

Land Management Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report

Los Padres National Forest – Fiscal Year 2020



Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Dear Los Padres National Forest Stakeholders:

November 14, 2022

I am pleased to present the Los Padres National Forest's (LPNF) fiscal year 2020 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 <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sopa/forest-level.php?110507>. Additional information and opportunities on the Los Padres National Forest may be found on our Forest website <http://www.fs.usda.gov/lpnf/>.

Sincerely,

CHRISTOPHER STUBBS

Forest Supervisor

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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 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 are 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.

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 to evaluate the effectiveness and application of design criteria established in the LMP. Projects that were completed or were in ongoing implementation in fiscal year 2020 were selected for monitoring from representative functional areas and districts. Selected projects were then reviewed to determine the application and effectiveness of the design criteria.

The fiscal year 2020 LMP Monitoring and Evaluation Report documents the evaluation of selected projects and programs where activities occurred during the monitoring period of October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020.

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 reflect current budget and staffing.

Table 1: FY2020 Accomplishments selected from geo-enabled Performance Accountability System (gPAS).

Indicator	Units	2020 Accomplishment
Terrestrial Habitat Enhanced	Acres	0
Aquatic Habitat Enhanced	Miles	4.3
Noxious Weeds Treated	Acres	0
Forestland Vegetation Improved	Acres	400
Watershed Improved	Acres	0
Land Ownership Adjusted	Acres	0

Heritage Programs Managed to Standard	Number	0
Recreation Special Use Authorizations Administered to Standard	Number	28
People At One Time (PAOT) Days Managed to Standard	Days	0
Recreation Sites Managed to Standard	Number	80
Land Use Authorizations Administered to Standard	Number	195
Mineral Operations Administered to Standard	Number	0
Grazing Allotments Administered to Standard	Acres	49,939
Hazardous Fuel Reduction	Acres	2,561
Passenger Car Roads Maintained to Objective Maintenance Level	Miles	0
High Clearance & Back Country Roads Maintained to Objective Maintenance Level	Miles	0
Road Decommissioned	Miles	0
Trail Operated and Maintained to Standard	Miles	0

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. Using the methodology described in the 2014 Land Management Plan Amendment, eight new and ongoing projects were randomly selected for review from five of the six functional areas listed in the LMP, as shown in Table 2. 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. A new project is one which is planned, implemented, and completed within a recent period.

Selected projects and activities are reviewed for compliance with the LMP and the application and effectiveness of design criteria. If the LMP design criteria are determined to be ineffective, then possible corrective actions are recommended, 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?

Table 2: Projects and activities randomly selected for review

Ranger District	Project Name	New or Ongoing	Functional Area	Documentation Reviewed
Monterey	1. AT&T Passive Reflector Replacement at Manuel Peak	New	Commodities and Commercial Uses	Categorical Exclusion (CE) Checklist

Monterey	2. Mill Creek Picnic Area	Ongoing	Public Use and Enjoyment	N/A
Mt. Pinos/ Santa Lucia	3. Branch Canyon Grazing Allotment	Ongoing	Commodities and Commercial Uses	Grazing Permit
Mount Pinos	4. Road 8N41	Ongoing	Facility Operations and Maintenance	N/A
Santa Lucia	5. Special Use Permit SLD20001 – Trek Travel	New	Public Use and Enjoyment	CE Checklist; Special Use Permit
Mount Pinos	6. Day Fire Hazard Tree Removal	New	Fire and Aviation Management	Decision Memo
Ojai	7. Fuelbreak Road/Gridley Trail Realignment Project	New	Facility Operations and Maintenance	Decision Memo
Santa Lucia	8. Sisquoc River Tamarisk Treatments	New	Resource Management	Environmental Impact Statement; Record of Decision

Project 1 - AT&T Passive Reflector Replacement at Manuel Peak

Project Description

AT&T (Pacific Bell Telephone) requested to replace the existing 12' x 8' passive reflector near Manuel Peak with a new 24' x 20' reflector located immediately adjacent to the existing structure. The existing reflector was damaged by wildfire and in need of replacement. It is essential to providing telephone service, including 911 emergency service, to Big Sur and the surrounding area.

