



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

**Forest  
Service**

Pacific  
Southwest  
Region

R5-MB-038  
November 2003

# Comprehensive River Management Plan

## Sespe Creek

### Los Padres National Forest





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# Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Description of River Setting and Resource Values.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Regional River Setting .....	4
Free-flowing values and impacts.....	4
Outstandingly Remarkable Values.....	4
River Classification .....	6
Resource values.....	6
Other land uses.....	10
<b>Planning Context (Coordination with Others).....</b>	<b>10</b>
Relationship to Other Federal Regulatory Agencies .....	10
Relationship to Tribal Governments.....	10
Relationship to Other Federal, State and Local Government Plans.....	10
Relationship to Other Regional Coordinating Bodies .....	11
Legislative Direction Specific to the River .....	11
<b>Management Direction.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Free-Flowing Condition .....	11
Water Quality .....	11
Scenic .....	11
Recreation .....	12
Wildlife.....	12
Geology.....	12
Fish Habitat .....	12
River Corridor Boundary.....	13
Principles for Land Acquisition.....	13
<b>Management Actions .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Monitoring Strategy .....</b>	<b>15</b>
Standards .....	15
Indications for Management Actions.....	15
Process.....	15

# Introduction

The Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) Act (16 U.S.C. 1271-1287) was amended in 1992 to designate a portion of Sespe Creek as an additional component of the National WSR System (Public Law 102-301) in order to preserve and protect for present and future generations its outstandingly remarkable values. The river segment was described as (see Map 1):

SESPE CREEK - The 4-mile segment of the main stem of the creek from its confluence with Rock Creek and Howard Creek downstream to its confluence with Trout Creek, to be administered by the Secretary of Agriculture as a scenic river; and the 27.5-mile segment of the main stem of the creek extending from its confluence with Trout Creek downstream to where it leaves section 26, township 5 north, range 20 west, to be administered by the Secretary of Agriculture as a wild river.

The boundaries of the Sespe Creek component of the National WSR system were published in the Federal Register (67 Federal Register 43:9953, March 5, 2002) as follows:

The Sespe Creek, California, Wild and Scenic River is located in the Los Padres National Forest, in the County of Ventura, State of California. The following description refers to the attached maps titled LION CANYON QUADRANGLE; TOPATOPA MOUNTAINS QUADRANGLE; DEVILS HEART PEAK QUADRANGLE; AND FILLMORE QUADRANGLE, dated 1995. Being the bed of said river and strips of land extending 1320 feet from the ordinary high water mark on both sides of said creek as represented on the maps and described as follows:

The 4-mile segment of the main stem of the creek from its confluence with Rock Creek and Howard Creek downstream to its confluence with Trout Creek and the 27.5-mile segment of the main stem of the creek extending from its confluence with Trout Creek downstream to where it leaves Section 26, Township 5 North, Range 20 West, San Bernardino Meridian.

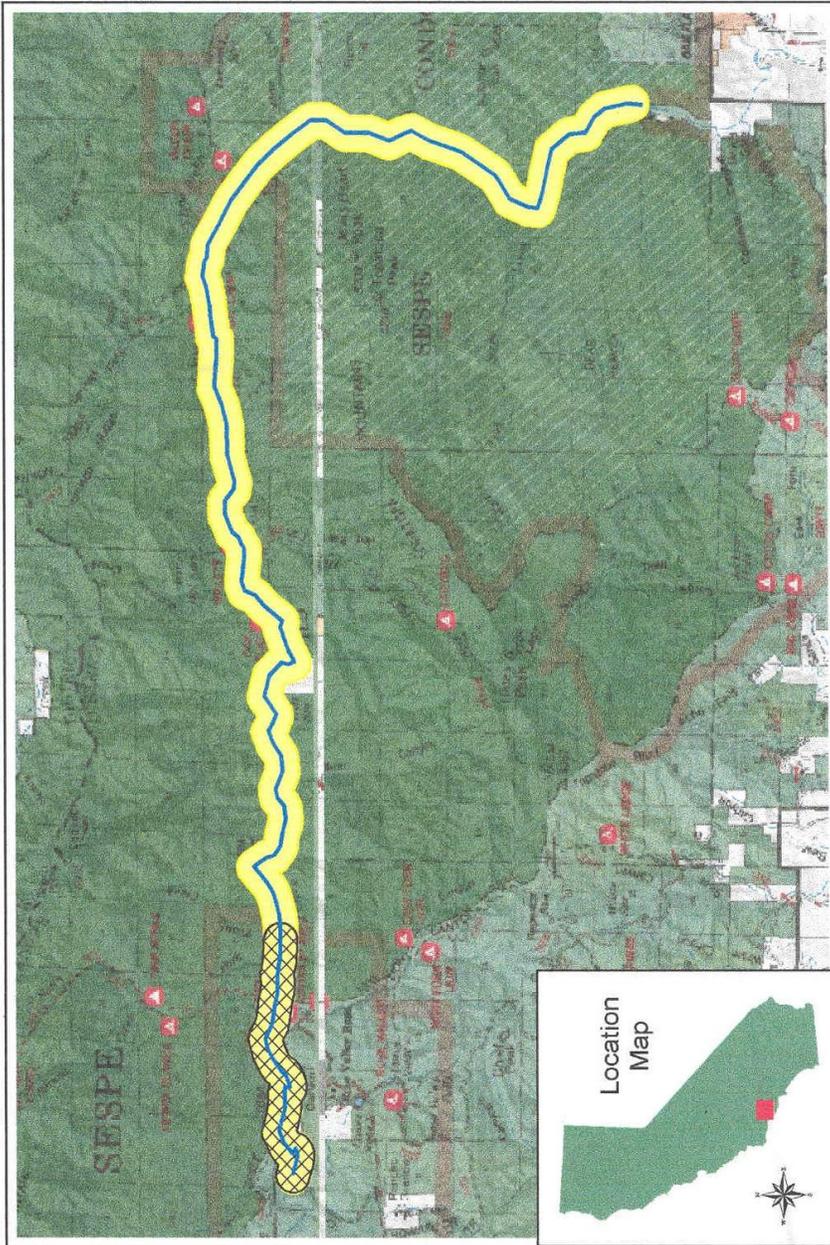
For rivers designated after January 1, 1986, Congress directed the Federal agency charged with the administration of each component on the National WSR System to prepare a comprehensive river management plan (CRMP) to provide for the protection of the river values (free-flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values). The plan shall address resource protection, development of lands and facilities, user capacities, and other management practices necessary or desirable to achieve the purposes of the WSR Act.

