JEFFREY PINE journal

BIANNUAL MAGAZINE, VOLUME XX, ISSUE I • **SPRING/22**

IN THIS ISSUE

FRIENDS OF THE INYO CARING FOR THE PUBLIC LANDS OF THE EASTERN SIERRA

JEFFREY PINE journal
Volume XX, Issue I, Spring 2022

FRIENDS OF THE INYO SINCE 1986
621 W. Line Street, Suite 201
Bishop, California 93514
(760) 873-6500
www.friendsoftheinyo.org

Printed on Recycled Paper

MAGAZINE DESIGN:
Alan Urquhart Design

COVER PHOTO: Looking south from West Bishop on a spring day, it's easy to see the effects of the Sierra Wave, air currents generated by winds lifting over the Sierra Nevada, on local capricious cloudscapes. Photo by Louis Medina.

NEW STAFF MEMBER

Kayla Browne, Desert Lands Organizer

When she experienced the beauty of the Eastern Sierra for the first time thru-hiking, Kayla knew she needed to make this area her home. After moving to Lone Pine from her home state of Michigan in 2017, she became involved with the Alabama Hills Stewardship Group, still volunteers with the Bureau of Land Management caring for the Alabama Hills, and spent the summer of 2021 working as a Trail Ambassador with FOI. In her new role as Desert Lands Organizer, she is excited to connect people and communities to the untouched landscapes that make this area so exceptional, focusing on Conglomerate Mesa and southern Inyo County. Kayla enjoys all the recreation the east side offers, including mountain biking, trail running, rock and ice climbing, hiking, and skiing.

Friends of the Inyo would like to thank **Conservation Lands Foundation** for their longstanding and critical support.

CONSERVATION LANDS FOUNDATION

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

At Friends of the Inyo, we work to protect and care for lands that have been, for over ten thousand years, and still very much are, inhabited by the Paiute (Nüümü), Shoshone (Newe) and Timbisha peoples. Many of these lands are now known by names recognizing people who never set foot here. These lands are called Payahuunadü or Panawe by the Nuumu and Newe peoples, respectively. This land acknowledgement is a recognition of the original inhabitants of the Eastern Sierra, and is intended as a show of respect for Native peoples and to surface the often-suppressed colonial history of our country.

FIRE

California's Normal: It Isn't New – We Just Need to Manage It Better

By Louis Medina, Friends of the Inyo Communications and Philanthropy Director

Earlier this year, on a windy day in mid-February, the communities of East Bishop and Big Pine got quite the scare. The Airport Fire would burn from February 16, when it broke out, until it was declared 100 percent contained on February 26 by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE).

No structures were destroyed or lives lost within the 4,100 acres that burned, but it took 16 crews of close to 700 personnel, 51 fire engines, three helicopters, seven bulldozers and eight water tenders to completely extinguish the blaze, according to CAL FIRE's online Airport Fire Incident Report found at **fire.ca.gov**.

At the time, it was the largest wildfire in California, prompting evacuation orders and threatening the Owens Valley Radio Observatory.

And the Airport Fire wasn't one of the horrific megafires burning 100,000 or more acres, like we have seen in recent years.

"We live in a state in which fire is inevitable," said Malcolm North, a research scientist with the US Forest Service for 26 years, and an affiliate professor with U.C. Davis' Department of Plant Sciences. "It's not a question of if we're going to get fire, but when."

That "when" window is larger now due to the dual influence of global warming plus California's ongoing drought. And as if that danger element wasn't enough, there are other factors at play that are making wildfires in our state bigger and more destructive.

Forest Mismanagement

North, a Mammoth Lakes resident since 2017, is trained as a forest ecologist. He studies how forest ecosystems respond to fire, drought, climate change and management practices.

Before the arrival of Europeans, most forests in California evolved with fire and would burn every decade or two, North said. "Almost every part of the forest ecosystem depends on fire," he added. "When the forest burns frequently, that is the keystone process that keeps the ecosystem healthy."

Native peoples knew this and would practice controlled burning. Called "cultural burning," it would begin with a blessing and the harvesting of useful plant materials prior to a burn.

However, a century ago, in the 1920s, the dominant Anglo-American culture began to suppress most fires, in large part due to economic concerns that forest fires might end up burning valuable timber, North explained.

Fire suppression, however, only delays the inevitable, allowing excessive fuel buildup that increases fire intensity and tree mortality.

Ways to Reduce Fuels

With the fire danger that exists today, the USFS and other agencies are looking closely at how to best reduce forest fires. The main ways, North said, are prescribed fires, managed wildfires and mechanical thinning, which he explained as follows:

Prescribed Fire: A defined area that you want to burn. How is it accomplished? Put together a burn plan and do some preparatory work to demarcate your burn area. You must apply to the California Air Resources Board for a permit, and they determine which days you can burn to avoid dangerous wind conditions and smoke drifting into urban areas. When conditions are right, crews start the burn with drip torches and make sure it does not escape from the containment area.

Managed Wildfire: This is something national parks have been doing for years. Basically, if you get a natural ignition—like a lightning strike—you let that fire burn unless there are real concerns that the fire will get out of hand (for example, if there are high wind conditions).

Mechanical Thinning: Focuses on the reduction of surface fuels (duff, tree needles and branches) and ladder fuels (small-to-intermediate-sized trees that carry a wildfire from the surface of the forest floor onto the crowns of tall trees). You want to avoid crown fires. "If the fire is in the crown, it tends to move pretty fast, jumping from tree crown to tree crown in the wind. And tree crown burning often kills the large trees you want to protect."

Indeed, most of the time, fuel reduction efforts are designed to keep fires on the forest floor, North said.

That was also the intent of the burns traditionally practiced by California Native tribes.

The Ravages of Wildfires and the Compounding Effects of Global Warming

Crown fires can destroy a fair amount of forest canopy, according to North. This amounts to loss of habitat for species that depend on the forest cover created by the tallest trees in the Eastern Sierra, generally in the 50-to-75-foot range. »

Airport Fire, February 2022. Photo by Jeff Kroll, Firefighter with the Lone Pine Volunteer Fire Department.

Aftermath of the Inyo Creek Fire 2021 on Mt. Whitney National Recreation Trail. Photo by Kayla Browne.

A 75 percent loss of habitat in a forest is considered high severity. "Most of our forest creatures are not well adapted to that type of forest loss," he said. This includes birds of prey. Animals that can move fast have a better chance of escaping during a wildfire, and underground dwelling animals can go down into their tunnels to remain safe. "But salamanders, frogs, small mammals like the Douglas squirrel or the flying squirrel, it's pretty hard for them to survive some of these fires."

As to a forest's ability to reseed itself, North said, "With conifers you get seeds that are wind-dispersed for 100 to 200 feet from a dead tree." However, with the megafires of recent years, he said, "You end up with larger and larger areas that have no live trees. If seeds cannot reach these areas, much of the burn areas will come back as shrub fields, not as forests."

One of the most dramatic changes caused by global warming is the rise in nighttime temperatures, North said. This lowers humidity, dries out fuels more intensely, making them easier to combust, and extends the fire season.

"Much of the headway against a wildfire is made at night," he said. "These days you just don't get that nighttime progress anymore. Nighttime minimum temperatures don't drop as low as they used to."

Public Education, Wildfire Prevention and Safety

Since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, more people have been discovering and traveling to the relatively COVID-safe outdoors, and for some of these visitors it can be their first time out in nature. They may not know much about fire safety—both how to prevent wildfires as well as how to recognize the signs of a wildfire in time to escape.

