Executive Director's Message

With the waning coastal fog and cooler temperatures upon us, it’s high time to hit the trails amid the clear days and crisp nights of autumn. Of course, things have changed since the 2008 fires. Shade is in shorter supply, and getting to remote enclaves like Big Pines and Lost Valley requires extra effort. Even “wilderness freeways” like the Pine Ridge Trail have seen significant damage as hikers scramble to avoid encroaching vegetation. But the wildfire aftermath has taught us about the Wilderness’s powers of regeneration, and the VWA has done its best to keep pace.

It was about this time four years ago that the Indians, Basin Complex and Chalk Fires were finally contained. Volunteerism was at our core then as it is now, but we were learning that volunteers could be far more effective with staff members working behind the scenes to raise funds, pay bills, and tell their stories. I signed on as Communications and Development Director and, before long, we’d hired an experienced Executive Director who could help to develop program goals and a strategic plan to accomplish them.

As with so many non-profits, our first strategic plan was overly ambitious. The VWA has always been blessed with an intelligent, dedicated base of members and volunteers, but with so much work to be done, we simply had to prioritize! About a year ago, we revised and distilled our plan down to what could reasonably be accomplished by mere mortals in an average human lifespan. These days, I’m honored to be serving as the VWA’s second Executive Director and, before long, we’d hired an experienced Executive Director who could help to develop program goals and a strategic plan to accomplish them.

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Obviously, everyone has their passion. For some it is trails, for others it’s ensuring the future of the conservation movement, and for still others it is boots on the ground, teaching visitors how to tread lightly on the land. We’ve done our best to incorporate all of these approaches into the VWA strategic plan, and I’m happy to say that when it comes to success stories, there’s a lot to tell.

I hope you’ll enjoy reading some of those stories in this edition of Ventana Wilderness Watch. Stay tuned for updates on VWA’s other wilderness advocacy and stewardship programs, and don’t forget that it is members like you who make this essential work possible.

Thank you, and happy trails!

Mike Splain | Executive Director
More than eighty percent of the Monterey Ranger District (MRD) of the Los Padres Forest is designated wilderness, an extremely high percentage, especially when compared to other National Forests. Because of this, many consider the MRD to be a “flagship district” with outstanding wilderness characteristics. That is why it is essential that the Ventana Wilderness Alliance partners with an under-staffed and under-funded US Forest Service to care for this land and the clean air, pristine waters and wildlife habitats that it provides.

Wilderness Stewards | Keeping It Wild

Being so close to significant population centers, there is a gap between the high visitor usage of the wilderness and the low amount of public contact and education in the backcountry. This gap imperils water quality, wildlife protection, fire safety and other human-caused impacts on the land.

That is why the VWA, in partnership with the MRD, has developed a volunteer program to maintain backcountry recreation sites while providing an educational resource to wilderness visitors. The VWA’s Wilderness Steward program has been established through generous matching funding from the National Forest Foundation.

Wilderness Steward Roles and Responsibilities

- Patrol the trails of the Ventana and Silver Peak Wilderness areas
- Provide recreation, campfire and natural history information to visitors
- Perform light trail maintenance and camp site restoration
- Identify and monitor invasive plant infestations
- Document activities and findings. This data will be the cornerstone of our collaborative planning with the Forest Service for future work in the backcountry.

Together the VWA and Forest Service have provided uniforms, radios and field equipment for the Stewards. And thanks to a National Forest Foundation matching award, the VWA is able to provide the volunteer Stewards with tools, supplies and a stipend to offset travel and food expenses.

