

DECISION MEMO
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE – FOREST SERVICE

WILLIAMSON ROCK CLOSURE AREA - ORDER NO. 01-08-01
SANTA CLARA/MOJAVE RIVERS RANGER DISTRICT

ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST
LOS ANGELES COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

DECISION

It is my decision to issue a Forest Order authorizing a continued temporary closure of the Williamson Rock area on the Santa Clara/Mojave Rivers District of the Angeles National Forest. The area affected is depicted on the map attached to the Closure Order. The closure will be in effect from January 1, 2008 through December 31, 2008, and will address concerns related to the protection of the Mountain Yellow-legged Frog and its Critical Habitat in the area. Hikers using the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail will continue to be re-routed around the closed area.

NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

In 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the Mountain Yellow-legged Frog (*Rana mucosa*) as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 USC 1531-1536, and 1538-1540). On September 14, 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated Critical Habitat for the Mountain Yellow-legged Frog including the section of Little Rock Creek affected by this closure (50 CFR Part 17, Federal Register/Vol. 71, No. 178, pp 54244-54385). Surveys have determined that a population of the Mountain Yellow-legged Frog exists within the upper reaches of Little Rock Creek on the Santa Clara/Mojave Rivers Ranger District of the Angeles National Forest.

Populations of Mountain Yellow-legged Frogs have declined precipitously in the Southern California Mountains, having been extirpated from more than 90% of their historic range in the region. The Forest Service is currently in the process of analyzing the effects of human activities on the Mountain Yellow-legged Frog in the upper reaches of Little Rock Creek. Human activities in the vicinity of Mountain Yellow-legged Frog habitat include rock climbers who must cross the stream in order to access climbing areas and a portion of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail that crosses the creek.

The Biological Assessment analyzing the effects of these activities within the area was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for consultation to determine the impacts of these activities on the Mountain Yellow-legged Frog or its habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has suggested additional consultation with the Forest Service in order to identify additional mitigation measures.

Closure of this area is necessary to reduce the potential for Threatened and Endangered Species take.

* On October 21, 2007, the Santa Clara Mojave Rivers Ranger District Office site was destroyed in the Buckweed Fire. All buildings and office equipment were destroyed in the fire. Past and present records, project files, special use permit files, contract and business files are gone with the exception of a few file cabinets that were located in a storage pod that survived the fire. The destruction included most of the documentation files regarding the Williamson Rock issue.

REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

This decision is categorically excluded from documentation under Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Section 31.1b (1) – Orders issued pursuant to 36 CFR Part 261 – Prohibitions to provide short-term resource protection or to protect public health and safety.

I find there are no extraordinary circumstances that might cause the action to have significant environmental effects; therefore the proposed action is excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment. Extraordinary circumstances would include but are not limited to negative impacts on the following:

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.

Preservation of the Mountain Yellow-legged Frog and its critical habitat will be enhanced by eliminating human activities within the closure area.

2. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.

This action will have no negative impacts on flood plains, wetlands, and municipal watersheds within the closure area.

3. Congressionally designated areas, such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study areas, or National Recreation Areas.

There are no congressionally designated Wilderness Areas Wilderness study areas or National Recreation areas within the closure area.

4. Inventoried roadless areas.

There are no inventoried roadless areas within the closure area.

5. Research Natural Areas.

There is no Research Natural Area within the closure area.

6. American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural areas.

There are no identified Native American or Alaska Native religious or cultural sites within the closure area.

7. Archaeological sites or historic properties or areas.

There are several archaeological sites or historic properties within the area. This action will have no effect on these sites.

SCOPING

Public information meetings were conducted with representatives of the rock climbing community since the popular rock climbing site (Williamson Rock) is within the area. Public notification regarding the Pacific Coast Trail (PCT) re-route has been done and will continue. Coordination with the following co-operating agencies has been conducted:

- Los Angeles County
 - Fire Department
 - Sheriff's Department
- State of California
 - Dept. of Fish and Game
 - Highway Patrol
 - Cal-Trans
- U.S. Department of Interior
 - Fish and Wildlife Service

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS.

This action is consistent with management direction (Angeles National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act (FSM 1922.41 and FSH 1909.12).

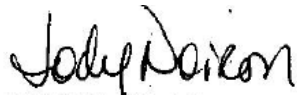
IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This action may be implemented immediately.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This action is not subject to review or appeal under the requirements of 36 CFR 215.12 (f).

APPROVED



December 28, 2007

DATE

JODY NOIRON
Forest Supervisor
Angeles National Forest