

# Jeffrey Pine JOURNAL

FALL 2017 | VOLUME XV, ISSUE II

## What Makes Us Great

People and Our Public Lands

## Monuments Matter

Americans Overwhelmingly Support Them

## Eastern Sierra Trail Ambassadors

Inspiring Summer in the High Country



PRESERVATION | EXPLORATION | STEWARDSHIP



THE JEFFREY PINE JOURNAL  
VOLUME XV, ISSUE II, FALL 2017

## NEWSLETTER OF Friends of the Inyo



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Newsletter Design: [www.nilsdavisdesign.com](http://www.nilsdavisdesign.com)

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Friends of the Inyo is dedicated to the preservation, exploration, and stewardship of the Eastern Sierra's public lands.



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### COVER PHOTO

Ansel Adams  
Wilderness  
Project  
volunteers on  
their morning  
commute.

PHOTO:  
Ken Miller

Inyo is a Paiute word meaning "dwelling place of the Great Spirit." For us, this dwelling place extends from the bottom of Death Valley to the top of Mount Whitney, from Owens Lake to Topaz Lake, from the crest of the Sierra Nevada to the roof of the Great Basin atop the White Mountains. *The Jeffrey Pine Journal*, named after the Eastern Sierra's most aromatic conifer, is distributed free to all members of Friends of the Inyo and wherever great spirits tend to dwell.

# What Makes Us Great

by Ben Wickham

Black and white photos are timeless, just like our public lands. Think of early conservation advocates like John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Ansel Adams. Imagine if we were privy to what was on their living room bookshelves, office desks, or stuffed inside their wallets. I'd guess there'd be black and white photos of the most beautiful places in the world. There would be photos of the very places that made them some of the greatest Americans that ever lived. Some of those photos probably included pictures of them being great in those beautiful places.

For a second, let's admit it's not the best time for our country. Let's admit it's not the best time for our public lands. But let's also acknowledge that for those of us who have put in the effort, we've made our point through comments, phone calls, and marches. We've made our point by going out and volunteering our time to work hard together to care for trails, restore lakeshores, and clean up places we love. We've made a great difference.

Over the years, I've led a discussion based on an Edward Abbey quote about the most beautiful place in the world. I've done this with fifth graders and adults, peers and strangers, and in both classroom and casual settings. It's astonishing and yet not astonishing that when I've asked people to imagine their most beautiful place, everyone describes the same visions that sound not unlike an Ansel Adams photo come to life: visions of clear blue water, a staggering sunset over meadows and mountains, any form of wildlife, and— most especially— a dark night in the middle of nowhere where you can look up at thousands of bright stars in a perfectly black sky.

So to make a long story short, I've been looking at black and white photos lately. I've been thinking a lot about what it means to be an American and about what makes us great. The thing I'm most confident about? Our public lands are the place that can bring us together. It's somehow ingrained in each of us that experiences in these big open beautiful places are part of who we are. It's also something we have in common and it brings out the best in us, which is something we need now more than ever.



Volunteers being great on our public lands in Rock Creek, Eastern Sierra. Photo: Ben Wickham

# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD UPDATE

## Connecting with What Moves Us

by Wendy Schneider

We are lucky when we get the chance to connect with something that moves us. Martin Powell grew up in Lone Pine, and his connection to the great outdoors began there. The drama and beauty of the Eastern Sierra have been a constant presence in his life.

Several months before Friends of the Inyo's 2015 Owens Lake Bird Festival, Martin was approaching retirement and accepted a family Christmas challenge to do a Big Year Bird Count. Martin really jumped in, friends led him to all the hot spots, and he wound up photographing 208 species of birds! He was thrilled. The experience changed the way he appreciated the great outdoors. Martin had connected with something that moved him.

Soon after, the Owens Lake Bird Festival arrived. Martin went on tours and attended the evening talks. He found everything informative, engaging, and entertaining. He especially liked learning that Friends of the Inyo's work helps maintain habitat in the Eastern Sierra so that wildlife, like the birds he loved to photograph, could thrive.

Friends of the Inyo board member and Owens Lake luminary Mike Prather recognized a talented photographer and fellow conservationist in the making. Mike invited Martin to lead outings at the 2016 Festival, and Martin accepted. Martin found that giving back to Friends of the Inyo, and to all the partners and agencies that make the Festival possible, gave him a great sense of personal fulfillment and satisfaction. He again felt that strong connection with something that moved him, and knew that he wanted to get more involved.

Two months ago, Friends of the Inyo invited Martin to join our Board, and we are so happy that he accepted the invitation. Martin is clearly committed to helping us increase our ability to do the necessary work, on the ground and in the offices and conference rooms, to keep our Eastern Sierra public lands accessible to all, protected, and well managed. Although he

now has less free time than he used to, Martin can still be seen frequently on the Whitney Portal, Cottonwood Lakes, and Alabama Hills trails. He goes there to stay connected, stay fit, and, of course, photograph birds.

My connection to conservation also began in the beauty of the place where I grew up, the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. As a child, I would wander along the shores of Watts Bar Lake near my grandmother's house, gathering treasures from the natural world. I loved to water-ski and ride my bike. As an adult, I moved on to backpacking, rock climbing, and snow-skiing. The details have never been important as long as I get to be outside.

