, and any required adjustments to the design criteria are documented in this report and updated in the LMP in accordance with Forest Service procedures.

The following questions are investigated for each reviewed project or ongoing activity:

- Is the project consistent with the LMP, and were LMP goals, desired conditions, and standards incorporated into the decision document?
- Were mitigations or design criteria identified from the LMP, consultations, and public input included in the decision, and implementation documents?
- Was the project implemented effectively?
- Were mitigations or design criteria effective?

- Were monitoring requirements identified and followed?

The following projects were chosen from a stratified sample of projects representing program areas and districts on the Los Padres National Forest. The LMP monitoring appendix calls for a 10% random sample of new and ongoing projects. Technically, an ongoing project is one that is either implemented over a long span of time, a routine ongoing activity, or is part of a long-term permitted activity such as livestock grazing on a range allotment, but which still requires NEPA-compliant environmental review for reauthorization. A new project is one which is planned, implemented, and completed within a recent period. Projects that are a simple renewal of a permit with no change in condition or permittee typically do not present the kinds of planning and implementation issues Part 3 monitoring is trying to monitor. Therefore, these kinds of projects are not included in the sample unless there is some kind of overriding resource issue that compels examination. The LPNF typically has approximately 50 ongoing and new projects in any year, so the strategy is to select projects covering a range of program areas geographically distributed over the Forest. Hence, when possible, at least one project per District is selected while striving to have several major program areas represented.

**Table 2: Projects Selected for Review**

Ranger District	Project Name	Program Area	Documentation Reviewed
Santa Barbara	Hazard Tree Reduction at White Rock Day Use Area	Facilities Management	Decision Memo; CE Checklist; Contract
Santa Barbara	Baron Ranch Trail Construction and Maintenance	Public Use and Enjoyment	Decision Memo; CE Checklist
Monterey	Grizzly Mine Closure	Mining/Recreation Management	Scoping Letter; Decision Memo; Contract; BA/BE
Santa Lucia	West Cuesta Ridge Road Repair and Maintenance	Road Management	Decision Memo; CE Checklist
Santa Lucia	Pozo La Panza Trail Reroute	Public Use and Enjoyment	Decision Memo; CE Checklist; Resource Monitoring Data

## ***Hazard Tree Reduction at White Rock Day Use Area***

### **Project Description**

Within the Lower Santa Ynez Recreation Area an evaluation of hazardous trees was conducted by the Forest Service and Parks Management Company. This evaluation revealed that there were hazardous limbs and dead trees at the White Rock Day Use Area. Due to a protracted drought (2012-18), stress and/or an infestation by bark beetle led to several Coast Live Oak, non-native pine, and non-native black locust trees dying. As a result, these trees needed to be removed from these areas because the dead and downed trees were hazardous fuels in a fire prone area, posing a risk to life and property. Several dead limbs and trees impacted picnic tables, barbeque grills, parking areas, and toilets. Local fire crews removed some of the hazardous trees and limbs, and Forest Service equipment operators used an excavator to knock down some of the large dead oaks. The excavator then placed the logs and slash in piles. To the extent possible, all work occurred outside of the breeding season for birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Any work that occurred during the nesting season for birds required nesting bird surveys. Dead trees that did not pose a risk to life and property were left as potential wildlife habitat and three of the log and slash piles nearest the river bank were retained as wildlife habitat. The downed tree and slash piles were subsequently chipped using a contract excavator and a rubber tracked tub grinder. Crews were requested to refrain from driving off road when the ground was moist to prevent rutting and erosion. Wood chips were scattered to mitigate erosion and support noxious weed control.

This action was covered under a NEPA category of actions that are excluded from documentation [repair and maintenance of administrative sites or 36 CFR220.6(d)(3)]. The Forest Fuels Manager, Nic Elmquist, and District Ranger, John F. Smith, discussed the project with the District Resource officer, Valerie Hubbartt and the South Zone Archaeologist, Steve Galbraith.

