



# FIELD REPORT

Pacific Region | Summer 2018



## Advocacy for Increased National Park Funding Yields Results

The recent FY18 appropriations bill that provides annual, operational funds for our national parks was a remarkable success. NPCA proudly led a coalition and worked with both Republican and Democratic officials to ensure Congress takes care of these special places. The bill included several improvements for our parks. Highlights include:

- A \$270 million, or 9 percent increase, to the overall Park Service budget
- A \$160 million increase for park maintenance
- Removal of many damaging policies that would have undermined clean air, clean water and public lands protection
- Funding for catastrophic wildfires on public lands

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**Top:** Wild flowers carpet the desert at the Amboy Crater in the Mojave Trails National Monument, California. ©BLM Photo | Alamy

## Cadiz Bid Stopped in the San Gabriel Valley

Recently, the Trump administration breathed new life into the Cadiz water-mining project—long opposed by NPCA—by eliminating required federal review of the project's proposed impacts to parks, wildlife and California's largest national monument, Mojave Trails. This deregulation empowered Cadiz to move ahead with plans to drain an ancient desert aquifer by mining 16 billion gallons of water each year for export and sale to Southern California communities. This harmful project would destroy sensitive habitat, hurt wildlife and jeopardize tourism economies near Mojave National Preserve and Joshua Tree National Park. [Read more about NPCA's opposition to this decision on p. 5.]

For this ill-advised project to be viable, however, Cadiz needs to find communities willing to pay for the water it mines. One such community recently rallied, stopping Cadiz's efforts to peddle its water in the San Gabriel Valley. A broad, grassroots coalition of stakeholders opposed the project at a March board meeting of the Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District.

Dozens of individuals testified in opposition to the project, citing its environmental damage and high cost. Testimony came from youth, retirees, small business owners and others who want to see the desert landscape protected and enjoyed by future genera-

tions. Numerous other conservation, recreation and environmental justice groups joined NPCA in calling on the board to reject the project, as did elected officials such as Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda Solis and Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon and Senator Anthony Portantino of California. The board's subsequent rejection of the proposal to purchase Cadiz water rewarded the effort of all those in opposition.



NPCA continues to work with state and federal leaders, Native American tribes, and park advocates to permanently stop the Cadiz project. In the meantime, victories like this are a reminder that together, and with vigilance, all citizens can play a role in protecting our national parks.

**Above:** NPCA youth advocates Edwin Galicia, Jonathan Diaz and Ashley Rojas call for the protection of the CA desert at a San Gabriel Valley water board meeting. ©Boris Villacorta

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## NPCA's Pacific Region Welcomed Chris Boone to its Team Last Year

Chris Boone serves as the regional director of development for the Pacific and Southwest regions. He serves as the face of NPCA to many of our donors, engaging them in NPCA's work and keeping them apprised of our efforts.

Prior to joining NPCA in 2017, Chris was the director of development and communications for the Los Angeles Youth Network (LAYN), an organization that focuses on youth homelessness and foster care. His experience also includes managing the individual giving program at The People Concern, a Los Angeles nonprofit focused on adult homelessness.



Chris is a native of the Pacific Northwest and a graduate of the University of Washington. After college, he worked at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for seven years as part of their communications team, focusing on their grantees and partners as a constituency.

In his spare time, Chris serves on the Board of Directors for the Human Rights Campaign, the largest LGBTQ advocacy organization in the country. He enjoys time at the beach and loves hiking around Los Angeles and Palm Springs.

**Above:** Chris Boone at Lower Yosemite Falls.  
©Mark Rose | NPCA



## Trump Administration Backs Off Proposed \$70 Park Fee

In a major victory for park lovers nationwide, the Department of Interior recently reversed course on their proposal to drastically raise entrance fees at 17 popular national parks during peak season. Instead of the proposed \$70 entrance fee (more than double the existing fee at many of these parks), the administration has settled on a more moderate, yet still significant, \$5 increase.

A broad and organized campaign against the administration's proposal garnered nearly 110,000 public comments, including 20,000 from NPCA supporters. According to NPCA estimates, a whopping 98 percent of those comments were opposed to the increase.

In our region, the fee hike would have impacted popular national parks like Yosemite, Sequoia, Kings Canyon and Joshua Tree. The proposed increase could have priced out many families, influencing not only those individuals, but the tourism economies of the parks' gateway communities as well.

While NPCA supports the administration's stated goal to tackle the nearly \$12 billion national park repair backlog, we believe a legislative solution such as the National Park Service Legacy Act will provide a more viable long-term solution without placing an undue burden on visiting families and local communities.

