

La Brea Restoration Project Summary

Background

The La Brea Restoration project area is located about 26 miles east of Santa Maria on the Santa Lucia Ranger District and includes 56,594 acres. Following the La Brea Fire, which started on August 8, 2009, and burned approximately 90,000 acres, the Forest had to close a portion of the area due to road damage and safety concerns. Subsequent to the La Brea Fire, during the winter of 2010 and 2011 Santa Barbara County experienced about 150% of normal precipitation. The intensity of the storms produced severe flooding and sediment deposition in the North Fork La Brea Creek. Forest Service system roads 11N04.3, 11N043B (La Brea Road), and 10N06.1 (La Brea Canyon Road); and Forest Service System Trail, 30W02 (Kerry Canyon Motorcycle Trail) were severely impacted with either complete loss of the road/trail template or complete burial of the road/trail template.

These roads and trails have been under a temporary emergency Forest Closure Order since the La Brea fire.

An Emergency Repair Federally Owned Roads (ERFO) assessment was conducted after the fire and storm event to determine the extent of the damage and provide cost estimates for repairs for the roads. Subsequent engineering, hydrologic, and biological (aquatic and wildlife) field evaluations were conducted in 2013, the results of which were captured in written assessments for five possible options for addressing the washed out roads. These options were evaluated by the Forest and used in development of the Purpose and Need and Proposed Action for this project.

A travel analysis that included the roads and trails within the project area was conducted this past year. Each road and trail was assessed for its risks and benefits in terms of natural resources, public safety, and access for recreation, private land inholdings, traditional cultural sites, grazing, and general forest administration. Recommendations from the Travel Analysis Report were used for refinement of the Purpose and Need and Proposed Action for this project.

See Map 1 Existing Condition.

Purpose and Need

The La Brea Restoration project area includes 56,594 acres. There are three Los Padres Land Management Plan Places in the project area, including the Colson Place (36,194 acres) (LMP part 2, p.47), the Cuyama Hwy -166 Front (6,413 acres) (LMP part 2, p.52) and the San Rafael (13,817 acres) (LMP part 2, p.75). All of the proposed actions occur within Colson Place. The theme for Colson is a traditional, rustic, back-roaded area utilized for hunting, remote touring and camping. It is identified by a mix of recreation and grazing activities, and threatened and endangered species habitat. On the northeast edge of the project area is the Cuyama- Hwy 166 Front Place, which is a natural agricultural setting and on the southeast edge of the project area is the San Rafael Place, which consists of a vast rugged wilderness setting. See Map 2 LRMP Places.

There are five Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA's) within the project area including: Horseshoe Springs, La Brea, Spoor Canyon, Miranda Pine and Tepusquet Peak. The San Rafael wilderness is also within the project area (see Map 3 IRA's). All existing Forest Service system roads have been excluded from the IRA's. All existing Forest Service system motorized and non-motorized trails are allowed in IRA's.

The purpose of this project is to evaluate portions of the La Brea and La Brea Canyon roads and the Kerry Canyon Trail, damaged during the floods of 2011, and determine whether to reclassify, relocate,

reconstruct, or decommission them. There are ten recreation sites in the project area; Colson, Barrel Springs, Miranda Pine, Brookshire, Horseshoe Springs, and Wagon Flat campgrounds and Lazy, Kerry, Bear, and Alejandro primitive camps. All need to be evaluated for the correct classification given current conditions and the proposed changes to roads and trails. Restoration of the area to provide a sustainable level of recreational use and access to the public while preserving the natural ecosystem, riparian habitat and cultural resources is the goal.

1. There is a need to improve hydrological functioning and riparian habitat for the North Fork La Brea Creek (LMP Part 1, Forest Goals, 3.1 page 35, 5.1 pages 39-40, 5.2 page 40 and 6.2 pages 44-45.)

Portions of the La Brea and La Brea Canyon Roads are located in the riparian zone of North Fork La Brea Creek and cross the creek in numerous areas (approximately 34 crossings). As a result, the road occupies areas that otherwise would likely be occupied by riparian vegetation providing habitat for riparian dependent wildlife species. This area constitutes critical habitat for federally threatened California red-legged frogs and federally endangered California south coast steelhead, and is home to Forest Service sensitive species such as the two-striped garter snake and southern western pond turtle. The North Fork La Brea Creek watershed has a condition classification of “Functioning at Risk” with poor riparian/wetland vegetation condition. The desired condition for the North Fork La Brea Creek watershed is: functioning properly, supports healthy populations of riparian dependent species, and the riparian and aquatic ecosystems are resilient (Forest Goals 3.1, 5.1 and 5.2). The extensive damage to the roads provides an opportunity to improve hydrological condition and riparian habitat in the existing road corridor.

