

# THE SESPE WILD

The Newsletter of the Keep the Sespe Wild Committee

P.O. Box 715, Ojai, CA 93024

(805) 921-0618

## ACT NOW TO STOP MASSIVE LOGGING/BRUSH REMOVAL ACROSS LOS PADRES NATIONAL FOREST

September 2022

A recent proposal from Los Padres National Forest (LPNF) would serve to open up 48,000 acres (or 75 square miles) of the forest to logging and chapparal removal, which they refer to as Forest Health Treatment Units. There are 16 of these, divided into 60 stands of trees.

And on top of that, the project aims to clear and log 186,000 further acres (or 290 square miles) of Fuelbreak and Defense Zones. There are 418 stands of trees and vegetation in this category, averaging 446 acres per stand.

The entire project is titled the LPNF Ecological Restoration Project.

As you recall, local forest conservation organizations and government bodies have spoken out in opposition to LPNF's earlier proposal to log and clear 755 acres (just over one square mile) of old-growth conifer ridge lines by Pine Mountain and Reyes Peak, at the north edge of the Sespe watershed and Wilderness. (This project is currently in the hands of the federal court system, with a decision likely in 2023.)

This new proposal was open for public comment until August 28, but the comment period has since been extended till September 27, thanks to a request from Congressman Salud Carbajal (D, Santa Barbara).

The entire project description runs to 15 pages plus references; the Reyes Peak project description, itself woefully inadequate, took up 24 pages.

So one can see that this new proposal covering 365 square miles of forest is described in nine fewer pages than was the Reyes Peak proposal which described 1.18 square miles. It is no exaggeration to describe the proposal as hastily put together and crucially lacking the depth of detail such a large project requires.

Los Padres Forest is divided into five Ranger Districts. The Ecological Restoration Project covers the entire forest except for the Ojai Ranger District.

This is because the funding source for the project's environmental review came from PG&E, the public utility responsible for causing several of California's most devastating recent wildfires. The grant was for \$1.68 million.

The Ojai Ranger District is not included because Ventura County is not served by PG&E.

One wonders if this proposal was led by the opportunity for this grant.

Of course, fuel reduction and brush clearing offer important protection from encroaching wildfires - mainly in the few hundred yards around homes and other structures.

Fuelbreaks many miles from inhabited areas have been shown to be of little use during the very hot and wind-driven wildfires we are seeing these days. The same goes for the logging and thinning of tree densities on acreages far from homes.

Congressman Carbajal has legislation before the U.S. Senate in D.C. (H.R. 973, the Central Coast Heritage Protection Act) that would expand the current wilderness areas in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties. It has already passed the House of Representatives, but it will need 60 votes to pass the Senate, so it is not likely to be signed into law very soon.

Approximately 35,000 of the acres in LPNF's Ecological Restoration Project overlap with areas proposed for new wilderness in H.R. 973.

The environmental review that LPNF administrators are preparing for their project is an Environmental Assessment, far less thorough than an Environmental Impact Statement.

## PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR COMMENTS!

We are asking all of our supporters to submit brief comments to LPNF by the deadline of Tuesday, September 27th.

**The most important comment you should make is to ask the agency to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.**

Please submit your comments to LPNF at this address -

<https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public//CommentInput?Project=62369>

It is hard to suggest much in the way of further specific comments, since the project documentation so far is almost non-existent.

You may mention that evidence shows that fuelbreaks are not effective in slowing the spread of wind-driven fires. The best approach is to clear space around homes.

You may find a county-by-county map of the project areas (one page per county) at the home page of Los Padres National Forest. Look under "Managing The Land", then "Projects", and then "Project Documents".

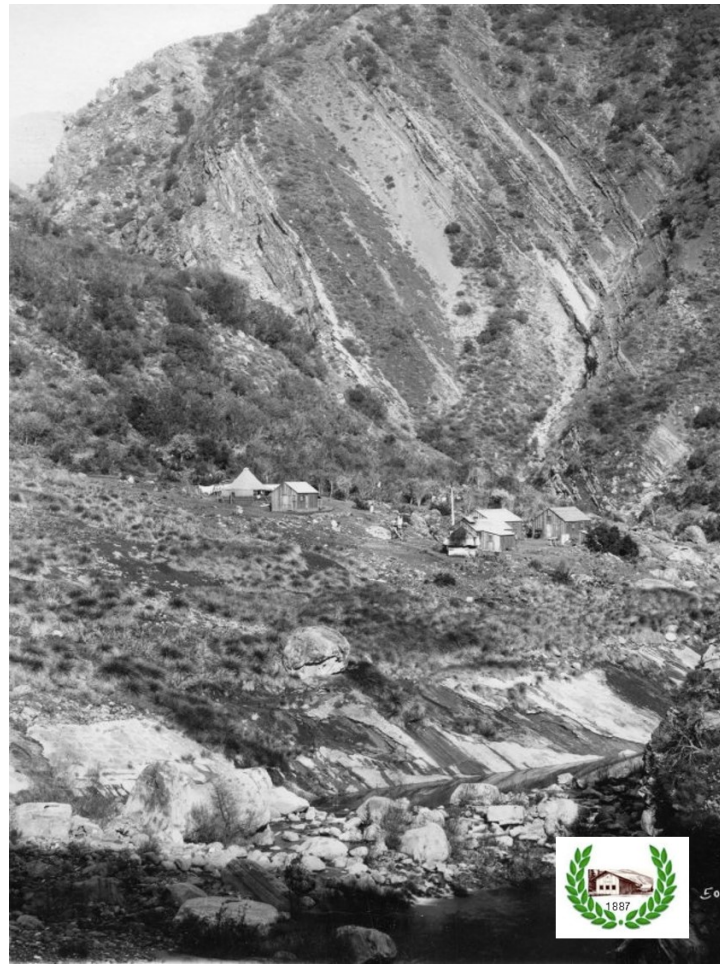
Los Padres ForestWatch has an excellent and interactive map on its website; the project is on their home page under News Items.

