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FIELDREPORT

Pacific Region • Spring | Summer 2023



From Fires to Floods

A Challenging Recovery Ahead for Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

By Mark Rose

Between 2020 and 2021, the Castle and KNP Complex fires burned through tens of thousands of acres in the drought-stricken forests in and around Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. These climate-driven wildfires spread quickly, closing park gates for extended periods and contributing to the potential loss of between 13 to 19% of the world's mature giant sequoias. In the months since these devastating fires, the National Park Service has been busy trying to recover and restore impacted areas, while also working to make the parks' remaining overgrown forests more resilient to future wildfires.

This effort began last year with the parks implementing emergency fire mitigation measures to reduce future fire risks by burning or removing decades worth of downed trees, branches and other fuels in multiple sequoia groves. The parks also aim to start work this year to begin removing thousands of roadside "hazard" trees that were left dead or dying after the fires and pose threats to park visitors and property. Simultaneously, the parks have introduced an ambitious plan to replant sequoia saplings in groves that burned so severely that new trees are unlikely to sprout without human intervention.

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Victory! Avi Kwa Ame Permanently Protected as Our Newest National Monument

By Neal Desai

The National Parks Conservation Association was thrilled to see President Joe Biden establish the 506,814 acre Avi Kwa Ame National Monument in March 2023, following years of advocacy. NPCA staff were in attendance at the White House Conservation in Action Summit where the designation took place, and celebrated the protection of some of the most visually stunning, biologically diverse and culturally significant lands in the Mojave Desert.

Avi Kwa Ame (pronounced (Ah-VEE kwa-meh) is the Mojave name for Spirit Mountain and the surrounding landscape, and is sacred to 12 tribes, including the 10 Yuman-speaking tribes who pay reverence to Spirit Mountain as the center of their creation. The monument is located in southern Nevada and includes lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service.

For decades, Tribes called on the U.S. Government for permanent protection and, in recent years, worked to defend the lands from proposals for industrial development projects. Given the onslaught of development proposals, NPCA worked with the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe in 2019 to develop the Avi Kwa Ame National Monument proposal as a way to proactively and permanently



protect these lands. NPCA helped organize a diverse coalition, ranging from gateway communities to the outdoor recreation industry, to build momentum. The coalition lobbied members of Congress and took reporters into the field (leading to front page stories in the Los Angeles Times and The Washington Post). In Washington, D.C., U.S. Rep Dina Titus (D-Nev.) led efforts in Congress to build support by introducing legislation and writing letters to President Biden.

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Top: Summit area of Spirit Mountain ©Stan Shebs **Above:** Highland Range at sunset ©Justin McAfee

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MESSAGE FROM THE SENIOR REGIONAL DIRECTOR

By Ron Sundergill

Vision and tenacity. That is what it took to make the creation of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument a reality. NPCA and its wonderful staff, in alliance with community-based organizations and tribes, has consistently produced results such as this.

In the case of Avi Kwa Ame, there is a specific staff member whom I want to mention.

I want to praise the work of Neal Desai. Neal is the best strategist I have ever worked with during my 45 years of working in various conservation and social justice organizations. And his vision and his tenacity were critical to this success.

For any reader of the Field Report who donates funds to NPCA, rest assured that



you made a good investment because you can count on people like Neal to make a critical difference. This is why one of our members in California recently established an endowed staff position in our California Desert office, donating well over \$1 million dollars to make it happen.

I don't usually use this space to ask you for a donation, but I'm making an exception this one time.

If you agree with my assessment of our effectiveness in getting the job done through vision and tenacity, then please consider donating in honor of Neal Desai or another hardworking NPCA staff member in the Pacific Region. It's a good investment that will live on beyond your years.

Above: Ron Sundergill

Victory! Avi Kwa Ame Permanently Protected as Our Newest National Monument

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On a larger scale, the Avi Kwa Ame National Monument completes landscape connections between existing national parks and protected lands in the region, including Lake Mead National Recreation Area in Nevada, along with Mojave National Preserve and Death Valley and Joshua Tree national parks. When considered as a whole, this vast and connected network represents one of the greatest desert conservation reserves in the world.

Kwa Ame National Monument honors the Native Americans who have long called for preservation of their cultural heritage.

The establishment of Avi Kwa Ame moves our country closer to achieving the global goal and Biden administration's America the Beautiful initiative to preserve lands and waterways. Importantly, it will serve as a significant contribution toward fighting climate change by protecting sufficient land acreage, plus elevational gradients, necessary to allow plants and animals the opportunity to adapt.