The passive reflector is located approximately 1.4 miles east of Big Sur in Section 20 of Township 19 S., Range 2 E., Mt. Diablo Meridian in Monterey County, California. The reflector is on a ridgeline in the Santa Lucia Mountains approximately ½-mile south of Manuel Peak.

The proposal for the new reflector was discussed publicly at Big Sur Multi-Agency Council meetings on June 10, 2016 and October 21, 2016. These meetings were well attended by the public and cooperating agencies. The proposal was shared with the public by both the Forest Service and AT&T. The public was supportive of the project knowing that it would replace failing critical communication infrastructure. There was strong public support to get the work done as fast as possible.

The Essalen and Salinan tribes were consulted. On December 6, 2016 representatives of the Essalen and Salinan tribes visited the reflector site. No concerns about the new reflector were expressed by tribal representatives.

The California Coastal Commission issued a waiver for the replacement of the passive reflector on January 13, 2017. Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding effects to the federally endangered California condor was completed on February 15, 2017, and included protective measures to avoid and minimize effects to condors.

Monitoring

The project was analyzed under a categorical exclusion for which a decision memo is not required. The analysis of potential effects included the completion of a NEPA compliance checklist on February 21, 2017. No extraordinary circumstances were identified. Mitigation measures in the decision for this project included painting the reflector a dark green color and installing a matching fabric cover on the face of the reflector to reduce its visual impact. In addition, during implementation helicopter flights were monitored daily by professional wildlife biologists from the Ventana Wildlife Society (VWS) to protect California condors; the biologists were authorized to postpone flights if condors were present until condors were deemed to be in a safe location. VWS stated that condors passed through the area sporadically, but not every day. When a helicopter pilot was alerted to condor activity by a VWS biologist, the pilot always responded promptly and remained on standby until VWS determined the area was clear. The condor avoidance measures for this project were successful.

Conclusion

The new passive reflector is consistent with LMP direction. The environmental analysis process included public involvement, as well as consultation with American Indian tribes, California Coastal Commission, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Project implementation was monitored daily by professional wildlife biologists from the Ventana Wildlife Society. No problems were detected during implementation and no corrective actions were necessary. Future special use inspections will be documented in the appropriate files and databases to ensure continued compliance. This project is consistent with Goal 7.1 as identified in the LMP: Retain natural areas as a core for a regional network while focusing the built environment into the minimum land area needed to support growing public needs.



Figure 1: Pre-Implementation, 12'x8' reflector (left),
During Implementation – 24' x 20" and 12" x 8"
reflectors (right)

Project 2 – Mill Creek Picnic Area

Project Description

The Mill Creek picnic area is a Big Sur coastal day use area on the Monterey Ranger District about 0.1 miles from Highway 1. The picnic area is approximately an acre in size and offers views of the Pacific Ocean with picnic tables, barbeques, vault toilets and is within walking distance of the Kirk Creek Campground.

Monitoring

The site requires a fee for use and is managed under special use permit by the concessionaire, Parks Management Company. According to the permit the site receives 120 days a year of high use or 57% occupancy. An indicator of visitor satisfaction is based on reviews visitors left on sites like Google maps. Reviews from 40 visitors over the last three years were positive overall and rated the site 4.8 out of 5 stars. Site visits from Forest Service personnel in 2022 confirmed conditions at the site were satisfactory but noted the need for improved signage of the picnic area.

The Dolan burned near the picnic facility in 2020. The recreation site was not directly impacted by the fire or subsequent landslide and runoff from winter storms, although nearby roadways and streams were affected (Figure 2).