### **Implementation and Monitoring**

Project implementation was initiated during December 2016 and resumed in May 2017. The work in December included the removal of some dead trees with an excavator and piling of downed logs and slash. In May 2017 all trees marked for removal were surveyed by the District Resource Officer for nesting birds and none were detected.

Fire crews and contractors implemented erosion control measures consistent with project requirements, such as spreading wood chips onsite and refraining from driving off road when the ground was moist. No erosion was noted during the project, or a year later.



**Before and after photos of hazardous trees removed above a picnic site**



2017 photo of tub grinder and excavator chipping logs and slash



2018 Photo of same area



Log and slash pile retained for wildlife habitat

**Conclusion**

This project ameliorated the risk to life and property from fallen tree limbs and dead trees, while also reducing impacts to nesting birds, retaining wildlife snags and downed logs, preventing further soil erosion, and helped prevent infestations of noxious weeds through the use of wood chips.

This project supports Forest Goals 2.1, 3.1 and 6.2 to decrease infestation of noxious weeds, provide the public with a well-maintained and safe recreational experience, and provide ecological conditions to sustain viable populations of native species, respectively. Finally, design criterion S18 was also invoked because all trees were surveyed for raptor nests, with none detected.

This project follows Forest Goals 5.1 and 7.1 to maintain public safety and environmental stability.



## ***Baron Ranch Trail Construction and Maintenance***

### **Project Description**

The Baron Ridge Trail project involved construction of 3.5 miles of new trail that connected to the existing Santa Barbara County's Baron Ranch Trail. The trail provided improved connectivity between existing trails on County land, Gaviota State Park, and land within the LPNF. The Santa Barbara Trails Council (SBTC) completed the environmental assessment, with review from the Forest, completed the construction of the trail, and provided project implementation monitoring. The project consisted of construction, maintenance, and use of this trail extension. The project was designed to avoid existing populations of Refugio manzanita (*Arctostaphylos refugioensis*) and late-flowering mariposa lily (*Calochortus fimbriatus*), both of which are Forest Service sensitive plant species. Multiple mitigation measures or Best Management Practices (BMP's) were built into the project.

### **Monitoring**

This action was analyzed under an environmental assessment and documented in a decision notice completed on July 28, 2015. The analysis of potential effects included but not limited to the visual qualities, botanical and biological resources, noxious weeds, water quality, fire hazards and cultural resources. There were a number of mitigations built into the project. They included provisions to mitigate impacts to birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, biological and botanical resources, noxious weeds, cultural resources and water quality.

Trail construction was performed using a small trail tractor during early March 2016. The timing of the work helped to avoid the bird breeding season and all BMPs were implemented. Prior to construction, a private consultant biologist hired by the SBTC, briefed construction crews on botanical and biological resources that had the potential to be within the project area and monitored all construction activities. To the extent possible, late flowering mariposa lily and Refugio manzanita were avoided. To prevent the spread of existing weed infestations or introduce new weed species, trail workers were instructed to clean all boots, tools and equipment prior to entering the project area. One of the BMPs for the project required monitoring of the distribution and abundance of noxious weeds during project implementation, and the eradication of new weed species detected following project implementation.

A site visit to the trail was completed on June 15, 2016, with about one mile of trail inspected beginning from the top of West Camino Cielo Road and heading south. Photos documenting the completion and status of the trail were taken. The trail was constructed according to standards outlined in the environmental assessment and followed Forest Service trail construction standards. Trail surfaces were constructed in such a way as to dissipate intercepted water in a uniform manner along the trail by out-sloping the trail, creating rolling dips, in-sloping with drains, or crowning with drains. Where feasible, and consistent with protecting public safety, out-sloping was used and rolling the grade (rolling dips) was designed as the primary drainage technique.