This CRMP describes the management direction and actions at a programmatic level. The CRMP will be incorporated as an amendment to the Los Padres National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP).

The WSR Act provides specific direction as to the contents and key elements of a CRMP. Specifically, a CRMP should:

- Describe the existing resource conditions including a detailed description of the outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs);
- Define the goals and desired conditions for protecting river values;
- Address user capacities;
- Address water quality issues and instream flow requirements;
- Reflect a collaborative approach, recognizing the responsibilities of and opportunities for partnership with all stakeholders;
- Identify regulatory authorities of other governmental agencies that assist in protecting river values; and
- Include a monitoring strategy to maintain desired conditions.

# Sespe Creek Wild and Scenic River Sespe Creek Comprehensive River Management Plan





# Description of River Setting and Resource Values

## Regional River Setting

Sespe Creek is located in Ventura County approximately 8 miles north of Ojai, California. Sespe Creek originates in the Santa Ynez Mountains, a part of the California Coast Range, and flows into the Santa Clara River south of Fillmore, California. The Sespe watershed includes those lands that drain into Sespe Creek and its tributaries. The watershed is bordered on the south by the Topa Topa Mountain Range and on the north by the Pine Mountain Range. The analysis area will be the designated WSR segments of Sespe Creek. The designated WSR corridor lies entirely within the administrative boundaries of the Los Padres National Forest. Most of the wild segment lies within the Sespe Wilderness. A portion, approximately 7 miles, traverses the Sespe Condor Sanctuary. The closest population center is Ventura to the south.

Elevations within the watershed range from 1040 feet at the downstream terminus of the designated wild segment to 3160 feet at the upper terminus at Howard and Rock Creeks. The climate is a temperate, Mediterranean type, typified by warm, dry summers, and cool, moist winters. Precipitation averages 27 inches of rain with approximately 95 percent falling between November and April.

Access to the Sespe WSR corridor is somewhat limited due to its largely wilderness setting. The nearest public vehicle access is a trailhead located near Lion Campground at the eastern terminus of the Sespe Road (Forest Route 6N31). The Squaw Flat Road (Forest Route 6N16) provides public access to a trailhead at Dough Flat east of the corridor. Numerous trails access the WSR corridor from the north, south, east, and west. Two hiking and equestrian trails (Forest Trails 22W04 and 20W30) parallel Sespe Creek for part of the length of the WSR corridor.

## Free-flowing values and impacts

Sespe Creek is free-flowing without past or present diversions. There are no planned impoundments or diversions.

## Outstandingly Remarkable Values

Five outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs) were identified for Sespe Creek and listed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Land and Resource Management Plan, Los Padres National Forest, completed in 1988. Those values are Scenic, Recreation, Wildlife, Geologic, and Fishery. The following descriptions specifically identify those values and provide the foundation for desired management direction and monitoring.