While sorely needed, the VWA Wilderness Steward program is not intended to replace professional Forest Service Rangers. The professional Ranger, working year in and year out across a given piece of ground, is fast becoming an endangered species. The VWA will continue to push for restoration of funding to support field-going, professional Rangers. Until such time, it is up to us to get creative, get our hands dirty, and together figure out how to sustain the diversity of wilderness values in the Ventana region and Big Sur coast. The Volunteer Steward program is just one way the VWA is rising to the 10-year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge. To read more and find out how you can help, see Meeting the Challenge on page 8.
VWA Partners with National Geographic

One day earlier this year, VWA member, backcountry explorer and mapping expert Jack Glendening walked into the REI store in Marina and purchased a copy of National Geographic’s “Trails Illustrated Map” of Big Sur and the Ventana Wilderness. It did not take Jack long to discover that the map had numerous errors. Jack reported his findings in the VWA’s online Forums and word quickly got back to National Geographic Maps headquarters. It was then that David Jay, Director of Sales and Business Development at National Geographic Maps, pulled the map from the shelves and contacted his friend and VWA Treasurer David Jacobs to talk about solving the problem.

David Jacobs immediately informed the VWA staff and soon a committee was assembled to edit the map for National Geographic. In return for the VWA’s expertise, National Geographic agreed to feature the VWA and what we do in a prominent location on the map. They also agreed to donate a quantity of maps to aid the VWA’s membership development efforts. Some of you reading this may have already taken advantage of our offer of a free map with a $50 or higher membership renewal.

All in all, the VWA Map Committee provided over 250 corrections, updates and improvements to the original version. This allows National Geographic to have the most up-to-date and accurate map of its type on the market. For example, the National Geographic map includes newly designated lands like the Milpitas Special Interest Area and Fort Ord National Monument.

The VWA Map Committee was comprised of Jack Glendening, Betsy MacGowan, Boon Hughey, Gordon Johnson, Mike Splain and Mike Heard. Their efforts have inspired National Geographic to establish what we hope will be a long-term partnership between the two nonprofits. The VWA will continue to ensure that National Geographic publishes an accurate Ventana region map. In return, the VWA will benefit from National Geographic’s expertise and prominence in protecting wildlands and wildlife.

The corrected version of the Big Sur map — one of more than 160 in National Geographic’s “Trails Illustrated” series — is now available. You may secure a free copy by joining the VWA or renewing your membership at the $50 level or higher. We would like to thank the VWA Map Committee and National Geographic for making this partnership happen.

A Special Spring Gathering at The Indians

A diverse crowd of more than 100 people gathered at The Indians on Saturday, May 12 to celebrate the Milpitas Special Interest Area. The ensuing potluck was one of the best in VWA Gathering history. Attendees enjoyed a varied program of activities and presentations on a beautiful spring day. VWA Vice President Dennis Palm emceed the event and introduced Terry Jones, Betty Rivers and Kathryn Klar, who shared their knowledge of Salinan Ethnogeography based on the work of John Peabody Harrington. Greg Castro initiated the day’s events with Native American song and blessings.

The VWA would like to thank the many people who attended this special event, including members of the San Antonio Valley Historical Association, the US Forest Service, and the good people of Juniper Ridge who handed out free samples of their wildcrafted soaps, teas, sprays and sachets. Special thanks goes out to Maria Ferdin, Julianne Rhodes and Tamara Jones, who organized the amazing potluck, and to Jon Libby for using his trailer to haul a ton of necessary equipment down to the Indians and then back to civilization.
The Arroyo Seco begins its descent to the Salinas River and thence to the sea on the slopes of the Coast Ridge near Cone Peak. The river’s most significant tributaries include Lost Valley, Willow and Santa Lucia Creeks, the latter of which draws its headwaters from the highest and most remote reaches of the Santa Lucia Range. The Spanish “arroyo” translates to “steep-sided canyon with a nearly flat floor,” with “seco” meaning “dry,” accounting for the river’s disappearance into the sand and gravel of the Salinas Valley. Of course, in its upper reaches, the Arroyo Seco is anything but dry, and despite the popularity of its seasonally crowded gorge area, the tenacious traveler will find plenty of solitude amid the pristine wilderness that lays upstream.

