



FIELDREPORT

Pacific Region | Winter 2015



A Monumental Meeting in the California Desert!

More than 1,000 people attended an October 13 meeting facilitated by Sen. Dianne Feinstein to discuss Feinstein's request to President Obama to create three new national monuments in the California desert; Sand to Snow, Mojave Trails, and Castle Mountains.

These monuments would encompass 1.5 million acres of federal land. Those who attended the meeting represented interests as diverse as conservation, off-roading, unions, schools, mining, and faith based groups.

Feinstein has encouraged the President to use the Antiquities Act to create these new monuments, which three out of four of those attending the meeting supported.

NPCA has been deeply engaged in this effort, educating stakeholders in the communities about the effort to protect these places and encouraging them to attend the public meeting. Staff also worked with the local business community, providing on-site briefings about the proposed monuments, gaining the support of more than 40 businesses in the Morongo Basin, representing the full span of the community including a

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Victory in the Desert

Over the past four years, NPCA has worked with local communities to oppose the Cadiz Water Project, which seeks to pump between one and two million acre feet of water out of a fragile desert aquifer. The project would harm the seeps and springs of the Mojave National Preserve and other groundwater resources. We recently secured a major victory when the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) opposed Cadiz Inc. on a critical issue. The Cadiz Inc. has consistently tried to skirt the law of the land by attempting to exploit a legal loophole that would have allowed them to bypass a federal environmental review if their water conveyance pipeline, which runs along the Arizona and California Railroad, "Furthered" the railroad's purpose. The company has tried to wriggle around the federal environmental review because that process would shed light on the project's environmental harm. Incredibly, the Cadiz Inc. continues to argue that they are "Furthering" the purpose of the railroad by providing water to wash dirty freight train cars, put fire hydrants along the train tracks and even develop a tourist steam train to carry tourists through some of California's most remote country!

The federal environmental review will serve an incredibly important purpose: to shed light on the Cadiz project's flawed scientific assumptions. For example, independent scientists and the National Park Service believe that the rate of recharge for the aquifer Cadiz wants to pump is far lower than what the international company states. The federal review could also engage the United States Geologic Survey, an agency that is the gold standard in conducting impartial and accurate hydrologic studies.

The BLM's ruling is a huge milestone and will help to keep the aquifer's water in the desert where it belongs.



Top: Train Station in Mojave National Preserve ©Zack Frank | Shutterstock.com **Above:** Spring wildflowers and railroad tracks in the Mojave Desert, California ©Joseph Sohm | Shutterstock

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LETTER FROM THE SENIOR REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Is Solar Power Good?

The answer is, of course, yes, but after experiencing the implementation of both solar and wind energy on a grand scale in the deserts of California and Nevada, my positive attitude toward renewable energy, both wind and solar, has been challenged.



It was not always this way for me. At one point I enthusiastically supported all solar and wind energy facilities because of the need to move away from fossil fuel based energy use.

Years ago, as a college student in Maryland, I helped to organize a solar house tour, showcasing homes that used solar radiation to heat water and homes that used the sun's rays to efficiently keep rooms toasty on winter days. Later in life, I went to work for a national non-profit environmental organization, serving as their Capitol Hill lobbyist. For four years, I lobbied for renewable energy production tax credits to advance solar and wind electricity production.

I am proud of the work I did in Maryland and Washington D.C. to advance the renewable energy cause, but since moving back to California and working for NPCA, my opinion on the renewables industry has shifted.

In this issue of the Field Report and in previous issues, you can read about solar and wind energy plants that are being proposed on public lands near national

park sites that would significantly harm the resources, especially wildlife, within those parks. The Soda Mountain Solar proposal, which we oppose, is one such example of a solar plant that would harm wildlife and other important resources.

Unfortunately, the industry has been somewhat lackadaisical about where they propose these

large power plants, and the federal government has sometimes been complicit by giving approval to poorly sited facilities. We have been able to block harmful projects from moving ahead, but not in all cases. Hopefully, the Department of Interior will turn down the Soda Mountain Solar project.

