The mission of the Ventana Wilderness Alliance is to protect, preserve and restore the wilderness qualities and biodiversity of the public lands within California’s northern Santa Lucia Mountains and Big Sur coast.

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NEWSLETTER PRODUCTION
Editor: Richard Popchak
Design: Lynn Piquett
Printing: Community Printers, Santa Cruz
Printed on 100% post consumer waste recycled paper with Agri-based inks.

ON THE COVER
Tom Killion is a long-time supporter of the VWA. His image of Ventana Double Cone is the centerpiece of our logo. Tom has been producing Japanese-style block prints of the Big Sur coast and mountains since the late 1970’s, depicting scenes where he has spent many days hiking, camping and sketching. His Big Sur prints, along with poetry and journals of Big Sur, will be included in his forthcoming book, California’s Wild Edge: The Coast in Prints and Poetry, to be published by Heyday Books in 2015. Please visit tomkillion.com to see a variety of his Big Sur images.

Executive Director’s Message

The Wilderness Act turns 50 this year, so let’s take a look back at the circumstances that set the stage for President Johnson to sign this critical piece of legislation, with a focus on our local public lands.

The US Census Bureau announced the end of the frontier in 1890, but it wasn’t until 1904 that the General Land Office retired approximately 340,000 acres in the northern Santa Lucia Range from the advancing tide of “Manifest Destiny.” Two years later, President Roosevelt created the Monterey Forest Reserve, soon to be the Monterey National Forest. For management reasons the Monterey Forest was eventually incorporated into the Santa Barbara National Forest, which was renamed the Los Padres in 1936.

It’s important to understand that the Forest Service’s founding mission was not conservation in the modern sense. The agency’s inclusion in the Department of Agriculture was no accident. Rangers were seen as overseers of a storehouse of natural resources to be exploited in perpetuity. Fortunately, a few insiders had the foresight to understand what was at stake and began recommending that particular swaths of Forest lands be left as nature made them. We all owe a grand debt to folks like Arthur Carhart, Aldo Leopold and Bob Marshall, whose efforts led to the “L-20” Regulations and subsequent “U” Regulations, which granted administrative protection to “Primitive Areas.”

For example, under the L-20 Regulations, 45,000 acres of the northern Monterey National Forest were protected as the Ventana Primitive Area in 1931. An important addition soon expanded the area by nearly 11,000 acres, and by 1937 the spectacular headwaters of the Little Sur, Big Sur, Carmel and Arroyo Seco Rivers were administratively withdrawn from development. But many conservationists questioned the long-term security of such “protections.” Just as the Chief Forester had preserved lands with the stroke of a pen, so could a successor easily undo the designation.

Motivated by this realization and battle-weary from a constant defensive campaign for rapidly diminishing wildlands, national groups like The Wilderness Society began forging a more concrete framework for permanent protections. In 1956, the Society’s Director, Howard Zahniser, presented the US Congress with a first draft of the Wilderness Act. Zahniser’s original intention was for the Executive Branch to hold designation authority; but after 8 years, 18 Congressional hearings, and 66 drafts, he settled on a bill that literally required an act of Congress to permanently protect wilderness. Initially considered a legislative setback, time has shown us that this provision has its advantages. The bill passed both houses of Congress and was signed into law by President Johnson on September 3, 1964.

We’ll reflect on what’s happened since in the next issue. In the meantime, enjoy this installment of Ventana Wilderness Watch. And as you read about the amazing work dedicated volunteers are accomplishing in our beloved Ventana and Silver Peak Wilderness areas, don’t forget that crucial act of Congress that has so successfully kept these places wild.

Happy Spring!

Mike Splain | Executive Director
The Ventana Wilderness Alliance sponsored a Partners in Preservation-Archaeological Site Steward program training on April 5 and 6, 2014. The purpose was to train volunteers to monitor existing sites in the National Forests and report signs of degradation from human, animal and weather abuse so that steps can be taken to preserve them. Twenty-five candidate volunteers received one day of classroom training at the USFS Monterey Ranger District facility in King City and one day of fieldwork at the Milpitas Special Interest Area. The training was conducted by the Society for California Archaeology-California Archaeological Site Steward Program (CASSP).

Key learning points included:
- a discussion of CASSP and what it takes to be a site steward
- an overview of the Monterey Ranger District’s prehistory and natural resources
- Native American perspectives
- a review of the Archaeological Resource Protection Act and other pertinent legislation
- discussions and small group role-playing exercises for interacting with the public in the field
- planning of site steward assignments

We would like to thank the volunteers and their efforts to help preserve the myriad cultural and natural resources of the Big Sur backcountry.
Students from Watsonville Environmental Science Workshop enjoy a snack atop a rock at the Indians.

