

# WORDS OF *the* WILD

Vol. XXIII, No. 1 April 2020

Newsletter of the Sierra Club's California/Nevada Wilderness Committee

## 2020: *Stewardship Year for Wilderness* National Wilderness Workshop Comes to California

**B**ig event of the year for the Sierra Club's California/Nevada wilderness committee and all other wilderness advocates in California will be the National Wilderness Workshop planned for Merced, California, October 13 to 17, 2020.

The conference being held in California this year offers our Committee a unique opportunity to engage, help organize, broaden local participation, and educate our own members on how important it is to protect our wild places **ON THE GROUND**, not just in legislative documents and on maps.

After an opening gathering at the University of California at Merced on the evening of Wednesday, October 14, the 15th and 16th will feature full days of plenary sessions and smaller concurrent workshops. Saturday is reserved for outings into the wild. Some workshop events and also outings will take place in Yosemite National Park.

The CA/NV Wilderness Committee is taking an active role in organizing local participation in the event and in preliminary planning -- *continued page 2*




photo: Mike Painter

Tioga Peak just outside Yosemite National Park in the Hoover Wilderness is typical of this wilderness park's more than 90 percent designated wilderness.

### Exciting News--some scholarship funds available for National Wilderness Workshop participation!

In 2020, the Sierra Club California/Nevada Wilderness Committee is leveraging a \$4,750 grant from Sierra Club's Grassroots Network to strengthen our team and elevate wildlands stewardship. Funds will be available to help both new and longtime wilderness activists attend the upcoming National Wilderness Workshop\* in Merced, CA, near Yosemite National Park, this October 13-17, and to meet together in person before the conference. Costs for registration, travel, lodging and food will be eligible for reimbursement; a simple application and selection process is currently being developed. We particularly encourage local youth who are interested in wilderness stewardship to consider applying.

If you want to learn more about this opportunity--especially if you'd like to help make our CA/NV Wilderness Committee more powerful, inclusive, and effective--**please contact Anne Henny, Committee Chair, at [anneth16@sbcglobal.net](mailto:anneth16@sbcglobal.net)**.

Ideal applicants for scholarship funds will have a desire to stay in touch over time with the Sierra Club's Wilderness Committee, and possibly serve on our leadership team. An ongoing concern for how to be actively engaged in wilderness stewardship and other related issues will be helpful in being accepted for funding. 

## National wilderness workshop –fr page 1

two committee members, Joanne Clarke and Vicky Hoover, are on the planning team, participating in biweekly planning calls, led by Heather MacSllarrow, executive director of the Society for Wilderness Stewardship. The planning team conference calls began in February and will continue until October.

Joanne Clarke is currently working with the Sierra Club's Merced Group to bring them to the front lines of event efforts. In particular, she hopes to have them involved in offering homestays for visiting workshop attendees during the events at U.C. Merced.

The National Wilderness Workshop is an annual event cosponsored since 2010 by two organizations focused on stewardship of existing wilderness—the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance (NWSA) and the Society for Wilderness Stewardship (SWS). Watch for information at [http://www.wildernessalliance.org/nwsa\\_annual\\_conferences](http://www.wildernessalliance.org/nwsa_annual_conferences) It is a gathering of representatives of wilderness stewardship organizations, federal land managers, wilderness researchers, and advocacy groups to learn and discuss current wilderness issues, network, and seek solutions to pressing wilderness problems. Sessions cover wilderness science, management issues, stewardship and volunteer steward engagement. Wilderness skills demonstrations and field trips are offered, as part of an immersive program of wilderness learning and networking with the wilderness stewardship community

In recent years, these workshops—attended by 100 to 250 people each, have taken place in New Mexico, Arkansas, Montana, Colorado, and Oregon. This year, California is the chosen site for this event to showcase the need to take care of our wilderness areas—and a very appropriate choice, since California has far more wilderness areas than any other state (157 compared to 90 in Arizona and 70 in Nevada, the two with the next highest numbers of wilderness areas.) Of course none of our Lower 48 states can compete with Alaska's 48 vast areas in amount of wilderness—Alaska has nearly half of all our country's wilderness acreage.

### Featured in this issue

National Wilderness Workshop	pp. 1-2
War on environment from DC	p. 3
Desert Refuge protection bill	pp. 4-5
Amargosa Monument proposed	p. 5
Support for Miwuk Nation	p. 6
Conglomerate area botany	p. 7
Desert, migratory birds at risk	pp. 7-8
Mountain bike coalition forms	p. 8
Outings	p. 9
Loss in wilderness family	p. 10

Words of the Wild's editor attended the November 2016 workshop in Missoula, Montana, and the October 2019 workshop last fall in Bend, Oregon. At both events, agency employees involved in wilderness stewardship seemed to make up about half the attendees, and the remaining half were staff and volunteers from nongovernmental environmental organizations, especially those that work physically within wilderness—building or clearing trails, taking youth groups into the wilds, etc. Both workshops opened with a Wednesday evening reception (food provided) followed by an initial plenary session, with Thursday and Friday dedicated to multiple concurrent workshop sessions, with lunch provided; and both evenings featured social gatherings in a local brew pub. (Drinks on your own.) Saturday is for getting out to some wilderness not far away—a variety of outings are organized, from two-hour to full day events, some with additional cost; participants can get box lunches prepared. While the basic focus most emphatically was on taking care of designated wilderness, presenters from several states discussed their impending campaigns for more wilderness. But stewardship is the name of the game, which is a strong motivation for our wilderness committee to consider 2020 as a “stewardship” year. We invite Chapters to plan to offer stewardship outings. Stewardship topics at the workshop can range from trail building techniques, how to monitor for wilderness character, funding obstacles, training staff and volunteers, managing wild and scenic rivers within wilderness, improving data collection, increasing diversity in

wilderness use, and much more—specific case studies may be featured.

