

House of Representatives Passes Rim of the Valley

By Dennis Arguelles, Sr. Program Manager

In February, the Rim of the Valley Corridor Preservation Act, sponsored by Rep. Adam Schiff (CA-28th), was passed by the House of Representatives as part of a package of public lands

Protecting America's Wilderness Act (H.R. 2546) marks a significant milestone in NPCA's multi-year campaign to expand the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

bill called the Protecting America's Wilderness Act (H.R. 2546). This legislation marks a significant milestone in NPCA's multi-year campaign to expand the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and was lauded by conservation leaders throughout the region.

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Mine Owners Use Stale Science

By Chris Clarke, Associate Director, California Desert Program

When legislators created Mojave National Preserve in 1994, they left a great big hole in it, the Castle Mountains, site of a large Viceroy Gold Corporation mine near the Nevada state line. In 2004, low gold prices prompted Viceroy's owners to stop production; the mine has been quiet ever since. Four years ago, President Obama took steps to fill that hole in Mojave by designating much of the land surrounding the mine as Castle Mountains National Monument. The land under the mine itself remains under the Bureau of Land Management's oversight.

Since the Monument was designated gold prices have bounced back, and the current mine owners want to restart production. The Bureau of Land Management has approved the company's proposal, including its plan to expand the mine's deadly cyanide heap leach field. But this approval hinges on environmental studies conducted more than 20 years ago.

We know things have changed in the Castle Mountains. Aside from the 2016 monument designation, there are new wilderness areas surrounding the Viceroy mine on the Nevada side of the line. Area wildlife that would be disturbed by renewed mining include the desert bighorn sheep, the local population of which has recently suffered a pneumonia

epidemic. In addition, climate change is intensifying droughts throughout the Southwest, potentially limiting the groundwater the mine would pump for daily operations.



We cannot greenlight Viceroy's Castle Mountain operation based on outdated science. The state of California must weigh in before the mine can reopen.

NPCA has joined with other groups to urge the state to require more study of the Viceroy mine's likely effects on this precious desert ecosystem. We will keep you apprised of our progress in future updates.

Top: The Simi Hills, in the Rim of the Valley, which took one step closer to becoming a reality in February. ©Tom Gamache **Above:** Part of the Viceroy Mine near Mojave National Preserve ©Chris Clarke | NPCA

FIELD REPORT

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LETTER FROM THE SR. REGIONAL DIRECTOR

By Ron Sundergill,
Senior Regional Director

As I write this, the world is grappling with the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact on our country has been severe. During this unprecedented time, I am thinking about all of you, and hope that everyone is healthy and safe.

I find it particularly distressing that, in the midst of this public health emergency, the Trump administration has continued to attack our fragile national parks. In recent weeks, the Department of Interior has moved forward with regulatory actions that would harm our park system. These include allowing e-bikes in the parks, enabling oil and gas drilling near Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks, and moving forward with the construction of an Alaska access road for international mining in an area surrounded on three sides by pristine national parklands.



NPCA forcefully opposes these propositions and will continue to mobilize our supporters to speak up on the parks' behalf. We want to ensure that when we are able to return to the parks, they are still as unspoiled and protected as they deserve to be.

"Millions of Americans' lives are being upended by this public health crisis," said Kristen Brengel, NPCA's vice president for Government Affairs. "Now

is not the time for the Interior Department to rush to decisions, without the opportunity for full public engagement, on issues that could impact the safety of our people and public lands."

Amen!

Thank you for your support of NPCA, and please stay safe during this perilous time.

Above: Ron Sundergill

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"It is critical legislation for all LA County residents and for the health and well-being of future generations," said Laurene Weste, a Santa Clarita city council member and leading Rim of the Valley advocate. "This legislation protects our wildlife corridors and helps to preserve our clean air and clean water resources."

The legislation must now be taken up in the Senate, where it will be championed by Sens. Kamala Harris and Dianne Feinstein. Although movement in the Senate likely faces an extended timeline as the body rightly focuses on addressing the coronavirus pandemic, we are now one step closer to giving the Los Angeles region the national park lands it deserves.

Below: The Rim of the Valley was part of a House package included several California public lands bills.



Honoring Avi Kwa Ame (Spirit Mountain)



By Neal Desai, Sr. Director of Field Operations

In southern Nevada, a new opportunity exists to protect some of the most visually stunning, diverse and culturally significant public lands in the entire Mojave Desert. NPCA is working with the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe and other conservation advocates to establish the Avi Kwa Ame National Monument to permanently protect these treasured lands for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Avi Kwa Ame is the Mojave name for Spirit Mountain, which is located within the boundary of the proposed monument

and is sacred to Native American tribes in the region.

The proposed monument would cover the area between Mojave National Preserve and Lake Mead National Recreation Area, connecting the landscape of the California desert with that of the Colorado River.

These lands feature dramatic peaks, ancient Joshua tree forests, and rich cultural history, including rock art.

NPCA, the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe and others are urging Nevada's congressional delegation to introduce legislation establishing this monument.

