Celebrating 50 Years of Wilderness

Special Map Insert
Lost Valley Trails Network

Volunteer Spotlight
Sharol Sevilla

Protecting the Big Sur Backcountry
Executive Director’s Message

It has been exactly fifty years since the Wilderness Act was signed into law. Passing in the Senate in April of 1963 and the House of Representatives in August of the following year, the Act emerged amid great controversy but ultimately earned widespread support and the President’s signature on September 3, 1964. Let’s start there.

One of the important provisions of the Wilderness Act was the induction of all existing Wild Areas, Canoe Areas and administratively protected Wilderness Areas into the National Wilderness Preservation System. These lands amounted to a mere 9.1 million acres nationwide, but fortunately there was much more to come.

First and foremost was the careful consideration of all existing Primitive Areas as potential wilderness, including a review of the 55,800 acre Ventana Primitive Area. Thanks largely to the tireless efforts of the Sierra Club’s burgeoning Ventana Chapter, additional tracts of the Big Sur, Carmel and Arroyo Seco watersheds were also reviewed. With the passage of the Ventana Wilderness Act in August of 1969, the 98,000 acre Ventana Wilderness was born.

As the nation’s environmental consciousness expanded, so did its wilderness boundaries. Meanwhile, critical legislation like the National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act made their way into law. By the late 1970’s, backpacking was a popular pastime and Congress had assembled the impressive Endangered American Wilderness Act. It passed in February of 1978, created 13 new Wilderness Areas, and expanded the Ventana to include the spectacular slopes surrounding Cone Peak.

1984 saw the passage of the California Wilderness Act, which included more than 3,000,000 acres of wilderness designations statewide. Among the areas protected was a Ventana Wilderness addition of 2,750 acres in the Church Creek drainage.

During the 1980’s, the late Sally Reid began a campaign to permanently protect significant portions of the Los Padres National Forest. Her extraordinary efforts led to the introduction of the Los Padres Condor Range and River Protection Act. The 1992 passage of this bipartisan legislation designated the Wild and Scenic Big Sur River, added 38,000 acres in the Arroyo Seco drainage to the Ventana Wilderness, and created six new wilderness areas across the Forest, including a 14,500 acre Silver Peak Wilderness.

In the late 1990’s, other potential additions were identified throughout the Big Sur backcountry and a group of activists set to work evaluating the wilderness qualities of these lands. Upon completion, the newly founded Ventana Wilderness Alliance presented its findings to Congressman Sam Farr. With the passage of Farr’s Big Sur Wilderness and Conservation Act of 2002, the Ventana and Silver Peak Wilderness areas were enlarged by 54,000 acres. With the strong support of the VWA, 413 acres of wilderness were designated in Limekiln State Park in 2008. This was the region’s first state wilderness designation.

In the years since, the VWA has focused its attention on protecting these spectacular lands by advocating for improved management and conducting targeted stewardship projects to restore trails, clean up trash and introduce the next generation to the wonders of its wild backyard. Read more about these efforts in the pages that follow and remember - wilderness conservation is everybody’s business. Please, get involved!

Happy Birthday Wilderness!

Mike Splain | Executive Director
The VWA has enjoyed celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act - using fun, informative and inspirational events to make the case for protecting our last wild places. The anniversary has had other benefits too. For instance, we were fortunate to receive a grant from the National Stewardship Alliance to design a Wilderness 50/Leave No Trace trailhead kiosk. (See page 8.)

We were also fortunate to see so many of you at the VWA Annual Gathering at Toro Park in Salinas on Saturday, June 14. Ecologist Nikki Nedeff led a morning hike at nearby Fort Ord National Monument and local musician Michael Greco serenaded us with original music as VWA members arrived with plate after plate of delectable potluck cuisine. Congressman Sam Farr presented a House Resolution recognizing the Wilderness Act and the VWA’s efforts to keep wilderness wild. Program leaders Betsy MacGowan, Steve Benoit, Greg Meyer and Bryce Winter took turns giving updates about important backcountry stewardship and youth education projects. US Forest Service Deputy Regional Forester Ron Ketter presented our very own Mike Heard with the prestigious Individual Volunteer of the Year award; and as if that wasn’t enough, we were treated to an enlightening talk by renowned wilderness historian Doug Scott. The gathering finished with a guided hike in the surrounding Sierra de Salinas, courtesy of Toro Park aficionado Ted Richardson.

