

Land Management Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report

Los Padres National Forest – Fiscal Year 2021



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 2021 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 2021 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 2021 LMP Monitoring and Evaluation Report documents the evaluation of selected projects and programs where activities occurred during the monitoring period of October 1, 2020 through September 30, 2021.

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: FY2021 Accomplishments selected from geo-enabled Performance Accountability System (gPAS).

Indicator	Units	2021 Accomplishment
Terrestrial Habitat Enhanced	Acres	4,582
Aquatic Habitat Enhanced	Miles	77
Noxious Weeds Treated	Acres	4,281
Forestland Vegetation Improved	Acres	0
Watershed Improved	Acres	15,039
Land Ownership Adjusted	Acres	0

Heritage Programs Managed to Standard	Number	0
Recreation Special Use Authorizations Administered to Standard	Number	30
People At One Time (PAOT) Days Managed to Standard	Days	0
Recreation Sites Managed to Standard	Number	81
Land Use Authorizations Administered to Standard	Number	154
Mineral Operations Administered to Standard	Number	0
Grazing Allotments Administered to Standard	Acres	127,268
Hazardous Fuel Reduction	Acres	3,055
Passenger Car Roads Maintained to Objective Maintenance Level	Miles	35
High Clearance & Back Country Roads Maintained to Objective Maintenance Level	Miles	6
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. Grizzly Mine Closure Project	New	Resource Management	Decision Memo

Santa Lucia	2. Davy Brown Campground	Ongoing	Public Use and Enjoyment	N/A
Santa Barbara	3. Recreation Residence, Lot 46 Santa Ynez Tract	New	Public Use and Enjoyment	Special Use Permit
Santa Barbara	4. Los Prieto's Ranger Station	Ongoing	Facility Operations and Maintenance	Determination of Eligibility for the National Register
Santa Lucia	5. 2019 ERFO Repairs Cerro Alto Campground Road 29S11	New	Facility Operations and Maintenance	Decision Memo
Mount Pinos	6. Frazier Park Public Utility District Permit – (MPD1002021)	Ongoing	Commodities and Commercial Uses	Special Use Permit MPD1002021
Santa Barbara	7. American Towers LLC lease	New	Commodities and Commercial Uses	Special Use Permit
Mount Pinos	8. Frazier Park Community Defense Zone	New	Fuels Rearrangement	Decision Memo and letters to the file

Project 1 - Grizzly Mine Closure Project

Project Description

The Grizzly Mine Closure Project was completed to protect Townsend's big-eared bats inhabiting the mine. The abandoned gold mine is located on the Monterey Ranger District, along Alder Creek approximately 1/8 mile north of the Alder Creek Campground, and consists of several openings, passages, and tunnels. Due to its proximity to the Alder Creek Campground and evidence of visitor use, it was determined that closing the openings was also needed to mitigate safety risks to the public. The first set of mines within the Grizzly Mine complex were closed in 2016.

Bat surveys indicated that at least six bat species occupy the mine, including the Townsend's big-eared bat, a Forest Service sensitive species. A decision was made to install steel, bat compatible gates that allow bats access to underground habitat while eliminating public entry into the mine. In addition to the gates, mine hazard signs were installed at the bottom of the entrances to alert the public of the safety risk.

Monitoring

Environmental review was completed in February 2020 using a categorical exclusion approved for wildlife habitat improvement activities [(36 CFR 220.6 (e)(6)]. Effects to wildlife species of concern were documented in a Biological Assessment and Evaluation completed in 2016 for the first set of closures. That analysis determined the project would have no effect on federally listed species and would provide benefits to Forest Service sensitive bats. This analysis was reviewed in 2019 and determined to still be current and applicable to the activities proposed in the next phase of the project. Other resource effects were considered in this review including heritage resources, botanical species of concern, and noxious weeds, all concluding the project would have no significant impacts.

