



FIELD REPORT

PACIFIC REGION

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Last Chance Canyon. © Tom Budlong

Victory for Wilderness in Death Valley

In October 2006, Inyo County, California filed a lawsuit seeking to build roads in the federally designated wilderness of Death Valley National Park, using a repealed, 19th-century law known as R.S. 2477. NPCA and other conservation groups intervened to defend the park, filing suit in federal court to halt this damaging road-building attempt.

In August, a federal judge largely threw out the county's lawsuit—marking a major victory for the largest national park in the lower 48 states. The protected areas in Death Valley include Greenwater Canyon, Greenwater Valley, and Last Chance Canyon.

Greenwater Canyon, on the east side of the park, is rugged, narrow, and deep, and carves a twisting course through volcanic rock. Forty-two prehistoric sites containing more than 300 important petroglyphs are found in this canyon, which also

provides habitat for desert bighorn sheep and desert tortoise. One of Inyo County's claimed "highways" would have cut through the canyon for about ten miles.



Source: Earthjustice

Greenwater Valley, to the south of Greenwater Canyon, is covered with lush, dense vegetation, including creosote, sagebrush, seasonal wildflowers, and cactus. The area includes important habitat for the Black Mountain bighorn sheep herd and desert tortoise.

Last Chance Canyon at the northern end of Death Valley is a remote and scenic area that is home to mountain lion, deer, coyote, and badger. Inyo County envisions paving over this area to build a ten-mile highway, which would run up the canyon and narrow into a boulder-choked, tree-strewn gulch, and ascend a nearly vertical 50- to 200-foot ridge of unstable rock. Cutting a two-lane highway across this rugged terrain would permanently and significantly scar the landscape.

All three of these areas were inventoried and found to be "roadless" (places where no roads have been built) in 1979, and were designated as wilderness when Death Valley National Park was created in 1994. NPCA continues its work and commitment to protect this park and other sensitive park lands nationwide from damaging road-building claims made under the repealed R.S. 2477 law.

Looming Water Issues Threaten Parks

Imagine a triangle that connects Death Valley, Great Basin, and Lake Mead, with Las Vegas smack-dab in the center. Then factor in the cumulative affects of global climate change, unusual drought, and rampant urban development. What you get is a bird's eye view of a looming water crisis that threatens Nevada and California desert parks.

The Situation: Lake Mead National Recreation Area—which supplies 90 percent of southern Nevada with consumable water—is 100 feet below natural levels, the lowest it has been in 40 years. Rampant

residential and commercial development is quickly draining Nevada's meager water resources resulting in an unprecedented "water grab" for every possible drop.

The Threat: Beneath Las Vegas and extending into eastern Nevada, western Utah as well as Death Valley is a carbonate-rock aquifer that holds precious water. Granted and pending applications to extract groundwater from the aquifer threaten the ecosystems of regional national parks. In Death Valley, for instance, the endangered Devil's Hole

(See "Water Issues" page 2.)

Lower water at Lake Mead.





Protecting Our National Parks
for Future Generations®

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Regional Director, Ron Sundergill. © Joshua Stark

Message from the Director

As you can see in this issue, many good things are being accomplished in this region to protect and support our parks, including:

- Defeating an ill-conceived attempt by Inyo County to build roads in federally designated wilderness areas of Death Valley;
- Passing a California Assembly Resolution that supports full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which allows our national parks to purchase in-holdings that threaten the integrity of the parks;
- Working to prevent the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power from constructing a power line through Big Morongo Canyon, an "Area of Critical Environmental Concern," which is used by bighorn sheep and other species in Joshua Tree National Park as a source of water and sustenance.

It is important that we celebrate the first two accomplishments, and not let our guard down in the fight to protect the Big Morongo Canyon. We will keep you posted on this campaign.

An NPCA-sponsored effort that is not included in this newsletter is the newly formed National National Parks Second Century Commission. This blue-ribbon Commission, co-chaired by former US Senators Howard H. Baker, Jr. (R-TN) and J. Bennett Johnston, Jr. (D-LA), will compile a comprehensive set of recommendations to chart the future of America's national parks. On August 25th and 26th, the Pacific Region played a critical role in this Commission as its first meeting was held at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMNRA). Since there is a major concern that minority youth and urban families are visiting the parks at very low levels, commission members were exposed to SMNRA's programs that successfully reach out to urban and underserved communities.

For more information on the Commission the website is: www.visionfortheparks.org.

(Continued from "Water Issues," page 1)

Pupfish (*Cyprinodon diabolis*) is creeping closer to extinction as water levels decline—a visible testament to the fragility of desert environments and precious water resources.

NPCA's involvement: The newly opened Nevada Field Office and NPCA's California Desert Offices are closely monitoring groundwater applications and proposed developments that tap regional water resources. NPCA is also currently formulating immediate and long-term strategies that assure the protection of America's parks. To learn more about this issue, please contact Nevada Program Manager Lynn Davis at ldavis@npca.org.

Consider a Planned Gift and Leverage Additional Support

The Earth Friends Wildlife Foundation, based in Jackson, WY, has offered NPCA a challenge grant. The foundation will match a portion of every gift made through a bequest pledge, charitable gift annuity, or outright gift to the NPCA endowment. Earth Friends hopes this challenge will broaden overall support for NPCA's national programs and encourage others to support NPCA's mission. For more information, call Morgan Dodd, Director of Gift Planning, at 1.877.468.5775.