Juan and Luis of Rancho Cielo Youth Campus enjoy the cool flowing waters of the Little Sur River.

A student from Greenfield Environmental Science Workshop scopes a bird at Santa Lucia Memorial Park.

A student from Greenfield Environmental Science Workshop ponders a giant Coulter pine cone.

“When in nature, I can feel at peace.”
– a Rancho Cielo student

The VWA's Youth in Wilderness (YiW) program continues to provide much needed opportunities for local young people to experience the beauty and wonder of our public wildlands.

Please join VWA members and the following major funders in supporting the Youth in Wilderness program in 2014:

Arkay Foundation
Barnet Segal Charitable Trust
Foundation for Youth Investment
Monterey Peninsula Foundation Youth Fund
Save the Redwoods League

Please call 831-423-3191 to learn more about how you can support this program.

Rancho Cielo students enjoying tea time at Jackson Camp along the Little Sur.
Teaching Visitors to Tread Lightly

Since 2010, the VWA's Volunteer Wilderness Rangers have patrolled the Big Sur backcountry. Their purpose is to make visitor contacts and impart fire safety and Leave No Trace information. Rangers also perform other critical tasks such as campsite cleanup, fire ring removal and, sadly, trash removal. We are tremendously thankful for the work of these dedicated volunteers.

Realizing that boots on the ground in the backcountry are not enough, the Rangers have led an effort to create resources for visitors to review BEFORE they head out to increasingly popular Sykes Camp on the Pine Ridge Trail. The first resource created was a dedicated Sykes web page at ventanawild.org. You can find it in the “Planning a Trip” section on our homepage. For many visitors, Sykes Camp is their first wilderness experience. The information at the Sykes page helps novice backpackers to properly plan their trip and to practice Leave No Trace principles in the backcountry.

More recently, we have created a map and brochure that echoes the information at ventanawild.org. Available as a download at the Sykes page and as a handout at Big Sur Station, this map and brochure helps visitors to plan and enjoy a safe trip. More importantly, it educates visitors about the impacts of overuse and encourages people to consider alternate destinations in the Ventana region. This valuable resource was made possible by a grant from the National Forest Foundation and Patagonia Santa Cruz Outlet.

Thanks to a grant secured from the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance, the VWA will design a trailhead kiosk this summer featuring a map of the Ventana region and the aforementioned Leave No Trace and interpretive information. The kiosk will also include language commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act and highlight volunteer stewardship opportunities on the Forest. VWA will enlist local youth to install the kiosk at the Pine Ridge trailhead in Big Sur, gateway to the Wild and Scenic Big Sur River, and the most heavily used trail on the Monterey Ranger District of Los Padres National Forest.

Minimize Campfire Impacts

- During Fire Restrictions (usually from June through October) campfires and smoking are not permitted ANYWHERE in the wilderness, and during extreme conditions even stoves are not permitted. (See “Plan Ahead” section on obtaining a fire permit.)
- Help to minimize impacts by only using existing fire rings. Do not build up fire rings or create new ones.
- Keep fires small. Use only sticks found on the ground that can be broken by hand.
- Use water (not rocks or dirt) to put your fire DEAD OUT. Test the ashes with your hands to make sure they are cold.
- Even when campfires are permitted, consider reducing your impact by not having one.
Silver Peak Wilderness - Silver Peak Trail Network

Originally designated by the Los Padres Condor Range and River Protection Act of 1992, the Silver Peak Wilderness was expanded in 2002 to protect a total of 31,555 acres of pristine wildlands harboring outstanding coastal views, biological rarities and cultural resources lending a glimpse into California's distant past. Within its nearly 3,500 feet of vertical relief and three designated botanical areas, one can experience seven species of conifers, including the southern and eastern-most stands of coast redwood, relicual groves of Santa Lucia fir and serpentine-dependent Sargent cypress. Rare fauna like California condor, Smith's blue butterfly and central coast steelhead rely on the Silver Peak for habitat and sustenance. Dedicated naturalists and casual hikers alike have much to learn by wandering its sinuous trails and admiring its grand coastal vistas, which many consider the finest in Big Sur.

The Crucikshank, Buckeye and Salmon Creek Trails serve as excellent alternatives to the often congested State Parks and heavily impacted Big Sur River corridor to the north. But the unfortunate reality is that declining Forest Service budgets provide for little if any trail maintenance, and this once-robust trail network has fallen into disrepair. Encroaching brush, downed trees and collapsing tread turn away all but the hardiest of visitors nowadays, and with no agency intervention in sight, the restoration of Silver Peak trails is reliant upon the efforts of volunteers like the VWA Trail Crew.

