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# Los Padres National Forest

*Land Management Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report for 2015*



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## Los Padres National Forest Stakeholders

I am pleased to present the Los Padres National Forest's fiscal year 2015 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), 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,



KEVIN B. ELLIOTT  
Forest Supervisor  
Los Padres National Forest

July 17, 2018

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 2015 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 2015 LMP Monitoring and Evaluation Report documents the evaluation of selected projects and programs where activities occurred during October 1, 2014 through September 30, 2015.

## 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: FY2015 Accomplishments**

Indicator	Units	2015 Accomplishment
Acres of Terrestrial Habitat Enhanced	Acres	1065
Miles of Aquatic Habitat Enhanced	Miles	30
Acres of Noxious Weeds Treated	Acres	40
Acres of Vegetation Improved (also see Hazardous Fuels Reduction)	Acres	968
Acres of Watershed Improved	Acres	N/A*
Acres of Land Ownership Adjusted	Acres	149
Number of Heritage Resources Managed to Standard	Number	N/A*
Products Provided to Standard (Interpretation and Education)	Number	N/A*
Recreation Special Use Authorizations Administered to Standard	Number	147
PAOT Days Managed to Standard (Developed Sites)	PAOT Days	263,069
Recreation Days Managed to Standard (General Forest Areas)	Days	N/A*
Land Use Authorizations Administered to Standard	Number	225
Number of Mineral Operations Administered to Standard	Number	N/A*
Manage Grazing Allotments	Acres	71,731
Acres of Hazardous Fuel Reduction	Acres	3,153
Miles of Passenger Car Roads Maintained to Objective Maintenance Level	Miles	N/A*
Miles of High Clearance & Back Country Roads Maintained to Objective Maintenance Level	Miles	N/A*
Miles of Road Decommissioned	Miles	0

\* Accomplishment indicator was not tracked for fiscal year 2015.

The indicators for interpretation and education products provided to standard, general forest areas recreation days managed to standard, and heritage resources managed to standard were not tracked in fiscal year 2015.

### 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 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	Hazard Tree Reduction	Facilities Management	Decision Memo; CE Checklist
Ojai	Lion Canyon Creek Dam Removal	Restoration	Decision Memo; CE Checklist
Monterey	NASA Portable Weather Monitoring Station at Brazil Ranch	Special Uses	Decision Memo; CE Checklist; Special Use Permit; Resource Monitoring Data
Santa Lucia	DGS.CHP Black Mountain Communications Site	Special Uses	Decision Memo; CE Checklist; Special Use Permit
Mount Pinos	Lake of the Woods Community Defense Zone Project	Vegetation	Decision Memo; CE Checklist; Resource Monitoring Data



***Hazard Tree Reduction at Sage Hill, Los Prietos and First Crossing*****Project Description**

Within the Lower Santa Ynez Recreation Area an evaluation of hazard trees was conducted by the Forest Service and Rocky Mountain Recreation Company. This evaluation revealed that there were hazardous limbs and dead trees at the Sage Hill Campground, the Los Prietos Campground and the First Crossing Day Use Area. Due to prolonged drought stress and/or an infestation by bark beetle several Coast Live Oak, Valley Oak and non-native pine trees resulted in dead fuel loads and needed to be removed from these areas because they had become hazardous fuels in a fire prone area. There were also many large limbs that were broken or dead that posed a hazard to life and property. Dead limbs and trees increase risks to wildlife in the area. Local fire crews were requested to remove the hazardous trees and limbs and to chip all slash onsite. To the extent possible all work would occur outside the breeding season for birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Some of the large fallen pine and oak boles were left onsite as seating for campsites, with wood chips scattered to mitigate erosion and support noxious weed control. Some oak rounds were taken by the public under a wood use permit and others taken back to the Santa Barbara Ranger District to heat fire stations.

**Monitoring**

This action was analyzed and documented in a Decision Memo. The Decision Memo included mitigation for biological monitoring of bird nesting and best management practices (BMPs) to mitigate erosion and water quality impacts.

Since the project was not ground disturbing it was determined that no archaeological monitoring was required.

