



LOS PADRES NATIONAL FOREST Multiple Use vs Wilderness

By: Lynn Gray Jensen

A new plan is being hatched in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties to create more wilderness within the Los Padres National Forest. While wilderness is a popular concept that has garnered past public support, this proposal is causing the concern of many citizens, particularly those who frequent the forest for recreation. VC COLAB is a stakeholder in this process as we have members who own property, recreate and even help maintain trails in the Forest.

While a small portion of the population can appreciate the traditional wilderness backpacking experience, a larger number of visitors enjoy mountain biking, 4x4 vehicles, and hiking on well maintained trails accessed by parking lots within the forest. Designating more wilderness areas lessens the accessible areas for these visitors and lessens resources for the National Forest Service to maintain the 1300 miles of trails within the Forest.

Consider these facts and statistics:

- Of the 1.1 million total Ventura County acreage, 618,000 (55%) is within the Los Padres National Forest
- Existing Wilderness is already 411,000 acres or 66% of the Forest and 36% of the total County land area
- There are 53,000 acres of private property within the forest, some with trail easements granted to the public.

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- Los Padres is a recreational forest, unlike many others that receive revenue from timber operations and the shrinking maintenance budget is mainly funded through taxes
- Constant lawsuits by environmental advocacy groups seeking compensation for attorney fees reduce the ability of the Forest Service to maintain trails and facilities
- “Wilderness” is a Federal designation that bans the use of motorized vehicles, bikes, mechanized tools, mining, logging and roads
- The wilderness designation impedes fire prevention, rescue operations and trail maintenance by the Forest Service as it prohibits motorized vehicle access and power tools without special permission.

The plan was initiated by a group called the “Los Padres Wild Heritage Campaign” advocating the conversion of roughly 70,000 more acres of forest to wilderness and adding five sections of wild and scenic rivers in Ventura County. The main backing of the proposal is Los Padres Forest-Watch who are plaintiffs in several lawsuits pending against the Forest Service.

A draft, compromise bill is being circulated for comment by Congressman Elton Gallegly proposing 33,400 acres to be con-

verted to wilderness and adding five sections of wild and scenic rivers in Ventura County. The main backing of the proposal is Los Padres Forest-Watch who are plaintiffs in several lawsuits pending against the Forest Service.



TOM BARBER GOLF A PUBLIC NUISANCE?

The Tom Barber Golf Practice Facility, located off Tierra Rejada Road in Moorpark is another county business whose future will be determined by a vote of the Board of Supervisors. At a hearing on February 28th the facility will ask for a twenty year extension to their permit to operate. The facility, which is immediately adjacent to the 23 Freeway, provides a unique recreational opportunity for county golfers including measured target areas for practice shots, lessons for beginners to experts and training for local high-school and college teams. The public benefit includes maintenance of a green space buffer to the Freeway within the Tierra Rejada Greenbelt. While there is overwhelming public support for this business as seen in hundreds of letters and a 2500 signature petition, there is a small contingent of citizens and public agencies who are opposed to the extension because of the night lighting. The facility maintains that without nighttime operation it would not be financially viable and without the permit extension this successful business could potentially close when the original permit expires in 2017.

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ANNOUNCEMENT!**VC COLAB QUARTERLY
MEMBERSHIP MEETING****Tuesday, February 28th****6:00 - 7:30 PM**Museum of Ventura County
100 E Main St., Ventura

Featured Speaker:

Andy Caldwell

Santa Barbara County COLAB

RSVP Sue/Cindi 805-654-6977

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The original 20 year permit was granted in 1997 with state of the art lighting technology and extensive conditions to reduce nighttime glare. For the extension, the applicant has volunteered to decommission three of the nine existing 35 foot tall light poles, add bulbs with a white coating and turn off the lights at 9:30 PM in the winter months instead of 10:00 PM. The project (CUP 4915 #3) was submitted to County Planning for approval in August of 2010 and to date has racked up over \$16,000 in County processing fees plus the significant cost of representation by attorneys and consultants.

The permit extension process led to a hearing at the Planning Commission in September of 2011. Planning Staff advised the Commissioners that under California Law the facility must be a "public nuisance" to deny the extension. According to case law, a discretionary permit holder acquires a

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vested right in a granted permit under its conditions. Staff acknowledges there have been no formal complaints against the facility for the lighting. Can a successful small business voted the #1 Driving Range in Southern California that has complied with all permit conditions for 11 years of operation be considered a "public nuisance" for night lighting that is turned off at 9:30 PM?