**Scenic:** The scenic value of Sespe Creek is associated with the narrow corridor of the creek itself and the contrast of the geologic features, water, and riparian vegetation. These components in different combinations create color, size, and shape contrasts that produce outstanding scenery. Most of the length of the creek is natural, undisturbed, and part of a larger area known as the Sespe Wilderness. Vistas that allow wide views of the landscape enhance the contrast of the riparian zone in the river corridor against the expansive chaparral vegetation on steep hillsides to create unique scenery. In the section between Oak Flat and Hot Springs Canyon, a reddish soil and low scrubby vegetation is prevalent. The hillsides

south of the creek contain stands of bigcone Douglas fir as well as oaks and maples. The creek includes diverse landforms and vegetation ranging from wider areas to narrow, rocky areas. In the middle and lower portions of the creek, there are rocky areas that include falls and deep pools in the river supporting steelhead trout. Portions of this area are in unusual, deep gorges with picturesque pools. Alder, sycamore, and cottonwood trees also line some of the riparian area and remain cool and green, even in the heat of summer. In the upper portion of the creek, the course of the creek is wider and forms several oxbow turns.

**Recreation:** This ORV was originally defined in the LRMP as applying only to the scenic segment. However, the proposed action chooses to define the entire length as having a recreation ORV. This action is linked to the fact that the entire river corridor offers excellent opportunities for solitude, primitive camping, hiking, horseback riding, and other wilderness-oriented activities. These important and outstanding recreation values are not only present in the scenic segment but also fit together as a key component of a package of all five ORVs representing notable outstanding qualities that are present over the entire designated corridor. There is an established trail system that generally parallels the creek just above the floodplain and that periodically crosses the creek at right angles. A total of six recreation trails, including a National Recreation Trail, either parallel or cross the creek at various locations. The river corridor provides a scenic area with access to water that enhances recreation. The southern portion of the river corridor provides a rare opportunity to traverse approximately 11 miles that has no trail and must be slowly traversed by boulder hopping and swimming through some sections. This section has numerous waterfalls up side canyons, although these side canyons are inside the Sespe Condor Sanctuary where public access is prohibited. The main canyon contains many deep pools.

**Wildlife:** This ORV was originally defined in the LRMP as applying only to the wild segment. It mentioned only the California Condor and the Sespe Condor Sanctuary as the reason for the ORV. However, the proposed action chooses to define the entire length as having a wildlife ORV. This action is linked to the presence of several threatened, endangered, or rare wildlife species that are found in a relatively undisturbed riparian habitat and in the adjacent wilderness. The combination of this habitat with the presence of above-ground water for 9-12 months a year and the remoteness of the area constitute an outstanding value for the area. This corridor currently provides habitat for such species as arroyo toad (Federally endangered) and California condor (Federally endangered). The application of this ORV to the entire length also complements the recent finding in the upper Sespe Creek study segment that it possesses a wildlife ORV. As these endangered species are located throughout Sespe Creek, it is not appropriate to exclude a 9.5-mile segment in between two segments that contain wildlife ORVs.

**Geologic:** This ORV was originally defined in the LRMP as applying only to the wild segment. However, the proposed action chooses to define the entire length as possessing outstanding geologic qualities. Also, geologic values are an integral feature in the scenic ORV for the entire designated length. Sespe Creek creates deep gorges that expose formations of the Topa Topa Mountain range. Wind- and water-carved caves, steeply folded multi-colored rock outcrops, hot springs, and deep gorges exposing water-worn boulders and exposures are a significant contribution to the scenic and recreation values. The designated river corridor contains the “type locality” of the Sespe rock formation where it was originally defined and named. The impressive Piedra Blanca Formation, which stands out as steeply dipping white cliff-forming outcrops, contrasted against the maroon Sespe sandstone and shale, are adjacent to the upper scenic segment of the river corridor. They are another feature that supports adding the geologic ORV for the entire designated corridor.

**Fish Habitat:** Sespe Creek is an historic southern steelhead stream with anadromous runs of both the southern steelhead trout and Pacific lamprey. This stream represents one of the southernmost anadromous fishery habitats in California. The southern steelhead is

designated as Federally endangered, adding to the need to focus management actions on its protection and enhancement. Non-native introduced fish species are potential threats to native fish and aquatic species.

## River Classification

Sespe Creek has 4.0 miles designated as a scenic river segment and an additional 27.5 miles designated as a wild river segment.

