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# Los Padres National Forest

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*Land Management Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report for 2012*



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## Los Padres National Forest Stakeholders

I am pleased to present the Los Padres National Forest's fiscal year 2012 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

December 2, 2013

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PEGGY HERNANDEZ  
Forest Supervisor  
Los Padres National Forest

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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 2012 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 2012 LMP Monitoring and Evaluation Report documents the evaluation of selected projects and programs where activities occurred during October 1, 2011 through September 30, 2012.

## 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: FY2012 Accomplishments**

Indicator	Units	2012 Accomplishment
Acres of Terrestrial Habitat Enhanced	Acres	453
Miles of Aquatic Habitat Enhanced	Miles	19
Acres of Noxious Weeds Treated	Acres	133

Acres of Vegetation Improved (also see Hazardous Fuels Reduction)	Acres	1,950
Acres of Watershed Improved	Acres	627
Acres of Land Ownership Adjusted	Acres	207
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	72
PAOT Days Managed to Standard (Developed Sites)	PAOT Days	0
Recreation Days Managed to Standard (General Forest Areas)	Days	N/A*
Land Use Authorizations Administered to Standard	Number	134
Number of Mineral Operations Administered to Standard	Number	73
Manage Grazing Allotments	Acres	20,911
Acres of Hazardous Fuel Reduction	Acres	3,515
Miles of Passenger Car Roads Maintained to Objective Maintenance Level	Miles	121
Miles of High Clearance & Back Country Roads Maintained to Objective Maintenance Level	Miles	148
Miles of Road Decommissioned	Miles	0

\* Accomplishment indicator was not tracked for fiscal year 2012.

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 2012.

### 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	Cherry Creek Pond Habitat Enhancement	Ecosystem Restoration	Environmental Assessment; Decision Notice/FONSI
Ojai	Lower Piru Rangelands – Temescal Allotment	Grazing Management	Environmental Assessment; Decision Notice/FONSI; Permit
Monterey	Kirk Creek Campground Restroom Replacement	Recreation management	CE Checklist; Proposal Documents; Engineering Plans
Santa Lucia	Verizon Wireless Emergency Power Supply at Plowshare Communication Site	Special Uses	Decision Memo; Special Use Permit; Communication Site Plan; Biological and Archaeological Evaluation
Mt Pinos	McPherson Peak Communication Site	Special Uses	Communication Site Management Plan

### ***Cherry Creek Pond Habitat Enhancement Project***

#### **Project Description**

Cherry Creek Pond is a small water feature located in the upper reaches of Corrales Canyon utilized for breeding by the California red-legged frog. Since the federally listed threatened frog was discovered within the pond in 2005, the pond had filled with cattails severely limiting the available breeding habitat. Surveys and test plots revealed that removing cattails would temporarily enhance breeding habitat. This project aimed to remove cattails and their root mass to create a relatively large open water area that would persist and improve breeding habitat within the pond for red-legged frogs.

#### **Monitoring**

An environmental assessment (EA) and finding of no significant impact (FONSI) were completed in 2009 documenting the analysis and impacts of the project. The decision notice (DN) authorized mechanical removal of cattails across approximately 25% of the pond on the southeastern side. Nearly a dozen mitigations measures were designed into the project to protect the population of red-legged frogs. In addition, reasonable and prudent measures, and terms and conditions were included from a project



specific biological opinion issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The project was implemented in one day on October 10, 2012. One biologist was on site in advance of and during operational activities.

A field review of this project was completed on September 12, 2013. The pond is enclosed by a wire link fence, which protects the pond from access by livestock on the Happy Canyon Allotment. Despite the enclosure, evidence was discovered that large wildlife utilized the pond area on a limited basis. Discussions ensued on improving access to the pond for large wildlife. On September 25, 2013 a section of the fence was modified to improve access for wildlife, while continuing to prevent access by livestock.



With exception of the cleared area and a few very small openings, the pond is filled with cattails. The open area cleared by the project is approximately 20 ft. wide by 70 ft. long and includes some dead woody debris, which provides substratum for attaching egg masses. A few two-striped garter snakes were observed within the cleared area, but no tadpoles or adult red-legged frog individuals. The adult frogs were very likely concealed within the protective cover of the cattails on the fringe of the open area. During the 2012-2013 breeding season two California red-legged frog egg masses were detected within the newly cleared area.

## **Conclusion**

This project is consistent with 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 also consistent with LMP Standard 12, which states 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 and were effective at achieving the desired result.

## ***Lower Piru Rangelands – Temescal Allotment***

### **Project Description**

The Lower Piru Rangelands (rangelands) are located on the Ojai Ranger District near Piru Reservoir in Ventura and Los Angeles Counties. The eastern portion of the project area is located on the Angeles National Forest; however the livestock grazing activity on the rangelands are administered by the Los Padres National Forest. The rangelands consist of three grazing allotments: the Piru, Pothole, and Temescal Allotments. With the exception of the Pothole Allotment, which recently removed private United Water Conservation District lands, the allotments include private and National Forest System (NFS) lands. In 2011 an EA was completed to analyze the impacts of reauthorizing livestock grazing on the allotments for a new 10-year term.