### Event sponsors

The Society for Wilderness Stewardship (SWS) is a professional association “made up of people who work in, recreate on, and care about wilderness”—agency or academic personnel whose profession is taking care of wilderness. Based in Grand Lake, Colorado, the organization seeks “to promote excellence in the professional practice of wilderness stewardship, science, and education to ensure the life-sustaining benefits of wilderness.”

The mission of the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance, started in 2010, is to develop a growing network of volunteer-based organizations to provide stewardship for America's enduring resource of wilderness. Their vision is eventually to help establish and then support a wilderness stewardship organization dedicated to protecting and nurturing the area's character and values for every wilderness area within the National Wilderness Preservation System. The organization is based in Bend, Oregon, home of executive director Randy Welsh.

Whatever your interests in and about wilderness may be—you will be sure to find plenty of items to interest you at the October 2020 National Wilderness Workshop at U.C. Merced, in Merced, California, and Yosemite National Park. In addition to education on specific topics—you'll find it a great networking opportunity and—well, to put it simply, fun. And for many its timing will give us an inspirational sendoff for important election work later in October and early November. ~

**FLASH** --just in: good news for red fox! After years of studies of the rare Sierra Nevada red fox, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed to list the fox as threatened or endangered. Conservation groups strongly support that proposal. Scientists estimate there may be as few as 15-50 surviving adults in the entire Sierra. The warming climate has greatly diminished the deep snowpack favored by the fox in its high elevation habitat.  
(from CSERC--Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center.)

# War on the environment -- from Washington DC

--by Jim Hines.

(from an article in the April 2020 *Condor Call*, newsletter of Sierra Club's Los Padres Chapter, Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties)

America's national coronavirus emergency does not apply to everyone.

On March 13th the President declared a national emergency because of the spreading corona virus. While this national emergency applies to you and me and millions of other Americans, it does not apply to the U.S. Dept. of the Interior (DOI) where it is business as usual.

DOI is still going ahead with issuing oil and gas leases on millions of acres of your national public lands in the western U.S.

The National Park Service is now in the process of closing, either partially or fully, various national parks in the west to YOU, but not to drilling and mining companies; it is work as usual for them. So -- if you want to spend time outdoors during this national emergency and want to visit a national park just show your drilling or mining permit and you're in.

And upcoming public comment periods for a number of projects which have the great potential to destroy fragile ecosystems, kill endangered wildlife, and ruin sacred sites so important to native Americans will not be extended to give the American public a chance to comment, says the Secretary of the Interior.

The U.S. Surgeon General announced in March that, "this week it's going to get bad." Of course, he was talking about the corona virus, but he could have easily been talking about environmental destruction measures which could be approved.

One example is federal regulators approving an LNG (liquefied natural gas) project in Coos Bay, Oregon, 2-1, over the objections of the state, which has (had?) the power to grant three necessary permits. "Backers of the project have been promising locals for 15 years that they would comply with state and local permits, but Pem-

bina (Pipeline Corp.) is now signaling that it intends to preempt the state," wrote a reporter from the Oregonian.

Despite the governor's insisting the project wouldn't go forward without the state's permitting, Pembina has appealed the state's rejection to Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross, a founder of the International Coal Group and a friendly to the oil industry.

During these times we will do what the Sierra Club does best, heading to court as well as meet with members of Congress and Interior staff, all of this done remotely and safely during this time of national emergency.

We want all lease sales on federal lands postponed and we want all public comment periods extended. Just two simple asks...will our requests be granted?

## Walling off the Wilds?

And there's even more -- in this news from Dan Millis of Sierra Club's Borderlands Team:

In January the administration stole \$3.8 billion from the National Guard and Reserves, as well as military equipment programs to squander these funds needed for veterans instead on building 177 miles of new border wall in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas with this illegally transferred money. These are the most rugged mountains, most sacred sites, and most remote wildlands of the border, places like the

**Jacumba Mountains** along Interstate 8 in California—which is one of the first places where a wall is intended to go--lands of the Cocopah Indian Tribe and San Rafael Valley in Arizona, the entire New Mexico boot heel, and the Texas communities of El Paso, Del Rio and Eagle Pass.

A 31,357 acre wilderness established by the 1994 California Desert Protection Act, the Jacumba Mountains is a broad range, managed by the Bureau of Land Management, and made up of ridges and intervening valleys. Each successive ridge is lower than the next, creating a great staircase descending dramatically from the peninsular ranges into the Colorado Desert.

If these walls are imposed, Dan Millis points out, billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars would be wasted and thirty-foot walls would span from San Diego, California to El Paso, Texas, with only a few small gaps. Communities will be separated, waterways blocked, as would wildlife corridors and migration routes, and endangered species would be at further risk of extinc-



photo: Pedro Rios AFSC: from Borderlands Team.

