

Center for State of the Parks



LASSEN VOLCANIC NATIONAL PARK

SNAPSHOT

In 1915, the spectacular eruption of northern California's Lassen Peak attracted the attention of the nation. Due to increased interest in the volcano, Lassen Peak National Monument and nearby Cinder Cone National Monument—which had been created in 1907—were incorporated into the new Lassen Volcanic National Park in 1916.

The park contains examples of all four volcano types (shield, composite, cinder cone, and plug dome) found on Earth as well as ongoing hydrothermal activity in the form of hissing fumaroles, bubbling mudpots, and boiling springs. Lassen Volcanic has the most intact system of hydrothermal features in the continental United States west of Yellowstone National Park. The park's other natural features include exceptional biodiversity and rare ecosystems.

Lassen Volcanic National Park has a long human history, with an archaeological record dating back 7,500 years. The Achumawi, Atsugewi, Mountain Maidu, and Yahi/Yana tribes all lived in the area before European colonization and westward migration. For the descendants of these traditionally associated peoples, the entire park is considered sacred.

The region's human history also



RUSSELL VIRGLIO

Changing leaves frame Manzanita Lake in autumn.

includes Euro-American settlers who traded furs, prospected for gold, homesteaded, and ranched livestock. Later, especially after the 1915 eruption of Lassen Peak, tourism gained momentum in the region. The historic Drakesbad Guest Ranch as well as roads, trails, buildings, and other infrastructure built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s remain as testaments to the strong draw the park held—and continues to hold—for visitors. In 2008, more than 377,000 people visited the park to experience its natural and cultural treasures.

CHALLENGES

- **Fire suppression consequences:** A history of fire suppression has led to unhealthy forest conditions at Lassen Volcanic National Park.
- **Damaged wetlands:** Lassen Volcanic's sensitive wetlands have been damaged by human modifications to the landscape. Most severe is the situation at Drakesbad Meadow, which features important fen (peaty marshland) habitat. An access road was built through this area in the early 1960s, and drainage and irrigation ditches were installed for livestock, all of which resulted in the depletion of the fen's vital water supply. Degradation of soils, loss of important peat-forming wetland plants, and an invasion of upland plants have followed.
- **Historic photos at risk:** Key portions of the park's museum and archival collections, such as the photographic slide collections of the eruption of Lassen Peak, are housed in an administrative building closet that lacks climate control and earthquake protection and is too small. Digitizing the photos for internal use and storing the originals at the park's shared facility in Orick would safeguard the historic collection.
- **Critical staff positions unfilled:** The park's cultural resource manager position is vacant, so holistic oversight of the park's archaeology, ethnography, cultural landscapes, historic structures, and museum col-



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lections is missing. In addition, the geographical information systems (GIS) program lacks a dedicated staff person to meet the park's GIS data management, information analysis, and mapping needs.

WHAT'S BEING DONE

- **Fire management begins to restore ecosystems.** Park managers use prescribed burns, wildfires, and mechanical or manual treatments to rectify the effects of past fire suppression policies. From 2004 to 2005, the park's fire management team treated approximately 10,000 park acres using wildfire and prescribed fires. In 2007 and 2008, the team treated more than 1,500 acres and 620 acres, respectively, through a combination of prescribed burning, pile burning, manual fuel treatment, and mechanical fuel reduction.
- **Land improvements ongoing.** A 1999 report identified 24 sites at Lassen Volcanic National Park that have been affected by past human uses and where resources would benefit from restoration efforts. Since the report's release, the park has restored 109 of the 195 acres of disturbed land; an additional 60 acres are scheduled for restoration in the next five years. In an effort to partially remedy the damaged wetlands at Drakesbad, in 2003 culverts were installed under the access road to allow for natural water flow, and some drainage ditches were experimentally dammed to allow replenishment of water to the fen habitat.
- **Management conflicts being addressed.** Drakesbad Guest Ranch, within the Warner Valley of Lassen

Volcanic National Park, is considered one of the park's premier cultural landscapes. The first lodge at the site was built in the late 1800s. A new lodge built at the ranch in 1938 has operated continuously since then. The Dream Lake dam at Drakesbad, constructed in 1932 to create a fishing and boating lake for guests, has altered water flows and negatively affected sensitive ecosystems there. While park managers are cognizant of the dam's historic value, they are equally aware of damage it has caused to sensitive wetlands. The park is completing a comprehensive site plan for the Warner Valley area, which will help ensure preservation of this important cultural site and the protection of its natural resources, while also providing for visitor access, facilities, and programming.

- **New visitor center opened.** In October 2008, the Kohm Yah-mah-nee Visitor Center—the park's first all-season visitor center—opened at its southwestern entrance. The center's name means "snow mountain" in the Mountain Maidu language, and refers to Lassen Peak. The center incorporates recycled and locally obtained materials and is very environmentally friendly. It is the first year-round National Park Service building to receive a "platinum" Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating.
- **Park improving relationships with traditionally associated peoples.** Lassen Volcanic staff are currently working to strengthen existing relationships with traditionally associated peoples, build new ones, and

improve interpretation of indigenous history.

- **Historic collections organized.** In 2004, through cooperation with the University of Washington, the park organized and preserved 35 separate historic photograph collections. Searchable finding aids accessed via the park's website (www.nps.gov/lavo) make it easy to locate information about items in the collections.

ABOUT NPCA AND THE CENTER FOR STATE OF THE PARKS

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come. NPCA initiated the State of the Parks program in 2000 to assess the condition of natural and cultural resources in the parks.

CONTACT US

For a copy of NPCA's full report on Lassen Volcanic National Park, to get copies of reports on other parks, or for more information about the Center for State of the Parks, visit www.npca.org/stateoftheparks or contact Dr. James Nations, vice president for the Center for State of the Parks, at jnations@npca.org. For more information on Lassen Volcanic National Park, contact NPCA's Pacific Regional Office at 415.989.9921 or visit the park online at www.nps.gov/lavo. For media inquiries, contact Lindsay Bartsh, NPCA media relations manager, at 415.989.9921 or lbartsh@npca.org.