

COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO

THE LAND USE AND CIRCULATION ELEMENTS
OF THE SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

LOS PADRES AREA PLAN

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ADOPTED BY
THE SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
SEPTEMBER 22, 1980 - RESOLUTION 80-350

Revised January 2007

COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO

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COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO

Amended

September 14, 1981	Ord. 2075
August 14, 1990	Ord. 2471
October 8, 1996	Ord. 2776
November 5, 2002	Ord. 2983
December 19, 2006	Ord. 3113

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Los Padres planning area encompasses a large portion of the rugged Santa Lucia and La Panza mountain ranges that traverse the center of the county from the northwest to the southeast. The boundary of the planning area coincides with the boundary of the Los Padres National Forest. The planning area contains no urban or village areas.

In 1990, the planning area boundaries were revised by eliminating from the planning area an area along the Santa Lucia Mountains west of Highway 101 largely corresponding to the boundaries of the Los Padres National Forest.

This report describes county land use policies for the Los Padres planning area, including regulations that are also adopted as part of the Land Use Ordinance. This area plan allocates land use throughout the planning area by land use categories. The land use categories determine the varieties of land use that may be established on a parcel of land, as well as defining their allowable density and intensity. A list of allowable uses is in Article 2 of the Land Use Ordinance.

Specific development "standards" are included in Article 9 of the Land Use Ordinance (Chapter 22.100 - Los Padres Planning Area) to address special problems and conditions in individual communities. These include standards for public services, circulation, and land use and provide criteria for detailed evaluation of development projects. The text of this report is for general planning guidance only and is not to be used as a basis for approval or disapproval of development or land division proposals. Careful reading of the standards in the Land Use Ordinance will assist creating projects that are consistent with adopted policies and regulations.

Proposed "programs" are also noted at the end of the chapters on public services (Chapter 3), circulation (Chapter 4), land use (Chapter 5), and combining designations (Chapter 6). Programs are non-mandatory actions recommended to be initiated by the communities through the county or other specified public agency, to work toward correcting local problems or conditions. They are also intended to support community objectives in implementing the general plan. Because many recommended programs involve public expenditures, their initiation will be dependent upon the availability of funding.

In addition to the land use categories and programs, one or more combining designations have been applied to specific areas. Combining designations identify potential natural hazards and locations of notable resources. The designations are shown at the end of this report.

CHAPTER 2: POPULATION AND ECONOMY

The Los Padres planning area contains less of the total county population than any other planning area. The 1989 population is estimated to be approximately 244, with projected growth to only 295 persons by the year 2000.

Table A contains population projections for the planning area, excerpted from countywide projections found in Framework for Planning. For comparison, Table B contains the projected population absorption capacity, the potential planning area population resulting from unconstrained growth and fully-occupied development to the maximum permitted in each land use category (Framework for Planning has a more detailed discussion of absorption capacity).

TABLE A POPULATION PROJECTIONS LOS PADRES PLANNING AREA		
Year	Planning Area	% of County
1980*	150	0.10
1985*	155	0.09
1989	244	.11
1990	255	.11
1995	281	.11
2000	295	.10

* Figures are based on pre-1990 planning area boundaries

Approximately 80% of the planning area is federally owned; the remainder is owned by state, county or private parties. A significant portion of the private land within the national forest boundaries is in the Williamson Act agricultural preserve program. The Los Padres Planning Area will continue to provide for expanding recreational, wilderness, watershed and aesthetic needs demanded by an increasing population in other planning areas. As such, it will continue to develop into an even more valuable resource.

TABLE B ABSORPTION CAPACITY¹ LOS PADRES PLANNING AREA	
LAND USE CATEGORIES	POPULATION
Agriculture	645
Rural Lands	660
ABSORPTION CAPACITY	1,305
Existing Population (1989)	244
POTENTIAL ADDED POPULATION	1,061

¹ Calculations are based on the following assumptions:

- a. Minimum parcel size is for Agriculture and Rural Lands is 80 acres
- b. 2.5 persons per household

CHAPTER 3: PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

With its small population, the Los Padres planning area requires few public facilities and services. The few ranches in the national forest are mainly self-sufficient.

