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Los Padres National Forest

Land Management Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report for 2011



Heidi Anderson

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Los Padres National Forest Stakeholders

I am pleased to present the Los Padres National Forest's fiscal year 2011 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 2006 Los Padres National Forest Land Management Plan (LMP).

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,

/s/ Kenneth E. Heffner
for

October 26, 2012

PEGGY HERNANDEZ
Forest Supervisor
Los Padres National Forest

Date

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Introduction

Monitoring is a means for confirming the sufficiency and adequacy of guidance in the 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 2011 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 2011 LMP Monitoring and Evaluation Report documents the evaluation of selected projects and programs where activities occurred during October 1, 2010 through September 30, 2011.

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 Land Management Plan. 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: FY2011 Accomplishments

Indicator	Units	2011 Accomplishment
Acres of Terrestrial Habitat Enhanced	Acres	2,601
Miles of Aquatic Habitat Enhanced	Miles	14
Acres of Noxious Weeds Treated	Acres	11

Acres of Vegetation Improved (also see Hazardous Fuels Reduction)	Acres	500
Acres of Watershed Improved	Acres	18
Acres of Land Ownership Adjusted	Acres	69
Number of Heritage Resources Managed to Standard	Number	15
Products Provided to Standard (Interpretation and Education)	Number	0*
Recreation Special Use Authorizations Administered to Standard	Number	59
PAOT Days Managed to Standard (Developed Sites)	PAOT Days	389,500
Recreation Days Managed to Standard (General Forest Areas)	Days	N/A*
Land Use Authorizations Administered to Standard	Number	100
Number of Mineral Operations Administered	Number	109
Manage Grazing Allotments	Acres	61,633
Acres of Hazardous Fuel Reduction	Acres	4,000
Miles of Passenger Car Roads Maintained to Objective Maintenance Level	Miles	87
Miles of High Clearance & Back Country Roads Maintained to Objective Maintenance Level	Miles	25
Miles of Road Decommissioned	Miles	0

* Accomplishments are no longer tracked as indicated.

The indicators for interpretation and education and general forest areas are no longer tracked annually. Products Provided to Standard has been replaced with the “Number of Interpretative and Conservation Education Plans Implemented.” The indicator for “Recreation Days Managed to Standard (General Forest Areas)” is no longer tracked.

Action(s) Needed:

The LMP should be updated to:

- Change the indicator “Products Provided to Standard (Interpretation and Education” with “Number of Interpretation and Conservation Education Plans Implemented.”
- Remove the indicator “Recreation Days Managed to Standard (General Forest Areas).”

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 lease such as a range allotment, but which still requires NEPA 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 LPF 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, 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	Lower Oso Bridge Erosion Repair	Road Management	Decision Memo; CE Checklist; Contract; Army Corps Letter, Biological Assessment (BA)
Ojai	Ventura County Communication Facility at Sisar Peak	Special Uses	Decision Memo; Lease; Contract; Site Management Plan, Biological Evaluation (BE)
Monterey	Sweetwater Rangeland Analysis	Grazing Management	Environmental Assessment; Decision Notice; Term Grazing Permit

Santa Lucia	Rinconada Mine Safety Re-Closure	Mining/Recreation Management	Decision Memo; CE Checklist; Contract, BA/BE
Mt Pinos	Day Fire Hazard Tree	Road/Recreation Management	Decision Memo; Contract

Lower Oso Bridge Erosion Repair Project

Project Description

The Lower Oso Bridge provides access across Oso Creek to a large portion of the Lower Santa Ynez Recreation Area on the Santa Barbara Ranger District. Predominately used by recreationist, the bridge is traveled throughout the year to access popular designated recreation sites, trail heads, and other locations upstream along the Santa Ynez River within Paradise Canyon.

In August 2011, an engineering inspection of the bridge revealed channel bottom erosion was undermining the eastern bridge abutment footing that provides structural support. Based on these findings, it was determined the bridge was unsafe for use, and emergency repair was needed. In response, the bridge was promptly closed to public use affecting concessionaire management of the recreation area and recreation access. In order to re-establish safe recreation access, this project proposed to repair the bridge footing by constructing a reinforced concrete toe wall to support the undermined bridge foundation footing, and stabilize the existing channel bottom to resist further erosion and stream bed cutting.



Monitoring

This action was analyzed and documented in a Decision Memo completed in July 2011. The Decision Memo included mitigations from the biological assessment to avoid impacts to wildlife under the Endangered Species Act, and best management practices (BMPs) to mitigate erosion and water quality impacts. The project area is in close proximity to the Santa Ynez River, which has known populations of the threatened California red-legged frog (CALF), and is within designated critical habitat. A site specific biological assessment of the project area showed that habitat conditions within Oso Stream segment are not suitable for the specie. As an extra precaution, the analysis stipulated day and night surveys be completed in advance of project implementation, if surface water was present within Oso Creek. The Army Corp of Engineers regulatory division also included stipulations to prevent water pollution and

erosion in their letter of concurrence. The Decision Memo did not include LMP standards, and an LMP consistency check was not completed for this project.

