Rescue at Sykes Camp

Special Map Insert
The Arroyo Seco Region

Remembering Paul Danielson

Protecting the Big Sur Backcountry
President’s Message

The takeover of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in Oregon by armed extremists is a wake-up call for all of us who value and respect our public lands and understand the important environmental and societal benefits derived from our collective ownership. Some may view the Oregon insurrection as just another skirmish in the decades-old Sagebrush Rebellion. But much evidence points to an increasingly well funded and well organized campaign to privatize our public lands for the benefit of special economic interests.

The real threat now is not a handful of delusional extremists like the Bundy family. Now the threat comes directly from the Cato Institute, the American Legislative Exchange Council, and other Koch-funded entities gaining strategic influence in Western state legislatures and Congress. Political forces in Utah are at the fore of the well oiled federal privatization movement, having passed legislation demanding that the federal government “return” its public lands to state control. Similar legislation has been introduced and is advancing in six other Western state legislatures. The Utah congressional delegation just introduced a bill that would transfer to the state’s law enforcement authority on federal lands. Imagine how a Bundy-like siege of a National Forest would play out under a law prohibiting federal enforcement in a county with a so-called “constitutional sheriff.” The Bundistas would have their way — the public and the environmental resources be damned.

The VWA was founded as an advocacy organization to “protect, preserve and restore” the public lands in the Ventana region. This very newsletter carries that intention loud and clear in its title – Ventana Wilderness Watch – as in, we will be ever-vigilant and keep our eyes on these public lands. We will act in their defense and for their betterment. And while we, who are fortunate enough to live and work and play in California’s treasured central coast, may feel somewhat insulated from the public land insurrection playing out in the intermountain west, let’s be mindful that it can happen here.

Our best defense is ourselves and our personal commitment to “protect, preserve and restore” our cherished public lands, both locally and nationally. On the local level, the VWA is making a difference on behalf of Ventana region public lands, but fresh new blood and energy is always needed. It is the volunteers, committee and board members, strategic thinkers, visionaries, and the ever-needed donors and funders that make our work possible. Please let me know how you can help. Nationally, we need to remember that every vote counts. The “green” voters of California can have a positive effect by sending informed and committed public land advocates to Sacramento and to Washington.

Tom Hopkins | tom@ventanawild.org
Take Action on Proposed LPNF Realignment | by Mike Splain

The Back Story
It’s no secret that Los Padres National Forest (LPNF) has been severely underfunded for many years. Nowhere is the problem more evident than here in the Monterey Ranger District, where an ever-shrinking staff is expected to manage 313,000 acres of heavily used public lands. At present, nearly half of the District’s Recreation and Wilderness positions are vacant. At this writing we have no Wilderness Manager and our Recreation Officer retired years ago. In the backcountry, “boots on the ground” are almost entirely volunteers. Critical maintenance work that volunteers can’t accomplish generally requires VWA-financed contractors. As agency funding continues to diminish, we’re in danger of losing the pack stock program that makes such third-party efforts even conceivable.

An internal LPNF survey reveals an even more troubling issue – employees have no time to manage volunteers or apply for grants. In other words, agency staffers are too overloaded to make use of the very tools that would lighten their load. You may want to read that last sentence again. If it sounds ridiculously paradoxical, that’s because it is. Keep in mind that LPNF consists of five Ranger Districts – Mount Pinos, Ojai, Santa Barbara, Santa Lucia and Monterey. Each District Office requires staffing, maintenance, information technology and so on. Add to the mix a much larger Supervisor’s Office, a radio dispatch station, and a Congress seemingly hell-bent on starving public lands out of existence.

Realignment
Of California’s 18 National Forests, only the Los Padres has more than three Ranger Districts, so the most obvious way to “balance the books” is to reduce Districts. To this end LPNF has embarked on a Forest realignment process. According to agency leadership, when the dust settles, we can expect a much leaner Los Padres with at most three Ranger Districts.

Why You Should Care
Consider that the Monterey Ranger District is 85% designated wilderness and protects the headwaters of six major rivers. Besides preserving a world-class viewshed and a reservoir of central coast biodiversity, the District provides clean air, fresh water, carbon sequestration and agricultural pollinators. And let’s not forget tourism. In an average California year, outdoor recreation generates 732,000 jobs and 85 billion dollars in consumer spending. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, at least 59% of all Californians enjoyed the great outdoors last year and that doesn’t even include hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing. The figure is likely even higher in Monterey County, where millions of visitors congregate at iconic landscapes like the Arroyo Seco Gorge and Big Sur coast. Separated from the southern Los Padres by a mere 20 miles as the condor flies, the Monterey Ranger District is nevertheless worlds apart. Take away experienced, localized management and this jewel of the central coast, our collective natural heritage, will inevitably be loved to death.

