

This is Not an Ecological Restoration Project

Forest Service targets 235,000 acres of the Los Padres National Forest



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From reports by Environmental Defense Center and Los Padres ForestWatch

On August 5, the Forest Service announced an “Ecological Restoration Project” for the Los Padres National Forest, an Orwellian moniker for a plan to remove [235,495 acres](#) -- 368 square miles -- of chaparral, forest, and riparian habitat throughout the Los Padres National Forest from Big Sur to Ventura County, impacting the California condor and red-legged frog, thousands of acres of proposed wilderness and roadless areas, and hiking and recreation areas such as Figueroa Mountain, Davy Brown Trail, Mt. Pinos, Pine Mountain, Camino Cielo, Cuyama, and the southern Big Sur Coast.

This is proposed despite the fact that last July, the [Central Coast Heritage Protection Act](#), co-authored by Rep. Salud Carbajal to protect nearly 250,000 acres of public land in the Los Padres National Forest and Carrizo Plain National Monument – overlapping 35,000 acres of the area now targeted by the Forest Service -- was approved in an amendment to the annual defense bill.

The large-scale clearance of trees of all sizes is the Service’s idea of wildfire protection, including massive fuel breaks in remote areas far from any communities. Per Los Padres ForestWatch, “The project would allow the use of heavy equipment to log live and dead trees up to two feet in diameter across many forested areas, and larger trees with no diameter limit could be removed across 186,000 acres of vaguely described “fuel break and defense zones.” If the project moves forward and receives approval from the agency, damaging timber harvest and chaparral removal activities could take place without any further site-specific environmental analysis or public notice.”

The activities being proposed in the name of fire mitigation or ecosystem health have repeatedly been shown to fail to mitigate wildfire spread under extreme weather conditions and to cause significant ecological impacts.

“Scientists and conservation organizations have long advocated that instead of going to backcountry logging and vegetation removal projects, funding should be directed to creating defensible space directly next to homes, retrofitting and building structures with fire-safe materials, and reducing development in the wildland-urban interface. Areas where native trees and shrubs are removed with heavy equipment are also prone to being infested with non-native invasive plants that can increase wildfire risk.”

On August 17, the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club joined Los Padres Forest Watch and numerous other forest advocates in writing to Forest Service Supervisor Christopher Stubbs to request a ninety-day extension of the project’s public comment period – which was scheduled to end on August 28 -- and preparation of a full environmental impact analysis instead of the once-over-lightly treatment the Service prefers. The letter noted:

“The U.S. Forest Service has indicated that a single environmental assessment (EA) will be prepared for the entire project area. The EA process only requires a single comment period to be provided and just one alternative to the proposed action to be analyzed. This is woefully inadequate, especially considering that no site-specific analysis or public notice would occur before work commences throughout the 235,000-acre project area if this EA is approved.

“The sheer size and scope of this project is difficult to comprehend, especially considering that the activities being proposed in the name of fire mitigation or ecosystem health have repeatedly been shown to fail to mitigate wildfire spread under extreme weather conditions—when the vast majority of acreage burned and community damage occurs each year—and they have been shown to cause significant ecological impacts in chaparral, mixed-conifer forest, and other local ecosystems.”

On August 18, Supervisor Stubbs decided to extend the scoping period for the project by an additional 30 days to September 27.

[Click here](#) to tell the Forest Service it must prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement for the Los Padres “Ecological Restoration Project.”