## Resource values

**Vegetation:** Along Sespe Creek, vegetation is typical of low gradient streams and rivers throughout the Forest. Southern riparian woodland is the most common vegetation. Fremont and black cottonwood, white alder, western sycamore, bigleaf maple, and California bay are typical tree species. Southern alluvial woodland, composed primarily of Fremont cottonwood, western sycamore, willows, and mulefat, border drier sections of the creek. Although southern alluvial woodland tends to be more common along the lower reaches of the creek, both types mix throughout the length of the creek, depending on local terrain and tributary drainage. This riparian vegetation is typically bordered by mixed chaparral consisting of scrub oak, mountain mahogany, hoaryleaf ceanothus, hairy ceanothus, silktassel bush, eastwood manzanita, and chaparral ash. This vegetation type occurs as continuous, even-age stands and as small pockets within other vegetation types. The upper edges of the floodplain are clearly defined by a live oak border. Live oak continues as the dominant canopy species well up many steep side drainages.

Riparian vegetation bordering Sespe Creek and its tributaries is an important component of fisheries habitat. Currently the biggest threat to this vegetation is the invasion of non-native plants and noxious weeds into the watershed. Two species which pose the largest threat are tamarisk (salt cedar) and arundo, which consume water at a higher rate than native riparian plants and eventually outcompete them. Arundo has not reached the Sespe watershed, but is found just outside the forest boundary on private lands.

Yellow star-thistle is another invasive noxious weed found within the Sespe watershed in considerable populations. The largest concentrations are in disturbed open areas in chaparral and oak woodland communities, such as along Sespe Creek between Lion Campground and Willet Hot Springs. The spread of yellow star-thistle results in habitat loss for native plant species.

**Geology:** The Sespe Creek watershed is within the east-west trending Transverse Ranges of southern California. Sespe Creek creates deep gorges that expose numerous rock formations and spectacular examples of faulted and folded sedimentary rocks of the Topa Topa Mountain range. Also, the “type locality” for the Sespe rock formation is within the river corridor.

Geologic values are linked with scenic and recreation ORVs due to the existence of deep gorges and impressive highly folded and faulted rock formations surrounded by chaparral with ribbons of lush green riparian vegetation. The local geology offers visitors a chance to observe geologic processes such as landsliding, development of large alluvial deposits, and mountain building in a relatively young geologic setting. These mountains are being pushed up by tectonic forces more than three times faster than they are being eroded, as evidenced by the steep, sharp “young” slopes and cliffs. Predominant rock types are folded Tertiary sedimentary sequences of inter-bedded sandstone, shale, and conglomerate.

**Water:** The geologic formations in the Sespe were at one time covered by the ocean and therefore are high in soluble salts. The high evaporation rate in the area tends to concentrate

the salts in the late spring and fall, causing higher salt concentrations in the water. During periods of high flow, total dissolved solids are relatively low.

Crude oil seeps are adjacent to Sespe Creek and crude oil flows into the creek in the vicinity of Maple and Tar Creeks and in the Green Cabins area. Sespe Creek is highly erratic in its flow and duration of flow. Torrential flows produce a large part of the flood discharge of the stream. High flow events occur every five to seven years. Large areas of the drainage have bare rock surfaces and thin layers of soil. These conditions produce rapid runoff conditions with a large percentage of the total rainfall to come off as flood waters. Estimates for the 34-year period 1922-23 through 1955-56 indicate the mean annual runoff of Sespe Creek near Tar Creek to be 62,330 acre-feet.

All tributaries within this area contribute critically important cold water to Sespe Creek for the maintenance of anadromous fisheries.

**Fire/fuels:** Wildfire is the primary natural disturbance process in the landscape. Natural fires were a primary factor in shaping the vegetative mosaic. The LRMP recognizes the role of fire as a natural component of the ecosystem. Consideration will be given for ways to reintroduce fire as a tool for maintaining balance and diversity.

**Fish and Wildlife:** Wildlife habitats are determined by the distribution and structure of vegetation communities, landscape features such as soil and rock types, and climate. Sespe Creek supports a variety of wildlife species representative of animals found throughout southern California. The mix of species is diverse because of the range of habitats found within the large Sespe watershed, from small intermittent streams to high mountain forests. Most of the watershed is covered by dry coastal sage chaparral and mixed chaparral, and the wildlife species present reflect this habitat. More commonly known denizens of the chaparral include California quail, bobcat, black-tailed deer, black bear, mountain lion, and hundreds of other vertebrate species.

The perennial, un-dammed, and mostly pristine Sespe watershed supports many riparian-dependent species that are not found in abundance elsewhere on the southern or central coast of California. Federally endangered species such as the arroyo toad (*Bufo californicus*) have been found along Sespe Creek.

Reference conditions for wildlife species distribution and abundance have been interpreted from what is known about habitat (vegetative communities) conditions. In chaparral habitats, there are indications that fire return intervals and sizes are similar to historic levels, but that fire intensities have increased, reducing the variability in stand age and fuel loading after a fire. Plant species composition in chaparral is probably similar except for the addition of exotics such as yellow star-thistle.

Pacific lamprey, speckled dace, and partially unarmored stickleback are native to this river system. Numerous aquatic invertebrate insects inhabit all flowing and standing water bodies in the area.

