Special Use Permits
For the USDA Santa Barbara Forest Service

Dennis Palacios
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USDA Advisor/Supervisor: Valerie Hubbartt
USDA Supervisor: Veronica Garza
Los Prietos Ranger Station – Lands & Resources Management

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Executive Summary

The Los Padres National Forest is divided into five administrative units known as Ranger Districts, for example Santa Lucia, Ojai, Mt. Pinos, and Santa Barbara. The main focus for the Los Padres National Forest is to protect and enhance watersheds, provide recreation and wilderness opportunities, and promote an ecological diversity and scientific research environment. Communities that are downstream from the Los Padres National Forest get most of their water from the forest. Los Padres National Forest provides a diverse wildlife and is responsible for the protection and preservation of any threatened and endangered species, as well as, their habitats. This Forest also manages two California Condor Sanctuaries, one in the Santa Barbara County and the other in Ventura County.

Through the WRI internship I was able to work with the USDA Forest Service Santa Barbara District performing inventories on riparian and wetland areas on the National Forest. The tasks that were involved with performing these inventories are organizing files electronically, which will allow Forest Service personnel to review this file and be able to determine whether the permit is still in use, what the water sources are, permit and application number, additional information, and contact information. Other tasks involve documenting conditions of the riparian/wetland areas, review permitted facility descriptions, schedule field visits with special use holders and prepare compliance reports on those conditions and facilities. Being able to monitor areas for condition class, compliance with special use permits and with state water rights are components that are important in lands and resources positions with the Forest Service. Tasks that I was also in charge of were using a GPS unit to mark where certain structures were located, record any additional information the permit holder may have that would be important to put in the file, and navigation (to each structure and
inspection site). After being a part of this internship I have gained a better understanding as to what the Forest Service deals with on a daily basis. It has helped me focus upon a career goal and given an insight as to what is expected of a Forest Service employee.

**Project Objectives**

I was not the only intern at the Santa Barbara district; Julieta Munoz was also stationed here with me. As interns for the Santa Barbara Ranger District, we worked under Veronica Garza who was in charge of Lands/Realty Specialist and Valerie Hubbartt who was a Resource Officer. The project that we were assigned was to perform inspections of riparian and wetland areas within the Los Padres National Forest. These inspections are performed in order to update the special use files. Sites that were visited were on Forest Service property, but private land owners had built structures on FS property for their beneficial use. When a private land owner wants to build a structure on FS property there are steps that must be followed. The initial step that needs to be done is fill out an application for a permit. Once the application is approved an assessment survey of the area needs to be completed, which could include a survey on geological, biological, or archeological importance. After all steps are completed the permittee is given certain rules such as the amount of water they are allowed to divert or what kind of tanks they are allowed to have.

Some of the files that we reviewed were quite old, dating back to 1923 and had not been inspected in 10 to 15 years. Specific tasks that were set out for us to perform were drive to remote areas, hike to sites, report the conditions of special use facilities, and organize data. Our mission was to conduct inspections within the Los Padres National Forest in order to update the files and provide an electronic database that was useable and update special use files. In addition, we learned what the process was for obtaining a special use permit and how
to conduct a proper inspection. Through the completion of this internship I am glad to say all the goals I set out to complete were fulfilled and I gained more knowledge on how the Forest Service works. Skills that were enhanced during my time in Los Padres National Forest were organization and conduct of site inspections.

When I read the project outline for the first time I had no idea what the project would be or how it would benefit me in terms of a career goal. After receiving further explanation from Veronica it became clear. The experience and knowledge that was acquired from this internship will benefit me in my career goals, as well as, a pathway program with USDA.

**Project Approach**

There was no set approach for conducting site inspections. Veronica and Valerie were able to give my colleague and I some tips on how to schedule appointments and perform inspections. But for the most part our approach for this project was to take it on as a research project. This approach allowed us to go into detail with the files in order to obtain background information on key points about the permit. Some information that was useful for us to know was: how many gallons of water they were allowed to use, what the capacity of the water tanks were, how many tanks were allowed, and when they were allowed to divert water.