What You Can Do
Although no formal comment process is underway, there is an alternative to Forest Realignment. A few years ago Congressman Sam Farr introduced a bill designating a Big Sur Management Unit (BSMU) with a reasonable degree of budget autonomy. Please ask the Congressman to reintroduce BSMU legislation right away. You might consider mentioning:

1. The Los Padres National Forest is too large and varied to be reduced to two Ranger Districts. Three Districts or (better yet) Management Units should be the absolute minimum.
2. The BSMU should be administered from within Monterey County.
3. The BSMU should be sufficiently funded to include a Wilderness Manager, a Recreation Officer, a Volunteer Coordinator and a robust pack stock program.

Contact Sam Farr Today!
US Congressman Sam Farr
100 West Alisal Street
Salinas, CA 93901
Electronic message: farr.house.gov
Rescue at Sykes Camp  by Richard Popchak

The importance of the VWA’s Volunteer Wilderness Ranger (VWR) program was highlighted on February 20 of this year when a backpacker was seriously injured and needed to be rescued from Sykes Camp. Joey Yee of Daly City was enjoying a first-time backpacking adventure with a group of friends from the Bay Area. An accomplished runner and in excellent physical condition, Joey excused herself from the group to explore on her own for a bit and with one miss-step fell 20 feet face-first from a cliff.

Noticing that Joey had been gone for some time, her friends found her on the ground and in shock. Her injuries were serious. In addition to lacerations to her face and a severely sprained ankle, there was concern that Joey had possibly suffered internal injuries. Two of Joey’s friends took off for help. With little to no cell coverage in the Ventana, the surest connection to the outside world was ten miles away at Big Sur Station.

Meanwhile, Volunteer Wilderness Rangers Lynn Moncher, Sharol Sevilla, Franco Guzman and Bryce Winter were performing routine trail maintenance while on patrol near Barlow Flat Camp. It is here that they were informed by Joey’s friends that there was a seriously injured person at Sykes Camp (over two miles away).

All VWRs are provided with extensive training, including Wilderness First Aid (WFA) certification which is renewed every two years. Rangers are also trained in the use of US Forest Service radios and are required to utilize one to go into and out of service with USFS dispatch on each patrol.

Lynn and Franco took the lead in radio communications with dispatch. They conveyed the reported condition of the victim and provided the exact GPS coordinates of her location. Dispatch determined that a helicopter rescue was necessary. Meanwhile, Franco took off for Sykes Camp to lend his Wilderness First Responder (WFR) expertise. WFR is an advanced certification that provides the tools to make critical medical and evacuation decisions in remote locations. Fortunately for Joey, the many visitors at Sykes Camp that day included a doctor and a former fireman. They had completed a thorough assessment of Joey’s condition just prior to Franco’s arrival on the scene.

Despite the presence of trained, radio-equipped rangers on site, all did not go well. The helicopter pilot initially attempted to make the rescue at Barlow Flat Camp, not at Sykes Camp. This delayed the extraction. It also created a learning opportunity. The work has already begun to improve the processes necessary to ensure that rangers, dispatchers and first responders are communicating at the highest level.

Ultimately, through the hard work and coordination of many people and agencies, Joey was airlifted out of Sykes by helicopter to Coast Ridge Road and then to Natividad Medical Center in Salinas. Since then she has received treatment at several other hospitals and care facilities. She suffered an L4 vertebrae compression fracture which required surgery. Her physical therapy is intense and she makes progress each day climbing stairs with the help of leg braces and a walker. She awaits her customized braces so that she can continue her recovery at home. We wish her the best.

This incident demonstrates the value of having well trained and equipped people in the backcountry. Not only do the Volunteer Wilderness Rangers engage with visitors to impart Leave No Trace and fire safety information. They also clean up campsites and pick up toilet paper and garbage. And in this case, they assisted in the rescue of a seriously injured visitor.

We’d like to thank Lynn, Sharol, Franco and Bryce (and all the VWR’s) for volunteering their time to provide this essential public service. And thanks to the VWA members and funders who enable the program. ■

Joey is “braced” for her recovery. Go to applesandappas.wordpress.com/to follow her progress.
Improving Access in the Silver Peak Wilderness

by Richard Popchak

In October 2014 the Ventana Wilderness Alliance received a conservation grant of $185,000 from Sean and Alexandra Parker and Neraida LLC for a four-year project to restore and maintain trails in the lovely Silver Peak Wilderness. Work began in earnest in the spring of 2015 when the Cruikshank Trail from Highway 1 to Upper Cruikshank Camp was restored to pack stock standards. Also, the Buckeye Trail from Upper Cruikshank Camp to Villa Creek Camp was restored to hiker/pedestrian standards. This effort was supplemented by a matching grant from the National Forest Foundation (NFF). The VWA contracted American Conservation Experience (ACE) crews to accomplish this work. This project is being led by VWA Stewardship Program Coordinator Mike Heard, well known throughout the region for his award-winning efforts in the Cone Peak network.

