

Yosemite Pilgrimage

By Dennis Arguelles

This year marked the 10th anniversary of the Yosemite Pilgrimage and Sing Peak Backpack, an event celebrating the significant contributions of Chinese Americans to both Yosemite and our National Park System. One of the event's many heroes is Tie Sing, the innovative backcountry chef who accompanied the 1915 Mather Mountain Party, and without whom we might not have a National Park Service.

However, this year a wildfire erupted at the location of the planned activities. Then, just as that fire seemed to be contained, a larger, more intense fire emerged just west of the park, threatening homes and forests and wreaking havoc on the region's air quality.

Like Tie Sing, event organizers including the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, the National Park Service and NPCA jumped into action and used all of the innovation, creativity and perseverance they could muster. Within two weeks, accommodations and activities for nearly 80 participants were moved to the eastern Sierra. Combined with good weather, heroic firefighting efforts and perhaps the spirit of Tie Sing, the event went off with limited disruption and attrition.

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NPCA Settlement Stops Oil and Gas Leasing on Over 1 Million Acres in California

By Mark Rose

This August, in a huge victory for California's national parks and communities, NPCA and our allies reached a legal settlement with the Biden administration to suspend federal oil and gas leasing across more than 1.2 million acres in Central California. The agreement also prevents drilling from occurring on over 4,000 acres already leased near Bakersfield, California, which ranks amongst the most polluted cities in the nation for air quality. This win comes after years of collective advocacy and a drawn-out federal appeal to stop this leasing management plan, which was hastily forced through by the Bureau of Land Management's Bakersfield Field Office under the prior administration.

NPCA became involved in the effort back in 2018 after learning that this massive leasing plan would result in significant additional air and climate impacts in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. Sequoia and Kings Canyon already face climate change-driven drought, high temperatures and annual wildfires, as well as the worst air quality of any U.S. national parks. Dirty haze pollution in Sequoia and Kings Canyon cuts down an average of 90 miles of visibility and harms the health and wellbeing of park visitors, employees and the region's ecosystems and wildlife.



Moreover, California's San Joaquin Valley, where most of the leasing would have occurred, ranks among the most polluted air basins in the U.S. thanks in part to the extensive oil and gas leasing that has occurred in the region dating back decades. New drilling in the San Joaquin Valley would have contributed substantial new levels of air, climate and water pollution in a region already facing abundant environmental impacts that far too often are disproportionately borne by some of its most vulnerable residents.

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Top: Wooden footbridge over a river in Kings Canyon National Park ©Mike93262 | Dreamstime
Above: Central California oil field highway ©Trekandshoot | Dreamstime

FIELD REPORT

Winter 2022-23

Pacific Regional Office Staff

350 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza • Suite 1100
Oakland, CA 94612
415.728.0839

Ron Sundergill
SR. REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Neal Desai
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF FIELD OPERATIONS

Vacant
REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

Kati Schmidt
ASSOC. DIRECTOR OF MEDIA RELATIONS

Liam Kelley
SR. COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Nicole Spooner
SR. COORDINATOR

Vacant
LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

Julie Hogan
SR. DIRECTOR, FOUNDATION RELATIONS

California Desert Field Office

61325 29 Palms Highway • Suite D
Joshua Tree, CA 92252
760.600.0038

Chris Clarke
RUTH HAMMETT ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Lucas Basulto
PROGRAM MANAGER

Los Angeles Field Office

767 N. Hill Street • Suite 302
Los Angeles, CA 90012
213.482.0642

Dennis Arguelles
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA DIRECTOR

Sally Garcia
OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

Sierra Nevada Field Office

Sacramento, CA
559.385.6148

Mark Rose
PROGRAM MANAGER

NPCA Membership Services Team

800.628.7275 • npca@npca.org



EST 1919

npca.org

MESSAGE FROM THE SENIOR REGIONAL DIRECTOR

By Ron Sundergill

Social change is often brought about when people set a course that leads to that change. The self-introduction in this Field Report by our new employee, Luke Basulto, reminds me of our efforts to bring about social change here in our own organization. The social change we brought about was very intentional. We started over 15 years ago to create a more diverse staff. We developed a “Ladder to Diversity” for the Pacific Region of NPCA, working with our then consultant, Jack Shu.

The diversity ladder plan led to various new programmatic efforts, including a fun youth engagement project called Tortoises Through the Lens that was led by David Lamfrom, who is now the NPCA Vice President of Regional Programs. One of the participants in that program was a young Luke Basulto,



who became a strong leader at an early age and even travelled to Washington, D.C., to meet and lobby Sen. Dianne Feinstein on California desert issues.

