

Memorandum

Date: July 24, 2011

To: Philip LaFollette, Backcountry Trails Program Director, California Conservation Corps.

cc: Dominic Santangelo, Kathleen Phelps, Ken Kunert and Jeff Bensen.

From: Joe Duran and Dave Weaver.

Re: Agreement #R-09-8154 with the California Conservation Corps and Los Padres National Forest trail project management code WFW307/CMLG07 using agreement #08PA1105070044

Los Padres National Forest Santa Lucia Ranger District Summary Accomplishment Report

For

**Manzana Trail (30W13) & Sisquoc Trail (30W12)
May 2 – June 3, 2011**

I. Trails Project Summary:

The primary purpose of this project was to significantly improve the safety corridor along these trails in the San Rafael Wilderness after the destructive Zaca Fire of 2007 and the harsh winter storms of 2008, 2009, and 2011.

The Manzana trail intersects with the Sisquoc River trail and forms popular loop options of approximately over 50 miles of backpacking recreation opportunities. Popular loops are: Nira to South Fork (on the Sisquoc), downstream to the Manzana Schoolhouse, and back via Hurricane Deck and Potrero Canyon Trails, or instead, back to Nira via the Manzana Trail. There are other loop options going upstream on the Sisquoc also.

Both hikers and equestrians, often with pack stock, heavily use the trails rehabilitated in this project area. The users are residents, visitors, and tourists (national and international) and residents from the South and Central Coast area. These trails provide multiple recreation opportunities by providing short day use or long loop hiking trips.

The hardworking California Conservation Corps (CCC) Backcountry crew was used to complete this work in 33 days. This special program crew will be described later in this report. The project was made possible by an agreement between the USFS, Los Padres NF, and the CCCs. The work accomplished was completed to a VERY high standard and exceeded the expectations of the Forest Service. It also boosts strong community support for future trail projects in the Los Padres National Forest working with local partnerships.

II. Trails Rehabilitated:

Manzana Trail 30W13:

Utilizing a base camp at South Fork Camp with stock support to pack in food, equipment and supplies, the crew hiked back up the Manzana Trail as far as a half mile (south) beyond White Ledge Camp.

The work required was to rehabilitate the immense damage caused by the devastating Zaca Fire and subsequent hard winters. The tasks were completed by brushing, removing down trees, repairing the effects of erosion slides, and filling in enormous sink holes. On several parts of the trail the crew constructed elaborate stone retaining walls which should keep the trail safe for years to come. Some of these trail failures had made the trail virtually impassable to stock.

Additionally the crew cleared several backcountry camps of fire hazards, stoves were cleaned out, and creek crossings were improved to minimize sediment sloughing and increase traveler safety.

TOTAL MILES: 3.0

Sisquoc Trail 30W12:

From the same base at South Fork camp the crew worked upstream as far as Mansfield Camp. During the first 2.5 miles to Skunk camp the area was very heavily overgrown and required extensive lopping with occasional small limb sawing. Also, the crew improved Skunk camp to a useable back country standard. The camp had deteriorated so badly that it was next to impossible to even find.

Beyond the Skunk area the trail was again overgrown needing much lopping, some sawing, and some trail widening to its former width as the brush had narrowed the path to a bare minimum. Downed limbs and trees were the norm on this trail which were removed.

The crew made it as far as Mansfield camp where they performed hazard reduction and removed the ash from the fire pit/stove.

During this brush section to Mansfield, the crew improved many crossings thus minimizing sedimentation in these riparian zones as well as making entry and exit safer for foot traffic.

TOTAL MILES: 4.5

Sisquoc Trail 30W12:

Again from the South Fork base camp the crew worked downstream improving several crossings to reduce sediment and improve the safety of travelers entering and exiting the water crossings. The deep and wide crossing just downstream from South Fork was hazardous to stock do to deep drop offs upon entering. They constructed rock steps to facilitate safe stock (and human) entry from the bank. There are many crossing in the first 2 miles below the So. Fork Camp.

TOTAL MILES: 2.0

Sweetwater Trail 27W06:

From base camp the crew worked up over a half mile from the bottom of the Sweetwater trail. They generally widened areas where the brush and tall grasses had closed in on the trail.

TOTAL MILES: 0.5

TOTAL: 10.0 MILES OF WILDERNESS TRAIL MAINTENANCE COMPLETED

III. Project Highlights:

A. Leadership:

The project involved a private contract packer, logistical support from the CCC San Luis Obispo center, the CCC Backcountry Program Leaders, and the core of the project, the Backcountry crew itself with its leader.