During summer months the steep, baking chaparral and live oak-laden walls of the Arroyo Seco canyon are best viewed from within the river itself. Few Ventana Wilderness experiences can match the relaxation of hiking and floating upstream from the horse bridge near the eastern end of the Marble Peak Trail. Early in the season, the river can be swift and cool enough to limit progress to little more than a mile, but as the river’s temper settles into mid-summer, adventures to distant gorges, waterfalls and crystalline pools become an enticing possibility.

Watch for verdant spring-fed patches of leopard lily (Lilium pardalinum), stream orchid (Epipactis gigantea) and sedge (Carex spp.) amongst scattered stands of cottonwood (Populus spp.), sycamore (Platanus racemosa), willow (Salix spp.) and alder (Alnus rhombifolia). Water ouzels stalk aquatic insects throughout the gorge. These stocky, ubiquitous birds with upturned tails are often seen bobbing up and down on rocks amid swift moving water – a habit that may help them spot prey despite the sunny glare. Ouzels are equipped with compact, downy wings, translucent auxiliary eyelids, and nostril-shielding scales – exquisite adaptations to facilitate underwater hunting. Observant travelers will catch a glimpse of noisy, inaccessible ouzel nests behind waterfalls or plastered to overhanging mossy cliffs.

With the onset of autumn, days grow shorter and the sun’s lowly path across the horizon barely penetrates the Arroyo Seco canyon’s shady recesses. Before long, rains return to quench the parched watershed, and eventually the river rises to scour away the flotsam deposited by summer revelers. Come winter, scarcely another hiker is encountered along Arroyo Seco-Indians Road, and beyond the Marble Peak trailhead, one ascends the proposed Arroyo Seco National Recreation Trail. This rapidly rising pathway, passable to hikers, bicyclists and equestrians alike, is flanked by wilderness on both sides and offers stunning panoramas of untrammeled central California, just as nature intended it.

A “hiker” ascends the Arroyo Seco canyon.
Ventana Wilderness - Tassajara Trail Network
TRAIL CONDITIONS - SEPTEMBER 2012

Sources: Jack Gerlach, USGS, CalAtlas, Monterey County, US Forest Service
Projection: NAD 83 UTM Zone 10 North - Scale: 1:40,000 - Contour Interval: 100 ft
Map Features

- Ventana Wilderness
- Los Padres NF
- Vehicle Camp
- Trail Camp
- Permanent Gate
- Bridge
- Primary Road
- Secondary Road
- Use Trail

Trail Conditions

- Wilderness Freeway
- Clear
- Passable
- Difficult
- Impassable

The Tassajara Trail Network will be the focus of the VWA in 2013. Thanks to the ongoing efforts of VWA Trail Crew volunteers, many of the core trails within the 30-mile network are in passable to clear condition. However, encroaching brush, deadfall and unstable slopes threaten access to the spectacular backcountry.

For the up to date trail conditions, or to post your own trail conditions report, please visit www.ventanawild.org where you can also find out how to help keep these trails open in perpetuity.

DISCLAIMER: This map is not intended for route finding or travel. Trail conditions change constantly. VWA assumes no liability for the usage of this map.
Meeting the Challenge | *It Starts with a Recreation Site Inventory*

by Mike Splain

On September 3, 1964, President Johnson signed one of America’s most forward-thinking pieces of legislation into law. Since then, the Wilderness Act has protected an enduring legacy of over 100 million acres of wildlands, including nearly 15% of the state of California. With the Act’s 50th anniversary rapidly approaching, the VWA has stepped up our stewardship efforts to meet the ten-year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge.

So what exactly is the Wilderness Stewardship Challenge? Back in 2004, in observance of the 40th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, the US Forest Service issued a challenge that all Wilderness areas in the National Forest System be brought to baseline management standards by 2014. To meet this standard, Wilderness Areas are measured on 10 stewardship “elements” and must achieve 60% of the total available points. So far, only a small fraction of Wilderness Areas meet this standard. In fact, here in California, the Ventana and Silver Peak rank dead last.