The installation of the gates occurred as planned and they were successfully installed April 24th, 2021. Approximately one year later, Forest Service personnel visited the mines and found the gates in-tact with no signs of tampering, vandalism, or public entry. The vegetation removed to provide ATV access to the mines to transport materials for gate installation has regrown, and the hazard signs are in place.

Conclusion

The Grizzly Mine Closure Project contributes to Los Padres National Forest LMP Goal 6.2 to “Provide ecological conditions to sustain viable populations of native species”. In addition, protecting sensitive bat habitat aligns with LMP strategies to prevent the listing of sensitive species (WL 1 - Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, Candidate, and Sensitive Species Management), and maintain and improve habitat (WL 2 - Wildlife, Fish and Plant Habitat Management). It also aligns with the LMP strategy to analyze, stabilize and restore areas where visitor use is negatively affecting recreation opportunities, public safety and environmental resources (REC 2 - Sustainable Use and Environmental Design and Lands 2 - Non-Recreation Special Use Authorizations).

The project complies with LMP Standard S23, which requires the forest to maintain habitat for bat species of concern, to the extent practicable, when closing abandoned mines or buildings for public safety or to protect the environment.



Figure 1: Adit 1 before (left) and after (right) a bat compatible gate was installed.



Figure 2: Adit 2 before (left) and after (right) the bat compatible gate installation.



Figure 3: Adit 3 before (left) and after (right) the bat compatible gate installation.

Project 2 – Davy Brown Campground

Project Description

The Davy Brown Campground, located on the Santa Lucia Ranger District, includes 13 campsites tucked along the banks of Munch Creek. The site places visitors within proximity to several trail heads including access to the San Rafael Wilderness. It is also a popular spot for hunters during the annual deer hunting season. The campground is managed by Parks Management Company, a concessionaire contracted by

the Forest Service. Campground improvements, funded by the Great American Outdoors Act, are currently underway. New toilets were installed a few years ago.

Monitoring

A forest order went into effect on July 29, 2021 and closed the campground to public access during construction of the Davy Brown and Munch Creek Aquatic Barrier Removal Project. While gates were closed and locked at Sunset Valley Roads, there were occasions where the locks were cut, and visitor trespass occurred, requiring gate monitoring. While the campground footprint was outside of the construction area, a staging area for concrete and other materials removed during demolition was located near the restrooms, but away from the campsites. The staging area encroached into a sensitive area causing resource damage that required mitigation and rehab to the site, although campground infrastructure was not damaged.

The aquatic barrier removal project also included the removal of an old road crossing on Munch Creek near the campground. Munch Creek was restored to its natural contour after the barrier was removed, improving the natural setting of the campground. The campground was reopened following a ribbon cutting event to celebrate the culmination of the project and nearby bridge construction on March 30, 2022.

New picnic tables, fire rings and barbeques were installed in the summer of 2022. These improvements were funded by the Great American Outdoors Act (see photos below).



Figure 4: Photos of Davy Brown Campground after new picnic tables, fire rings and barbeques were installed in 2022.

Conclusion

Maintaining the Davy Brown Campground as a functional recreation site is consistent with Goal 3.1 in the LMP, which directs the Los Padres National Forest to provide for public use and natural resource protection. The desired condition is that facilities and infrastructure are high quality, well-maintained, safe, accessible, and consistent with visitors' expectations. An LMP tactic for maintaining or moving

toward that desired condition is to improve, remove or replace aging developed recreation infrastructure to better meet current needs and future demand (REC 3). The recent work within and adjacent to the Davy Brown Campground, made possible by the Great American Outdoors Act and other partnerships, is consistent with the LMP and will ensure continued recreation opportunity at the Davy Brown Campground.

Project 3 – Recreation Residence, Lot 46 Santa Ynez Tract

Project Description

Recreation residence permits authorize the occupancy of a residence on National Forest System Lands for personal, noncommercial recreation use. They are authorized pursuant to the Act of March 4, 1915, the Term Permit Act, 16 U.S.C. 497; and 36 CFR Part 251, Subpart B, as amended. Permits are valid for a 20-year period. The Santa Ynez tract, on the Santa Barbara Ranger District, was found ineligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in April of 2011, meaning the tract does not have enough historic structures or features remaining or in a condition that would make them eligible under NRHP. The tract was cleared from maintaining historic status.

