

File Code: 1950

Date: February 26, 2021

Dear Commenter:

Thank you for your continued interest in the [Williamson Rock / Pacific Crest Trail Project](#) (“the Project”). As you may know, the Bobcat Fire burned over 115,000 acres of the Angeles National Forest (ANF) in 2020, including the area around Williamson Rock and the entire downstream watershed of the Littlerock Creek. Burn intensities were variable throughout the area and the slopes directly around Williamson Rock burned particularly hot. On a post-fire ground survey of the upper Littlerock Creek/Williamson Rock area in mid-October, we observed multiple impacts from the Fire, including:

- Multiple dead trees fallen into the creek channel.
- Up to a foot of accumulated ash throughout the area, including the creek channel.
- Ash and charred wood leachates visibly entering the surface flow of the creek; and,
- Small rockslides from both the north and south slopes that reached all the way to the creek.

Depending on the amount and the intensity of winter precipitation that the area receives, some of these impacts could be even worse as slopes that have lost all their vegetation could experience soil erosion and introduce large debris flows into the creek.

Given the current impacts and the potential for even more post-fire impacts to the population of endangered mountain yellow-legged frogs (MYLF) in the Project area, our partners at the United States Geological Service captured around 15 adult frogs and over 150 tadpoles from the site and moved them either to another suitable location on the ANF or to captive breeding facilities at the Los Angeles Zoo and the University of California – Los Angeles. These activities were conducted with the concurrence of, and under permission from, the United States Fish & Wildlife Service, and were consistent with the goals of the [2018 MYLF Species Recovery Plan](#).

The health and persistence of the Littlerock population of MYLF is central to the success of the Project. As currently written, the baseline MYLF population size is the primary indicator in the Project’s adaptive management approach. Changed conditions due to the direct and indirect impacts to the area from the Bobcat Fire may likely require an updated assessment of the baseline environment and potential impacts of the Project. We also need to account for the removal of a large portion of the MYLF population and the feasibility of returning animals to the area next year. For these reasons **I have decided to pause any further action on the project until late spring of 2021**, when ANF staff and our agency partners can revisit the area and assess the changed conditions and status of the MYLF population.



After the Bobcat Fire, a Closure Order was put into effect for a majority of the burnt area, including this project area. The Closure Order is meant to protect both public safety and the fragile natural resources. **The entire area in the Williamson Rock Project is closed to the public by Forest Order 05-01-20-08 until April 1, 2022.** In 2021, ANF staff will assess changed conditions, revise Project documentation as needed, and get a final signed Record of Decision before the current closure order expires.

I recognize that delays to the completion of the Project represents a continuing impact to recreational opportunities and public access to the area. As always, I appreciate your interest in the ANF and your patience as we navigate this complicated set of issues. Please feel free to send any questions or comments about the Project or this letter to SM.FS.anf_sgmnm@usda.gov and staff will respond as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Jerome E. Perez
Forest Supervisor