



FIELDREPORT

Pacific Region | Summer 2013

Victory on the Way

By Neal Desai

Americans are captivated by wilderness; it comes in all shapes and sizes, from the rainforests of Olympic National Park to the river of grass in the Everglades. Thanks to a historic decision by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, Americans can now experience the majestic beauty of the first marine wilderness area on the West Coast: Drakes Estero, in California's Point Reyes National Seashore.

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The decision to protect Drakes Estero as wilderness became a reality in November 2012, but it was nearly 40 years in the making. In 1976, Congress passed a law that designated the estuary within Point Reyes National Seashore as the first marine wilderness area on the West Coast. That designation

continued on back page

Victory Achieved

Eagle Mountain Landfill Finally Trashed

By David Lamfrom

NPCA's on the ground work includes working on policies and legislation to fund, protect, and expand parks; building community support; and sometimes engaging in long term battles to oppose projects that would result in irreversible harm to our national parks. The recent final defeat of the Eagle Mountain landfill is an example of the latter—a powerful win to protect Joshua Tree National Park that was a long time coming.

In 1987, the Los Angeles County Sanitation Department proposed using an area within the Eagle Mountain range—less than two miles from the boundary of Joshua Tree National Park—for the nation's largest landfill. The project was designed to accept up to 20,000 tons of trash from the Los Angeles area per day for 117 years. NPCA had long argued that a landfill in that area would have resulted in strong odors, loud noise, light pollution, and it would have attracted ravens that feed on endangered desert tortoises. It also threatened to disrupt the migration pattern of bighorn sheep.

NPCA—with the ongoing help of the Stanford Law Clinic—legally opposed this project in 2000, after administrative remedies were unsuccessful. A complex series of subsequent

legal appeals and decisions favorable to protecting the site culminated in 2011, when the Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal and reinforced earlier legal decisions that protected Joshua Tree National Park.

When the Mine Reclamation LLC, the project proponent, filed for bankruptcy in 2011, the Los Angeles County Department of Sanitation threatened to purchase the project, but NPCA continued to do what it does best: organizing coalitions against the project; expressing concern to the Secretary of the Interior's office and members of Congress; and educating local communities about the harm this project posed to Joshua Tree National Park as well as to the desert tortoise.

On Wednesday, May 22, 2013, the Los Angeles County Sanitation Department decided not to move forward with their plans to develop a landfill. They cited changes that have occurred since the project was envisioned 30 years ago, including the increase in recycling in L.A. County. So while NPCA's efforts to protect our national parks can take many years, the Eagle Mountain Landfill victory has protected Joshua Tree National Park forever. Without NPCA's loyal members and supporters, this protection would not be possible.

Above: Sunset in Joshua Tree National Park. ©Namolik | Dreamstime.com

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REFLECTIONS FROM THE SENIOR REGIONAL DIRECTOR, RON SUNDERGILL

Two Steps Forward and a Big Cloud

While NPCA savors the two major victories—one at Joshua Tree National Park and one at Pt. Reyes National Seashore—reported in this issue, it's hard to ignore the dark cloud threatening our overall progress in protecting our national parks. That cloud is park funding.

As I write, Memorial Day is behind us, and the busiest season for our national parks approaches. Meanwhile, the media is filled with stories about the impact of budget sequestration. As millions of visitors arrive at the parks, the buzz of discontent is likely to grow. It is impossible to remove more than \$150 million from the budget of the National Park Service (thanks to the sequestration) and not notice an impact.

NPCA has worked hard to raise the visibility of the impact the budget cuts will have on both the parks and the communities that surround them. Mark Wenzler, a colleague from NPCA's Washington DC office, was interviewed in late May on NBC's *Today Show*, and Nick Lund, another DC staffer, spoke on NPR's *All Things Considered*. Both Mark and Nick discussed the impact of the sequester, and Nick was joined in the NPR interview by Fred Link from Bar Harbor, Maine.

Fred manages the beautiful Bar Harbor Inn, and he expressed his frustration with the

impact of sequestration on Acadia National Park and his business. He noted that his customers who come to visit Acadia in the spring expect all the park roads to be opened by mid-April, which has traditionally been the case. This year—because of sequestration cutbacks—the road to the top of picturesque Cadillac Mountain was closed.

