



## Eagle Crest Bailout Legislation Stopped Again!

By Neal Desai

**I**n what turned out to be a legislative whack-a-mole, NPCA stopped multiple attempts by the Eagle Crest Corporation to pass state legislation that would bail out its floundering pumped storage project next to Joshua Tree National Park.

The proposed project, which would overdraft ancient desert aquifers next to and under Joshua Tree, was found unnecessary by state regulators and would cost California rate-payers billions of dollars. For the last several years, it has stalled without a buyer of its energy. Despite this, four different pieces of legislation were introduced in the California Legislature this year that would have forced rate-payers to pay for the project and bail it out. NPCA and our allies, who ranged from utility companies to consumer protection groups, worked overtime to stop all the bills and protect Joshua Tree's groundwater.

In addition to fighting Eagle Crest at the state capitol, NPCA is also challenging federal permits recently issued for the project. We hope to report good news on that front soon.

## World's Largest Joshua Tree Forest Burns

By Chris Clarke

**T**here was devastating news this August from the California desert: The 44,000-acre Dome Fire torched more than a million trees in the heart of the world's largest Joshua tree forest. Sparked by lightning and fueled by both introduced grasses and native shrubs, the Dome Fire was also stoked by several days of unusually strong winds. By the time firefighters gained the upper hand on the blaze, one of the Mojave National Preserve's best-known landscapes had been forever changed.

Among the areas hardest hit by the blaze was the popular Teutonia Peak trail, a two-mile out-and-back hike that offered visitors both an enchanting glimpse of

... one of the Mojave National Preserve's best-known landscapes had been forever changed.

the Joshua tree forest and a sprawling panoramic view of the northern Mojave preserve from the trail summit.

At this writing, the National Park Service is still assessing the extent of the damage and the best course for long-term management of the burn area. NPS may issue a call for volunteers to control weedy grasses in the area to inhibit subsequent fires; NPCA stands ready to help. Get in touch if you would like to be part of that effort at [cclarke@npca.org](mailto:cclarke@npca.org).

**Top:** Cima Dome before the fire. ©Studiobarcelona | Dreamstime  
**Below:** Joshua Tree forest after the Dome Fire. ©Chris Clarke



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Fall | Winter 2020

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## MESSAGE FROM THE SR. REGIONAL DIRECTOR

By Ron Sundergill,  
Senior Regional Director



**D**espite the pandemic, I am pleased to report that major progress has been made by NPCA on numerous fronts, including here in the Pacific region.

Some of these victories are final, such as the defeat of the Las Vegas water pipeline, a 300-mile conveyance that would have drained 150 million gallons of water a day from desert aquifers next to Great Basin National Park.

But often, our work resembles a game of whack-a-mole, as pointed out in the story on page one, detailing our ongoing campaign to stop the Eagle Crest Pumped Storage Project next to Joshua Tree National Park. Therefore, your ongoing support is so critical: It simply takes eternal vigilance to keep the parks protected.

As I write this column the election is 6 days away, but you likely know how things turned out by now. Depending on that outcome, we will likely see either an increase or a decrease in threats to parklands, as federal

policy has a huge impact on parks in the Pacific Region.

Under the Trump Administration, for instance, we had to redouble our efforts to stop the water mining company known as “Cadiz” from draining 16 billion gallons of water per year from the aquifer that provides life to the Mojave Desert protected lands. During both the Obama and Trump Administrations, we had to guard against poorly sited

solar and wind power plants in the Mojave. The Cadiz project is defeated, as are the poorly sited power plants, but these threats could return.

No matter who has won the Presidential election, NPCA will be here to defend our parks, as we have always done, working with all political representatives in a non-partisan way.

Thank you for standing with us, and remaining vigilant, as we work in many communities and with our federal and local officials in California, Hawaii, Nevada and in the Pacific Islands area.

**Above:** Ron Sundergill

## NPCA Appeals EPA Clean Air Deadline Extension



By Mark Rose

**N**PCA, alongside Sierra Club, Medical Advocates for Healthy Air and the Association of Irrigated Residents, recently filed a petition for review in the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals challenging a July, 2020 decision by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to extend the attainment deadline for a crucial Clean Air Act Standard in California’s San Joaquin Valley. For years, the San Joaquin Valley has been the most polluted air basin in the nation for fine particulate (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) air pollution, far exceeding federal PM<sub>2.5</sub>

standards set in 2006. EPA’s troubling decision not only grants California an additional five years to meet that standard in the San Joaquin Valley, it also fails to fully identify how the state will improve its worst-in-the-nation air quality. Additional delay in meeting clean air act standards will likely impact air quality in nearby Sierra Nevada national parks, like Yosemite and Sequoia—harming the health of visitors and employees, as well as the wellbeing of local ecosystems.