Owing to the high density of Refugio manzanita on the north end of the trail, some manzanita removal could not be avoided. The number of manzanita removed or damaged was minimal and insufficient to disturb the entire Refugio manzanita population, or significantly reduce plant recruitment. Larger manzanita within the trail prism were pruned by hand, and larger oak trees and shrubs were avoided. The project may benefit late flowering mariposa lily since it thrives in more open habitats. Brush clearing was confined to the established trail and kept to a minimum by removing only what was necessary to establish the minimum trail width. The trail tractor could not avoid traversing West Camino Cielo, an area known

to have infestations of perennial veldt grass (*Ehrharta calycina*) and yellow star thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), in order to access the site and establish the trail. Although yellow star thistle was not in flower at the time of construction, veldt grass was located on the road shoulder, so there is the possibility that these two species could have been introduced onto the newly constructed trail. In support of BMPs, the trail will need to be surveyed for noxious weeds and eradicated if found.



Trail looking south



Refugio manzanita (larger individuals avoided)



Most Refugio manzanita were avoided. Some were destroyed during construction of the trail, but noticeably re-sprouting.

## Conclusion

This project supports Forest Goal 3.1 (Provide for Public Use and Natural Resource Protection) by providing recreation facilities that are safe and well-maintained, while also providing for the protection of natural resources. This project is consistent with the place-based program emphasis to "monitor threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate and sensitive species (listed species habitat and populations), protect cultural resources, and promote uses compatible with listed species." This project conforms to LMP direction Part 2, Transportation 3 - Improve Trails, including the following objectives:

- Construct and maintain the trail network to levels commensurate with area objectives, sustainable resource conditions, and the type and level of use.
- Maintain and/or develop access points and connecting trails linked to surrounding communities and create opportunities for non-motorized trips of short duration.

This project complies with design criteria related to wildlife and implementation of recreation activities (S9, S10, S11, S13, S25 and S34). In conclusion, trail work occurred outside of the breeding season for birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, minimal trail work was completed within riparian areas, and to the extent possible, all listed plant species were avoided. Regular maintenance of the Baron Ranch Trail will help to reduce erosion and siltation within streams, and assist in maintaining the surrounding habitat by keeping trail users within the trail boundary. Mitigations in the decision notice were executed as outlined.

## ***Grizzly Mine Closure***

### **Project Description**

The Grizzly Mine is located on the Monterey Ranger District, along Alder Creek approximately 1/8 mile north of the Alder Creek Campground. The mine consists of one adit (horizontal mine passage) and two shafts about 66 feet deep plus over 400 feet of tunnels. It was determined that the open adit and shafts needed to be closed in order to mitigate safety risks to the public. Bat surveys indicated that at least six bat species occupied the mine, including the Townsend's big-eared bat, a Forest Service sensitive species. It was decided that the proper course of action would be to install a steel bat gate at the main adit and two raised bat gates above the two shafts, as this would eliminate entry of visitors into the mine while still allowing bats to use the complex underground structure as habitat.



### **Monitoring**

The proposed action was analyzed under a categorical exclusion and documented in a decision memo completed on April 26, 2016. The applicable category of actions was "Timber stand and or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction" [36 CFR 220.6(e)(6)]. The analysis of potential effects included review of the standard resource conditions that should be considered when determining whether a project can be categorically excluded from further documentation in an EA or EIS, and also included evaluation of noxious weed risk, management indicator species, and migratory bird species. No extraordinary circumstances were identified. Work on the project began on July 7, 2016 and was completed on July 10, 2016.

Post-implementation visits to the project site have revealed no evidence of public entry into the mine or disturbance of the bats.

### **Conclusion**

This project supports Forest Goal 3.1 - Provide for Public Use and Natural Resource Protection, and Forest Goal 4.1a - Administer Minerals and Energy Resource Development While Protecting Ecosystem Health by providing a Forest environment free of man-made safety hazards while also providing for the protection of natural resources.

