

Eagle Crest

By Chris Clarke

Ever since the Eagle Mountain area was sliced out of Joshua Tree National Monument in 1950, one destructive project after another has been proposed for the once-protected desert landscape. First came the Kaiser iron mine, which gouged away a huge section of the mountain. The mine closed in 1986. Not long after Joshua Tree became a national park in 1994, the City of Los Angeles got serious about its plans to turn the open pit into the world's largest landfill. NPCA and other desert protection groups, foremost among them the Desert Protection Society, fought that landfill for two decades until Los Angeles finally gave up in 2013.

Now, the Eagle Mountain area is faced with the possibility that Florida-based NextEra Energy will be able to turn the old mine into a hydroelectric reservoir in one of the driest places on the planet. NPCA leads the opposition to this project, which would endanger wildlife in Joshua Tree, threaten to permanently overdraft local groundwater, and raise electric bills for California ratepayers.

The so-called Eagle Crest pumped storage plant would consist of two uncovered reservoirs, one lower and the other higher, in old mine pits. When renewable energy is abundant, claims NextEra, water would be pumped uphill into the upper reservoir, then

continued on page 5

Giant Sequoias, Wildfire and the Costs of Climate Change

By Mark Rose

Like many park lovers around the world, I have been left devastated by the news of a massive wildfire sweeping through Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. As I write, the KNP Complex Fire has grown to burn over 88,000 acres of this beloved wilderness. Our favorite national parks can shape who we are on a profound level—invoking an overwhelming desire to protect and preserve these landscapes just as we remember them. I am now forced, however, to face the reality that some of my favorite spots in nature will no longer exist as I recall them—altered forever by the boundless fury of nature and countless mistakes of man.

Poor forest management, leading to more than a century of fuel buildup in our forests, has come head-to-head with the runaway impacts of human-caused climate change. Exceptional drought conditions, record high-temperatures and native bark beetle outbreaks have weakened forests across the West, leading to a tree mortality crisis that has killed off well over 150 million trees in the Sierra Nevada region alone. All of this has set the stage for an explosion in climate-driven mega wildfires over the last few years. These fires behave like no wildfires we have ever seen—spreading faster,

growing larger and burning hotter than anything on record. Few examples more strongly illustrate the horrifying reality that climate change is already here than the thousands of giant sequoias that have been killed off by these recent climate-driven mega wildfires. If these behemoths, with lifespans dating back as long as 3,000 years, cannot make it in the new climate reality, what will?



If you have visited a giant sequoia grove, you may have learned about how sequoias are fire adapted. Not only can they survive occasional wildfires, but they have evolved to depend on natural wildfires to help open up their cones, spread their seeds and clear out underbrush so that new saplings can

continued on page 6

Top: The General Sherman tree in Sequoia National Park ©Miroslav Liska | Dreamstime **Above:** High intensity burn scar in Sequoia National Park following the 2020 Castle Fire ©Anthony Caprio | NPS

FIELD REPORT

Fall-Winter 2021

Pacific Regional Office Staff

350 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza • Suite 1100
Oakland, CA 94612
415.728.0839

Ron Sundergill
SR. REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Neal Desai
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF FIELD OPERATIONS

Chris Boone
REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

Kati Schmidt
ASSOC. DIRECTOR OF MEDIA RELATIONS

Liam Kelley
COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Nicole Spooner
SR. COORDINATOR

Elliot Richardson
LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

Julie Hogan
ASSOC. DIRECTOR, FOUNDATION RELATIONS

California Desert Field Office

61325 29 Palms Highway • Suite D
Joshua Tree, CA 92252
760.600.0038

Chris Clarke
RUTH HAMMETT ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Vacant
PROGRAM MANAGER