As a young adult, I moved west to run the Los Angeles fundraising office for a national environmental group. The many experiences that connect me to the Eastern Sierra began at that time. My favorite memories are backpacking trips with my then-boyfriend-now-husband, especially hours spent lying next to high alpine lakes. These days we take the kids with us. I hope they know how lucky they are.

Like Martin, my connection to conservation in the Eastern Sierra was strengthened and accelerated by participation in a Friends of the Inyo program. During the summer of 2016, I spent many hours recording plant data as a citizen scientist to help the National Park Service assess the effects of climate change in Devils Postpile National Monument. While I have long been interested in the natural world and protecting special places, this experience, especially the fascinating training I received from park ecologist Monica Buehler, caused me to take immediate steps to rejoin the conservation movement.

Friends of the Inyo has many programs like the Owens Lake Bird Festival, volunteer stewardship days, and outings and explorations to special places that ignite the connection between people and the lands we love and work to protect. We hope you will join us soon.



White Pelicans at Owens Lake  
Photo: Martin Powell

## Transitions

Friends of the Inyo is excited that Wendy and Martin have joined our organization. We're also very happy to welcome Julia Runcie as Stewardship Program Manager and Michael Cleaver as Operations Manager. Check out their biographies on our website. This summer, Dave Herbst left both the Eastern Sierra and Friends of the Inyo's board. Dave served as our resident scientist, and we are forever grateful for the sound insight that he brought to our positions on policies and management plans. Thank you Dave, good luck, and enjoy Santa Cruz.



## PRESERVATION

## Monuments Matter

by Jora Fogg

I traveled into Kings Canyon National Park for Labor Day weekend to clear my head in anticipation of the release of Department of Interior (DOI) Secretary Ryan Zinke's report on the national monument review, which was due August 24th. Since it was not released as expected, I could have spent longer enjoying the backcountry of my favorite national park. Days and then weeks passed by with no news until the Washington Post leaked Secretary Zinke's draft report on September 17. Although 99% of the more than 2.7 million comments support monuments and their current boundaries, Secretary Zinke's report recommends:

- Boundary changes to **Bears Ears** (UT), **Grand Staircase** (UT), **Cascade-Siskiyou** (OR/CA), and **Gold Butte** (NV), but specific changes are still unknown as maps have not been made available.
- Management changes for **Organ Mountains** (NM) that would greatly expand grazing through mandatory minimums, **Rio Grande** (NM) that would allow uses like mining, logging, and drilling in protected areas, **Katahdin Woods** (ME) that would expand commercial logging, and the **Northeast Canyons** and **Seamounts Marine National Monuments** that would allow commercial fishing.

Secretary Zinke's recommendations make it clear that the monument review was arbitrary, secretive, and unnecessary. Although (at our time of press) the White House has not released a statement on the report or any decision, available intelligence indicates that it is likely they are preparing the largest attack on protected lands in United States history. If

we stand by without action, an area several times the size of Yosemite National Park could soon be lost to mining, drilling, and logging. Native American sacred sites, natural wonders, and places that are currently open for hunting, fishing, hiking, and outdoor recreation are at risk of being permanently lost to energy extraction, mining, and private development. The elimination of vast portions of America's national monuments could destroy local economies adjacent to these monuments and deeply cut the multi-billion dollar recreation economy that America's public lands and waters support.

This review was unpopular across the country, especially in California, where iconic popular monuments are at risk of major reductions in size and protections. Although the only monument in California Secretary Zinke recommends shrinking is Cascade-Siskiyou, an attack on one is an attack on all. Perhaps most alarming, the draft report announces that Department of Interior will undertake a review of the management plans of national monuments in general, weakening and altering their protection.

As we wait for likely Congressional action, citizens can respond by inundating the White House and Congress with comments to leave our national monuments alone! Only Congress has the authority to implement Secretary Zinke's recommendations. If the White House attempts to act on these recommendations, they will be challenged in court and likely overturned. Until then we can keep up the steady drumbeat of support by visiting our national monuments, learning more about what makes them special, and sharing our experiences with family and friends.



Mojave Trails National Monument. Photo: Patrick Donnelly



**Many of the national monuments in California** appear to have been spared for now, but we are still waiting for a final report from Secretary Zinke and action from the White House. Besides Cascade-Siskiyou, Secretary Zinke's report never mentions his review of the other California monuments, therefore they remain under threat from future boundary or management changes through Secretarial Order, Executive Order, Solicitor's Opinions, management plan reviews, or legislative action. Take the time to voice your support for all national monuments under threat, not only the monuments listed in the final report, but also monuments that were under review.