Conclusion

The use and reviews of the site suggests this day use area is providing a quality, sustainable recreation opportunity. The Mill Creek picnic area is consistent with LMP Goal 3.1 – Provide for Public Use and Natural Resource Protection.



Figure 2: Mill Creek picnic area prior to the Dolan fire, Google Earth image from February 2019 (left). Mill Creek Picnic area after the Dolan Fire, Google Earth image from August 2021 (right).

Project 3 - Branch Canyon Grazing Allotment

Project Description

The Branch Canyon Allotment totals 26,005 acres on the Mount Pinos and Santa Lucia Ranger Districts and provides for permitted livestock grazing use. Management of the allotment is guided by an Allotment Management Plan and a Term Grazing Permit that authorizes continued livestock grazing for a 10-year term. The permit allows for 1,528 head months during the grazing season from March through November. The current permit expired on December 31, 2021 and a new permit is in the process of being issued.

Monitoring

The permit ensures grazing is consistent with the LMP and occurs on suitable National Forest System lands. It incorporates range utilization and monitoring standards from the LMP, as well as an array of standards for wildlife, heritage, riparian areas, and forest service infrastructure that are designed to protect forest resources. Onsite range utilization monitoring was limited in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and relied on the permittee to communicate range conditions and move cattle accordingly. No infrastructure changes were made and there were no issues resulting from this arrangement. Range utilization monitoring resumed in 2021 and was completed in May of 2021 with data demonstrating range condition standards were met. The permittee will complete reconstruction of existing non-functional range improvements to improve livestock distribution and riparian condition.

Conclusion

The Branch Canyon Allotment is consistent with LMP Goal 6.1 - Move toward improved rangeland conditions as indicated by key range sites. With expiration of the permit a new permit will be issued that incorporates relevant LMP standards, and continued monitoring will guide management decisions in the short and long term.



Figure 3: Allotment range condition transects from 2021 (left). Branch Canyon Allotment in 2018 (right).

Project 4 – Road 8N41

Project Description

Road 8N41 on the Mt. Pinos Ranger District extended from Lockwood Valley Road through private property to the West Frazier Road on Frazier Mountain. In the 1990's or early 2000s, use and management of the road was changed to a motorized trail, and access across private property ceased. Today, the route consists of two motorized trails: Trail 20W02 – West Frazier Mine Road OHV #118; and Trail 20W03 – West Frazier Tie Road OHV – #119 (Figure 4). The 2018 Motor Vehicle Use Map designates these routes as seasonal use only, open from May 1st to November 1st to vehicles 50 inches wide or less.