This year Parker conservation grant funds, again supplemented by a matching grant from the NFF, were committed to finance four ACE crew hitches. The objective was to restore the Buckeye Trail from Upper Cruikshank Camp to Buckeye Camp to pack stock standards. In January 2016, ACE crews, supported by pack stock, started work from Upper Cruikshank Camp. Despite the loss of some work days owing to inclement weather, the crews got to Buckeye Camp by the end of the third hitch. Now ahead of schedule, the fourth hitch was devoted to repairing minor damage caused by the pack stock and to brushing out the Buckeye Trail and Soda Springs Trail between Salmon Creek Station and the Soda Springs trailhead. That effort provides a head start on work that was originally scheduled for the next phase of the project.

The VWA would like to thank the Parkers, Neraida LLC and the National Forest Foundation for providing the funding for this project. We also would like to thank the ACE crews, led by Trevor Willits, for their excellent work in trying El Niño conditions. Their efforts would have been infinitely more difficult without the pack support provided by volunteers Rick Jacobsen, Bill Blue and Duke Krenkel and by USFS fire personnel Luke Krenkel, Corey Finneman and Eric Harris. “We were really fortunate to get so much work done despite the El Niño storms,” said Mike Heard. “The crews did a good job of focusing on the task at hand and the packers really went the distance to support us.”

Looking ahead, six ACE crew hitches will be deployed on this project during each of the next three years, assuming that the VWA continues to be awarded matching funds by the NFF. The following work is planned:

**October 2016 – June 2017:** Complete work on the Soda Springs Trail and on the Buckeye Trail between Salmon Creek Station and Buckeye Camp, and restore the Salmon Creek Trail from Highway 1 to Spruce Creek Camp.

**October 2017 – June 2018:** Complete work on the Salmon Creek Trail from Spruce Creek Camp to the South Coast Ridge Road.

**October 2018 – September 2019:** Complete work on the Cruikshank Trail from the Buckeye Trail junction to the South Coast Ridge Road.

If grant funds remain after all of the work listed above is completed, then the project will be expanded to include portions of the Spruce Creek Trail from the junction with the Salmon Creek Trail to Dutra/Three Peaks Trail and the Buckeye Trail between Villa Creek Camp and Alder Creek Camp.

Do yourself a favor and get out on the trails of the Silver Peak Wilderness. With the improving trail conditions, one can better focus on the beauty, biodiversity and solitude to be found on these amazing public lands.

The trail between Cruikshank and Buckeye Camps connects hikers with a variety of plant communities.
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.

This map is provided as a resource for visitors to the Arroyo Seco Region, aka the Tassajara Trail Network.

Recent volunteer and VWA-funded contract crew efforts have restored portions of the Marble Peak, Black Cone and South Fork trails, but much remains to be done.

The good news is you can help. Join us as a member, volunteer on a trail crew (Google "VWA Meetup"), post trail conditions reports at ventanawild.org, and tell a fellow hiker about the VWA!
**The Many Benefits of Getting Young People Outdoors**

*by Richard Popchak*

If you are reading this article, it probably means that you *get it*. And by that I mean that you understand the importance of time spent in nature and the value of our public wildlands. Many of you not only get it, but you *have to have it*, meaning that you periodically need to immerse yourself in the wilds of the northern Santa Lucia Mountains. You understand the many benefits that come with the experience. Now imagine if you are a young person living in the area and you don’t even know about the Big Sur backcountry. Or maybe you are aware of this special place but you don’t have the means, knowledge or inclination to explore it. That is where the VWA’s Youth in Wilderness (YiW) program comes in.

As time goes by, we better understand the benefits associated with outdoor exploration. Yet for many young people today, access is limited, especially for underserved kids in urban areas like Salinas and Seaside and rural areas like Big Sur. The Youth in Wilderness program connects local students to their public wildlands, where they develop an appreciation for nature, learn camping skills and gain a commitment to conservation. Let’s take a look at some of the benefits of the Youth in Wilderness program:

**Healthy Habits** | Okay, this might be a given. It is nearly impossible to walk the Ventana without some form of strenuous hiking. Beyond the exercise, participants learn about proper nutrition, the importance of hydration and appropriate backcountry sanitation.