For starters, it is always good to let others (including a ranger) know where you will be backpacking or camping, whenever possible, and to pay attention to fire danger postings. Remember that cell phone service may be spotty or altogether unavailable when you are out in nature.

It is also a good idea to become familiar with "The 7 Principles of Leave No Trace" (**lnt.org**), especially Principle 5: Minimize Campfire Impacts.

A campfire should only be started during calm conditions in an established campground. Otherwise, North said, a campfire can easily escape and become a wildfire. "It literally is playing with fire. You ramp up the possibilities of starting a fire that could grow into explosive proportions." Plus, he highlighted, most of us don't cook over a campfire anymore. Indeed, a basic camping stove can be purchased for as little as $30 online or at a sporting goods store.

Being a "lookie-loo" to try to get a close-up view of a wildfire is never a good idea, either, North said. "Private citizens should not be anywhere near a fire." Firefighters know that whenever flames get any higher than four to six feet at most, they can explode. Non-experts do not know that and should therefore avoid being near a fire. They can endanger themselves and overburden firefighting crews who may need to stop fighting a fire to come to their rescue.

With the expansion of the wildland-urban interface (the area where houses meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland vegetation), people who live near wooded areas have to accept the fact that fire—and smoke—are part of the landscape. "People can say to themselves, 'I didn't move to Mammoth or Tahoe to breathe smoke,'" North said, "but they're going to get it regardless."

With all that we know about wildfires in California, North is clear about what we need to do: "We should be controlling more of the fire," he says, "rather than have the fire controlling us." ■

Malcolm North, research scientist with the US Forest Service and an affiliate professor with U.C. Davis

In Loving Memory

JOHN TREES LOUTH

1952-2021

Friends of the Inyo would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the passing of a beloved Board Member, John Louth. His involvement as a Board Member with Friends of the Inyo began in November of 2015, shortly after retiring from a career spanning nearly forty years with the U.S. Forest Service. During his working years, John did everything from fighting fires to preserving the Ancient Bristlecone Pines and managing the forest they live in, as well as the visitor center at Schulman Grove in the White Mountains. John readily shared his extensive knowledge and passion for the Eastern Sierra. His years of experience with the USFS and many years of backcountry adventures informed his expertise and commitment to the conservation community and Friends of the Inyo. John was admired and respected by FOI Staff and fellow Board Members. He remained on the Board until December of 2021. John will be remembered and missed. Our hearts go out to his family and friends. If you knew John, please consider planting a tree in his memory. We are sure the man whose middle name was "Trees" would appreciate it. ■

Tribute and photo courtesy of Sydney Quinn, Friends of the Inyo Board Member and Past Board President.

Noé Gadea, Publisher of El Sol de la Sierra and The Sierra Reader, and real estate entrepreneur, in one of his offices in Downtown Bishop.

Partner Profile

NOÉ GADEA:

Son of the Andes by Birth, Son of the Eastern Sierra by Choice

Story and Photos by Louis Medina, Communications and Philanthropy Director

When Friends of the Inyo launched its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiative in early 2021, to engage, in a greater way, Inyo and Mono Counties' communities of color in our work to protect and care for the public lands of the Eastern Sierra, we knew we needed to involve the local Hispanic community.

A sizable 23.4% and 26.8% of residents in Inyo and Mono Counties, respectively, are Hispanic or Latino, according to the latest U.S. Census figures based on the 2020 Census. As a percentage of the overall population of Mono County, Hispanic representation has not increased too much from the 26.5% recorded in the 2010 Census; still it is easy to see that more than one in four Mono residents are Hispanic. In Inyo County, however, the Hispanic population has grown by a full 4 percentage points since 2010's 19.4%.

In its efforts to increase outreach to the Eastern Sierra's Hispanic community in Spanish, Friends of the Inyo soon found a willing partner and true friend in Noé Gadea, business and real estate entrepreneur and the publisher of our region's sole Spanish-language weekly newspaper, *El Sol de la Sierra*—and of the popular English-language weekly, *The Sierra Reader*.

Thanks to Gadea's partnership, FOI has been able to reach thousands of Spanish-language readers since August of last year with our column, "Amigos de Nuestras Tierras" (in English, "Friends of Our Lands"), which usually runs in *El Sol* on the first Thursday of the month. It is a great vehicle for delivering news and advocacy pieces to the Spanish-speaking community regarding FOI's work, public lands conservation and protection issues, climate change concerns and mitigation efforts, responsible recreation in the outdoors, Native people's traditional culture and ecological knowledge, and more.

"I feel that anything that has to do with helping the community is a plus," Gadea told us. And while the exposure in *El Sol* is great for Friends of the Inyo, readers of the paper benefit from reading stories about conservation with a local focus. After all, he said, "People in the Eastern Sierra are very community-minded." He should know: He and his wife, Donna, have lived in the Owens Valley for close to 30 years.

Noé Gadea's Story

Born Noé Nicodemo Gadea Valderrama on August 30, 1958, in Surquillo, a district of Lima, capital of the Andean nation of Peru, Gadea is the youngest of eight children, six boys and two girls.

His mother wanted him to become a doctor, he said, so after graduating from high school, Noé came to the U.S. with the hope of going to university. He had a ready-made support network through his older brothers, most of whom were already living in this country, as well as through the Seventh Day Adventist Church, of which he and his family were members.

Life in Southern California

Soon after arriving in Southern California, however, Gadea realized that university tuition would be cost-prohibitive for him; so he went the community college route, taking English as a Second Language (ESL) and other classes at San Bernardino College. But he needed to work, so he started selling SDA educational books door to door. He did that for three years, he said, commuting more than 70 miles from Loma Linda, in San Bernardino County, to Indio, in Riverside County.

After that came six years of working as an insurance agent for different companies selling life and multiline insurance. It was around this time that he and Donna met.

Then came a career change when Gadea became friends with a fellow Peruvian and started working for him. This friend was none other than Richard Alcedo, the founder of now-Pomona-based Bright Glow Candle company, one of the largest suppliers of religious candles in the world. Gadea's work selling votive candles to corporate clients allowed him to travel on business to South America, Spain, France, Portugal, and around the U.S. for a number of years.

Life in the Eastern Sierra

Around 1994, Gadea and his wife moved to the Owens Valley. Donna's father owns a ranch in Big Pine, and they wanted to give their children an opportunity to grow up in the healthy environment of a small town.

They have five children between them, Gadea said: two together, one is hers from a previous marriage, and two are his from a previous marriage. He pointed out that, "I never use the word stepchildren."

Out here, Gadea went to work for *The Inyo Register* at first, in advertising sales, he said. He did that for less than a year and went back to work for Bright Glow Candle.

But commuting was tough, as his job was in the largely industrial city of Vernon, south of Downtown Los Angeles. He would leave Big Pine on Monday and come back home after work on Friday. He was running himself ragged, and rather than risk having an accident on the road due to driver fatigue, he opted to quit, even though that meant being without work.

People who knew him and his past experience selling ads for *The Register* encouraged him to launch his own newspaper, which is how *The Reader* was born in 1996, followed by *El Sol* five years later. Both publications are free to readers, and Gadea is proud to offer free classifieds to private individuals wanting to sell, for example, a vehicle, furniture, or pets, he said.

El Sol de la Sierra and the local Hispanic community

El Sol de la Sierra is truly an international operation: The person who lays out the paper for Gadea is in Peru, and work requests and content decisions are communicated via e-mail. Gadea provides local content for him to lay out, and the designer plugs in news from Peru and other Latin American countries, which gives each issue a colorful mix of local and international features. »

Noé Gadea holds up a framed ad from The Reader that was featured as one of Jay Leno's 'Headlines' on the Tonight Show.