1. The crew, led by Agnes Vianzon, backpacked 8 miles on the Sweetwater Trail, from 5,000' to 2,000' into the South Fork Camp on the Sisquoc River. As the crew had already been together over a week, they had started to develop into an effective team. They started to work with high energy and proceeded to knock out all the trail miles listed above. The quality of work they completed was almost without equal. It is important that their work last as long as possible because the winters are hard on trails, AND the area is rather popular with hikers and equestrians. After a month this crew had developed into a family. They had no quitters (from the program), there were no malingerers, they are eager to help each other, and have adapted to life in the backcountry amazingly well. Their sum is greater than their parts. **They are among the strongest teams/crews we have ever seen.**

Recalling that these individuals came from all over the country and are at all levels of educational and socioeconomic levels, their melding into a cohesive family **is due directly to the remarkable talents of their leader, Agnes.** Agnes relates to these young people as a combination drill sergeant, mother, sister, teacher, and trail crew leader. She is simply amazing! This crew is extremely fortunate to have worked with and known Agnes for they will remember her fondly for the rest of their lives.

2. There were **other “Leader’s and Volunteer’s”** who worked behind the scenes to make this project the success it is with their numerous hours that were committed. **Phil LaFollette** and **Karlson Hubbard** provided outstanding leadership and oversight to the program. **Frank Salituri from the SLO center** saw that the food order was prepared and ready to go weekly, **Kiva Vigil from the Santa Maria Satellite**, along with Forest Service **Wilderness Ranger Kyle Robb** hiked in for 2 days to set up the camp.

Philip LaFollette, Backcountry Trails Program Director hired **Mark Bailey** for the first week to help the crew with technical advice. Mark had had a CCC crew in the exact same area in the past. During Mark’s week, he not only shared his technical knowledge with the crew, and hosted a FS Biologist involved with the project, but he

felled a large diameter tree in the camp area and a large limb threatening to fall on the cabin, both with the crosscut saw. Both were neatly and professionally done. In recognizing those who made this project excel, we would be remiss if we did not identify the **cook, Lilia Otero**. Lilia certainly did more than cook delicious meals. She helped set up the camp before the arrival of the crew, she coordinated and prepared the back haul loads on each packer visit, and was the unofficial back up crew supervisor in case Agnes had to take a crew member out. Lilia also quickly became part of the “family.” So, Lilia was much more than “the cook.”

B. Safety:

This project was completed over a 33 day period involving crew strength of 16, plus the crew leader. This equates to **approximately 5,660 hours of work** (including the cook) throughout the 5-week period. The crew endured rain, hail, lightning and winds. They worked in rough, slippery, terrain with dangerous tools, hiking over 4.5 miles one way some days, and during several segments they had to constantly cross the river thus continuously having wet feet and boots. With all this going on it is amazing that the crew suffered **NO significant accidents or substantial lost time**. The minor problems included foot blisters, surprisingly few poison oak cases, and at the end the beginnings of Immersion Foot (Trench Foot), as a result of the long days of multiple crossings, and work in the crossings. Likely at their next project, the dry high desert air of the Inyo NF will relieve the condition. The crews and their crew leaders are to be highly commended for their attention to safe practices on the trail and in camp.

- We have been impressed and proud of the Backcountry program’s safety record, considering the continuous high-risk exposure, while working in a remote wilderness setting on our forest. Dave Weaver and Joe Duran can attest to the fact of the unrealistic Safety Awareness by all parties that were involved without a major accident.

C. Working conditions:

Generally speaking, trail work is arduous. These trails had brush, poison oak, uneven, sometimes steep ground, slippery and /or rocky footing, rain, wind, and at times cold temperatures. Most noteworthy for this project was the necessity to constantly cross the river or a fork. One can see how this can be both annoying and a health hazard with constant damp feet. In addition they had long hikes each day to and from the work sites. The **crewmembers** worked through some difficult terrain and weather conditions but enjoyed productive days and outstanding views of the wilderness setting. The crew had such a positive attitude that on their weekends off they backpacked fairly long loops covering large areas on both the Manzanita Creek and the Sisquoc River.

It should be noted here that the packer outfitter, Graham Goodfield, had some close calls fulfilling his packing commitment due to impending snow/ rainstorms. He and his packers had to negotiate about 20 miles of dirt road in the rain with heavy stock trailers.

- One’s self and their crew have to maintain situational awareness for the unexpected elements that they may be facing. It’s easy to get complacent in the outdoor wilderness environment.

D. Logistics support, Forest Service:

The Santa Lucia Ranger District provided ongoing support in a variety of ways. The district provided 2 portable radios, contractor packer support, satellite phone for safety, loppers (pruners), assistance in developing the work plan, overall project coordination, on-the-site, and satellite phone supervision and guidance by forest employees, (Joe Duran and Dave Weaver).

- Dave Weaver and volunteer Rik Christensen spent 5 days with the crew and provided instruction in personal hydration, common wilderness medical problems, the early settler history of the area, interesting destinations for their weekends off, and how to backpack using lightweight gear.
- 80 mule loads of food, base camp supplies and equipment went in.
- 20 mule loads of back hauling base camp and equipment came out.
- Total 100 loads of pack support at 15,000 lbs. of food supplies and equipment.

