A little known corner of the northern Mojave Desert is being targeted as the latest solar energy sacrifice zone. Charleston View, California doesn’t have a Post Office or a zip code. Public meetings used to convene in front of the payphone, but then the phone company removed it, so now they occur in front of the dumpsters. There are 150 people that live in this far-flung outpost on the California/Nevada border, and they are squarely in the crosshairs of land use planners for Inyo County and the California Energy Commission (CEC), who desire the locale as a site for utility-scale solar energy production.

Inyo County has proposed Charleston View as a Solar Energy Development Area (SEDA) in its Renewable Energy General Plan Amendment (REGPA). This planning process was funded by a $700,000 grant from the CEC, which, in its mad dash to help the state meet its Renewable Portfolio Standard obligations, is incentivizing desert counties to expedite the permitting of solar projects on private land. If the Inyo County REGPA is adopted, solar developers would face reduced bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining county permits for projects within the SEDAs, and potentially may not be required to prepare full Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs). Charleston View is by far the largest of the seven SEDAs proposed in the county, allowing up to 400MW of generation on 2,400 acres.

Continued on page 6
THE MOJAVE DESERT’S NEWEST NATIONAL PARK SERVICE UNIT

Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument

The 113th Congress did an amazing thing shortly before adjourning in late December of 2014: it passed a bill. Specifically, it passed the Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument Act, which created a new National Park Service unit on the northern margin of Las Vegas Valley. This legislative action was the culmination of several years of political spadework by a coalition of people in Southern Nevada. The political effort was coordinated by the National Parks Conservation Association, with strong support from the Sierra Club and many other groups. Several local officials, especially Mayor John Lee of North Las Vegas and the Las Vegas Metro Chamber of Commerce, lobbied hard for the passage of this bill, hopeful that a fossil-themed national monument would broaden Southern Nevada’s tourism base and encourage non-gaming visitors to linger longer in the Las Vegas area before heading off to the Grand Canyon, Zion, Death Valley, or other destinations.

Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev) and his staff took the lead in drafting the Tule Springs bill, and Congressman Steven Horsford (D-Nev) played a key role in shepherding it through the recalcitrant House Subcommittee on Public Lands. The National Park Service—all the way up to Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell—was supportive of adding Tule Springs to their portfolio, especially because it is adjacent to an urban setting, thus providing opportunities for a national-park experience for people who may never visit national parks in more remote settings. NPS paleontologists are excited because Tule Springs will be the first NPS unit—of which there are more than 400—specifically dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of Pleistocene Ice Age fossils. The bill was co-sponsored by the entire Nevada congressional delegation (three Democrats and three Republicans—not known for holding hands and singing kumbayah), and endorsed by Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval and the Nevada legislature. There was no organized opposition. And, oh yes, the site is loaded with Ice Age fossils, going back in time at least three times as far as those at the famous La Brea Tar Pits in Los Angeles.

With all of this going for it, future visitors to the national monument might think that its creation was a veritable “walk in the park.” They would be wrong. Up to the day Congress passed this bill, its fate was uncertain. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex), for example,

Above: Portion of a foot bone (metapodial) of a dire wolf collected in the Tule Springs Fossil Beds. This bone is the first known evidence of the presence of dire wolves in the Ice Age fauna of Southern Nevada.

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Owens Lake Mitigation Finally Settled

Owens Lake sits at the terminus of the Owens River near Lone Pine. It is a typical Great Basin river and lake system having no outlet to the sea. Over millennia the depth of its sediments grew 8,000-10,000 feet. To supply the City of Los Angeles, the Owens River was diverted in 1913 and Owens Lake began its slow death until it was virtually gone by the mid 1920’s. Also gone were the hundreds of thousands of migrating shorebirds and waterfowl that had stopped for rest each spring and fall. Los Angeles grew in wealth as a world-class city while for 80 years the people living in the Owens Valley choked on dust during the fierce winter storms from the Pacific.