Monitoring

Permit number SBD090231 was issued to the new owner of the cabin on lot 46 of the Santa Ynez tract. This permit also accepted a 372 square foot shed structure and included it as part of the authorized structures. The existing permit expires in 2028. This issuance of this permit was part of an effort by Forest Service staff to address a back log of expired permits.

Conclusion

Maintaining recreation residences consistent with program standards is consistent with Forest Plan Goal 3.1 to “Provide for Public Use and Natural Resource Protection”. It aligns with LMP tactics identified in REC – 5, to manage recreation residences as a valid use of National Forest System land, and to administer all recreation special-use authorizations to standards. Updating recreation residence permits when ownership of the improvements changes is an important part of administering permit standards and keeping records current.

Project 4 – Los Prietos Ranger Station

Project Description

The Los Prietos Ranger Station is an administrative site located approximately 15 miles northwest of Santa Barbara and approximately 20 miles southeast of Solvang adjacent to the Santa Ynez River. The site functions as the Santa Barbara Ranger District headquarters and includes about twenty-five buildings, some dating back to 1933, with the most modern additions in 2004 and 2021. The original ranger station, barn and residences were constructed at the inception of the Forest Reserves in 1907, but have since been lost, making the site ineligible for listing on the National Register of Historic places as documented in a 2016 “Determination of Eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places” report. The various buildings within the Los Prietos administrative site serve as offices, visitor center, storage, housing, garages, and workshops.

Monitoring

The facility operations and maintenance activities at this site include regular upkeep of buildings and the grounds. Notable work that was completed in 2021 include falling hazard trees within the administrative site and construction of a new fire engine garage.

After a fire burned the original garage, construction of the new building began in the same footprint in 2020 and was completed in winter 2021.

Conclusion

The work completed in fiscal year 2021 for the Los Prietos Ranger Station meets the intent set forth by the LMP, which outlines a program objective for facilities operations and maintenance. The objective is to provide and maintain administrative facilities (i.e., offices, storage, warehouses, garages, visitor centers, communications, etc.) to:

- Provide safe and functional workspace.
- Support the Built Environment Image Guide concept in the design and construction of buildings to improve the image, aesthetics, sustainability, and overall quality of Forest Service facilities.
- Provide for the effective and efficient protection and management of the national forest by location and design of buildings.
- Provide for facilities and related infrastructure that is maintained and operated in compliance with federal, state and local rules, codes and regulations.

Project 5 – 2019 ERFO Repairs Cerro Alto Campground Road 29S11

Project Description

The Cerro Alto Campground located at the base of Cerro Alto Peak on the Santa Lucia Ranger District is a popular recreation site for hikers, bikers, and equestrians. The campground includes 22 campsites, which include picnic tables, fire rings and pedestal grills. In 2019, storm events damaged multiple water control features on road 29S11 that connects Hwy 41 to the campground. As a result of the storm damage, use of the road 29S11 posed a safety risk to the public, Forest Service personnel and contractors.

Road 29S11 is the only access route to the Cerro Alto Campground. Portions of the road fill were eroded by storms, resulting in a hollow space between the road surface and drainages, placing any vehicles using the road at risk of collapsing the road and falling into the void. The damaged road impacted access to Cerro Alto Campground, Cerro Alto Trail head, the day use fee area, and trailer loop. Project planning was focused on stabilizing the road condition and repairing the damage to reestablish safe access to the recreation site, and protecting the road from future storm events. The proposal included replacing an old, damaged, and undersized culvert, with a water crossings, while being considerate of resource and operational needs.

Monitoring

A decision memo was signed in October 2020 to approve the repair and maintenance of road 29S11. Implementation was completed in March 2021 and replaced the undersized and misaligned culvert in

the trailer loop with an adequately sized and structurally sound water crossing. All other water control features along road 29S11 were cleared of debris jams, and downed trees were removed to restore bank stability. All potholes along the road were collapsed, filled, and patched.