Still, NPCA strongly supports renewables. In fact we advocated this year for legislation that increased the percentage of electricity to be generated by renewables to 50 percent by 2030 in California. We ask only that the power plants not be placed in environmentally or culturally sensitive areas, with a particular focus on better siting practices in our fragile and beautiful deserts in California and Nevada.

Ron Sundergill

Below: Solar Power in the Mojave Desert
©Rebel Angel Dylan | IStock.com



Returning the Eagle Mountain Lands to Joshua Tree National Park

More than 10,000 NPCA activists have sent a clear message to the Department of Interior: return land once removed from Joshua Tree back to the national park.

Most people know that Congress can add land to national park units. But did you know Congress can remove land from national park units, too? In 1950 Congress removed more than 200,000 acres from Joshua Tree National Monument for mineral exploration during a time when our nation needed iron ore. An area in the north of the monument called the “Old Dale District” was removed

as were lands in the south referred to as the “Eagle Mountain” lands. The Eagle Mountain lands are home to the park’s most genetically diverse population of bighorn sheep, golden eagles and desert tortoise. The Eagle Mountain lands became the site of the Kaiser Mine, which provided iron ore to be processed in the city of Fontana until the mine closed in 1983. Since the late 1990s, NPCA has fought numerous ill-conceived projects slated for this area, most notably the Eagle Mountain landfill. It would have been the largest landfill in the United States, surrounded on three sides by Joshua Tree National Park wilderness.

We now have a historic opportunity to return the majority of the Eagle Mountain lands to Joshua Tree National Park. The Joshua Tree National Park Eagle Mountain Boundary Study is currently underway. In addition to the comments of support from NPCA activists, NPCA staff based in the California desert generated a letter signed by 50 businesses in the community who understand that returning these lands to the park would further support a healthy local economy.

Below: Eagle Mountain ©Michael Gordon



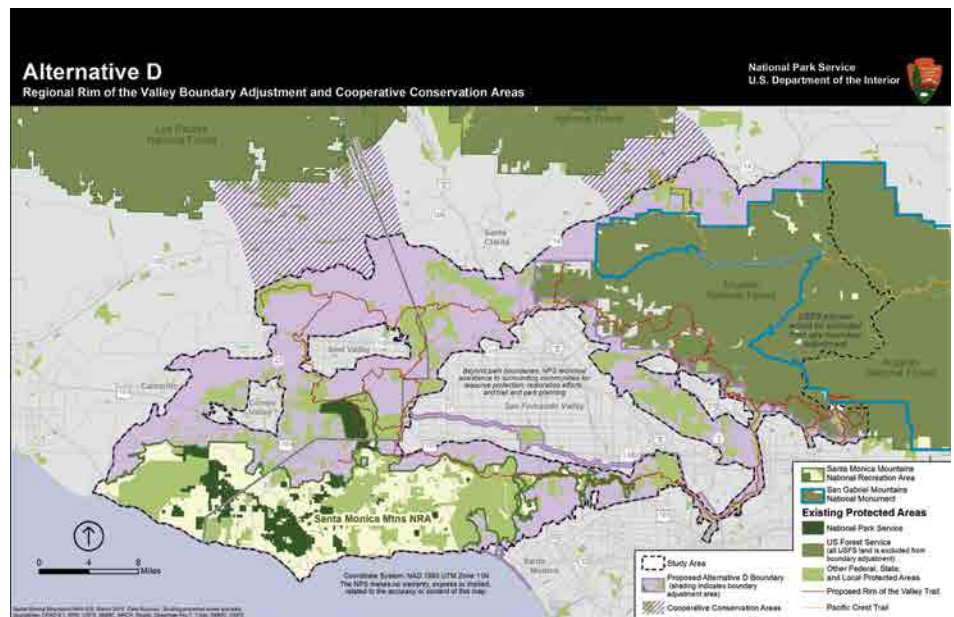
Mobilizing To Create New Park Opportunities in Los Angeles

NPCA’s campaign to expand Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area saw some progress this past summer, with the release of the National Park Service’s draft Rim of the Valley Special Corridor Resource Study. The study recommended “Alternative C”, which would more than double the park by adding 173,000 acres of native habitat, wildlife corridors, strategic watersheds, and cultural sites that capture key elements of Los Angeles’ history. The study also provided “Alternative D”, which identified up to 313,000 additional acres and quickly earned widespread support from local municipalities, community groups and individual citizens.