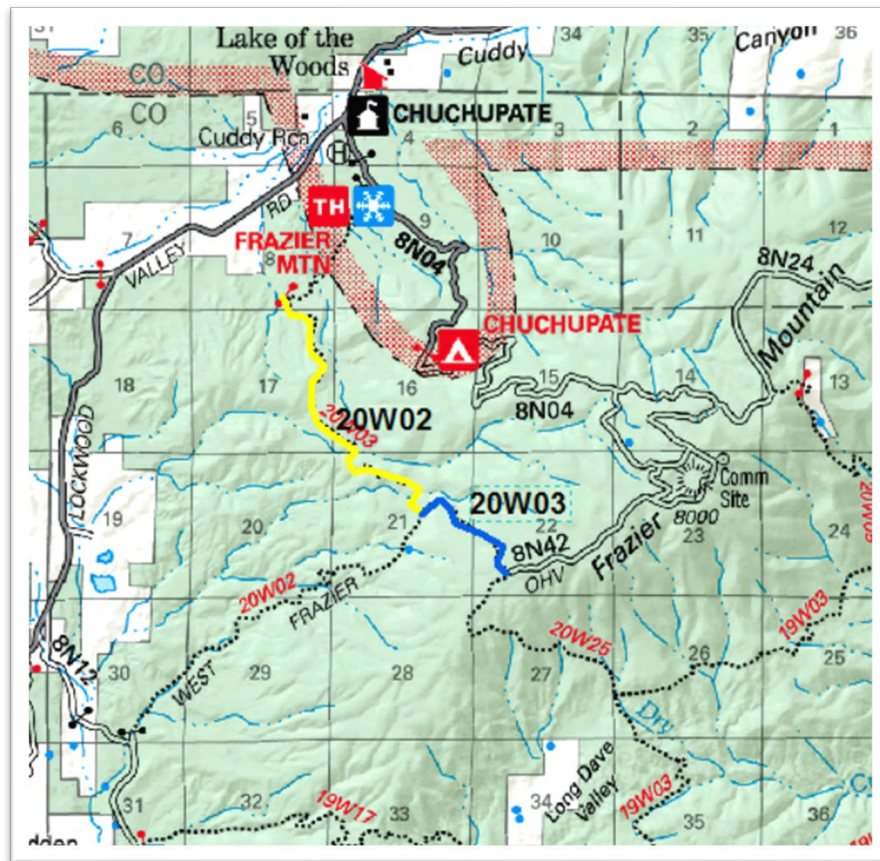


Figure 4: Map of the Frazier Mountain area where motorized trail's 20W02 and 20W03, formerly FS Road 8N41, are located (shown in yellow and blue).

The Los Padres National Forest offers approximately 335 miles of OHV trails, of which the majority are on the Mt. Pinos and Santa Lucia Ranger Districts. In November 2017 a decision was signed by then Forest Superior, Robert Baird, to continue ongoing activities associated with the OHV program including the use and maintenance of these trails. The West Frazier OHV trails, on the Mt. Pinos Ranger District, were included in this Decision Memo.

Monitoring

In 2020, no routine trail maintenance was accomplished on the trail due to the COVID-19 pandemic, wildfire restrictions and forest closures.

The forest has been updating our GIS and NRM INFRA databases for system trails to better represent the location, classification, and arrangement of system trails on the forest. This information will provide for accurate mapping and reporting of the trails and will be published to the Enterprise Data Warehouse when complete.

Conclusion

The trail is in the Hungry Valley/Mutau geographical area. The LMP desired condition is to maintain the place “as a natural appearing landscape that functions as an OHV recreation area and tranquil Back Country area.” Routine maintenance of OHV routes is required to provide a sustainable OHV trail system that is well-maintained, safe, consistent with visitor expectations, and environmentally sound in accordance with Forest Goal 3.1 in the Lost Padres National Forest Land Management Plan. Trail maintenance will proceed across the Forest as conditions, time and funding allow.

Project 5 - Special Use Permit SLD20001 – Trek Travel

Project Description

Trek Travel is a cycling outfitter and guiding operation that was issued a temporary permit authorizing the Figueroa Bike Tour to take place along paved roads on the Santa Lucia Ranger District. A CE Checklist was signed in 2016 documenting the initial permit and heritage mitigation measures. Subsequent tours have occurred as approved by updated permits and tiering to the existing NEPA documentation.

Monitoring

The heritage mitigation measures recorded in the CE Checklist were identified to protect heritage sites along the roadway. Riders were not permitted to stop along the road in areas identified by heritage staff. Monitoring revealed this measure had been followed. No other issues have been identified from this use.

Conclusion

The project meets LMP Goal 3.1 which directs the Los Padres National Forest to provide for public use and natural resource protection.