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.
Special Places of the Santa Lucias | The Milpitas Special Interest Area (part 1)  
by Mike Splain  

Morning breaks over Escondido Camp and dew persists in the adjacent meadow as the sun slowly makes its way over the extensive buttresses of Santa Lucia (aka Junipero Serra) Peak to the east. We begin the day with a sip of fine spring water near the Lost Valley Trailhead but soon turn our attention southeast. Despite a paucity of early rainfall and the certainty of an extreme summer ahead, spring is definitely underway and as we continue our journey along Indians Road, the rebirth it has prompted is a feast for the senses.

Less rain means fewer annual wildflowers, but hardy perennials are happy to fill in. Take for instance the showy flannel bush (*Fremontodendron californicum*) that occasionally emerges from the chaparral above the road. The 2008 Indians Wildland Fire burned much of the visible shrublands but seems to have actually encouraged this lovely species, which reproduces both with abundant seeds and new growth sprouting from its root crown.

There’s an aroma about and a closer look at the road cut reveals the delightful inflorescences of creeping sage (*Salvia sonomensis*), a favorite meal for indigenous bees. California is home to some 1,600 bee species, most of which are “solitary,” meaning they lack the queen-centered colonial structure typical of introduced Eurasian honeybees. Most of our native bees inhabit underground tunnels and are especially ubiquitous when they cluster during spring nesting. They aren’t aggressive and rarely sting, but watch your step and you’ll be treated to a fascinating show as these essential pollinators go about their affairs, descending and emerging from tiny tunnels in the road bed.

Soon we enter the riparian zone and encounter conifers interspersed with the more characteristic willow, alder and cottonwood. The most obvious is incense-cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*), with its drooping foliage and distinct redwood-like bark. Not actually a cedar at all, this cypress relative occurs throughout California’s mountain ranges but is somewhat uncommon in the Santa Lucia. Another species, this one endemic to our mountains, makes a few appearances nearby. With its thin bark, narrow profile and upright cones, Santa Lucia fir (*Abies bracteata*) is a true fir with minimal tolerance for fire. Its presence here is likely due to a sheltered microclimate with perennial water. Many botanists consider both of these conifers relicts from the cooler, moister climates of California’s distant past.

After crossing Roosevelt Creek, we quickly enter the spectacular Milpitas Special Interest Area (SIA). The SIA was granted this designation in observance of its outstanding cultural and biological resources. Native American sacred sites and historic structures abound and spring is the perfect time to experience its vast wildflower meadows, sprawling oak savannahs, and abundant wildlife. There’s far too much to explore to go any further, so until next time, we make camp…
Volunteer Spotlight | Mike Heard

Recently, Los Padres National Forest officials announced that the US Forest Service has selected longtime Monterey Ranger District and Ventana Wilderness Alliance volunteer Mike Heard as the national Volunteer of the Year. For nearly 15 years, Mike has been instrumental in repairing and maintaining remote wilderness trails overgrown by brush or damaged by fires, erosion and debris slides. He plays a valuable role coordinating and leading extensive on-the-ground trail work in the Cone Peak area of the Ventana Wilderness. Over the last two years alone, Mike volunteered nearly 3,700 hours of his time to project work in the wilderness. We are very proud of Mike’s accomplishments. Let’s learn a bit more about him.

Q: First off, please tell us a little about yourself and your family. Where were you born and raised?
I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1954. My parents were both Oklahoma natives. My father, a WWII veteran, was running a contract drilling company with the help of my mother, who had been a schoolteacher. In 1960, by which time I had been joined by a brother and a sister, my father’s company went bankrupt and he took a job with Texaco in Colombia. Over the next several years my father’s work took the family to Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Scotland and Connecticut, and our family was joined by another brother, 17 years my junior.

Q: Please tell us about your education and career.
I earned a BA in physics from Wesleyan University, a BS and MS in electrical engineering at Columbia, an Engineer degree in electrical engineering from USC, and an MS in physics from UCLA. I have worked as an electrical engineer, a system engineer, and a programmer for several aerospace and communications companies, most recently for Honeywell International.

Q: How did you first come to be involved with the VWA?
My introduction to the Monterey Ranger District was a hike up to the Cone Peak Lookout in 1984. By the early 1990’s it became a personal tradition to hike the Cone Peak Loop every year. This kept getting harder and harder to do, and in 1998 I made an unsuccessful attempt to volunteer with the Forest Service. A couple of years later a web search turned up a new organization called the Ventana Wilderness Alliance that had a volunteer trail crew and I was able to tie in with some of the founders on a work trip to Goat Camp.