Appropriate levels of service for urban, suburban and rural areas are discussed in Chapter 5 of Framework for Planning. The following portions of the text discuss service concerns that directly affect the Los Padres planning area.

A. SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Public services are provided by two special districts in the planning area. Detailed information and recommendations for these districts are provided in a 1977 report prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) entitled "Special Districts: An Inventory and Analysis." Existing districts in the planning area include:

1. Cuyama Resource Conservation District - Established in 1970 with the following objectives: water conservation and development; flood control; farm and ranch land conservation programs; and wildlife and recreational development and improvements. A cost sharing program with the federal government was established to aid in soil conservation and wildlife management of federal lands.
- b. Cemetery Districts - The Santa Margarita and Arroyo Grande cemetery districts, which provide cemetery functions and supporting services.

B. UTILITY SERVICES

Water Supply

The planning area encompasses several mountain ranges with steep and rugged terrain, which delineate several watershed and groundwater basins. These include the San Luis Obispo, Pismo Beach, Arroyo Grande, Santa Maria, Pozo, Paso Robles, Carrizo Plains and Cuyama water basins. Most of the land within the planning area is undeveloped national forest, with some scattered ranching operations. The planning area is a watershed resource, consuming water only to supply the recreational campground facilities and the limited agricultural uses. There are minor watershed basins and springs within the planning area, which provide water supplies in some local situations. However, these water supplies have limited consumption and distribution capabilities, due to basin configurations, geographical and other similar physical limitations. Water extraction will be a function of economic pumping and will be recharged annually by rainfall or streamflow. While no safe yield information is available, it can be assumed that water supplies and individual wells are adequate to support future low intensity recreational demands, extremely limited residential uses, and any future intensified agricultural uses. Additional water resource information may be found in the San Luis Obispo County Master Water and Sewerage Plan (1972).

Sewage Disposal

The entire planning area, including rustic trail campsites and recreational sites within the national forest area and private ranch holdings, utilizes either pit toilets or leach lines for sewage disposal. The more developed campground area has permanently located pit toilets that are periodically pumped, while other more remote campsite areas and lookout stations simply relocate toilet facilities when necessary. Private residences generally use septic tanks and leach lines. These sewage disposal methods should be adequate and efficient so long as the densities do not become too great, or the intensity of uses too concentrated.

Solid Waste Disposal

Refuse collection in the national forest, including campgrounds and lookout stations, is provided by the U.S. Forest Service. They provide regular pickup service and dispose of refuse at the nearest disposal sites located in the adjacent planning areas. Other refuse disposal practices that are successfully used on private lands include disposal of waste on individual properties and direct haul by residents to disposal sites. These methods are presently adequate; however, if indiscriminant dumping becomes a problem, rural container stations should be established in appropriate locations.

C. EMERGENCY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Police Service

Within the national forest, police services and emergency response are provided by the county sheriff, with cooperative assistance, upon request, provided by the Forest Service. The county sheriff also has the responsibility for serving residents of private lands. However, service is on a demand basis and the response times are generally poor, due to the large areas to be served and the distances involved. Sheriff's substations are presently in Atascadero and Oceano, with the main facility at Camp San Luis Obispo.

Emergency Medical Service

The state Department of Forestry and county sheriff are available on demand for emergency situations, as are ambulances from the urban area nearest the national forest.

Fire Protection

A primary function of the U.S. Forest Service is to prevent and suppress wildland fires on national forest lands and cooperate with the Department of Forestry and local firefighting agencies in combating fires on privately-owned lands. This is accomplished through fuel and vegetative management programs, and by response to wildland fires by operating lookout stations and equipment during high fire seasons. Lookout stations are at Hi and Branch mountains; fire stations are at Lopez, Pozo, La Panza, and a helicopter base east of Arroyo Grande. Fire prevention includes educational programs and coordination with other fire agencies.

Human Services

All human services offices (e.g., counseling, mental health, welfare, family planning) are in adjacent planning areas.