Los Angeles Field Office

767 N. Hill Street • Suite 302
Los Angeles, CA 90012
213.482.0642

Dennis Arguelles
SENIOR PROGRAM MANAGER

Vacant
OUTREACH MANAGER

Sierra Nevada Field Office

Sacramento, CA
559.385.6148

Mark Rose
PROGRAM MANAGER

NPCA Membership Services Team

800.628.7275 • npca@npca.org



EST 1919

npca.org

MESSAGE FROM THE SENIOR REGIONAL DIRECTOR

By Ron Sundergill,
Senior Regional Director



I am in Hawaii as I write this. There is much to focus on here in Hawaii that is of concern. There are air-tour management plans for Hawaii Volcanoes and Haleakala national parks that are coming up soon. Air tours and the noise they cause is a huge problem, but perhaps the greatest threat is the numerous bird species that are near extinction because of climate change. With higher temperatures, non-native mosquitoes are quickly making their way into the higher, and previously colder, habitat. The mosquitoes bring with them deadly avian malaria that is wiping out three honeycreeper birds at Haleakala: Ākohekohe, Kiwikiu and the Maui Alauahio. Not to put too fine of a point on it, but the problem ultimately is human influence and our insatiable need for oil, gas and other greenhouse gas-producing products.

Speaking of climate change, an article in this issue of the Field Report that focuses,

in part, on climate change is about sequoia trees—and the news is not good. Thousands of them are dying because of intense fires. The effects of climate change and the mismanagement of large swaths of federal forested lands have not been kind to the unique habitats that sustain sequoia trees. Yet, because of better management at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, there is some hope.

Again, I am in Hawaii, but an appeal to the powerful Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of fire, cannot be counted on to turn this around. No, it is us—the mortal humans—that need to fix this. Check the article by Mark Rose and learn how some magic at the federal level could help to turn this around. Please, Congress! Please, Mr. President! Please make the magic happen! For good measure, when I hike to the top of Diamond Head next week, my first words will be a chant to Pele.

Above: Ron Sundergill



Replanting After the Dome Fire

By Chris Clarke

In August 2020, one of the California Desert's treasures was irrevocably damaged when the Dome Fire burned 43,000 acres on Cima Dome in Mojave National Preserve. Among the lost were an estimated 1.3 million eastern Joshua trees. Since then, though a handful of burned Joshua trees have grown live sprouts from their bases, the Cima Dome Joshua tree forest has changed even further as killed trees slowly decompose and fall over.

With the nurse plants that would have sheltered young Joshua trees also incinerated, the Cima Dome Joshua tree forest won't be

coming back without help. The National Park Service intends to provide that help. From December 3-17, Mojave National Preserve is offering volunteers a chance to take part in replanting the forest, with seedlings grown at nearby Lake Mead National Recreation Area from seeds collected on Cima Dome before the fire. Volunteers should be prepared to camp self-sufficiently and carry the seedlings to planting sites. To sign up, contact preserve botanist Drew Kaiser at Andrew_Kaiser@nps.gov, or 760-252-6106.

Above Left: The Cima Dome Joshua Tree Forest after the fire. ©Chris Clarke **Above Right:** Joshua tree seedlings in the nursery wait to be replanted. ©National Park Service



By Leilani Commons

Los Angeles is home to a diaspora of people from all around the world; its ethnic and cultural diversity is one of the greatest draws to the city and among its strengths. Immigrants make up a third of Los Angeles' population, but sometimes it takes a little more than a look around to see the imprint they've left on the city. As is often the case, the stories of immigrants, particularly people of color, are seldom told, and Los Angeles' built environment often reflects that. Histories and legacies across several generations disappear in a blink of an eye as their buildings and relics are among the first to fall in the interest of redevelopment. NPCA's LA Field Office has been working to promote stories of immigrants and communities of color as they have traditionally been neglected or excluded from our nation's historical narrative. We believe these stories can be preserved and interpreted by a national park unit dedicated to the city's diverse and dynamic migration and immigration history.

Los Angeles' role as a sanctuary city is not limited to the recent past. Since its incorporation, the city has served as a safe haven for those who fled their native countries in search of better work opportunities and improved living conditions. It was no easy feat—while the overall climate in America was welcoming toward immigrants, many still faced unfair and unequal treatment and were often targets of racial violence and hate. Forced to live downtown and on the east and south sides of the city, they worked hard to build and reclaim neighborhoods to replicate fragments of the life they lived in their native countries. Ultimately, these ethnic enclaves and neighborhoods played a significant role in migrants' livelihood and success as residents

helped one another navigate daily life in their new country. Exemplary districts include El Pueblo de Los Angeles, Chinatown, South LA, and Boyle Heights, some of which are, unfortunately, at risk due to haphazard urban development, speculation, and gentrification.