El Sol is welcomed by local Hispanic readers and Gadea has gotten to know well the growing Latino community in the Eastern Sierra, which includes a large Mexican contingency throughout, Salvadorans (myself included) and Peruvians in Bishop, and a small community of Chileans in Mammoth.

"The Bishop community has open arms," Gadea said, adding with pride that Bishop is a "clean and safe and beautiful city." Always affable, with a smile on his face and a joke to tell, Gadea enjoys walking, going for drives throughout the Eastern Sierra, and dining out at local restaurants.

Born in a country known for its majestic mountains, Noé Gadea chose not only to live in, but also—through his community engagement—to enrich this region of our state that is likewise known for its lofty, snowy peaks, which is what Sierra Nevada means: "snowy mountain range."

"This is my home and this is where I'm going to retire."

Friends of the Inyo is glad for that, Don Noé, and fortunate to count you as a solid partner in our DEI efforts. ■

Legacy Giving

Leaving a legacy of protection for public lands through your support of Friends of the Inyo

It is possible that you have heard about Friends of the Inyo's Legacy Giving Program but wondered what it's all about and whether a Legacy Gift is something you can even afford to make.

Following is a brief Q&A with long-time FOI Board Member and recent Legacy Gift Donor Sydney Quinn, in the photo with her dog, Kya, enjoying the White Mountains. We hope it will take some of the mystery out of Legacy Giving for you.

How long have you lived in the Eastern Sierra, Sydney?
I moved to Mammoth in 1970, so about 52 years.

How long have you been engaged with Friends of the Inyo and in what capacity?
Founding Member Frank Stewart asked me to join the board in 2008, but I was already engaged in activist meetings with FOI in 2007.

What made you decide to get involved with our organization?
The mission of FOI aligns with my values on preservation and it was a wonderful way to engage on issues with a grassroots organization.

When did you decide to become involved in Friends of the Inyo's Legacy Giving Program and why?
In creating our trust last year, my husband and I had to designate charitable organizations we wanted to leave a portion of our estate to.

What are some of the merits of contributing a part of your estate to a charitable cause you care about?
We don't have children, so it makes sense to leave our hard-earned money to causes we value.

Is your Legacy Gift something you are bestowing alone or together with your spouse?
Together.

Is your gift in memory or in honor of someone you love or admire?
Two mentors: Genny Smith and Andrea Mead Lawrence, who were the guiding forces leading me through the sometimes-difficult path of environmental advocacy.

What would you like others to know about Friends of the Inyo?
Since 1986, FOI has grown from a volunteer grassroots organization to a vital nonprofit with a professional Staff and Executive Director. Our mission is to protect and care for the public lands of the Eastern Sierra. I am proud of our Policy work and "boots-on-the-ground" work with the Stewardship Team and the Trail Ambassadors.

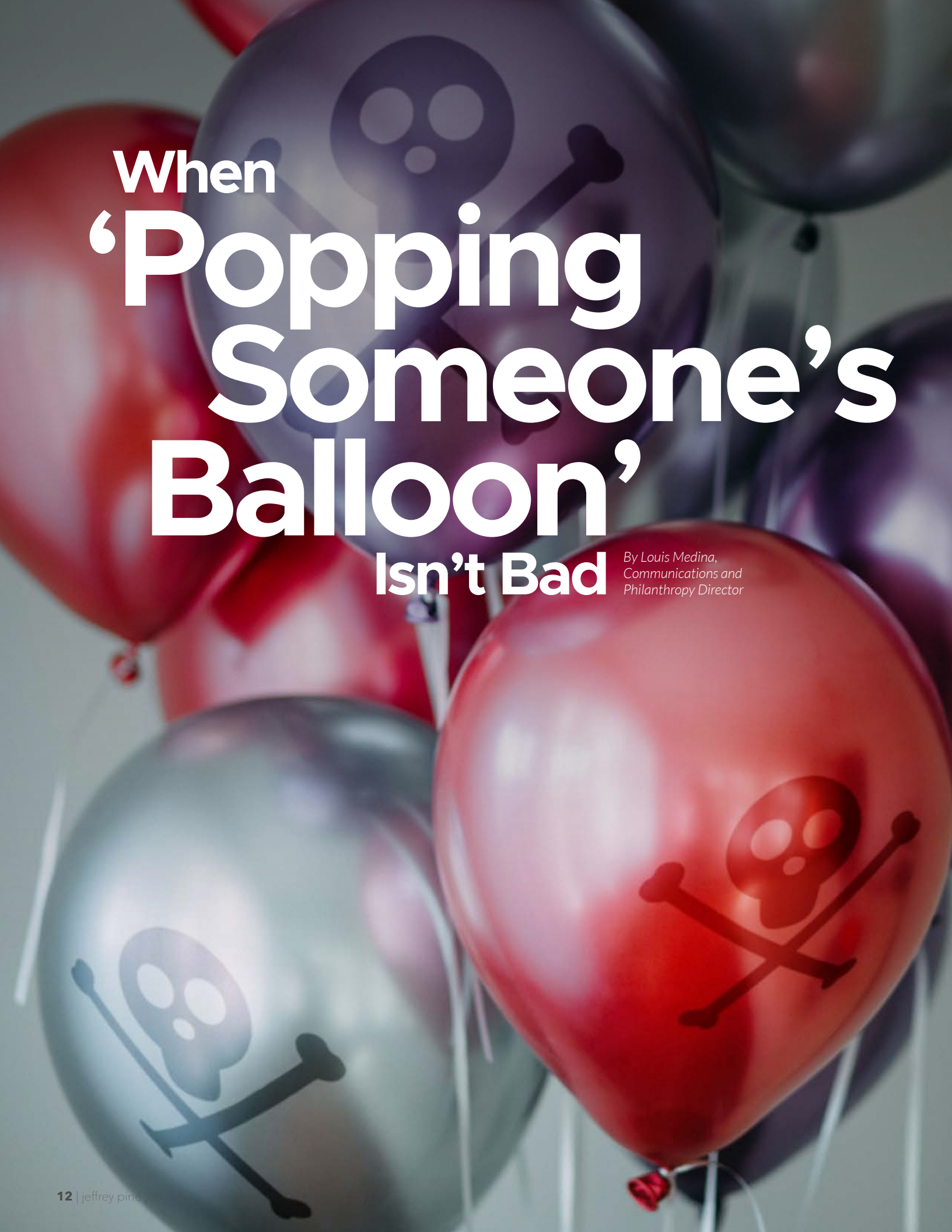
What would you like others to know about Legacy Giving?
It's a wonderful way to enhance and support the work of an organization to make its sustainability more solid and its future more secure.

What type of Legacy Gift have you made: real estate, share of 401K/IRA, etc.?
A portion of my 401K from 15 years with Mono County.

As you can see, a Legacy Gift:

- Is easy to set up;
- Costs nothing during your lifetime (because it is basically a designation or pledge);
- Creates peace of mind for you and the nonprofit you opt to support;
- Enables you to be more generous than you ever thought possible; and
- Allows for your memory, or that of someone dear to you, to live on in the name of public lands protection.

Visit the Legacy Giving page on our website, **friendsoftheinyo.org/legacy**, or write to **info@friendsoftheinyo.org**, to learn more. ■



When 'Popping Someone's Balloon' Isn't Bad

By Louis Medina, Communications and Philanthropy Director

In recent outings to public lands throughout the Eastern Sierra, various members of the Friends of the Inyo team have come across a seemingly innocuous item that can nonetheless prove lethal to wildlife and detrimental to the environment: balloons.