**Life Skills** | With adventure comes risk, yet the wilderness experience endows the young explorer with skills that make life less intimidating and more productive. We’re talking about character traits like courage and resiliency and competencies like decision making, organization and teamwork.

**Digital Detox** | It’s not just kids these days. Most of us could do a better job of limiting our exposure to technology. How did we end up spending just 30 minutes outside and over seven hours indoors in front of a screen each day? The benefits of time spent in nature and away from technology are powerful. YiW participants learn to unplug and enjoy time outside on a regular basis.

**Diversity** | Look at the audience at a VWA or Sierra Club event. Then look at the latest demographic data for California. The conservation community historically has been the realm of Caucasians. The continued protection of our public wildlands will be the responsibility of an American people that will be largely Latino, Asian and Black. YiW helps to bridge this gap by making Wilderness culturally relevant to the next generation of Californians.

**Mentorship** | People who care enough to introduce underserved youth to the outdoors tend to be amazing mentors. YiW Program Manager Bryce Winter and Lead Instructor Franco Guzman, along with teachers like Christian Lamonea, Jake Glazier, Jose Sanchez and Brian King model the way as outstanding mentors in the outdoor classroom. Their positivity, knowledge of traditional camping skills and ability to relate with young people is inspirational. When participants understand that the adults in the group truly care for them, they carry that beneficial effect with them for years to come.

As you can imagine, there are many other benefits to getting young people outdoors. Hopefully you will be out on the trail sometime soon. If you happen to come across young people enjoying our public lands, ask them how they came to appreciate nature. Ask them what benefits they get from being outside. Don’t be surprised to find that they *get it*. Thank you for supporting the VWA and the Youth in Wilderness program.

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**MANY THANKS**

to the following major funders for supporting the Youth in Wilderness program during the period 1/1/2015 through 3/31/2016:

- Alexander P. Saxton Trust One
- Arkay Foundation
- Community Foundation for Monterey County
- Paul and Margaret Danielson
- The Dean Witter Foundation
- Fernandez Pave the Way Foundation
- Tom and Julie Anne Hopkins
- Monterey Peninsula Foundation
- Norcross Foundation
- Rancho Cielo Inc.
- Save the Redwoods League
- The North Face Explore Fund

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In March, students from Carmel Middle School enjoyed a three-day, two-night backpack expedition from China Camp to Big Sur Station.
Remembering Paul Danielson

Editor's Note: The VWA community lost a dear friend when Paul Danielson passed away on March 1, 2016. Our thoughts are with the Danielson family at this time. We asked Paul's friend and hiking companion Jack Glendening to share a few memories of his explorations of the Ventana with Paul.

I don’t remember how Paul and I connected for our first hike back in 2009. But after some getting-to-know-each-other contretemps, we found we were both inquisitive about the Ventana and had a passion for exploring new places. This led to us sharing nearly 60 hikes together over the next six years.

Paul had already been exploring the Ventana for many years, first hiking all its trails, then going off-trail to locate “lost camps.” These were places used by hikers, hunters and fishermen back in the day when the US Forest Service maintained the trails. Having served on the Big Sur Land Trust board as well as the VWA board, Paul worked hard to create and preserve public lands and helped expand wilderness areas in the Ventana. His knowledge of the backcountry was both wide and deep. As many of you know, Paul loved to talk so he shared his knowledge and stories during our drives to and from trailheads. His generosity helped me pass along that knowledge via my on-line trailmap (bigsurtrailmap.net).

Paul was a people-oriented person and interviewed many old-time residents to learn their stories — so he especially delighted in showing me old homesteads with their decaying but still recognizable artifacts, or perhaps a still-fruiting orchard tree.

Paul enjoyed the view above the Arroyo Seco Gorge. He will be dearly missed.

by Jack Glendening

Paul was a positive, kind, caring person. One fond memory is a bushwhack we did to find a waterfall I’d seen from afar. We were both gassed before the last leg, which left the overgrown firebreak we’d followed. But I was set on glimpsing the falls, so I pushed downslope while he waited above. On returning, I lost my way and found myself pinned in dense brush, befuddled and lacking the energy to push through it. But Paul saw I was in trouble and sallied down to guide me back up. At that time he seemed an angel sent from heaven.

Thank you, Dennis and DBK

After many years of service, Dennis Palm and David Knapp have decided to make room for new blood on the VWA Board of Directors. Both men made indelible contributions to the organization and their leadership, wisdom and dedication will be greatly missed.