During the 60-day comment period that followed the release, NPCA mobilized members of the Rim of the Valley Coalition to submit comments in support of its campaign to expand the park.

NPS’s final report is expected to be submitted to Congress later this year. NPCA and the Coalition are working with Rep. Adam Schiff to win Congressional approval for what stands to be one of the region’s most significant conservation legacies since the founding of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area in 1978.

“Alternative D”, identified up to 313,000 additional acres [for Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area], and quickly earned widespread support from local municipalities, community groups and individual citizens.



Above: The proposed Rim of the Valley would greatly expand the ability of the National Park Service to protect habitat and wildlife corridors outside and adjacent to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

Speaking Up for Our Parks: #FindYourVoice Launches in Los Angeles



NPCA launched Find Your Voice this spring, a new initiative to attract and inspire the next generation of advocates as we enter into the centennial year of the creation of our National Park System.

Los Angeles was the site of two Find Your Voice events, which helped to mobilize volunteers from neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles including communities not traditionally connected to the national parks. These events also brought attention to NPCA's Rim of the Valley campaign, an effort to expand Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, protect fragile habitat and increase outdoor recreational and educational opportunities for the area's 17 million residents.

The first event took place in April at the Audubon Center at Ernest Debs Regional Park, about five miles north of downtown Los Angeles, a 300-acre island of native habitat and biodiversity. Fifty NPCA volunteers working under the supervision of National Park Service rangers built a native plant nursery, which now grows seedlings for restoration efforts throughout the park.

The event included an Earth Day Fair, educational panels on sustainability and biodiversity and a program that featured State Senate Pro Tem Kevin de Leon, and community leaders. Senator de Leon

congratulated the volunteers for their leadership and discussed his parks and conservation agenda, while local high school senior and NPCA volunteer Niki Calderon discussed her work at the Audubon Center and the importance of the park to her community.

The second event took place in the heart of Los Angeles' historic district, El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic Monument. On a rainy day in July, 30 NPCA volunteers, along with Park Service staff, helped restore the site's native plant garden. NPCA provided more than 100 seedlings, along with lunch and recognitions for the volunteers during a program that included addresses from Congressman Xavier Becerra and LA County Supervisor and former U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis. Becerra and Solis talked about the importance of parks and open space in their districts, and why young people needed to be involved in actively shaping and advocating for their communities.

NPCA volunteer Jonathan Vivar, an Air Force veteran and local college student,

talked about the importance of places like Debs Park and El Pueblo to him as he grew up in a neighborhood with few parks and open spaces. He was particularly motivated to ensure these places were protected for both other members of his community and future generations, and excited by the fact that they could become part of the National Park System through the proposed Rim of the Valley expansion.

Overall, the events helped introduce NPCA to the greater Los Angeles community, generated awareness about the Rim of the Valley campaign and allowed NPCA to work with strategic partners and allies. It also marked the first step toward building a diverse cadre of residents in Los Angeles, particularly urban millennials and youth of color, who can serve as advocates, leaders and spokespeople. NPCA's LA Field office is planning future trainings and events to further engage these volunteers in the protection and expansion of our national parks. For more information about the initiative and activities near you, please visit FindYourVoice.camp.

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Above: NPCA volunteers and NPS staff work at Debs Park and El Pueblo ©Alex Pitt Photography



Travel with NPCA

Are you looking to check off a few more national parks from your list? In partnership with Off the Beaten Path, NPCA has increased its annual tours from 15 to more than 80 across the national parks as well as a few of the parks around the world in 2016.

Most trips are limited to sixteen guests, with

an 8 to 1 “traveler to guide” ratio, creating a unique, engaging, and educational travel experience. In addition, every time you join an NPCA small-group tour, a percentage of your tour cost helps support NPCA’s work protecting our national parks for current and future generations.