## ***West Cuesta Ridge Road Repair and Maintenance***

### **Project Description**

Repair and maintenance of the asphalt and dirt road known as West Cuesta Ridge Road, Forest Road 29S28, (also known as TV Tower Road) was achieved by patching potholes, repairing, smoothing and stabilizing road surface materials; shaping and/or rocking a road surface; installation and maintenance of rolling and critical dips; restoring functional capacity of inboard ditches, cross drain, or drainage structures; roadside vegetation trimming; and installation of access control structures, such as bollards, fences or equivalent to reduce off road uses. The road is approximately 7.1 miles long, beginning at Cuesta Grade Summit at Highway 101 and ending at Tassajera Peak.

West Cuesta Ridge Road had been deteriorating to the point of requiring extensive repair and maintenance. Forest Service staff were unable to use the road in its former unsafe condition, leaving the area minimally managed. Members of the public that were able to pass through the road, experienced vehicular stranding owing to tire damage. Likewise, communication site permittees had limited access to communication sites along the road, and were unable to manage the infrastructure.



Multiple communication site permittees coordinated with one another to garner sufficient funds to cover the costs for the major road repair work that was needed to access their respective communication towers. The Forest Service coordinated the efforts with these permittees to determine the cost it would take to improve the road for motorized access within the existing road prism.

### **Planning**

The action to maintain the road was analyzed and documented in a NEPA Compliance Checklist for a Categorical Exclusion titled West Cuesta Ridge Road, (Forest Road 29S28) Repair and Maintenance signed December 9, 2015 by District Ranger, Nathan L. Rezeau.

The decision included 1) mitigations for biological monitoring of bird nesting sites during the limited operating period between March 15 – August 15, 2) flagging and avoidance of sensitive resources affected by the road maintenance, and 3) best management practices (BMPs) to mitigate erosion and water quality impacts. Best management practices including equipment and clothing inspections, as well as equipment

Los Padres National Forest Land Management Plan refueling and services were also included.

A fire plan was also prepared and implemented for this project. No heritage sites were within the project area.

**Monitoring**

Project implementation was initiated in November 2015 and work continued into February 2016. The District Resource Officer, Zone Lands Officer and Forest Engineers, coordinated with Pacific Gas and Electric, and their contractors, to complete the road maintenance and installation of heavy duty barriers. All mitigations were followed.

Completed work included patching potholes; repairing smoothing, and stabilizing road surface materials; shaping the road surface; installation and maintenance of rolling and critical dips; restoring functional capacity of inboard ditches, cross drains, or drainage structures; roadside vegetation trimming of no more than ten feet from the road edge; and installation of access control pipe barriers.

**Conclusion**

This project was a great success and resulted in eliminating problems that were causing soil erosion and damage to vehicles.

By repairing the deteriorated asphalt road and roadside drainage, the public, permittees and Forest Service staff can now safely drive on West Cuesta Ridge. Continued maintenance will be needed to keep the road from becoming damaged again.

This project was consistent with the Land Management Plan, Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and the National Forest Management Act of 1976.



## **Pozo La Panza Trail Reroute**

### **Project Description**

In 2012, the Santa Lucia Ranger District collaborated with the Central Coast Motorcycle Association (CCMA) to discuss multiple Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) trail reroutes that were unsustainable, several that were within private property, and ways to improve OHV trail connectivity and sustainability in the Pozo/La Panza OHV area. A proposal was completed that included reroutes on nine trails. An OHV grant from the California Off-Highway Motorized Recreation Vehicle Division was awarded to the Forest that funded eleven reroutes on nine OHV trails. Implementation of these routes as well as restoration of existing routes was made possible with assistance from an Enterprise trail crew, local hand crews and volunteers, and continued until 2019. The Enterprise trail crew traveled to the LPNF on multiple tours to complete the construction of the routes during ideal soil conditions. The CCMA applied for a separate OHV grant to complete the restoration of the old routes, which included fencing off the original route and posting signage. The eleven sections of reroutes took place on Howard's Bypass, Tower, Navajo Bypass, Benchmark, Mare Springs, La Panza Bypass, Las Chiches 4x4, Las Chiches Cutoff, and Queen Bee.