Schools

The planning area is served by schools of the Atascadero, San Luis Coastal and Lucia Mar School Districts. Bus service is provided to most populated areas. Travel reimbursements are provided students who must be transported from outlying ranches to the rural bus stops.

D. RECREATION SERVICES

The Los Padres National Forest is a regional recreation area for the county as well as this planning area. Several roads and trails provide access to the public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, and campsites interspersed throughout the forest provide a wilderness setting for campers desiring various levels of amenities. The Santa Lucia Wilderness is oriented to hikers. It has minimal improvements and no vehicle access except for emergencies.

Public land access and facility improvements are subject to Forest Service management policies. Continued maintenance and upgrading of recreational services is recommended to provide quality outdoor recreational experiences consistent with Forest Service policies for resource protection.

CHAPTER 4: CIRCULATION

The circulation system of the Los Padres planning area is planned to accommodate anticipated traffic along existing and new roads as future development warrants construction. The road system in the planning area will continue to be oriented to its rural character. Some areas will be provided with very limited vehicular access, others will not have vehicular access of any kind, and still other areas will be expanded, especially in regard to off-road vehicle trails.

A. ROADS

The LUE official maps show functional classifications of existing and proposed roadways in the planning area. This plan coordinates road policies with the county Transportation Plan and "Standard Improvement Drawings and Specifications." Improvements will be required with proposed land divisions by the county Real Property Division Ordinance and planning area standards.

The following are main roads in the planning area for which substantial improvements are proposed. The listed order does not imply any priority.

Principal Arterial

Highway 101 - It borders the planning area at Cuesta Grade. Caltrans has proposed some modifications to the roadway in order to increase safety (i.e., widened traffic lanes, a truck lane, etc.). Proposed improvements should be carefully reviewed to minimize possible environmental impacts.

Collectors

Santa Margarita Mountain Road - Improve to rural arterial standards between Pozo and La Panza/Highway 58.

Pozo-Hi Mountain Road - Relocate the right-of-way to the alignment previously used by the county. The county and the U.S. Forest Service should work in a cooperative effort to complete the relocation and return the land to its natural state when possible. Hi Mountain Road should be maintained so that conventional vehicles will be capable of access during at least three seasons.

B. OTHER TRANSPORTATION MODES

Trails

Off road vehicle, hiking and equestrian trails run throughout the national forest. Some are well identified and marked, while others are more "cross country" oriented. Permitted off-road vehicle trails (both two-wheel and four-wheel) are shown on the 1976 ORV Plan Map developed by the U.S. Forest Service. Restricted off-road vehicle use is allowed on approximately 320 acres in San Luis Obispo County. Proposed equestrian and hiking trails are shown in the County Parks and Recreation Element.

C. PLANNING AREA CIRCULATION PROGRAMS

"Programs" are non-mandatory actions or actions or policies recommended by the Land Use Element to achieve community or areawide objectives identified in this area plan. The implementation of each LUE program is the responsibility of the community, through the county or other public agency identified in the program itself. Because programs (some of which include special studies) are recommended actions rather than mandatory requirements, implementation of any program by the county should be based on consideration of any program by the county should be based on consideration of community needs and substantial support for the program and its related cost.

1. **Pozo - Hi Mountain Road.** The county should relocate the Pozo - Hi Mountain Road to the old county right-of-way and maintain on a seasonal basis.
2. **Roads in the National Forest.** The county Public Works Department should work with property owners and the Forest Service to transfer road rights-of-way providing public access to forest lands to Forest Service control. Access to forest lands from such roads should be limited to hikers and equestrian use, and motor vehicles where permitted. Where rights-of-way cannot be transferred, an agreement should be negotiated between the Forest Service, property owners and the county to allow year-round public access to forest lands. Such agreements should include provisions for road maintenance, rubbish and litter control, and road closure in designated wilderness areas and during high fire hazard periods.

Los Padres National Forest. The following programs regarding trail circulation within the national forest are proposed to the U.S. Forest Service as recommendations only. Any proposal by users to extend or establish trails on private lands is to be submitted to the county for review, comment and approval. County review is to include affected property owners.