Join us as we explore national parks from

American Samoa and Denali to Big Bend and Acadia—or visit the parks of the world, like Los Glaciares in Patagonia and Rapa Nui on Easter Island. The full 2016 lineup is available at www.npca.org/travel.

Above: Giant Sequoias
©Welcomia | Shutterstock.com

Victory Protects Manzanar

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) has withdrawn its plans for the 1,200-acre Southern Owens Valley Solar Ranch. The project, which would have been just east of Manzanar National Historic Site, would have affected

the National Park Service's ability to interpret the isolation of the site, where more than 11,000 people of Japanese descent, many of whom were American citizens, were incarcerated during World War II. Additionally, it would have affected an already

threatened watershed, pristine riparian habitat and a critical flyway for migratory birds. The victory was the result of a multi-year struggle by the Manzanar Committee and activists in both Owens Valley and Los Angeles. NPCA worked with a network of organizations in Los Angeles to oppose the project, held meetings with key City and LADWP officials and mobilized signatures for an on-line petition. While the project has been placed on indefinite hold, LADWP reserves the right to revisit the project as it seeks to expand its renewable energy portfolio beyond 2030. However, NPCA, the Manzanar Committee and others remain committed to protecting the site and ensuring its legacy for future generations.



Left: Manzanar Relocation Center, California, 1943 ©Ansel Adams | Everett Historical | Shutterstock.com

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A Monumental Meeting in the California Desert!

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Japanese Restaurant, pet shop, barber shop, country market, shoe store and computer repair shop.

One of the three monuments, Castle Mountains, would be administered by the National Park Service. This unique area is the westernmost extension of grasslands that stretch through Arizona and New Mexico and includes a critical wildlife corridor and habitat for iconic bighorn sheep, golden eagle and mountain lion. It also encompasses one of the finest examples of high elevation Joshua Tree, piñon pine and juniper forest in the entire California Desert Conservation Area.

Castle Mountains has spectacular views of Spirit Mountain, a Nevada peak that is a sacred site for numerous southwestern Native American Tribes, and the historic abandoned gold mining town of Hart that lies just to the south of the towering Hart Mountain.

In the coming weeks and months, NPCA will continue to generate support for these newly proposed monuments and urge the President to act swiftly.

Left: Castle Mountains ©David Lamfrom



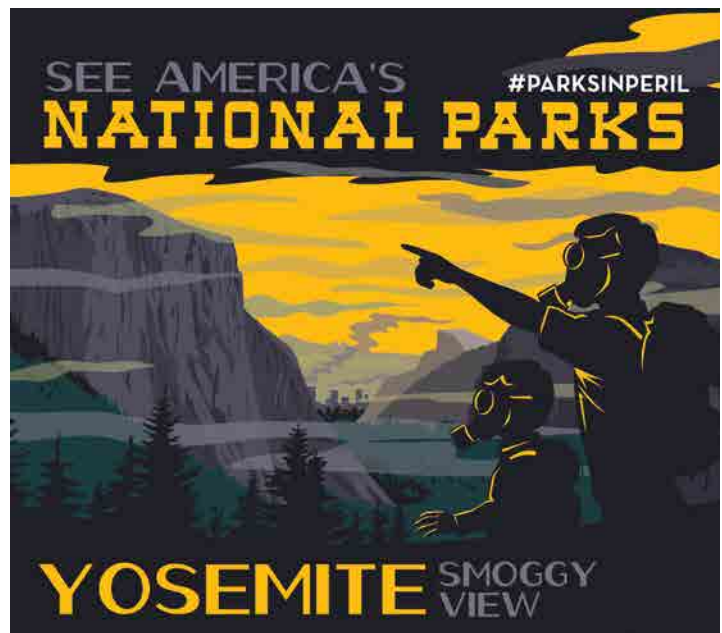
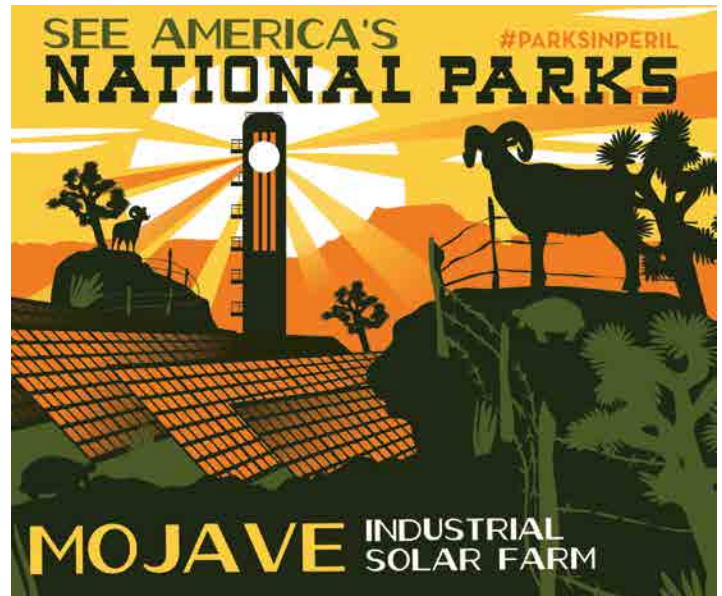
Mojave and Yosemite Among 9 National #ParksInPeril