## Monitoring

A DN and FONSI were completed in September 2011. The decision was to continue livestock grazing on the Temescal Allotment similar to what had occurred in the recent past, and to continue livestock grazing on the Piru and Pothole Allotments with appropriate mitigations and improvements necessary to protect resources. Mitigations specific to the Piru and Pothole Allotments were incorporated that stipulated conditions for the use of Canton Canyon Road, maintenance on the Reichenbach Road, and ingress and egress along the Pothole Trail. In addition, fence work would be completed to restrict livestock from entering adjacent United Water Conservation District lands before authorizing livestock grazing on the Piru and Pothole Allotments. On the Temescal Allotment, fencing would be installed to restrict livestock access to suitable southwestern willow flycatcher habitat in Reasoner Canyon. The decision also included LMP standards specific to livestock grazing activities (S52, S53, S54, and S56), best management practices, cultural resource protection measures, and measures to prevent or minimize the spread of invasive weeds. A portion of the rangelands are within inventoried roadless areas (IRA) and additional measures to protect IRA characteristics were incorporated. The IRA protection measures were primarily focused on the use and maintenance of a road system used to access improvements and manage the allotments. The Temescal and Potholes Allotments include suitable lands in the Sespe Wilderness. A short segment of road within wilderness on the Temescal Allotment would require a separate analysis in accordance with policy before motorized use could be allowed.



Upon completion of the DN, livestock grazing has only been authorized on the Temescal Allotment. Two temporary permits have been issued for both the Reasoner and Rodeo Flat Units. A term grazing permit and allotment management plan will be completed. The temporary grazing permits include those resource protection measures identified in the EA and DN that are applicable to the permittee, with exception of the motorized cross-country travel stipulations. Annual monitoring is occurring as described in the EA.

A field review of the Temescal Allotment was completed on July 30, 2013. The review was combined with an assessment of potential suitable southwestern willow flycatcher (SWFL) habitat in Reasoner Canyon to determine if any management





actions were needed to protect SWFL habitat in accordance with the EA and Endangered Species Act. Several areas, both on NFS lands and on private lands within the allotment, were identified as containing the requisite habitat characteristics to support SWFL foraging and nesting. However, 2005 flooding events have altered these areas permanently changing and decreasing the suitable habitat areas which previously existed. It was determined that the areas of potential suitable habitat will recover to suitable habitat in the future, and thus warrant management actions, such as a limited operating period, and/or fencing to restrict livestock from these areas (adaptive measures from the EA). Other locations within Reasoner Canyon, previously suitable, were determined to be not suitable.

The Rodeo Flat Unit was also visited. Below normal rainfall has resulted in less vegetative growth on the allotment this year. Both units in the Temescal Allotment have seen low to moderate utilization on NFS lands and are within the residual dry matter and soil cover levels prescribed in the LMP. Certain areas on the Reasoner Unit were near utilization levels and it was recommended that livestock be removed from NFS lands until conditions improve, or authorized range improvements are installed to distribute livestock more evenly over Forest range areas.

## **Conclusion**

The project is consistent with Goal 6.1, "move toward improved rangeland conditions as indicated by key range sites," as well as other objectives, standards, and the Ojai-Piru Front Country place-based program emphasis found in the LMP. Livestock grazing standards have also been incorporated into the grazing permits. According to this review, all project design criteria and monitoring are being completed as stipulated. The design criteria appear to be effective at achieving the desired result. Rangeland condition is either at or moving toward desired conditions for areas currently being grazed by livestock.

## ***Kirk Creek Campground Restroom Replacement Project***

### **Project Description**

Kirk Creek Campground has had persistent potable water and leach field problems. Located along the Big Sur Coast, several projects had been implemented over the years to address these issues. Most recently, the facilities were not able to fully comply with Monterey County water quality standards, and either needed to be upgraded or replaced. The Monterey Ranger District determined toilet replacement would be the best course of action to address the water system issues while also meeting the recreation needs at the campground and protecting sensitive resources in the area.

### **Monitoring**

Environmental review was completed to evaluate the removal of the existing restroom and water system facilities, and installation of new waterless vault toilets. This project was analyzed under a categorical exclusion and documented in a NEPA Checklist on August 17, 2012. The project was designed to minimize impact to sensitive resources and campground users. The two new toilets would be located where they would have least the impact based on resource data, and existing underground installations collapsed and abandoned.

The first vault toilet was installed across the shared loop road from the existing toilet during August 2012. This location was selected to minimize impact to sensitive resources. The second vault toilet was installed within the footprint of the existing toilet during December 2012 following the removal of that toilet. These actions, including the implementation of best management practices, were completed by private contractors, and monitored by the district archaeologist. The remaining flush toilet was removed May 2013, with exception of the concrete foundation, which will likely be left in place to avoid impacts.