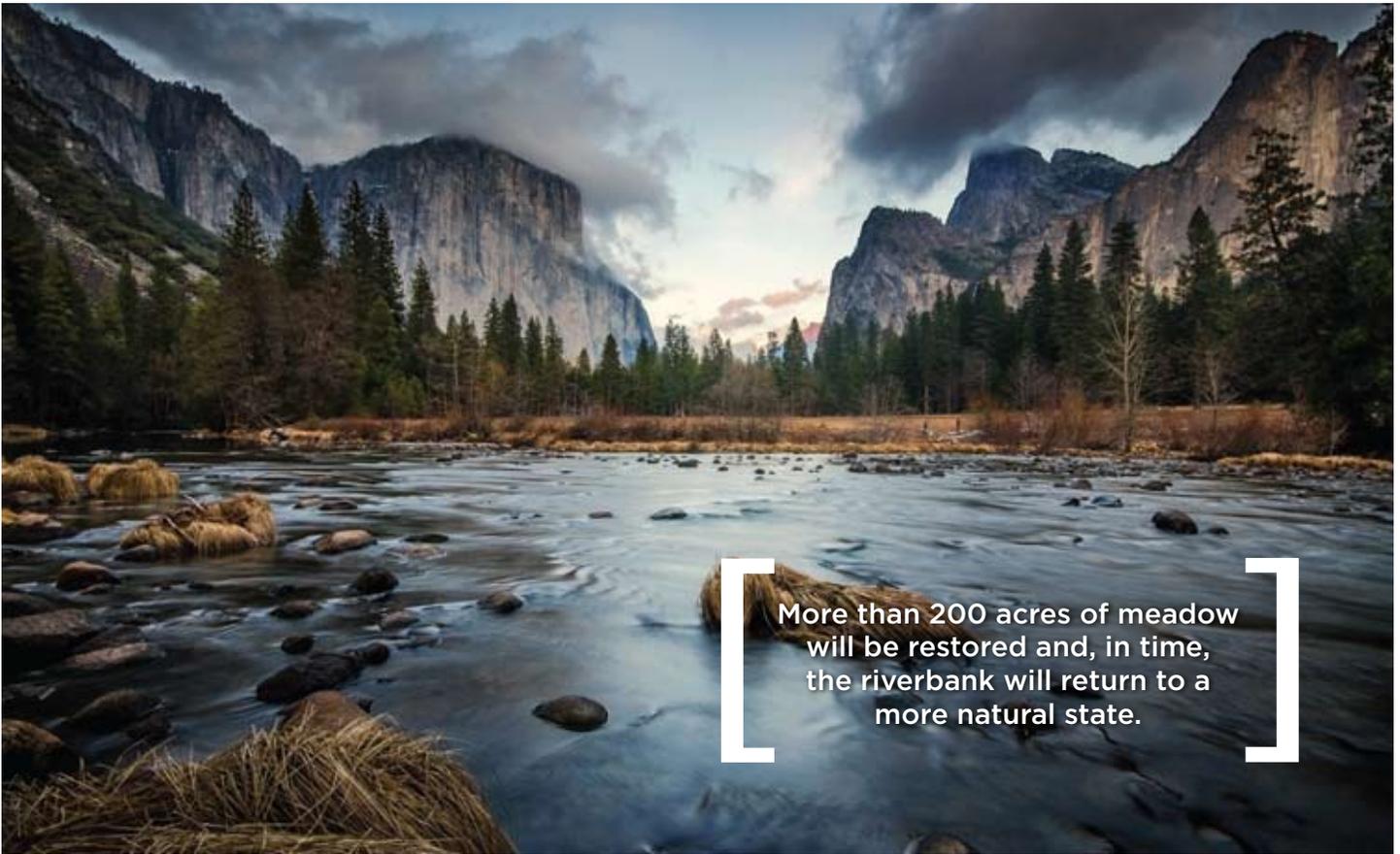
Fred reported customers who were "very disappointed" and several departed after a one night stay rather than staying the usual two or three nights. The loss of business clearly impacts the economy of communities surrounding the national parks. This scenario is being replayed all over the country, with delays and lack of service in the parks impacting visitors as well as businesses in gateway communities.

NPCA continues to mobilize our members, supporters and allies to reverse the budget cuts. I hope that Congress and the Administration hear the concern of citizens and remove the cloud hanging over the National Park Service budget in the next fiscal year. National Parks are the best of America—just ask any of the millions of foreign visitors who revere our national parks—and they deserve extraordinary support from our government.

Ron Sundergill



Above: Members of NPCA's Pacific Regional Council joined staff in March 2013 for a three day visit to Death Valley National Park. The more adventuresome members of the group tackled an ambitious dune hike. ©Ray Foote



More than 200 acres of meadow will be restored and, in time, the riverbank will return to a more natural state.