Congressman Salud Carbajal supports the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement. In his request for an extension of the public comment period on the proposal he stated:

"With such diversity and immense terrain, an Environmental Impact Statement will provide a more complete analysis and give more opportunities for public comment.....It will also provide for a deeper examination related to rare and endemic flora within inventoried roadless areas and potential wilderness areas."

## PLEASE KEEP SUPPORTING KSWC'S WORK WITH YOUR DONATIONS

KSWC depends on your continuing generosity to support our efforts to protect the Sespe's watershed and to educate the public about local forest issues. Our thanks to all who have donated or bought t-shirts recently.



A friend recently shared with us some archival photos taken on the lower Sespe near Fillmore about 100 years ago. The photos are housed in the collections of the Fillmore Museum.

This picture is of Grassy Flats on the west bank of Sespe Creek just upstream of the junction with West Fork Sespe Creek, about ten miles as the creek flows north of the City of Fillmore.

The cabins and tents were inhabited by oil field workers who helped build and maintain the oil well infrastructure a mile or so downstream on the west bank.

These wells were abandoned in 1947 when the Sespe Condor Sanctuary was created on both sides of Sespe Creek south of the Alder Creek tributary, in an effort to protect the dwindling California condor population.

In the early 1900's a road had been built up the west bank from Fillmore to serve the workers and the oil wells. It reached just to Grassy Flats, though we've heard that a network of roads existed then. One is the old Tar Creek trail, which after the 2006 Day Fire was clearly constructed wide enough for vehicular access to the Sespe.

## **AGREEMENT REACHED with BLM to SUSPEND NEW OIL & GAS WELLS across ONE MILLION ACRES of CA.**

Back in 2000, the former administration had planned to open up seven central Californian counties (incl. Santa Barbara and Ventura) for new drilling and fracking to occur. A large group of mainly nationwide environmental organizations filed suit against these plans.

The agreement announced on August 01 between these organizations, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the state of California requires the BLM to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Report and to reconsider where and under what conditions new drilling can occur. The area affected is around one million acres (or 1500 square miles) of the central part of California.

The BLM is authorized by Congress to approve and manage all oil and gas infrastructure on federal lands, below ground level.

## **REP. CARBAJAL WORKS to PROTECT SESPE AQUIFER from OIL**

The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is expected soon to announce a decision on a proposal by Carbon California, an oil and gas company operating in much of Ventura County, to continue to inject toxic oil drilling liquids into the Sespe Aquifer. The Sespe Oilfield north of Fillmore, on the east bank of Sespe Creek is dotted with hundreds of active and inactive oil wells, some a century old. The EPA has the ultimate authority over the disposal of the industry's oil drilling liquids. In 2019 the state of California approved the continued use of the Sespe Aquifer, which underlies the Sespe Oilfield, for the disposal of used drilling liquids. But the state failed to send their disposal approval on to the EPA, as is required. To date, it has still not been submitted. And the underground injection of toxic oilfield wastewater continues unabated.

The EPA wrote to the state of California last fall, stating their "serious concern" about the many oilfield wastewater wells still injecting these liquids into aquifers also used for drinking supplies. 25 of these injection wells are situated in

the Sespe Oilfield alone. The project application states that operators in the Sespe Oilfield have over the years injected about 872 million gallons of toxic oilfield wastewater into the Sespe Aquifer. That is a volume equivalent to a football field a half mile deep in oilfield wastewater.

"It is particularly troubling that the state continues to miss critical timelines to achieve compliance, especially in this time of drought and diminished water supplies across the state," said the EPA.

Rep's Carbajal and Brownley, along with Senators Feinstein and Padilla, recently wrote to the EPA stressing their concerns for the protection of the Sespe Aquifer, which serves as Fillmore's only supply of drinking water. They also requested a full environmental review of the use of the Sespe Aquifer for the disposal of oilfield liquids.



*A party of ladies enjoying a pool on the lower Sespe around 100 years ago. We imagine they drove up there.*

## **"SACRED NATURE" by Karen Armstrong**

This new book by Karen Armstrong continues her writing on topics related to religion. She has been called "one of our best living writers on religion." Sacred Nature makes the case that in the face of global environmental catastrophe we must rekindle our spiritual bond with the natural world. Highly recommended if you agree with that premise.

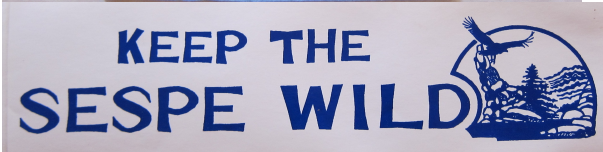


**KEEP SESPE WILD COMMITTEE**  
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**Allow a few weeks for delivery.**

A good day's catch on lower Sespe Creek  
a century ago.

At the start of the springtime steelhead fishing season back then, the miles-long single track road from the forest boundary up to West Fork Sespe would be packed with the vehicles of fishermen who camped out for days to fish for the steelhead returning from the ocean to their spawning grounds.

With the advent of dams at the Freeman Diversion site on the Santa Clara River downstream, the upstream passage of steelhead returning to spawn in Sespe Creek came to an end. We are working to restore access for the steelhead into Sespe Creek again.