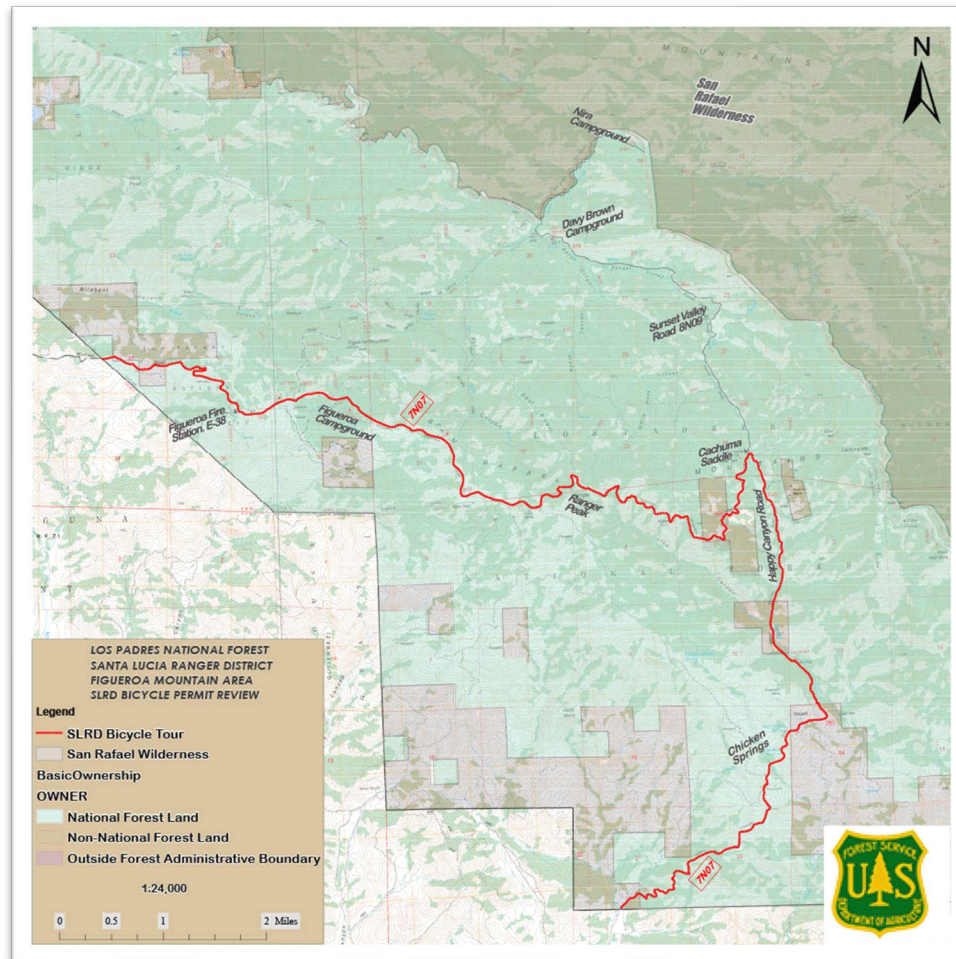


Figure 5: Map showing the Figueroa Bike Tour route.

Project 6 - Day Fire Hazard Tree Removal

Project Description

The Day Fire burned in 2006 in the Alamo Mountain and Grade Valley areas creating fire killed hazard trees along roads, OHV trails, trailheads and within campgrounds. The Day Fire Hazard Tree Removal Decision Memo authorized hazard tree removal to mitigate fire killed trees posing an immediate risk to the above-mentioned areas. The decision, completed under two categorical exclusion authorities, 36 CFR 220.6(d)(4) and (5), also addressed future mortality expected to occur overtime. The majority of the hazard trees were felled within the first few years following the fire. Since that time additional tree mortality occurs annually as a result of the ongoing drought related stress and beetle killed trees creating additional hazards in the project area.

Hazard trees were defined within the 2007 Decision Memo as “all or a portion of the tree has high potential to fall or roll onto the road-way or facility and cause personal injury or property damage”. The criteria used to identify and select hazard trees is based on the 2005 Field Guide for Danger Tree Identification and Response and include indicators such as trees with 10% or less visible green needles,

within proximity to road, trail or facility or at least 50% of the root system is undermined, or at least 70% of the tree diameter is burned out or decayed.

