



FIELDREPORT

Pacific Region | Summer 2016



Joshua Tree National Park Eagle Mountain Boundary Study

What better birthday present for the National Park Service during its centennial year than to return the Eagle Mountain lands to Joshua Tree National Park once and for all! The Eagle Mountain lands were once part of Joshua Tree National Monument but were removed by an act of Congress for mineral exploration in the 1950s. For over 50 years, the majority of these lands were mismanaged by the BLM and were the location of some of the worst development proposals in the California desert such as the defeated Eagle Mountain landfill and a current threat: the Eagle Crest Pumped Storage Project.

Now, thanks to Congressman Ruiz and the National Park Service, a boundary adjustment study is under way, which is the first step in returning Eagle Mountain lands to the park. NPCA has been hard at work organizing stakeholders to comment on the boundary study. The Eagle Mountain lands have substantial populations of desert tortoise, bighorn sheep, and golden eagle as well as significant historical resources. The National Park Service stands ready to steward these resources for future generations.

Monumental Land Protection in the California Desert!

Over the past eight years, NPCA staff worked closely with Senator Feinstein on her proposed California desert bill that would have created three new monuments, national park additions, and wilderness and wild and scenic river designations. Our program staff traveled throughout southern California making presentations to energy companies, city councils, chambers of commerce, Native American tribes, and local businesses, securing many endorsements for this important legislation.

This February, after years of inaction from Congress despite broad-based support, President Obama used his executive powers as outlined in the 1906 Antiquities Act to designate three new spectacular California desert monuments: **Sand to Snow**, **Mojave Trails**, and **Castle Mountains National Monument**. These new monuments preserve spectacular cultural and historic sites, habitat for desert species, and serve as the connective tissue for wildlife moving between the California desert national parks.

Mojave Trails will be managed solely by the Bureau of Land Management and is the corridor linking Mojave National Preserve to Joshua Tree National Park and existing wilderness areas, providing vital habitat for sensitive wildlife, and unspoiled desert vistas. It contains irreplaceable archaeological and

Native American spiritual and cultural sites, the longest undeveloped stretch of historic Route 66, and General Patton's WWII desert training camps.



The new Sand to Snow National Monument will be managed by the Forest Service and BLM. It protects some of the most diverse habitat in the country, linking the San Geronio Wilderness to Joshua Tree National Park and the San Bernardino National Forest. Rising dramatically from the Sonoran Desert floor to Southern California's tallest alpine peak, this monument is one of the most critical wildlife corridors in Southern California. Hiking enthusiasts should know it contains a 23-mile stretch of the famed Pacific Crest Trail!

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Top: View of blooming Joshua Tree Woodland framed by the now protected Castle Mountains ©David Lamfrom | NPCA **Above:** Five Name Ridge, Sand to Snow National Monument ©Frazier Haney | Campaign for the California Desert

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LETTER FROM THE SENIOR REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Three Steps Forward—One Step Back

Our California Desert parks and the lands in between them just got a huge lift. After eight years of NPCA advocacy three new national monuments were created, setting the stage for landscape protection and intact wildlife corridors in much of the region. (See article titled “Monumental Land Protection in the California Desert”.)



The Obama administration took three steps forward when the monuments were designated. However, just seven weeks later the Department of Interior, in a move that might be called oddly dissonant, undermined some of the park protections it had just put in place by approving a badly placed solar industrial facility right next to Mojave National Preserve. (See article titled “Soda Mountain Solar”.)

These three new monuments, one of which is a national park unit, represent a huge victory for all NPCA members. Congratulations to all who made this possible with your emails, letters, attendance at public hearings—and through your support of NPCA over this period.

But then came the next decision. And it was not good.

Above: Ron Sundergill

So NPCA members, this is not the time to take the foot off the accelerator. We must continue to keep the “pedal to the metal”—because we have a lot more work to do. We certainly have not given up in our effort to block the construction of Soda Mountain Solar. Developers are coming up with even more monstrosities proposed near the parks. We promise to keep the NPCA engine revved up for as long as it takes.