## Carrizo Plain

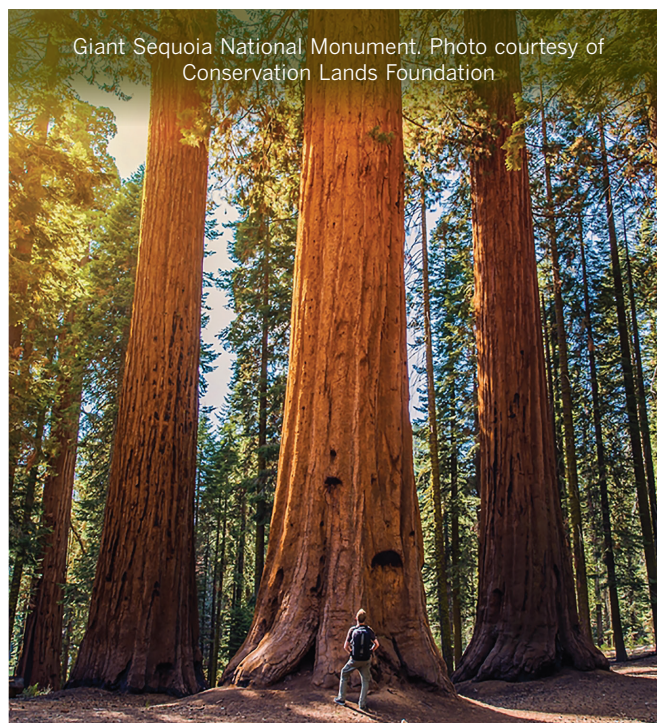
The 204,107-acre Carrizo Plain National Monument preserves the last tract of native grasslands that once stretched 400 miles through central California. As the largest undeveloped remnant of this ecosystem, the monument provides crucial habitat for the long-term conservation of the many endemic plant and animal species that still inhabit the area, including the endangered San Joaquin kit fox, the California condor, and the blunt-nosed leopard lizard. The grasslands also support populations of pronghorn and tule elk. Rare and sensitive plant species abound and thousands of visitors witness spectacular blooms each year. The area is known for its unique geography that can be attributed to the San Joaquin Valley faults. It is also rich with fossil remains that give us clues into the North American provincial mammalian age. Important prehistoric artifacts include dozens of sites with pictographs, village middens, and bedrock mortar milling locations. Oil and gas development are a major threat to Carrizo if boundary modifications are recommended.

## Giant Sequoia

The 328,315-acre Giant Sequoia National Monument was designated in 2000 to protect giant sequoia trees and associated species and history. Giant sequoia trees are the world's largest living trees and can survive to over 3,000 years old, growing only in a narrow 60-mile band along the Sierra Nevada. The monument contains 33 groves, nearly the species' entire population outside of national parks. Many other rare species are supported by this ecosystem and its abundant creeks, rivers, and meadows, such as Pacific fisher, great gray and California spotted owls, and peregrine falcons. The monument also contains a series of limestone caverns and holds unique paleontological resources documenting tens of thousands of years of ecosystem change, as well as many Native American archaeological sites and historic remnants of early Euro-American settlements.



Carrizo Plain National Monument. Photo courtesy of Conservation Lands Foundation



Giant Sequoia National Monument. Photo courtesy of Conservation Lands Foundation

## Mojave Trails

The 1.6 million-acre Mojave Trails National Monument preserves the core of the Mojave Desert and its major landscape linkages while connecting 15 wilderness areas, Joshua Tree and Death Valley National Parks, and Mojave National Preserve. Part of the monument's large size is due to these existing designations, which contain some of the best examples of intact wilderness, scenery, and recreational opportunities in the West. The monument preserves the most pristine, undeveloped remaining stretch of historic Route 66, known as the Mother Road, which is arguably the most famous highway in America. The monument offers a scientific opportunity for discovery because the California desert remains largely unexplored botanically and species new to science are still being discovered and described. The monument is home to the federally threatened desert tortoise, southwest willow flycatcher, Bell's vireo, desert bighorn sheep, golden eagle, and many other wildlife species. The monument contains a number of significant sand dune features, most notably the stunning Cadiz Dunes, which have been studied extensively and contain an ancient underground aquifer. The aquifer is currently threatened by the Cadiz water mining project, which proposes to pump 50,000 acre-feet of water a year and send it to the Colorado River Aqueduct. With the Cadiz project named to the Trump administration's list of 50 national security infrastructure priorities, it's no surprise Mojave Trails National Monument is under review.



## TRAIL AMBASSADORS

**This summer,** Friends of the Inyo partnered with the Inyo National Forest to place Eastern Sierra Trail Ambassadors on high country trails from Big Pine Creek to June Lake. After a historic winter, the Trail Ambassadors removed 94 logs, improved 98 trail structures like steps and water bars, and cleared hundreds of pounds of rocks and debris where spring floods had buried the boardwalk at the inlet of Convict Lake. Along the way, they maintained almost 19 miles of trail, removed 264 pounds of trash from wilderness, provided information to 968 public lands users, and led insightful and fun interpretive hikes. All of us in the Eastern Sierra are very thankful for Astra and Alex's creativity, passion, and hard work this summer. They made a lot of people smile.

## A Trail Ambassador Land Ethic for All of Us to Join

by Astra Lincoln

To answer the question burning in the minds of the majority of hikers passing by while Alex and I were on trail this summer working as Eastern Sierra Trail Ambassadors: no, we did not find gold. We were not digging a mine start. We didn't find the mammoth bones at the bottom of Mammoth Lake either. I'm sorry to disappoint.

On the plus side, we did remove nearly 200 pounds of trash. We built rock steps. We cleared at least the first couple miles of nearly every trail from Big Pine to June Lake. We took out hazard trees suspended over trails. We interpreted for dozens of hikers the present and remnant ecology, glaciology, and volcanism of this beautiful place. We one-upped each other weekly regarding who concocted the superior trail snack.