In response to the designation, NPCA President and CEO Theresa Pierno stated, "President Biden's establishment of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument is a testimony to protecting and preserving lands with not just our children and grandchildren in mind but for generations to come. Avi Kwa Ame National Monument honors the Native Americans who have long called for preservation of their cultural heritage, and we are grateful to the president for taking historic action. Amid the worsening climate crisis, the long-term health of Joshua trees and other plants and wildlife in this region is inextricably linked to conserving critical lands. NPCA has been privileged to work with Tribes and partners in Nevada and beyond for more than a decade in support of protecting this irreplaceable landscape."

Above: Joshua tree forest in Avi Kwa Ame ©Justin McAfee

CADIZ UPDATE

By Chris Clarke

For more than a decade, NPCA has led the campaign to keep the Cadiz corporation from pumping billions of gallons of groundwater each year from the driest part of the Mojave Desert. In the past few years our coalition has kept Cadiz from carrying out its plan to drain the desert for profit. But even as Cadiz finds its path

Countering Cadiz's Deceptive Claims

blocked by environmental protection rules and successful litigation, the company has launched a PR strategy to greenwash its image in the public mind. And we're campaigning to keep this deceptive strategy from working.

A bit of background: Cadiz owns a large piece of private land surrounded by the 1.6 million-acre Mojave Trails National Monument. Underneath this land is an

aquifer—a vast underground “reservoir”—holding water that was naturally stored there during the Ice Ages. Peer-reviewed scientific studies have proven that this aquifer feeds at least five desert springs in Mojave Trails. Those springs are critical water sources for wildlife and hold immense cultural value to desert tribes. Cadiz claims the aquifer gets recharged quickly enough by rain and snow that its pumping won't harm those springs. But every independent scientist or scientific agency that's studied the aquifer says Cadiz's claims are wildly optimistic.

Cadiz has tried to counter the scientific consensus by sponsoring deceptive PR-based studies run by friendly consultants that provide results more to the company's liking. Last year, NPCA was able to block the most troubling of these fake studies by bringing our case to the Southern California water agency that was conducting it.

Five desert springs in Mojave Trails are critical water sources for wildlife and hold immense cultural value to desert tribes.



Above: Bonanza Spring, the largest water source in 1000 square miles of the Mojave Desert, which Cadiz would damage beyond repair ©Michael Gordon **Below:** Wild desert primrose carpet the sand at Cadiz Dunes in the Mojave Trails National Monument ©BLM Photo | Alamy



Blocked on the legal and scientific fronts, Cadiz is pivoting to a fear-based strategy. Taking advantage of the drought and the looming collapse of the Colorado River, Cadiz is reaching out to frontline communities claiming to offer a source of reliable, safe, affordable drinking water. It's a compelling argument, but it's wrong on every count. The Municipal Water District of Orange County, a pro-Cadiz agency, calculated that Cadiz would be the most expensive new source of water currently available to its customers. Cadiz would be selling water containing 800 times the amount of carcinogenic chromium 6 set by California as its public health goal for chromium in drinking water. And Cadiz's supply would only be as reliable as its aquifer recharge claims. When those claims prove false and the desert's springs dry up, communities relying on that water will be left high and dry as well.

Fortunately, a growing number of organizations and communities are seeing through Cadiz's PR strategy. We at NPCA look forward to working in coalition with those communities to expose Cadiz's claims for what they are. We cannot allow Cadiz to play divide and conquer with frontline communities in order to advance its own destructive project.

Protecting Asian and Pacific Islander American Heritage in our National Parks



By Dennis Arguelles

Each May, Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month celebrates the community's history, culture and contributions. NPCA's Pacific Region is fortunate to be the home of numerous parks and sites that tell their important stories, however, several of these sites face serious threats, and much work is needed to tell a more accurate and comprehensive narrative of the experiences of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Here are just a few of the issues NPCA is monitoring in the Pacific Region:

The Tule Lake National Monument commemorates the unjust incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, the overwhelming majority of whom were American citizens. It received its national monument designation in 2008, only to be threatened by the proposed construction of an airport fence that will bisect the property, reduce access and threaten irreplaceable cultural and archaeological resources. NPCA is supporting the work of the Tule Lake Committee to push back against the fence and preserve the site's integrity.

Like Tule Lake, Honouliuli National Historical Site tells the story of Japanese American incarceration and martial law in Hawaii in the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor. While public access to the park is still in the planning stages, the County of Honolulu is currently considering an area near the site for the location of a landfill. NPCA opposes locating such a facility near the park and is closely monitoring the County of Honolulu's plans in relation to the new landfill.