Exotic species pose a threat to riparian wildlife. Green sunfish, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, black bullheads, Sacramento suckers, mosquito fish, red swamp crayfish, and bullfrogs are exotic species that have been introduced to Sespe Creek. Many of the exotic species are competitors or predators of steelhead trout and other native species. Exotic species numbers appear to be particularly high in the Sespe drainage. In a statewide survey of non-indigenous species, the conclusion was that the South Coast Bioregion was particularly hard hit, with more non-native species than any other California bioregion. Non-native plants such as tamarisk also pose a threat to riparian wildlife.

## Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species

Section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act requires that all federal agencies evaluate the effects of any action they take, fund, or carry out on species federally listed as Threatened or Endangered to ensure such action is “not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any listed species or results in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat.” The Forest Service Manual directs that biological evaluations be prepared to determine potential effects of actions on species proposed for federal listing and those Regionally listed as Sensitive, and that decisions “must not result in loss of species viability or create significant trends toward Federal listing.”

The Los Padres National Forest is required to consult with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration concerning how forest management activities may affect threatened and endangered species. The Southern California Conservation Strategy was developed in response to difficulties in balancing protection of threatened and endangered species and other resource uses. The entire length of the WSR is within the administrative boundaries of the Los Padres National Forest.

Southern steelhead: Southern steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), federally listed as Endangered, historically ran up Sespe Creek. There is currently a small run of southern steelhead trout that makes it to Sespe Creek during years of high stream flow. Migrating steelhead can generally navigate upstream against flows up to six feet per second and leap over four- to six-foot heights. Deep water (> half of the vertical jump) is necessary to gain the leaping momentum. Resting pools (>6”) are necessary in long sections of high velocity flows. During low flows, boulder cascades, bedrock slides, and low-gradient riffles may become barriers to upstream fish movement. Steelhead may become stranded on their upstream migration if flows rapidly decline. The presence of good deep resting pools in the lower Sespe is essential during this period.

Boulders pile up to form fish barriers at bedrock-controlled narrows. Examples of these types of boulder fish barriers include the complete barriers at West Fork Creek and the incomplete low-flow boulder barriers along a section of the lower Sespe Gorge. Substantial areas of spawning and rearing habitat are available to adult steelhead below the more permanent barriers. Boulders may shift (especially within constricted canyons such as the lower gorge) and temporarily and partially block upstream migration. Since swimming and jumping abilities are size dependant, fewer but larger individuals may be able to reach the upper Sespe spawning beds. The fewer spawners would be compensated with less competition for available habitats, larger and more numerous eggs, and healthier progeny.

The lower Sespe and its tributaries do not offer good stable spawning conditions. Storm flows gain power as they sweep through the constricted canyon. Eggs and fry of the lower Sespe are susceptible to being washed downstream, smothered in silts and sands, or damaged in debris flows. Landslides also have a tendency to occur with greater frequency in the lower Sespe watershed and may cause a complete or partial blockage until additional flows cut through and restore the channel grade. Coldwater Canyon, Pine, and West Fork Sespe Creeks seem particularly landslide prone.

Approximately 38 miles of steelhead trout habitat would be accessible if steelhead trout could more easily reach the upper portions of Sespe Creek. Since Sespe Creek is not impounded, water management downstream of the forest affects steelhead trout migration into National Forest System lands.

Non-native introduced fish species are potential threats to native fish and aquatic species. The spread of non-natives has increased dramatically over the past five years. They now occupy virtually every reach of the WSR.

Arroyo toad: The arroyo toad is federally listed as endangered. The Los Padres has been collecting population information on this species partly as a means of assessing overall health of aquatic systems in the Sespe. Arroyo toads historically inhabited most of the coastal river and stream channels of southern California. Believed to have been extirpated from 75% of its prior range, the toad is now found in small isolated populations from Santa Barbara to San Diego. Historical records from throughout southern and central California indicate that populations of the arroyo toad have declined and fragmented within the area, although to a lesser extent than in areas off of the National Forests. This is primarily due to habitat degradation and fragmentation. Prime habitat for arroyo toads includes sandy beaches along streams. Their habitat was likely more plentiful prior to suburban development along streams, primarily outside National Forest boundaries. Loss of riparian habitat, reduced water flows, and predation by exotic pests are thought to have collectively contributed to declines of this species.

The toads appear to select low-gradient stream sections, with very shallow pools and a sand or gravel substrate. Breeding occurs late in the season, with metamorphosis normally completed by July. Juvenile arroyo toads spend the first two to three months of their lives on newly exposed sandbars or stream margins dispersing to terrace and flood zones through September. Arroyo toads are mostly inactive during fall and early winter months. Surveys on the Sespe were conducted annually back to 1991.