Yosemite's Merced River Plan

By Emily Schrepf

For more than ten years, NPCA has been advocating that one of the park's most important planning documents—the Merced River Plan—protect Yosemite's outstanding natural resources while providing an exceptional visitor experience for the more than four million people who visit each year. In 1987 Congress designated the Merced a "Wild and Scenic" River, which means that the river is afforded special protections because of its unique values. Yosemite Valley and other areas in the park are part of the river corridor, so the NPS is responsible for creating a protective plan for the area.

Unfortunately this planning process had been stymied for years by ongoing litigation.

In January of this year Yosemite introduced a new Merced River plan that strikes a reasonable balance. NPCA supports the Park's recommendation because it advocates maintaining access to Yosemite for all visitors, but it will also increase access for those visitors to public transportation, thus eliminating some of the automobile traffic that clogs the park's roadways.

In addition, this new plan proposes more camping facilities, allowing budget-

conscious visitors more overnight options, while enhancing protections for the river corridor's natural resources. More than 200 acres of meadow will be restored under the plan preferred by the Park, and over time the river bank will return to a more natural state.

NPCA urges our members to express support for the Merced River plan to their elected representatives. Join us in working to protect one of our country's crown jewels.

Above: Yosemite's Valley View and Merced River at sunset in Winter. ©Cnaene | Dreamstime.com

FUN FACT

The highest and lowest points in the continental United States are within 100 miles of one another and are both in national parks.

Mount Whitney (western slope) is in Sequoia National Park) measures 14,495 feet and Bad Water in Death Valley National Park is 282 feet below sea level.

Current and former members of NPCA's board were among guests who gathered at the San Francisco Maritime Museum on May 9 for the first San-Francisco based NPCA dinner and gala, to honor Gene Sykes, Trustee Emeriti. More than 130 guests enjoyed a glorious evening overlooking the San Francisco Bay.

From l to r: Bill Walter, Gretchen Long, Gene Sykes, Tom Secunda (current board chair) and Steve Denning.



Death Valley Night Skies

By David Lamfrom

PARKS BY NIGHT

This February, the International Dark Sky Association (IDA) confirmed what local communities like Shoshone, Tecopa, and Furnace Creek have long known, by making Death Valley the largest International Dark Sky Park. The park received a gold-tier classification, meaning that “the skies there are affected by only the smallest amounts of light pollution classifying it at the highest level of IDA designation and star-filled skies. Astronomical objects seen there are available only to some of the darkest locations across the globe.” Amazingly the IDA states that “The park is distant enough from the large cities of the southwest so that much of the night sky above the desert floor is near pristine and, in many places, offers views close to what could be seen before the rise of cities” (IDA, Feb. 20, 2013).

NPCA continues to advocate for the protection of the dark night skies in our parks, supporting star parties in parks and communities surrounding Mojave National Preserve, Great Basin, and Bryce Canyon to connect enthusiasts and youth to pristine night skies. In fact, in Mojave National Preserve a bi-annual star party has become a tradition connecting astronomers and their giant telescopes to star gazers from throughout Southern California and Nevada. Impressively, a dark-sky festival is now a popular event in Baker, Nevada, just outside of Great Basin’s world-class skies.

I can attest to the wonder of really seeing the night skies for the first time in the California desert. It was an experience that I refer to as having the film peeled off my eyes. I am proud of the work NPCA does to protect this underappreciated and rapidly disappearing resource and our sponsorship of events that show off our night skies to so many people, often for the first time. We spend our lives under the ornate blanket of the starry skies, and with a thoughtful approach to light pollution and air pollution, we may be able to enjoy and protect skies like those found in Death Valley National Park. NPCA’s would like Mojave National Preserve to win similar recognition for its night skies as well.

Below: Death Valley National Park. ©Paul Lemke/ISTOCKPHOTO



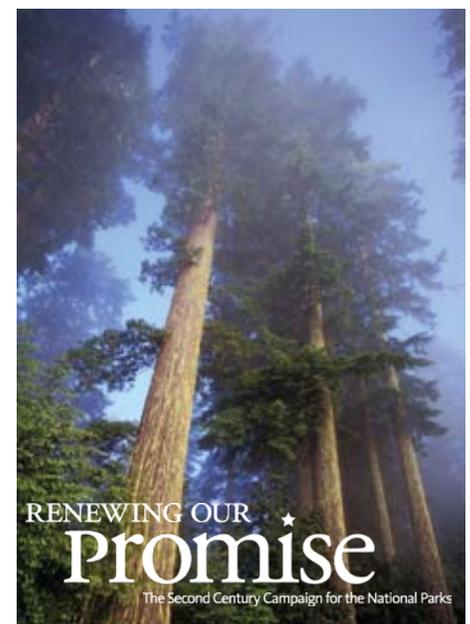
YOU Did It!