Our poor showing is best understood in the context of Challenge elements. For instance, Element 1 requires a fire plan that accounts for the full range of management responses. Shortfalls in this element are being resolved through the FireScape Monterey process. (See our Summer 2011 and Spring 2012 newsletters for more details.) Element 4 emphasizes the need for a Wilderness Education Plan. Fortunately, a Forest-wide plan was completed in August and incorporates many VWA suggestions and innovations, including web-based trail conditions reports for all ten Los Padres National Forest Wilderness Areas.

The Ventana and Silver Peak need the most help concerning what’s known as “visitor use management.” Specifically, Wilderness Stewardship Challenge Elements 5 and 6 mandate solitude and recreation site monitoring. Solitude monitoring is as simple as counting other hikers along our favorite trails; but in order to monitor recreation sites, we must first take a comprehensive census of Wilderness camps. In order to accomplish this Herculean task, we have trained and outfitted a dedicated group of Inventory Interns who hit the ground running earlier this fall.

Thanks to a generous grant from the National Forest Foundation, these volunteers will visit every official and unofficial backcountry campsite, take photographs, assign condition class ratings, and make management recommendations based on “Leave No Trace” principles. Along the way, Interns will monitor opportunities for solitude, record trail conditions, and take notes concerning signage and other administrative structures. When the project is completed in June of 2013, we can all look forward to the benefits of these valuable data, which will be used to directly guide management and restoration efforts by VWA Volunteer Stewards and Forest Service personnel alike. For more information on the recreation site inventory program, or to find out how you can help, contact Mike Splain at mike@ventanawild.org.
In this edition of Ventana Wilderness Watch, let’s get to know Adam Wachtel. Adam is involved in a wide variety of VWA field activities. He is an active member of the VWA Trail Crew and patrols the backcountry as a volunteer Wilderness Steward. Born in Monterey and raised in Prunedale, Adam developed a deep appreciation for the local wildlands through his parents, Rosann and David. Adam is engaged to Kristine Kemper, whom he met during his many years as a Youth and Adult Leader at Pico Blanco Boy Scout Camp.

Adam earned his B.A. at Humboldt State University in Geography with a Minor in Environmental Planning. Aside from his involvement with the VWA, Adam enjoys hiking in the Santa Lucia Mountains, birding, and insect identification. We were able to catch up with Adam at a recent VWA Trail Crew outing on the Little Sur Trail, which he helped to organize.

Q: How did you become involved with the VWA?
A: I first found out about the VWA around 2005-2006 when I was planning hikes in the Ventana as a youth in my Boy Scout Troop. What got me most interested in the VWA were my first discussions with people involved in the organization. I talked to Boon Hughey regarding Jeff Norman’s work, Mike Splain regarding flagging tape along Jackson Creek, and Betsy MacGowan regarding the delicious food on VWA outings and events. I was not able to attend many outings when I was in college, but I’m glad I was able to stay in touch.

My main role with the VWA is as a Wilderness Steward, which is much more than being a “wilderness janitor.” As Volunteer Stewards, our job is to educate wilderness visitors, mitigate hazards, and set the example of how a “Leave No Trace” campsite should look. Along with Steve Benoit, I help lead the Wilderness Steward program, which includes scheduling, paperwork and coordination with the Forest Service. I like to get involved with other VWA events and enjoy being part of VWA Trail Crew outings.

Q: What makes the Ventana Wilderness special to you?
A: There is such a diversity of terrain. You can see so much in such a short distance. The lack of snow cover allows for year-round hiking. And mostly, it is the people who use it and love it, or the so-called “Ventanaphiles.” They are very friendly and work so hard to keep the wilderness clean and the trails open.

Q: What are some of your favorite places in the Ventana?
A: I especially enjoy the Little Sur River area. The trails and camps within its watershed are under-used and under-appreciated. There is one spot in particular that is my favorite. Somewhere between Little Sur River Camp and the circular pool waterfalls along the North Fork of the Little Sur River there is an ancient stream bed terrace. On this terrace are some of the southernmost old growth Douglas-firs, a grove of redwoods, alders with various warblers foraging in them, endemic Dudley’s lousewort and some Esselen grinding rocks covered in moss. I’d rather not give away the exact location, but with a bit of searching you should be able to find it.