With most of the dog days of summer behind us, we hosted the VWA’s third annual Wild and Scenic Film Festival at the Golden State Theatre in Monterey on Saturday, September 14. (You can read more about the film festival on the back page.)

On a rare hot and sunny weekend (October 3-5) in Carmel, the VWA joined the Robinson Jeffers Tor House Foundation for its annual Fall Festival. The Foundation, tasked with the upkeep of our favorite poet’s Carmel estate, invited us to participate in this year’s program, themed “Jeffers and the Wilderness.” At Friday’s Sunset Celebration we enjoyed wine and hors d’oeuvres while basking in a fantastic sunset poetry reading by Taelen Thomas. On Saturday, we began the day with a compelling talk by VWA member Rob Kafka. Next, a panel consisting of artist Tom Killion, wilderness activist Vicky Hoover, scholar/educator Lindsay Jeffers, VWA Executive Director Mike Splain, and VWA co-founder Boon Hughey took the podium. Each panelist read a selection of Jeffers’ work and educator/VWA member Chris Lorenc masterfully moderated a lively discussion of each poem’s relevance to wilderness conservation. To round out the day, Barbara Briggs-Anderson presented outstanding archival photos of Jeffers Country and Jeffers scholar James Karman gave a sneak peek at the final installment of The Collected Letters of Robinson Jeffers. On Sunday, Tor House docent and photographer Alan Stacy hosted a poetry walk from the beach to Carmel Point and beyond.

If you’d like to share stories, photos or suggestions about VWA events, we’d love to hear from you. Please drop us a line at vwa@ventanawild.org.
Youth in Wilderness participants enjoy a late summer sunset from high above the fog. Photo: Bryce Winter

The mission of the Youth in Wilderness program is to educate, inspire and motivate future generations of central California’s wilderness advocates and stewards.

From 2010 through October 2014, Youth in Wilderness has led 1,165 local young people on 64 wilderness expeditions into the Big Sur backcountry.

“This was an unbelievable experience for our students. We really look forward to continuing our relationship with VWA!”

— Brian King, a teacher at Ponderosa High School, Ben Lomond, CA
Brush Never Sleeps

An observant veteran of the trails of the Ventana region once said, “Brush never sleeps.” He may as well have added, “and gravity is the law.” While we have a love and appreciation for the northern Santa Lucia, we also bemoan the encroaching brush and fallen debris that limit our access to this amazing land. And that’s why today we say “Thank heavens for the volunteers of the VWA Trail Crew!”

Over 155 people volunteered for the VWA Trail Crew over the past year. These intrepid doers-of-good came from far and wide to tackle the myriad impediments to travel-by-foot in the northern Santa Lucia. Since the land is designated wilderness, the workers clear the trails with traditional hand tools such as crosscut saws and loppers while repairing the tread with shovels, MacLeods and Pulaskis.

The multifaceted role of the Trail Crew Leader is essential to the success of the program. Leaders schedule the outings, help recruit volunteers, plan the overall work strategy, ensure the work is done safely and report accomplishments. Let’s take a look at our leaders and what they and their recruits achieved over the past year.

Trail Crew Chief and VWA Board Member Betsy MacGowan has prioritized work in the Tassajara Network of trails over the past three years. The Marble Peak Trail from Arroyo Seco Station to Strawberry Valley is clear for pack stock! Betsy also spearheaded an effort to clear the Pine Ridge Trail for pack stock. This will enable the installation of four much-needed toilets and the removal of over 400 pounds of trash that is cached near overused Sykes Camp. Thank you, Betsy!