Monumental Land Protection in the California Desert!

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Finally, Castle Mountain National Monument has become the 410th National Park Unit, protecting some of the finest Joshua tree, piñon pine, and juniper forests in the entire California Desert Conservation Area. It encompasses native desert grassland and features stunning vistas of California and Nevada desert mountain ranges, including Nevada’s Spirit Mountain, which is revered by southwestern Native American tribes and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Additionally, Castle Mountains National Monument offers unparalleled opportunities to study wildlife movements,

it is home to sensitive bat species, and it is a target location for the reintroduction of pronghorn, the second-fastest species of land mammal in the world.

The designation of national monuments will raise the profile of the California desert as a destination for regional tourism, benefit public health by enhancing opportunities for outdoor recreation, and preserve the vibrant but fragile desert ecosystem for generations to come.

Above: Marble Mountains in Mojave Trail National Monument ©Frazier Haney | Campaign for the California Desert

Momentum Grows for Expansion of Santa Monica Mountains NRA

Efforts to expand the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area got a big boost in February when the National Park Service released its final recommendations for the Rim of the Valley Corridor Special Resource Study, and again in June when Rep. Adam Schiff (CA-28th) introduced the Rim of the Valley Corridor Preservation Act (HR 5467). The Park Service recommended adding approximately 170,000 acres to the park and protecting wildlife corridors, waterways, and other landscapes critical to the connectivity and health of the region's ecosystem. This includes the Simi Hills, Santa Susana and Verdugo Mountains, Griffith Park, Los Angeles River, and Arroyo Seco. Cultural sites that preserve and interpret Los Angeles history, such as the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the birthplace of the City, El Pueblo de Los Angeles, were also included in the expansion area. Rep. Schiff's bill

expands on these recommendations and proposes adding approximately 193,000 acres to the existing park.

The Rim of the Valley would more than double the size of the existing Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and represents an opportunity to leave a significant conservation and environmental justice legacy for future generations. Operating in these areas would allow the Park Service to form partnerships with local communities, greatly enhance research and planning, improve habitat protection and restoration, and increase outreach and

interpretation programs to urban and underserved communities. It would also expand outdoor recreational opportunities for the region's 17 million residents.

The recommendations were met by widespread public support during two town hall meetings hosted by Rep. Adam Schiff, who introduced the original study legislation and has championed the effort for over a decade. NPCA is now working with the representative to move the bill through Congress and continues to build support for it through the Rim of the Valley Coalition and other efforts.

Left: Congressman Adam Schiff speaks to members of the Rim of the Valley Coalition. **Right:** Cyclists and hikers in Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area ©Photoeye | Dreamstime **Bottom:** View of trails in Griffith Park and Los Angeles from Griffith Observatory. © Jon Bilous | Dreamstime





A 'Black Hole' & Exceptional Dark Sky Viewing

Great Basin NP achieves International Dark Sky status, hosts weekly astronomy programs and a three-day stargazing festival

From the air, at night, eastern Nevada is vast darkness with a few pinpricks of light, a black hole of a different kind. Noted as having the darkest skies in the lower 48 states, Great Basin National Park offers exceptional stargazing. Recently the park was designated as an International Dark Sky Park, an honor bestowed on fewer than three dozen locations around the world.