[Avi Kwa Ame National Monument] features dramatic peaks, ancient Joshua tree forests, and rich cultural history, including rock art.



In His Own Words | An Advocate Story

By Erick Andino, U.S Navy Veteran

My name is Erick Andino, I am the 1st generation of my family to be both born here in the U.S as well as served in the military. I was a medic in the U.S Navy for 8 years and got out in 2009. Like some veterans I was lost after my service. The uniform was off and I had no mission. I struggled with a loss of identity and depression, but through a series of events I was introduced and joined a veteran organization called The Mission Continues which helped me by giving me a sense of purpose by giving back to my community through volunteer work along with an awesome team composed of both veterans and motivated civilians, which then introduced me to NPCA through a clean-up mission we did in Death Valley back in 2019 cleaning up the dry camps

around Eureka Sand Dunes. Now four cleanups later from the dry desert of Death Valley to the enormous Sequoia trees up in Sequoia National Park with NPCA and NPS, I am grateful for the opportunities given to me like being able to use my photography to try my best to capture the essence our events and even being chosen to have some

of my images published by NPCA for their annual report. I am grateful to Laura Navar for her efforts of including our organization in some clean up missions at these amazing beautiful places that have been a first for me to witness the beauty and magic of our National Parks with my own eyes and through the lens of my camera. Her passion

and love for our National Parks is as clear as day and her positive energy is of a contagious nature. I now take it as my personal mission to do my part to ensure our parks remain in balanced order for our future generations to enjoy these breathtaking National Parks as we have.



Above: Erick jumps with joy at Joshua Tree from the happiness the desert brings him ©Erick Andino

Giving Mountain Lions a Fighting Chance

By Dennis Arguelles, Sr. Program Manager

Last year, we highlighted our efforts to protect wildlife in and around the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. These efforts include our “Rim of the Valley” campaign to expand the park boundaries and protect surrounding landscapes, our support for Ventura County wildlife corridor ordinances, and ending the indiscriminate use of rodenticide poisons in the State. One of the species we’re most at risk of losing is also the one that often serves as the ambassador for these efforts: the mountain lion.

Though this wild cat has roamed California since before the arrival of humans, subpopulations in Southern California and along the state’s central coast have faced mounting challenges in recent years. The primary threats stem from habitat loss and fragmentation (resulting in-breeding), intra-species conflict and vehicle collisions.

Now, this iconic species may get a much-needed boost from the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). In April, the State Fish and Game Commission, which oversees the Fish and Wildlife Department, considered a petition by the Center for Biological Diversity requesting that these subpopulations be



listed under the CESA. Such an action would improve the cat’s chance of survival by improving habitat connectivity and preserving natural wildlife corridors.

[The mountain lion] may get a much-needed boost from the California Endangered Species Act.

After analyzing the petition, the Department found ample data to support the listing, including extensive research by the National Park Service. In a unanimous decision, the Commission approved extending protections to these sub-populations and launched a one-year study period to determine if they will ultimately be listed as endangered. NPCA supported the listing and encouraged supporters and allies to submit public comment in advance of the meeting. We will continue to monitor the actions of the Commission and Department in our ongoing efforts to protect the Santa Monica Mountains and California’s majestic mountain lions.

Top Left: Tragedy on the highway: listing under the California Endangered Species Act gives mountain lions hope for survival. Photo courtesy of NPS. **Left:** Genetic isolation has led to inbred kittens in the Santa Monica Mountains, like this one discovered in 2018. ©NPS



From Litigation to Legislation, NPCA's Work to Prevent Fracking Near California's Parks

By Mark Rose, Sierra Nevada Program Manager

Ill-sited oil and gas development poses one of the biggest threats to national parks across the country. Recently, California became a new epicenter for development when the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) finalized a plan to open over 1 million acres of federal land and mineral estate in central California to new oil and gas hydraulic fracturing (fracking) leases. Alongside harms to local communities in the Central Valley—which already face some of the worst air pollution in the nation—this plan could result in dirtier air for nearby park units, such as Sequoia, Kings Canyon and Yosemite National Parks, as well as for numerous other national monuments, forests and recreation areas.



NPCA joined with numerous national and local groups to file a lawsuit responding to this reckless proposal and challenging the adequacy of BLM's final plan. Ultimately, we seek an injunction to stop new leases. NPCA is also stepping up to support legislation (H.R. 5936), introduced by Rep. Salud Carbajal (CA-24th), which would require additional environmental review prior to any leasing actions.

If you'd like to help protect California's parks and communities, reach out to your members of Congress and ask them to co-sponsor California's Land Preservation and Protection Act.

Left: Sequoia is one of several parks threatened by BLM's fracking plan. ©SimonDannhauer | Dreamstime **Above:** Sequoia National Park ©Kelsey Mcquisten | Dreamstime



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Travel with Us

By Jared Dial, Travel Program Manager

Join us on one of our small-group educational land adventures or small-ship cruises and experience the very best of our national parks. Land tours are limited to just 16 participants plus two guides and include meals, accommodations and on-trip transportation. Find details at npca.org/trips.