And on particularly arduous projects, people noticed. On those days it seemed like every hiker that passed by commented, "now that's some real hard work." And every time, I wished I could respond that more than hard, it's necessary. That their (and my) recreation is predicated on someone doing the hard, important work.

In addition to hauling our tools around and tromping up trails, Alex and I spent this summer talking. A lot. Alex is chatty and I'm outspoken. Our interests have an uncanny degree of overlap. Perhaps more importantly, we spent between 20 and 40 hours a week hiking together. And so we talked.

On one of many long-winded chats, we were waxing poetic about the world order. A hiker walked by and overheard us. He said,

"Even out here you two are talking politics? You must be a bunch of masochists!"

I remember Alex and I laughed. And then we kept talking, caring, and engaging in every way we could. We are embedded in this place; its well-being is inseparable from our own. In this and so many other ways, being a Trail Ambassador reaffirmed that there can be no apolitical land ethic.

As my last-ditch attempt at seasonal stewardship, I offer this formula so that you, too, can be an ambassador of the land. It is informed by this season, as well as by my time working with seven other trail crews in years past.

First, be humble. We learn with every encounter how to better care for each other, and for this place. Our place in this landscape will always be secondary to the animals to whom it is the only home. Learn from their presence, and mitigate the scale of your own. Second, be grateful: to the people stewarding and to the flora and fauna that do so much invisible work to preserve the ecosystems in which we play. Third, be diligent. Pick up trash, stay on trail, educate every other recreationalist you can, every chance you get. Fourth, be active. Use your words, your body, your mind, your heart, and your network to disrupt when necessary, and inspire when possible. The least we can give these mountains is everything we've got. And to the approximately 759 visitors we've spoken with about trail work this season as of the time of my writing, I say: you're welcome, and would you like to join us?



Clearing trails in Little Lakes Valley. Photo: Ben Wickham



Trail Work Thursday volunteers working on the the boardwalk at Convict Lake. Photo: Astra Lincoln



## TRAIL AMBASSADORS

### More Than a Bunch of Numbers

by Alex Ertaud

Statistically speaking, Wednesday, August 16th was the day I hiked from the South Lake trailhead to Bishop Pass as an Eastern Sierra Trail Ambassador and cleared 32 water bars while monitoring 4.6 miles of trail and making 15 public contacts. But a day is worth much more than a bunch of numbers. A day is made up of the sensory feedback that imprints itself on the silvery emulsion sheet of your mind. Here's a look at my negatives from that day.

It started inauspiciously enough, my bones weary from two and a half months of trail work and my back loaded with a full kit. I struggled with the first section of trail which meandered through trees separating lakes South and Long. As I got to the latter lake my pain oozed away, replaced with a wide smile. Long Lake put on quite the show. Its flowers popped in a polychromatic display with the expansive Sierra Crest as a backdrop, its granite spires dazzling. The lupine, paintbrush, and lilies, all flashing, poked up from deeply verdant tall grasses. With my spirits buoyed and my legs feeling light, I continued on.

As the trail ratcheted up in grade, my fatigue returned. Ahead of me were two men with large packs taking a break on the side of the trail. As I approached, their eyes focused on the tools I carried. They asked who I worked for and I told them about Friends of the Inyo, the Eastern Sierra Trail Ambassadors, and what we do. They said thank you and complimented the quality of the trail as I deflected the credit to the hardy souls that built the trail in the first place, years before me.

I got back to work and a couple of switchbacks later I stopped to clear a water bar. The two men caught up to me again.

"Do you know what this flower is called?" one asked.

"I'm not sure," I said.

"That's an alpine gentian!" the other said. The three of us crouched around the plant in question.

"I really don't think so," the first said. "My guess is an alpine columbine."

"You're nuts! Have you ever seen a columbine? They look nothing like that!"

I crouched between the two of them, a grin stamped on

my face. They went on for another quarter hour, bringing up our elevation, whether certain flowers grew in the Sierra, and even technical processes like phenotypic plasticity. I'm not sure we ever came to a consensus, but I sure got a kick out of the conversation.

"Well whatever it is, it sure is pretty," the first man said. We all agreed.

This is what I love about our job the most: interacting with human, floral, and animal beings to create a delightfully nuanced work experience. As Astra will tell you, I'm able to chat up a storm, and love doing so with anyone I meet on trail. The natural splendor I experience in the day-to-

day of this job is amazing, and caring for it provides me with purpose. But without the context of my fellow humans, that purpose would remain nebulous, and my work a mere selfish, esoteric exercise. While we may forever ponder whether a tree falling in a human-less forest makes a sound, I know for certain that my summer would not have been as rich without humans there to make sure the work I did existed outside of a vacuum. Thank you.



Good work and good times on the Emerald Lake Trail in Mammoth. Photo: Astra Lincoln

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## STEWARDSHIP

# Taking Care of the Places We Care About

by Julia Runcie

Diane Wilson has lived at Twin Lakes in Bridgeport since the seventies. She knows exactly where the bald eagle makes its nest every summer and where the fishermen's trails wind through tall grass and mud along the shores of the upper lake. No piece of trash escapes her eye, no matter how small. As she walks the trails and collects garbage, she tells everyone she meets what she's doing and why. Some weekends she organizes parties of her neighbors in cleanup patrols. Often nowadays, she's not the only one strolling along the marina with a trash bag on a Sunday afternoon.