**Above:** The San Joaquin Valley near Sequoia National Park ©Matthew Clausen | Dreamstime

# Las Vegas Pipeline Dead in the Water

By Neal Desai

**A**fter decades, park lovers can breathe a sigh of relief that the Las Vegas pipeline is dead. Recently, the Southern Nevada Water Authority voted to abandon its proposal after multiple defeats in court and a growing realization that the public did not support the pipeline.

The 300-mile proposed pipeline would have pumped 58 billion gallons of water annually, or 150 million gallons of water a day, from desert aquifers next to Great Basin National Park for export to Las Vegas, at a cost of \$15.5 billion to southern Nevada residents.

NPCA was concerned by this proposal because the Park Service found that the pumping would devastate the region's



numerous creeks, springs and groundwater systems. In particular, the research showed that 305 springs, 112 miles of streams, 8,000 acres of wetlands and 191,000 acres of shrubland habitat in eastern Nevada would be threatened by the pipeline project.

NPCA joined advocacy efforts led by the Great Basin Water Network to defeat legislation to greenlight the pipeline, raise public awareness of this threat, and highlight responsible alternative water supplies for Las Vegas. We thank the Water Network and all of our members and supporters for this successful outcome!

**Left:** Oregon Grape Holly, Great Basin National Park ©Rinus Baak | Dreamstime **Below:** Fall foliage in Great Basin National Park ©Arlene Hochman Waller | Dreamstime



# Wildlife Gets Reprieve from Dangerous Rat Poisons

By Dennis Arguelles

**I**n August, National Park Service biologists in the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area discovered an adult bobcat and subadult mountain lion that died as a result of anticoagulant rodenticides. These rat poisons are ingested by wildlife, causing immeasurable harm and threatening the long-term survival of numerous species within the park and throughout the state.

Thankfully, there's good news. This September, Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law AB 1788, which prohibits the use of most anticoagulant rodenticides until a re-evaluation by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation is completed. The Department of Fish and Wildlife will play a consultation role in the re-evaluation. The bill, introduced by Santa Monica Assemblyman Richard Bloom, represents a hard-fought victory for the coalition of wildlife advocates and local and national conservation groups, including NPCA, who have worked for several years to ban these poisons in California.



NPCA will monitor implementation of the bill, which includes exemptions for several industries and in cases of a public health crisis. Nonetheless, the passage puts California on the right course toward protecting its fragile wildlife resources, including mountain lions, bobcats and birds of prey that call the Golden State home.



**Middle:** AB 1788 will hopefully reduce wildlife deaths caused by exposure to dangerous rat poisons, like the juvenile Mountain Lion discovered in August. ©NPS **Above:** California Condor can ingest rodents killed by these anticoagulants. ©Feverpitched | Dreamstime **Right:** Red-shouldered hawks are also at risk. ©Brian Lasenby | Dreamstime

...the passage [AB1788] puts California on the right course toward protecting its fragile wildlife resources, including mountain lions, bobcats and birds of prey that call the Golden State home.



# Introducing New California Desert Program Manager, Demi Espinoza

By Chris Clarke

**W**e would like to introduce Demi Espinoza, the Pacific Regional Office's newest staff member. Hired as the California Desert Program Manager in August in the middle of the pandemic, Demi immediately dove right into our desert protection campaign work, instantly becoming central to our campaign to encourage water agencies to shun the destructive Cadiz water mining project.

As a local of Riverside, California, Demi was in her 20s when she first visited nearby Joshua Tree National Park, just 80 miles away. That experience added to her determination to ensure that her fellow Southern Californians get easier access to our desert parks.



**Above:** Demi Espinoza enjoys a floral mural at a local art show. ©Julia Lippe-Klein

“I grew up in a predominately Latinx community plagued with environmental justice burdens. I grew up thinking of the desert as industry’s playground, a place where warehouses and logistics centers are built,” Espinoza said. “I never had the

opportunity to connect with the breathtaking views of desert landscapes, where so much rich biodiversity of flora and fauna exists. Therefore, I’m committed to building stronger outdoor accessibility for underrepresented communities and to protecting California desert habitat from extractive projects.”

