



Los Padres National Forest grant program

NFWF CONTACT

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ABOUT NFWF

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) protects and restores our nation's fish and wildlife and their habitats. Created by Congress in 1984, NFWF directs public conservation dollars to the most pressing environmental needs and matches those investments with private funds. Learn more at www.nfwf.org

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Los Padres National Forest in California | Credit: Blue Tomorrow

BACKGROUND

In 2015, the Los Padres National Forest (LPNF) began a collaboration with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to advance fire recovery efforts in watersheds affected by wildfires, specifically the 2007 Zaca Fire and 2003 Piru Fire.

The Los Padres National Forest – Zaca and Piru Fires Restoration Grant Program builds partnerships between interested stakeholders and the national forest through competitive grant opportunities that address fire-related natural resource concerns, while increasing the pace and scale of restoration activities in the national forest.

The goal of this grant program is to support projects in the national forest that:

- Improve LPNF's capacity to identify and approach resource management issues that address the impacts to watersheds and ecosystems affected by fire
- Provide sustainable and lasting environmental benefits
- Promote ecological resilience to future wildfire events
- Inform efficient post-fire restoration through innovation

Over the course of this program, approximately \$12 million in fire recovery settlement funds will be made available to implement restoration actions within the watersheds affected by the Zaca and Piru fires.



ABOUT THE FOREST

Los Padres National Forest encompasses approximately 1.75 million acres of central California's scenic Coast and Transverse Ranges. The forest stretches across almost 220 miles from north to south and consists of two separate land divisions. The northern division is within Monterey County and northern San Luis Obispo County and includes the beautiful Big Sur Coast and scenic interior areas. NFWF grants support a number of projects in the forest, including recovery efforts following the 2003 Piru Fire and 2007 Zaca Fire.

— Source: USFS

In its first year, the program funded 11 projects, representing an investment of over \$1.4 million in funding that will draw nearly \$1 million in grantee match, for a total conservation impact of more than \$2.4 million.

Projects were selected based on their ability to address the conservation goals and strategies identified by NFWF and the Los Padres National Forest and to maximize project value through partner involvement and matching funds.

Descriptions of project categories and associated first-year grant awards are provided below.

INVASIVE VEGETATION ASSESSMENT AND ERADICATION

Projects will identify, evaluate and remove nonnative, invasive vegetation from watersheds within the burned areas. Initial investments will focus on invasive tamarisk. Tamarisk degrades aquatic and riparian habitat, depletes water from streams, and increase risks of wildfire ignitions, severity and spread. Reduction of tamarisk will enhance native biodiversity and habitat conditions for high-value riparian systems supporting endangered and threatened species on the Los Padres National Forest, including Southern California Coast steelhead, arroyo toad, and southwestern willow flycatcher.

Tamarisk Removal in the Cuyama River Watershed: Social and Environmental Entrepreneurs (Habitat Works) will treat invasive tamarisk within burned areas in the Cuyama River

Watershed (Rancho Nuevo Creek and Deal Canyons, and portions of the Cuyama River).

Tamarisk Removal in the Sisquoc River Watershed: Channel Islands Restoration (CIR) will treat tamarisk in streams within the Sisquoc River Watershed, including the main stem of Manzanita Creek and the main stem of Sisquoc River and their tributaries.

Assessment of Biocontrol Options for the Management of Invasive Riparian Plants in LPNF River Systems: The University of California – Santa Barbara (UCSB) will examine tamarisk removal through the proposed introduction of tamarisk beetle for biocontrol. UCSB will develop regulatory compliance documents for NEPA analysis. If after NEPA analysis, biocontrol of tamarisk on LPNF is deemed acceptable, UCSB will develop project details to implement future releases of beetles for tamarisk-infested riparian sites, and set up monitoring protocols to evaluate impact and ecosystem responses.

AQUATIC SYSTEMS ASSESSMENT AND RESTORATION

Projects will provide important information on water quality, geomorphology, and aquatic and riparian habitat conditions across watersheds impacted by the Zaca and Piru fires. This work will help prioritize future actions for the restoration and conservation of steelhead, and other threatened and endangered aquatic and riparian species including California red-legged frog and least Bell's vireo.



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Los Padres National Forest – Zaca and Piru Fires Restoration Grant Program *continued*

Los Padres National Forest Stream Condition Inventory:

Blue Tomorrow will conduct water quality and stream condition monitoring in selected streams in the Los Padres National Forest. Survey data will be used to assess habitat conditions (including steelhead habitat), sedimentation impacts, stream restoration opportunities, and to track effectiveness of future restoration activities.

