Backcountry Reopened to Visitors

Rescue at Santa Lucia Creek

Remembering Bob Dawson

Protecting the Big Sur Backcountry
Message from the Executive Director

The Great Equalizer

We’d been hearing about it for years. All told, ten states would be within the 70-mile-wide path of totality. As long as we could get there and skies were clear, an astounding natural wonder awaited. For months on end, my wife and I researched prevailing weather patterns, roads, and of course, public lands. We settled on the sunny, desolate rainshadow of the High Cascades. As August drew near, we dreamed of a mountaintop solar eclipse amid awe-inspiring solitude.

Departing with a week to spare, we stopped along the way to admire wildlife, ascend peaks, and swim in pristine rivers. Adventuring through four National Forests, we saw scarcely another human; the dream was alive and well. Then, near Bend, Oregon, the mass migration converged and reality set in. Tiny hamlets were packed. Vendors hawked jewelry, ice cream, and t-shirts. Homespun signs pitched overpriced camping in barren cow pastures. Continuing east to meet friends at an intentionally remote rendezvous, we were dismayed by how many others apparently had the same idea. As we settled in, cars rolled by, each claiming a slightly less desirable campsite than the last.

But soon it was time for the main event. Perfect strangers in tinted glasses huddled beneath the shade of scruffy junipers. On this even playing field, the camaraderie was undeniable; out here race, religion, caste, and creed were meaningless. Peacefully co-inhabiting the commons, we were united in pursuit of celestial splendor at the end of the road less traveled. As the corona flared around the moon’s indigo orb, it was heartening to think of home and know that even California’s crowded central coast has a 500,000-acre stake in our collective public land legacy.

Let’s not forget the wisdom and foresight that made it so. Most importantly, let’s stand up to greed and short-sightedness and remain ever-vigilant in defense of this precious public land heritage. In an era of increasing disparity, only our shared spaces endure as the great equalizer. I hope this issue of Ventana Wilderness Watch will inspire you to get involved and do all you can to keep them wild and public.
Healthier, Happier, and Smarter

Despite the 2016 Soberanes Wildland Fire and the subsequent winter storms of 2017, the Youth in Wilderness program had its most productive field season ever. Although the Forest Closure and the impassibility of Highway 1 and other roads caused some loss of access, the program continues to give young people the guidance to be healthier, happier, and smarter. We applaud the extraordinary efforts of our staff, partners, and volunteers.

MANY THANKS
to the following major funders for making this program possible:

Arkay Foundation
Richard, Susan, Allicia, Laura, and Ryan Beach
The Change Happens Foundation
The Cleo Foundation
The Dean Witter Foundation
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Save the Redwoods League
Tom and Julie Anne Hopkins
The Youth in Wilderness Funds
at the Community Foundations
in Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties

The outdoor classroom provides the perfect environment for students and teachers to learn from each other.

With full immersion into Wilderness, students learn that public wildlands are theirs to enjoy and protect.

Students from Greenfield Community Science Workshop (led by José Sánchez in the foreground) enjoy a dayhike on the Santa Lucia Trail out of Arroyo Seco.
Waiting with Bated Breath

On July 22, 2016, an illegal campfire escaped into Garrapata State Park. By the time the smoke and ash cleared, the resulting Soberanes Wildland Fire burned through 132,000 acres of wildlands and 260 million dollars of state and federal fire funding. In cash terms, this was the most expensive suppression effort in US history; but the costs didn’t end when soaking rains extinguished the last smoldering redwood. Indeed, the precipitation kept on coming, until record rainfall induced slides, road closures, and untold damage to trails and camps amid a charred and fragile landscape.

At this writing, the Pfeiffer Canyon Bridge has at last been replaced and after much waiting with bated breath, the Forest has finally restored access to most of the Los Padres National Forest Monterey Ranger District. However, portions of the Pine Ridge Trail, Palo Colorado Road, and Coast Highway One are still impassable, desperately needing repairs that may take years to complete. With more winter storms around the corner, the prognosis is not good, but the Ventana Wilderness Alliance is doing all it can to educate visitors, mitigate damage, and assist with repairs.