Q: What do you try to convey to visitors as you patrol the Pine Ridge Trail?
A: I want them to realize that the camps along the Pine Ridge Trail are getting excessively trashed and that “Leave No Trace” goes beyond packing out what you pack in. Along this trail, especially at Sykes Camp, anyone seeking a wilderness experience might be sharing this experience with hundreds of other people with a different definition of a wilderness experience. At the very least, I’d like people to realize that tin and glass do not burn and that not all maps can be trusted.

Q: What are some of the stranger things you have seen or heard in the backcountry?
A: When out in the field as a Wilderness Steward, we explain to forest visitors that we are volunteers and convey to them the importance of “pack it in, pack it out.” I find it humorous that people use this as an opportunity to ask us if we can haul out their garbage for them. Also, seeing rock fire rings under the waters of the Big Sur River at Sykes Camp is both funny and dismaying.
Lost Camps of the Ventana

VWA member Paul Danielson has graciously donated his fascinating new book to the Ventana Wilderness Alliance as a fundraiser. Over 13 years in the making, *Lost Camps of the Ventana* is finally in print. Only six signed, first edition copies remain! Secure your copy today by joining the VWA or renewing your membership at the $100 level or higher. You can do this at ventanawild.org or by sending a check to the VWA at PO Box 506, Santa Cruz, CA 95061. Please call 831-423-3191 for more information.

Ventana Trails Forever Donors Honored at Big Sur Station

The Ventana Wilderness Alliance recently completed the installation of a plaque at the multi-agency facility at Big Sur Station. The plaque recognizes donors who have contributed to the Ventana Trails Forever fund. Thus far, we have raised over $200,000 to provide permanent funding for the maintenance and restoration of the public trail network in and around the Ventana and Silver Peak Wilderness areas.

The Ventana Trails Forever Campaign, which resides at the Community Foundation for Monterey County, aims to raise $500,000 by 2014. 80% of this total will be deposited in a restricted-use fund. The remaining 20% will be available for immediate use by the VWA for maintenance and restoration of public trails throughout the Big Sur and Ventana region.

Donors providing gifts of $1,000 or more are recognized on the commissioned fine-art piece which was designed by Big Sur artist and sculptor Greg Hawthorne. This permanent monument has been placed at the public entrance to Big Sur Station, the hub of backcountry visitation in the Ventana Region, operated by CalTrans, the United States Forest Service, and the California Department of Parks and Recreation. Please check out the plaque the next time you are in Big Sur and join us in thanking the generous donors.

To learn more about the Ventana Trails Forever campaign, visit the Ventana Wilderness Alliance at ventanawild.org or call 831-423-3191.

Discover the Benefits of Giving Wisely

Did you know there are creative ways to support the Ventana Wilderness Alliance? Ways in which you and your loved ones all benefit at the same time?

Such giving techniques are called “planned gifts,” because with thoughtful planning, you create win-win solutions for you and the VWA.

For example:

- You can make a gift that costs nothing during your lifetime.
- You can give stock and realize larger tax savings.
- You can donate your house, continue to live there, and get a tax break all at the same time.

www.legacy.vg/ventanawild

We encourage you to consider supporting the VWA through planned giving. For more information, please see our Planned Giving pages at the above link or contact Tom Hopkins at tom@ventanwild.org.
Youth in Wilderness | Update
by Kimmy Gal

We are excited to embark upon a new chapter of the Youth in Wilderness Program! After three years as Program Coordinator, Morgan Harris has left the VWA to pursue graduate school in London. Morgan was essential to the development of the Youth in Wilderness Program. We greatly appreciate his hard work, positivity and immeasurable contributions to the VWA.

