

KEEP THE SESPE WILD & FREE

The Newsletter of the Keep the Sespe Wild Committee

PO Box 715, Ojai, CA 93024

(805) 921-0618 • www.sespewild.org

JUNE 2017

25 YEARS OF A WILD & SCENIC SESPE!

On June 19th 1992, while visiting Los Angeles, President H.W. Bush signed the Los Padres Wilderness Act. As well as adding nearly 450 square miles of new wilderness to Ventura County's Los Padres National Forest (approximately 220,000 acres of Sespe Wilderness, 30,000 acres of Matilija Wilderness, and 38,000 acres of Chumash Wilderness) the Act preserved 31.5 miles of Sespe Creek as a federal Wild and Scenic River.

The 31.5 miles of Sespe Creek protected were exactly as many miles as would fit between the two then proposed damsites on Sespe Creek– the Coldsprings site on the upper Sespe near Howard Creek, and the Oat Mountain site downstream of the forest boundary near Fillmore.

This marked the first time in the history of the national Wild and Scenic Rivers system that an entire pristine river– the Sespe – had been divided up into artificial segments to allow for potential dams at some future date. While local Congressman Bob Lagomarsino (R) repeatedly maintained that his legislation did not allow for dams on the creek, as a simple matter of geography the boundaries of the protected Wild & Scenic River stretch were designed solely to allow for future dam developments. The cities of Ventura, Fillmore and Ojai and the Ventura County Board of Supervisors had all passed resolutions supporting a Sespe Creek free from tall dams, and the Ventura County Star had editorialized the protection of all 55 miles of Sespe Creek.

KSWC FOUNDED FOUR YEARS EARLIER

Keep the Sespe Wild Committee had been formed only four short years before this legislation was signed into law. A group of Sespe hikers based in Ojai noted that the 1988 Los Padres Forest Management Plan recommended new wilderness areas, and Wild & Scenic River status for segments of Sespe Creek and the Sisquoc.

But the Sespe Creek segment was bookmarked by those two dam sites. Water interests in Ventura County had for decades planned to dam the Sespe somewhere, and many sites had been evaluated.

In fact, in 1967 a bond issue was on the ballot in the service area of United Water, based in Santa Paula. It called for a \$90 million bond to dam the Sespe at the TopaTopa site, where Alder Creek meets the Sespe. This dam would have inundated the Sespe Hotsprings Canyon. The bond issue lost by a mere 39 votes! That was pretty close.

Anyway, the 1988 Los Padres Management Plan galvanized that group of Ojai hikers to found Keep the Sespe Wild Committee (KSWC). Within months Congressman Bob Lagomarsino introduced his legislation in D.C. for new wilderness and Wild & Scenic River miles in his district, which then encompassed Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties' Los Padres National Forest backcountry.

The next few years were a blur of activity. KSWC spoke to community groups, local backcountry organizations, city councils – anyone who would listen – to build a brand new Sespe preservation constituency from the ground up. The U.S. Congress held three sets of hearings on the bill in D.C., and we traveled to testify at each.

KSWC worked hand in hand with Friends of the River in Sacramento and with American Rivers in D.C., to lobby for a fully-protected Sespe Creek. We were not successful in that, by the way.

There is an important point that must be noted here – often we are also credited with protecting the Sespe Wilderness. But the wilderness areas in the bill were a project of the Sierra Club, led by activists Sally and Les Reid from Frazier Park. Though we both supported one another's efforts, the wilderness lobbying was all led by the Sierra Club.

What KSWC was very successful at was in showing that the two proposed Sespe dam sites were not viable projects. The Coldsprings dam was too far up the watershed; the Oat Mountain dam would soon silt up, and it sat atop the San Cayetano earthquake fault. We also demonstrated from creek-flow studies that the Freeman Diversion Dam on the Santa Clara River near Saticoy captured more Sespe Creek water than the tall dams on Sespe Creek itself would have done.



On June 19th, the 25th anniversary of the Sespe Wilderness Act, we were deep in the lower Sespe Gorge on our annual tamarisk eradication hike. This pool is adjacent to the Tar Creek trailhead, now closed to the public to protect condor roost sites.