Ranger Patrols | Getting boots on the ground is probably the most important thing we can do to mitigate fire-wrought damage and prevent a repeat of such a tragic event. If only a State Park Ranger had been patrolling Soberanes Canyon in time to extinguish that illegal campfire and, better yet, apprehend the culprit! Unfortunately, State Parks are in the same downward funding spiral as National Forests, and field staffers are the first to go. In cooperation with Los Padres National Forest, the VWA has trained and deployed a cadre of Volunteer Wilderness Rangers to fill this critical need. You can read more about that program (including an account of a harrowing rescue in the Arroyo Seco drainage) later in this issue.

Trailhead Outreach | Sometimes educating folks in the backcountry is just too late. Contacting visitors at key trailheads can be the most effective way to convince them to comply with regulations and Leave No Trace principles, and keep them out of trouble. Important questions like “Do you have a campfire permit?” and “Did you bring a stove to cook your meals?” can prevent irresponsible or illegal use of fire. During trailhead outreach at the popular Salmon Creek Trail on National Public Lands Day (September 30), VWA staff and volunteers contacted 157 visitors and even convinced a few of them to take a trash bag and pack out refuse left by less conscientious hikers.

BAER Trail Surveys | After a wildfire affecting its lands, the Forest Service conducts a Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER), which initially includes surveying the landscape for lingering dangers (like slides and mudflows) that could adversely affect nearby communities. But secondary BAER efforts also consider damage to trails, camps, and other recreation infrastructure. The VWA has partnered with the Forest Service to vet and train volunteers to conduct trail and camp surveys. In summer and early fall, Volunteer Wilderness Rangers, Trail Crew Leaders, and even some local ultra-runners surveyed the Pine Ridge, Carmel River, Miller Canyon, Black Cone, South Fork, and Marble Peak trails. South Fork, Miller Canyon, and portions of the Pine Ridge Trail were in particularly bad shape. An extremely dangerous slide on the latter may leave its western half closed indefinitely.
Advocacy | At this writing, much of the Monterey Ranger District has just reopened following a closure of nearly 18 months. An ongoing closure of the popular Pine Ridge Trail between Big Sur Station and Sykes Camp makes perfect sense; the trail is utterly impassible and hikers attempting to use it would merely overwhelm Search and Rescue resources. But many burned regions of the District are no more dangerous now than they were before the fire.

In some cases, keeping hikers off the trails only compounded the backlog of maintenance needed to restore them. Conversely, concentrated use has taken a toll on the few areas that have been open since last winter. Perhaps most importantly, with fall field season upon us, much of the Big Sur backcountry has already missed out on the efforts of able-bodied volunteer crews eager to maintain their favorite trails. Rest assured that the VWA wasn’t standing silently on the sidelines. While assisting the agency and educating visitors, we continued to emphasize that the long-standing closure be reduced as soon as possible. Thanks goodness the Forest has finally taken heart and restored access to the northern Ventana Wilderness!

▼ A volunteer surveys the Black Cone Trail.

A Forest Service staff member surveys the eastern Pine Ridge Trail. Photo: USFS

A volunteer surveys the Black Cone Trail.

CalPoly students prepare to pack it in and pack it out at the Salmon Creek Trailhead.
Leverage Your Year-end Donation through Monterey County Gives!

The Ventana Wilderness Alliance is delighted to once again be a participant in the 2017 Monterey County Gives! campaign. Your year-end gift goes further through the pro-rata match each participating nonprofit receives. On top of that, a couple that supports the VWA (and wishes to remain anonymous) has greatly sweetened the pot with a $30,000 Challenge Grant! Our goal is to match that challenge and bring in over $60,000 during the campaign. This year’s program runs through December 31, 2017. Donations may be made at montereycountygives.com/nonprofit/ventana-wilderness-alliance/. Monterey County Gives! is a special project of the Monterey County Weekly Community Fund, Community Foundation for Monterey County, and Monterey Peninsula Foundation.

Vehicle Donation!

This summer, longtime VWA member Chuck Tremper donated a Subaru Outback to support field programs like Trail Crew and Youth in Wilderness. An accomplished nonprofit manager, Chuck is the Vice President and General Counsel of Ecology Action, the author of several books (most notably As the Oceans Rise: Meeting the Challenges of Global Warming), and a founder of the AmeriCorps national service program. VWA has benefited greatly from his wise counsel and generosity through the years, but this amazing donation was over the top! Thank you, Chuck!

Does Your Employer Have A Matching Gift Program?