Project implementation was initiated on November of 2014 and work continued into February of 2015. The District Resource Officer, discussed with fire crews the need to leave wood chips onsite and that, to the extent possible, all work would be conducted outside the breeding season for birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. There was also an understanding that if a dead tree did not pose a risk to life and property it should be left as potential wildlife habitat.

Fire crews implemented erosion control measures consistent with BMP requirements, such as spreading wood chips onsite and refraining from driving off road. No erosion was noted during the project.



**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 prevented further soil erosion 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 followed in this case 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.



## ***Lion Canyon Creek Dam Removal***

### **Project Description**

The Lion Canyon Creek Dam Removal Project is located on the Ojai Ranger District in Ventura County. Lion Canyon Creek is a tributary to Sespe Creek, one of the few remaining wild rivers in southern California with 31 of its 61 mile-length designated as a National Wild and Scenic River. Sespe Creek, then, flows into the Santa Clara River, which supports a Core 1 population of the federally endangered Southern California Coast Steelhead (SCCS) Distinct Population Segment (southern steelhead). Core 1 southern steelhead populations have the highest priority for recovery actions. The project consisted of the removal of a 26.5 feet L x 3.1 feet H abandoned diversion check dam on Lion Canyon Creek that created a barrier to southern steelhead migration along the stream corridor. The removal of the dam opened an additional 3.7 miles of high quality spawning and rearing stream habitat for federally endangered SCCS. The California Conservation Corps (CCC) demolished and removed the dam during October 2014 under the direction of their team leader, a fish habitat specialist in the CCC's Steelhead Restoration Program.

### **Monitoring**

Los Padres National Forest (LPNF) staff specialists coordinated planning, site evaluation, and other resource review with staff from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Restoration Center (Center) in Arcata, California; National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS); the CCC; and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. LPNF specialists met onsite on February 11, 2014, with NMFS and CCC.

The project was funded by NOAA's Community-based Restoration Program (CRP), a national effort to encourage partnerships to carry out locally important habitat restoration to benefit marine resources. NOAA's NEPA process included analysis of environmental effects of the CRP in a 2002 Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) and a 2006 Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Assessment (SPEA) that concluded with a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). Additionally, given that a snorkel survey conducted on August 4, 2014, revealed the presence of 77 juvenile steelhead within the project reach, the Center initiated formal consultation with NMFS for project effects to southern steelhead. NMFS completed the project-specific biological opinion on October 3, 2014. It allowed for incidental take and required compliance with reasonable and prudent measures and terms and conditions to minimize take. In addition, the best management practices that had been incorporated in the CCC's project description were followed during implementation. Upon receipt of NMFS's Biological Opinion, the Center completed its NEPA review, including the CRP NEPA checklist, and on October 9, 2014, issued a letter of inclusion for the project under CRP's PEA and SPEA and the associated FONSI. A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permit was not required; however, the CCC applied for and received authorization from the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) to proceed with the Lion Canyon Creek Small Dam Removal after September 21, 2014. This date was based on the receipt by the Board of the required project mitigation plan on August 7, 2014.

The LPNF consulted informally with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on project effects to federally threatened California red-legged frog with a "May Affect but Not Likely to Adversely Affect" determination. The USFWS concurred with this determination. The California red-legged frog was the only terrestrial wildlife

Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, or Candidate (TEPC) species potentially affected by the project. Cultural resource clearances were provided by the LPNF South Zone Archaeologist and the LPNF Tribal Liaison, respectively, as a Screened Exemption on January 29, 2014, and as a statement on September 15, 2014, that because of no impacts to cultural resources, tribal consultation would be unnecessary. On October 10, 2014, the Ojai District Ranger (ODR) signed the *Lion Creek Dam Removal Project Memo to File* for the review and adoption of NOAA's NEPA. The ODR found that the environmental evaluation for this project had been completed sufficiently under NEPA and that the project was designed to avoid significant impacts to resources.



