



FIELDREPORT

Pacific Region | Fall 2019

Paradise Valley Update

By Chris Clarke

After more than a decade of work, we're close to protecting Joshua Tree National Park's southern boundary from a new suburb of 8,500 homes. The development—which would threaten wildlife migration, impair the region's dark night skies and deplete precious groundwater reserves—galvanized a diverse coalition of social justice activists, business owners and environmental organizations, including NPCA.

Together, we've spoken out against this ill-conceived plan, drawing attention to the environmental and social impacts that would result if the new suburb were built.

The project would badly undermine the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan. The plan protects 27 species of plants and animals on 240,000 acres of conservation land and streamlines infill development in the urban Coachella Valley. Paradise Valley would be built in an area designated for conservation, but its developers refuse to follow appropriate procedures, putting the entire conservation plan in jeopardy if the project is approved. And that would slow appropriate development in the Coachella Valley, threatening residents' livelihoods.

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Protecting California Desert Water

By Chris Clarke

NPCA and our partners won a huge victory in August when the state of California required new environmental review of the Cadiz Inc. water mining project.

Cadiz wants to pump 16 billion gallons of water from beneath Mojave Trails National Monument and sell it to southern California water agencies. Though Cadiz claims its project is benign, independent science has shown the project threatens desert springs crucial to wildlife.

In 2017, the Trump administration exempted the project from federal environmental review, essentially green-lighting its progress. But after three years of intense campaigning by NPCA and our partners, the California legislature passed a bill, later signed by Governor Gavin Newsom, that should stop Cadiz in its tracks.

The bill (Senate Bill 307) requires that state agencies certify Cadiz's water project will not harm the California desert before the company can export any water. During hearings on the bill, Cadiz's lobbyists stated that there was no way Cadiz could meet this standard. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has already

determined the project threatens desert bighorn sheep and other species. Therefore, it is unlikely the project will survive review by CDFW and other agencies.



NPCA would like to thank our friends and supporters, and friends of the California desert in elected office, for ensuring Senate Bill 307 became law. We will stay vigilant until the state agencies make their rulings on Cadiz, but passing this bill is a significant victory.

Top: Bonanza Springs ©Chris Clarke Right: Desert Bighorn Sheep ©Pwnature | Dreamstime

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LETTER FROM THE SENIOR REGIONAL DIRECTOR

By Ron Sundergill

NPCA's 100-year history includes a string of park victories made possible by support from past presidents. But, at this moment, we cannot rely on the White House to prioritize or advance national park protection. Rather, we must turn more and more to state and local decision-makers.

In the Pacific region, for example, the Trump administration abandoned its responsibility to protect parks by approving the Cadiz, Inc. water mining project, which would have removed 16 billion gallons of water a year from the Mojave Desert aquifer and transported it to customers in Orange County and other locations. NPCA and our allies nimbly changed tactics, targeting state legislators to advance legislation in Sacramento that would protect the precious desert ecosystem from such an ill-conceived scheme. Our work on this campaign is recounted in the article "Protecting California Desert Water" on page 1. Though we cannot be completely confident the project is dead, it is certainly



on its last legs, thanks to our allies in the California state legislature and to Governor Gavin Newsom.

In other good news, we anticipate a victory in our campaign to stop the construction of a new 8,500-home development on the southern border of Joshua Tree National Park. As explained in "Paradise Valley Update" on page 1, local officials in Riverside County have moved to oppose the

project. We expect a favorable vote from the county supervisors to stop the development. It is gratifying to see our local officials do the right thing, protecting designated conservation lands that neighbor a nationally treasured park.

We will continue to be vigilant as new threats emerge. Whether we seek park protections through federal, state or local means, our work benefits from the members and supporters of NPCA who contribute their time and money to help us fight the long-term battles. Thank you.

Above: Ron Sundergill

NPCA's Centennial Celebration in Los Angeles

By Dennis Arguelles

In early September, over 100 Los Angeles-area supporters converged on the city's historic district, El Pueblo de Los Angeles, to celebrate NPCA's centennial. The event took place in the Avila Adobe, the city's oldest standing residence, and allowed us to recognize Robert Garcia, founder of The City Project, and Laurene Weste, Santa

Clarita City councilmember, for their leadership in the Rim of the Valley campaign to expand the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. We were also joined by Representative Judy Chu (CA-29th) and Representative Adam Schiff (CA-28th). As the Rim of the Valley's legislative champion, Congressman Schiff was the evening's keynote speaker.



Left: Kristen Bregel, NPCA Senior Vice President of Government Affairs, addresses a crowd of over 100 supporters ©Erick Andino **Above (L-R):** Laura Navar (NPCA Outreach Manager), Robert Garcia, Laurene Weste, Representative Adam Schiff and Dennis Arguelles (NPCA Senior Program Manager) ©Erick Andino

A MODERN MATHER MOUNTAIN PARTY

Beyond the Founding of the Park Service



By Laura Navar

NPCA's Pacific Regional Office hosted a reimagining of the famous Mather Mountain Party of 1915 in Sequoia National Park. The original gathering, organized by Stephen Mather, consisted of a group of businessmen brought together to discuss the creation of a unified National Park System to oversee our most treasured landscapes. Mather went on to become the first director of the National Park Service and, subsequently, a founder of NPCA.