We have found them all over our service area: on Conglomerate Mesa, Santa Rosa Flat and Lee Flat near Death Valley in Southern Inyo County; near Kettle Peak and in the Bodie Hills in Northern Mono County; on the Mt. Whitney Trail and at the Cottonwood Lakes Basin near Horseshoe Meadows in the Inyo National Forest.

People think balloons look pretty when they are arranged as decorative bouquets and arches at parties, graduations and weddings. They find them to be inspirational and moving at commemorative balloon releases, and patriotic at Fourth of July or veteran-focused celebrations. But when winds carry them over to our side of the Sierra Nevada and leave them entangled on a tree branch in the forest, or lying deflated and wrinkled amid rocks and plants in the desert (lots of balloons end up in Death Valley and other desert lands), they look like nothing more than an ugly piece of trash—and they are full of harmful chemicals.

Birgitta Jansen, a long-time Death Valley National Park volunteer who currently resides in British Columbia with her husband, has done extensive balloon litter research, including for her articles:

- "Balloons, Balloons, Balloons," published in the Spring 2019 issue of *The Survivor*, the official newsletter of Desert Survivors **(desert-survivors.org/newsletter)**, and
- "Up, Up and Away…But Not Quite – The Problem with Balloons," published in the December 2019 issue of *Desert Report* **(desertreport.org)**, which provides news of the desert from the Sierra Club California/Nevada Desert Committee, and where she is a Writer and a current Managing Editor.

She writes that what is different between balloons and other forms of litter, such as cans, plastic containers and glass bottles, is that balloons can be found in very remote areas in nature, away from roads and people, because they are basically "airborne litter" that, under the right atmospheric conditions, can be transported by winds for thousands of miles.

There are Mylar balloons, also called foil balloons, manufactured with a thin metallic coating applied to polyester film, and latex or rubber balloons, Jansen explains in her authoritative articles.

Mylar balloons are not biodegradable, but over time disintegrate into tiny shards that are considered microplastics. These shards could be mistaken for flakes of food by wildlife.

Rubber balloons are considered biodegradable but can take up to four years to break down and are treated with a variety of chemicals that pollute nature and harm animals.

Here are some all-too-common deadly scenarios caused by these lighter-than-air culprits:

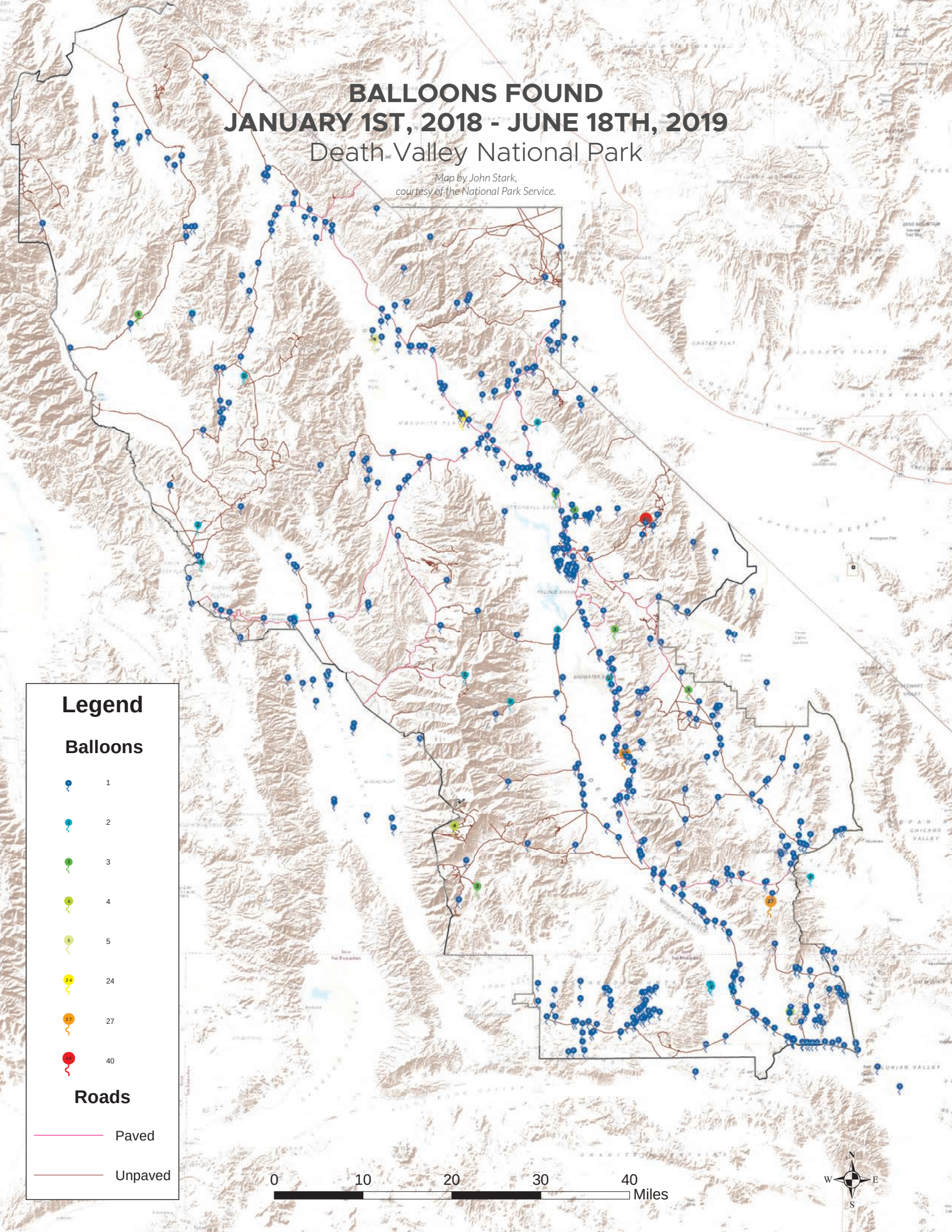
- Sea creatures, shorebirds and land animals that ingest pieces of balloons can die from blockage in their digestive tract.
- Birds or other animals can become entangled in or ingest balloon strings and die a slow, agonizing death of immobility and starvation, strangulation, or digestive system blockage. »

Friends of the Inyo's Kayla Browne holds up a deflated Mylar balloon littering the Bodie Hills this February. Photo by Louis Medina.

Birgitta Jansen, expert on balloon litter research. Photo by Julie-Anne Davies.

BALLOONS FOUND
JANUARY 1ST, 2018 - JUNE 18TH, 2019
Death Valley National Park

Map by John Stark,
courtesy of the National Park Service.



Jansen reflects philosophically, "So much suffering inflicted by such a minor and forgettable gesture: the letting go of a balloon…"

- Because of their metallic coating, Mylar balloons that come in contact with power lines can trigger power outages and cause wildfires from sparks. Utility companies report hundreds of power outages each year caused by Mylar balloons, and especially warn about "Mylar Season," which starts with Mother's Day in May and extends through "Dads and Grads" celebrations in June. But with wildfire danger being a year-round reality in California now because of climate change, care against wayward Mylar balloons needs to be emphasized throughout the year.

In our state, what is known as the California Balloon Law (SB 1990) was passed in 1990 to regulate the sales and use of helium-filled foil balloons to prevent power outages. The law has been amended a number of times over the years, and currently, Section 653.1 of the California Penal Code says that a balloon made of electrically conductive materials cannot be filled with a substance lighter than air unless its string is tied to a counterweight, and that the string itself must not be electrically conductive. It also prohibits the release of foil balloons.