Steelhead Distribution and Lifecycle Monitoring in

Manzana Creek: The Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission will research distribution and relative abundance, and conduct lifecycle monitoring of steelhead in Manzana Creek. Crews will complete snorkel and spawning surveys in and around the fire affected area. This work will be coupled with the work of Blue Tomorrow to provide a picture of stream conditions and baseline steelhead information to prioritize future stream/steelhead restoration implementation projects within the Zaca Fire.

Davy Brown and Munch Creek Fish Passage

Improvements: South Coast Habitat Restoration will develop preliminary engineering designs for the removal of three instream migration barriers in the Manzana Creek watershed, an identified focal watershed within the Zaca Fire scar. The design work through this project will serve as the initial phase of a multi-phase approach to ultimately provide access to an additional 3 miles of quality creek habitat for steelhead and other aquatic organisms.

LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT AND RESTORATION

Projects will provide important information on landscape conditions across watersheds impacted by the Zaca and Piru Fires. This work will evaluate the impacts of wildfire on native vegetative communities and develop strategies for the protection and recovery of those ecosystems, with particular attention to big cone Douglas-fir and chaparral communities.

Evaluation and Restoration of Degraded Chaparral within the Piru Fire Perimeter:

University of California – Santa Barbara (UCSB) will assess the impacts of multiple overlapping fires and drought on chaparral condition within the Piru Fire perimeter to analyze the impacts from fire, and identify and characterize areas most susceptible to degradation and takeover by invasive species. The results from this effort will provide viable methodology and identify conditions necessary to inform and expand future chaparral restoration.

Restoration and Resilience of Endemic Big Cone Douglas-

fir: The University of California – Berkeley will conduct a science-based evaluation of pre- and post-fire conditions focusing on bigcone Douglas-fir after the Zaca Fire. Activities will include mapping of forest stands and their condition, analysis of environmental factors important for regeneration,



California condor



Steelhead trout | Credit: Mark Capelli/NOAA



California red-legged frog

WILDLIFE IN THE FOREST

The Los Padres National Forest contains a wide range of ecosystems, from seacoast and marine habitats to redwood forests, mixed conifer forests, oak woodlands, grasslands, pinyon juniper stands, chaparral and semi-desert areas, which are home to more than 468 fish and wildlife species. There are 23 threatened or endangered wildlife species, 20 regionally sensitive wildlife species and 34 forest-level sensitive wildlife species in the forest. The LPNF provides habitat for and is involved with the management and protection of California condors, steelhead, arroyo toad, California red-legged frog, southwestern willow flycatcher, least Bell's vireo, and many endangered plants.



Conservation work in the Los Padres National Forest. | Credit: Bryan Conant/Los Padres Forest Association

collection and propagation of local seed, and synthesis of findings for the long-term adaptive management of big cone Douglas-fir. Findings from this project will inform future restoration locations, out-planting, and evaluation of survival in the field.

NON-NATURAL FEATURES ASSESSMENT AND RESTORATION

Projects will identify and restore non-natural features such as trails, roads, and fuel breaks where impacts from wildfire or fire-fighting activities have led to or exacerbated environmental impacts. Restoration of fire affected non-natural features will reduce erosion and sediment loading to stream systems, maintain use to focused and designated areas and protect surrounding resources, and re-establish safe passage for forest users and employees.

Upper Sisquoc River Trail Restoration Project: Concerned Resource & Environmental Workers, a non-profit organization that provides paid employment and job development skills to young people, will complete trail repairs across the Sisquoc River Trail, which has been significantly degraded due to Zaca Fire impacts. This project is located in the headwaters of the

Sisquoc River watershed, which provides important aquatic habitat for federally endangered and threatened species.

Zaca Fire Trail Maintenance & Conservation Program: The Los Padres Forest Association, a local nonprofit organization founded to help preserve and protect the Los Padres National Forest, will provide trail maintenance and restoration for selected trails of Los Padres National Forest trail system damaged as a result of the 2007 Zaca Fire.

Manzana and Sisquoc Archaeological Trail Surveys: The Los Padres Forest Association will perform archaeological surveys for selected trails impacted by the Zaca Fire. Archeological surveys must be conducted to ensure preservation of important cultural and historical resources before any trail restoration work can occur, and surveys conducted through this project complement and support trail restoration projects throughout the Los Padres National Forest. Trails to be surveyed for this project provide the only access to important parts of the burned area within the Manzana Creek and Sisquoc River watersheds, watersheds noted for their importance to federally endangered Southern California Coast steelhead.