OJAI RANGER DISTRICT OFFICE TO BE CLOSED – in a few years from now.

Los Padres National Forest has for the last two years been conducting an internal discussion on consolidating their five Ranger District offices down to three locations. Most other National Forests across California have already completed similar Ranger District office consolidations.

The current preliminary plan is to consolidate the Santa Barbara and Ojai Ranger District offices at the Paradise Road office north of Santa Barbara, and to consolidate the Santa Lucia Ranger District (in Santa Maria) and the Pinos Ranger District offices, at the Santa Maria location. This latter change will mean changing some Ranger District boundaries.

There is nothing hasty about all this - the draft plan has been sent on to the USFS' Regional HQ in San Francisco for approval. Ranger District boundary changes must be approved by the Department of Agriculture, which is up the chain of command from the U.S. Forest Service.

There is no implementation of this plan expected for at least three years.

With only 3 Ranger Districts, there will be only 3 district biologists, 3 recreation officers, and so on. This will mean that the few remaining Los Padres staff will each have much more work to do.

The Los Padres decision process has focused on how best to deliver services while budgets are shrinking. The fire budget has now grown to fully three quarters of Los Padres Forest's money pool. Every other function – recreation, endangered species management, trail maintenance, public outreach - is shrinking.

While Los Padres Forest is mandated to keep all fire staff positions filled, President Trump has imposed hiring freezes on other open staff positions, such as District biologists, etc.

Senator Feinstein and others introduced a bipartisan bill in the last session of Congress to pay for forest fires from FEMA funds, as the federal government pays for other natural disasters. This legislation would help the U.S. Forest Service's financial woes to some degree - this legislation deserves our support.

Locally there are 5 fire trucks in the Ojai Ranger District - one each at Piru, Sespe/Fillmore, Casitas, Wheeler Gorge and at the Ojai Ranger District office. The Ojai Ranger District fire truck will have to find a new base when that office closes. It is the closest forest fire truck for the whole Ojai Valley.

When the Ojai Ranger District office closes, the only Ojai area forest visitor services will be at the Wheeler Gorge visitor center, staffed year-round on weekends only, by Los Padres Forest Association volunteers.

The Ojai Ranger District office is unusual in being readily accessible by public transportation.

Local forest organizations are considering how to respond to these projected office closures. We'll keep you informed.

LOS PADRES FOREST HQ MOVING – but not quite yet.

The lease on the Goleta HQ of Los Padres National Forest ran out this spring, but the agency has been given some extra months to complete their plans to move their HQ to a new location in the Buellton area. The new location is being arranged by the federal General Services Agency, which has not released an actual new HQ address yet.

PLEASE SEND KSWC A DONATION!

Your donations are our only source of funding. Please keep on sending us a donation every so often. This newsletter goes out to interested persons at no cost, and those that choose to support our work keep us afloat. Thank you for your donations so far this year. Unfortunately, they are not tax-deductible.



A bear taking a swim just downstream from our hiking group this June. It walked off up the east bank – and probably came back down to the creek after we had all passed.

FOREST/BLM FRACKING HALTED IN CA.

Conservationists have forced the Trump administration to halt plans to open more than 1 million acres of public lands in California to oil drilling and fracking. The victory preserves a four-year-old moratorium on leasing federally-owned land in the state for new oil and gas development.

The legal settlement, approved in mid-May, resolves a lawsuit brought by the Center for Biological Diversity and Los Padres ForestWatch, represented by attorneys with Earthjustice. The new agreement requires the Bureau of Land Management to rework a resource-management plan that would have auctioned off drilling rights on vast stretches of public land in California's Central Valley, the southern Sierra Nevada, and Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo and Ventura counties.

The BLM has not held a single oil lease sale in California since 2013, when a federal judge first ruled that the agency had violated the National Environmental Policy Act by issuing oil leases in Monterey County without considering the environmental dangers of fracking. The new settlement will continue that de facto leasing moratorium.

"Our hope is that this settlement puts the final nail in the coffin for BLM's illegal practice of rubber-stamping fracking in California without environmental review", said Greg Loarie, who represented the groups. "Fracking has no place in California's clean, renewable energy future."