**Above:** Yosemite's Tioga Pass Entrance Station, where peak season fees were set to more than double to \$70. ©Helena Bilkova | Dreamstime

## Local Leaders Tour Rim of the Valley

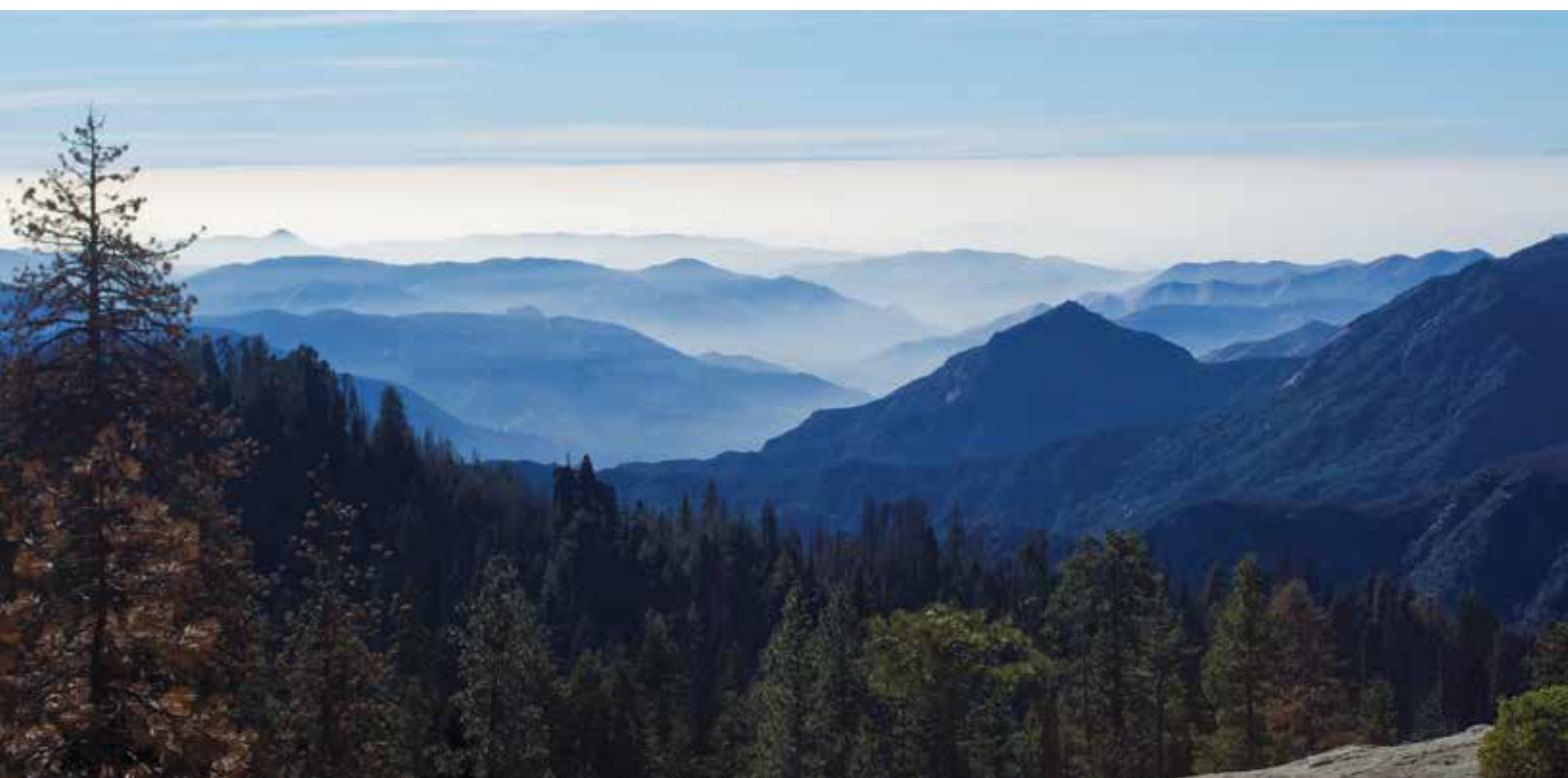
In March, late season rains provided perfect conditions for an aerial tour of the Rim of the Valley and landscapes that are part of NPCA's efforts to more than double the size of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. The Rim of the Valley campaign will protect critical habitat wildlife corridors and cultural treasures, while expanding outdoor recreational opportunities for Los Angeles' urban and park poor communities. Thanks to NPCA's relationship with EcoFlight and conservation pilot Bruce Gordon, California Assemblyman Dante Acosta and Santa Clarita Mayor Laurene Weste were treated to stunning views of the verdant landscape. During



the flight, Weste, a long-time advocate for the Rim of the Valley, discussed how the expansion of the National Recreation Area

would benefit the open spaces in the Assemblyman's district. A Santa Clarita film crew also collected valuable footage that will help educate the public about the initiative. Currently, NPCA is working with allies like Weste to urge Representative Steve Knight, whose district includes Santa Clarita and much of the proposed expansion areas, to be a champion for the Rim of the Valley Corridor Preservation Act (H.R. 4086), which faces a critical juncture in Congress.

