



# FIELDREPORT

Pacific Region | Summer 2017



## Trump Administration Fast Tracks Desert Development

In October 2015, the Obama administration issued a determination that the Cadiz water mining project required federal review and could not use a railroad right of way to carry a water pipeline until that review was completed. Cadiz seeks to drain 16 billion gallons of water per year for 50 years from a desert aquifer that underlies Mojave Trails National Monument and Mojave National Preserve.



In February 2016, the Obama administration took powerful action to protect 1.8 million acres of the California desert by creating three new national monuments: Mojave Trails (managed by the Bureau of Land Management), Sand to Snow (jointly managed by the Bureau of Land

## Will the Trump Administration Abolish National Monuments and Cut Park Funding by 12 Percent?

Our national parks have been on a roller coaster since the start of the Trump administration. NPCA was encouraged to hear that Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke stated that he would be opposed to selling federal lands and that his top priority would be fixing the Park Service's \$12 billion repair backlog.

Since then, unfortunately, the administration proposed its fiscal year 2018 (October 2017-September 2018) budget for the Interior Department (which the Park Service is part of) that would slash an already strained budget by another 12 percent. These cuts would further prevent the Park Service from adequately serving visitors, conducting scientific research, and repairing trails, visitor centers, and roads that make the parks safe and enjoyable. NPCA, and bi-partisan members of Congress, will be fighting these proposed cuts.

Additionally, President Trump has decided to put protected areas, including national park sites, on the chopping block through executive action that requires the review of national monuments created since 1996. This review includes Mojave Trails, Giant Sequoia and Carrizo Plain National Monuments, among others, and could lead to

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removal of protections or reduction in the size of the sites. NPCA, with the pro-bono legal support of Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer law firm, will be making the case that our national parks and monuments that protect our waters, air, wildlife, and diverse cultural stories, should not be abolished or altered.

In Congress, NPCA continues to lead efforts to build support for the bi-partisan National Parks Legacy Act of 2017, which is sponsored by Sens. Portman (R-Ohio) and Warner (D-Va.). The legislation would provide \$12 billion over 30 years to address the repair backlog.

**Left:** Bonanza Spring is the largest surface water feature in the South East Mojave. A vital part of Mojave Trails National Monument, this spring is threatened by the Cadiz project. ©David Lamfrom NPCA **Top:** Vernal Fall, Yosemite National Park ©Mariusz Blach | Dreamstime

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## Letter from the Senior Regional Director

### Building Young Advocates for National Parks

**W**e tend to assume that leaders will continue to emerge in support of our national parks and public lands. That is not necessarily the case. NPCA believes that we have a responsibility to reach out to and train a new set of leaders. This is especially important for young people of color who are often missing from debates about public land issues, environmental protection and historic preservation.

We are excited to report that, to date, the Los Angeles NPCA staff has trained over 40 young people to advocate for our parklands. The training programs have focused specifically on advocacy to affect political leaders at the local and national level. Once the young people are trained, they can help their elected political leaders recognize the inequities that exist in cities such as



Los Angeles, where young people in some neighborhoods have minimal access to green spaces and recreation.

This issue features one of these young people, Esther Acosta, who joined Dennis Arguelles and Laura Torres, NPCA's Los Angeles Program Manager and Field Representative, on an exciting trip to Washington, D.C.,

to lobby members of Congress on a range of national park issues. The trip was preceded by her participation in our Civic Voice Lessons training program, which prepared her to be an advocate and spokesperson.

We hope that many more young people like Esther will be able to accompany us on trips to the halls of Congress and to other places where policy decisions are made, such as Los Angeles City Hall. Because of young leaders like Esther our future is bright!

*Ron Sundergill*

## From LA to DC Advocating for National Parks



**I**n January, Dennis Arguelles and Laura Torres from NPCA's Los Angeles Field Office traveled to Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., with youth leader Esther Acosta to advocate for the Rim of the Valley expansion of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and the proposed Cesar Chavez National Historical Park. Esther, a recent graduate of NPCA's Civic Voice Lessons program, put her advocacy training into practice as the team met with

congressional offices, committee staff and organizational partners to garner support for the park campaigns. They also advocated for reducing the park system's \$12 billion repair backlog. Esther grew up in Compton, California, where she helped found her high school nature club. She is currently attending Long Beach City College and is an outdoor leader for Outward Bound Adventures. She continues to work with NPCA to protect the places she loves.