Borderlands activists in San Diego.

tion. Wilderness areas--considered protected "in perpetuity"--would be sacrificed. ☞

## New Nevada delegation bill to protect threatened Desert National Wildlife Refuge

To defend the integrity of Nevada's Desert National Wildlife Refuge and combat the Air Force's plan to take over most of this, the largest national wildlife refuge in the Lower 48 states, Sierra Club has worked at its strongest—with many entities, volunteers and staff working together for a well-coordinated effect. Led by the Toiyabe Chapter, the Wildlands Team and CA/NV Wilderness Committee, as well as Chapter and National staff, especially our Washington DC lands team, ramped up opposition to this unsavory military scheme. As Toiyabe Chapter director Brian Befort emphasizes, "Sierra Club's greatest strength is our breadth, diversity and talents at all levels—national, local, volunteer and staff. In these next critical months, we will need to marshal the best of all of these to keep the Air Force's invasion of the Desert Refuge at bay." (For background on the Air Force's takeover plans for much of the Desert Refuge—see WOW April & Dec 2019, April & Dec 2017.)

Most recently, in this saga, the Democratic members of the Nevada Congressional delegation, led by Senator Catherine Cortez Masto, introduced legislation to protect the integrity of the Desert National Wildlife Refuge by constricting the proposed expansion of the Air Force's Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR.) In addition to protecting the Refuge, the new "Desert National Wildlife Refuge and Nevada Test and Training Range Withdrawal and Management Act" (S 3145) calls for more than 1.3 million acres of wilderness and would be the largest wilderness bill in Nevada history. The House version is HR 5606, by Rep. Steven Horsford, D-NV4.

Sierra Club Washington DC lands team director Athan Manuel provided us a detailed analysis of the new bill:

"In addition to severely limiting the proposed air force expansion, highlights of the bill include:

- Promotes Tribes and their land management concerns by ensuring access to lands within the Desert Refuge for Tribal cultural and religious purposes;

including Tribal representation on an intergovernmental executive committee; ensuring Tribal considerations are permanently embedded in managing these refuge lands by creating a Tribal-recommended Resource Officer to work with both the Air Force and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) on minimizing and mitigating impacts to cultural resources within the co-managed lands.

- Creates four wilderness areas within the lands co-managed by USAF and FWS, comprising a total of 645,998 acres, and four additional wilderness areas within the lands solely managed by FWS, comprising a total of 664,808 acres.



Desert National Wildlife Refuge resident

- Provides for a very limited expansion for the NTTR. The DOD was asking for upwards of 800,000 acres, but the bill only allows the Air Force access to around 60,000. The original ask by the Air Force would have been the largest loss of wildlife refuge land in Nevada history so limiting them to 60,000 acres is significant.

- Reinforces the Fish and Wildlife Service as the agency with primary jurisdiction of the Desert NWR. The FWS will continue to manage wildlife maintenance activities and water development projects and will continue to preserve access for Tribal, cultural, recreational, hunting, educational and research interests.

- Extends the public lands withdrawal for the Nevada Test and Training Range for an additional 20 years until Nov. 6, 2041.

- Establishes an Intergovernmental Executive Committee for Nevadans and other interested stakeholders to exchange views, information, and advice relating to the management of the natural and cultural resources of the lands withdrawn under this Act. USAF and FWS will also be required to appoint agency liaisons to interface with the public and members of the Executive Committee.

"This bill is well in line with Sierra Club's main goal with the Desert National Wildlife Refuge -- to blunt or stop the Air Force's aggressive expansion plan.

This bill does that by severely limiting their expansion plans. Not only does this bill stop the Air Force; it also includes two Sierra Club priorities: designating more wilderness, and promoting Indigenous voices and values. As a result, when the bill was introduced, Sierra Club put out a statement highlighting the wilderness and Tribal considerations included in the bill.

"The bill may get a hearing this summer and could actually move this year as part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Due to coronavirus-caused delays, the hearing may not be until September; indeed, at this time all Congressional schedules are uncertain. That said, the Democratic-led House and the Republican Senate will almost certainly pass different versions of bills to deal with the NTTR and Desert National Wildlife Refuge. Those differences will have to be negotiated in a conference committee.

"Sierra Club supports one change proposed by the Moapa Band of Paiutes. They would like to see the bill specify that the Tribal representative on the new intergovernmental executive committee be from the region. The Paiutes' creation story starts in a cave in the Desert National Wildlife Refuge area so they feel strongly that only local Tribes should be represented.

"Most of Sierra Club concerns about setting legislative precedent are reasonably well addressed in this bill.

### Politics of this issue

"Since the bill was introduced, the Department of Defense has actively pushed back on the Nevada delegation. *We will have a fight on our hands.*

"Having this bill introduced is significant. It demonstrates that the Nevada delegation is not reluctant to confront the DOD and fight back against the proposed Air Force expansion.

The work of conservation groups, and especially of the Paiutes and Indigenous voices, helped strengthen the resolve of the delegation—who are presently very frustrated with

-- continued page 5

# The Amargosa Basin National Monument proposal, a big step forward

-- by Susan Sorrells

The Amargosa Basin is located between Death Valley National Park and Mojave Preserve, and includes the communities of Shoshone and Tecopa.

Although in the past its more famous park neighbors have eclipsed the Basin's importance, lately the area has come into its own. It not only has become recognized as being home to land treasures and resources of national significance, it also has become recognized as being an important connecting corridor and transitional zone for the flora and fauna located between the Preserve and the Park. Presently the Amargosa Basin land designations, except for private property, all fall under the jurisdiction of the National Conservation Lands System—a protective lands system under the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

This transformation to special protective lands designations over the last ten years is testament that the Amargosa Basin is a unique and

beautiful desert landscape that deserves to be protected permanently by being declared a national monument. Although parts of the Amargosa Basin are already included in ten units of the National Conservation Lands System, national monument designation for the entire Basin would ensure that this pristine and fragile area would be protected and stewarded by a holistic management plan. The extensive sweep of lands in the Basin has brought forth a significant proposal for a national monument of 1,152,552 acres.