Work has been ongoing in this project area since 2008. It is anticipated that hazard tree falling activities within this area will need to continue as more trees fade out over the next decade. However, fewer hazard trees are left standing so fewer will need to be felled.

Monitoring

In 2020, additional hazard trees were felled in the Alamo Mountain portion of the project, along roads 8N01 and 6N10 covering approximately 384 acres. Only trees that posed a hazard to the roads or adjacent campgrounds were felled and the felled trees were left in place. No operations to remove the logs occurred. The downed material is being left in place and is available to the public for use in the form of personal use firewood permits. While mortality is continuing, fewer trees need to be felled each year.

Conclusion

This project mitigated the risk to public safety and Forest infrastructure resultant from the post-fire effects of the Day Fire. The strategic removal of dead trees within the zone of impact of roads, trails, trailheads, and campgrounds re-established safe public access and recreation opportunity in the Alamo Mountain and Grade Valley areas in accordance with Forest Goal 3.1. This project also contributed to Forest Goal 1.1 by reducing potential wildfire intensity through vegetation treatment, which enables safer and more effective wildlife suppression. Standards, strategies, and design criteria from the LMP were identified and successfully incorporated into the project.



Figure 6: Hazard trees dropped and left in place near Dutchman Campground as part of the initial hazard tree reduction efforts.

Project 7 – Fuelbreak Road/Gridley Trail Realignment Project

Project Description

The Fuelbreak Road/Gridley Trail begins off forest, traversing private property before entering the Los Padres National Forest. In December 2017, the Thomas Fire burned the existing vegetation adjacent to the Gridley Trail that previously shielded nearby property and confined trail users to the trail corridor. Following the fire, trail users began walking and mountain biking off-trail due to the lack of dense vegetation resulting in trespassing and vandalism at a private residence south of the existing trail. The landowner proposed relocated the trail. The project proposed a new route on the north side of property and rehabilitation of the former trail to its natural condition.

Monitoring

Environmental analysis was completed in partnership with the landowner and their consultant, and in February 2020 a Decision Memo authorized the trail reroute. Trail construction was completed in the spring of 2020, and while the new route was ultimately installed successfully, there were some initial challenges. Trail construction began on private land without consultation from an experienced trail designer. After a qualified trail designer was consulted, the landowner corrected the trouble areas and trail construction was completed along a more sustainable route. PAX Environmental consultants, working on behalf of the landowner, conducted a pre-construction survey for threatened, endangered or sensitive plants and wildlife. The trail was constructed by The Concerned Resources Environmental Workers (CREW) with supervision by the Ojai Land Conservancy.

Conclusion

This project helped to ensure the safety and security of landowners adjacent to the LPNF while improving recreational opportunities for hikers and mountain bikers. This project is consistent with the



Los Padres National Forest Land Management Plan Goal 3.1 – Provide for Public Use and Natural Resource Protection.

Figure 7: Before (left) and after (right) photos of the Gridley trail realignment project, photos courtesy of PAX Environmental, Inc.

Project 8 - Sisquoc River Tamarisk Treatments

Project Description

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision (ROD), completed in 2016, authorized the eradication of the invasive, non-native tamarisk (*Tamarix* spp.) plant from Piru Creek, Lockwood Creek, Cuyama River, Santa Ynez River, Sisquoc River, Sespe Creek, and Arroyo Seco River watershed on the Los Padres National Forest. Tamarisk occurring in riparian zones along perennial and intermittent streams, covering approximately 368 linear miles, are targeted with manual and mechanical removal as well as herbicide application to control infestations effectively and efficiently.

Removing tamarisk before it becomes the dominant vegetation component within riparian landscapes, native plant communities will be maintained and can continue providing habitat to species dependent on healthy, properly functioning riparian ecosystems. Monitoring and maintenance treatments will continue to treat existing infestations and new infestations discovered within the project area. It is anticipated that most of the project will be implemented within ten years (from 2016 to 2026) with the most intensive treatments occurring during the first five years. While treatments are planned on all five ranger districts of the Los Padres National Forest, this review is specific to the 2020 treatments within the Sisquoc River Watershed on the Santa Lucia Ranger District.