"Finally," Diane said when she heard Friends of the Inyo and Mono County scheduled a volunteer stewardship event at Twin Lakes last June, "one of these trail days is happening right in our backyard!"

As Diane and I walked along with our trash-picker-uppers, she had a story about every beach or bay we passed. "I've never seen this much water at the inlet," she'd say, or, "there's more algae than usual this year." That deep knowledge of place—that memory of a lakeshore or forest or trail through the seasons and through the decades—is a powerful ingredient in the recipe for community stewardship of public lands. We take care of what we care about.

I've seen that care transmitted in many different forms over the course of the summer. At Bodie Hills Stewardship Day in August, a State Park ranger who grew up in Bridgeport joined our team of volunteers. Erica Hedlund wasn't just another pair of hands. She was a treasure trove of place knowledge, enriching our experience of the park. As we pulled fence wire to improve sage-grouse habitat, Erica told us colorful stories about the town's former residents and helped us imagine Bodie as a bustling hub of 8,500. Volunteers were genuinely connected to the stewardship effort that day, because they understood the project—and the place—in context. Feeling the centuries of history in the soil at their feet lent purpose and meaning to their work.

Care for public lands can also generate



Bodie Hills volunteers improve wildlife habitat by getting after fence wire removal. Photo: Dylan Welcome

conflict. There is no universal manual for good stewardship; what one group sees as restoration may seem like wanton destruction or heavy-handed over-management to another. This summer, Friends of the Inyo's Stewardship Crew worked hard to restore places where motor vehicles have trespassed on closed roads or in roadless areas. This project is highly controversial within the local community and has brought different user groups into bitter conflict. Even within groups, there is little consensus about where roads and motor vehicles should and shouldn't be allowed. Many motorists have a deep respect for the land and practice Leave No Trace etiquette, while others routinely trespass in fragile areas. Some hikers and mountain bikers abhor vehicles in their special places, while others are willing to share the road.

Yet even where true consensus is elusive, there is room for compromise and cooperation. As Mike Johnston, the president of the Eastern Sierra Four Wheel Drive Club, drove me through the Tungsten Hills in his jeep, we both paused to wonder at an improbably balanced boulder silhouetted on the skyline.

"I'm just amazed that kind of thing can happen in nature," Mike said, and I agreed.

We were in the Tungstens that day to scope out a joint volunteer project repairing washouts on access roads used by motorists, hikers, and mountain bikers alike. Despite the sometimes divergent missions of our

organizations, we continue a tradition of collaborating on public lands stewardship, finding projects we can all agree are for the common good and the good of the landscape.

I can't say for sure that Mike and I felt the same feeling when we turned a corner to a sudden view of the Volcanic Tablelands caught in a net of purple shadow. We may not have the same hopes and plans for this landscape. But I think Mike spoke for both of us when he said, "Democrat, Republican, off-roader, hiker, I just don't see that it matters. We all love this place."

Stewardship is taking care of the place you love. There is room in the Eastern Sierra for each of us to find our place, and protect it.



A young volunteer on her summer break helps brush back the creek trail in Rock Creek. Photo: Julia Runcie



## STEWARDSHIP

## Community Service and Camaraderie by Thomas Zentmyer

All I really needed were a few community service hours for school next year, which I just happened to put off until the last minute. However, like any fifteen-year-old nowadays, I despise heavy labor. Signing up for five days of backcountry trail stewardship in the Ansel Adams Wilderness would not have been my first choice, and I called myself crazy when I did so. Yet this week with Friends of the Inyo, the Inyo National Forest, and funding from the National Forest Foundation turned out to be one of the greatest experiences I've ever had.

Every job we did was different in its own way. The fallen logs we tackled with a crosscut saw could range from barren sticks taking no more than ten minutes to saw through to dead behemoths surrounded by a thick net of sticks and branches. Campsite rehab entailed disguising a campsite that was too close to water and turning it into one of the most uncomfortable places on earth. Campfire ring destruction gave you an opportunity to chuck rocks into the river (an activity anybody can enjoy), and cleaning water bars meant digging funnels so that any water would flow harmlessly off to the side instead of eroding the trail.

My fellow workers were an outstanding and encouraging group of six volunteers and two Friends of the Inyo staff. These people showed me what true mountain folk are like, whether they are geologists, nurses, journalists, or firefighters in the frontcountry. From them I got great stories, new friends, and even some writing tips. No matter how demanding the work, this

talented crew would keep me going until the workday was done.

I'm a frequent visitor to the backcountry, but this trip had scenery like I had never seen before. I would come back from a hard day of work and settle down for dinner, surrounded by the sound of gushing water, golden light from the setting sun, the gentle whisper of the trees, and the impressive mountains of the Ritter Range above Shadow Creek. Even in the midst of arduous labor, the place felt beautifully alive, with the soft swaying of the ferns, the occasional animal or birdsong, or the sunlight sifting through the trees and casting itself on the dust stirred up by our boots. The place had this immense power to drag me out of what I was doing and cause me to stare around in wonder.

More people my age, and more people in general, need to work together to help keep the Sierra as natural as possible, while also keeping it accessible for future generations. Our trails need care and love, and federal agencies aren't the only ones responsible. The Ansel Adams Wilderness Project offered me a wonderful opportunity to give back to the backcountry. I will use that opportunity again in the future, whether I need community service hours or not.