Presidio – A San Francisco Landmark at Risk

There are few places in America that better weave together the threads of the West's history, development, and exploration than the Presidio of San Francisco—a national park created to protect rich historical features in addition to its natural, cultural, and recreational resources. Recently, however, the management agency overseeing the Presidio has attempted to push through disturbing development propos-

Proposed art museum. © Presidio Trust



als that would severely alter the historic landscape that exists at the Presidio. We need your help to prevent this degradation of our national park.

Perched on the southern flank of the Golden Gate, this land provided settlers both the sustenance to survive (fresh running water) as well as a tactical, protective viewshed (a commanding view over the San Francisco Bay). The Presidio of San Francisco became a national park in 1996, undergoing a land and management transfer from the United States Army to the Presidio Trust, which was formed to oversee the transformation from “Post to Park.”

The Trust has drafted development plans that would allow for new construction totaling 190,000 square feet, including a modern art museum and a hotel, all in the most historic area of the Presidio, the Main Parade. The Parade defines the Presidio's historical significance through its design of buildings, its open space layout, and the archeological artifacts buried beneath the ground. The National Park Service has informed the Trust that the Presidio may be de-listed as a National Historic Landmark District if the Trust enacts the development proposals, which

demonstrate a lack of respect for the historic setting.

Please visit www.presidio.gov to learn more about the proposals and submit your comments to the Trust, reminding them that irresponsible development should not take place in our national parks. Comments are due by November 17, 2008.

Protecting Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

Joshua Tree National Park's neighbor to the west is Big Morongo Canyon Preserve—31,000 acres of diverse desert habitat that has been identified as an “Area of Critical Environmental Concern.” What makes Big Morongo so important? For one thing, it has a large and pristine desert oasis. In fact, the oasis at Big Morongo Canyon is one of the ten largest cottonwood and willow riparian habitats in California. Joshua Tree National Park wildlife, including desert bighorn sheep and mountain lions, cross the park boundary to drink from Big Morongo's year-round springs, enabling these animals to survive the harsh summers of the desert.

But the path that bighorn and other sensitive species use to reach the preserve's life-giving oasis is threatened. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) is considering the construction of a new 500-kilovolt transmission line directly through this area of critical concern. Construction would bulldoze a wide corridor across the desert floor, destroying habitat and bisecting the path that leads from Joshua Tree's rugged wilderness to life-sustaining water. LADWP is calling their power line project “Green Path North,” as 20% of the energy transmitted would be from renewable sources. While NPCA applauds the City of Los Angeles for its forward-thinking commitment to renewable energy, we think that a true “green path” would never threaten Joshua Tree's wildlife. NPCA's desert staff is meeting with representatives from LADWP in order to seek a new route for this transmission project.

TRAVEL WITH NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION EXPERIENCE AMERICAN HERITAGE New England Islands & Mountains

June 21-30, 2009

The National Parks Conservation Association has partnered with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to bring you a tour that focuses on important national parks and charming towns around New England. Savor the natural beauty on Cape Cod National Seashore. Witness a slice of revolutionary history at Minute Man National Historical Park. Walk the iconic Freedom Trail and other historic sites around Boston. Explore traditional wharves in Salem, Massachusetts. Each day presents a different community

and chronicles a distinct aspect of our rich national heritage.

NPCA MEMBER PRICE: \$1,649 double occupancy, \$750 single supplement.

Dreamstime. © Chee-onn Leong





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NPCA is America's only private, nonprofit advocacy organization solely dedicated to protecting and preserving the National Park System. NPCA was founded in 1919 and today has over 340,000 members. Membership benefits include the quarterly National Parks magazine and more.



Gambels quail. © David Lamfrom

GREAT ESCAPES

Fall Wildlife Viewing in Mojave National Preserve

Mojave National Preserve, renowned for its biological diversity, is home or a seasonal haven for 51 mammals, 38 reptiles, and more than 200 species of birds. Mojave, a haven for iconic and threatened animal species like the desert bighorn sheep, desert tortoise, and kit fox, is an excellent place to view wildlife. Autumn brings cooler temperatures and shorter days, and this change is met with the fall bird migration and daytime activity by many animals that are active only at night during the summer.

Look to the pinyon-juniper forest and

Joshua tree woodland for excellent bird-watching during this season. There, you can find bird species like the golden eagle, prairie falcon, Swainson's hawk, pinyon jay, road-runner, and Bendire's and Crissal thrasher.

As temperatures drop, desert bighorn and mule deer gather into breeding groups. In late autumn, mule deer males fight over harem, and desert bighorn butt heads over breeding rights to a particular female. Small mammals and reptiles are also active in autumn, searching for their final meals to build fat reserves that will sustain them during the long winter.

Victory – California Assembly Voices Support for Our National Parks

On August 12th, the California State Assembly passed House Resolution 32, authored by Assemblywoman Julia Brownley (D-Santa Barbara) and encouraging the federal government to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The LWCF is the mechanism by which the National Park Service purchases private lands within designated park boundaries from willing sellers. It also provides funding for state land purchases and for state outdoor recreation programs.

Created in 1964, the LWCF is funded through offshore oil leases in the Gulf of Mexico, and each year Congress may allocate up to \$900 million dollars to the National Park Service and state agencies. However, in the past ten years annual funding appropriations for Park Service land acquisition has decreased more than \$200 million, from \$274 million to \$69 million. Even worse, President Bush's 2009 budget request allocates less than \$22 million and altogether eliminates

funding for the states. Meanwhile, the National Park Service maintains a nearly \$2 billion backlog of purchases from willing sellers.

By passing HR 32, the California Assembly officially supports full and complete appropriation of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Hopefully, this measure of support will turn some heads in Washington, and it will help provide the strength to fully support our parks and responsible recreation.