2. There is a need for roads and trails (La Brea and La Brea Canyon Roads and Kerry Canyon Trail) to be safe and efficient to manage (LMP Part 1, Forest Goals, 3.1 page 34 and 7.1 page 47)

These roads and trails have been damaged substantially and currently are unfit for use. Historically, both roads have required only moderate maintenance, primarily at the numerous stream crossings. There are approximately 34 stream crossings in need of some level of maintenance. The cost for annual road maintenance has increased, calling for an evaluation of options for providing a viable and feasible transportation system that considers the cost for long-term annual maintenance. One of the desired conditions for Forest Goals 3.1 and 7.1 is that the transportation system is safe and efficient to manage.

3. There is a need to maintain and restore some level of access in the North Fork La Brea area to provide a range of sustainable motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities. (LMP Part 1, Forest Goals, 3.1 page 35)

La Brea Road, La Brea Canyon Road and Kerry Canyon Trail to a lesser extent, provide dispersed recreation access to motorized and non-motorized trails, and semi-primitive and primitive campgrounds. The general public uses this area for a variety of activities including hunting, off-highway vehicle travel, hiking, equestrian, and camping. Presently, access for recreation and fire suppression in the North Fork La Brea area has been restricted and reduced by the damage to the roads. The desired condition is to maintain function as a traditional back-country area with access to historic trails (Colson Place).

4. There is a need to provide “adequate and feasible access” to private land within the forest boundary in the North Fork La Brea Creek area (LMP Part 1, Forest Goals, 3.1 page 34)

La Brea Road and La Brea Canyon Road have provided motorized access to private land within the forest boundary in the North Fork La Brea Creek area. The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) requires “adequate and feasible access” be provided to private property owners when their land is within or surrounded by forest land. The desired condition is to provide access to private lands in the area consistent with ANILCA. (LMP Part 3, page 20)

Proposed Action

Please refer to Map 4 Proposed Action.

1. Repair La Brea Road (NFS Road 11N04.3) from Pine Canyon Road (NFS Road 11N04.1) to Wagon Flat Campground. This road segment is generally in good shape, but the southernmost mile is currently gated closed due to cut-slope slumps blocking the travel-way. Work can primarily be accomplished with a bulldozer, though a backhoe or loader would be desirable for drainage repair, including replacing a failed downspout 0.3 miles south of the closure gate. The road also needs blading to remove rocks that have rolled down the hillside and stopped on the travel way. Two crossings of La Brea Creek just north of Wagon Flat would require reconstruction. Material would be removed from the active riparian area and streambed and relocated on the roadway above the stream.

2. Convert La Brea Road (NFS 11N04.3) from Wagon Flat to Rattlesnake Canyon at intersection with La Brea Canyon Road (NFS Road 10N06.1) to non-motorized trail. This road segment has 24 stream crossings that have been washed out, making the road impassable by vehicle. Approximately 30 cubic yards of material would need to be excavated at each crossing to make it passable by vehicles. Converting this road to a non-motorized trail would be accomplished through a simple travel management reclassification exercise and signage; no dozer or excavation work would be needed. Trail maintenance standards would apply.

3. Convert motorcycle trail 30W02 Kerry Canyon to a non-motorized trail. This trail is adjacent to and crosses the creek numerous times along steep side-slopes that make it difficult to ride and maintain. Converting this trail from motorized to non-motorized would be accomplished through a simple travel management reclassification exercise and signage; no dozer or excavation work would be needed. Level 1 and 2 trail maintenance standards would apply. This trail needs to be surveyed for its current condition so a determination can be made to either reroute or rebuild sections that have been severely damaged and washed out.

4. Convert Lazy Camp Road (NFS Road 11N04B), to non-motorized trail that becomes the beginning of Kerry Canyon Trail (30W02). This road segment has 4 crossings of La Brea Creek that would require reconstruction, along with other smaller crossings of tributaries that need repair. There is also a 300-foot length of travel-way that was located in the creek bottom, but is essentially gone. This section would require substantial bulldozer work to recreate the travel-way and smooth the creek bed for vehicle passage. Converting this road to a non-motorized trail would be accomplished through a simple travel management reclassification exercise and signage; no dozer or excavation work would be needed. Level 1 and 2 trail maintenance standards would apply.