*Thomas Zentmyer is a sophomore at Bishop High School and earned his community service hours in wild fashion with Friends of the Inyo on the Ansel Adams Wilderness Project in August of 2017. This article originally appeared in the Inyo Register.*

Friends of the Inyo appreciates the partners and supporters that helped make our stewardship projects happen this summer:

- Alabama Hills Stewardship Group
- Amargosa Conservancy
- Bishop Paiute Tribe
- Bodie Hills Conservation Partnership
- Bodie State Historic Park
- Bureau of Land Management
- California Department of Fish & Wildlife
- Eastern Sierra 4WD Club
- Eastern Sierra Land Trust
- Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
- Inyo National Forest
- June Lake Trails Committee
- Mono County
- Mono Lake Committee
- National Forest Foundation
- Sierra Club
- Sierra Eastside Mountain Bike Association
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



Good times while giving back in the Ansel Adams Wilderness. Photo: Ken Miller



Volunteers grooving away on the cross-cut saw in the Ansel Adams Wilderness. Photo: Ken Miller



## FIELD GUIDE

# THE WINTER LIFE

*around you*

by Ben Wickham

As we turn the corner of fall, many of us start to get amped for a beautiful day of backcountry skiing or snowshoeing. When we get out there to enjoy a crisp, quiet, gorgeous winter day, there's also a bustle of activity underlying the layers of snow that have fallen over the winter. While you're out there, pause and take notice. This is the story being told.

You set out on a well-traveled snow trail (grooming or a previously placed ski or snowshoe track). Look down and notice the canine tracks in the packed snow (a heel pad with four toe pads and space to mark an X in between). These could be coyote tracks. Energy efficiency is critical in winter, so coyotes will use human-packed snow trails when they can. How do you differentiate coyote tracks from those of a domestic dog? One clue is the path of the tracks. On the grooming it can be hard to discern, but off-trail coyote tracks will follow a straight line from point A to point B whereas a domestic dog (who has dinner and a warm bed waiting at home) will leave tracks that roam in whimsical circles that seem to have no intended destination. Also, a coyote will posthole with its front legs, and place its back legs in the same holes already created, leaving a two-print pattern of tracks. Domestic dog tracks will probably not be so precise.

Keep skiing, and veer off the grooming into the powdered snow. You're passing through lodgepole pine and notice a small set of tracks bounding between trees. This is the chickaree or Douglas squirrel. If you're skiing during a storm, the chickaree is riding it out quietly in an abandoned woodpecker hole. The chickaree's tracks will often be the first to appear after a storm, and on a clear day, you'll see them bounding on the snow from tree to tree or screeching from a branch near their stash of pinecones.

Ski farther. You notice a tiny yet menacing creature standing upright on the snow, glancing your way. It's angelically white

and for a moment you wonder if it's a phantom of your imagination. Its body has the circumference of a quarter and about the length of a human hand. You may notice a viciousness to its clawed front legs and a creepiness to the way it glances at you that belies its diminutive size (you may also think it appears really cute). As soon as you've realized this creature is for real, it's taken off, staying gracefully atop the snow. As it disappears, you notice the tip of its tail is black. You just spied a short-tailed weasel, a voracious year-round hunter whose fur turns from brown to white in winter to blend in to its snowy environment.

You've reached the base of the slope you're planning on ascending to make some turns. Here you dig a snow pit to assess the avalanche safety of the north-facing slope. Shaving a vertical wall to check the snowpack, you observe a layer at the bottom (nearly 20 cm) that is sugary and slips out of place like ball bearings with just a slight touch from your gloved fingers. Although this snow layer is dangerous in avalanche science, in ecological terms it plays a crucial role by insulating the subnivean layer, which helps provide habitat for species like the vole. While you're skiing across a deep snowpack, voles tunnel through these sugary crystals to the snow-free space above the ground. Covered by snow, they're insulated from cold air (the temperature near the ground remains near 0° Celsius all winter), and the snowpack provides some protection from predators during long winter months (although weasels can sneak into their tunnels and devour them). However, in spring a melt-freeze cycle can cause water to penetrate the depths of the snowpack, and when it re-freezes, an ice dam blocks burrowing rodents from their food stashes. In a shallow snowpack, ski or snowmobile tracks can wall off the subnivean layer.

The snow crystals above the subnivean layer alarm you, so you turn around and enjoy the mellow ski back to the trailhead, reveling in the memory of the creatures you encountered.





## EXPLORATION

## Get Out!

Devils Postpile National Monument by Ben Wickham



On my most recent trip, I hiked into “The Postpile.” I realized that every other time I’d visited Devils Postpile National Monument, I’d ridden the shuttle and traveled the same routes on the same beaten paths of other visitors to the same exact spots. I wanted to see the park differently, so I decided that I should enter the park differently. On the hike in, I opened the map to figure out where I was going, and found myself looking at the lines of trails and contours imaginatively. Like a vision, a route glowed from the map’s paper and illuminated points and directions I could follow, with the amazing geologic Postpile formation one possible destination among others, and the river connecting it all.