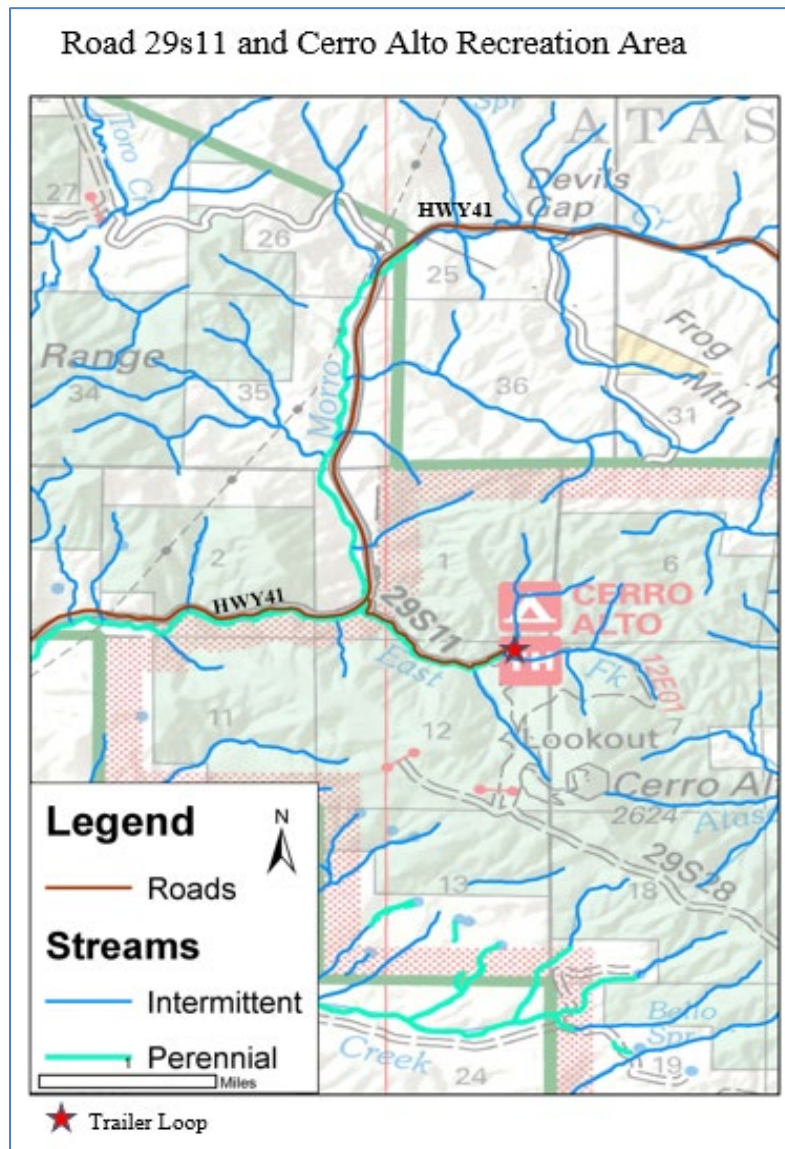


Figure 5: Cerro Alto area

Conclusion

The LMP directs management of the transportation system to maintain, reconstruct, or relocate roads to reduce the effects to species, watersheds, and heritage sites while safely accommodating use. This project contributes to meeting the annual target of maintaining 10 percent of National Forest System roads to their operational maintenance level, and LMP Goal 3.1 – Provide for public use and natural resource protection and LMP Goal 7.1: the transportation system of roads and trails is safe, affordable,

and environmentally sound...the system is well maintained commensurate with levels of use and available funding.