Large acreages that burned in the 1920s and 1960s may have had detrimental effects on arroyo toad. In chaparral habitats, there are indications that fire return intervals and sizes are similar to historic levels, but that fire intensities have increased, reducing the variability in stand age and fuel loading after a fire. Increased fire intensity can result in increased movement of streamside gravels and sediment within riparian systems when heavy rains occur after fires. Surveys indicate that steelhead populations declined in the 1920s and 1960s. This decline was due to intense fires followed by heavy rains resulting in heavy sedimentation and pool filling. This pattern could also affect riparian-dependent species such as the arroyo toad.

Present threats to the arroyo toad include recreational use and natural events such as extended droughts, exceptional flooding in El Nino years, and the magnification of flooding and sediment loading caused by wildfire. There are no data on the extent of impact from any of these possible disturbance factors to the arroyo toad population in the area. However, the US Fish and Wildlife Service in their listing package, and other biologists, generally accept that the aforementioned disturbance factors are a cause for concern.

California condor: The California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) is state and Federally listed as endangered. Recovery efforts have played a significant role in defining management activities in the Sespe. Concerns for declines in the remaining Sespe-Sierra population led to the establishment of the 35,000-acre Sespe Condor Sanctuary in 1947. It was enlarged to 53,000 acres in 1951. With the exception of a few narrow travel corridors, the sanctuary has remained closed to public entry. It contains a condor release site.

A considerable amount of conservation activity occurred in the late 1960s and 1970s. This included land acquisition, administrative closures, law enforcement activities, advisory committee reports, management plans, and numerous other studies and investigations. In 1976, a large portion of the Sespe drainage was designated as one of nine critical condor habitat areas under the Endangered Species Act. In the 1980s, management efforts shifted to the captive breeding-reintroduction program headed by US Fish and Wildlife Service. Reasons for the population decline included illegal collection of adults and eggs, inadvertent poisoning from livestock predator control efforts, lead poisoning from ingested lead fragments embedded in game carcasses, powerline collisions, and loss of open feeding country to development. There are no estimates on population sizes, but condors once

ranged into Oregon where the Lewis and Clark expedition recorded them along the Columbia River in 1803.

**Recreation:** The Los Padres National Forest is considered an urban forest because of its close proximity to the Los Angeles metropolitan area and San Francisco Bay Area. Sespe Creek is a focal point for recreation in the Sespe Wilderness. Primitive camping, hiking, horseback riding, nature study, photography, swimming, and wading are popular activities. Overnight camping occurs at unimproved dispersed sites and at designated primitive campsites throughout the river corridor. There is an established trail system consisting of six trails, including one National Recreation Trail. The river corridor provides a scenic area with access to water that enhances recreation. A unique feature of the WSR corridor is its 11-mile segment without trail access that offers the adventurous many deep pools set in a deep boulder-strewn gorge. The corridor area is mostly used in spring and fall.

## Other land uses

There are no known valid mining claims in the Sespe WSR corridor. The WSR Act states that "...subject to valid existing rights, the lands designated as the WSR corridor are withdrawn from all forms of appropriation under the mining laws and from operation of the mineral leasing laws..." The designated corridor is described as "being the bed of said river and strips of land extending 1320 feet from the ordinary high water mark on both sides of said river." The portion of the WSR corridor inside Sespe Wilderness is also withdrawn from mineral entry as of the date of wilderness designation.

# Planning Context (Coordination with Others)

## Relationship to Other Federal Regulatory Agencies

The Los Padres National Forest is required to consult with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration concerning how forest management activities may affect threatened and endangered species. The Southern California Conservation Strategy was developed in response to difficulties in balancing protection of threatened and endangered species and other resource uses. The entire length of the Sespe Creek WSR corridor is within the administrative boundaries of the Los Padres National Forest.

## Relationship to Tribal Governments

The Los Padres National Forest recognizes a government-to-government relationship with the Santa Ynez band of Chumash Indians, and also consults with other organized Native American groups and individuals known to the forest. Any future site-specific proposals will coordinate with the local tribal governments during preparation of NEPA documents.

## Relationship to Other Federal, State and Local Government Plans

The Los Padres National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (March, 1988) establishes long-range direction and associated goals and objectives. Specific direction for the management of WSRs and wilderness areas is found in that document. The Sespe Creek CRMP will be incorporated into the Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) as an amendment. The Los Padres National Forest is currently revising the LRMP, and the CRMP will be incorporated into the revised LRMP.

## Relationship to Other Regional Coordinating Bodies

The Sespe WSR corridor lies within the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District. The District is a non-attainment area for several California State Ambient Air Quality Standards. Prior to prescribed fire activities, the Forest Service prepares and submits a Smoke Management Plan that describes the planned activities and expected impacts to air quality. If approved, a permit is issued for the activity.