Q: What are some of your key takeaways from your six years plus managing the Cone Peak Trails Project?
I guess that the first one is how many moving parts any project like this has. It takes a lot of people other than the project manager to make it work: the other volunteers, the fundraisers, the donors, the supervisors and crew members on the hired trail crews, and the Forest Service staff. I want to thank all of those folks and to apologize to anyone I’ve forgotten to mention. A second key takeaway is that some of the unplanned side effects may well be the greatest achievement of any project like this one. At Vicente Flat Camp I recently encountered two volunteers from an American Conservation Experience crew that I worked with in 2011. They told me that I had made their experience, and that of many other ACE volunteers, something that they will remember for the rest of their lives.

Q: What is it that attracts you to these mountains?
The Cone Peak area has got to be one of the coolest places in the world. You can go hiking through ecosystems that vary from the Sierra-like north face of Cone Peak to oak woodlands, grassland, redwood groves along the creeks, chaparral, and coastal scrub, with amazing ocean views on the way. This diversity is one of the reasons why the area has been designated as the Cone Peak Gradient Research Natural Area. It’s been a great privilege to have spent the majority of my time there over the last several years.
Supports the VWA

We would like to thank the law firm of Johnson, Fantl and Kennifer LLP for supporting the VWA at the Business Benefactor membership level. JF&K attorneys offer substantial expertise in the development of plans for the transfer of wealth, during life and at death, in a manner designed to respect and implement the client’s personal objectives while also addressing federal and state transfer tax issues.

“There are many reasons we need to protect wilderness,” says JF&K attorney Nick Fantl. “Wilderness protects the watersheds that provide clean drinking water for Monterey County. Wilderness filters and cleans the air we breathe. Many animals we love call wilderness their home. We value the work of the Ventana Wilderness Alliance to protect this spectacular and enduring resource.”

The VWA welcomes other businesses in the community to become members of our Business Council. Demonstrate to the community that protecting our public wildlands is important to you and your customers not just today, but for generations to come. Please call 831-423-3191 for more information.

Youth in Wilderness Fund Established

We are pleased to report that long-time VWA members Tom and Julie Anne Hopkins have established an endowed fund at the Community Foundation for Monterey County to support the Youth in Wilderness program. Tom and Julie Anne established the fund with an initial gift of $25,000. It is now open to all donors who want to add permanent support for the program.

Tom Hopkins puts it this way, “If we are going to be successful in preserving Wilderness, we need to teach more young people how Wilderness benefits both humans and wildlife. For those of us committed to teaching future generations the value of Wilderness, the Youth in Wilderness Program is a great investment.”

Please support this fund by making your donation at the Community Foundation for Monterey County (831-375-9712), or by donating directly to the VWA (831-423-3191).

2013 Annual Report

In February of this year, we shared the organization’s financial data with our supporters. Included in the mailing were programmatic highlights of 2013. We are very proud of the VWA’s accomplishments and remarkable efficiency. Of every dollar contributed, 90 cents went directly to programs on the ground, less than 6 cents supported fundraising, and less than 5 cents supported management and governance. We feel that this is an ideal financial profile reflecting a high level of professionalism in each and every VWA staffer, board member, and volunteer.

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### YEAR-END BALANCE SHEET

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[Graph and chart details]

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Tom and Julie Anne Hopkins
Celebrating 50 Years of Wilderness

On September 3, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Wilderness Act into law, establishing the National Wilderness Preservation System and setting aside 9.1 million acres of wildlands for the use and benefit of the American people. Over the past fifty years Congress has added over 100 million acres to this unique land preservation system, including the Ventana and Silver Peak Wilderness areas so dear to all of us.

In celebration of the Wilderness Act’s 50th birthday, the VWA has planned a series of events throughout 2014. The VWA’s Annual Gathering at Toro Park in Salinas (June 14) will include a talk by author and wilderness scholar Doug Scott plus special guests and plenty of surprises. Our third annual Wild and Scenic Film Festival at the Golden State Theatre in Monterey (September 13) will feature films about wild things and wild places and ways we can all get involved in their protection. A panel discussion entitled Jeffers and Wilderness at the Robinson Jeffers Tor House Foundation Fall Festival in Carmel (October 4) will examine the inspirational qualities of wilderness through the lens of the California poet’s most insightful works.

Wilderness conservation is everybody’s business, so please spread the word and join us at these exciting events.
For more information, contact us at vwa@ventanawild.org.