Project 6 – Frazier Park Public Utility District Permit - (MPD1002021)

Project Description

Part of the water supply system for the community of Frazier Park comes from National Forest System (NFS) lands adjacent to the community on the Mt. Pinos Ranger District in Kern County. Improvements on NFS lands include several water tanks, and associated facilities and infrastructure that the Frazier Park Public Utility District is authorized to operate and maintain through a special use permit (see Figure 6 and 7 for maps). In 2012, a decision memo was signed to re-issue the special use permit for ongoing operations and maintenance.

Monitoring

As of September 16, 2022, Frazier Park Public Utility District was in compliance with the terms and conditions of the special use permit.

Conclusion

Providing for water infrastructure to support community needs is a focus within the Commodity and Commercial Uses program area. The program emphasis is on managing these uses while preserving recreation opportunities and resolving natural resource conflicts. Regular inspections and up to date permitting of water sources contributes to the expectation to annually reduce backlog of special use authorizations by approximately five percent. This project is consistent with LMP Goal 7.1 - 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: Special-uses serve public needs, provide public benefits, and conform to resource management and protection objectives...All uses are in full compliance with the terms and conditions of the authorization.

Project 7 - American Towers LLC lease

Project Description

The American Towers LLC holds a communications lease within communications sites on Santa Ynez and East Santa Ynez Peaks on the Santa Barbara Ranger District. Management of the site is set forth in the Santa Ynez and East Santa Ynez Peaks Communications Site Management Plan which was last updated in 2018.

The updated lease agreement, which supersedes a 1997 special use authorization to AT&T Communications of California Inc., was completed in October 2020. In addition to authorizing the new lessee's possession of the area for construction, operation, maintenance, it also authorizes equipment shelters, antenna support structures and ancillary improvements, including the addition of a rest room, antenna support structures and other ancillary improvements. The lease agreement termination date is December 31, 2048. The lease is not renewable, but the lessee has the right to request a new lease.

Monitoring

To date the facilities are in compliance with the current term and conditions of the lease, including the access road and authorized updates.

Conclusion

Designated communications sites are included under Commodity and Commercial Uses, one of the six functional Program Emphasis areas in the LMP. The program emphasis focuses on managing the sites while preserving recreation opportunities and resolving natural resource conflicts. Updating leases contributes to the expectation to annually reduce backlog of special use authorizations by approximately five percent. This project is consistent with LMP Goal 7.1 - 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: Facilities supporting urban infrastructure needs are clustered on existing sites or designated corridors, minimizing the number of acres encumbered by special-use authorizations...Special-uses serve public needs, provide public benefits, and conform to resource management and protection objectives...All uses are in full compliance with the terms and conditions of the authorization.

Project 8 – Frazier Park Community Defense Zone

Project Description

A decision memo was signed in 2007 by then District Ranger Thomas Kuekes, and approved the treatment of 174 acres of hazardous fuels on National Forest System lands around the community of Frazier Park. The project is located on the Mount Pinos Ranger District in Kern County, California with the aim to implement four categories of treatment: 1) conversion of vegetation to a less flammable condition to increase defensible space and firefighter safety on NFS lands within 300 feet of dwellings and occupied structures; 2) widen the existing fuelbreak to a width from 300-500 feet about two miles long (97 acres) located above the northern boundary of the town; 3) disposal of accumulations of cut plant materials; and 4) vegetation treatments to maintain the effectiveness of the community defense zone (CDZ) over time. Maintenance of the fuelbreaks and defense zones closest to structures was identified in the decision memo to occur every three to ten years as needed to maintain the shaded fuelbreak.

Monitoring

In 2021, maintenance occurred within the Frazier Park CDZ with 39 acres of vegetation clearing along the eastern portion of the project. Vegetation was masticated by Forest Service personnel. The vegetation treatment followed previous treatments within the project area and is part of the ongoing maintenance program for this project. It is anticipated that follow-up treatments will occur in the next 3-7 years depending on precipitation and rate of growth of the vegetation. The project will be monitored each year to better determine when re-entry needs to occur to reduce vegetation and flammability.