The shift in land designation has not come easily. The communities of Shoshone and Tecopa within the Amargosa Basin, and organizations like the new Friends of the Amargosa Basin, who consider the area their home, have worked hard toward protecting these precious resources through achieving key land status changes. These citizens have partnered with local and national environmental organizations as well as with local, state and federal representatives to achieve these changes. As a result of these

hard fought efforts, in 2009 a 25-mile segment of the Amargosa River was given Wild and Scenic River designation -- the first desert river to be included in the National Wild & Scenic River System. And in 2016, more than 600,000 acres of the Amargosa Basin were newly designated as California Desert National Conservation Lands through the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP).

The next important step forward, with the support of the community, the county representatives, nonprofit partners and the many visitors who value the Amargosa Basin region is to seek out federal representatives who will sponsor legislation that will mandate this new designation. Presently a new nonprofit, based in Shoshone, called Friends of the Amargosa Basin is being formed to unite the supporters of this “monumental” campaign with the goal of transforming these aspirations into reality. ∞

Susan Sorrells, a native of Shoshone, CA, is the community's CEO and owner.

## Nevada delegation bill for Desert Refuge -- from page 4

the Air Force. They have run out of patience with them and feel that the DOD is asking for far more acreage than needed. The delegation also considers that the Air Force has not negotiated sincerely or in good faith..

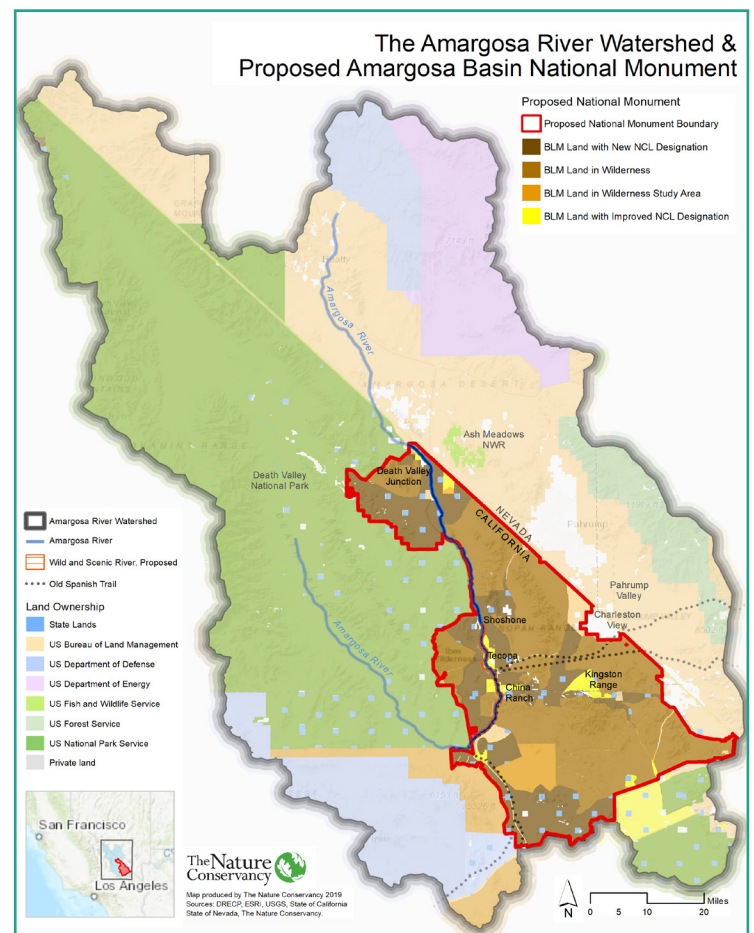
“Unfortunately, both Senate and House bills have been assigned to the respective Armed Services committees, where there are fewer environmental champions than in the Natural Resources committees.

“Getting this bill enacted will be difficult due to the opposition from the DOD and the Trump Administration, but it is a very good bill worth supporting—for its limitation to the proposed expansion by the Air Force's Nevada Test and Training Range into much of the Desert National Wildlife Refuge; its protection of 1.3

million acres of wilderness; and promotion of Indigenous voices and concerns.”

Anne Macquarie, Toiyabe Chapter chair, points out, “The Toiyabe Chapter's legislative committee packed committee hearing rooms with Club members and supporters--to standing room only--in the 2019 Nevada Legislature to support two joint resolutions opposing both the Air Force and the Navy's proposed military expansions in Nevada. Toiyabe Chapter leaders have been active members of the coalition opposing the expansion, and have met several times with our Congressional delegation. And Chapter volunteers have thanked Senator Cortez Masto for her leadership on the new Desert Refuge bill.” ∞

The Amargosa River Watershed & Proposed Amargosa Basin National Monument



## Sierra Club Supports Federal Recognition of Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation

-- by Gary Lasky, Tehipite Chapter Chair

The Tehipite Chapter Executive Committee voted in fall of 2019 to support the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation's (SSMN) effort to gain federal acknowledgment from the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI). Federal recognition of Native tribes is important for tribal autonomy and would enable SSMN to receive federal support, including direct funding and benefits such as the Indian Health Service. Only federally recognized tribes have full authority, under the U.S. Constitution, of negotiating as sovereign nations with the U.S. government. The SSMN has been applying for federal acknowledgment since 1982.