A matching gift program is a corporate philanthropy approach designed to support the nonprofit organizations that employees are passionate about. They usually match employee donations dollar-for-dollar. Please ask your employer about their matching gifts program and sign up if they have one so that your gift to Ventana Wilderness Alliance will be doubled! You and your employer, together, will be supporting the protection of our public wildlands so important today and for future generations.
Why Your VWA Membership is Important

Each year, we ask supporters like you to renew your VWA membership. Thanks to all of you who have kept your membership current! Memberships are important for several reasons:

- **REVENUE** | Last year, membership dues and year-end giving accounted for over 18% of the organization’s income. These essential dollars help to pay for staff, office space, computers, transportation, and so much more.

- **STRENGTH** | The VWA purpose, as articulated in Article 2 of its charter, is to “bring together into a unified and resolute force” the many concerned individuals who share an affinity and respect for the Ventana region. A strong network of members is essential if we are to support each other, further the cause, and grow the organization.

- **FUNDRAISING** | In addition to a compelling proposal, many grantmakers look at a nonprofit’s membership level to guide their funding decisions. Volunteer support and social media following also aid their decision-making. Here at VWA, we are proud to have over 800 members, 200 volunteers, and thousands of followers. Thank you for keeping your membership current! It helps us to secure grants that represent over 63% of our income.

Community Foundation Funds Enable Sustainability

**COMMUNITY FOUNDATION**

Leveraging the outstanding capabilities of two central coast Community Foundations, Tom and Julie Anne Hopkins have led the way in establishing multiple endowments that enable donors to support VWA activities now and in perpetuity. Each fund is structured so that the principal amount of each donation is kept intact while investment income is available for use. Anybody is welcome to make contributions to the funds, and many of you have! A gift of any size to the endowments helps to improve VWA’s sustainability as well as our visibility in the philanthropic community. So please consider a gift today.

- The purpose of the **Youth in Wilderness Funds** at both Community Foundation for Monterey County and Community Foundation Santa Cruz County is to connect underserved young people of the central coast to their public wildlands.

- The purpose of the **Ventana Trails Forever Fund** is to maintain and restore the public trail network of the Ventana region.

- The purpose of the **Ventana Wilderness Alliance Fund** is to support the general operations and programs of VWA consistent with the organization’s Statement of Purpose (available at ventanawild.org/about-the-vwa/mission-purpose).

QUESTIONS? Give us a call at 831-423-3191 to discuss your potential support of these endowment funds.

Wild and Scenic Film Festival

On September 23, 900 attendees packed the Golden State Theatre in downtown Monterey to watch eight powerful films about conservation, wild places, and outdoor adventure. Big thanks to Master of Ceremonies Bruce Delgado and filmmakers Matt Mikkelsen and Palmer Morse for introducing the program. This year’s festival was made possible by the support of many generous sponsors. Business sponsors 1st Capital Bank, Big Sur Salts, the City of Monterey, Juniper Ridge, National Geographic Maps, and The Treadmill, and individual sponsors Dorothy Massey, Marc Eldridge and the VWA Board of Directors demonstrated an admirable commitment to wilderness; we are so grateful to them. Last but not least, many thanks to all the generous local businesses that donated excellent raffle prizes, and to all of you who attended and made this such a fine event. We’re already looking forward to next year!

The lovely Golden State Theatre.
Volunteer Spotlight | Beth Benoit

In this edition of Ventana Wilderness Watch, we get to know superstar volunteer Beth Benoit, who is a Trail Crew Leader and Operations Officer for the Volunteer Wilderness Rangers.

Q: Please tell us about yourself and your family. What was it like growing up in Monterey?

I grew up the oldest of four with three younger brothers. My dad taught Chemistry at Monterey Peninsula College (MPC), so we always had summers free to go camping. I first started backpacking in the Ventana with the Girl Scouts. My mom would go along as the token adult. My first boyfriend tested me by taking me on a cross-country backpack trip to Deer Pasture. I later married that CalFire fireman who had a passion for backpacking. Together we have one son and have just celebrated our 41st wedding anniversary.

Q: Tell us about your education and career.

I went all through school in Pacific Grove and then MPC, followed by getting a BA in Field Biology at UC Berkeley. My career primarily was being the Lab Manager in the Biology, Physiology, and Anatomy departments at MPC. That career was interrupted by a 16-year gap while I raised our son, Nathan, and volunteered in his classrooms as a teacher’s aide. In 2000, I returned to my original job at MPC. I especially liked collecting things in the woods and at the shore for the Biology labs. I retired in 2010. Now I volunteer with Monterey County Reads, do yoga, help my parents take care of their large garden, and go on Volunteer Wilderness Ranger patrols and VWA Trail Crew trips.