## Legislative Direction Specific to the River

The Sespe WSR is almost entirely within the Sespe Wilderness. The WSR Act states that any portion of a designated WSR within a wilderness area shall be subject to the provisions of both the Wilderness Act and the WSRs Act and with respect to the preservation of river values, and in the case of conflict, the more restrictive provisions apply.

The Sespe Condor Sanctuary lies partially within the Sespe WSR corridor. The sanctuary is managed to provide maximum habitat protection, and all other resource activities are discouraged. The public is not allowed to enter the sanctuary, although public entry is allowed in the WSR corridor along Sespe Creek.

## Management Direction

This section contains a synopsis of each relevant resource along with the desired future condition of that resource.

### Free-Flowing Condition

Free-flowing condition is one of the values for which Sespe Creek was designated a wild and scenic river. The designation protects the river from having a dam built on it or the effects of a dam built in a lower portion of the river from reaching the wild and scenic portion.

**Desired Future Condition** – The Sespe WSR is maintained in a free-flowing condition.

### Water Quality

Water quality is one of the values for which Sespe Creek was designated a wild and scenic river. A wild river in the WSR Act generally has, among other things, unpolluted waters. The river is located mostly within the Sespe Wilderness, which provides it a large measure of protection from most pollutants. Pollutants resulting from humans and animals using the area for recreation are insignificant due to the low number of users and difficulty in accessing the area. Sedimentation, due to heavy rains following fire, is the most significant effect to water quality. A large fire that consumes all vegetation will have a much larger effect than a smaller fire with unburned areas intermixed. There are also natural pollutants (dissolved salts, tar seeps, etc.) that affect water quality as discussed above.

**Desired Future Condition** – Water quality is maintained in Sespe Creek.

### Scenic

Scenic values were identified as an ORV. The river corridor, in conjunction with the larger area of the watershed that is natural and undisturbed, combines to create beautiful scenery.

**Desired Future Condition** – Scenic values of the entire watershed and maintenance of a natural appearance are considered when managing, planning, or implementing any projects in or around Sespe Creek.

## Recreation

Recreation was identified as an ORV. Current recreation consists of primitive camping, hiking, horseback riding, and other dispersed and wilderness-oriented activities. Use is low in this WSR corridor due to seasonality of use and difficulty of access. Use is concentrated in the spring and fall due to harsh weather conditions. The effects of recreation use are relatively low and concentrated along riparian areas.

**Desired Future Condition** – All existing recreation opportunities such as dispersed camping, backpacking, and horseback riding will remain or be modified to protect the outstandingly remarkable values of Sespe Creek. Wilderness values, including a sense of solitude and lack of user conflicts, are enjoyed by recreationists.

## Wildlife

Wildlife values, particularly threatened and endangered species, were identified as an ORV. There are several threatened, endangered, or Forest Service sensitive wildlife species that are found in a relatively undisturbed riparian habitat. Introductions of invasive exotic plant and animal species and recreational uses such as camping and hiking on trails that cross the habitat have the potential to impact threatened and endangered species and their habitats.

**Desired Future Condition** – Threatened and endangered species are protected. Campers, hikers, and equestrians are directed to campsites and well-maintained trails that minimize access to the water in areas that are arroyo toad habitat. Stream crossings are kept to a minimum in an effort to disturb as little of the habitat as possible. Efforts will continue to prevent the introduction of non-native plants and animals. The Forest will continue to work with USFWS and CDFG to enlist the help of volunteers and others to control or eradicate non-native wildlife species.

## Geology

Geologic values were identified as an ORV for the entire Sespe WSR corridor. Dramatic geologic features and processes combine to create a scenic backdrop for visitors as well as boundless opportunities to serve as an outdoor classroom.

**Desired Future Condition** – An appreciation of geologic values is cultivated through interpretive displays at trailheads and informational handouts. These actions lead to no further graffiti on geologic features or illegal collection of specimens.

## Fish Habitat

Fish habitat values were identified as an ORV. Sespe Creek offers a significant amount of habitat for the recovery of southern steelhead.

**Desired Future Condition** – Threatened and endangered species are protected. Campers, hikers, and equestrians are directed to campsites and well-maintained trails that minimize access to the water in areas that are steelhead habitat. Stream crossings are kept to a minimum in an effort to disturb as little of the habitat as possible. Any human-made barriers to fish passage are considered for removal. Efforts will continue to prevent the introduction of non-native fish and aquatic species. The Forest will continue to work with NOAA and CDFG to enlist the help of volunteers and others to control or eradicate non-native fish and

aquatic species. As an upstream tributary, the Rose Valley Lakes are stocked with triploid (sterile) trout to prevent interbreeding with steelhead. Through coordination with California Department of Fish and Game, fishing regulations promote steelhead recovery.

