

THE SESPE WILD

The Newsletter of the Keep the Sespe Wild Committee

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LOS PADRES FOREST OK's PINE MTN. LOGGING PLAN SEPTEMBER 2021

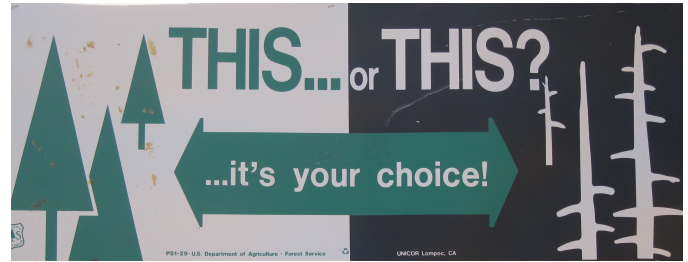
On Monday October 04, Los Padres National Forest (LPNF) administrators released their long-awaited Decision on how they will proceed with their 2020 proposal to log 15,000 ancient conifer trees from the 6,500-foot elevation ridge of Pine Mountain and Reyes Peak, on the northern rim of the Sespe's watershed.

Project critics had raised numerous valid scientific reasons why the proposal was deeply flawed, and made suggestions as to how to amend it in ways that would actually improve the forest's health. These rare high-elevation conifer forests in Southern California are called "sky islands", and they are at risk from a rapidly warming climate.

LPNF administrators ignored every single one of these concerns. No mitigations were added, no refutation was provided to the arguments addressed in the numerous public comments. Instead, the proposal was simply green lighted to go ahead as originally proposed.

Up front we must state, to alleviate any understandable sense of anger, depression or anxiety about the imminent fate of this gorgeous conifer forest, that logging will not start any time soon. Moreover, local conservation groups are already planning a legal challenge to LPNF's recent Decision. KSWC is involved with that. More court news in our next newsletter.

Los Padres Forest has long been a popular agency with their local public. Few extractive resource proposals have been proposed, in a forest that is largely recreational in focus. But with this logging proposal that will shift, maybe for many decades. Sound science has been set aside, and the death-knell sounded for the over 15,000 conifer trees that LPNF has targeted for removal. A black day indeed for LPNF, in the eyes of the many thousands of visitors that deeply cherish their local wildlands.



This sign on the Pine Mountain Road finds a new meaning as LPNF green lights their logging plan. Except that there has actually been no public choice involved.

PROJECT COMMENTS FROM PROFESSOR CARLA D'ANTONIO

Let us revisit some of the issues that LPNF has decided to be unworthy of any response in their Decision document.

Carla D'Antonio, Distinguished Professor of Environmental Studies at U.C. Santa Barbara, provided a 10-page academic paper critical of LPNF's logging proposal. It was the only comment to LPNF on their plan which came from a professional academic in the field of fire and other topics in Southern California's chaparral and conifer forest environments. Here are some excerpts from her comments:

Given the expertise and commitment of LPNF Natural Resource staff, the Reyes Peak project could be a model for thoughtful and innovative forest management in the face of climate change. Yet in its current form, the proposed action plan is inadequate.

Overview: Currently, the proposed actions lack careful justification and sufficient detail to evaluate if they are necessary and will be effective over both short and long terms. Likewise a clear vision of desired future condition(s) is missing.

There appears to be no monitoring plan. Information on the forest history, structure and biophysical conditions is scanty, and careful critical comparisons to other mixed conifer forests in

California and the Transverse ranges are non-existent. Lastly, the proposed actions are described in the context of out-of-date assumptions about forest functioning and concepts of 'naturalness.'

Restoration of forest health. There are no data provided to indicate that the health of this forest is in peril or in need of improvement and "health" is not defined. At least three studies of mixed conifer forest suggest that thinning may have little to no effect on tree mortality during drought.

The creation of fuel breaks is known to result in non-native species invasions (Merriam et al. 2006, Potts & Stephens 2009) especially by non-native annual grasses, which can increase fire occurrence and frequency.

The project plan refers to the forests of Reyes Peak as being "overstocked." This unfortunate terminology is not scientifically sound and implies that there is an ideal stocking (density) that should be maintained in these forests.

The project is lacking in sufficient detail regarding both short and long-term objectives.

In fact, no data are provided on species composition within the boundaries of the proposed forest thinning area and what species will be the targets of management actions.

Size and number of trees proposed to be cut needs to be rethought. The justification for 24 inches as the cut off is lacking. A size/age relationship should be established via a tree coring study to better support future management and to high-light the age of trees being targeted for removal.

The action plan mentions a fire return interval of 35 years, but with no supporting data.

OTHER IMPORTANT COMMENTS

Los Padres ForestWatch commented on the fact that LPNF introduced their Reyes Peak proposal under a Trump-era Categorical Exclusion from environmental review and analysis. This will be challenged in court.

LPNF described their proposal as being vital for the fire protection of the small community of Camp Scheideck, south of Lockwood Valley Road. Tree thinning many miles away from that location will be of no real value in terms of fire protection, with many miles of unthinned forests in between.

They also stated that forest fires were frequent in the project area. In fact, the hundreds of large fallen dead tree trunks all across the

Pine Mountain landscape suggest instead that fires there are small and infrequent, as large fires would have burned up those dead trees laying all over the ground.

The "LPNF Southern Districts Strategic Fuel Break Assessment" ranks the Pine Mountain fuel break as priority No.150 out of 163 projects.



The north-facing slope of part of the project area, where LPNF plans to remove an average of 36 trees from 12" to 24" in diameter per acre, over 423 acres, giving a total of 15,228 conifers to be turned into lumber.