In addition to her passion for the California desert and its public lands, Demi comes to NPCA with more than a decade of experience in community organizing, with a special focus on environmental justice issues affecting southern California cities. That work will certainly help as she tackles the issue of air quality in desert parks. She and her partner live near Joshua Tree with their dogs, Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers. We hope you’ll join us in welcoming Demi to NPCA!

## California's Public Lands Threatened by Oil and Gas Lease Sale



By Mark Rose

**T**his December, the Trump administration will move forward with the first oil and gas lease sale on California’s federally owned public lands in eight years. This sale comes on the heels of a lawsuit filed by NPCA, numerous other environmental and community groups, and the state of California, challenging a poorly developed plan by the Bureau of Land Management to open up over 1 million acres of federally

owned land in central California to new oil and gas leasing. Despite this ongoing litigation, the administration is looking to lease over 4,000 acres in Kern County, which already faces some of the worst air and water quality in the nation. Moreover, this could be the first of many federal lease sales in the region in the coming years. Any additional drilling locally will likely worsen air quality in a number of federal public lands, including Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, jeopardizing visitor and

ecosystem health. Moreover, several parcels for sale in December are directly adjacent to Carrizo Plain National Monument and other ecologically sensitive environments. Moving forward, NPCA will continue working with allies to try to prevent all oil and gas lease sales impacting California’s national parks and other public lands.

**Above:** Carrizo Plain National Monument ©zrfphoto | Dreamstime

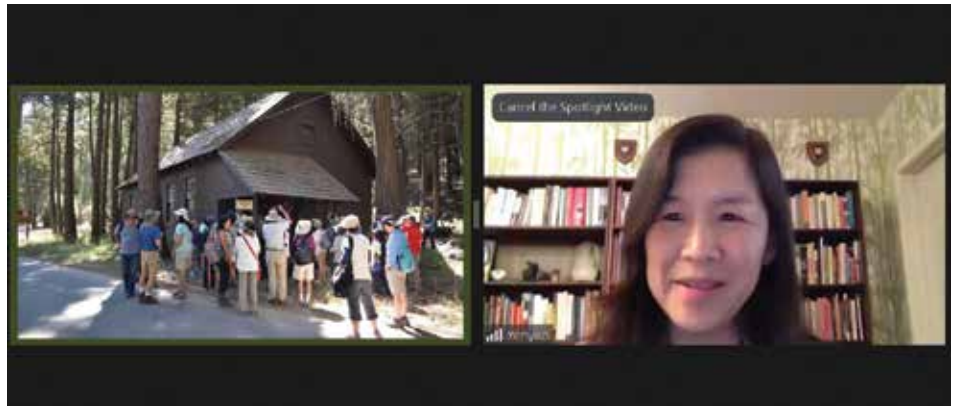
# Virtual Yosemite Pilgrimage Celebrates Chinese American History

By Dennis Arguelles

The Yosemite Pilgrimage has taken place every July since 2013, bringing together outdoor and history enthusiasts to celebrate the contributions of Chinese Americans to Yosemite National Park, the Sierra Nevadas and the National Park Service (NPS).

NPCA is a prominent supporter of the multi-day event, which is organized by the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California and NPS. It normally includes lectures and tours that highlight important park stories and culminates with a trek for experienced backpackers to Sing Peak, named for Tie Sing, the innovative chef who cooked for the historic 1915 Mather Mountain Party.

Because of the pandemic, this year NPCA hosted a “virtual” pilgrimage attended by 150 individuals. Park rangers, writers, artists and others discussed Yosemite history, as



Above: Park Ranger Yenyen Chan discussed a new interpretive center under development in Yosemite. The virtual pilgrimage drew over 150 participants. ©Dennis Arguelles

well as ongoing efforts to establish a new interpretive center in a building formerly known as the Chinese Laundry. In place of the potluck that usually concludes the event, this year’s festivities included a segment on Chinese recipes, some of which were likely

used by the park’s early Chinese workers.

We hope the pilgrimage can resume in person in 2021. More information can be obtained by reaching out to event organizers at [yosemitesingpeak@gmail.com](mailto:yosemitesingpeak@gmail.com).