Devils Postpile and the Middle Fork of the San Joaquin River Valley were once part of Yosemite National Park. However, in the early 1900s, mining, grazing, and timber interests lobbied to have the park boundaries redrawn and remove the protections that national park status would have ensured for the area (sound familiar?). On this day, I’m thankful for the opportunity to hike through a wild, open valley. When I pass the wilderness boundary and national monument signs, I feel thankful that others before remained vigilant in protecting this landscape. I’m also thankful for the public servants--the Park Service staff, volunteers, and other supporters--that ensure the enjoyment and protection of this special place.

**Getting There:**

You can ride the required shuttle bus on the only road entering the monument, or you can try hiking in. It’s about a 4.5-mile one-way hike from Horseshoe Lake, over Mammoth Pass, and to the San Joaquin Valley floor. This is an underrated walk (2,000-foot descent) through a wild fir forest and burn area abounding

with wildflowers, birds, and staggering views of the Minarets, Ritter Range, and Lower San Joaquin River Canyon.

A note of caution: although hiking out of the valley is not as steep as similar river canyons like the Merced or the Kings, it can be blazingly hot on a summer afternoon (trust me, I know). If you don’t want to hike out, take the shuttle back uphill (purchase your tickets before starting your hike). Or, to avoid the heat, time your hike for the evening. If you must make the sweaty hike mid-day, take plenty of water and budget time for a rewarding dip in McLeod Lake near the top of Mammoth Pass.

**Being There:**

Devils Postpile itself and Rainbow Falls are a must-see. I enjoyed lunch at Minaret Falls, a classic Sierra cascade over a granite shelf. But if there’s one thing I now find myself coming back for, it’s the river (I like being on it in the evening).

There’s something about the sound and the feel of a river. Where creeks crash, rivers vibrate into your soul. While creeks babble, a river hums at your heart. No offense to the Owens, but a real river is the one thing we lack in the Eastern Sierra. Take the time to enjoy the San Joaquin River at Devils Postpile. Step lightly on vegetation and soil as you access its shore. Soak your feet. Drop a line in the water. Take a swim. Think about the amazing geological art this water crafts as it tumbles towards the ocean. Listen, feel, and then be thankful. Drift into a daydream as the water sings you to sleep and reflect on all the geological, ecological, and cultural layers in this magical place and how a river runs through it all.



# PINE DROPS

## NEWS AND NOTES FROM THE EASTERN SIERRA'S PUBLIC LANDS

by Jora Fogg

### CONGLOMERATE MESA

Located to the south of the Inyo Mountains in the Eastern Sierra, Conglomerate Mesa is once again under attack from mining interests. The current project proposes to drill seven exploratory drill sites to locate gold deposits in the heart of this roadless area, recently designated as California Desert National Conservation Land under the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP). The Environmental Assessment has four alternatives: no-action, the construction of an overland route, opening a previous route that the Bureau of Land Management went to great expense to close several years ago, and helicopter access. If gold is located during the exploratory drilling phase, there are many concerns that the project could develop into an open pit mine because of the type of gold that is located on the mesa. The Environmental Assessment is required to comply with Conservation Management Actions and Disturbance Caps outlined in the DRECP. At the time of press, the BLM state director is reviewing the Physical Exposure Report, which details whether a claim is financially viable. We expect the public comment period to be sometime this coming winter, and will keep you informed via our website and newsletter. FOI is taking the lead on protection of this wild place.

### NEW CHIEF OF THE FOREST SERVICE

USDA Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell retired on September 1st, 2017, leaving a 40-year Forest Service career and eight years as Chief. His accomplishments include creating a culture of agency collaboration

with states, Tribes, private landowners, and NGOs dedicated to conservation. He drew the attention of the administration and Congress as well as public support to confront the increasing severity and costs of wildfires and their residual impacts on



Aerial view of Conglomerate Mesa.  
Photo: Neal Nurmi

the agency's land stewardship. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue appointed Tony Tooke as the new Forest Service Chief on August 21st, 2017. Chief Tooke was previously the Regional Forester for the Southern Region. He also previously served in Washington, D.C. as Associate Deputy Chief, Director for Ecosystem Management Coordination, Deputy Director for Economic Recovery, and Assistant Director for Forest Management. He is a strong pick for continued conservation and collaboration within the Forest Service.

### MAMMOTH BASE LAND EXCHANGE

Several years ago a process began for the Forest Service to exchange 35.6 acres of National Forest System lands within the boundaries of the Inyo National Forest and currently managed as part of a Ski Area Term Special Use Permit to Mammoth

Main Lodge Redevelopment, LLC for 1,296.7 acres of privately owned lands located within the boundaries of the Inyo, Plumas, and Stanislaus National Forests and a 1.4-acre parcel in Bishop, CA (adjacent to the White Mountain Visitor Center).

In late August we commented on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, expressing concerns that the EIS does not adequately address impacts to wildlife, groundwater, and recreation access at Mammoth Mountain. Once the exchange is approved we will be monitoring the plans for redevelopment at Mammoth Mountain and engaging as necessary if we see potential impacts to adjacent public lands and access.

### FOREST PLANNING

The Inyo National Forest is in the final stages of completing its new Land Management Plan, which will inform how the forest is managed for the coming decade. This has been a long process, beginning in 2013, and we engaged from the very beginning. Friends of the Inyo is the only locally based group working with stakeholders, regional organizations, the Inyo, and the Pacific Southwest Region to create a robust plan based on the newest science, rooted in conservation management and responsible recreation. Our contribution to this plan has been to protect our at-risk species, waterways, and remaining roadless areas, advocate for quiet recreation, and restore historic fire regimes to the landscape. We are closely monitoring the final stages of plan development and expect to review the final documents this winter.