Project implementation was initiated on October 20, 2011. The contract specifications included BMPs pertinent to this type of activity, and a Forest Service engineer was onsite monitoring the repair work. At the beginning of implementation there was no standing water within the creek, and the subsurface flow had retreated below disturbance depth. Despite these conditions precautionary measure were still implemented, including installation of a drift fence downstream of the project area and CALF survey. The repair work was completed on November 16, 2011.

Conclusion

The Lower Oso Bridge provides sole access to a number of recreation sites and trailheads within one of the busiest recreation areas on the forest. The compromised bridge footing resulted in the closure of the road and restricted access to the recreation sites for a period of time. The infrastructure maintenance completed under this project resulted in improved public safety and recreation access, and thus contributed to Forest Goal 3.1 and 7.1.

Standard 25 in Part 3 of the LMP states to conduct road maintenance activities during the season of year that would have the least impact on threatened, endangered, and proposed (TEP) wildlife species in occupied habitats, except as provided by site-specific analysis. Even though this design element was not specifically considered, the project did not occur in occupied TEP habitat and was conducted at an appropriate time of year to avoid impacts to the CALF.

Ventura County Communication Facility at Sisar Peak Project **Project Description**

Ventura County applied for a communications use lease to relocate, operate and maintain existing facilities, and to install new facilities at Sisar Peak Communication Site. The objective of the request was to provide improved radio coverage and a microwave link connecting north and south county with voice and data services for public safety purposes. Under the proposal Ventura County equipment would be relocated within the site to a compound that housed California Highway Patrol (CHP) facilities. Within the compound new facilities would be constructed, including a 10 ft. x 20 ft. prefab building, 50 ft. self-supporting tower, emergency generator, buried electrical lines, an additional array of solar panels, and an addition to the existing 8 ft. high chain link security fence.



Monitoring

This action was analyzed under a categorical exclusion and documented in a Decision Memo completed on August 13, 2008. The analysis of potential affects included a biological evaluation, management

indicator/migratory bird treaty act analysis, archaeological report, tribal consultation, and a geotechnical evaluation. The project decision incorporated applicable design elements from the LMP, and measures identified from resource analysis and public scoping. These design elements included: Appendix G of the Forest Plan for the protection of bird species; elements to protect the high scenic objective of the area; mitigation to protect cultural material if exposed during excavation; and the presence of a tribal monitor during ground disturbing activities at the request of the local tribe.

A 30-year lease was issued to Ventura County for the relocation and construction activities, and long-term management of the site improvements. The engineering plans attached to the lease included anti-perching devices for birds in accordance with Appendix G, and a fire mitigation plan for the construction phase of the project. During the same time period, a Communication Site Management Plan was finalized for Sisar Peak describing the overall objectives of the communication site, and a MOU crafted for shared and co-located facilities within the CHP compound. The management plan includes guidelines to protect resource, including the high scenic integrity objectives at the site, and is also incorporated into Ventura County's lease agreement.

Monitoring revealed that LMP guidance was incorporated into the lease, engineering plans, and site management plan collectively. However, the site specific cultural resource mitigations were not detailed in this documentation. Despite this omission, a tribal monitor was present during excavation activities and no cultural materials were discovered. The lease improvement area is organized and clean. This can be partially attributed to the relative newness of the improvements, and the use limitations imposed at the site. Due in part to these site limitations it has been several years since compliance monitoring was completed. Vegetation is encroaching within the fire hazard buffer surrounding the improvements, and some of the anti-perching devices installed to protect bird species, such as the Endangered California condor, have become unattached. The access road is connected to the Nordoff Ridge Road and is open to recreation use on a permitted basis. Evidence of public use was observed adjacent to the project site and included a primitive fire ring and bullet casings. This area is patrolled by district recreation and fire staff as well as California Department of Fish and Game wardens. In the same vicinity dismantled communication materials from another project, including buried anchor mechanisms and portions of a tower, were piled and are awaiting removal.

Conclusion

The project occurs within a designated communication site and abides by the site restrictions as described in Part 2 of the LMP. This project contributes to Forest Goal 7.1 by supporting facilities that serve public needs, while co-locating facilities and minimizing the number of acres encumbered by special use authorizations. This project is a good example of communication site analysis, opportunities for joint management, and the benefits of cooperative use. The LMP communication site guidance to protect bird species was implemented as intended. Monitoring revealed that installed anti-perching devices require periodic inspection and maintenance to maintain function, particularly at sites that experience extreme weather conditions.