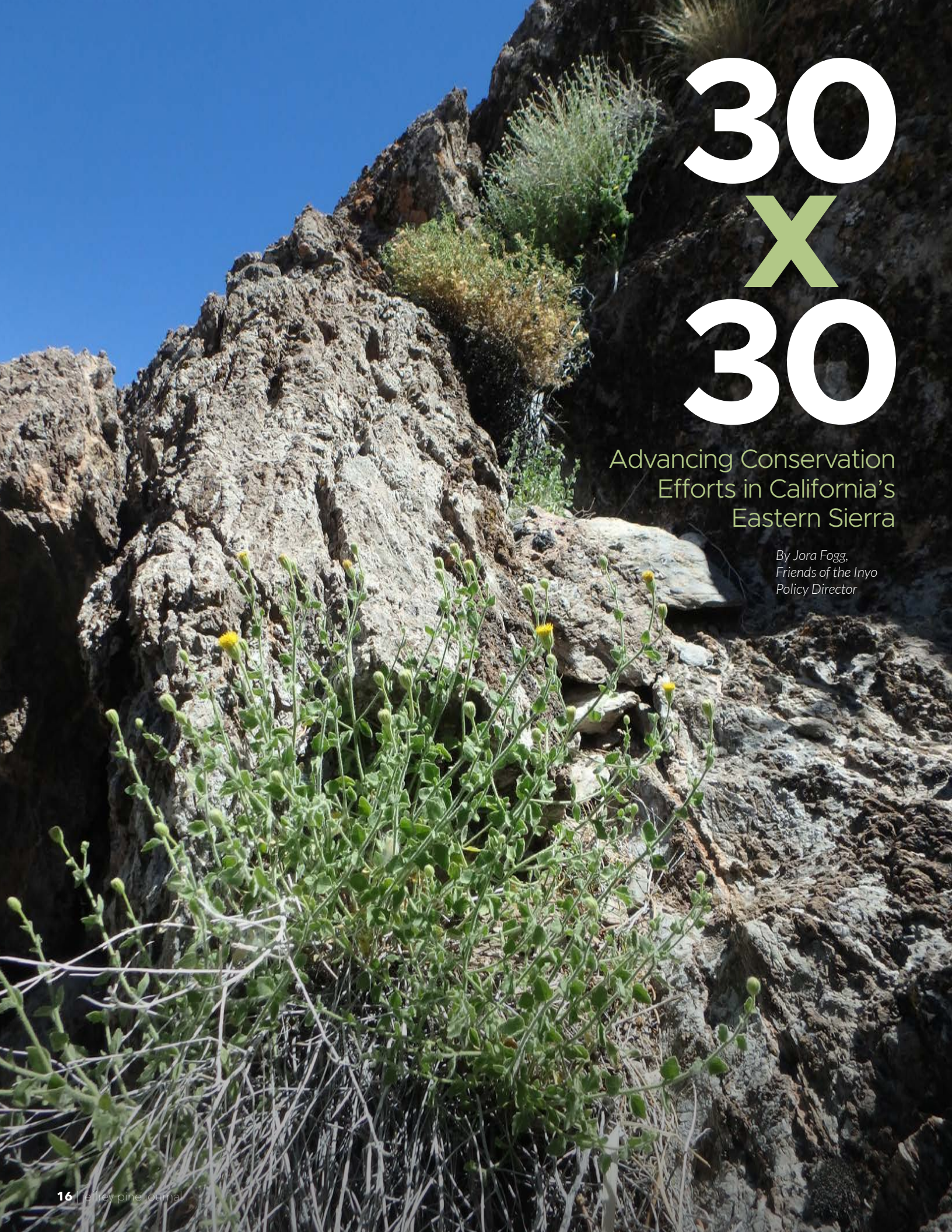
However, according to the Santa Barbara-based website **MylarMistake.com**, "Although it is law that these balloons come with weights, most people remove them, tie them to a post, or give (them) to their children." This increases the chances of balloons flying away and ending up as litter in our oceans and public lands.

Besides the dangers of balloons already identified above, Jansen points out another problem: Balloons also deplete our planet's finite supply of helium, a substance that is "abundant in the universe but rare on Earth," as she writes in her *Desert Report* piece. "It cannot be manufactured but is most commonly obtained as a by-product of mining natural gas. Seventy-five percent of the world's helium comes from three places: Texas, Wyoming and Qatar. There are other sources but with lesser amounts of helium mixed in with the natural gas. Currently known sources are being depleted, and new sources have not yet been located." Helium is important, she says, because it is used in medical equipment and laboratories.

What Can You Do?

- Jansen references the website **balloonsblow.org**, which woefully "shows many images of unfortunate creatures who paid with their lives for a few moments of human enjoyment." The "Get Involved" tab on that website has plenty of ideas.
- Jansen also mentions the **Desert Balloon Recovery Crew**, which, according to their **Facebook page (@ DesertBalloonRecoveryCrew)** works "to preserve the pristine beauty of Death Valley National Park through search and recovery of Mylar helium balloons." Check out the work they are doing and consider getting involved.
- If you see balloon litter out in nature, don't just pass by it: Pick it up so you can later dispose of it properly. Proper disposal includes puncturing the balloon, if it still has helium in it, to ensure it will not float away again when placed in a trash receptacle.
- Encourage others to stop balloon releases.
- When celebrating or offering sympathy to someone you love, enhance the occasion with a green gift like flowers or a potted plant, rather than balloons.
- Keep this thought, which Jansen likes to share, top of mind: "Balloons are ubiquitous and we have accepted them completely as 'normal' and part of our lives. But they are so completely unnecessary. The sentiment we associate with what a balloon represents is short-lived; the damage they cause is long-term." ■

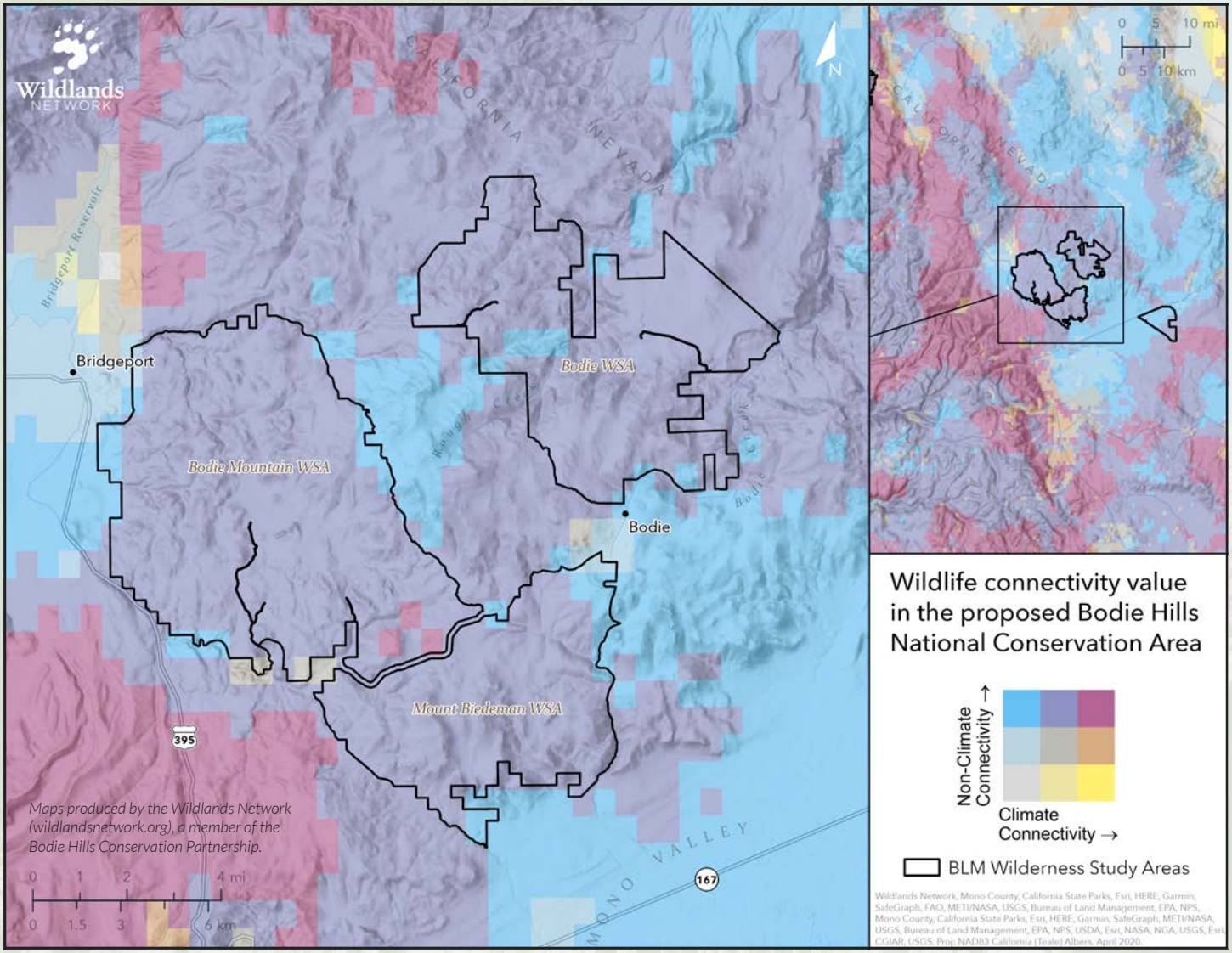
Friends of the Inyo's Policy Director Jora Fogg holds up a Mylar balloon found on Conglomerate Mesa in Oct 2021. Friends of the Inyo found and removed three Mylar balloons from desert lands around Conglomerate Mesa during an Owens Lake Bird Festival outing April 23. Photo by Louis Medina.