## Conclusion

This project meets Forest Goal 3.1 – Habitats for federally listed species are conserved and listed species are recovered – and Forest Goal 6.2 – Provide ecological conditions to sustain viable populations of native species. It is an outstanding example of Goal 5.1 – Improve watershed conditions through cooperative management – indeed, collaboration of many partners was essential to the project's success. The project is also consistent with the LMP Fish and Wildlife Standard 12 to accept short-term impacts where long-term effects would provide a net benefit for the species and its habitat. Project-specific mitigations, reasonable and prudent measures, and terms and conditions were implemented as stipulated. Long-term monitoring to determine project effectiveness is ongoing. For example, during summer 2016, long-term data collections as a part of a joint LPNF stream monitoring project by LPNF and UCSB biologists, noted 114 *Oncorhynchus mykiss* (mostly juvenile), 215 juvenile *O. mykiss* were estimated in the summer of 2017, and >300 juvenile *O. mykiss* in the summer of 2018 during ongoing snorkel surveys at Lion Canyon Creek.

***NASA Ames Portable Weather Monitoring Station at Brazil Ranch*****Project Description**

NASA Ames Research Center requested renewal of a special use permit to continue operating and maintaining two portable weather monitoring stations at Brazil Ranch for a term of thirty years. The weather monitoring stations are for the purpose of gathering temperature, rainfall, humidity, solar radiation and wind data and include a solar panel and data loggers. One weather station is located behind the guest house known as Indian House and one is located on the nearby hillside called Hurricane Ridge facing the Pacific Ocean. The stations are situated such that they allow topographic and vegetative screening so that they cannot be seen from Highway 1. The holder provides the Los Padres National Forest with an annual summary of the data collected.

**Monitoring**

The action was analyzed under a categorical exclusion and documented in a decision memo completed on September 22, 2014. The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as "Issuance of a new special use authorization for a new term to replace an existing or expired special use authorization when the only changes are administrative, there are not changes to the authorized facilities or increases in the scope or intensity of authorized activities, and the applicant or holder is in full compliance with the terms and conditions of the special use authorization." [36 CFR 220.6(e)(15)]. The analysis of potential effects included review of any changed conditions since the previous authorization was issued (2008), completion of a NEPA checklist, and a compliance inspection. No extraordinary circumstances were identified.



A new special use permit was issued to NASA on October 28, 2014 providing for the continued use and maintenance of the facilities for a 30-year term. The permit included an operation and maintenance plan that stipulated resource protection measures and fire prevention measures.

A field visit to Brazil Ranch was completed on April 9, 2015 and facilities matched the description in the special use permit. The area surrounding the facilities is free of trash or microtrash and has sufficient topographic and vegetation screening vegetation to remain out of sight of Pacific Coast Highway, as stipulated in the authorization. Resource protection measures were monitored for applicable LMP Standards IS1, LM1, LM3, Lands2, S9, S24 and S42.

**Conclusion**

The weather stations are fully consistent with LMP direction and are in compliance with terms and conditions of the special use permit. The Decision Memo of 2014 to re-authorize the special use permit documented that the facilities meet LMP goals, desired conditions, and applicable standards, have adequate resource protection measures and are a suitable land use. No problems in implementation were detected and no corrective actions were necessary. Future special use inspections will be documented in the appropriate files and data bases to ensure continued compliance.

***DGS-CHP Black Mountain Communications Site*****Project Description**

Black Mountain Communications Site is located in the Pozo/La Panza area 26 miles from Santa Margarita, California, San Luis Obispo County in the Los Padres National Forest. The south peak of this site occupies approximately one acre off all weather Black Mountain Road, 29S10, at an elevation of 3622 feet above mean sea level. This site is used as a low power non-broadcast site shared by public agencies, a commercial user and an amateur user.

The State of California Department of General Services (DGS) (for California Highway Patrol (CHP)) requested authorization to construct a new communication building and tower within Black Mountain Communication Site. The project included decommissioning of the aging Forest Service communications building, wooden pole, and short tower to allow room for the new building and tower at the highest elevation of the site. The CHP agreed to allow other public agencies to share space in the new building and tower. The project also included State improvement of the 0.12 mile natural surface access road, installation of a road gate, and installation of cyclone fencing around the

new building and tower to increase site security.

**Monitoring**

A Decision Memo was completed on January 10, 2013 and stipulated that construction and operation would follow requirements for resource protection as described in the BA/BE (avoidance and minimization measures), Land Management Plan (LMP), Communication Site Management Plan (sections VII and VIII and Appendix F), and project and engineering drawings and specifications. The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as "Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of NFS lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land" [36 CFR 220.6(e)(3)]. No extraordinary circumstances were identified.