5. Convert La Brea Canyon Road (NFS 11N06.1) from Rattlesnake Canyon past Barrel Springs Campground to the gate near Alejandro (NFS Trail 31W15), to non-motorized trail. This road segment has 10 stream crossings that have been washed out. Approximately 30 cubic yards of material would need to be excavated at each crossing to make it passable by vehicles. Converting this road to a

non-motorized trail would be accomplished through a simple travel management reclassification exercise and signage; no dozer or excavation work would be needed. Level 1 and 2 trail maintenance standards would apply.

6. Designate and construct a trailhead at Wagon Flat Campground, at the junction of NFS 11N04.3 and NFS 10N06.1. This would involve establishment of a parking area, information kiosk, and installation of a welded pipe barrier to define the area and limit motorized access. The use of heavy equipment such as a dozer, grader, backhoe and/or loader is expected to create a designated location to park. Posts for the welded pipe barrier would be pounded in or utilize hand dug holes and cement.

7. Designate and construct a trailhead at the bottom of Rattlesnake canyon at the Junction of NFS 11N04.2 and NFS 11N04.3. This would involve establishment of a parking area, information kiosk, and installation of a welded pipe barrier to define the area and limit motorized access. The use of heavy equipment such as a dozer, grader, backhoe and/or loader is expected to create designated location to park. Posts for the welded pipe barrier would be pounded in or utilize hand dug holes and cement.

8. Designate and construct a trailhead at the Forest Service administrative site near Colson Campground that would involve establishment of parking to provide access to several trails and accommodate horse trailers. An information kiosk and welded pipe barrier to limit motorized access would be installed as well. The use of heavy equipment such as a dozer, grader, backhoe and/or loader is expected to create a designated location to park. Posts for the welded pipe barrier to define the trailhead would be pounded in or utilize hand dug holes and cement.

9. Reclassify the Barrel Spring Campground as a primitive campsite. This campground currently has 6 camp sites and 2 pit toilets. This campground has not been accessible by vehicle since 2010. Since access would now be via non-motorized trail, this campground would no longer be managed as developed. Primitive campsites are not serviced and therefore require a pack it in, pack it out, leave no trace mindset. Conversion from developed to primitive would require no ground disturbing actions, except for removal of the toilets and filling the holes with nearby soil. Existing improvements such as fire rings and tables will stay in place, but will not be replaced when they are lost or become unusable.

10. Decommission Alejandro, Bear, Kerry and Lazy Primitive Camps. Decommissioning would involve removal of picnic tables, fire rings, bulletin boards, etc. and changing the classification. No ground disturbing actions would be required. These camps would be removed from all forest maps. Dispersed camping would still be allowed.

11. Decommission Colson Campground and build a welded pipe barrier around it to keep vehicles out. Decommissioning would involve removal of picnic tables, fire rings, bulletin boards and changing its classification. This campground had the toilets burned down and the pits filled over ten years ago and has not been maintained to standard due to issues involving protection of cultural sites and is experiencing soil erosion due to uncontrolled water and damaged vegetation. No reshaping or treatment of the eroded road or other sites within the area are proposed with this project. The welded pipe barrier and signage will be used to protect the site from further damage by vehicles and to discourage camping. Posts for the welded pipe barrier would be pounded in or utilize hand dug holes and cement. This campground would be removed from all forest maps. Dispersed camping would still be allowed unless a Forest Order is in place restricting that use.

Land and Resource Management Plan Consistency

The proposed project activities are consistent with the Southern California National Forests Vision (LMP, Part 1), specifically Goal 3.1- Provide for Public Use and Natural Resource Protection (p. 34), Goal 5.2- Improve Riparian Conditions (p. 42), and Goal 6.2- Provide ecological conditions to sustain viable populations of native and desired nonnative species (p. 45). They are also consistent with the desired condition for Colson, Cuyama – Hwy166 Front and San Rafael Places. The proposed activities would provide public, private, and administrative access while restoring riparian conditions and protecting endangered species (LMP, Part 2, p. 47-48). The project is consistent with the program emphasis for Colson, Cuyama – Hwy 166 Front and San Rafael Places, including to continue multiple-use management while minimizing conflicts between TESP species, recreation, and livestock grazing activities; and to improve developed campgrounds facilities and access to historic trails (p. 48). The District would incorporate Forest-wide standards and guidelines to ensure the project conforms to the Land Management Plan; and would ensure the project meets all applicable local, state, and federal laws such as the Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act and Clean Water Act.

Decision to Be Made

The Responsible Official will decide whether to implement this project as proposed, modify the project to address any unresolved conflicts, or not implement the project. The results of the environmental analysis, which includes public and other agency input, will be utilized in the decision-making process.