

THE SESPE WILD

The Newsletter of the Keep the Sespe Wild Committee

P.O. Box 715, Ojai, CA 93024

(805) 921-0618 www.sespewild.org

GROUPS APPEAL USFS' PINE MOUNTAIN LOGGING PLAN

SEPTEMBER 2023

Conservation organizations, led by Los Padres ForestWatch and Keep Sespe Wild, have filed an appeal of the decision on July 19 by U.S. District Judge John Walter to give the green light to the U.S. Forest Service's proposal to log 423 acres of old-growth conifers atop Pine Mountain.

The appeal was filed by the Environmental Defense Center (EDC), of Santa Barbara, on September 19. It will be heard by a panel of three judges on the the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

"Commercial logging and other activities allowed under the Reyes Peak Project would do irreparable harm to vulnerable wildlife and pristine areas of the forest", states Maggie Hall, the EDC's Deputy Chief Counsel. "This appeal is critical to protect this beautiful natural place and prevent logging companies from exploiting a sacred cultural site."

The U.S. Forest Service approved this logging and chaparral clearing project in 2021.

Local and national wildlands organizations, and Patagonia, are all opposed to this project. They include the Earth Island Institute, the American Alpine Club, the Center for Biological Diversity, and the California Chaparral Institute.

"Pine Mountain represents a uniquely special environment for its high elevation ancient conifers, its views to our offshore islands, and its variety of recreation opportunities," said Keep Sespe Wild's Conservation Director Alasdair Coyne. "Logging these old growth conifers will do nothing to protect homes from forest fires, as there are no buildings for miles around.

These trees are being targeted because the agency was instructed by D.C. to increase logging, and Pine Mountain has a paved access



The high elevation ridgeline of Pine Mountain, where logging of the old-growth conifers is proposed.

road all the way to where the trees grow. The USFS is also targeting old-growth conifers on Mount Pinos - another site with road access."

PLEASE DONATE TO KSWC'S PINE MOUNTAIN APPEAL FUND!

We had the funds on hand for the first court case to protect Pine Mountain from logging. For this appeal, we must call on our supporters to cover the costs by donating to the cause..

The EDC's attorneys work at a much-reduced hourly rate than for-profit law firms, but we still need to raise \$6,000 in the next few weeks. All contributions are welcome, but with \$6,000 as our goal we'll need to see multiple contributions of over \$100. Mail your donation to:

KSWC, PO Box 715, Ojai Ca. 93024
and please write Pine Mountain Appeal on your check. Thank you!

KSWC has only participated in three other lawsuits in our 35 years of operations. None required raising attorney funds. They are -

- (1) an appeal of the 1988 Los Padres National Forest management plan, which proposed protecting 27.5 miles of Sespe Creek as a federal Wild and Scenic River. The case was settled when we won another 4 miles of protection for Sespe Creek, from Rose Valley upstream to Howard Creek.
- (2) a lawsuit filed against the Limoneira company, for planning to build their new housing development on the east bank of Santa Paula Creek very close to the narrow concrete creek channel. We settled when Limoneira agreed to an open space buffer zone on the east bank of Santa Paula Creek, leaving adequate space for a future widening of the creek channel there.
- (3) a lawsuit against the USFS' so-called Adventure Pass fee program, for access to undeveloped public lands across Southern California's four National Forests. A federal court in Tucson had ruled that fees to access undeveloped lands were in violation of the fee authority granted to the USFS by act of Congress.

The case was settled, and many hundreds of square miles of our Southern Californian National Forests were once again made free of access fees.

Our point is that until now KSWC has NEVER before needed to request your financial support for a special purpose like this Pine Mountain logging appeal.

So please donate generously to this vital campaign to keep the loggers away from the high elevation Pine Mountain/Reyes Peak ridge, which sits on the northern rim of the watershed of Sespe Creek.

The initial Pine Mountain court case was supported by both the City of Ojai and the County of Ventura. District Judge John Walter ruled that both the City and the County did not have standing to sue - meaning sufficient connection to and harm from the logging action challenged, to support their participation in the case. It is unlikely that either the City or County will decide to authorize funds in order to attempt to establish standing in the appeal.



Upstream of Tar Creek in the Sespe Gorge, the large rock on the right has long been a popular jump spot into the deep pool below. No more - the winter storm flows in early 2023 carried the rock on the left (with arrow) downstream to where it now sits, blocking the flows that created a pool to jump into from the bigger rock. Just imagine the flows that were needed to lift that hundreds of tons of rock up off the creekbed, & carry it away downstream!