While the 1915 event was notable for its lack of diversity, our 2019 event sought to convene an inclusive group of park and community allies to consider the future of our national parks. We invited current and potential partners who work on a range of environmental issues ranging from equitable access to parks to environmental justice issues local communities are facing. With this gathering we are looking to strengthen long term partnerships. We're inspired by their passion and vision, and feel confident that, together, we can work toward a brighter future and a



stronger park system. The program included a more nuanced look at park history by historian Bill Tweed, an opportunity for participants to collect data for a Park Service citizen science pilot program and a discussion of park protection in a changing climate. In our conversation we identified several opportunities to strengthen our park system—such as highlighting little known or missing stories to reflect the full spectrum of this country's history—these ideas will help

inform our path forward. Our parks and communities benefit from a diversity of perspectives. Bringing more voices to the table helps us better understand the needs of today's park visitors, offers us ways to reach new audiences, and more fully prepares us to respond to emerging threats and opportunities.

Top: Mather Mountain Party on July 14, 1915 ©G.H Grosvenor | NPS **Above:** Mather Mountain Party in 2019 ©Erika Rose

Travel with Us

By Jared Dial

Join us on one of our small-group educational adventures, where you'll hit the trails or explore via small-ship cruise. Land tours are limited to just 16 participants plus two naturalist guides and include meals, accommodations and on-trip transportation.

Learn more about the full lineup of NPCA trips at npca.org/trips.

Hiking Utah's National Parks

May 2-10, 2020
October 4-12, 2020

This 9-day hiking-focused journey takes you off the beaten path through delicate arches, deep canyons and backcountry gulches in Utah's "Mighty Five" national parks: Arches, Canyonlands, Capitol Reef, Bryce and Zion.

Experience American Samoa

October 15-20, 2020 (spots fill up quickly so register soon!)

Halfway between Hawaii and New Zealand, you'll find the only U.S. national park south of the equator: American Samoa. Get ready to weave baskets from palm fronds, hike rainforest-lined cliffs, enjoy a feast made in an umu (earth oven) and snorkel some of the clearest waters in the Pacific!

Channel Islands National Park Small-Ship Cruise

April 25-29, 2020
September 23-27, 2020

Channel Islands National Park—five islands off the coast of Los Angeles—is one of America's least-visited national parks. Kayak and hike unmarred landscapes, revel in pure nature, and rejuvenate mind, body and soul on this "wildness and wellness" cruise.



Top Right: Arches National Park ©Alesnowak | Dreamstime Middle Right: American Samoa ©S.G. Barmeyer Bottom Right: Red Fox in Channel Islands National Park ©Kyle T Perry | Shutterstock

Wildlife Protection in and around the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

By Dennis Arguelles

The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area is probably best known for its stunning ocean views, outdoors recreational opportunities and historic movie sets. It's lesser known for its role providing habitat for a wide range of wildlife, including numerous threatened and endangered species.

NPCA is taking steps to preserve the park's wildlife, most notably by advancing the proposed Rim of the Valley legislation, which would more than double the size of the park and help protect surrounding landscapes, including critical wildlife corridors, watersheds and native habitat.

Since 2014, we have supported efforts to protect park wildlife from anti-coagulant rodenticides (rat poisons) that enter the park's food chain through indiscriminate use in surrounding communities. In tests run by the National Park Service, these rat poisons have been found in nearly 90% of the area's mountain lions, bobcats and coyotes. This year, we supported AB 1788, State Assembly Member Richard Bloom's (50th-Santa Monica) effort to effectively end the use of the most potent rodenticides throughout the state. This bill passed the State Assembly but was held-up in the Senate. NPCA and a coalition of conservation and wildlife organizations will be vigorously advocating for the bill in 2020.

Additionally, NPCA is working to protect wildlife corridors connecting the Los Padres National Forest in the northern part of



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Ventura County to the Santa Monica Mountains in the south. In January, the County passed two ordinances providing guidelines for outdoor lighting, fencing and brush clearance in sensitive wildlife pathways and riparian environments. A coalition of business and industry groups subsequently sued the county. NPCA is

working with other organizations to support the county as it defends itself against the lawsuit. We will continue to monitor the case as it makes its way through the State courts.

Above: P-22, Los Angeles' famed mountain lion, continues to thrive in Griffith Park, for now. ©Miguel Ordenana.

Paradise Valley Update

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The threat to the conservation plan has strengthened and expanded the coalition opposed to Paradise Valley, even bringing representatives from construction trade unions to hearings to testify against the project.

In August, Riverside County's Planning Department and Planning Commission each recommended against letting Paradise Valley go forward. The county's Board of Supervisors is expected to follow those recommendations in early November. It's still too early to celebrate, but we are confident that Riverside County's supervisors will stop Paradise Valley and save some of the best unprotected desert habitat in California.



Above: Barrel cacti on the Paradise Valley site ©Chris Clarke | NPCA



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Summer Slam Event with The Mission Continues

By Mark Rose

For the second year in a row, NPCA staff joined with Veterans Service Organization, The Mission Continues, for our Summer Slam volunteer event in Sequoia National Park. This event is part of our national partnership with The Mission Continues and was a wonderful way to give back to one of America’s most iconic parks.

#Fixourparks campaign tackles deferred maintenance projects in our park system and asks Congress to adequately fund our parks’ aging infrastructure.

It also provided NPCA with an excellent opportunity to draw attention to our #Fixourparks campaign, which tackles deferred maintenance projects in our park system and asks Congress to adequately fund our parks’ aging infrastructure.

The weekend’s activities centered around a half-day project removing invasive grasses brought into the park by ranchers decades



ago. Working in the shadows of towering sequoias, we improved the habitat of the park’s famed Giant Forest by helping to restore roughly a half acre of prime meadowland. Our visit to the park wasn’t all work, as all 20 attendees still had plenty of time to hike up to Moro Rock, saunter around Crescent

Meadow, eat some delicious food around the campfire, and pitch our tents under a canopy of pines.

Above: The Mission Continues Volunteers in Sequoia’s Round Meadow ©Fanny Garcia

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