Dennis, a resident of Paso Robles, joined the board in 2004 and has served as Vice President since 2008. A cabin owner at the Indians, Dennis led the effort to implement the Milpitas Special Interest Area management plan. He was also instrumental in the re-invigoration of the Archaeological Site Stewardship program. Dennis was the VWA liaison with the Partners in Preservation program to ensure that 25 volunteers were trained in the processes to protect the myriad cultural resources in the Ventana region. We will miss Dennis’s keen sense of humor and thought-provoking questions and we look forward to seeing him and his charming wife Ollie at Gatherings and at the Indians.

Dave Knapp (aka DBK) is also a resident of San Luis Obispo County, living in Nipomo. The organization’s first Trail Crew Chief, Dave has served on the board since 2008. It was Mr. Knapp who took the VWA’s fledgling volunteer Trail Crew and turned it into the productive and fun-loving posse that we know today. Dave introduced the concept of the Saturday Night Potluck and many a tired volunteer gathered around his communal fondue pot after a day of clearing trail. Dave was one of the first Trail Crew members to get his crosscut saw certification and he inspired many others to do the same.

As an Operating Systems Analyst at Cal Poly SLO, Dave lends his considerable technical acumen to the organization and has always been counted on to help us solve problems.

Dave Knapp

Please join us in thanking Dennis and Dave for their many years of dedicated service to the organization. Their leadership will be missed but we know we’ll see them around.
Enjoy Tax Benefits with a Charitable Distribution from Your IRA

If you are 70 ½ or older, a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from your IRA is a great way to support the VWA. This charitable gift option was made permanent by the IRS in 2015. Contributing from your IRA to the VWA is an easy way to reduce your tax burden and make a significant gift to protect the public wildlands of the northern Santa Lucias.

Each year, the IRS requires those 70 ½ years of age or older to withdraw a required minimum distribution from their IRA, and pay income tax on the distribution. Gifts made from your IRA (up to $100,000 per year) are not subject to income tax and qualify toward your required minimum distribution which can be a significant tax benefit. Best of all, it is easy. Simply contact your IRA administrator to learn how you can further the work of the VWA while getting a break from the IRS.

While unrestricted gifts are best, you can request that your IRA gift be used for a specific VWA program such as Trail Crew, Youth in Wilderness or Volunteer Wilderness Rangers. You can also direct your gift to the Ventana Trails Forever Fund or the Youth in Wilderness Fund at the Community Foundation for Monterey County. There is also a Youth in Wilderness Fund at the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County in need of additional capital.

You cannot receive any goods or services in order for an IRA gift to qualify for tax-free treatment. But you will have the satisfaction of knowing your generosity is instrumental in the protection of the enduring resource that is Wilderness.

2015 Annual Report

2015 was a strong year for the VWA. The Annual Appeal campaign has become a significant source of critical funding for programs and overhead, second only to grants. Stewardship and advocacy programs were delivered with maximum efficiency and minimal expense. Thank you for your ongoing support of our organization. When you donate, we see that as the ultimate indication of trust and we take that trust very seriously. For every dollar raised in 2015, nearly 92 cents went to programs on the ground.

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Business Students Analyze VWA with Capstone Project

Last September, Jana Nason, then a senior business student at California State University, Monterey Bay, approached the VWA and asked if her “Capstone” team could adopt the VWA as a business client. All CSUMB students must complete a Capstone project in order to graduate. These projects put into practice the research skills and team-work tactics that students gained from their academic efforts. The purpose of the project was to analyze an organization from a strategic management and operations perspective and offer recommendations based on that analysis. VWA enthusiastically embraced this opportunity and gave the team full access to every aspect of the organization.

You may recognize the Nason name. Jana is of Esselen heritage and the 8th generation of her family to call the Big Sur coast and Santa Lucia Mountains home. The Capstone team also included Josie Lisk (niece of a former backcountry ranger), Miranda Aguilar, Amanda Waymire and Stirling Gerbic-Forsyth.

Last December, VWA representatives attended the team’s presentation on campus at CSUMB’s Capstone Festival. Their presentation was outstanding and certainly one of the best of the day. VWA received a copy of their comprehensive strategic analysis of our work. We will benefit from its many recommendations regarding brand awareness, organizational structure, partnership opportunities and program management. We are very thankful to the Capstone team for selecting the VWA for their project. All five members of the team have graduated and we wish them the best. We are fortunate as they will advocate for public wildlands and their continued protection for years to come.

The Capstone Crew from left to right: Stirling Gerbic-Forsyth, Amanda Waymire, Josie Lisk, VWA board member Al Budris, Jana Nason and Miranda Aguilar.