## Partner Profile: David Page of Winter Wildlands Alliance

*Friends of the Inyo's Ben Wickham sat down at Mountain Rambler Brewery with David Page, Advocacy Manager for Winter Wildlands Alliance, to talk about SnowSchool, a national education program designed by Winter Wildlands Alliance with 60 sites across the U.S. that educate 30,000 youth each year.*

### Why bring SnowSchool to Mammoth?

**David Page:** It was natural. We live with tons of snow. Certainly a lot of our kids are out on ski team, but a lot of the kids don't get that. A lot of the snow science isn't necessarily coming into the schools, so it seemed a great way to pioneer it for the Eastern Sierra and get a lot of those kids out and try to start to get the meaning of snow and have them learn about the watershed and see that snow translates directly to water in the tap, for starters. The point is to begin to see the complexity of flows through the watershed, what it means when it snows, and when it melts.

The conception that a lot of people have, and kids inherit, is that winter's sort of the dead zone, when in fact it's the source of life for most of the year. So the point is to try and open the kids' eyes to that. At a primal level, it's also to show kids how much fun there is to be had in winter. You and I as backcountry skiers take that for granted, but a lot of Americans retreat from winter. So we try to begin to open up the door to embracing winter and understanding what it is and to understand that you can go out and enjoy it and thrive in it.

### Was there a favorite moment from last year's SnowSchool?

**DP:** It was amazing. The kids had a blast the entire day. It was blizzarding both of the days that we did it with really adverse conditions, but the kids loved it.

**Ben Wickham:** I didn't hear one kid complain (about the weather).

**DP:** I didn't either. A lot of kids don't really go outside during winter. Some didn't even bring gloves, and they still had a terrific time. It's kind of a fun bait and switch where you do the fun and games and at the same time, they're learning. You sneak in the learning around the fun.

### Do you have a favorite activity from the SnowSchool curriculum?

**DP:** What really got everybody paying attention was digging a snow pit. They loved the digging part.

**BW:** I love that moment when they realize there's layers in the snow and they can tunnel under certain layers.

**DP:** I totally agree. It's kind of consciousness-expanding to see there's this whole history in the snow pack. The deeper I dig, the longer back it goes. The Snow Water Equivalency experiment also is mind-blowing. They kind of know that you're going to melt snow down and water's going to fill less of the container. Melting snow in a container, there's a direct equivalency. They're pretty simple scientific concepts that are hands-on and super graphic. It's eye-opening.

**BW:** I like to let them hypothesize before doing it, and each kid gets to take a guess at how much water there will be after



SnowSchool: Learning through fun and games.  
Photo: Ben Wickham

melting the snow.

**DP:** That's the goal of SnowSchool. You're asking questions. You say, let's look at this thing and what do you see? What do you guys think? You let them theorize, talk about it, and work their way through toward the synthesis of data. That brings them through a process that helps them engage and stay curious.

### What are you looking forward to in this year's SnowSchool?

**DP:** It was great to have one day on the snow, but it demonstrated the need to expand it to all the seasons. I realized that if we start in the fall before snow, and then track the snow as it's building so they have a concept of what's been happening over the season, and then dig the snow pit in a manner they can touch, it's so much more resonant, right? Then we have them follow it through in the spring as it's melting. A lot of other SnowSchool sites do a snowpack prediction contest. That's a neat idea, too. We get everybody involved in asking how much snow is there going to be, and follow those instruments and data through the year to really see what's happening, when it's melting and what it means for stream flows. It's always going to have more impact if you're doing it in the field.

**BW:** Some kids pick that up in the classroom, but for other kids, it's a struggle being boxed inside. I've seen kids who literally thought they were bad students, but then outside they open up.

**DP:** That brings it back to your question of why Mammoth? If you flip it on its head, it's so absurd that we don't have across-the-board outdoor education. We drop our kids off at school when on the way we see some of the most spectacular mountains in the West. Then they go inside during the day in the winter with short days and come out with limited understanding of how that stuff works. I think the more we can do to get them out doing really experiential education, I think the better we're going to be as a community.

**SnowSchool in 2017 was made possible by the following organizations working together: Mammoth Elementary, Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, Friends of the Inyo, Eastern Sierra Avalanche Center, Mammoth Mountain, and NASA/JPL. To read the full conversation, check Friends of the Inyo's blog at [www.friendsoftheinyo.org](http://www.friendsoftheinyo.org).**



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<b>5</b> NOV	Bishop Fall Highball Stewardship Event
<b>1</b> DEC	Backcountry Film Festival in Bishop
<b>7</b> DEC	Backcountry Film Festival in Lone Pine
<b>8</b> DEC	Backcountry Film Festival in Mammoth Lakes
<b>13-15</b> JAN	Racetrack Playa Stewardship Event
<b>20</b> JAN	Winter Exploration Outing
<b>10</b> FEB	Tablelands Tour
<b>17</b> MARCH	Short Canyon Exploration
<b>31</b> MARCH	Chocolate Mountain Hike
<b>14</b> APRIL	Conglomerate Mesa Exploration
<b>27-29</b> APRIL	Owens Lake Bird Festival



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Photo: Ken Miller

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