Luke is not the only staff member who came to us through these intentional outreach programs. I am proud of these innovative efforts that have allowed us to engage and then cultivate young people, giving them the opportunity to grow and to eventually find a great job working at NPCA. As Luke says in his article, “I like to think that I am a part of a growing, long overdue change in the conservation field.” He is totally on target with that sentiment. And we need to keep moving in that direction. Creating a movement to protect parks and to create new inclusive national parks must become relevant for all people.

Above: Ron Sundergill

Luke Basulto Joins NPCA Pacific Staff

By Luke Basulto

Please allow me to introduce myself; my name is Luke! I am the California Desert Program Manager and the newest member of NPCA’s Pacific Region Team. I was born and raised in the California desert in Barstow, California, and the San Gabriel Valley near Los Angeles. I have always considered Los Angeles my second home. My ancestry in the city dates to the first businesses on Olvera Street (LA’s oldest road), and my heritage is deeply rooted in the Chicano culture of East Los Angeles.

Both places have my heart, but the desert has my soul. Desert protection has always been a constant in my family. From around the age of 8, my parents would take me to any desert restoration event they could to do things like plant native grasses after a fire or repair illegal off-road vehicle routes, among other things. It was this upbringing that led to me choosing the career path I did. I have over 22 years of lived experience in the California desert and involvement in desert issues. Since the age of 16, I have worked as a field person for the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife and a few desert-based nonprofits in both a voluntary and paid capacity. I’ve worked with some of the deserts’ most imperiled



species, like the Mojave Desert tortoise and Mojave tui chub, and even got my introduction to desert advocacy with NPCA at the age of 17, thanks to then Program Manager David Lamfrom.

I like to think that I am a part of a growing, long overdue change in the conservation field: young people of color that don’t fit the old stereotype of “conservationist” coming into roles like mine with new perspectives, life experiences and ideas. I am the product of someone taking a chance on me. Sometimes, that is all it takes. My passion and purpose lie with doing the same for others and connecting them to the desert so that they fall in love with it as I did, because people protect the things that they love.

Above: Zion National Park, 2021 ©Luke Basulto

NPCA Settlement Stops Oil and Gas Leasing on Over 1 Million Acres in California



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NPCA helped lead opposition to this poorly considered proposal from the very beginning, submitting thousands of comments from our members and supporters, speaking at hearings and working with the media to shed light on this harmful plan. All said, a coalition of more than 35,000 individuals and 85 community and advocacy groups spoke

out against this leasing plan before it was pushed through. Once finalized, NPCA kept fighting, joining a broad coalition of environmental justice, public health, conservation and business groups, and the state of California in filing lawsuits to challenge the management plan, citing the bureau's failure to fully evaluate the significant harms this leasing would cause to communities and the environment.

As a result of this successful settlement, all new federal oil and gas leasing in California will likely be paused for the foreseeable future. Looking ahead, NPCA and our allies will continue to track and engage on this issue in an effort to prevent this or any future administrations from pursuing ill-advised federal oil and gas leasing projects in the region.

Above: Oil and gas fields near Bakersfield, California. ©Mark Rose

Camping Close to Home

By Sally Garcia

For many families in Los Angeles, their first exposure to the outdoors is their local community park. Whether that's for a birthday party, a quick walk or a carne asada, these experiences are important in building a connection with the outdoors. NPCA believes in working with local communities and meeting them where they are to build stronger and meaningful relationships. Because of this, NPCA sees the value that local parks can provide in developing the next generation of outdoor leaders and advocates.

In July, NPCA hosted a night of camping at a local heritage park, Rudy Ortega Sr. Park in the City of San Fernando, alongside Las Palmas Senior Citizen Center. For nearly all of the 13 families in attendance, this was their first time camping. Being able to provide these families with the opportunity to camp at a park in their own neighborhood

This was my family's first time camping ever! If we can camp at a park that's just around the corner from us, we can definitely camp at a National Park!

—Emerson Contreras, father of camping participant

allowed them to feel comfortable and safe without leaving home. The participants worked together to set up their tents as teams and even came up with their own group names. Discussions around the campfire included NPCA advocacy work, Leave No Trace principles and camping basics. Of

course, no camping trip would be complete without s'mores!

We also had the honor of having Tribal President Rudy Ortega Jr. of the Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians join us and give participants and staff an educational tour of the park, which includes a simulated traditional village, a Japanese tea house, a Mission-style plaza, a small amphitheater and the restoration of a historic water tower. Ortega's presence helped the participants feel more connected to a place with an abundance of history that they had only ever seen as the local park.