Most of the information could be found at the station in the special use files, we just had to read all the paperwork within the file. But when there was information missing in the file we were able to go to the State Water Resource Board to help us find what we were looking for ([https://ciwqs.waterboards.ca.gov/ciwqs/ewrims/EWServlet?Redirect_Page=EWWaterRightPublicSearch.jsp&Purpose=getEWAppSearchPage](https://ciwqs.waterboards.ca.gov/ciwqs/ewrims/EWServlet?Redirect_Page=EWWaterRightPublicSearch.jsp&Purpose=getEWAppSearchPage) and [http://waterrightsmaps.waterboards.ca.gov/ewrims/gisapp.aspx](http://waterrightsmaps.waterboards.ca.gov/ewrims/gisapp.aspx)).
The first week Julieta and I were at the Los Prietos Ranger Station we met everyone and went to the Santa Barbara district office where we met Kelsha, the Hydrologist for the Forest Service. She provided Veronica with an Excel file that contained useful information and our first step was to organize the information onto another Excel file. With this Excel we were able to pick out certain information such as Source Name, Tributary to, type of use and application number. With this information we were able to create a separate Excel sheet containing these categories:

- Section
- Township
- Range
- Current or Abandoned
- USGS quad name
- Source name
- Spring, stream, storage, well, etc.
- Type of use
- File name
- Application #
- Permit #
- Holder
- Contact information
- Water use

The next step was to take notes about facilities located on Forest Service lands and set up appointments. When calling a permit holder we would introduce ourselves by our names and that we wanted to schedule an appointment with them to inspect a diversion or pipeline. Most of the holders were willing to show us around, but there were a few that were cautious and would ask us why we wanted to do an inspection. With California being in a drought we understood why they were being so cautious with having someone come on to their property and conduct an inspection. For example in one inspection the owner of the Las Varas Ranch when I first contacted him informed me that there had been people trying to take away his water right and that he didn’t trust/believe me. With this situation I informed Veronica Garza
and she spoke with him verifying that I was with the Forest Service. After this situation had been resolved, I contacted the owner once again and set an appointment. Generally after an appointment is set we begin to prepare by:

1. Creating a sheet that contained contact information, what to look for, address, and any information we might need about the site
2. If maps were provided in their file make copies of those
3. Gather our gear, this included GPS unit, spot, Forest Service Walkie Talkie, and Forest Service keys.
4. The last thing we did and the most important is put on pre-contact for poison oak. This is the most important step because Poison Oak proliferates in the area.

As soon as we arrived at an inspection site we would be greeted by the permit holder. Most of the permit holders were a little concerned that Forest Service was at their property to look at their structures on Forest Service property. But we quickly eased any concerns they had and made sure they understood that we were not there to terminate their permit. We informed them that we were only here to update files that for maybe 10 to 15 years had not been checked.

**Project Outcomes**

California has been in a drought for three years, and most people do not understand a severity until they have experienced the hardship whether personally or just by visually seeing the effects of the drought. I know I was skeptic at first being from LA I knew that the area is classified as a Mediterranean climate under the Köppen Classification. During our time in Santa Barbara we experienced the drought first hand and how it affects ranchers, recreational
users, and water companies. Many had to apply for more permits in order to divert water from other streams, truck in water, or dig test holes to see if a well could be installed.

During our site inspections we mapped structures such as diversions, wells, and pipelines using a GPS unit provided by the Forest Service. Before performing our first inspection Veronica provided us with a quick PowerPoint that outlined key points such as, conduct out on the field, how to record information, and what the rules were for performing an inspection. Valerie accompanied us on our first inspection in order to give us a hands on lecture on how to perform an inspection. Over time we were able to determine whether or not the permit holder was in compliance with his permit, two examples that will be provided are Las Varas Ranch and St. Francis Ranch.