30 X 30

Advancing Conservation Efforts in California's Eastern Sierra

By Jora Fogg,
Friends of the Inyo
Policy Director



There is a groundswell of excitement in the world of public lands conservation as we enter the second full year of a collective effort to advance land protection. The excitement is rooted in a national and statewide approach called "30x30" (read 30 by 30), which seeks to protect 30 percent of the lands and waters of the United States and California by 2030, to help curb the ongoing and escalating climate and biodiversity crisis.[1]

30x30 and the Eastern Sierra

At the state level, California became the first to agree to conserve 30 percent of its land and coastal waters by the end of this decade. As part of this executive order, Governor Gavin Newsom pledged to use California's vast network of natural and working lands to store and remove carbon from the atmosphere. The details of how this will be achieved are still emerging, but the governor has tasked outreach and strategic development to the California Natural Resources Agency. Most recently, the agency released a pathways to 30x30 document that details a strategy based on months of public participation and collaboration, including Tribal consultations, public input surveys, regional discussions, and topical workshops.

Although the state's efforts will likely focus on private and state lands, Friends of the Inyo is pushing for the state's involvement in federal lands too, with meaningful collaboration with federal agencies and the Biden Administration. It is no secret that despite our conservation gains over the last 30 years, there are still many public lands across the Eastern Sierra that allow—and in fact facilitate—the destruction of habitat and conversion of the land. In recent years, mining seems to be the primary driver of such development.

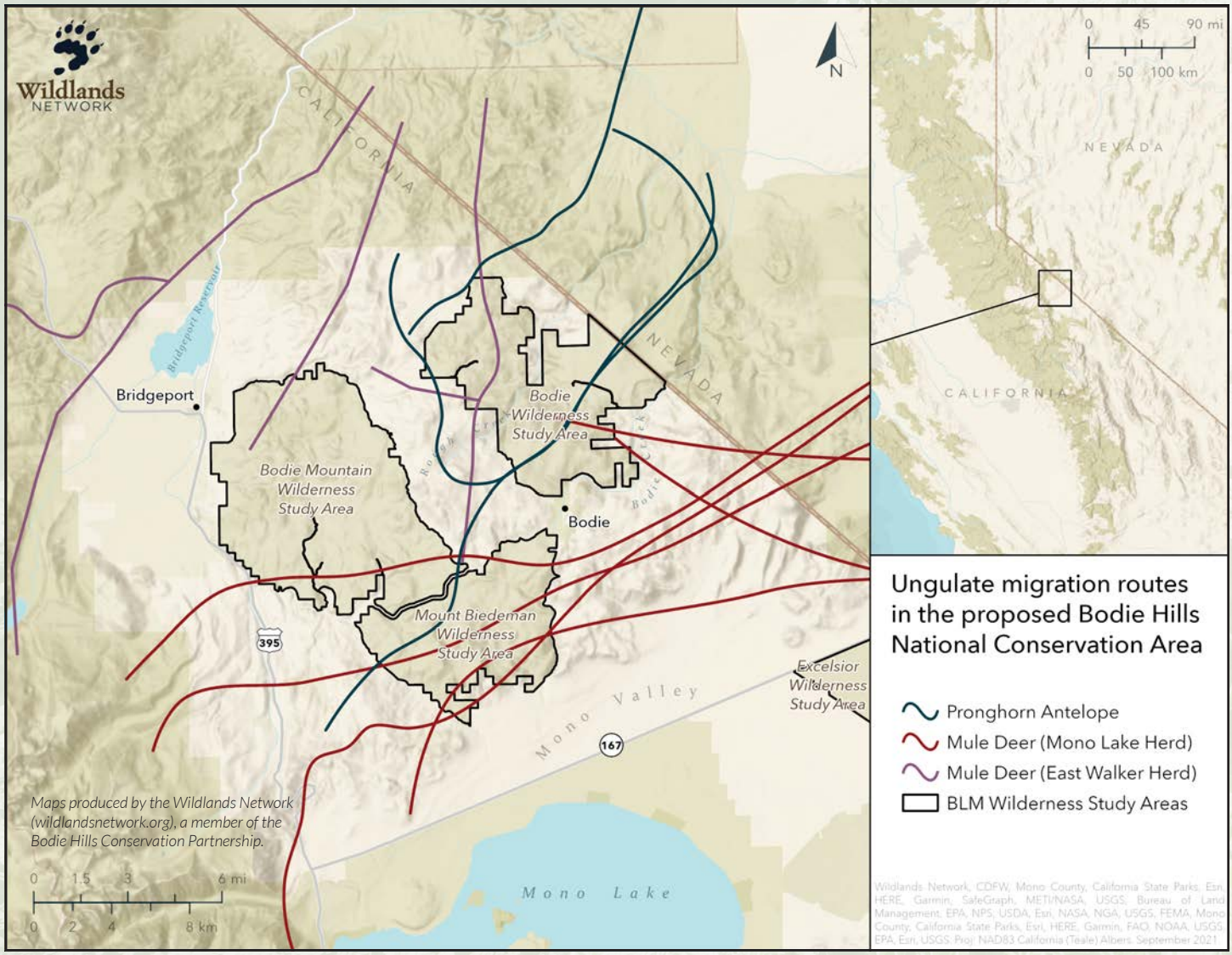
Places like Conglomerate Mesa in Southern Inyo County, and the Bodie Hills in Northern Mono County, which Friends of the Inyo is protecting and prioritizing for contributions to 30x30, are highly mineralized and on the radar of international companies who hope to gain financially from these public lands.

30x30 and People

These also happen to be places with sacred significance to the area's tribes, which comprise the Northern and Southern Paiute as well as the Shoshone.