E. Costs allocated by the funding source(s):

- Labor crew cost was \$50,000 dollars charged to management code CMLG07
- The totals hours of service by CCC crew to the Forest Service was recorded at approximately 5,630 hours.
- Food and equipment supplies cost was \$10,000 dollars charged to management code WFW307.
- Los Padres Outfitters packer support cost was \$ 24,615 dollars charged to economic stimulus program “ARRA” management code CRTR0210
- Legacy funds were use to support the project and \$12,000 dollars has been charged to management code CMLG07
- Total cost was \$ 96, 615 dollars to complete this segment of the project.

F. Recommendations for future trails projects:

Planning is important in all projects. This project was well planned, in most ways. The pre-project package comprising among other things the communications, medical, and work plan, gave participants a daily guide / outline to go by every day and during emergencies.

- This year we were able to get the crew in at a reasonable time by having them travel from the San Luis center to the FS Cuyama fire station for the night. This way they were able to get an early start down the trail to their base camp for the next 33 days. In the past, they traveled in one day from the San Luis Obispo to the trail head, received a lengthy briefing, AND THEN hiked several hours into their camp. This was simply too long a day and was not healthy to start such a rigorous hike in mid-afternoon. The result was that the crew made the initial hike in, in reasonable time with no mishaps.

- Another change was to give crew leader Agnes most of the Santa Lucia's lesson plans on backcountry safety. Agnes could incorporate it into her own safety plan, thus saving precious time on hike-in day. The JHA was covered just before the hike in.
- The packer support arrangement needs to be firm- up in the future. The packer was just too busy trying to support the on-going job demands that he had committed his company to in the local area. The number of pack stock varied at times, and the times of pack trips to and from camp varied greatly. It was difficult for supporting forest personnel's to coordinate supplies with his busy company schedule.
- In the future, the forest leadership needs to understand the value of participating and of commitment in allowing forest service sponsors to attend the Backcountry Trails closeout session. The continued review of the program to ensure safety, recognizing a job well done and the building of relationships with partners are priceless.

G. Appreciation:

As representatives of the Santa Lucia Ranger District, we experienced a Backcountry crew and crew leader that do not occur very often, but when you get the right person in place, there is total magic. This year Dave and Joe had that magic on the Los Padres National Forest with the 2011 Inyo Crew.

We would like to commend you for providing us with such an unusually high quality professional trail crew and an extraordinary crew leader. "Anges Vianzon". Once trained, they exhibited solid work habits and consequently members conscientiously did their part to achieve the common goal. Individual crewmembers were occasionally given specific assignments for which they took great personal pride in the outcome. We were pleased to see such commitment and dedication to improving our wilderness trail system.

Judging from their eagerness to get out and explore vast areas of the San Rafael Wilderness on their weekends off, it appeared that they became totally immersed in the values and attractions of the Los Padres National Forest.

We look forward to working with the California Conservation Corps Backcountry Program again in the near future. Hopefully we will have a new 5year program, starting with FY 2012, if forest funding is available and project agreements can be put in place.

H. Inyo 2011 Crew statement for Los Padres Forest experience excerpts:

- I can hardly describe the kind of physical and mental transformation I have gone through. I understand that my back country career has only begun. I know that my transformation has only begun and the kind of change I am about to embark on is probably something beyond my wildest dreams.
- I got to do a 30 mile loop. I got to see a lot of the beautiful Los Padres sites. It has a whole lot to offer. Now, it's kind of sad that the Los Padres is coming to an end but that's OK; because everything it showed me is a memory I'll keep forever.

- I have learned so much about myself in just the past month and love the challenges I'm faced with every day. ...I grow spiritually, mentally and physically. The hardest challenge.....hiking 30 miles.
- South Fork offered us a sanctuary where we could come lay our tired bodies and energize our tired body and soul to tackle another day on the hills.
- A place of beauty that truly inspires me. I hope to one day return here.
- Out here you can experience the backcountry at its fullest and as peaceful as possible. Walking the historical traces was amazing. I truly felt connected with nature while I was out here. I saw a good sized brown bear while hiking. It got spooked when I saw it face to face.
- Things are constantly unfolding out here...
- The Los Padres helps us build strong backs and a perfect balance of love and respect for its mountains.
- There is a lot of historic value which is priceless. I would like to thank my crew for staying positive, working hard and taking initiative.
- I have a greater peace within that I haven't felt before, sincerely happy and it overwhelms me every day. We grow stronger as a crew and already have made great bonds.look forward to the pain that the hike out will bring.
- The LP was a challenge to get into and I'm expecting a challenge again to get out. One thing I know for sure is there is no easy path to anywhere worth going.
- It has been life changing for me. ...when I visited the Sisquoc falls, I felt really connected and grateful for the beauty this earth holds.
- It's been special to dive into this experience face first with no one but sixteen strangers to make sure I land safely. I thank the unique aura that surrounds the entire area, and know we were looked after by something bigger than us.
- I never think about the fact that I'm in California – I see/smell/hear more things out here that remind me of Yellowstone, the Tetons, and other wilderness areas.
- It has been one of the hardest challenges in my life. Wet boots aren't bad anymore. Soap is unnecessary when bathing every day.
- For me, the wild creates an atmosphere that allows me to reflect on myself and the world around me.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the undersigned at: (805) 925-9538, Ext 220.

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