Our Sierra Club has a direct historical connection with the actions taken by the federal government to banish Yosemite Valley's traditional Native inhabitants. In recognition of this connection, our national Sierra Club today, under the leadership of executive director Michael Brune, has authorized the Tehipite Chapter (based in Fresno, CA) to send a letter to the Office of Federal Acknowledgment from the Chapter on behalf of the national Sierra Club in support of federal recognition of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation. This action is consistent with the Sierra Club's recognition of the importance of environmental justice as a concern of the Club and our members, for it is only through alliances such as these that the Club will be able to achieve its goals of protecting the environment from the aggressive actions of American industry and its government collaborators.

Despite a seven-year review by the DOI's office of Federal Acknowledgment (OFA), completed in 2017, in which a majority of the staff recommended federal recognition for the SSMN, the Trump administration's OFA made a preliminary determination in May 2019 to recommend against federal recognition of the tribe. The OFA's stated reason was that the

SSMN's 600-plus tribal members were scattered across California and did not meet often enough to demonstrate their continuing presence as a qualifying tribe, and OFA suggested further research by the tribal leadership.

The Southern Sierra Miwuk are one of seven tribes whose members were the original inhabitants of Yosemite National Park and, in particular, Yosemite Valley. In 1906, following a famous three-day camping trip by Sierra Club founder John Muir and President Theodore Roosevelt, Yosemite Valley was reacquired by the federal government and Yosemite National Park was expanded to include the Valley.

Soon after, a Native village at the base of Yosemite Falls was burned down by the National Park rangers and by 1910, only one of five villages in the Valley remained standing. Natives remained in the Park to serve the tourist trade. The last remaining Native residents of the Valley were removed in 1969, and their housing structures burned in a fire department exercise (!).

In 2018, after extensive negotiations, the National Park Service authorized the Southern Sierra Miwuk to construct a traditional roundhouse in Yosemite Valley, nearby the Camp 4 campground, utilizing historically authentic materials and methods. This is a significant breakthrough and recognition by a federal agency. It is also significant from the standpoint of the tribe, which needs to demonstrate a historical pattern of recognition of the SSMN by federal agencies in order to establish its claim to federal acknowledgment.

The official OFA report recognized that two treaties signed by Natives with the federal government in 1851 were signed by the ancestors of the SSMN, but what is disputed is whether the SSMN can demonstrate a connection to the tribelets which existed at the time. These and nine other treaties, negotiated with the

federal government in or about 1851 by California tribes, were never ratified by the U.S. Senate. Nor did the Congress ever grant any lands to the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation. It is worth noting that the ejection of the SSMN from Yosemite Valley, at gunpoint, by state and federal authorities (including the U.S. Army's Buffalo Soldiers following the Civil War), is a direct cause of the diaspora of this tribe and a valid reason for their difficulties in demonstrating a cohesive government to Federal authorities today. *Give them a break....* Of the seven tribes originally inhabiting what is now Yosemite National Park, only some have achieved federal recognition.

The Tribal Chair of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, Bill Leonard, attended the Tehipite Chapter Executive Committee meeting this past October, and he patiently answered all questions to the satisfaction of ExCom members and others present. Mr. Leonard explained that, if the SSMN is granted federal recognized status, this could benefit other California tribes that are still seeking recognition. He also stated that two former staff of the Office of Federal Acknowledgment, a historian, and an anthropologist, both support his tribe's efforts. The SSMN has now completed a census and is presently conducting a survey of the tribe's members to attempt to satisfy the federal government's rather strict protocols.

On October 10, 2019, the Office of Federal Acknowledgment granted the SSMN a second six-month extension to continue their research to make the case of why OFA should grant them status as a federally recognized tribe. At this time, the tribe is seeking a further six-month extension, to help complete their survey and gather more documentation. Public comment on this proposed action will remain open until May 2020.

For more information and background, visit the official website of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation at [southernSierramiwuknation.org](http://southernSierramiwuknation.org) or contact Gary Lasky, Tehipite Chapter, at [data.nations@gmail.com](mailto:data.nations@gmail.com) or 559-790-3495. ☞



## “How can we protect it if we don’t know it’s there?”

-- by Maria Jesus

Hidden between Death Valley National Park and the eastern Sierra in Inyo County, California is a special place known as Conglomerate Mesa. Many who’ve endured the long journey to get here can attest to its special qualities – vast Joshua tree woodlands speckled with pinyon and juniper, unbroken views in all directions, and a permeating sense of quiet. According to several mining companies, buried among these natural riches is a low-grade ore of gold. Though nearly surrounded by and intimately



photo: Maria Jesus

Jaeger's hesperidanthus

connected with adjacent protected lands (Death Valley National Park, Inyo Mountain Wilderness, Malpais Wilderness), Conglomerate Mesa does not receive the same level of protection; therefore, it is vulnerable to development and is at risk of becoming an industrial-scale open pit gold mine. (See WOW, Dec 2017 and Aug 2018 for background on Conglomerate Mesa mining threats.)

What all will be lost if Conglomerate Mesa is developed for gold mining? Until adequate baseline data are collected on this area’s unique resources, we cannot accurately answer this question. Historically, very little was known about the flora and fauna that live here. For this reason, I decided to focus on this location for my Master’s research at the California Botanic Garden in Claremont, CA. Since July 2018, I have been working to fill in gaps in botanical knowledge by traveling to Conglomerate Mesa in order to document plant species and their distribution patterns. Such research provides critical evidence to better predict the true impact of potential development. Thus far, I’ve discovered that at least ten rare plant species live

here, including local endemics like the Inyo rockdaisy (*Perityle inyoensis*) and Jaeger’s hesperidanthus (*Hesperidanthus jaegeri*). Some, like Parry’s monkey flower (*Diplacus parryi*), are ephemeral annuals that require sufficient precipitation to make an appearance. It is quite possible that during prolonged drought conditions, these plants could go several years hidden away as seeds in the soil.