JULY HIKE THROUGH SESPE GORGE REVEALS CHANGES FROM WINTER STORMS

Our annual hike from Alder Creek down past Los Padres Forest's boundary at Devil's Gate had multiple surprises for the participants.

Alder Creek, with relatively moderate flows, was not particularly changed by the flood flows, but it was certainly flowing strongly and uninterrupted, for the first days of July.

After reaching Sespe Creek down the steep Alder Gorge, the first pool was greatly enlarged from how it has been since the 2006 Day Fire.

This fire burned almost all of the middle of the Sespe's watershed, and in following winters the unvegetated steep slopes let loose massive amounts of sedimentation that filled up the lower Sespe's channel. The channel has stayed pretty full of sediment since then. First Narrows, where we long ago measured the water depth at 24 feet, became wadeable. Even the 2023 flood flows did not move as much sediment as we'd expected. The greatest difference in the hiking was that almost all the vegetation in the broader creek channel had just - disappeared. Which made for easier passage. Enormous vol-

umes of vegetation, hundreds of mature trees, had been washed out to sea.

The creek water level was quite a bit higher than we've usually seen it, and still, in July, moving faster. Sometimes you felt the water trying to knock you down, as you crossed from one side to the other. All the main waterfalls and springs through the Sespe Gorge, usually nearly dry in summer, were still flowing nicely.



This long pool in the Sespe Gorge was still filled with enough sediment to allow its several hundreds of feet in length to be easily waded.

The greatest changes in the lower Sespe Gorge became apparent below West Fork Sespe, a tributary that enters the Sespe from Bear Heaven on the west bank. West Fork Sespe usually carries the largest storm flows to enter the mainstem Sespe at any point. This canyon had been stripped of dozens of alder trees with trunks 18" in diameter.



Around 15 mature alder trees along West Fork Sespe - all snapped off at the same height, and carried away by the early 2023 winter storm flows.

This summer saw none of the exotic invasive fish species usually plentiful along the Sespe - such as catfish and bluegill. In winter storm flows, these wide fish get washed far downstream, even out to the ocean.

Meanwhile, the sleek native trout are able to stay where they are, facing upstream into the current, under a rock. The exotics, all of them predators on the native trout, will in time re-populate the Sespe again. In the meantime the trout will have several years to build up their numbers again, without the threat of the exotics eating their juveniles.

HIGHWAY 33 TO RE-OPEN AROUND THANKSGIVING

The ongoing major winter storm repairs are expected to allow Hwy. 33 to re-open to the public around early December, from Matilija Canyon Rd. to Ozena. Gateway to the Sespe!

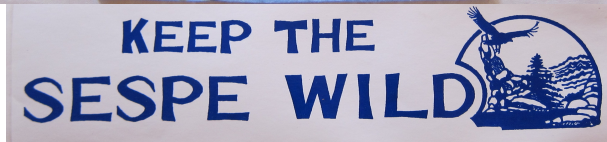


Tamarisk stumps we eradicated with hand tools on Grassy Flat, just upstream of West Fork Sespe. Shallow and wet soil helped a lot with the digging up of these invasive tamarisk plant. Thanks to the work crew!

**KEEP SESPE WILD COMMITTEE
PO BOX 715
OJAI CA 93024**

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Address correction requested



UPDATE ON PHOSCHEK DUMP IN UPPER SESPE CREEK

The October 08, 2022 Howard Fire below Rose Valley led to massive amounts of bright red Phoschek fire retardant being dropped around the 85-acre blaze. A total of 36,051 gallons were dropped - that's 720 50-gallon drums worth. The U.S. Forest Service later said that 12,000 gallons were "misapplied". That's 240 50-gallon drums worth. The "mis-applied" Phoschek was dumped into a pool on the Sespe, which is illegal by the agency's own

SESPE T-SHIRTS: \$20 incl. tax & shipping.

Light Blue T-shirts - 5-color logo on front.

White T-shirts - 5-color logo on back, small blue pocket logo on front.

State white or blue, and what size - S, M, L, XL, or XXL.

T-shirts are 100% organic cotton fabric.

SESPE BUMPERSTICKERS: \$2

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

Allow a few weeks for delivery.

Thank you.

regulations, as it is toxic to fish, turtles, and other aquatic species. This pool was targeted by a 650-foot and 210-foot wide swath of Phoschek.

Los Padres Forest has had the greatest amount of Phoschek dumped on any National Forest in the nation, from 2012-2019 - 9.3 million gallons, which is 18% of what was used in all of California. There have been no consequences for this massive toxic targeting of a Sespe Creek pool containing endangered native trout and other aquatic species.