As we prioritize the places we champion for 30x30, we should also critically examine the connection and contribution of people to those places to ensure that future »

1. The 30x30 effort is rooted in the recommendation from the international science community that we must protect 50 percent of our world's lands and waters by 2050 if we are going to negate the worst impacts of the climate and extinction crisis.



conservation facilitates equitable access and ongoing traditional uses and practices. In truth, by centering the perspectives and voices of historically and deliberately overlooked communities, conservationists can work towards reconciliation and model an improved approach to more inclusive and collaborative conservation.

30x30 and Biodiversity

A recently published study shows California leads the way both as a biodiversity hotspot and for the number of species at risk of extinction.[2] Recent work by the Wildlands Network also confirms the contribution of the region to biodiversity.

Scientists across disciplines recommend we increase the amount of protected land in order to mitigate the impacts of climate change and slow the loss of biodiversity. Therefore, it seems prudent to also look at areas of high biodiversity and connectivity (areas that connect already protected public lands or unaltered corridors, thereby providing for species' movement).

A Northern Mono Case Study

The Conservation Lands Foundation recently released the Climate Atlas.[3] It is an online mapping tool that overlays an array of data on climate, biodiversity, carbon and land management status displayed spatially on a map. Publicly accessible and user friendly, the Climate Atlas creates a visual understanding about priority public lands at a landscape scale that provide the best opportunities for 30x30 advancement. Zooming in, the Atlas shows that the Bodie Hills are within the top 10 percent of all unprotected Bureau of Land Management lands in California for biodiversity. The roughly 150,000 acres of unprotected areas of the Bodie Hills connect to Wilderness Study Areas, Areas of Critical and Environmental Concern and several U.S. Forest Service Inventoried Roadless Areas, creating a larger interconnected landscape that offers a powerful future contribution to 30x30.

The Climate Atlas also shows the Bodie Hills as having a high concentration of priority habitat for Sage Grouse. Perhaps due to the higher elevations and overall continuity of high-quality sagebrush, the Bodie Hills are an anchor population for the Bi-state Sage Grouse, providing a source population for state and federal efforts to reintroduce individuals where their numbers are dangerously low.

The Bodie Hills also represent a vital migration corridor for two separate herds of Mule Deer and the Pronghorn Antelope, a species rare within California. Also

2. https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/eap.2534
3. https://www.csp-inc.org/public/CSP_ClimateAtlas_TechnicalReport_11-05-2021.pdf

contributing to biodiversity, the Bodie Hills represent 21 species of flowering plants that are rare and unique to the area. There is also exceptionally high plant species diversity because of the Bodie Hills' location bridging the Great Basin and the Sierra Nevada.

A Southern Inyo Case Study

Traveling to the southern end of the Eastern Sierra, Conglomerate Mesa also shows an excellent example of a landscape that is under imminent threat but also has incredible biodiversity and opportunities for conservation under 30x30.

Conglomerate Mesa sits on the northwestern edge of the mighty Mojave Desert, creating a unique high elevation habitat for flora and fauna that connects two existing wilderness areas that have been protected since 1994: the Malpais Mesa Wilderness and the White Mountains Wilderness. Conglomerate Mesa is a thriving woodland for the California desert's iconic but threatened Joshua trees with interspersed Pinyon Pines, and is home to rare desert plants like the endemic Inyo rock daisy, the Parry's monkeyflower, and the tiny and delicate Badger thread plant. These plants are pollinated by a high diversity of insects from moths to bees.

It also provides an essential corridor for animals to travel safely between nearby mountain ranges and seek out cooler habitats at higher elevation as the desert continues to warm. The Mesa is a veritable climate refugia for these plant and animal species in the face of ongoing rising temperatures and greater water scarcity across the Mojave. The current proposal for mining activities here threatens to destroy what could become a vital contribution to the state and federal efforts to identify and prioritize lands that contribute to the 30x30 solution.

Conglomerate Mesa was chosen by California's Power in Nature Coalition to be featured as a special landscape that can help our State reach its 30x30 goals. Learn more and check out news coverage on Conglomerate Mesa by visiting **PowerInNature.org** and clicking on the "Places" tab.

Just Eight More Years Till 2030

We have eight more years to plan and execute a strategy here in the Eastern Sierra that will provide meaningful contributions to our 30x30 target. It makes sense to first look at the federally managed lands that are most threatened by development interests and comprise the majority of our lands here on the east side of California. In fact, with an average of 98 percent public land across Mono and Inyo Counties, it is our duty as stewards and users of this land to help the Newsom and Biden administrations advance their goals. One meaningful approach to this is by changing the status of how the state and federal government manage these lands.

The three major tools to change the conservation status of federal public lands are through either congressional, administrative, or executive action.

- Congressional legislation is a powerful and permanent tool that when properly crafted will help contribute to the critical imperative in reaching 30x30. Conservation designations such as Wilderness, National Conservation Areas, National Scenic Areas (Alabama Hills) and National Monuments are established through acts of congress.
- Although sometimes less permanent, there are a wide variety of administrative actions the Secretary of the Interior or the Secretary of Agriculture can take to establish conservation on public lands. Such decisions always include a public process to gather input. One example is for the Secretary of the Interior to establish new Wilderness Study Areas on lands that have been identified as having wilderness characteristics. In the Bodie Hills and at Conglomerate Mesa there are thousands of acres that would qualify for this protection.
- The third tool, under the Antiquities Act of 1906, allows the President to designate National Monuments through a proclamation. When legislation fails to move through congress, stalling action, presidents will often use their executive authority to protect cultural, historic, biological and scientific resources on public land.

The common theme to the success of these conservation tools is the level of public support. We need a groundswell of voices to call upon the Newsom and Biden administrations to act on 30x30 by protecting places like the Bodie Hills and Conglomerate Mesa. Friends of the Inyo is advocating for a National Monument at Conglomerate Mesa and a National Conservation Area in the Bodie Hills, both with the input and collaboration of local residents and businesses, emphasizing the priorities of the Tribes with traditional homelands in these areas. We encourage everyone to help us protect these areas by responding to our Calls to Action in the coming months. If you have not signed up to receive these and our monthly electronic newsletter, you can easily do so by visiting **friendsoftheinyo.org/subscribe**. ■

Joshua Tree blooming on Earth Day 2022. Photo by Jora Fogg.

GETTOUT

Conservation Open Space Area on the Bishop Paiute Reservation

By Louis Medina, Communications and Philanthropy Director

Santiago Escruceria, President of the Audubon Society's Eastern Sierra Chapter. Photo by Louis Medina.

Driving through Bishop on West Line Street you wouldn't know it, but just west of the center of town, on the Bishop Paiute Reservation, there are wetlands for the public to enjoy at no charge from dawn to dusk: for walking, running, birding, learning, and just plain disconnecting from the structured, harried pace of everyday life.

The Conservation Open Space Area (COSA) is a 25-acre habitat reserve set aside by the Bishop Paiute Tribe in 1998 to remain undeveloped in perpetuity as mitigation for parcels developed in the Tribe's commercial park, including the land where the building that houses the Inyo National Forest Supervisor's Office and the Bureau of Land Management Bishop Field Office was built, near the local Department of Motor Vehicles.

Recently, I had the opportunity to get two different perspectives on this charming little oasis on consecutive days, thanks to COSA Education Coordinator McKenzie Dale, and the Eastern Sierra Chapter of the Audubon Society, which conducts birding walks on the roughly one-mile COSA trail once a month.