While the Planning Commission approved the extension in a 3-1 vote, the decision was immediately appealed to the Board of Supervisors by the Cities of Moorpark and Thousand Oaks. This has cost county taxpayers and the Golf Facility more time and money. In 2010, these cities supported a plan before the Board of Supervisors to remove golf courses with night lighting from allowable uses in the open-space zone which was ultimately rejected. In their opposition to the extension, the City of Thousand Oaks contends that night-time facility lighting is an urban use, "not compatible with the agricultural nature and semi-rural character of the Tierra Rejada Valley". However, The Tom Barber Golf facility has had no real impact on surrounding agricultural operations. In addition, it is directly adjacent to the 23 Freeway, a large corridor with lighted signs.

In reality, many businesses with night lighting operate in the open space zone including agricultural facilities, retail agribusinesses, greenhouses, private colleges, camps and a popular Presidential Library. These facilities can be woven into a semi-rural setting in certain locations where they are advantageous to the community. While the Reagan Library was annexed into the City of Simi Valley in 2010, it was conceived and built as a compatible use within the open space zone including the lighted parking lots. Many established vital businesses are under attack by a rigid philosophy that does not recognize the importance of the privately owned core of the unincorporated county between cities that need to support their land expenses while contributing unique agricultural, educational, recreational and spiritual opportunities to the community.

The county is in need of more recreational facilities that promote fitness and are connected to the

outdoors. As a majority of us work or attend school during the day, recreational facilities such as golf, tennis, skiing, biking, horseback riding, walking and hiking trails that can operate in the early evenings are beneficial to the health of the community. Recreational facilities have marginal economic potential and must be encouraged as defined by a goal in the County General Plan to "retain open space lands for outdoor recreational activities".

VC COLAB is concerned about the negative impact on business and job creation of a County policy of "uncertainty" that considers imposing new expensive conditions and threatens non-extension of permits when there are no significant changes proposed by the applicant. Companies that make sizeable investments must be assured a reasonable time frame for payout. As we oppose this policy we recommend approval of the Minor Modification #3 to CUP 4915 (LU10-0087) without additional conditions (Option A) and encourage our members to write letters of support for to the Board of Supervisors for the 2-28-12 Hearing:

Address emails to the Clerk of the Board for distribution: clerkoftheboard@ventura.org

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verted to wilderness, two wild and scenic river sections, two Special Management Areas for Off Highway Vehicle usage (70,500 acres) and a land swap with United Water. The bill is an effort to balance the desires of numerous special interest groups with differing views on usage of the Forest.

While environmental advocacy for roadless areas is important, preservation of wild lands is only one of the functions of the National Forest system. According to the Federal Register (vol. 70, No. 216) "*Most National Forest visitors use motor vehicles to access the National Forests . . . Motor vehicles are a legitimate and appropriate way for people to enjoy their National Forests - in the right place, and with proper management.*"

Some environmental advocacy groups promote their agenda through fear, claiming that population growth, urbanization and development are immediate and imminent threats to the survival of the Forest. They contend that only permanent "roadless areas" will secure healthy wildlife populations, clean water and outdoor recreation opportunity for our local community. In truth, a majority of the Forest is already designated wilderness (66%) and there are no public plans for development or urbanization of the Forest. Any private commercial plans would need to be approved through a rigorous public process. In addition, wilderness areas do not create outdoor recreational opportunity for most

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of the population.