Existing regulations require public land managers to assess the environmental impacts of ground disturbing projects, including mining exploration. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, regulatory assessments of environmental impact rarely capture the fullness of biological diversity and processes on the ground. To do so may take years or even decades of scientific research – a pace far slower than that afforded to most regulatory entities. In the absence of scientific evidence, assumptions (sometimes poor ones) are made and projects move forward.

The recent botanical findings at Conglomerate Mesa, including several occurrences of a species new to



photo: Maria Jesus

Parry's monkey flower

science, underscore the importance of establishing thorough baseline data. In the event that a new gold mining proposal emerges, it is my hope that ongoing research will create a better baseline that will be incorporated into future environmental assessments. Furthermore, if Conglomerate Mesa eventually receives protection from mining, these data will provide important information for land managers as well as enrich the connection that people have to this special place.

For more information, or to learn how to get involved, please contact Maria Jesus at [mjesus@rsabg.org](mailto:mjesus@rsabg.org). ☞

## Birds at Risk: desert birds, migratory birds

The impacts of a hotter world are not off in the future — they have arrived. As the planet grows warmer, the effects of heat stress on organisms trying to survive outside the temperature envelope in which they evolved is becoming increasingly evident.

In the early 20th century, pioneering naturalist Joseph Grinnell and his team studied the flora and fauna of California, conducting meticulous surveys across the state, including in the Mojave Desert. Their 100,000 specimens and 74,000 pages of field notes provided a good baseline for measuring long-term change.

Several years ago, a University of California, Berkeley, research team made a new study to find how desert

birds had fared over the last century. The changes were profound. The team found that on average temperatures in the desert had increased 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit and that nearly a third of the 135 bird species present a century ago are far less common today -- with a distinctly less widespread range. The “heat stress associated with climate change” is the culprit, the study concluded, because desert birds need more water in the hot season to keep cool, but it is no longer available. “This study tells us that ...in certain areas, animals can’t tolerate the warming and drying that has already occurred,” said lead author. Eric Riddell, a physiological ecologist.

University of Arizona professor of ecology  
-- continued page 8, bottom

## New Mountain Bike Advocacy Group Formed

-- by Geoffrey Smith

A new entity has recently formed in California to advocate on behalf of mountain biking on public lands. The California Mountain Biking Coalition ([www.camtb.org](http://www.camtb.org)) grew out of conversations held at the 2018 California Trails & Greenways Conference in Rohnert Park (<https://catrailsconference.org>). Expect to see CAMTB fill a void in mountain bike advocacy left by IMBA (International Mountain Bike Association, [www.imba.com](http://www.imba.com)) when their California Region Director position was eliminated in 2017. The person who held that position went on to head the California Trails Conference Foundation.

In past WOW issues, I have written about the challenges -- and threats -- presented by the rapidly growing electric mountain bike industry. In this era of heightened public awareness of the climate crisis, the emergence of electric pedal-assist bicycles has taken on a new significance. Seen as a replacement for the car for many urban excursions, sales

of e-bikes are surging at a time when the bicycle retail industry is depressed overall. (See WOW, April & Aug 2019)

While motorizing a bicycle for use on streets where cars go is perfectly appropriate and to be encouraged, putting a motor on a bicycle which is used off-pavement presents some real challenges. Mountain bikes have been a serious public lands management issue for a variety of reasons, including sheer numbers of users, impacts to wildlife, proliferation of and damage to trail systems, conflicts with other trail users (hikers, horses.) Put a motor on a mountain bike and what have you got? Good old fashioned 'motorized recreation' -- inappropriate and in many cases disallowed on most public lands.

To the extent that some of our non-wilderness public lands are or could be candidates for federal Wilderness designation, the nexus is



clear. As Wilderness advocates, we need to care about mechanical and motorized recreation on our public lands. Be aware that CAMTB is the new player in town, and engage as needed in your local community to promote the Sierra Club's mission and policy relating to the use of mechanized and motorized travel on our public lands.

As pressure to exploit our natural systems increases with over population and technology advances, it is more important than ever to engage locally in your community's public lands management decisions. Know your landscape and speak up for its protection! You can be sure that some mountain biking advocates are speaking up too. ~

### Desert birds, migratory birds -- from page 7

David Breshears, an expert in forests and climate change, worries. "First you get drought, on top of that the average temperature is going up, and on top of that a heatwave occurs. Do extremes matter? You better believe they do, it's scary and getting scarier."

Extreme temperatures-- as opposed to warmer average temperatures—are the catalyst for a growing number of local extinctions, experts say. Insect or animal-eating birds, which get their water from their prey, are the worst off. The Mojave Desert study found that if water needs increase by 30 percent, larger birds need to catch 60 to 70 bugs more per day to satisfy their water needs, which requires more energy used up. That's why avian carnivores in the desert — including the kestrel, prairie falcon and turkey vulture — have declined along with insectivores such as gnatcatchers and mountain chickadees. Also sharply

declining are mountain quail and gray vireo. All told, the increasing need for water has led to a 43 percent decline in species richness, the Grinnell Resurvey Project concluded.