Q: How did you discover the VWA?

My husband, Steve, first found the VWA in 2005 after he retired. He joined Dave Knapp’s trail crew. I soon joined him on VWA trail crew trips, earning the epithet “Trail Gardener.”

Q: What are your favorite parts about being a Trail Crew Leader and Volunteer Wilderness Ranger?

I like taking pictures of everyone doing their work, then giving them accolades for the great work they’ve done. As crazy as it sounds, I enjoy cleaning up a camp (TP and all), redoing a fire ring, and leaving a camp all neat and tidy for the next campers to enjoy. I like sharing trail information with hikers.

Q: After helping to lead the VWR program for many years, you’re ready to have someone else step into your role as Operations Officer. Why is it important for new people to take a leadership role in the Ranger program? What skills are most important for these roles?

It would be prudent to have new people take on leadership roles while the old guard is still around to help with the transition. It would devastate the program if the leadership dropped out with no one having learned the ropes. The program has grown over the years and the range of responsibilities has expanded as well. Rangers need to have a love of the Ventana and the Silver Peak, a respect for the US Forest Service, and a view that rangers are there to enrich peoples’ experience of the out-of-doors. I would say the most important skill for leadership is communication. Communication is needed to keep the group inspired, to keep the group’s skills sharp, and to continually strengthen connections with all of our partner organizations.

Beth removing barbed wire at Buckeye Camp.
On September 22, 2017, Volunteer Wilderness Ranger (VWR) Joe “Rad” Radoslovich was patrolling the Arroyo Seco area, performing mundane yet essential ranger tasks like visitor education, campsite cleanup and illegal fire ring removal. After a night in the backcountry, he relocated his camp to the Santa Lucia Adobe. Around 5 PM, Joe encountered a young woman near Camp Cawatre who expressed that she was “going for a swim.” Given the time and location, he figured she was heading to the Arroyo Seco for a dip.

Hours passed, darkness fell, and the hiker had not returned, at least not via the same route. Around 2 AM, Joe was awakened by Monterey County Sheriff’s Office Search and Rescue (SAR) volunteers shouting for “Jessica”, who had by now been reported missing. Joe assisted the search strategy with his considerable knowledge of the area; but not being a trained SAR, settled in for a fitful night of sleep while volunteers scoured the Arroyo Seco Gorge.

With morning light came SAR shift change; Joe learned that the hiker was still missing. He loaded his pack with food, water, clothing, and a Forest Service radio. On a hunch, he ascended the steep Santa Lucia Trail along the rim of its namesake canyon, periodically stopping to call Jessica’s name. After several hours, he finally heard a response, deep in the massive gorge below. Indeed it was Jessica, stranded above a waterfall. Helicopter extraction was perhaps the only way to retrieve her. Joe conveyed his discovery to the Los Padres Communication Center in Santa Maria, which in turn contacted CHP - Coastal Division Air Operations. An H-70 Airbus team was quickly dispatched to perform the rescue.

As the helicopter arrived, CHP patched Joe into direct contact, as he was the crew’s only hope in locating Jessica in the yawning canyon below. Eventually establishing visual contact, the chopper’s hoist, connected to a “screamer seat”, carefully lowered a SAR volunteer into the precipitous locale. One at a time, both individuals were slowly airlifted to safety. Joe watched from the trail, as far below, the helicopter and rescuers flawlessly performed their amazing work. Jessica was safely returned to civilization. In an odd twist, Joe was left alone on the now-silent Santa Lucia Trail … never knowing what the rescuers even looked like. Such is the thankless work of a Volunteer Wilderness Ranger. Kudos to the Monterey County Sheriff’s Office SAR team and CHP - Coastal Division Air Operations for their outstanding rescue capabilities. And a massive high five to Joe Rad! As Jessica recently remarked on the VWA Instagram page, “Joe is my hero”. Selflessly serving as the “boots on the ground” to conserve our public wildlands, he’s our hero too.