From Arches to Yosemite, the crown jewels of our National Park System are at a crossroads. And it is up to each of us to determine which path they take. This call to action is driving NPCA's new #ParksInPeril campaign, focused on protecting some of America's most iconic national parks from imminent threats within and just outside their borders. The initiative, which focuses on national park sites, including Mojave National Preserve and Yosemite National Park, calls on the Obama Administration to take action and prevent these threats before time runs out.

#ParksInPeril features bold illustrations depicting the grim future our national parks could face if action is not taken.

For Mojave National Preserve, the recommended action is to stop the industrial-scale Soda Mountain renewable energy project from being built next to the park, in an important wildlife corridor.

At Yosemite National Park, the suggested action is for the clean air rules to be strengthened, holding polluters accountable and helping to speed the restoration of clean and healthy air—an action that is currently estimated to take centuries to achieve.



Ride or Hike in 2016 to Support NPCA

Biking or hiking through our national parks is one of the best ways to experience them. For the past four years, NPCA has partnered with Climate Ride, a nonprofit that organizes life-changing charitable events to raise awareness and support sustainability, active transportation, and environmental causes. As a Climate Ride partner, NPCA receives donations from fundraising participants who designate us as a beneficiary.

In 2016, NPCA will be the featured beneficiary on two events, a five-day ride through Death Valley in late February and a five-day hike through Glacier in August. In addition, Climate Ride is introducing a new ride through the Olympic Peninsula as well as five other rides and hikes in 2016 where NPCA will be a beneficiary. For more information, please go to <http://www.climateride.org/2016>.

Right: Climate Ride NYDCD 2013 ©Climateride





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Soda Mountain Solar **UPDATE**



Last June, NPCA organized a meeting in Barstow regarding the Soda Mountain Solar Project. Stakeholders from all over the desert met with Janice Schneider, the Department of Interior's Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals. Schneider, who is a key decision maker for the Soda Mountain Project, heard testimony from biologists, conservationists, local residents and members of the artistic community who support relocating this project where it won't hurt bighorn sheep wildlife corridors, kit fox and desert tortoise.


The final decision for this project is still under consideration. NPCA will continue to push to have this project moved to a place suitable for industrial scale solar development. Scientists have called the current location the most important restorable bighorn sheep corridor in the entire southeast Mojave Desert. The *LA Times* recently reported that the city of Los Angeles is not interested in purchasing the power that would be generated from the Soda Mountain Solar Project. This announcement makes this project even more speculative.

Above: Soda Mountains ©Michael Gordon



Did you know giving stock can be more beneficial than giving cash?

In addition to direct donations, another way to support NPCA's work is through a donation of appreciated stocks, bonds or mutual funds. These gifts, if you have held them for more than a year, allow you to claim a federal income tax charitable deduction for the full, appreciated value of the securities. In addition, you pay no capital gains tax on the transaction. This means the after-tax cost is less than a gift of cash. For more information, call Nina O'Connor toll-free at 1-800-NAT-PARK (ext. 241).

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