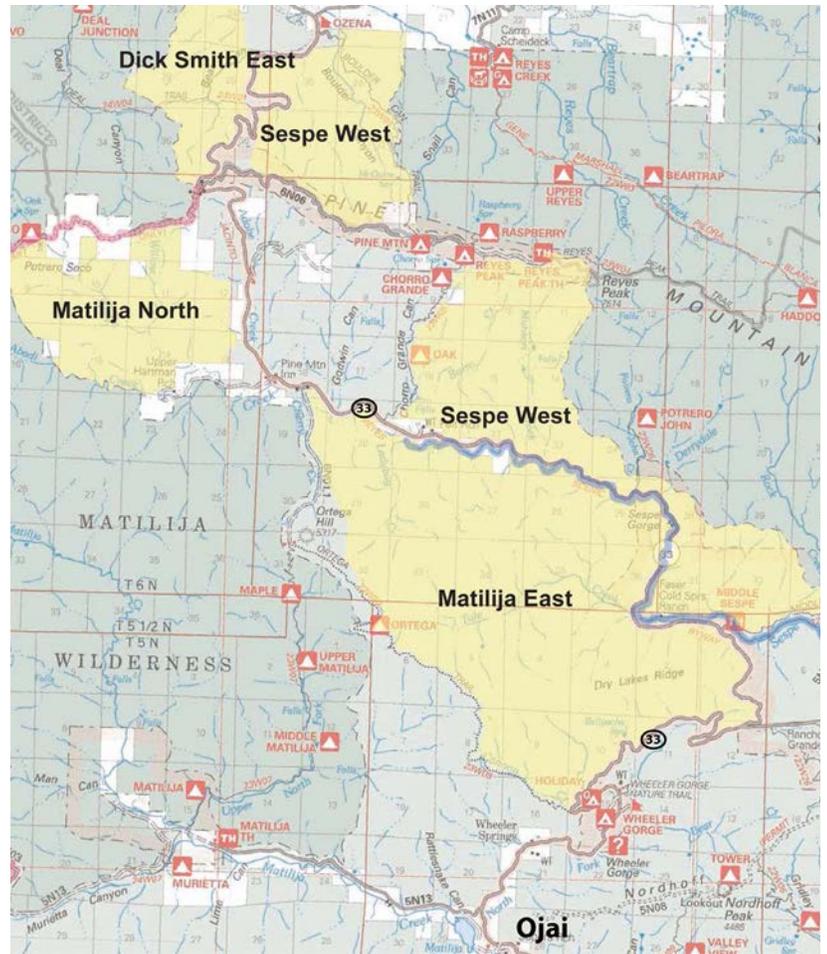
The most concerning part of the proposal is the expansion of the Matilija, Dick Smith and Sespe Wilderness areas to within 500 feet on both sides of State Highway 33 (see map). The Highway 33 corridor provides an essential transportation link to North County residents and Kern County.

The following are our most pressing concerns about the draft proposed Congressional Action:

1. This action could be used to limit future access to State Highway 33 through lawsuits over the environmental impact of vehicles on the new wilderness.
2. There is potential for loss of access and limitations on use of the private property (white parcels on map) surrounded by the newly created wilderness.
3. The Matilija East wilderness area expanding toward the City of Ojai will decrease fire prevention thereby increasing the fire danger to city residents.

National Forests were conceived as a multiple use system with a variety of benefits to the population and the environment. Balancing these interests and benefits is a difficult task. In this time of economic crisis and massive public debt, we question the need for spending public tax dollars on such a proposal. In the end we believe this will reduce the flexibility for the Forest Service to serve the range of visitors who enjoy the Forest.

Proposed Wilderness Adjacent to Highway 33



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VC COLAB SPRING EVENT
SAVE THE DATE!
Sunday, April 29th; 2:00 PM
DAVE STAMEY CONCERT
LAMB RANCH RESERVOIR

Ventura County COLAB Important Links:

Ventura County COLAB Website: www.colabvc.org

Santa Barbara COLAB Website: www.colabsbc.org

Andy Caldwell Talk **Radio Show**: Weekdays 3:00 to 5:00 PM

Cal Chronicle: www.calchronicle.com - online Newspaper
COLAB Santa Barbara and San Luis Counties

Santa Barbara COLAB **January Newsletter**



**Ventura County Coalition of
Labor, Agriculture and Business**

P.O. Box 4237, Ventura, CA 93007
Email: membership@colabvc.org
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MEMBERSHIP FORM

I would like to apply for an Active Membership at the following level:

- \$100 Individual - Promote economic vitality and individual rights in Ventura County
- \$500 Business - Promote the common business interests of **VC COLAB** Members
- \$1,000 Gold - Further our efforts to monitor, educate and represent our common business interests
- \$1,500 Platinum - Support ongoing research to challenge harmful and unreasonable regulation
- \$2,500 Black - Advance legal and administrative action for the mutual benefit of **VC COLAB** members
- \$5,000 Benefactor - Let's make a difference in the business climate of Ventura County

Please accept my membership fee of: \$ _____

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Print this form and send with a check to the P.O. Box or contribute online with PayPal

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