Because of the park's remote location (five hours from Las Vegas, four hours from Salt Lake City), increasing numbers of travelers are making their way there to gape at millions of stars, brilliant against dark night skies. Great Basin's "dark rangers" host weekly astronomy talks, where rangers compare the darkness of the park's famed Lehman Caves with dark skies above, which showcase star

formations in vivid details and the glittering, sparkling Milky Way. From September 29th to October 1st, Great Basin hosts its annual three-day Astronomy Festival with daytime sun-gazing followed by early evening guest speakers leading star tours around an array of telescopes offered by dozens of visiting astronomers. For more information: nps.gov/grba/planyourvisit/great-basin-night-sky.htm

Above: Great Basin National Park ©Blake Gordon



Soda Mountain Solar

Despite intense opposition from NPCA and allies, the Department of Interior issued a Record of Decision permitting the Soda Mountain Solar Project to move forward. The Soda Mountain Solar Project is currently the most controversial renewable energy project in the U.S. because it would foreclose on the opportunity to reestablish bighorn connectivity across the I-15 between the North and South Soda Mountains, which according to scientists is one of the best places to connect bighorn populations in the

Mojave National Preserve with those to the north in the Avawatz Mountains and Death Valley National Park.

In fact, the project's impacts were so egregious they drew the attention of two of the nation's most eminent ecologists, E.O. Wilson and Thomas Lovejoy, who voiced their opposition to the development in a New York Times opinion piece. Even the city of Los Angeles refused to enter into a power purchase agreement with project proponent Bechtel,

in large part because of the environmental harm the project would cause.

The Department of Interior's Record of Decision on the Soda Project is particularly misguided due to the DOI's movement toward policies that support landscape-level conservation and not developing sensitive areas like the one in question. NPCA will continue to fight vigorously against the Soda Mountain Solar Project, protecting iconic species like the desert bighorn.

Above: Soda Mountain ©2013 Michael E. Gordon

Creating a National Park for Stonewall

During the summer of 1969, on the hot streets of Greenwich Village in lower Manhattan, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people stood up and took action against years of discrimination and harassment. What happened that night at the Stonewall Inn, nearby Christopher Park and the surrounding streets—now known as the Stonewall uprising—became a rallying point that inspired the LGBT community to organize in support of their civil rights.

A few years ago, NPCA teed up the idea of recognizing LGBT civil rights through our National Park System, working primarily with New York congressional members, local elected officials and civil rights groups. Last fall, NPCA and our partners launched a national campaign to create a national park for Stonewall, calling on President Obama to use his executive authority to recognize this historic event. On June 27, President Obama did just that, in designating the Stonewall National Monument, our first national park site dedicated to LGBT history.

Leading up to the historic designation, NPCA hosted public events along the West Coast, including in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Las Vegas, where supporters of LGBT

civil rights and national parks discussed the historic opportunity.

NPCA recognizes the need for our park system to represent America's diverse

cultural history and stories. Stonewall National Monument, our 412th national park site, is another key step toward achieving this goal.



Above: Stonewall Inn ©NPCA

A Guide to the Lower Colorado River

What's the difference between a spring and a seep? Springs typically have flowing water while seeps tend to leak from rock surfaces.

How can you identify a double-breasted cormorant? A long neck and bright orange markings near the bird's bill.

What makes water-diving cormorants so special? Unlike other birds, cormorants have no oil in their feathered wings, which makes them less buoyant and requires them to spread their wings in the sun to dry.

Such are among the interesting facts in the newly published Black Canyon Water Trail Guide, a project propelled and funded by NPCA's Nevada Field Office. The 32-page guide provides rafters, kayakers and canoeists with maps, photos and information on a 30-mile scenic stretch of the Colorado River below Hoover Dam that was recently designated as a U.S. National Water Trail for its picturesque and historic qualities. The guide offers wide-ranging information about wildlife, plant life, geology and the area's history.

NPCA worked with members of the Lower Colorado River Water Trail Alliance to first secure the National Water Trail designation and then, to develop the guide. "The goal of the guide is to connect thousands of visitors and local residents with the important attributes of this part of Lake Mead National Recreation Area," said Lynn Davis, NPCA's Nevada field office manager. Guides are sold in Lake Mead's Visitor Center and through concessioners, with proceeds banked to fund future publications. NPCA staff time and publishing costs were funded by a generous anonymous donor.