On July 7, 2014 we had scheduled a site inspection for Alex Geremia who was the permit holder for St. Francis Ranch. When reviewing their special use permit it stated that they had a water right permit for two diversion and pipeline. Making a note that the diversion and pipeline was what we needed to go inspect we created our site inspection template and prepared our equipment. Upon arrival to Alex Geremia’s property she gave us access to her locked gate and met with us at the first barn. The drive to the barn was a sight, because she had Zebras, a water buffalo, and Watusi cattle (Figure 1). When speaking with Ms. Geremia she seemed a little concerned that we wanted to inspect the structures, because an inspection had not been done in a long time. She informed us that on her property she had four reservoirs, a water tank, and a well. She also informed us that because of the drought she had to truck in water. Thankfully we did not have to hike this entire property because it would have taken us a lot longer than driving to each site. On our way up to the first diversion we passed three reservoirs. I created a track which showed the route we took in order to reach
each location (waypoint). This was later mapped using ArcMap which allowed us to view property lines and the location of each structure; the map can be viewed in the appendices (Figure 3). On our inspection we were able to track where the pipeline runs and how long it was. On file as mentioned before, they are allowed two diversions; but when we did our inspection, one of the property caretakers told us they have three diversions but the second and third they count as one because they were close together (Figure 2). This was an example of where we determined that a permittee was not in compliance with their special use permit.

For the Las Varas Ranch a lot of investigation had to be done because the permit holder, Timothy Doheny, had passed away and the new owner of the ranch was just using the permit that was under Timothy’s name. This is not allowed; when property is sold or given away, if the new owner wants to continue using any structures covered by the permit he/she must reapply in order to update the permit holder name and information. Unfortunately, we learned that not too many people reapply for new permits. When I had finally acquired the contact information of Paul Van Leer who is the new owner I passed the information to Veronica. Paul Van Leer was uncooperative when I spoke with him because he did not believe that the Forest Service wanted to perform an inspection. His main concern was that many people were trying to take his water right and after assuring him that I was from the Forest Service and I only needed to update his file he still did not budge. After informing Veronica about the situation she got in contact with Mr. Van Leer and when she was done with the conversation he informed me to give him a call to schedule an appointment. Although Mr. Van Leer was reluctant in allowing us on to his property, he was still eager to show me where the structures were located on Forest Service property. In his file it stated that on Forest Service property there was a bridge, pipeline, and a diversion. During the inspection it seemed as if he was
trying to rush us and not give us enough time to take notes or record any information. Regardless, we were still able to accomplish our task and collect waypoints and create a track for the structures in order to create a map (Figure 4). After performing the inspection, we were able to determine he was in compliance with his permit.

**Conclusions**

This internship project involved me in working on special use permits within the Santa Barbara County. During my internship, I performed inspections of riparian and wetland areas within the Los Padres National Forest. These inspections are performed in order to update the special use files. This project helped me gain a better understanding as to how the drought was affecting people in Santa Barbara. With my time as an intern I participated and gained the knowledge of how to conduct special use permit inspections using methods shown to us by Valerie and Veronica, GIS/GPS instruments, and by just engaging the permit holder in a conversation. Any further research would involve further organization and update of files. This internship has helped me to focus and narrow my career focus towards the Forest Service as a Hydrologist and not only performing inspections on sites, but also maintaining watersheds, performing aquifer testing, and well testing.
Appendices

Figure 1:

Water Buffalo

Watusi cattle
Figure 2: Notes and Pictures of structures

• This is the first reservoir that we were taken to it is used for stock and irrigation.
• Second reservoir on Alex Geremia’s property, it is also used for irrigation

• There was presence of old pipeline where the first diversion was located at.
- St. Francis Ranch has a permit with two diversion this is the first diversion.

- This is the third reservoir on Geremia’s property, it is used for irrigation purposes and feeds into the second reservoir.
• This is the fourth reservoir that is almost dry, it feeds the third reservoir.

• This was the second diversion that was mentioned on the permit.
• This is where the white PVC pipe takes water from the waterfall.

• This is a third diversion on the Forest Service property that feeds to St. Francis Ranch. We were told that because they are close together they count both of these as one.
• This is a solar powered well that feeds to the second reservoir.
Figure 3: Mapped area of St. Francis Ranch
Figure 4: Mapped area of Las Varas Ranch