Trail Crew Leader and Lead Volunteer Ranger Steve Benoit continues to inspire volunteerism with his annual trips to the Pine Ridge Trail corridor, Pine Valley, the Little Sur and Miller Canyon, just to name a few. Steve’s positive attitude and dedication are contagious and the trips he leads are very popular.

Maria Ferdin is a VWA Board Member and Volunteer Wilderness Ranger in addition to her emerging role as a Trail Crew Leader. In 2014 Maria led two trips to Pat Spring to make headway on the Ventana Double Cone and Puerto Suelo Trails. She also led two trips based at Cold Spring to work on the oft-neglected but very important Big Sur Trail. We need a few more Marias!

Last but not least is Mike Heard. Mike’s guidance of the Cone Peak Trails Project is now legend, as evidenced by his selection as the USFS Individual Volunteer of the Year in 2013. In 2014, Mike partnered with students from UCSC, Cal Poly and CSUMB to complete Forest Stewardship trips as part of the VWA’s Youth in Wilderness program.

Please join us in thanking all of our Trail Crew volunteers. They are modern heroes, working together with minimum tools to provide access to a rugged, primitive and unrelenting wilderness. Thank you for your support of the VWA Trail Crew.

Our Trail Crew Leaders remind us that the work is never done and we are at risk of losing much that has been accomplished without more volunteers, more trip leaders and more dollars. That’s why your support is so important and appreciated.
Ranging from Marble Peak in the west to Santa Lucia Peak in the east, the Lost Valley Trail Network lies at the heart of the Ventana Wilderness. Visitors to this area experience unique geology, flora, wildlife, fire ecology, cultural history and topography.

While strides have been made to improve access, much work remains. The USFS has cleared the Lost Valley Trail from Escondido Campground to a mile past Lost Valley Camp. VWA Trail Crew efforts on the Marble Peak Trail improve access from the northwest. Intrepid explorers can enjoy a variety of loop options.

You can help restore and maintain access to this magnificent area by donating to the Ventana Trails Forever fund at the Community Foundation for Monterey County or by joining and supporting the VWA Trail Crew.

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

In 2004, as the Wilderness Act celebrated its 40th birthday, the US Forest Service acknowledged that all was not well in the 400+ wilderness areas under its jurisdiction. Forest Chief Dale Bosworth thereby issued a “Wilderness Stewardship Challenge” to all forests to improve their wilderness management practices to protect critical values like clean air, clean water, wildlife, native plants and solitude. To make it official, he detailed a 10-point scoring system across ten key elements for a total of 100 possible points (see inset).

He also included a deadline - the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act in September 2014.

Due to agency budget cuts, the Ventana and newly designated Silver Peak Wilderness areas entered the Challenge with some of the lowest scores in the Pacific Southwest Region. But thanks to hardworking volunteers and a series of generous grants from the National Forest Foundation, we’ve been able to help our Forest meet the challenge. Beginning with the Volunteer Wilderness Rangers and evolving to include a recreation site inventory, solitude monitoring, and a partnership with the California Native Plant Society that facilitated the protection of native species and the removal of non-natives, the VWA has developed a program to keep our wilderness wild. But don’t take our word for it.

According to Christina Boston, Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Program Leader for the US Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, “The VWA’s assistance improved Challenge scores in the Ventana and Silver Peak Wilderness areas well beyond what would have been possible with limited USFS personnel. These two areas experienced one of the sharpest score increases in the country, as a direct result of this partnership and VWA’s leadership of its dedicated and energetic volunteers.”

So what does it all mean to the average hiker? With the benefit of management based on real field data, we’ll eventually enjoy less crowding, healthy native plants and wildlife, and more opportunities to experience the land on its own terms. Front country staff will be able to redirect visitors to less popular wilderness camps with real opportunities for solitude, while scarce backcountry personnel focus education and enforcement efforts on areas that might otherwise be “loved to death.” The net result will be an enhanced wilderness experience, but much remains to be done. For more information on how you can help us continue to meet the Challenge and keep the wilderness wild, contact vwa@ventanawild.org.