Thanks to you, *Renewing Our Promise: The Second Century Campaign for the National Parks* raised \$134 million toward a goal of \$125 million.

A historic and highly successful fundraising campaign, *Renewing Our Promise* is an achievement designed to ensure that our national parks are restored and protected for future generations. As the money was raised over the past five years, it was invested by NPCA—into our endowment that will support the organization in perpetuity, into existing programs to ensure the organization’s health and vibrancy, and into new programs that extend our impact on national parks throughout the land.

Renewing Our Promise sought improvements to virtually every NPCA department and program, an extraordinary infusion of support for our regional and field work, advocacy and government affairs, strategic communications as well as our park research and park management services. These widespread enhancements to NPCA broadened and deepened our work on behalf of national parks.

NPCA is grateful to you and to the legions of members, corporations, foundations, and other friends whose campaign gifts have touched and transformed NPCA—and by extension—the future of our beloved national parks. Thank you!



Above: Redwood National Park. ©Images & Stories /Alamy



Victory on the Way (continued)

recognized that the permit for the existing commercial oyster company would expire on November 30, 2012. Once the commercial operation ended—and the motorboats and non-native oyster planting stopped—he estuary would return to its natural state. Taxpayers purchased this property with the goal of protecting it and making it accessible to park visitors.

Unfortunately, when the ownership of the oyster company changed hands in 2005, the new operator (the Drakes Bay Oyster Company) chose not to honor the contract, and instead mounted an aggressive campaign to allow his oyster operation to remain in the estuary.

As our members and supporters know, NPCA is not one to back down from a fight—especially when something as rare and precious as marine wilderness is at stake. Our work advocating for the wilderness protection began once we learned of

the oyster company's efforts to seek a lease extension. Over the years, NPCA has conducted extensive legal and policy research on this issue, rallied local and national supporters, educated elected officials, and supported scientific studies to protect the long-standing plan to attain a fully-protected wilderness at Drakes Estero. Our work demonstrates that advocacy is consistently needed if we want our national parks to be unimpaired for future generations.

Secretary Salazar's decision to provide full wilderness designation to Drakes Estero—as planned and paid for by the American public—will enhance opportunities for public access to a remarkable protected marine environment near San Francisco and the nine Bay Area counties, home to more than 9 million people. Offering far more than just a beautiful view, Drakes Estero serves as a stopover for thousands of migratory birds and as a habitat for seals. It also accounts for at least 7 percent of

California's eelgrass habitat, which helps maintain a healthy marine ecosystem. Without the bustle of business and a noticeable commercial footprint in the middle of Drakes Estero, all who visit Point Reyes National Seashore can enjoy enhanced opportunities for recreation, wildlife viewing, and solitude.

NPCA's work to protect Drakes Estero is not over. On December 4, the oyster company filed a lawsuit to fight Secretary Salazar's landmark decision. The Federal District Court rejected the company's request for an injunction, and the company is now appealing that decision. We will remain vigilant in our efforts to safeguard the secretary's decision and protect the future of the West Coast's first marine wilderness area. You can stay connected with the campaign at savepointreyeswilderness.org.

Above: Drakes Estero, Point Reyes National Seashore ©Robert Campbell Photography / Chamois Moon



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Pacific Regional Staff Visits Rim of the Valley Corridor

By Seth Shteir

OUT IN THE PARKS

The National Park Service recently invited Pacific Region staff to tour lands in the Simi Hills and downtown Los Angeles—sites that may be added to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, pending the results of the Rim of the Valley Corridor Special Resources Study. The study, which is currently underway, examines how best to enhance recreation and access for urban residents to a variety of historical, cultural and natural sites in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. NPCA's staff visited important corridors for deer and mountain lion along the 118 freeway, hiked along the historic Butterfield Stagecoach route, and visited the Los Angeles State Historic Park near Chinatown in downtown Los Angeles. "The land being examined by the Rim of the Valley Corridor Study not only has spectacular mountains and a unique ecosystem," said Ron Sundergill, senior director of NPCA's Pacific regional office, "but also can tell the story of the rich history and diverse cultures of Los Angeles." The Rim of the Valley Corridor Special Resources Study draft report will be published and open for comment in 2014.

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Photo: Hiker overlooking Yosemite Valley in Yosemite National Park, California © Rick Perino/Dreamstime