**Above (left to right):** Los Angeles Program Manager Dennis Arguelles, Field Representative Laura Torres and youth advocate Esther Acosta, meet with House Natural Resources Committee staff members Bertha Guerrero, Justin Monetti and Brandon Bragato. ©NPCA

## Will Mountain Lions Continue to Roam Santa Monica Mountains?

**M**ountain lions roamed the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, Los Angeles' closest national park, long before humans came to the region. The park is now one of the few places in the world where large, predatory cats co-exist with people on the edges of a sprawling metropolis. Unfortunately, a 2016 report by the National Park Service and UCLA found that mountain lions could disappear from the area within 50 years, the result of multiple threats including the use of rat poisons that make their way up the food chain and wreak havoc on the animals' health. However, the single greatest threat to mountain lion survival is the loss of open space and habitat.

For over a decade, the National Park Service has researched and monitored mountain lions in and around the park. As apex predators, they serve as an important indicator species: a measure of the ecosystem's overall health.

Mountain lions require extensive ranges and the current park provides enough space for only a small population. This has led to mortality from intra-species fighting, competition for prey, the abandonment of kittens, and traffic incidents as young cats seek to escape the park and find themselves crossing dangerous freeway systems and

other formidable barriers. In fact, lack of habitat accounts for up to 75 percent of mountain lion mortality. Combined with a loss of genetic diversity from inbreeding, which makes the population more susceptible to diseases and other threats, it is no wonder they face possible extinction from the region unless we take immediate actions.

For its part, NPCA has monitored issues affecting mountain lions and, in 2014, supported the successful effort to pass legislation banning the use of certain rodenticide poisonings in and near parks and other environmentally sensitive areas across the state. NPCA is also working with numerous allies and local elected officials to bring public attention to the plight of the mountain lions and supports the building of a wildlife bridge across the Ventura Freeway, where mountain lions have been killed attempting to cross. The effort, led by the Santa Monica Mountains Fund and National Wildlife Federation, would allow cats to disperse into other natural areas.

The wildlife bridge would also make it easier and safer for cats from nearby regions to enter the park. These cats would introduce new genetic material and curtail inbreeding. However, long-term survival depends on how we manage our existing open space and public

lands, protect and restore native habitat, and continue the research, community education and advocacy that give the cats and other wildlife a voice in our public policy. As such, NPCA continues to lead the Rim of the Valley campaign, which would more than double the size of the park and strengthen the role of the National Park Service in the region.

NPCA also supports efforts to change a rigid state law that requires officials to issue permits to kill mountain lions suspected of preying on livestock. The hope is to find a compromise whereby applicants exhaust all other means of protecting their livestock before the issuance of a permit. Alternatively, exemptions for vulnerable cat populations, such as those in the Santa Monica Mountains, may be a solution. Additionally, the trapping method employed by the National Park Service for its mountain lion research is in possible conflict with state law, despite its impeccable safety record and success. NPCA will continue to monitor these and other relevant issues and engage when necessary to ensure that these majestic creatures continue to remain a fixture of our national parks. For more information about the Rim of the Valley, go to [www.npca.org/rimofthevalley](http://www.npca.org/rimofthevalley).

**Below:** A new litter of mountain lion kittens face an uncertain future in the Santa Monica Mountains. Photo courtesy of National Park Service.



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# Trump Administration Fast Tracks Desert Development

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Management and the United States Forest Service), and Castle Mountains (managed by the National Park Service). NPCA played a leadership role in all of those campaigns at both the political and the grassroots level. Each of those actions taken by the administration served to protect the California desert and its precious water, wildlife, and landscapes, for future generations. The designation of 1.8 million acres of national monuments was one of the largest conservation designations in U.S. history. NPCA is incredibly proud to be a part of that remarkable accomplishment.

Unfortunately, the monuments and the Cadiz determination are now facing serious threats under the Trump administration. The Department of the Interior recently rescinded legal documents related to the Cadiz determination, indicating that there is a strong possibility of the determination being overturned. That action would allow the harmful Cadiz project to move forward.

The Trump administration has also called for the review of the Mojave Trails and Sand to Snow National Monuments. A public comment period has been opened and NPCA will be forwarding information and e-alerts to all members to combat this threat.

Progress has been hard-won in the California desert, and we will need the support of our members and allies to ensure protection of one of America's wildest and most national

park-rich landscapes. NPCA will continue to fight to protect the desert, to stop the rollback or reduction of our national monuments, and to keep the Cadiz water in the ground.

**Below:** Big Morongo Canyon, part of Sand to Snow National Monument, is a beautiful wetland comprised of Cottonwood, Willow, and California Fan Palms. It is designated as an Important Bird Area, and blazes with fall color in October and November. ©David Lamfrom | NPCA