American kestrel

Birds suffer more than other animals. "They have high exposure to climate change," said Riddell. (See <https://www.sdnhm.org/science/birds-and-mammals/projects/grinnell-desert-resurvey/>)

### Weakening bird protection?

And birds have other problems: According to the American Bird Conservancy (ABC)--the Administration has **doubled down on its effort to weaken the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA)** with a new proposed regulation that would severely undermine fundamental protections for migratory bird species. The MBTA has long stood

as one of our most important conservation laws for birds. The impacts of this new rule could be devastating to birds at a time when populations of many species are hitting historic lows.

The new rule would leave migratory birds more vulnerable to unintended harm and killing by industrial activities, a drastic pivot away from more than 100 years of enforcement against these preventable bird deaths.

While these efforts to weaken bird protections are discouraging, we can be optimistic about another recent bill. **This new legislation, the Migratory Bird Protection Act, has tremendous potential to help birds.** And it's gaining momentum. To see it across the finish line, though, contact your legislators.

Ask your U.S. Representative to **[please co-sponsor the Migratory Bird Protection Act--H.R. 5552](#)**--by Rep. Alan Lowenthal, D-CA47. (Current 61 cosponsors include ten from California and two from Nevada.) Ask them to oppose the Administration's proposed rule to weaken the MBTA. ~





# Outings



Support wilderness the Sierra Club way!

--May your trails be crooked, winding, lonesome, dangerous, leading to the most amazing view. May your mountains rise into and above the clouds. -- Edward Abbey (as quoted in Range of Light Group newsletter)

## Spring Outing

**CANCELLED**

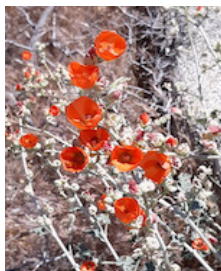
*the crowning blow.....*



Corona virus attacked and we had to cancel our spring service trip with BLM to help the Kingston Range Wilderness by working on the

Amethyst Canyon trail. Sad--just at the height of spring blooms. These blossoms are a tiny sample of what we missed.

**But -- here are some late spring trips scheduled--with uncertainty--do check in with trip leader in May:**



**May 9-10, May 23 - 24 -- Sat-Sun**

**Ventana Wilderness: Pine Ridge trail**  
Ventana Wilderness Alliance offers two combined backpack and work weekends: Backpack 1.5 miles to Terrace Creek Camp. Set up camp, and hike another 2.5 miles to end of work area, on Pine Ridge Trail. Exact location depends on how much progress is made earlier. Work between Ventana Camp Trail and State Park boundary, where the trail has been closed since it burned in the 2016 Soberanes Fire, VWA volunteers have cleared Terrace Creek Trail down to Terrace Creek Camp. Now we are working on the Pine Ridge and Ventana Camp Trails. Work is challenging but very rewarding to see the clear sections. For more info, contact Betsy MacGowan, bmacgowan@hotmail.com.

**May 22 - 25 -- Fri-Mon: Memorial Day Mt Grafton NV Wilderness service**

Join Wilderness Committee eastern NV service project with BLM at north edge of Mt. Grafton Wilderness, south of Ely. Brush back vegetation and overhanging tree branches along east access roads; enhance the parking and dispersed camping at one road, also take out an old un-used water tank. Car camp, optional central commissary. Contact Vicky Hoover, vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org or 415-928-1038.

## Wilderness Committee winter desert activities

February saw us in the tiny community of Shoshone, California, for the annual combined meeting of the CA/NV Wilderness and Desert Committees. The two interrelated groups have met together once a year ever since 1999; their first two joint meetings took place in Zzyzx, but that was rejected after no one could figure out how to spell the name of the place. Shoshone, on the eastern edge of Death Valley National Park, was a most welcoming community and has been so for 21 years. Village leader Susan Sorrells and her companions have put at our disposal the Flower Building, their community center, and here we've met year after year on the Saturday and Sunday of the second weekend in February. Blustery winds, even rain, and sometimes balmy sunshine have greeted us.

Meeting participants set up tents outside, stay in local campgrounds or hotels, sleep out under the stars, or even -- I name no names -- sleep on the raised dais/stage inside the Flower Building. Interesting reports on issues, networking with like-minded allies, discussions and



Stacy Goss and Anne Henny, 2020 Shoshone meeting chairs

presentations from agency staff, and simply fun conversation with friends whom we see only rarely make the weekend fly. After Saturday's potluck

comes a slide--or power point--show; this year we heard from Abby Wines--on Death Valley National Park staff.

Service outings also form part of the weekend. Friday before the meeting has for many years been dedicated to a work project with Mojave National Preserve staff, usually at Zzyzx--you can work there with no spelling expertise. After

the weekend, a southern Nevada service trip often follows, working with Friends of Nevada Wilderness and their Las Vegas volunteers. This year, Friends of Nevada Wilderness arranged for us to help out the BLM managers of Nevada's southernmost two wilderness areas--Spirit Mountain and Bridge Canyon. The boundary road between these two wilderness areas gets littered every year by local folks decorating the roadside stately juniper trees with Christmas ornaments. Such decorations would not be a concern--if people took them down after Christmas, as one would do at home--and if the area adjacent to the road were not designated wilderness. Our volunteer project cleaned up numerous trees and left the area looking much more natural than before. Several campers in the vicinity who watched us in action were inspired to join and help.

Since this Christmas Tree Pass service was the weekend after Shoshone, several of us used the midweek to camp in the beautiful Gold Butte National Monument (established by President Obama): 300,000-plus acres in Nevada's southeast corner between the Overton Arm of Lake Mead (mouth of the Virgin River) and the Arizona border.