1. **Off-Road Vehicles.** ORV trails and ORV rules should be clearly identified and enforced.
2. **Trail Systems-Coordination.** Any proposal by the Forest Service to extend or establish trails on private lands is to be submitted to the county and affected property owners review, comment and approval.
3. **Trail Crossings.** The Forest Service should work with the county and state Department of Transportation to establish trail crossings at all major roads, especially at Highway 101, allowing continuous trail passage.
4. **Trail Systems.** Coordinate hiking and equestrian trails with the state trail system and adjacent county trail systems. Obtain trail easements from private property owners linking various sections of recreational trails together.

CHAPTER 5: LAND USE

This chapter addresses land use issues affecting the Los Padres planning area. The entire planning area is rural, with no urban or village areas. The LUE official maps separate the planning area into land use categories, each of which defines regulations for land uses, densities, and intensity of use. Land use "programs" identified at the end of this chapter recommend actions by the county or other public agencies. Article 9 of the Land Use Ordinance (Chapter 22.100 - Los Padres Planning Area) contains development standards related to the land use categories to assist in guiding planning area development. Standards are actions required for development to be consistent with the general plan.

Table C summarizes the acreage for each land use category in the Los Padres Planning Area.

TABLE C LAND USE ACREAGE LOS PADRES PLANNING AREA	
Land Use Categories	Total Acres
Agriculture	20,657
Open Space	175,803
Rural Lands	21,133
TOTAL	217,593

A. LAND USE CATEGORIES

Open Space

Public lands in the planning area are managed by the U.S. Forest Service, part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. These public lands are designated in the Open Space land use category. The Forest Service is not a land use permit agency and can only review projects and recommend conditions of approval. Uses allowed in the national forest are set by federal statute. The Forest Service may permit limited uses such as roads, grazing leases and communications facilities.

Because Forest Service policy is directed by the Department of Agriculture, the national forests are considered agricultural commodities, though resource conservation to maintain production is also emphasized. The principal values identified for Los Padres National Forest by forest officials are:

1. Watershed (water yield, storage, transmission; protection of soil; forage for wildlife and stock, etc.)
2. Rare and endangered species (flora and fauna)

3. Wildlife protection (including aesthetic resources)
4. Wilderness resource (per the Wilderness Act of 1964).

Those values guide Forest Service multiple-use management objectives, and resulting trade-offs are evaluated for possible use and production levels under the National Environmental Policy Act. Forest Service programs emphasize:

1. Watershed management to provide high quality water and regulate distribution and timing of runoff, including minimizing soil erosion. Watershed protection and water production were the original reason for creation of the forest; this major role will continue.
2. Fire protection to continue minimizing fires and acreage burned, including limited chaparral modification and fuel reduction by fire and fuelbreaks where they make minimal physical changes, though natural fire is recognized as an integral part of the forest ecosystem.
3. Protection of threatened and endangered flora and fauna should continue, with fish and wildlife habitat management directed toward reaching and maintaining a natural population balance without habitat modification.
4. Recreation offering experiences emphasizing natural, quality wildland rather than man-made attractions.
5. Study and evaluation of roadless and undeveloped areas for possible addition to the wilderness preservation system and for dispersal of recreation to lessen pressures for facilities in designated wilderness areas.

Agriculture

Agricultural lands in the planning area are privately-held and in agricultural preserve. These are mainly large cattle ranches with occasional residences or out-buildings. Limited dry-farming exists where soil and terrain permit.

Many ranches have obtained special Forest Service use permits allowing cattle grazing allotments on national forest lands. These permits are reviewed periodically to ensure use of recommended range and grazing practices.

Some ranches also control private access roads into portions of the national forest. Cooperative use of access is fairly well-established; however, public access in most cases is permitted at the discretion of ranch operators.

Rural Lands

Due to the diversity of landforms, climate, vegetation and uses, and the large amount of land in this planning area, privately-owned areas in the national forest are treated separately from federal lands. The rugged, chaparral-covered lands in private ownership within the forest boundary are designated Rural Lands.

These inholdings are of various sizes. Most are large acreage ranches not under agricultural preserve. They provide limited agricultural uses (primarily marginal rangeland) though some areas have orchards and limited farming operations. Other uses include rural homesites, rural recreational uses and organized group camp facilities, such as in Lopez Canyon.