COSA Education

Dale is a Sierra Nevada AmeriCorps member on assignment at the Bishop Paiute Tribe's Environmental Management Office from October 2020 till September 2022. She feels fortunate for all the knowledge she has gained and all the projects she has accomplished during her time at the COSA: from learning techniques for restoring wetland habitat; to designing new educational curriculum for fifth graders from neighboring Bishop Elementary School who come to learn at the COSA through a partnership between the Tribe and the Inyo County Office of Education; to helping to breed and care for native fish species like the Owens Tui Chub; to developing displays and interpretive signage for the Owens Valley Paiute Shoshone Cultural Center's interactive "COSA Corner" for kids and adults.

But, she says, the most valuable learning she is taking away from her time serving with the Bishop Paiute Tribe is the importance of building relationships with everyone she works with, as relationship building has turned into precious knowledge sharing.

A graduate of Portland State University with a bachelor's degree in applied linguistics and a minor in Spanish, Dale has become thoroughly familiar with the plants and animals of the COSA and, just as importantly, with traditional ecological knowledge imparted to her by Tribal members.

Near a water tank that is mostly used in summer (see photo on next page), she points out a patch of willows transplanted from another part of the COSA. "It's a willow restoration project for gathering materials for basket making," she says, "and it also might help with flooding."

We come upon a species of Himalayan blackberry that is not native to the area but yields berries that Paiute people like to collect and eat. They don't think of plants like this in terms of being invasive versus native, she says, but rather desirable as opposed to undesirable.

There is lots to learn from Dale on our short walk with unobstructed views of the mountains all around.

Hidden wildlife cameras have captured visits to the COSA by deer, skunk, foxes, and lots of birds, she points out.

The flower beds on the grounds of the Cultural Center on the west end of the COSA trail feature plentiful signage identifying plants by their Paiute, scientific and English names. »

All bird photos were taken at the COSA by Rachel Dristine, former AmeriCorps Member on assignment as COSA Education Coordinator at the Bishop Paiute Tribe's Environmental Management Office.

Lesser Goldfinch

Dale tells me about the Audubon Society's free bird walks through the COSA conducted on the second Saturday of the month. The next one happens to be the day after my meeting with her and I decide to join the fun.

Birding

On my birding walk, I meet Santiago Escrucería, Eastern Sierra Audubon Chapter President, two other Audubon board members, a wildlife biologist from the BLM's Bishop Field Office, and a young couple who have driven down from Mammoth Lakes for their first birding experience after finding out about the COSA and the bird walks on social media.

Escrucería leads the group and enters bird sightings in an app on his phone called **eBird**—an online database that allows scientists as well as amateurs wanting to practice "citizen science" to record real-time data about bird observations. The other Audubon board members and the BLM biologist help him spot birds and identify them using pocket field guides. Their knowledge as seasoned birders affords the rest of us less experienced attendees the luxury of enjoying a thoroughly educational walk. They even lend two pairs of binoculars to the couple from Mammoth.

We get lots of pointers on birding from Escrucería, who works for the Mono Lake Committee and has come down from Lee Vining for the day's outing. "Close your eyes and listen to the sounds a bird is making," he says. "Turn your head and open your eyes to see the bird. Point to it. Then, while keeping your eyes on the bird, bring the binoculars to your face." This, he says, is a way to involve several of one's senses in the birding experience.

"The pleasure of birding is discovering the birds," he says, not just looking at them through binoculars or a camera lens, but really noticing their behavior: Are they jumping from tree branch to tree branch, hopping along the ground, bathing, or soaring high in the sky? Different birds behave differently and move and fly differently depending on the species and the activity they are engaged in.

For Escrucería, who is originally from Colombia, birding is a Zen-like experience: a time when he can disconnect from worries and cares and just enjoy being in nature, he said.

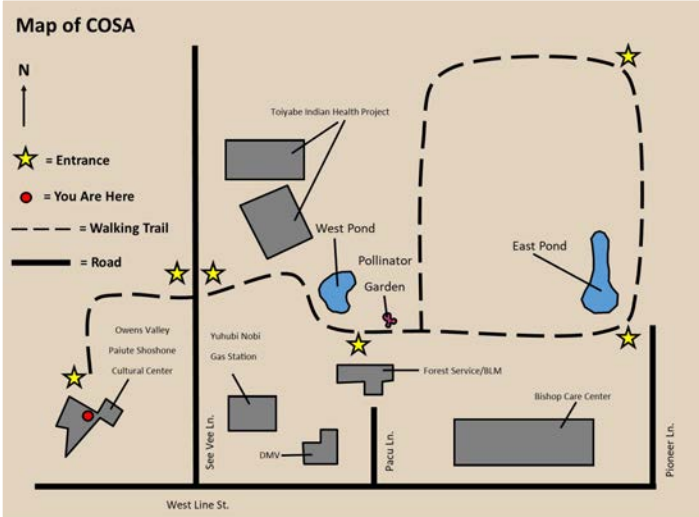
Here is a list of the birds we see that sunny, windless, mid-March morning, in alphabetical order—not the order in which we spot them: American Crow • American Kestrel • Anna's Hummingbird • Bewick's Wren • Common Raven • Downy Woodpecker • European Starling • House Finch • Lesser Goldfinch • Mallard • Mountain Chickadee • Red-Shafted Northern Flicker • Red-Shouldered Hawk • Red-Tailed Hawk • Red-Winged Blackbird • Ruby-Crowned Kinglet • Song Sparrow • Spotted Towhee • Steller's Jay • Turkey Vulture • Western Bluebird • White-Crowned Sparrow. All in the heart of Bishop!

Indeed, the COSA is a good starting point for learning about the flora and fauna of the Eastern Sierra. »

COSA Education Coordinator McKenzie Dale. Photo by Louis Medina.

Red-Shouldered Hawk

IF YOU GO ▸



Birding at the COSA with the Eastern Sierra Audubon Society

Audubon Society walks at the Conservation Open Space Area (COSA) of the Bishop Paiute Reservation happen on the second Saturday of the month at 8:30 a.m. from October through May, and at 7:30 a.m. from June through September. Attendees meet at the parking lot that is west of the BLM building and behind the Bishop DMV. Access is via Pacu Lane. There is an information kiosk and an ungated entrance to the COSA trail at the northwest end of the lot. (Refer to map)

For birding etiquette, follow the group leader's instructions.

For more information about the Eastern Sierra Audubon Society, visit **esaudubon.org** or e-mail **info@esaudubon.org**.

COSA rules to remember anytime you come to enjoy this habitat reserve:

- No smoking or open flame of any type
- No dogs off leash
- No vandalism or littering
- No alcohol or drugs
- No camping, hunting, fishing, or swimming
- No motorized vehicles (including ATVs)

You can like and follow the COSA on Facebook (**@BishopTribeCOSA**) and Instagram (**@bpt_cosa**).

Owens Valley Paiute Shoshone Cultural Center

Adjacent to the COSA is the Owens Valley Paiute Shoshone Cultural Center, where you will find an interactive COSA Corner, as well as permanent and temporary exhibits on Paiute Shoshone life, art and culture. The Center is located at 2300 W. Line Street in Bishop, and its open hours are as follows:

- In Winter (Oct – Early April) - 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday
- In Summer (Early April – September) - 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday (with some extended hours when there are special events)

There is plenty of parking at the Cultural Center.

For more information, visit **bishoppaiutetribe.com** or call **760-873-8844**. ■

(760) 873-6500
621 W. Line Street, Ste 201
Bishop, CA 93514
info@friendsoftheinyo.org
FriendsoftheInyo.org
@FriendsoftheInyo
@FriendsofInyo

THANK YOU!

Besides our steadfast individual donors, Friends of the Inyo would also like to acknowledge the following generous funding partners for their support: