

# THE SESPE WILD

The Newsletter of the Keep the Sespe Wild Committee

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## RESTORING ROSE VALLEY CREEK

JUNE/JULY 2022

Los Padres Forest staff provided a period this spring for public comments on their proposal to restore Rose Valley Creek, which is fed by the Rose Valley Falls, to its original course.

In the 1950's a federal work camp was constructed adjacent to the creek, for the use of training for personnel from the SeaBee base (which stands for the U.S. Navy's Construction Battalion) in Port Hueneme. At this juncture the creek was altered by the addition of three brand new lakes along its course, two upstream of the Rose Valley Road, and the third and largest one below the road. These lakes provided a water supply for the use of the work camp.

After several different agencies had kept the work camp running after the SeaBees' use of it came to an end, Los Padres Forest staff had all the buildings removed about a decade ago, as no interested users had come forward.

Over the years these lakes also provided for public recreation - day use, boating, swimming and fishing. The fishing part is what has led to the longterm degradation of the natural habitat of Sespe Creek, from Rose Valley all the way to Fillmore, where the Sespe joins with the Santa Clara River.

We must remember that the public's understanding of ecological consequences has grown considerably since the 1950's. In those days nobody saw any reason not to add a few of their favorite fish species to the Rose Valley Lakes, in order to create a better fishing experience for local anglers. In this manner, the Rose Valley Lakes became a year-round home for non-native species such as catfish, bluegill, sunfish and others.

Non-native bullfrog tadpoles were added to the lakes by a school group around 1980, and they too quickly spread downstream.

The spread of the exotic species sped up in wet years, when the lower Rose Valley Lake overflowed its concrete spillway, transporting some of them into the lower reaches of Rose



*SeaBees building the Rose Valley Lakes in the 1950's.*

Valley Creek. This creek soon joins with Howard Creek, and together they flow into Sespe Creek a few miles downstream.

Before the lakes were constructed, Sespe Creek was considered top quality habitat for native trout and steelhead. Warm summer water, and plenty of insect life for food, allowed trout and steelhead to grow more quickly to maturity than in rivers further north. The addition of the invasive, non-native fish species changed all that.

Now there was competition for breeding grounds and food supply from the rapidly-growing populations of all the newcomers.

Even worse than that, the newcomers found young trout to be a tasty addition to their diet. So not only were the trout left with diminished space to live in, but there was much less food for them - and the newcomers were also eating up the young trout. Young native arroyo toads, an endangered species, are also eaten by these non-native fish species (and by the bullfrogs).

Over time, the entire downstream length of Sespe Creek has become entrenched habitat for all of these exotic species. You can readily see them all, all the 35 or so miles to Fillmore. KSWC leads a hike down the lower Sespe Creek every summer, and we see these invasive species inhabiting nearly every pool.



*An adult non-native catfish swims in six inches of water in lower Sespe Creek, July 2022.*

The above-stated conditions have led Los Padres Forest administrators to initiate the restoration of Rose Valley Creek, and the removal of the three artificial lakes. This will be a longterm project, and will likely include building a bridge along Rose Valley Road to replace the current culvert creek channel under the road.

### **SOME of our COMMENTS to LPNF**

The creek restoration channel should follow as closely as possible the route of Rose Valley Creek's original stream bed.

All steelhead migration barriers there must be removed.

Around 100 years ago, state trout releases in the upper Sespe Creek watershed took place along Rose Valley Creek in springtime, so it has a recorded history as good trout rearing habitat.

A major project component must be a separate plan to direct the gradual removal of the many exotic, non-native fish species (and the bullfrogs) from the mainstem of Sespe Creek downstream of Howard Creek in Rose Valley. This will likely necessarily be a longterm project.

The restoration should include provisions to restore habitat as appropriate for the other listed endangered species in the vicinity.

The project's public relations component should be robust in describing both the project's benefits, and in addressing any public concerns about the potential and historic use of the lakes' water during wildfire event. Modern practices use fire-fighting helicopters to drop fire retardant on wildfires, not water.

There should also be an investigation into the status of and potential for lead contamination in Rose Valley Creek downstream of the lowest Rose Valley Lake, arising from target shooting at the adjacent Rose Valley Gun Club site, which has been in operation for many decades.

A further public benefit from the project would be the clearing and re-opening of the lost-in-the-bushes loop of the Rose Valley Campground, near the falls, which once had several additional campsites. Further improvements and additions to this campground/day use area could make up for some of the lost recreation opportunities at the lakes.

Just a few further words about those bullfrogs. A study of Sespe Creek bullfrogs' stomach contents found a mouse, two shrews, a barn swallow, two sparrows, three garter snakes, a hatchling pond turtle, many young bullfrogs, crayfish, tarantulas, scorpions, centipedes, and a wide range of insects - mostly yellowjackets and dragonflies.