The Federal and California Clean Air Acts brought the requirement of environmental health standards to Owens Lake. They protected the right of all people, no matter where you live, to be able to breathe clean air. In 1978, Los Angeles accepted culpability for the creation of the Owens Lake dust hazard and committed to controlling the problem. In 2001 water began flowing from the Los Angeles Aqueduct into Owens Lake to stop the dust. “Water is effective and it is quick,” said Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District (GBUAPCD) officer Ted Schade, the hero in this story. But over the next more than ten years after spending $1.2 billion and using an average 75,000-80,000 acre-feet of water from their aqueduct, Los Angeles began to stir like a cornered tiger. Los Angeles’ strategy to stop the bleeding was to bury GBUAPCD in a dozen lawsuits and label Ted Schade a ‘rogue’ regulator in their legal briefs. Los Angeles Department of Water and Power website video called for the stop of the ‘waste’ of water at Owens Lake. But to people living in the Owens Valley the question was whether it is a waste to use water for environmental health and wildlife. The answer was No.

New Los Angeles mayor Eric Garcetti brought a more tempered tone to the fireworks at Owens Lake. Noting the poor record of Los Angeles in lawsuits in the Eastern Sierra from Mono to Owens Lakes, the City soon negotiated a settlement with GBUAPCD that may spell the end to nearly 90 years of dust while conserving water and protecting extensive shorebird and waterfowl habitat.

The November 12, 2014 Stipulated Judgment gave Los Angeles an end point for their obligations at Owens Lake. The number of square miles of the lakebed that must be treated for dust control was defined and, in addition, the control method of tillage that uses virtually... Continued on page 14
Meet Joshua Tree National Park’s New Superintendent

Joshua Tree National Park Superintendent David Smith has always liked the idea of public service. Growing up he longed to be a fireman, a police officer, or a priest. After leaving college, he spent a winter camping around the United States, and soon discovered that aside from having a really interesting job, park rangers seemed to be the happiest people he’d ever met. He was hooked! And best of all, becoming a park ranger allowed him to fight fires, help protect people, and so much more.

Twenty-three years later, he is the newest of Joshua Tree National Park superintendents and has come full circle from his first job as a naturalist at Dinosaur National Monument in Utah. At Dinosaur, he realized how much he liked the idea of rescue and police work, and went on to become backcountry ranger at Canyonlands National Park. In 1995 he volunteered at Joshua Tree National Park and then left for a short stint with the Border Patrol in Arizona. But his future would be the National Park Service – a law enforcement position at Arches National Park, then onto becoming a biological technician at Cabrillo in San Diego. One of the happiest days of David’s life – besides the arrival of his children – was getting a permanent position at Joshua Tree in 1998.

In 2001 David went to the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail in Arizona and eventually, he moved on to become the district naturalist at Grand Canyon. In 2010 he was transferred to Washington DC to work on the House Committee for Natural Resources and from there to his first superintendency at Brown v. Brown Board of Education site.

David has a bachelor’s degree in Development Studies from the School of Forestry at UC Berkeley, and also a master’s degree from Stephen F Austin State University in Resource Interpretation. He graduated from seasonal law enforcement in Santa Rosa CA, and eventually the Federal Law Enforcement Center in Georgia.

David credits his experience with the National Park Service as a great teacher. In his own words, “Working as district naturalist at Grand Canyon was amazing. Coordinating a workforce of 25 interpretive rangers working at three visitor centers with the capacity to contact 4.5 million visitors a year was amazing. It was the kind of park where there were two or three major rescues, a structural fire, and a presidential visit all going on at the same time. I learned that a little bit of chaos is manageable when you have a good team. I also think my time working with Congress helped me

immeasurably. Seeing firsthand what can happen when there is a lack of compromise was a good lesson in how park managers have to work closely with their partners and neighbors to really be good public servants.”

David feels that Joshua Tree is the kind of place where you can really get away and see no one for days. “It’s also the type of park where fifty people might show up to go on a flower and poetry walk. Someone on a Harley, a novice gym climber, a trail runner, someone in a wheel chair – the park gives everyone a way to enjoy it. We have over twenty million people living within a three hour drive of the park. This really is Southern California’s National Park – anyone can find a way to enjoy themselves here.”

He adds, “Historically, many have looked at deserts as waste lands. Joshua Tree gives us a chance to realize that our desert public lands are special, sacred places, preserved for their beauty and for all Americans. I think anyone – when they look out over the great expanse of the Pinto Basin in the southern half of the park – feels connected to the world around them. It is an overwhelming sensation of being part of something much bigger.”