El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles was established as a Spanish colonial town (pueblo), serving as the administrative and commercial center to the nearby San Gabriel Mission. Settled by 11 families of Spanish, Native American,



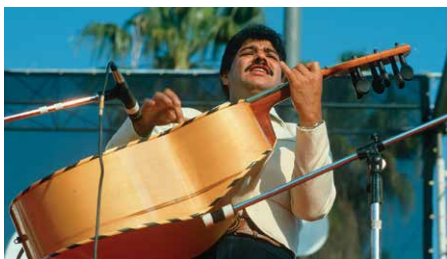
Top Left: The Pico House was the first grand hotel built in Los Angeles. Built by former Alta California Governor Pio Pico, the Italianate hotel is a formal reminder of Mexico's short-lived jurisdiction of Los Angeles. ©Waltercicchetti | Dreamstime **Top Right:** Olvera Street is a popular marketplace along one of the city's oldest streets. Tourists and locals alike visit Olvera Street for a taste of Mexican food and culture. ©Philip Bird | Dreamstime **Middle:** Chinatown Plaza is a global destination for Chinese food, art, and shopping. ©Ect100 | Dreamstime **Above:** The Dunbar Hotel served as a safe haven for Blacks traveling through Los Angeles ©Wikimedia Commons

and African descent on Tongva-Gabrielino tribal land, the Pobladores created what is now the modern-day city of Los Angeles. Today, El Pueblo de Los Angeles is a City and State Historical Landmark spanning 44 acres with various museums, historic buildings, and relics. Principle establishments such as the Pico House, Avila Adobe, and Olvera Street have helped steer the preservation of Mexican heritage and traditions within the region, though more can be done to address the history of African Americans and indigenous people.

Chinese people were among the first of California's settlers, escaping the economic chaos caused by the Opium Wars to make a new life for themselves in America amid the Gold Rush and subsequent westward expansion. De facto and de jure segregation restricted where Chinese people could live, so they formed their own enclaves to live, work, and play. Chinatown Plaza has served as a Chinese and Asian commercial hub for several decades but was originally established as a residential neighborhood for the Chinese residents displaced by the demolition of Old Chinatown for the construction of Union Station and the 101 Freeway. Today, LA's Chinatown is a global destination for Chinese food, art, and shopping, though few Chinese residents remain as the neighborhood has fallen victim to redevelopment and gentrification due to its proximity to Downtown Los Angeles and popular nearby neighborhoods.

The Dunbar Hotel originally opened as Hotel Somerville in 1928. Built by John and Vada Somerville, the hotel served as a South LA institution for African Americans by African Americans. The Dunbar Hotel hosted the first NAACP National Convention and became a popular venue for African American

entertainers, serving the likes of Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald. Today, the site of the Dunbar Hotel is a mixed-use, low-income, senior-housing community known as Dunbar Village. Like Chinatown, South Los Angeles is under increasing threat of gentrification due to its proximity to Downtown Los Angeles as well as the University of Southern California. While the Dunbar Hotel remains standing, local Black residents have been displaced and their homes and businesses are often demolished, erasing buildings with potential historical significance.



Since the 1930s, mariachi musicians have gathered along East 1st Street and North Boyle Avenue in hopes of being hired by visitors and passersby. Modeled after Mexico City's Plaza Garibaldi, Mariachi Plaza has served as a center for mariachi music and Mexican culture in Los Angeles, as well as the heart of the Boyle Heights' neighborhood. Likewise, Boyle Heights is undergoing demographic change as capital investment projects have demolished various homes and businesses, displacing long-time residents.

The story of Los Angeles is not unique as many American cities are a part of an ever-evolving history of cultural and demographic shifts. The immigrant experience is a part of a greater narrative that many Americans can relate to—that hard work and perseverance will lead to a better life. We hope to work with these underrepresented members of the community to bring forth and recognize their stories and legacies on both the local and national level as they are intrinsic to understanding our nation as a whole.