Greg Meyer continues to offer his expertise in outdoor leadership as the Youth in Wilderness Program Director. As the new Program Coordinator, I am working with Greg and the VWA staff to build new partnerships with youth programs throughout the central coast while growing existing relationships. Bryce Winter, an experienced and enthusiastic wilderness advocate and youth leader, has joined the team to help me lead trips when necessary.

This fall we have already partnered with the Bakari Project in San Luis Obispo and YES High School in Santa Cruz on environmental education expeditions. Also, we will partner with UC Santa Cruz students for a stewardship project in Limekiln State Park. In this project, UCSC students will be working to re-establish the Alvin Trail, which is a critical connector from the state park to Twitchell Road and the backcountry beyond…including the the Cone Peak Trail network.

The Youth in Wilderness Program aims to inspire a new generation of dedicated wilderness stewards while providing students with an opportunity to gain skills in leadership and community-building.

We provide opportunities for students to be fully immersed in nature and experience new ways to collaborate with their peers and teachers. By implementing unique, empowering overnight wilderness expeditions, our goal is to make a lasting impact on students that will enhance their skills, interests and abilities in the following areas:

- Willingness to participate in conservation and restoration efforts
- Knowledge of “Leave No Trace” wilderness practices
- Interest in and knowledge of central coast ecology
- Willingness to be outdoors
- Self-confidence
- Community engagement
- Effective leadership skills
- Conflict resolution abilities

We would like to send a special “thank you” to VWA Trail Crew Leaders for providing expertise and guidance on Youth in Wilderness stewardship expeditions.

Youth in Wilderness expeditions are provided to the participants at low to no cost. To help ensure that we are able to continue inspiring the youth of California, please consider a donation to the program. Thank you to all of our sponsors and volunteers. Your contributions allow us to keep providing exceptional outdoor experiences to youth, many of whom would otherwise not have the opportunity.

Youth in Wilderness Partners
Salinas Community School | Rancho Cielo Community School | Rancho Cielo Wildfire Suppression Program | Pacific Ridge School
UC Santa Cruz | CSU Monterey Bay | Cal Poly Sierra Student Coalition | The Anacapa School
The Bakari Project | Police Activities League Seaside (PALS) | YES High School

Youth in Wilderness Funders
Fernandez Pave the Way Foundation | Tides Foundation | Arkay Foundation | Save the Redwoods League
Community Foundation Santa Cruz County | The Applewood Fund | California State Parks Foundation.

In addition, hundreds of individual supporters have contributed time, gear and financial resources towards the success of the program.
EVENTS

October 27-28
Pine Valley Trail Crew Trip
Email vwa@ventanawild.org
for details.

Join the Trail Crew
Email List
www.ventanawild.org/trails/trail-crew.html

Please like our fan page on facebook

VWA Welcomes New District Ranger | and Thanks Sherry Tune for Her Service

The VWA would like to extend thanks and congratulations to former Monterey District Ranger Sherry Tune. Sherry brought a wealth of wildfire management experience to the District. Her legacy includes FireScape Monterey and the signing of the Milpitas Special Interest Area Collaborative Management Plan. We wish her all the best in her new position as Forest Supervisor of the Mendocino National Forest.

We also extend a warm welcome to new Monterey District Ranger Tim Short. Tim’s resume includes time on Wyoming’s Bridger-Teton National Forest as well as Arizona’s Kaibab National Forest. In both cases, he managed districts with extensive areas of designated Wilderness. Tim recently met with VWA staff and volunteers for a brief tour of the Milpitas Special Interest Area, during which we acquainted him with many of the area’s unique resources and challenges.

Welcome aboard, Tim! We look forward to working closely with you and your staff to protect resources and resolve challenges on the Milpitas SIA and throughout the Monterey Ranger District.

VWA Vice President Dennis Palm (left) and VWA Trail Crew Leader Mike Heard (center) discuss unauthorized roads on the Milpitas SIA with new Monterey District Ranger Tim Short (right).