The settlement requires the BLM to complete a new analysis of the pollution risks of fracking, which blasts toxic chemicals mixed with water underground,

to crack open rocks, allowing more oil to flow out. The public lands at stake in the new settlement encompass "numerous groundwater systems that contribute to the annual water supply used by neighboring areas for agricultural and urban purposes," a federal judge noted last year.

A [2015 report](#) from the California Council on Science and Technology concluded that fracking in California happens at unusually shallow depths, dangerously close to underground drinking water supplies, with unusually high concentrations of chemicals, including substances dangerous to human health and the environment.

NEW ZEALAND MUDSNAILS NOW IN THE VENTURA RIVER IN OJAI

The invasive New Zealand mudsnail, *Potamopyrgus antipodarum*, has now established itself in the upper Ventura River from Wheeler Gorge down into Meiners Oaks. This represents a threat to the entire watershed, and is only one footstep away from infesting all of Sespe Creek also.

Only 3 millimeters long at maturity, mudsnails can completely take over a river ecosystem, with no known natural predators in the U.S.

They can reach densities of up to ¾ million per square meter! The snails and their grain-of-dirt-sized larvae remain unnoticed on hikers' shoes, and can survive out of the water long enough to be carried to another creek on the hiker's next day out.

Trout fed only on mudsnails passed over half of them alive through their digestive tracts, and lost up to half their body weight per day, a starvation diet.

Mudsnails will not survive extended weeks of dry summer creekbeds, but the Ventura River Preserve is used by dozens of hikers a day all year round, and hikers there during the rainy season could easily and unwittingly infest other waterways they visit in the following days.

Fortunately the best evidence from other nearby creeks where the N.Z. mudsnail is established is that their population initially boomed for 2-3 years, and then dropped down to a much lower, and tolerable population level. While this could be because of stream predators that developed a greater ability to consume the small snails, it's more likely that an unknown, naturally-occurring parasite was able to adapt to using the N.Z. mudsnail as a host. There is also a newly-approved trematode (parasitic flatworm) that can control the mudsnails, which may be introduced if need be. Studies are ongoing.

Keep the Sespe Wild
P.O. Box 715
Ojai, CA 93024

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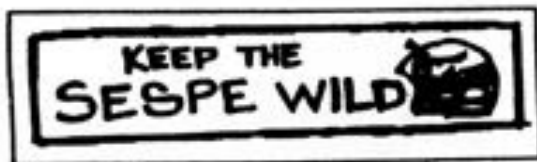
Our original T-shirts are light blue with the Keep the Sespe Wild logo in five colors.

Our newer T-shirts are white with the same five color logo on the back, and with an additional, pocket-sized logo in blue on the left front.

Please state white or blue with your order. Sizes are S, M, L, XL and XXL.

All 100% cotton.

Bumper Stickers \$2.00



All prices include tax and shipping. Please include address and a phone number. Allow 2 to 3 weeks for delivery.

Send your order and check, made out to KSWC to: Keep Sespe Wild, PO Box 715, Ojai, CA 93024

IN MEMORY OF PAT WEINBERGER

Ojai resident Pat Weinberger passed away at 93 last December. She was a fearless fighter for the environment of Ojai and western Ventura County.

Pat led the opposition to U.S. Gypsum's proposal in the early 1970's to construct numerous open-pit phosphate mines on the south slope of Pine Mountain, at an elevation of 6,000 feet, east of the summit of Hwy. 33 between Ojai and Lockwood Valley. The beautiful mountainside that forms the northern rim of Sespe Creek's watershed was to have been floodlit all night to allow the 24-hour mining of a 5-mile stretch of hillside. Half a million gallons of concentrated sulfuric acid was to have been stored on site. Godwin Creek, an upper Sespe

Creek tributary, was to be dammed to hold the highly-acidic mine tailings. The main impact to Ojai from the phosphate mining would have been the convoys of up to 100 truck and trailer rigs coming down Hwy. 33 through Ojai every day of the week, 24 hours a day.

In the end, the project was dropped when an enormous new deposit of phosphate was discovered elsewhere in the world, causing the price of phosphate to drop substantially. Without local opposition, which slowed the project down, the mines would have been in operation long before this price drop occurred.

Pat, thank you, the Sespe is forever in your debt.