“I'm hoping that our visitors leave with a sense of peace – from an amazing view atop Queen Mountain, the glory of the cacti in the cholla gardens at sunset, from a successful trip up a multi-pitch

Continued on page 11
The first thing I notice when I arrive at the two-room Mojave Cabin on a cold, sunny early January afternoon in tiny, remote Shoshone – a Mojave Desert town adjacent to Death Valley National Park – is the huge scorpion mounted on the wall next to the front door.

It’s a wire scorpion, crafted simply out of a rusty coat hanger, and in a flash that’s quick as a scorpion’s sting, I know I’m where I need to be. I’m now officially the Writer-in-Residence for the month of January, 2015 this one-café, one-gas station town which proudly calls itself the Gateway to Death Valley. My residency is part of the relatively new Artist-in-Residency program sponsored by Susan Sorrells – who also hosts the annual February Desert Committee Meetings - and Shoshone Village.

And, of course, as I quickly learn, the mascot of the small, K-12 Death Valley Public School, right next door to the Mojave Cabin, is the Scorpion!

And why does this all matter? It matters greatly to me, because I’m about to write the first draft of a book which takes place largely in the Mojave Desert. I’m here to dig in and find the quiet, space, and scenic inspiration to make major headway writing my memoir about my years fighting wildland fires for the Bureau of Land Management’s California Desert District during the late 1980’s, when I was an undergraduate at California State University, San Bernardino.

I’ve left the comforts of life in urbanized Palm Desert, land of a new Whole Foods gourmet grocery store and a huge Whole Foods, and I feel like I’ve finally come home.
Solar Sacrifice Zones: Who Decides?

Continued from page 1

This is not the first time solar power production has been proposed in this area: BrightSource Energy put forward the Hidden Hills Solar Energy Generating System (SEGS) in 2010. This behemoth 500 MW utility-scale solar project was to feature two 750-foot tall power towers, dwarfing those at the now-infamous Ivanpah SEGS, located two valleys to the south. In late 2013, the EIR was put on hold for two years, at least partially due to widespread opposition, which caused delays in permitting.

Charleston View is located in the northern Mojave Desert, perched above the beautiful Pahrump Valley (which is largely in Nevada) on the southeast slope of the Nopah Range. It boasts a stunning view across the valley to the Spring Range and snow-capped Mt. Charleston. Decades ago, a wildly optimistic landowner graded a grid of roads here, hoping to grow a bedroom community for Las Vegas. This never happened, and many of the roads have gradually returned to the desert. It is a fairly typical creosote/saltbush scrub ecosystem. There are known populations of desert tortoises and burrowing owls, bighorn sheep use it to connect adjacent mountain ranges, and it is generally what one might think of as “undisturbed.” During the Hidden Hills proceedings, a California Native Plant Society survey found seventeen rare plants, many discovered in California for the first time, and only known in the state in this immediate area.

And spread out across the landscape in isolated pockets are the residents of this largely undeveloped area. Hidden Hills SEGS would have been quite literally in the front yards of some residents, and would be directly in line with the prized view of Mt. Charleston for the entire community. The Old Spanish Trail, a National Historic Trail and route taken by explorers and traders, runs directly through Charleston View. The area is sacred to the Pahrump Paiute, and has been identified as part of the Salt Song Landscape, a vitally important ethnographic area for all Southern Paiute. The land slated for development completely envelops these modern and historic cultural areas, turning what was a quiet desert refuge into an industrialized solar slum.

Southern Inyo County, which also includes the communities of Tecopa, Shoshone, Death Valley Junction, and Furnace Creek in Death Valley, has no more than 500 residents, representing less than 3% of the county’s population. There is near universal opposition to utility-scale solar development in the scenic Owens Valley, 200 miles away on the more populated side of Inyo County, but many feel that the County “has to put it somewhere.” No matter how well-meaning, politicians have voters to please and the CEC to appease, so the REGPA plans for 45% of the utility-scale solar power development in Inyo County to be sited at Charleston View.