Navajo Bypass reroute - unsustainable section of trail pavers.

### **Monitoring**

The Forest collaborated with the NEPA compliance consultants to ensure that adequate NEPA reporting was complete for this project. The CCMA and the Santa Lucia District worked to identify locations of sedimentation and erosion in creek crossings in January and February of 2016. We identified areas that required reroutes and restoration of these sites in order to prevent further resource damage and OHV trespass off designated trails. Forest staff, volunteers and trail crews flagged these areas of concern and determined a proper route that would avoid sensitive habitats. NEPA consultants were able to survey and monitor for flora and fauna as well as heritage resources in the trail prism. With water in some locations on the trails, forest staff were able to identify issues in water runoff after the storms and provide alternative routes to the specialists. Stream crossing monitoring, soil monitoring and trespass monitoring occurred to identify which sections needed to be rerouted immediately. NEPA was complete in April of 2016 and implementation of the reroutes began immediately. Forest staff began to work with a trail crew to start creating new route and installed fencing on these reroutes as soon as they were completely constructed to prevent the public from using so the soils could become stable. Smooth wire fencing was installed to prevent trespass from occurring during construction as well as restoration signing and patrolling to monitor if users were riding off trail. After the following winter in 2017 and into 2018, additional reroutes were constructed and fenced off to allow for the trails to harden. Some routes have not been open so the soils can adjust to the winter conditions, water run off can be monitored and tread can be repaired if any damage is occurring. Informational signs are also posted informing the public



that the trail will be opened later in the year so the ground can continue to stabilize. New reroutes that have been opened are monitored for tread damage, erosion, and trespass and are remedied as soon as they are discovered. The old routes were covered in brush and downed trees removed from construction of the new trails. Old routes are also fenced off with either wood posts or smooth wire along with signs informing the public that the routes are closed.

**Conclusion**

The district’s OHV partners were an important factor in identifying the issues on OHV routes that needed to be addressed. The BA/BE and Erosion Control Plan included BMPs and LMP design criteria standards for protective measures for sensitive species to be included in the project.

The Santa Lucia District’s Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) and Motor Vehicle Opportunity Guides (MVOGs) were updated in 2018 to show the most current routes to ride and are available to the public on line or at the District Offices free of charge. In 2020, the district will plan to purchase new map panels to be posted in Pozo at Navajo Flat Staging Area/Campground, at Red Hill Road, and at the Pozo Fire Station.

This project supports Forest Goal 3.1 - Provide for Public Use and Natural Resource Protection, and complies with design criteria related to wildlife and implementation of recreation activities (S17, S50).



Original burnout trail fenced and closed from continued use.



Navajo Bypass reroute closed to stabilize during the winter.



**LMP Amendments**

The LMP is a dynamic document that can be amended in response to:

- Errors and or discrepancies found during implementation;
- New information;
- Changes in physical conditions;
- New laws, regulations, or policies that affect National Forest management;
- New guidance indicated by application of adaptive management principles.

Significant LMP amendments change guidance or management zoning which, because the LMP is a NEPA document, requires NEPA. This is completed through a project-level NEPA decision that requires an LMP amendment to make the project consistent with the LMP, or directly in a supplemental EIS. Non-significant changes not requiring NEPA include corrections; clarification of intent; changes to monitoring questions; and refinements of management area boundaries to correct GIS inaccuracies. These are simply updates that are posted to the LMP and made public through such means as publishing on the Forest website, as is the case for this document. From the evaluation of monitoring results no amendments are needed.

**Public Participation**

The 2016 Los Padres National Forest Land Management Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report is posted on the Forest website.

**List of Contributors**

The following individuals participated in the completion of this report either as Part 2 contributors of program area assessments, or as team members in Part 3 project field reviews:

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