Sweetwater Rangeland Analysis Project

Project Description

Livestock grazing on the Sweetwater Allotment has been an ongoing use in Vaquero Canyon on the Monterey Ranger District. The allotment is a combination of private and National Forest System (NFS) lands, and includes approximately 84 capable rangeland acres on NFS. In 2009, an Environmental Assessment was completed to determine whether to reauthorize livestock grazing on the allotment for a new 10-year term.



Monitoring

A Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact were completed in 2009. The decision authorized continued livestock grazing for 40 cow/calf pairs (63 total AUMs) annually from January 15 through May 14 on range approximately 30% NFS lands and 70% private lands controlled by the permittee. The decision included LMP standards specific to livestock grazing activities designed to protect resources: maintain effective soil cover (S52); protect resources from salt and other supplements (S53); complete range analysis following a wildfire (S54); and maintain residual dry matter levels greater than 700lb/acre (S56). Additional requirements included complying with the Region 5 MOU for Grazing and national programmatic for the protection of historic resources, and to mitigate the spread of non-native invasive plants. A portion of the allotment is within designated wilderness and includes a segment of road providing access to a private inholding within the allotment. The decision included notification protocols and specifications for completing road maintenance to ensure compliance with the Wilderness Act. A number of monitoring requirements were also incorporated into the decision to assess rangeland and resource conditions, and to determine whether management adjustments are needed. All of the design criteria and resource protection measures were included in the term grazing permit. Operating instructions are issued to the permittee as adjustments are needed resultant from monitoring.



A field review of this project was completed on August 27, 2012. On the NFS portion of the allotment utilization by livestock has been low and are well within the residual dry matter and soil cover levels prescribed in the LMP. Vaqueros Creek was surveyed and there was no evidence of erosion, concentrated waste, or functional impairment from livestock. The road within the wilderness is overgrown and has not been maintained for a few years. During the 2008 Indians Fire a 20 foot wide hand line was constructed off the road. This hand line is still discernible from a distance, but has re-vegetated and at close distance blends in with the undisturbed vegetation adjacent.

Conclusion

The project is consistent with Forest Goal 6.1, “move toward improved rangeland conditions as indicated by key range sites,” as well as other objectives, standards, and the Arroyo Seco place-based program emphasis found in the LMP. Design criteria, resource protection measures, and specified monitoring are being implemented as stipulated and have been effective at achieving the desired result. Presently, the rangeland condition is either at or moving toward desired conditions.

Rinconada Mine Safety Re-Closure Project

Project Description

The objective of this project was to re-close entrances to adits at the Rinconada Mine in the interest of public safety. All of the adits and shafts were closed in 2004 under a separate decision. Because the composition of the rock at most of the adit entrances weren’t conducive to anchoring metal gates, polyurethane plugs were installed. By 2005, vandalism had removed or compromised the integrity of most of the polyurethane plugs. Under the proposal, explosives would be used to re-close vandalized adits and collapse the arch over the open pit; polyurethane at one adit (if still intact) would be encapsulated with mortar; graffiti paint would be sand blasted from rocks; the wire fence encircling the open pit would be expanded if needed following blasting activities; and warning signs posted throughout the mine site.



Monitoring

The project activities were analyzed and documented in a Decision Memo completed in 2008. The Rinconada Mine is a historic site and consultation was completed with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) who determined the project would not adversely affect historic properties at the mine. The biological analysis identified two bat species that may be impacted by the project, but it would not result in a listing of the species. Surveys in 2003 showed bats were utilizing the mine. However, during the analysis for this project, no bats or sign were observed at the vandalized areas. This could be the result of human trespass and disturbance at these locations, including toxic fumes from the burned polyurethane. The project analysis did acknowledge that closing some of the adits may inhibit or prevent bat access at those locations. However, the project would also impede continued human access and disturbance, which would be beneficial to bats that may enter other portions of mine.

Implementation of this project began promptly following completion of the 2008 NEPA. The arch over the main pit was collapsed, and several adits entrances were blasted shut and sealed with rock. Additional on-site review at the Mahoney Tunnel entrance revealed there was enough solid rock to anchor a bat gate, and one was installed at this location.

In 2009, new NEPA documentation was completed for this activity, and a contractor was hired to complete implementation. The contract included provisions to protect TES species, prevent erosion and pollution, protect the historic mine improvements, and mitigate fire risk. In 2011 installation was completed and abandoned mine warning signs re-installed.