## River Corridor Boundary

The boundary for the Sespe WSR corridor is totally within the administrative boundaries of the Los Padres National Forest. It extends ¼ mile on each side of Sespe Creek from its confluence with Rock Creek and Howard Creek in the Rose Valley area downstream approximately 31.5 miles to where it leaves Section 26, T5N, R20W, SBBM. The boundary lines are displayed on the 1995 Forest Service revision of the USGS 1988 1:24,000 topographic quadrangles.

## Principles for Land Acquisition

There are four parcels of private land in the Sespe WSR corridor. Three of these are in the scenic segment and one is in the wild segment. If any of these parcels were put up for sale, the Forest Service would attempt to acquire them due to their WSR location. Such acquisition would only be attempted based on a willing-seller basis. The possibility of land exchanges should be considered as another method of acquiring private lands within the WSR.

## Management Actions

This section includes the criteria developed to guide subsequent site-specific agency decisions and a description of probable management actions.

### All ORV Values

- Develop and provide educational and interpretive materials such as trailhead displays and pamphlets that present the outstandingly remarkable values of the Sespe Creek WSR. Interpretive themes and products will be coordinated with the Corridor Management Plan being developed for the Jacinto Reyes Scenic Byway (Highway 33).
- During management of large wildfires, continue to protect all of the ORVs for the WSR.
- Look for opportunities to use prescribed fire when it can protect and enhance ORVs through maintaining ecological stability and diversity.

### Free-Flowing Condition

- Coordinate with upstream landowners outside the corridor to minimize flow reductions where possible.
- Coordinate with regulatory agencies as appropriate to promote downstream flows in the Santa Clara River to support steelhead migration on Sespe Creek.

### Water Quality

- Utilize wilderness toilets where appropriate; locate outside riparian zones.
- Monitor trail conditions following large wildfires to consider flood damage mitigation.

## Scenic Value

- No oil and gas leasing in the entire corridor or visible from Sespe Creek on NF lands.

## Recreation Value

- Convert the group campground at Piedra Blanca to a trailhead to promote WSR and wilderness access.
- Enlist use of volunteers to assist with trail maintenance. Emphasize maintenance and reconstruction of the trail system to maintain or enhance recreation opportunities in the WSR corridor.
- Maintain dispersed recreation opportunities by maintaining, relocating, or constructing dispersed camping facilities.
- Promote low impact camping techniques and Leave No Trace ethics in the WSR to maintain quality recreation experiences for all users.
- Promote safe and efficient recreation access by maintaining cairns and high water trail markings as needed.

## Wildlife Value

- Decommission Beaver and Lion Campgrounds to protect and enhance known arroyo toad habitat at these locations.
- Look for ways to limit number of stream crossings of trails to minimize impacts to riparian habitat.
- Utilize trained volunteers to remove invasive non-native species to maintain native wildlife habitat.
- Use interpretive signing to educate visitors about threats to native wildlife species and habitats.
- Coordinate with USF&WS, NOAA-Fisheries, and CDF&G on non-native species management, introductions, and monitoring activities.

## Geology Value

- Continue to provide educational and interpretive materials on the local geology.

## Fish Habitat Value

- Look for ways to limit number of stream crossings of trails to minimize impacts to native fish habitat.
- Coordinate with USF&WS, NOAA-Fisheries, and CDF&G on non-native species management, introductions, and monitoring activities. Work with NOAA Fisheries and volunteers to perform non-native species eradication in Sespe Creek.

# Monitoring Strategy

Sespe Creek is currently lightly used by the recreating public and has a sizeable capacity for additional use. The potential primary threat to the ORVs is overuse by the public. The monitoring strategy is to monitor and/or regulate that use to protect and enhance the ORVs.

## Standards

Annually assess monitoring data from all sources to determine effects on ORVs. Those sources may include biological TES monitoring, trail counters, voluntary trip reports, periodic visitor interviews and samples, and field observations from wilderness ranger.

Information from the monitoring will be used to determine if specific actions, projects, or additional monitoring need to be planned. Future specific projects, if any, may require a separate NEPA analysis.

## Indications for Management Actions

The indications for management actions are:

1. A sustained increase in the level of use of the river corridor;
2. Inability of trail system to accommodated the observed level of use.

## Process

Due to historical low levels of use observed on Sespe Creek, current monitoring intensity and frequency is low and uses the variety of tools as described above. A significant portion of that monitoring is visual observations from wilderness rangers, volunteers, and public feedback. Due to the uncertainty and fluctuations of the federal budget, firm monitoring costs cannot be relied upon to complete needed monitoring. As a result, use of input from volunteers and the general public to monitor use and impacts in the corridor is an essential element in the monitoring strategy.