Top: Famed jazz musician Duke Ellington frequented the Dunbar Hotel. ©Gordon Parks

Above: Mariachi has been embraced as an emblem of Latino and Mexican American cultural heritage and pride. Mariachi bands and dancers are often hired to perform at major events, such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. ©Joe Sohm | Dreamstime



Cadiz Water Project Still Threatens Desert

By Chris Clarke

It's no secret that the last White House was fond of the Cadiz water mining project: it even appointed Cadiz's attorney David Bernhardt as Secretary of the Interior. The Trump administration was marked by questionable reversals of policy and even illegal end-runs around federal law to benefit Cadiz.

That was a problem. The Cadiz project would siphon 16 billion gallons of irreplaceable desert groundwater each year from an aquifer full of ancient water that would only be replenished after centuries have passed. Peer-reviewed scientific studies in 2018 showed that this aquifer feeds at least five important springs in Mojave Trails National Monument—springs on which wildlife depends for survival, and which are crucial for the cultural survival of the desert's Native people.

The importance of these springs and the aquifer that feeds them made it especially problematic when in January 2021, in the waning days of the Trump administration, the Bureau of Land Management issued Cadiz a permit to convey water through a pipeline without conducting any environmental review or tribal consultation. BLM decided it would issue a pipeline permit to Cadiz using a categorical exclusion from assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act and other federal laws. In other words, Cadiz would not need an Environmental Impact Statement to pump water and use the pipeline.

With our partners at the Native American Land Conservancy, NPCA sued the Department of the Interior in federal court, arguing that the BLM should have considered the devastating impacts of Cadiz's proposal to pump groundwater out of the desert at a rate far exceeding that aquifer's natural recharge, which poses serious threats to the desert's natural and cultural resources. We expect a decision on our lawsuit in the coming months.

In the meantime, the fight continues to protect our California desert parks and monuments from Cadiz. For example, because of a state law passed in 2019, Cadiz must obtain a permit from the state in order to pump water. But if we've learned one thing about Cadiz over the decades we've been fighting the project, it's that the company, like the water it wants to mine, will seek out every possible weakness in whatever contains it.

Above: The Cadiz water mining project threatens desert wetlands like Bonanza Spring. ©Chris Clarke

NPCA New Employee Spotlight

By Jimi Shaughnessy

Jimi Shaughnessy is a Marine who works in the conservation space, first in the field and most recently improving programs to accommodate service and recreation opportunities for veterans and friends in local and national parks. Jimi spent a lot of time in California connecting veterans to community engagement



opportunities and advancing their leadership skills. Jimi joins NPCA as the Veterans Program Manager and resides in the Washington, D.C. area. His two main pursuits in life are challenging the veteran stereotype and increasing access to and improving public spaces both green and grey.

Above: Jimi Shaughnessy in Lakeview, OR
©Jimi Shaughnessy

Eagle Crest

continued from page one

allowed to course downhill through turbines to generate power when renewable energy is scarce. Pumped storage is a proven technology, but there are far more appropriate places for it—such as on rivers that already have reservoirs on them, where water would not have to be pumped out of depleted aquifers.

The ridiculous siting of the Eagle Crest project and the certain high price of the power it would provide have each discouraged California utility companies from doing business with Eagle Crest. Since the project was first proposed two decades ago, Eagle Crest has not lined up a single paying customer—and this in a state that is desperate for renewable energy.

In fact, the industry in California and elsewhere is moving away from gigantic power storage projects such as Eagle Crest, as smaller-scale storage options based on batteries or other technology have become more widely available and far more economically viable.

Right: NPCA is working to keep Eagle Crest from turning the abandoned Kaiser iron mine near Joshua Tree into a hydroelectric plant.
©Chris Clarke

Rather than try to compete with more modern technologies on a level playing field, however, NextEra decided to use its political clout to try to tilt that playing field in its favor. First in Washington and then in Sacramento, NextEra persuaded elected officials to introduce one bill after another that would have subtly favored its project over its competitors. Working with a broad coalition of energy customers, trade groups, tribes and environmental NGOs, NPCA successfully blocked one NextEra/

Eagle Crest bailout bill after another.

NPCA strongly supports a power grid run on 100% renewable energy. If we're to blunt climate change's worst impacts on our national parks and our communities, we need renewable power generation and storage. But there's a right way and a wrong way to do everything. Eagle Crest is the wrong way forward for California, and we will continue to fight to keep it from being built.