A field review of this site and all the adit locations was completed on August 28, 2012. Some of the adits collapsed and blocked with rock had small openings that allowed air flow in the tunnel, but prevented human access. The bat gate at the Mahoney Tunnel was still in place and appeared to be effective at deterring human access. Some vandalism has occurred in this location and occasional monitoring should be completed to ensure the closure remains effective. The post and cable fence encircling the main pit was constructed effectively, and serves as a deterrent in combination with the posted warning sign. Following the demolition activity at this portion of the mine, the arch over the pit has been collapsed and large boulders strewn across a portion of the pit. A few adits and shafts were still secured with polyurethane foam overlaid with rock. At one of these shafts, a culvert was imbedded in the polyurethane providing air flow and access for bats.



Conclusion

The abandoned mine pit and access points to underground portions of the mine are unsafe for public entry. One of the intents of Forest Goal 7.1 is that National Forest facilities and infrastructure be among other things safe. Forest Goal 3.1 restates this intent. This project restored the safety closure originally implemented in accordance with perimeter control guidelines identified in the Appendix D, Part 3 of the LMP, while also protecting the historic integrity of the above ground facilities and minimizing impacts to wildlife.

The project was also designed in conformance with Forest Standard 23, which states when closing abandoned mines in the interest of public safety to do so in a manner that will maintain habitat for bat species of concern, to the extent practicable. Due to the orientation and rock composition of some adit entrances, bat gates were not a practicable solution for preventing access, and other alternatives to collapsing the entrances had been explored and implemented with limited success. Yet, some of the entrances were blocked with bat gates, and with culverts imbedded within polyurethane to maintain air flow and access for bats.

Day Fire Hazard Tree Project

Project Description

The Day Fire burned over 160,000 acres on the Los Padres and Angeles National Forests in 2006. Though predominantly within the wilderness, the wildland fire also burned tree stands within and around developed recreation sites, and access routes frequented by the public and patrolled by Forest Service staff. Trees adjacent to public use areas in the Alamo Mountain and Grade Valley areas were killed, severely injured, and structurally compromised by the fire resulting in a hazard to public safety and recreation use closure of these areas. The purpose of this project was to remove the hazard trees from campgrounds, trailheads, roads, and OHV trails impacted by the Day Fire in the Alamo Mountain and Grade Valley areas to allow for safe passage and use.



Monitoring

A Decision Memo was completed for this project in October 2007. The decision was to cut down identified hazard trees within 100-150 ft. of roads, OHV trails, campgrounds and trailheads in the Alamo Mountain and Grade Valley areas. As part of the decision, those trees within the project area that fit hazard tree criteria and were of commercial size could be sold and extracted as part of a commercial operation. This portion of the decision was subsequently appealed and later litigated. By the time the litigation was resolved in 2008 much of the economic value of the hazard trees was lost. As a result, the commercial extraction portion of the decision, which also included design criteria applicable to logging, was not implemented. In late summer/early fall of 2009, treatment of the hazard trees for non-commercial purposes commenced. A contract was awarded for the Alamo Mountain area, and a Forest Service crew was hired for the Grade Valley area to complete the tree falling activity.

Monitoring was completed for the Alamo Mountain portion of the project. A review of the contract revealed inclusion of LMP standards, BMPs, and other mitigations measures identified in the Decision Memo to protect forest resources. Hazard trees were directionally felled to protect roads, willow habitat for birds, and to keep watercourses clear of debris, and the felled trees were left on site. Implementation under the contract was completed within a few months, and the areas were eventually re-opened to the recreating public. Since then periodic hazard tree assessments and treatment have been completed by staff within the project area.

A site visit to Alamo Mountain was completed on August 24, 2012. Many of the trees that were felled along the roadway have been cleared by fire use permit holders. Waterways on the mountain within the project area are predominately intermittent or ephemeral, and have been kept clear of felled tree debris in accordance with the riparian conservation area design criteria. Slash from the felled trees was not concentrated or even readily visible, and was kept under the 18 inch accumulation threshold. Willow habitat appeared to be intact and unaffected by the project activities (LMP standard 11 & 12).

Because all the hazard trees targeted by the contractor were already dead before being felled, application of the fungicide sporax was not needed (LMP standard 5). Tree seedlings planted in 2009 have successfully established. Standing dead or dying trees that fit hazardous criteria were observed within the project corridor adjacent to the road, and should be assessed in follow-up for potential treatment.

Conclusion

This project mitigated the risk to public safety and Forest infrastructure resultant from the post-fire effects of the wildland 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.

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 other than updates.

Public Participation

The 2011 Los Padres National Forest Land Management Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report is posted on the Forest website.

List of Preparers

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:

Adam Furlow
Bruce Emmens
Eleanor Molina
Gregory Thompson
Jeff Bensen

Jeff Kwasny
John Smith
Kathleen Phelps
Kyle Kinports
Melody Fountain

Patrick Lieske
Sue Exline
Valerie Hubbartt
Veronica Garza
Vicki Collins