Monitoring

The implementation of the Los Padres Tamarisk Removal project began in the spring of 2017. In fiscal year 2020, approximately 500 acres of tamarisk were monitored and/or treated in the Sisquoc Watershed under the project. This work was completed through partnerships with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Channel Islands Restoration. Manual and chemical (i.e. herbicide) treatments were used for the removal of tamarisk along the Sisquoc River. Treatment effectiveness monitoring was conducted in May 2021 by Forest Service staff and volunteers. The team noted a great reduction in tamarisk density on the flat gravel terraces near Cliff Camp but found large tamarisk plants or clusters remained in areas between Sycamore Camp and Abel Camp. The team recommended continuing targeted treatments in areas they identified.

Conclusion

The tamarisk removal treatments conducted in the Sisquoc Watershed removed hundreds of tamarisk plants and prevented those plants from reproducing and spreading into surrounding environments. The treatments, however, are not 100 percent effective due to various environmental factors. Additionally, tamarisk seeds within the soil seedbank or from nearby untreated tamarisk individuals could germinate in the post treatment Sisquoc Watershed, perpetuating the presence of this noxious weed on the landscape. Additional treatments of tamarisk within the Sisquoc Watershed are planned within the next few years.

Herbicide use for the project is consistent with the Forest Service Pesticide Use Policy; is in compliance with state and federal regulations; and follows Region 5 Best Management Practices for Vegetation

Manipulation, the Region 5 Supplement for Pesticide-Use Management and Coordination, and the Los Padres National Forest Land Management Plan guidance including the Supplement to Soil and Water Conservation Practices FSH 2509.22-2005- 1.

This project is consistent with the following goals as identified in the LMP (2005):

- ✓ Goal 2.1 - Reverse the trend of increasing loss of natural resource values due to invasive species
- ✓ Goal 6.2 - Provide ecological conditions to sustain viable populations of native and desired nonnative species.



Figure 8: Volunteers manually removing tamarisk.



Land Management Plan Amendments

The LMP is a dynamic document that can be amended at any time 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

Plan amendments may be broad or narrow, depending on the need for change, and are used to keep plans current and help units adapt to new information or changing conditions. A plan amendment is required to add, modify, or remove one or more plan components (e.g., desired conditions, standards, suitability of lands, etc.), or to change how or where one or more plan components apply to all or part of the plan area (including management areas or geographic areas). This is usually completed through a project-level NEPA decision that requires an LMP amendment to make the project consistent with the LMP, or directly in an EIS that supplements the NEPA analysis completed when the LMP was originally developed. The LMP can also be updated administratively to make 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. No amendments to the LMP are needed based on the results of this monitoring evaluation.

Public Participation

The 2020 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:

- Kyle Kinports, Forest Planner and Vegetation and Fuels Program Manager
- Coye Burnett, NEPA Planner
- Gary Huxel, NEPA Planner (detail)
- Greg Thompson, Forester
- Steve Galbraith, Archaeologist
- Jonathan Schwartz, Minerals Program Manager and Geologist
- Veronica Garza, Lands and Special Uses
- David Betz, Lands and Special Uses
- Alicia Sanchez Scott, Recreation Officer
- Diane Cross, ORD Assistant Recreation Officer
- Adam Furlow, Assistant Forest Engineer
- Patrick Lieske, Forest Wildlife, Botany and Range Program Manager
- Heidi Guenther, Botanist
- John “Fin” Eifert, MRD Resource Officer
- Monica Pina, Rangeland Management Specialist
- Annette Howell, Range Technician
- Loreigh Brannan, Assistant Recreation Officer
- Marilyn Porter, GIS Coordinator