VWA-driven programs resulted in some of the sharpest Wilderness Stewardship Challenge score increases in the country.
Volunteer Spotlight | **Sharol Sevilla**

**Q:** Please tell us a little about yourself and your family. Where were you born and raised?

My father was born in his house in Mountain View. His family of 12 picked the fields in the Monterey area. My mother has her roots in Omaha, Nebraska. Her family moved to California when she was a child. I have a younger brother and sister and am a native Californian. We lived a simple and loving life around lots of family and friends. For vacation we mainly camped and I have many fond memories of these outings. This was my introduction to activities like camping, fishing, boating, hiking and just having a good time. I started backpacking when I graduated from high school.

**Q:** Please tell us about your education and career.

After high school I worked my way up in the telecommunications field and was a product manager until I retired five years ago. I got a business degree when I was 40, thinking I might be looking for work at another company and needed an education to get in the door. I really enjoyed my job. It was always challenging, working with diverse teams.

**Q:** Besides volunteering with the VWA, what do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I like to be with family and friends. I live in Capitola so during the week I hike with local Meetup groups. During the spring and summer I go on several backpacking trips in various areas of California. I like to play duplicate bridge. It is challenging and fun and helps my brain. I also belong to a Red Hat group. We go on outings doing fun activities. This month we are going to San Francisco for a Halloween outing. I like anything outdoors: kayaking, free diving, golfing, skiing and such, but hiking and backpacking take up most of my time these days.

**Q:** How did you first come to be involved with the VWA?

I got involved through the Monterey Bay Area Hiking Meetup Group. My first VWA trail maintenance was in the Big Pines Trail/Pat Spring area in April of 2011.

**Q:** What is it that attracts you to these mountains?

This is where my passion for backpacking began and it is where I want to give back. My first trip was to Ventana Camp off the Pine Ridge Trail. I went back many times. My favorite camping site was and still is Barlow Flats on that same stretch of trail.

**Q:** What have you learned from other Trail Crew and Wilderness Ranger volunteers?

Everything. After my first trip I commented, “What a wonderful and rewarding experience trail maintenance is.” The people were great and, being a novice, I took a lot in. People patiently explained what needed to be done. I worked on smaller plants, clippers in hand. I especially remember (with thanks) Steve and Beth Benoit being very warm and welcoming. I feel this is a continuing learning process and everyone has such a great passion for what they are doing. I have gained so much and appreciate everyone involved.

**Q:** What is it going to take to ultimately ensure that the trails of the Ventana region are clear?

Well, more leaders, more volunteers, and the trails may ultimately never be clear. Plants and trees are always growing and weather is always reshaping the landscape. Mother Nature will always challenge.
We Love and Appreciate Our Volunteers

Volunteers are the heart and soul of the Ventana Wilderness Alliance. They always have been. It started with the vision and wisdom of the founders and continues to this day with over 270 passionate volunteers giving their time and expertise to ensure that the Big Sur backcountry is carefully protected, thoughtfully managed and rightfully celebrated. Our heartfelt thanks to each and every person listed below.

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Mike Heard
Esperanza Hernandez
Dennis Palm

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Al Budris
Maria Ferdin
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David Jacobs
David Knapp
Betsy MacGowan
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Volunteer Wilderness Ranger Program
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Malo Bruder
Anne Canright
Stuart Carlson
Maria Ferdin
Maya Frota
Mike Heard
Esperanza Hernandez
Betsy MacGowan
Lynn Moncher
Joe Radoslovich
Josh Rude
Sharol Sevilla
Vince Silva
Mike Spain
Adam Wachtel
David Wachtel

Youth in Wilderness Program
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Gus Alexander
Daniel Bergmann
Sofie Brodsky
Carlos Clark
Kailey Cox
P. Mason Dubois
Cameron Dunn
Josh Elson
Andrea Fieber
Erika Flickner
Tony Gandolfi
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Thomas Ng
Christopher Otte
Melanie Philips
Brenda Quintero
Sean Reidy
Toney Sebits
Grayson Shor
Peter Spalholz
Emily Spurgeon
Ona Stewart
Stephanie Subdia
Brady Volkman
Sean Windell
Bryce Winter
What is the advantage of donating through Monterey County Gives?