Remoteness, rugged terrain and extreme fire hazard on most Rural Lands indicate that residential uses should not be encouraged. It would be more appropriate for these lands to remain in low intensity agricultural use, such as grazing and rangeland. Development of non-intensive recreational activities such as dude ranching and recreational camps would also be appropriate provided access problems, fire protection, water supply and impacts on adjacent national forest watershed areas can be resolved.

B. PLANNING AREA LAND USE PROGRAMS

"Programs" are non-mandatory actions or policies recommended by the LUE to achieve community or areawide objectives identified in this area plan. The implementation of each LUE program is the responsibility of the community, through the county or other identified public agency. Because programs (some of which include special studies) are recommended actions rather than mandatory requirements, implementation of any program should be based on consideration of community needs and substantial community support for the program and its related cost.

- 1. Los Padres National Forest.** The existence of the Forest Service programs is acknowledged. Any proposed changes in these programs should be submitted to the county and affected property owners for review.

CHAPTER 6: COMBINING DESIGNATIONS

A. COMBINING DESIGNATIONS

Combining designations are special overlay categories applied in areas of the county with hazardous conditions or special resources, where more detailed project review is needed to avoid adverse environmental impacts or effects of hazardous conditions on proposed projects. The following areas are subject to special combining designations. In some cases, specific standards have been adopted for an area where a combining designation is applied. These standards are found in Article 9 of the Land Use Ordinance (Chapter 22.100 - Los Padres Planning Area) and are applicable to development proposals in addition to the standards of Chapter 22.14 of the Land Use Ordinance.

Black Mountain Wild Horse Range (SRA) - This area is the known range of several wild horses. Under 1971 legislation, all wild horses are considered integral to the natural system and are protected. These wild horses have been officially designated by congress.

Fish Creek-Geode Mountain (SRA) - This site east of Twitchell Reservoir supports oak woods, mixed evergreen forests and scenic geologic outcrops.

Hi-Mountain Road (SRA) - The Regional Transportation Plan designates this as a scenic road and recommends it for scenic highway standards.

Knobcone Pine Forest (SRA) - Knobcone pine (*Pinus attenuata*) is restricted to an area of several square miles east of Highway 101 at Cuesta Summit. Coulter Pine (*Pinus coulteri*) is also in this area.

La Panza Ranch Natural Area (SRA) - This remote ridge includes several square miles with little alteration and is one of the more primitive areas in the county.

Pine Mountain (SRA) - This section of the La Panza range has botanical, wildlife, scenic and historic value. An extensive Coulter pine forest is included in the parcel, as well as a California condor nest site. The La Panza gold rush of the 1870's took place in this area. The mountain range, extending south to Machesna Peak, has been relatively unscarred by human intrusion.

Rinconada Mine Botanical Area (SRA) - About 800 acres of foothill woodland are in this site. *Monardella palmeri*, a plant on the California Native Plant Society's list of rare and endangered species, is known to this area. In addition, the site is botanically significant as an outstanding representative of foothill woodland with a wide diversity of species.

Santa Lucia Wilderness Area (SRA) - This rugged area is extremely important for its wilderness wildlife value, and is one of the most primitive in the county. Several rare and endemic plant species are present, and the area is valuable as a wildlife habitat, watershed and scenic backdrop.

Portions of the Entire Planning Area (GSA) - This defines areas of high landslide risk identified in the Seismic Safety Element of the general plan.

B. COMBINING DESIGNATION PROGRAMS

"Programs" are non-mandatory actions or policies recommended by the LUE to achieve community or areawide objectives identified in this area plan. The implementation of each LUE program is the responsibility of the community, through the county or other public agency identified in the program itself. Because programs (some of which include special studies) are recommended rather than mandatory requirements, implementation of any program should be based on consideration of community needs and substantial community support for the program and its related cost.

- 1. Hi Mountain Road.** The county and U.S. Forest Service should prepare a study of Hi Mountain Road to establish the limits of the scenic corridor and to develop appropriate standards for land use and development within their respective jurisdictions.