Joe snapped this photo at the start of the extraction process.
Chipping Away at an Endless Task

By now you know the story: drought, fire, storms, repeat. We’ve all seen the impacts on our central coast communities. And we’ve seen the herculean efforts put forth to restore man’s constructs, be they homes, bridges, roads, sewer systems, or outhouses. In Wilderness areas, however, largely free from the impacts of human activities, the natural state prevails—despite our incursions. One major exception is the trail network. The cycle of fire and storm has wreaked havoc on the man-made trail system. Here at the VWA, we have committed ourselves to the restoration and maintenance of the 300-plus miles of trail in the Big Sur backcountry. It might be a foolhardy endeavor, but we believe that without access people may not appreciate public wildlands; we cannot expect them to defend what they do not know and love. In that spirit, we offer this update on what’s going on with VWA-sponsored trail projects.

Cone Peak Network
In October 2016, Trevor guided a 12-person ACE crew for an eight-day hitch based out of Vicente Flat Camp. The team conducted brushing and tread repair. This work was funded by the Patterson Family Foundation with a matching grant from the National Forest Foundation.

Lost Valley Network
The all-volunteer VWA Trail Crew accomplished much-needed brushing, clearing, and tread repair on the Carrizo Trail on several outings between February and May of 2017.

Silver Peak Network
As reported in the Spring 2017 Ventana Wilderness Watch, the loss of Highway 1 access to the Silver Peak Wilderness wiped out our trailwork plans for the winter and spring of 2017. Despite access being limited by the epic Mud Creek slide, work by professional crews resumed in October 2017. At this writing, an ACE crew is currently restoring the Buckeye Trail with six eight-day hitchs based out of Salmon Creek Guard Station and Buckeye Camp. We applaud Trevor’s efforts and patience in leading this project. This work is funded by Sean and Alexandra Parker (Neraida LLC) with a matching grant provided by the National Forest Foundation. Elsewhere in and around the Silver Peak Wilderness, many dedicated volunteers tackled work on the Prewitt Ridge Loop and Three Peaks Trail in early 2017. Thanks to our grant providers, volunteers, the Gabilan Conservation Camp, and ACE for embracing these trail restoration challenges. At times, it may feel like we are “pushing water uphill with a rake,” but progress is being made!

Carmel River Network
In March of this year, the all-volunteer VWA Trail Crew put in considerable effort to make the Pine Ridge Trail stock-passable from Tassajara Road to Divide Camp. With pack stock support, Stewardship Program Coordinator Trevor Willits was able to lead American Conservation Experience (ACE) contract crews on five backcountry hitchs. Working from Divide Camp, and despite continuing winter storms and difficult access, the crews made significant gains in restoring the upper Pine Ridge Trail. This fall, Steve Benoit led a crew from the Gabilan Conservation Camp, conducting maintenance on the Carmel River Trail. Many thanks to our friends at REI for funding this work, along with the National Forest Foundation, which doubled REI’s impact with a matching grant.
Thank you 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 200 passionate volunteers giving their time and expertise over the past year 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.