LPNF's project manager Katherine Worn told the Ojai Valley News "This isn't a timber project. This is a blip. This is the tiniest little amount of wood." However, each 18" diameter tree felled will average around 59 board-feet of lumber per 16-foot log length. Multiply by LPNF's total of 15,000 trees to be logged (all up to 24" in diameter) gives a total of 885,000 total board feet. Not exactly "a blip." (One board foot is 12" x 12" by 1 inch deep.)

NEW INFORMATION ON FUNGAL NETWORKS IN FOREST ECOSYSTEMS

In her 2021 book "Finding the Mother Tree", author Suzanne Simard, forest ecology professor at the University of British Columbia, has been investigating the interactions of fungal networks and trees in forest soils.

From a recent interview with Richard Powers: "Simard has been instrumental in a revolution in our way of thinking about what's happening underground at the root level in a forest. And if you had talked to old-school foresters, or even some foresters still quite active, there would have been this sense that there's nothing particularly interesting happening underground except for competitions for minerals among individual trees and competition for water among

individual trees. And the idea for the kinds of experiments that Simard set up would have been almost outside of the concept of these practitioners. And what Simard was seeing is if you take away one species from a plot of land, you often see degradation and failure to thrive in other species on that same plot of land. So she got to work very rigorously and empirically looking at mycorrhizal connections between the roots of trees and fungal mycelium, the threads of fungus that just fill the soil underground in a forest. And she began to see that the forests were actually wired up in very complex and identifiable ways and that there was an enormous system of resource sharing going on underground, that trees were sharing not only sugars and the hydrocarbons necessary for survival, but also secondary metabolites. And these were being passed back and forth, both symbiotically between the trees and the fungi, but also across the network to other trees so that there were actually trees in wired up, fungally-connected forests where large, dominant, healthy trees were subsidizing, as it were, trees that were injured or not in favorable positions or damaged in some way or just failing to thrive. And the marvelous thing about the work, which continues to get more sophisticated and continues to turn up newer and newer astonishments, is that there was an odd kind of reciprocal interdependence and cooperation across the species barrier, that Douglas firs and birches were actually involved in these sharing back and forth of essential nutrients. And that's a whole new way of looking at forest."

Intensive logging operations would severely damage these fungal networks as heavy machinery churns up the soils and drags dead tree trunks uphill to waiting trucks. Simard's work involved the injecting of a tree with mild radioactive markers, which she then found showing up in other trees nearby. This is an astounding story of interspecies communication and resource sharing in order to benefit all members of the forest environment, across different species. A welfare state in nature. Something that is indicative of a form of intelligent behavior. Ponder on that.

VENTURA COUNTY SUPERVISORS VOTE AGAINST LOGGING PINE MOUNTAIN

On Tuesday October 04, the Ventura County Board of Supervisors voted 4:1 to send a letter of opposition to LPNF's logging proposal on Pine Mountain. The motion was brought by Supervisors Matt LaVere and Linda Parks. Our thanks to the Board for their support. As we go to press, the Ojai City Council is poised on Oct. 12th. to write their letter supporting no logging.

REP. CARBAJAL'S WILDERNESS BILL IN THE U.S. SENATE

This bill would, among many other additions, increase the current Sespe Wilderness acreage in the Pine Mountain area. As soon as it passes the Senate and is signed into law by the president, it will protect from any logging about one third of the area currently under threat by LPNF's Pine Mountain logging Decision.



Clambering around and over giant water-smoothed boulders of Sespe sandstone in the lower Sespe Gorge below Tar Creek, in June 2021.

PARADISE RD. CONCESSIONAIRE PERMIT UP FOR RENEWAL SOON

The concessionaire, Parks Management Co., who manage recreation facilities across Los Padres Forest, has for five years now allowed their staff at the kiosk on Paradise Road north of Santa Barbara to charge \$10 to each and every driver passing by. This is and has been illegal, since the FLREA fee law restricts fees to developed recreation sites only. *(continued on p.4)*

KEEP SESPE WILD COMMITTEE

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Light Blue T-shirts - 5-color logo on front.
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small blue pocket logo on front.

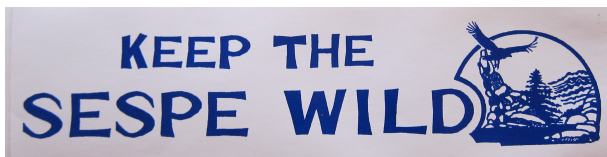
State white or blue, plus the sizes -
S, M, L, XL, or XXL.

T-shirts are 100% organic cotton fabric.

SESPE BUMPERSTICKERS: \$2 each.

Mail orders to: KSWC, PO Box 715,
Ojai, CA 93024.

Allow a few weeks for delivery. Thank you.



As the PMC concessionaire permit comes up for renewal in October 2021, a way must be found to make it clear that each PMC kiosk operator must begin every interaction with a driver by asking their destination. KSWC has urged LPNF administrators to enact and enforce stricter operating procedures at the kiosk. Training by PMC administrators has been uniformly poor on this point. Many visitors who know the rules have been bullied into paying the fee by argumentative kiosk staff who insist that they are correct in demanding a fee, even to the point of stating they will call the police on the visitor. A sign was posted in the summer of 2020 on the Paradise Road kiosk, in a clearly-visible location for drivers to see, which stated that no fee was required for access to and parking at undeveloped sites. In early 2021 that sign was removed by Parks Management Company staff, who stated that while rearranging the other kiosk signs, that the no-fee sign was inadvertently overlooked. It took about 6 months for that sign to be replaced. **We hope that you will help us and other forest visitors by recording any interactions you have with PMC staff at this kiosk, and sending them on to us.** We shall continue to bring this matter up with LPNF and our federal legislators.