Black Mountain Communications Site is surrounded by the Black Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area, and the project was determined to be in keeping with the character of the existing communication development. By following construction and resource protection standards, the project did not represent a significant change to IRA characteristics. The Forest Service communication building once served as the base of a lookout tower and a cultural resource report was completed. The report determined that the use of the area as a fire lookout, identified as a potential historic property, was ineligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places and California Register of Historical Resources; the SHPO concurred. The design and height of the new tower and other building and tower features adhered to standards described in

Appendix G of the LMP to protect the California condor. The new building and tower were determined to be within acceptable visual quality standards. Best Management Practices were followed for the construction of the new facility.

The Forest issued a communications use lease to DGS-CHP on April 24, 2013 for a term of thirty years. Several monitoring inspections were conducted through the construction process and construction was completed in April 2015. Field visits to Black Mountain were conducted on April 21, 2015 and September 28, 2016; the facility was found to be in compliance with requirements for defensible space, noxious weed prevention, microtrash removal, presence of anti-perching devices where needed, and other requirements of the authorization. Resource protection measures were monitored for applicable LMP Standards IS1, LM1, LM3, Lands2, S9, S24 and S42.

Winter storms in 2016 resulted in the discovery that the gated access road leading to the new tower and building required work to improve drainage capacity. Some slope erosion and structure undercutting on a downhill facility were repaired and road drainage improved.

## **Conclusion**

The project occurs within a designated communication site as described in the Black Mountain Communication Site Management Plan and in accordance with design and resource protection criteria as described in the LMP and NEPA documents. 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. The new DGS-CHP building and tower at Black Mountain Communications Site allows use by multiple public agencies at a key location in San Luis Obispo County. By replacing a small aging building and wooden pole with a larger prefab building and 80-foot tall self-supporting four-legged galvanized steel tower, the result is an increased public agency coverage area and improved public health and safety services. All relevant criteria were followed, monitored, and determined effective, the access road drainage was corrected, and no further corrective actions are necessary. Future special use inspections will be documented in the appropriate files and data bases to ensure continued compliance.



### ***Lake of the Woods Community Defense Zone Project***

#### **Project Description**

The purpose of this project is to support the Los Padres National Forest Land Management (Forest Plan) (USDA 2005) goals to improve the ability of Southern California communities to limit loss of life and property (Goal 1.1). As part of this goal, the desired condition is to have vegetation treated to enhance community protection, reduce the risk of loss of human life, structures, improvements and natural resources from wildfire. The Lake of the Woods Community Defense Zone Project is designed to implement the following four categories of actions:

- Conversion of vegetation to a less flammable condition to increase defensible space.
- Construct an approximately 300-500 foot wide x 1.5 miles long fuelbreak (90 acres).
- Disposal of accumulated cut plant materials.
- Execute vegetation treatments that maintain the effectiveness of the Community Defense Zone over time.

#### **Monitoring**

This action was categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified within agency procedures under FSH 1909.15, 31.0 – Categories of Actions for Which a Project File or Case File and Decision Memo are Required, “Category 6: Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities”. This category is appropriate because the project includes brush control and incidental thinning to reduce fire hazard, as outlined in Subcategory b. This project was documented in a decision memo completed October 9, 2007 and underwent a NEPA sufficiency review in February of 2015. After the 2015 review it was determined the project still fit within the identified category, no new extraordinary circumstances exists, and implementation should continue.



In the spring of 2015, the Mount Pinos District Fire Staff continued maintenance activities within the fuelbreak. Maintenance activities included thinning of the pinyon pine stands, piling of activity fuels created from the thinning and eventually burning wood piles. Burning activities occurred under an approved burn plan. More maintenance of this project is planned to occur within the next few years so that desired conditions can be either be met or maintained on all subject areas.

#### **Conclusion**

This project is consistent with Land Management Plan Direction, NEPA sufficiency review has documented that the project meets compliance within the identified category, and maintaining this fuelbreak for community protection still exists.



## **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 2015 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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