Conclusion

The project contributes to Forest Goal 1.1 - to improve the ability of southern California communities to limit loss of property and lives. As part of this goal, the desired condition is to treat vegetation to enhance community protection and reduce the risk of loss of life, structures, improvements, and natural

resources from wildland fire. This will provide firefighters improved opportunities for tactical operations and safety. Vegetation clearing has been effective in reducing standing vegetation and the flammability of the Frazier Park CDZ. This project is part of a larger system of vegetation treatments designed to meet goals described in the 10-Year Comprehensive Wildland Fire Strategy (USDA/USDI 2001) for using a collaborative approach to reduce wildland fire risks to communities.



Figure 6: Frazier Park CDZ project area after completion of 2022 work. One of the Frazier Park Public Utility District water tank is also visible in the top left corner of the photograph.

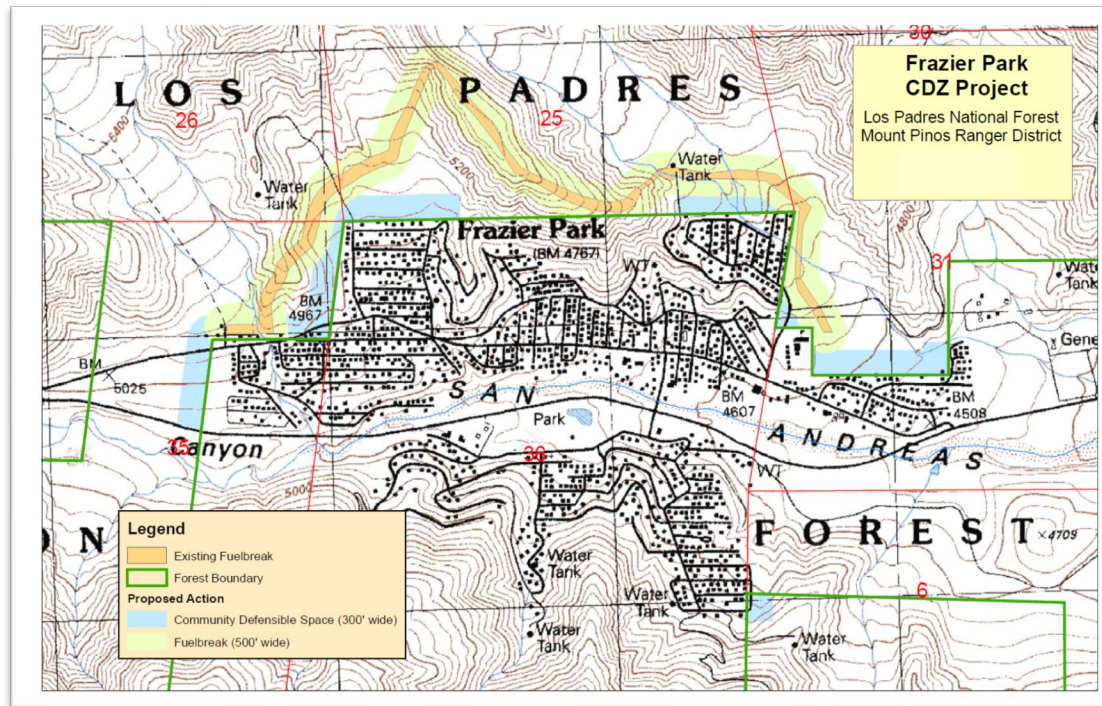


Figure 7: Map of the Frazier Park CDZ Project area. Map also indicates where the water tanks, authorized via special use permits to Frazier Park Public Utility District are located.

Land Management Plan 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.

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 2021 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
- Greg Thompson, Forester
- Steve Galbraith, Archaeologist
- Helen Tarbet, Adventure Pass Ranger
- Jonathan Schwartz, Minerals Program Manager, Geologist
- Veronica Garza, Lands and Special Uses
- Alicia Sanchez-Scott, Recreation Officer
- Patrick Lieske, Wildlife, Range and Botany Program Manager
- Adam Furlow, Assistant Forest Engineer