Kaloko-Honokohau, on the Big Island of Hawaii, is a place of cultural and spiritual significance and one of the few national park units dedicated to preserving aspects of Native Hawaiian heritage, particularly ancient fishponds and aquaculture practices passed down by generations of local families. Today, the freshwater aquifer that feeds these coastal fishponds and sustains the salinity level needed to keep them productive is threatened by excessive withdrawals to support residential and commercial development in the region. NPCA opposes the excessive withdrawals and has followed this issue for several years, including engaging consultants from the local community.

Despite these threats, NPCA also realized a recent victory, namely the opening of the Chinese Laundry Building in Yosemite, an exhibit that preserves and interprets the critical role played by Chinese Americans in the early days of the park and in the founding of the National Park Service. Currently, a proposal to expand the Cesar Chavez National Monument will help tell the broader story of the struggle for fair wages and better working conditions in the fields of California and Arizona, including the critical role played by Filipino farmworkers in the founding of the United Farmworkers Union (UFW). The Pacific Region plays an outsized role in the preservation of Asian American and Pacific Islander heritage, and NPCA will continue its efforts to ensure the community's story remains a vital part of our national parks' narratives.

Above: The fish ponds at Kaloko Honokohau NHS are threatened by excessive water extraction. ©David Pillow | Dreamstime

New National Park Could Tell the Story of a Unique Island Ecosystem and Culture

By Dennis Arguelles

National parks exist across the Pacific, including Hawaii, Guam and American Samoa, yet few of these sites focus on the preservation of indigenous cultures and histories. Today, a proposed park in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands would help protect a unique but vanishing ecosystem and the history of the Chamorro people, the original inhabitants of the Marianas and Guam.

The National Park Service (NPS) is near the completion of a Special Resource Study on Rota, the southernmost island in the Marianas chain. Among the resources they have identified are pristine limestone forests, one of the most diverse natural plant communities in the region, mostly lost to development and invasive species on other islands. Also identified are archaeological sites related to the local Chamorro people. In fact, NPS found at least 26 sites, including rock art caves, rock shelters, artifact scatters and the remnants of traditional stone villages, rising to the level of national significance. NPS describes the resources as unmatched in terms of integrity, concentration and diversity, and with the potential to yield important information on Chamorro history and culture.

NPCA supports the establishment of a park that contributes to a better understanding our nation's diverse cultural heritage, and we look forward to working with the people of Rota and the Northern Marianas after the NPS' final recommendations are released later this year.



Above: Ancient quarries on the island of Rota provided building materials for Chamorro villages. Courtesy of the Department of Interior.

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. Here are the remaining trips for this year:



**Bears, Whales and Glaciers:
Lake Clark and Kenai Fjords
National Parks
July 15-22, 2023**

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.

**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.

Above: Top of Cadillac Mountain, Acadia National Park ©Alexey Stiop | Shutterstock
Bottom: Avalon Harbor in the Channel Islands ©Lindblad Expeditions





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Throughout the planning and implementation of these various projects, NPCA is continuing to engage with the Park Service to ensure any potential impacts to Sequoia and Kings Canyon's abundant natural and cultural resources are fully considered. Moreover, to help the parks recover, NPCA successfully lobbied Congress to pass a disaster relief bill that included \$10 million for Sequoia and Kings Canyon. This funding is in addition to the millions the parks have received as part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act. Looking ahead, to ensure the parks will be able to continue with this important work, NPCA is pushing Sequoia and Kings Canyon to quickly move ahead with a comprehensive fire management plan to provide the parks with a clear path to proceed with future mitigation efforts.

Unfortunately, this winter, just as the parks were starting to bounce back after the recent fires, they were hit by another climate disaster. Record-breaking amounts of snow alongside



series of atmospheric river rain events inundated the entire southern Sierra Nevada region. All the moisture from these storms resulted in a string of flooding events that caused numerous mudslides, rockfalls and washouts which swept away sections of roads, campgrounds and other infrastructure throughout both parks. The excessive road damage caused by these storms closed both

parks for weeks, and it will likely take until 2024 before all the roads in the parks are fully reopened. The recovery ahead will be long and challenging, but NPCA will continue doing what we can to ensure the parks have the funding and resources they need to rebound as quickly as possible.

Right: Firefighter suppressing a wildfire in Kings Canyon National Park. ©Wellesenterprises | Dreamstime



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