Many of the Sespe Creek exotics get washed away in winter storms. They are not sleek like trout, which can stay in place under a rock in storm flows, facing upstream. But the exotics' populations bounce back quickly.



## TAMARISK IN SESPE CREEK

The invasive tamarisk plant, which has been present along Sespe Creek for 35 years or more, continues to require work parties to dig out well-established specimens that we still discover. We have been doing this for 30 years.



*KSWC volunteers William McColgan, Drew Watumull and Iain Coyne spent an hour digging down 24 inches next to Sespe Creek in July 2022, in order to cut out and remove a large tamarisk whose stem had become deeply buried in sediment after fires in the watershed. Thanks to all our crew of tamarisk volunteers!*

## REMEMBERING COUNTY SUPERVISOR JOHN FLYNN - CHAMPION OF SESPE CREEK

John Flynn was born in Ojai, but in his career as a 32-year County Supervisor he represented Oxnard. One of his abiding interests was water supplies for the county. He passed away in February of this year, at 89.

He had proven adept at bringing a variety of interests together, where water was concerned - an arena where turf wars tended to dominate. But he also possessed a strong sense of what was the right thing to do, even if this ruffled feathers.

One of these issues was the question of protecting or damming Sespe Creek. When KSWC was formed in the late 1980's, legislation was introduced in Washington D.C. by our then Congressman Bob Lagomarsino, to protect the central miles of the creek as a federal Wild and Scenic River, leaving open the lower and upper

stretches as locations for potential dam construction. The legislation also created the Sespe Wilderness, but it was the creek's protection that became contentious across western Ventura County.

Established water interests had for decades dreamed of building one or more dams on Sespe Creek, and they were in no mind to accept protecting all of the Sespe as a Wild and Scenic River, which would prohibit any dams. They were led by United Water, a water company whose board was then, and still is, dominated by ag interests on the Oxnard Plain. (This is also the agency that continues to do next to nothing to provide fish passage for the endangered steelhead upstream past their Freeman Diversion dam on the Santa Clara River. This dam is the predominant migration obstacle still preventing adult steelhead from returning to Sespe Creek to spawn.)

When hearings on the legislation were held by the House in D.C., Ventura County's farming community were represented by several witnesses testifying that agriculture in the county would literally not long survive, without the options to dam Sespe Creek at some future date.

Supervisor John Flynn agreed to testify with KSWC in D.C., on the importance of protecting all of Sespe Creek. And a while later, as hearings were scheduled on the legislation in the Senate, John agreed to travel to D.C. to testify a second time. Many local water interests were not happy about this.

We agreed, of course, that Sespe Creek was worth fighting for. At a County Supervisors' meeting many years later, on a totally different topic, John Flynn mentioned that Los Padres "Forest is a sacred place."

John Flynn was also supportive of both the removal of Matilija Dam, and the restoration of the Ventura River.

## PLEASE KEEP UP YOUR DONATIONS!

Your donations remain the most important funding for our efforts to protect Sespe Creek and its watershed.

Unfortunately they are not tax-deductible. Our thanks to all who donated, and to all who purchased KSWC t-shirts, since our spring 2022 newsletter. And a special thanks to those who donated to protect the Pine Mtn. forests.

**KEEP SESPE WILD COMMITTEE**  
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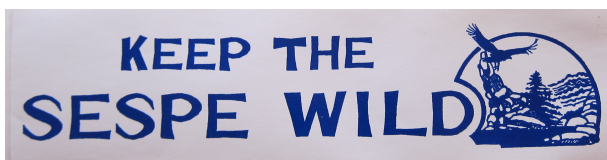
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**Mail orders to: KSWC, PO Box 715,**  
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### **NO NEWS ON PINE MTN. LOGGING PROPOSAL LAWSUIT**

We have no news yet of a court date. The courts do not publish their lists of cases, nor when one case may get to the top of the list.

The Environmental Defense Center in Santa Barbara, the attorneys in this lawsuit for Los Padres ForestWatch and ourselves, are ready to prepare to appear in court on behalf of the high-altitude conifer forests, whenever they get the word. We shall keep you posted.

Thanks for supporting us in this lawsuit - it has strong popular support locally.

### **LPNF HAS BLACKHAWK FIRE CONTROL CHOPPER LOCALLY**

The good news for fighting forest fires in our area is that Los Padres Forest has received a Blackhawk helicopter, which has been adapted for fire-fighting purposes. Its advantages are its high speed in flight, and its ability to fly and work after dark. A second one may arrive soon, as backup for when the first one needs maintenance or repairs. These will be shared between Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties, as needed. A very welcome addition to Los Padres Forest's fire-fighting toolbox.