New Exhibit Recognizes Yosemite's Chinese American History

By Dennis Arguelles

This October saw the opening of the historic Chinese Laundry Building in Yosemite's Wawona basin, a much-anticipated exhibit paying homage to the critical role Chinese immigrant workers played in the park and throughout the Sierra Nevada in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The exhibit was the culmination of nearly a decade of advocacy by the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California and other community activists determined to revive and preserve a critical piece of Yosemite's heritage previously omitted from the park's interpretation.

Chinese workers brought with them great skills, innovation and industriousness in the early days of America's West, yet faced tremendous discrimination, racism and even violence. After being forced out of the mining industry, many went to work as rail and road builders, completing the 56-mile Tioga Road across the Sierra Nevada in 1883 in just 130 days, a route that reaches over 10,000 feet in elevation. In Yosemite itself, the workers built some of the park's early infrastructure and

provided critical services for its growing hospitality industry. Among them was Tie Sing, a legendary backcountry chef who was critical to the success of the Mather Mountain Party and the founding of the National Park Service.

The exhibit was made possible by a generous grant from Sandra and Franklin Yee and support of the Yosemite Conservancy. For

its part, NPCA has been a supporter of the annual Yosemite-Sing Peak Pilgrimage, which has gathered community members in the Park since 2013 to explore and celebrate Chinese American history. The pilgrimage has played an important role building awareness and support for the exhibit, and continues to introduce younger generations to this important aspect of Yosemite's history.



Above Left: Representatives of the NPS, Yosemite Conservancy and Chinese Historical Society of Southern California cut the ribbon for the Chinese Laundry Building exhibit. ©National Park Service
Above Right: Sign commemorating the Chinese Laundry Building in Yosemite's Wawona, now an exhibit honoring the Park's Chinese American history. ©O.C. Lee



PACIFIC REGIONAL OFFICE

350 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza
Suite 1100
Oakland, CA 94612

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

NON PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
OAKLAND, CA
PERMIT #2030

Giant Sequoias, Wildfire and the Costs of Climate Change

continued from page one

grow from the nutrient-rich ashes. Unfortunately, this new breed of extreme wildfires in the West is too much for even some of the oldest and largest “monarch” sequoias. 2020’s Castle Fire is believed to have killed off between 7,500 and 10,600 monarchs—about 10-14% of the world’s population of mature giant sequoias. This year, the lightning caused KNP Complex Fire in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, alongside the Windy Fire burning through nearby groves in Sequoia National Forest and Giant Sequoia National Monument is likely to wipe out hundreds or even thousands more of these emblematic species. It’s a tragedy on a scale that is hard for even those who work closely on this issue to comprehend.

There is, however, a small sliver of light peeking through the dark clouds of smoke. Since the late 1960s, forward-thinking park scientists in the Sierra Nevada started recognizing the danger posed by past forest management practices and began to acknowledge the crucial role that fire has played for millennia in cleaning up and

regenerating our forests. Subsequent decades spent utilizing prescribed burns and managing wildfires for resource benefits may very well have been a key factor in keeping this year’s fires from spreading to areas such as Sequoia National Park’s Giant Forest and reaching trees such as General Sherman, the largest tree on earth. While this crucial work has provided us with a clear roadmap for how we can best protect our forests, years of underfunding, red tape and lack of on-the-ground capacity mean that only a small fraction of the millions of acres in the Sierra has been adequately treated with these preventative measures.



While state and federal wildfire funding has increased in recent years, it is still not nearly enough to both mitigate future risks and fight off the numerous wildfires breaking out in the West each year. This is why NPCA is continuing to advocate for a drastic increase in funding at every level to expand preventative treatments in our forests. Several solutions floated as part of the Biden administration’s priorities for the Build Back Better reconciliation bill, such as establishing a Civilian Climate Corps and appropriating billions more for wildfire resilience, will provide a good start. Taking strong actions to curb our reliance on the fossil fuels driving this climate crisis is also necessary.

It is clear that without significant effort, we may very well see a number of iconic national park namesake features, like sequoias, disappear from our landscapes forever. Our forests have lived with fires for millions of years. We must be willing to do whatever it takes now to ensure that they can continue living with humans.

Left: Prescribed fire in Sequoia National Park’s Giant Forest, 2011 ©Anthony Caprio | NPS