A field visit to the campground was completed by an IDT on September 13, 2013. The toilets are functioning as intended, meeting the needs of recreators, and the surrounding area has largely recovered from the disturbance. Due to a lack of funding, the first toilet walkway is lined with decomposed granite instead of concrete. If future funding allows, the granite should be removed and replace with concrete. Upslope of the second toilet there appeared to be a potential drainage issue that may need to be resolved to prevent standing water from developing adjacent to the facility.



## Conclusion

This project is consistent with Forest Goal 3.1 by providing recreation facilities that are safe, accessible, and well-maintained, while also providing for the protection of natural resources. The Big Sur Coast is a popular destination for regional and international visitors, particularly the Highway 1 corridor. The place based program emphasis in the LMP states, among other things, to “provide continuing opportunities for day-use and camping, including the maintenance, upgrading or construction of visitor facilities along California State Highway 1.” In addition, the desired condition is to accommodate visitor use without compromising resource values. This project achieved both.

## ***Verizon Wireless Emergency Power Supply at Plowshare Communication Site***

### **Project Description**

Verizon wireless requested a special use permit to install, maintain, and use a generator to provide back-up power to their existing facilities at Plowshare Peak. They also request permission to remove two unused diesel fuel tanks, and replace them with one new tank. Under the proposal Verizon Wireless would install the new generator on an existing concrete pad adjacent to the building containing their improvements.

### **Monitoring**

The action was analyzed under a categorical exclusion and documented in a decision memo completed on January 27, 2012. The analysis of potential effects included review of the standard resource conditions that should be considered when determining whether a project can be categorical excluded

from further documentation in an EA or EIS, and also included evaluation of noxious weed risk, management indicator species, and migratory bird species. No extraordinary circumstances were identified.

A special use permit was issued to Verizon Wireless on April 24, 2012 to complete the requested actions. The special use permit provided for the continued use and maintenance of the generator and replacement fuel tank for a 10-year term. The permit included an authorization from Santa Barbara County Air Pollution control district for generator emissions, and operation and maintenance plan that stipulated resource protection measures and fire prevention measures in accordance with Appendix G in the LMP.



A field visit to Plowshare Peak was complete on September 11, 2013. The generator and fuel tank are located behind the American Tower facility as proposed and authorized, and are of sufficiently dark coloring to conform to the Plowshare Peak Communication Site Plan. The area surrounding the generator is clear of vegetation, trash, and orderly as stipulated in the operation and maintenance plan.

## **Conclusion**

The project occurs within a designated communication site and abides by the site restrictions and design criteria as described in 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.

## ***McPherson Peak Communication Site***

### **Project Description**

The McPherson Peak Communication Site is located above the Cuyama Valley off the Sierra Madre Ridge Road. At 5,740 feet above sea level, the communication site consists of approximately 2 acres for development and includes facilities operated by the Department of Defense, U.S. Geological Survey, amateur radio, Verizon Wireless, AT&T, and Unavco. These facilities are authorized by special use permits or leases depending on the use, and are considered ongoing activities due to the duration for which they are authorized.

### **Monitoring**

A new communication site management plan for McPherson Peak has been under development, and is pending signature. This plan was selected for monitoring with the focus occurring at the site scale, rather than on individual projects or uses within the site.

The LMP for the Los Padres National Forest includes suitable uses, strategies, tactics, and standards for communication sites. According to the LMP, McPherson Peak is suitable for low power/non-broadcast. Strategies and tactics for administering special use authorizations (SUAs) are included in Part 2 of the LMP and describe what actions to take for existing operations within threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, and sensitive specie habitats. Part 3 of the plan includes design criteria for realizing the desired conditions described in the plan. Most specific to communications sites is standard 42, and Appendix G - Guidelines for Protection and Conservation of Bird Species at Mountain Top Communication Sites, which includes guidelines for the construction, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning of towers and other structures.



A file review was completed and the site was visited by an IDT on September 11, 2013. Standard 42 in the LMP states to implement Appendix G guidelines within 1-year for communication site permits within identified high-use flyways of the California condor, and 5-years for high-use flyways for other raptors. McPherson Peak is not within a California condor high-use flyway, but may be on the migratory path for other raptors. Following completion of the LMP, the Forest Service did implement the guidelines in Appendix G for the existing permits and leases at McPherson Peak. Additionally, in accordance with the strategies and tactics for non-recreation SUAs, photos and avoidance information for an identified sensitive plant within the communication site area were communicated to permittees/leasees. A review of the draft communication site management plan show that the guidelines in Appendix G have been incorporated and additional conditions on visual quality, fire prevention and hazard reduction, heritage resources, and vegetation have been included.



## Conclusion

The draft McPherson Communication Site Management Plan is consistent with Forest Goal 7.1 by including conditions that aim to minimize encumbered land through consolidation of facilities, shared uses, and removal of obsolete facilities where appropriate, while providing for uses that serve the public and conform to resource management and protection objectives.

## **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 2012 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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