This camping trip was meant to serve as an introduction to experiencing the outdoors in a new way. Come November, we are inviting these families to join us for a night of camping at Joshua Tree National Park. We hope that these experiences help these families feel more comfortable in the outdoors and in their parks.

NPCA Travel Collection 2023

By Jared Dial

Our unique small-group tours are designed to give you exclusive experiences within the parks and special behind-the-scenes access to National Park Service staff, NPCA partners and other local specialists. Our goal is to offer NPCA members premium itineraries in educational travel in the places we know best: America's national parks.

Joshua Tree and Death Valley March 18-24, 2023

Explore Joshua Tree, Death Valley and three lesser-visited national park units: Sand to Snow National Monument, Mojave National Preserve and Manzanar National Historic Site.

Ancient Forests of the Olympic Peninsula June 20-26, 2023

Adventure through pristine beaches, crystal-blue lakes and ancient rain forests in Washington's Olympic Peninsula.

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Visit two of Alaska's most stunning national parks—Kenai Fjords and Lake Clark—and visit prime habitats to seek whales and bears, among other charismatic Alaskan wildlife, in some of North America's wildest places.

Acadia to Katahdin: Exploring Maine's Waterways, Woodlands and Wabanaki Cultural Heritage September 23-29, 2023

Uncover the beauty of Acadia National Park and the unmarred wilderness of Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument.

The National Parks of Hawai'i October 14-22, 2023 with Optional Guided Trip Extension October 22-24, 2023

Experience the cultural and natural beauty of the remote and scenic Hawaiian Islands on a curated tour through all eight national park units.

Wild California Escape: Channel Islands National Park Small Ship Cruise: November 4-8, 2023

Embark on an unprecedented five-day expedition into wildness and wellness in the beautifully isolated Channel Islands.

For more information, visit www.npca.org/trips or contact NPCA's Educational Travel Program at 1.800.628.7275 or travel@npca.org.



Top Right: Death Valley National Park ©Jared Dial **Middle:** Kayaker on Lake Crescent in Olympic National Park ©NPCA **Bottom:** Hiker in Alaska ©NPCA **Above:** Jordan Pond in Acadia National Park ©Shutterstock

Yosemite Pilgrimage

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After spending several days in the park exploring sites significant to Chinese American history, the group convened in the town of Lee Vining for a celebratory potluck, complete with a cooking demonstration by celebrity chef David Soohoo. Later, a group of 21 intrepid hikers departed on a two-night backpacking trip to Sing Peak, named to honor the pioneering chef. The group successfully summited the 10,000-foot peak, capping off a chaotic but rewarding pilgrimage for all who participated. Park Service Ranger Yenyen Chan, one of the principal organizers, was impressed that so many participants turned out despite the conditions leading up to the event. "It was heartwarming to see old friends and new friends gathering together to honor and celebrate the innumerable contributions made by Chinese workers who helped make Yosemite National Park what it is today," she said.

Right: 21-year veteran cook Tie Sing at Yosemite National Park in 1909 ©U.S. Geological Survey

Bottom Left: Nearly 80 participants turned out for the 2022 Yosemite Pilgrimage despite recent wildfire activity. ©O.C. Lee **Bottom Right:** Ranger Yenyen Chan leads hikers to the top of Sing Peak. ©D. Arguelles





PACIFIC REGIONAL OFFICE

350 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza
Suite 1100
Oakland, CA 94612

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The New LA Young Leaders Cohort

By Sally Garcia

NPCA values the strengths, experiences and knowledge young people can offer for the protection of our parks. As an effort to engage young advocates and volunteers alike, the Los Angeles Young Leaders Council was created. These young professionals and park lovers volunteer to engage people from urban areas, immigrant communities and communities of color. Since 2018, young leaders have had the opportunity to lobby in Washington, D.C, and Sacramento, write op-eds and letters to the editor, lead hikes, and some have even gone on to become NPCA employees.

During the summer, NPCA opened applications for a new cohort of young leaders. While it was tough to narrow down the applicants, the L.A. field office now has nine new young leaders from all over Los Angeles and two returning young leaders from the previous cohort. Members of the 2022-2023 cohort are well versed advocates in their own communities. We have members who work in policy, education, botanical

gardens, zero waste management, the Los Angeles Zoo and more. The varied set of skills they bring will make for a very diverse and engaging cohort.

In September, we had our first in-person meeting at which members shared their

goals and expectations for this new cohort. All of the members are excited to hit the ground running and learn all there is to become more engaging park advocates for themselves and their communities. Look out for this new cohort as many great things are to come.



Right: Meet the new 2022-2023 LA Young Leaders. ©Sally Garcia



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