The area boasts classic Mojave desert vegetation and intricately shaped red rock sandstone formations, with remarkable Native rock art. This newsletter for 20 years has told of threats to these fragile features of Gold Butte from off-road vehicle users. BLM, with inadequate staff, has struggled to control activities. This year, three of us, Alan, Jim and I, enjoyed two days of leisurely hiking -- over ridges and in canyons, before it was time to head for Christmas Tree Pass. (vnh)



Ridge resting in Gold Butte

# A Giant Loss in the Wilderness Family--remembering Cal French

January 1937 - March 2020

In August 2015, Words of the Wild lamented the passing of Letty French—our dedicated committee secretary and dame of honor, Now it is Letty's husband Cal whose loss we mark with deep sadness. How we miss his abiding friendship and his broad, good-sense but incisive outlook on many conservation issues—particularly wilderness! And Cal was one of the founders of "Sierra Club California."

Cal and Letty's daughter Frances Reneau reminisces about her father:

"Just a year ago he was diagnosed with cancer, and after surgery and chemo, he wasn't getting better. In January he moved from his farm 14 miles west of Paso Robles to a residential care facility,

My parents got involved with the San Gorgonio Chapter when I was a kid, and both served on the ExCom for that chapter, as well as leading chapter outings. They initiated a rock climbing section. We had lots of weekend trips rock climbing in Joshua Tree and to "Big Rock," - now Lake Perris. I particularly remember a clean up they

organized at Big Rock with volunteers bagging litter, recycling bottles and cans, and burning tumbleweeds..

By the time I was in grade school, they were avid backpackers, and we kids were being left with my grandparents, my Dad's parents, in San Luis Obispo, while they took my Dad's younger brothers backpacking in the Sierra. On their first trip, to Lake Reflection, they spent the time fishing. They cooked over the fire in those pre-stove days. How filthy they were when they got home! In our house in Upland, where my Dad taught high school English, there were big Sierra Nevada topo maps taped to the wall with their trips highlighted in orange.

They got involved in leading National Outings by the early 1970s, and they both served at various times on the Knapsack Training Trip with Jim Watters and Gordon Peterson, and others. My Dad taught map and compass, and stream crossing and other rope skills, and he also led two trips to Lake Baikal in Russia for International Outings. He

really enjoyed those trips for how very different it was from anyplace else he'd been. They also led some activist trips, including to the Mojave and the Sierra.

After my dad retired, they moved to Paso Robles, where they joined the Santa Lucia Chapter, and Daddy served on the board of Friends of the Carrizo.

Daddy's big trek across California, in March/April of 2011, to promote the inter-connectivity of the natural areas from the Colorado River to the Pacific, was something he figured out and organized all on his own. He said he was just looking at maps and realized that it would be possible to cross California entirely (okay, almost entirely) on public land. Tom and Madeleine Landis and Dave Reneau joined him for all or parts of the trip, (See wow, Aug 2011, for Cal's account of his remarkable feat.)

My father was a very knowledgeable person, very wise and well-read; his brothers called him "the professor." He was kind--oh so kind!--tenderhearted and generous. He loved puns and jokes. He was a good man, and led a good life--and he wanted more." ~

The Sierra Club's California/Nevada Wilderness Committee, an issue committee of the CA/NV Regional Conservation Committee, advocates for preservation of unroaded, undeveloped public lands in a wild state through legislation and appropriate management, and sponsors stewardship and wilder-

Chair: Anne Henny, SF Bay Chapter (510) 289-2294  
Heather Anderson (559) 681-6305: Arts and Wildlands liaison:  
Judy Anderson (818) 248-0402: wilderness management  
Victoria Brandon (707) 994-1931: Redwood Chapter coordinator  
Joyce Burk (760) 252-3820: Southern CA forests co-chair  
Cindy Buxton (619) 934-0323: San Diego Chapter coordinator  
Alan Carlton (510) 769-3403: Forest Planning liaison  
Sandra Cattell (661) 714 -2850: Angeles Chapter coordinator  
Joanne Clarke (209) 233-7380: Tehipite Chapter coordinator  
Eric Diesel (650) 847-8646: Southern CA forests-co-chair  
Larry Dwyer (775) 786-8564: Toiyabe Chapter coordinator  
Steve Evans (916) 442-3155: Wild & Scenic Rivers  
Steve Fernald (530) 577-5112; Tahoe area coordinator  
Joe Fontaine (661) 821-2055: Wilderness Watch, Kern Kaweah Ch.  
Terry Frewin (805) 966-3754: CA Desert areas  
Hermi Hiatt (702) 361-1171: Friends of Nevada Wilderness  
James Hines (805) 340-9266: Los Padres Chapter & Wildlife coord.  
Vicky Hoover (415) 977-5527: Newsletter editor, Outings  
John Moore (916) 731-7153: Mother Lode Chapter coordinator  
Mike Painter: (415)752-3911: Californians for Western Wilderness  
Geoffrey Smith (858) 442-1425: Wilderness Listserv manager  
Mike Splain (831) 359-2489: Ventana Chapter coordinator  
OPEN-San Francisco Bay, San Gorgonio, and Santa Lucia Chapter coordinators

From:  
2101 Webster St.,  
Suite 1300,  
Oakland CA 94612



SIERRA  
CLUB  
FOUNDED 1892



Cal French on his 2011 Colorado River to Pacific Ocean trek

Photo: David Reneau

"Cal and Letty are premier models of what it means to be leaders and activists. A sad day for Knapsack and Outings--and all of the Club is brightened by the memory of all that both contributed for so many years. It is quite a legacy."

-- Bill Flower, former chair, National Outing Committee

Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you. -- Pericles (430 B.C.)