**Left:** CA State Assemblyman Dante Acosta and Santa Clarita Valley Mayor Laurene Weste joined a Rim of the Valley aerial tour in March.  
©Bruce Gordon | EcoFlight



## FACING THE DIRTIEST AIR IN THE NATION Local California Air District Drags Its Feet

**A**ccording to a new report by the American Lung Association (ALA), California's San Joaquin Valley holds the dubious honor of being home to four of the nation's top seven worst cities for ozone pollution, and four of the top six for both short-term and year-round particle pollution.

This same pollution often makes its way into the neighboring Sierra Nevada Mountains. As a result, Yosemite, Sequoia,

and Kings Canyon National Parks have some of the dirtiest air of all the park units—impacting overall visibility and visitor health.

While the ALA's report is unsurprising given the valley's long history of poor air quality, what is remarkable is the local San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's apparent lack of urgency in addressing the matter. Despite long overdue statutory deadlines, the Valley

Air District continues to delay releasing a comprehensive plan to tackle the fine particulate pollution and meet air quality standards.

Working with a coalition of local air quality and environmental justice organizations, NPCA's Sierra Nevada office is applying pressure on the District through a wide-range of strategies aimed at improving local air quality.

## EmpowerHER CAMPOUT

## Women Leading Outdoor Advocacy

During Women's History Month, NPCA's Los Angeles Field Office conducted its first EmpowerHER Campout. More than a dozen young female leaders participated in a weekend focused on building their skills as both outdoor leaders and national park advocates. The program took place at Leo Carrillo State Park and received support from REI's "Force of Nature" grant program, which supports opportunities for women and girls in the outdoors.

The weekend included elements of NPCA's Civic Voice Lessons curriculum, with special emphasis on learning how to speak up for our parks, develop effective messaging, and engage elected officials and policy makers.

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Nonstop rain marked the weekend, yet all the participants remained engaged, enthusiastic and supportive. "The EmpowerHER camp out was eye-opening!" described participant Jenny Lopez. "It was the first time I'd gone camping with other women. Very seldom do I have this type of opportunity, and the experience has inspired me to continue sharing with, and learning from, other women who share my passion for the outdoors."

Discussions included policy issues such as the National Park Service Legacy Act, developing long and short-term goals, and the sharing of individual stories. The "She Explores" podcast also participated in the weekend and plans to feature the campout in a future episode.

**Top:** Group shot of all the EmpowerHER campout participants and NPCA staff at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. ©Megan Hernbroth | NPCA • **Right:** Participants practicing their topographic map reading skills. ©Laura Torres | NPCA



# NPCA Takes Interior Department to Court over Railroad Law, Cadiz



Cadiz, Inc. plans to pump 16 billion gallons of water a year from an ancient aquifer beneath Mojave Trails National Monument and Mojave National Preserve, threatening springs crucial to Mojave Desert wildlife. There's just one problem for Cadiz: building a pipeline across 43 miles of public land to connect Cadiz's wells to the nearest aqueduct triggers review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Cadiz has proposed siting its pipeline along a little-used railroad line, hoping to take advantage of a 19th-century law exempting railroad-related projects along rights-of-way on federal land from further review by the federal government. In 2015, the Obama administration said "no" to that argument,

ruling that Cadiz's pipeline didn't serve a railroad purpose, and that Cadiz must therefore apply for a federal right-of-way permit and undergo NEPA review by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

But in 2017, the Trump administration's Interior Department reversed that decision, issuing an Interior Department Solicitor's Opinion exempting these types of projects from federal review as long as they don't impede railroad operations. The decision cleared the way for Cadiz to start building its pipeline, an act that could set a dangerous precedent for other federal lands far from the Mojave Desert.

In April 2018, NPCA—represented by the

Environmental Law Clinic at the University of California, Irvine—filed suit against the Interior Department and the BLM challenging the Solicitor's Opinion, on the grounds that it undermines federal environmental law and threatens two of the California Desert's crown jewel national parks. Though the suit is still in its very early stages, we'll provide updates on any major developments at [n pca.org](http://n pca.org).

**Top:** Active railroad in Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM). ©Thomas Vieth | Dreamstime  
**Bottom (Left to Right, Clockwise):**  
Spring bloom in the Cadiz Valley ©BLM Photo | Alamy • Desert bighorn sheep. ©Chris Curtis | Dreamstime • Historic railroad ruins in MTNM. ©Witold Skrypczak | Alamy



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## Advocacy for Increased National Park Funding Yields Results



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- A \$16 million, or 20 percent increase, for the Historic Preservation Fund, to support historic preservation efforts
- \$300 million for large transportation infrastructure project needs on public and tribal lands, which should help fund crumbling Park Service roads

In addition to the annual, operational funding for parks, NPCA continues to work to pass the bipartisan, bicameral National Park Service Legacy Act, which would provide the Park Service with more than \$11 billion over three decades to fix crumbling infrastructure in parks such as trails, historic buildings and roads.

**Top Left:** Needed road repairs at Yosemite will help ease traffic congestion. ©Maryna Konoplytska | Dreamstime **Top Right:** Scotty's Castle at Death Valley remains closed due to damaged infrastructure from a severe thunderstorm in 2015. ©Scott Prokop | Dreamstime



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