You can easily donate to the VWA at the Monterey County Gives! website (montereycountygives.com). Best of all, a matching grant raised by the Monterey County Weekly and the Community Foundation will increase the value of your donation. In addition, several generous VWA members have donated an Individual Challenge Match for VWA supporters. Your donation can go a long way with the MC Gives! match plus the challenge match. It's a win for everyone.

When does the campaign start and end?

Monterey County Gives! kicks off November 13 and ends at midnight December 31.

What's the big idea?

Our “big idea” for this campaign is Happy Trails. We will promote the VWA Trail Crew and backcountry access at our campaign page. However, funds raised during this campaign will be used to support all VWA programs.

Can I donate through the mail?

Yes. Donors who do not wish to donate online may mail check or money order to: Monterey County Gives, 668 Williams Ave, Seaside, CA 93955. Be sure to specify that you are donating to Ventana Wilderness Alliance and include your address, phone, and email address.

Can I donate stock?

Yes, donations of stock are accepted. Please contact Dan Baldwin or Christine Dawson at the Community Foundation for Monterey County at 831-375-9712.

Are donations tax deductible?

Yes. Donors will receive an email receipt immediately after making an online donation. Donations in excess of $250 will also receive an acknowledgement letter from the Community Foundation for Monterey County (Tax ID#94-1615897.)

Who handles the money from the donations?

All donations are deposited directly into a bank account overseen and managed by the Community Foundation for Monterey County. The Community Foundation will disperse the donations to the individual nonprofit organizations at the close of the fundraising campaign.

How will the matching grants be applied?

The Gives! matching grant will be divided amongst all the organizations based on the percentage of the total donations received during the campaign on the first $50,000 each organization raises through Monterey County Gives! The amount of the Individual Challenge match is immediately applied at campaign's end.

Who can I contact if I have additional questions?

Please email vwa@ventanawild.org or call 831-423-3191 for further information.
Wild & Scenic Film Festival 2014

Last January, VWA staff and volunteers trekked up to the South Yuba River Citizen’s League (SYRCL) Wild and Scenic Film Festival in Nevada City. The objective was to select films and meet filmmakers to bring to the VWA’s annual screening here in the Monterey Bay area. With a tip of the hat to Wilderness50, we chose films about wild things and wild places and set to work producing a few features of our own.

We’re happy to report that the VWA’s third annual Wild and Scenic Film Festival was a smashing success. This year’s program was comprised of 13 short films, including two locally-produced wilderness features from expert filmmaker Erik Gandolfi. (Check them out at the VWA YouTube channel.) Some of the material was heavy but Master of Ceremonies Adam Scott did a fine job reminding us that we’re better off meeting conservation challenges with a sense of humor. In the end we raised about $7,000 to support VWA programs and signed up over a hundred new members. None of this would have been possible without help from lots of altruistic people and businesses, so many thanks are in order.

Media sponsors KAZU and Monterey County Weekly did a great job of spreading the word and local sponsors National Geographic and 1st Capital Bank generously offset the cost of our venue. National Sponsors Sierra Nevada, Mother Jones, Orion Magazine, Klean Kanteen, CLIF Bar and Patagonia provided licensing and films. REI, Patagonia, Tom Bihn packs, Frame Circus, Synergy Organic Clothing and Quail Lodge donated epic raffle prizes, as did local artists Julie Himes and Paola Berthoin.

Thirty VWA volunteers helped with set-up, ticketing, raffle sales, hospitality and clean-up. The lovely Golden State Theatre in downtown Monterey was far larger than any previous VWA event venue. This was cause for concern until 750 filmgoers packed the house!

Whether you’re a Wild and Scenic Film Festival sponsor, raffle prize donor, volunteer, VWA member or attendee, we are so grateful for your support! If you have questions or suggestions on how we can improve the festival next year, please let us know at vwa@ventanawild.org.

750 people (including Adam Scott at right) filled the beautiful Golden State Theatre for the Wild & Scenic Film Festival.