Franklin Abdon
William Akey
Ethan Alexander
Elena Armstrong
Alan Baldwin
Luke Beaudoin
Roger Beaudoin
Victor Beaudoin
Leif Behrmann
Beth Benoit
Steve Benoit
Mark Bibbo
Tim Bills
Shunkila Black Calf
Tom Boehme
Joe Bonnano
Tom Brisley
Ben Bruce
Gary Bryant
Al Budris
Weston Call
Inome Callahan
Claire Cambell
Anne Canright
Stuart Carlson
Gabrielle Carroll
Lise Carter
Iera Chaudry
Ben Christensen
Justin Cogley
Aaron Cole
Elena Collin
Bryan Conant
Kate Cunningham
Luis Curiel
Steve Cypher
Armond Dai
Ben Daniels
Chris Day
Bruce Delgado
Redwood Devitt
Peggy Diller
Justin Doolittle
Inga Dorosz
Kara Downey
Gary Dudney
Allen Duong
Eva Echenique
Marc Eldridge
Nathan Estrada
James Farber
Darlene Felsman
Gary Felsman
Maria Ferdin
Sean FitzHoward
Nick Flores
Sandra Flores
Diana Fong
Larry Fong
Lincoln Fong
Ryan Fries
Ashley Fulk
Erik Gandolfi
Paul Garneau
Quintin Gilmore
John Glendening
Maha Golkany
Karen Gonzalez
Bekan Goodman
Mike Gordon
Marie Goulet
Cindy Grall
Mike Grall
Diane Graves
Dick Graybill
Bernard Green
Carol Greenstreet
Francisco Guzman
William Coates
Daniel Hartmann
Charles Haworth
Bob Hazelton
Mike Heard
Chris Hensley
Esperanza Hernandez
Estefani Hernandez
Javier Hernandez
Suzanne Hierl
David Hirsch
Gregory Hoisington
Dana Holdt
Heidi Hopkins
Julie Anne Hopkins
Tom Hopkins
Gordon Huang
Jui Huang
Will Hubert
Boon Hughey
Zi Hun
Armando Iglesias
David Jacobs
Gordon Johnson
Tamara Jones
Kiera Jorden
Chris Kang
John Kenny
Dave Knapp
Jacob Koff
Christian Lamonea
Kat Lane
Becky Lange
David Lautzenheiser
Sean Lawley
Jean LeBlanc
Philippe LeBlanc
Gabriel Leng
Jon Libby
Jaylen Liu
John Lopez
Caitlin Lorenc
Betsy MacGowan
Nik Madsen
Dario Malengo
Nikki Marangoni-Simonsen
Frank Martin
Mark Maslow
Dottie Massey
Maddy Maurer
Randy May
Adriel McNer
Christie McCullen
Paul McFarland
Natalie McNear
Bruce Merchant
Greg Meyer
Matthew Mikkelsen
Lynn Moncher
Blanca Moody
Demi Moore
Johnny Morales
Ryan Morris
Palmer Morse
Melissa Moyer
Tessa Munson
Francesca Nash
Nikki Nede
Dave Nelson
Sophie Noda
Claire Northall
John O'Mara
Juliana Ortiz
Dennis Palm
Leor Pantiliat
Robert Parks
Trent Pearce
Edge Pecjo
Mario Pesendorfer
Kathleen Phelps
Ella Phillips
"Edge" Pompeyo Pecjo
Mel Preston
Joe Radoslo
Siri Reintz
Roxanne Renedo
Victor Reyes
Ryan Richter
Charmaine Robinson
Poti Robinson
Clayton Rodda
Jessica Rodgers
Brian Rowlett
Josh Rude
Florendo Sales
Will Salmon
Carly Sanchez
Madeleine Schmidt
Christian Schwar
Pov Seng
Sharol Sevilla
Burkhard Siedhoff
Luis Silva
Vince Silva
Ria Sleeth
Sekoya Sleeth
Ashley Sonde
Alexandro Soto
Evan Spruing
Terry Spitz
Bob Stalard
Bobby Steger
Kim Chi Steger
Mark Stockman Sullivan
Melinda Stockman Sullivan
Brody Swanner
Jennifer Tatum
Debe Taylor
Ken Taylor
Katsukai Terasawa
Lizzie Thomas
John Tilley
Chuck Tremper
Johnathon Turner
Elizabeth Valentine
Lois Van Buren
Keith Vandeveer
Francesca Verdi
Maria Villela
Eri Vivito
Bill Vogt
David Wachtel
Kelly West-Burrola
Dylan Whitner
Derek Williams
Jane Wilson
Lynelle Wing
Bryce Winter
Veronica Yovovich
Richard Zahm
EVENTS

January 28

VWA Day – An Afternoon of Inspiration and Education
Hidden Valley Music Center, Carmel Valley
Details TBA

Please like our fan page on Facebook
Be sure to join us on Meetup

Remembering Bob Dawson

On June 20, 2017 the central coast lost a true friend of wilderness. Robert Gene Dawson was a native of Texas, where early on he was drawn to nature and joined the Boy Scouts of America. Bob eventually achieved Eagle Scout status and was a Brotherhood member of the Order of the Arrow. He went on to attend the US Naval Academy, returning home to marry his longtime sweetheart and best friend, June Burkhart. Bob later enlisted in the US Marine Corps and served as an Aviator, flying over 250 combat missions in Vietnam, where his cheerful demeanor in the face of adversity earned him the call sign “Sunshine.” It was during an aviation training exercise that he first noticed the rugged peaks and canyons of the Santa Lucia Range. Intrigued by this vast, mountainous landscape, Bob began setting out on foot to explore it. He and June would later retire nearby in Carmel Valley, where they both took pride in ridding their property of invasive plants and volunteering with numerous nonprofit organizations.

Bob was instrumental in the campaign for the Big Sur Wilderness and Conservation Act of 2002, which added nearly 55,000 acres to the Ventana, Silver Peak, and Pinnacles wilderness areas. He served on the VWA board of directors from 2008 until 2012. We’ll miss Bob “Awesome Dawson” dearly and are infinitely grateful for his dedication and commitment to the conservation of wild places.