Above: Reflective waters on the Colorado River. Photo courtesy of Alan O'Neill.

Eagle Crest Pumped Storage Project

NPCA and stakeholders throughout the desert fought the Eagle Mountain Landfill for a quarter of a century, before Los Angeles County Department of Sanitation backed out of the project in 2013, ending one of the most pitched conservation battles in California desert history.

There's great reason to celebrate the many conservation and community heroes who pushed back against the landfill, but unfortunately the fight isn't over. The Eagle Crest Pumped Storage Company wants to develop a hydro plant that will serve as energy storage for solar energy projects in the area. The project will use two of the Kaiser Mine's



abandoned pits, pumping water uphill during non-peak hours and letting it run downhill to turn generators and create electricity during peak hours, but it is a net energy loss and a grave threat to the resources of Joshua Tree National Park.

Eagle Crest would pump copious amounts of groundwater from a basin that is hydraulically connected to those that lie beneath Joshua Tree National Park. The two water-filled abandoned mine pits would increase

the population of ravens that prey on desert tortoise by providing water resources in an area that was previously arid. Finally, the pumped storage project would impede the movement of bighorn sheep between the park's Coxcomb and Eagle Mountains.

Most recently, the BLM has evaluated the final project component—its transmission line—but strong opposition from NPCA and others to this project continues.

Above: Eagle Mountains ©Michael E. Gordon

New Bill Proposes Cesar Chavez National Historic Park

In March 2016, Congressman Raul Ruiz (CA-36th) introduced the César Chávez National Historical Park Act. The bill would create a new National Historic Park that would include the existing monument plus four additional sites, with three in California and one in Arizona dedicated to the labor leader's legacy and the history of

the farmworker movement in the Southwest. NPCA's Los Angeles and Arizona field offices are now working to develop a multi-state strategy aimed at building bipartisan support for the bill. Additionally, NPCA is leading efforts to build grassroots support in the four congressional districts where the five sites are located, as well as a national

coalition comprised of Latino and Filipino organizations, labor groups, historic preservationists and other constituencies.

Left: César Chávez is buried here at the Memorial Garden ©NPS **Top Right:** César Chávez's office ©NPS | Ruben Andrade **Bottom Right:** An example of farmworker housing during the 1960s ©NPS | Ruben Andrade



Find Your Voice Los Angeles

NPCA's 2016 Find Your Voice efforts got off to a fast start in February with an exhibit at El Pueblo de Los Angeles to honor Black History Month. "Forgotten Founders: The Hidden African Ancestry of Los Angeles" told the story of the city's earliest founders and was curated by students from the History Department at Cal State Northridge. Future events include a family bike ride in July along the Arroyo Seco, a historic waterway in the proposed Rim of the Valley expansion area of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. These and other projects are helping to build a new and diverse movement of park advocates in Los Angeles.

**FIND
YOUR
VOICE**

Speak up for
National Parks



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Forgotten Founders The Hidden African Ancestry of Los Angeles

Los Angeles has had a diverse population from its very beginning. In honor of Black History Month, NPCA held a month-long art exhibit, “Forgotten Founders: The Hidden African Ancestry of Los Angeles,” at the historic Pico House located at El Pueblo de Los Angeles. The event highlighted the importance of representing all Americans in the national park system. The exhibit was curated by students of California State University, Northridge’s history program with the collaboration of the Western National Parks Association. The exhibit was a successful manifestation of our Find Your Voice initiative.



Top Left: NPCA staff at the opening of Forgotten Founders exhibit **Right:** The Historic Pico House hosted the exhibit during African American History Month **Bottom Left:** Over 200 guest attended the opening. ©Laura Torres | NPCA



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, rather than the value at which they were purchased. In addition, you pay no capital gains tax on the transaction. For more information, call Shelli Goldzband toll-free at 1-800-NAT-PARK (ext. 241).



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