## Once-in-a-Generation Legislation Signed into Law!

By Neal Desai

After over a decade of advocacy by NPCA, our national parks will receive the greatest funding boost in decades. This past summer, the Great American Outdoors Act was signed into law, accomplishing two major goals.

- The funding addresses our parks’ nearly \$12 billion repair backlog by dedicating \$1.3 billion per year over five years to tackle high-priority projects. Park roads and facilities have been deteriorating for decades, and federal funding has been insufficient to meet the system’s mounting needs. This money would help address park infrastructure repair needs, including updates to visitor centers, trails, roads, bridges, water and electrical systems, and more.
- The act also allows vulnerable lands inside and outside of parks to be purchased so that they can become publicly owned. The law fully and permanently funds the Land and Water Conservation Fund at \$900 million per year, helping protect our parks and public lands from incompatible residential and commercial development.

NPCA has led long-term campaigns to secure this vital park funding, and our



advocates have spoken out time and again to advance both critical programs. The legislation’s bipartisan support is the culmination of two decades of work, thousands of emails and phone calls, hundreds of trips to Capitol Hill offices, and a shared love for America’s heritage.

Left: Damaged road, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park ©Mikhail Dudarev | Dreamstime  
Below: San Francisco Maritime Municipal Pier ©Elizabeth Ackley





## NPCA Granted Right to Intervene in Critical Court Case

By Dennis Arguelles

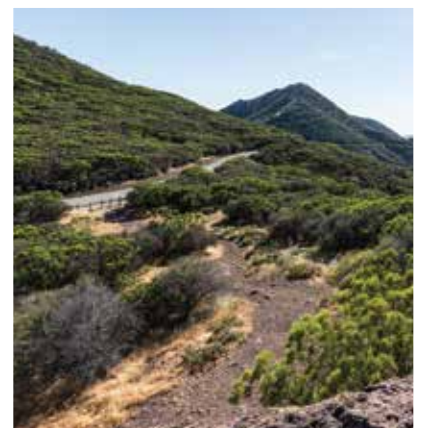
**N**PCA won an important court victory in September when the California Superior Court granted our motion to intervene in a lawsuit filed by industry and business groups against Ventura County over ordinances it passed in 2019 to protect wildlife corridors, including many critical to the health of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Despite opposition from industry groups, the presiding judge ruled that the intervening organizations, which include NPCA, the Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife and Los Padres Forest Watch, have a “direct and immediate interest” in the case.

With this ruling, NPCA and our allies—represented by the UC Irvine Environmental Law Clinic—are now positioned to vigorously defend the Ventura County ordinances in the coming weeks. Protecting

Protecting wildlife corridors in this area is more important than ever given the recent wildfires, the continuing effects of climate change and the degradation of native habitat from development and invasive species.

wildlife corridors in this area is more important than ever given the recent wildfires, the continuing effects of climate change and the degradation of native habitat from development and invasive species.

**Above:** Mountain lions continue to roam the Santa Monica Mountains, but face a precarious future. ©Moose Henderson | Dreamstime **Inset Photo:** National Park Service biologist are discovering mountain lions with genetic abnormalities, like this curve in the tail of a recently captured male. The condition is the result of genetic in-breeding and isolation, which recent Ventura County ordinances seek to address by protecting existing wildlife corridors. ©NPS **Right:** Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area ©Trekandshoot | Dreamstime





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## TRAVEL WITH US

By Jared Dial

**J**oin NPCA on one of our brand-new journeys in 2021. Led by NPCA experts, these exciting small-group trips will provide behind-the-scenes access to NPCA's park protection work, naturalist-led hikes, sightseeing by local specialists, and exclusive opportunities to meet with NPCA partners who are fighting for the future of America's National Park System.

### The 2021 Trip Collection

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>AUG 15-22</b>     | Isle Royale                                |
| <b>SEPT 26-OCT 2</b> | Mesa Verde   Chaco Canyon                  |
| <b>OCT 1-8</b>       | Civil Rights tour in Alabama & Mississippi |
| <b>NOV 8-14</b>      | Big Bend                                   |
| <b>NOV 15-21</b>     | Joshua Tree   Death Valley                 |

For more information about these exclusive NPCA trips, visit [npca.org/trips](https://npca.org/trips) or contact [travel@npca.org](mailto:travel@npca.org).

**Right:** Mesa Verde National Park ©Golasza | Dreamstime



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