Meanwhile, within the environmental community there are echoes of the Great Schism of the late 2000s, when a stark divide appeared between desert activists, who prioritized land conservation, and big national environmental groups, who prioritized combating climate change. Submitting comments on the REGPA in January 2015, local Inyo County groups were unanimous in their opposition to utility-scale solar development in Charleston View, and many national groups supported that position. But not all. Some national groups told the County that private lands in Charleston View would be appropriate for utility-scale solar power. The history of resource conflicts related to the industrialization of the West has been one of trade-offs: battles won and battles lost. We kept the dams out of the Grand Canyon and Echo Park; we let them build one in Glen Canyon. We prevented oil and gas drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; we let the Pine-dale Anticline in Wyoming and the San Juan Basin in New Mexico turn into vast petro-wastelands. We’ve kept utility-scale solar out of the central Mojave (so far); we’ve let the Ivanpah, Chuckwalla, and Antelope Valleys get paved under with mirrors.

But who gets to decide that Charleston View is a solar sacrifice area? Do politicians representing far-off and more visible constituencies decide on the fate of an ecosystem and a community? Do state-level energy planners, drawing with pink colored highlighters on a map of a 25 million acre desert, get to put this place
on the chopping block in the name of meeting abstract targets and goals? Do big, national environmental groups get to choose which areas are wild enough or full of enough endangered animals to save, and which are just “junky desert?”

By press-time, Inyo County and the CEC may already have decided Charleston View’s fate. By this time next year, Charleston View could be undergoing a dramatic transformation, from a quiet and undisturbed desert community, full of wildflowers and tortoises and humans, to an industrialized energy production zone. This is the cost of PG&E and SoCal Ed using our electric bill to fund political battles to suppress the expansion of rooftop solar. This is the cost of Californians feeling superior about how green their energy is every time the Renewable Portfolio Standard gets ratcheted up further. This is the cost of making trade-offs.

This story illuminates a fundamental problem with the way we, as a society, have chosen solar sacrifice zones. We think that only those places with formalized protection, with Wilderness status, Critical Habitat, or National Conservation Lands designation are worth saving. Private land tucked into some remote corner of the desert, full of underprivileged and largely invisible citizens, seems the ideal place to declare a sacrifice zone in the minds of some.

But at heart, this is an issue of environmental injustice. These places matter. These people and their homes matter. These tortoises and bighorn and burrowing owls and rare milkvetches matter. The Southern Paiute’s traditional sacred lands matter.

So resistance continues. Residents have mobilized, and great pressure is being brought to bear to protect this place from solar power’s shimmering hand. Groups like Amargosa Conservancy, Friends of the Inyo, and many others have been lobbying Inyo County and the CEC, attempting to give a voice to a place that is so often overlooked. At a County hearing on the REGPA in Tecopa, over 30 residents came out to express their displeasure at having their homes and landscape targeted for solar development. Perhaps the greatest quote of the evening came on the topic of appropriate mitigation to “make up” for the damage done to the landscape. “You mean if they go out there and kill a bunch of turtles, but then they make turtle soup out of ‘em, and feed it to hungry kids, well then it’s OK to destroy my neighborhood?”

Remember Glen Canyon. Remember Charleston View. Watch out. Your neighborhood could be next.

Patrick Donnelly is the Executive Director of the Amargosa Conservancy. He first came to the desert during the torrential winter of 2004-05, and knew he’d found home. More recently, he entered into self-imposed educational exile for several years in the Bay Area and spent two summers in Spain researching utility-scale solar policy. He is now back in the desert, a resident of Shoshone, California, where he and dogs Kelso and Riley love to splash around on the banks of the beautiful Amargosa River.

References
1 The Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) also targets Charleston View for solar. While the DRECP is intended to expedite incidental take permits for solar development focus areas, the County has final authority over land use designations on private land, and thus the REGPA is the focus of this article. For more on DRECP, see the cover story in the last issue of Desert Report.
2 Environmental review documents have consistently ignored or downplayed the populations of these animals. And yet residents report frequent occurrences of tortoises crossing Old Spanish Trail, of dense burrowing owl burrows, and of widespread bighorn sign in the surrounding hills. Paid biologists that visit an area for a few hours or days cannot possibly ascertain all there is to know about an ecosystem.
4 It is not the intent of this article to inspire partisan rancor over this issue, and thus names have been omitted. Interested readers can view public comments on the REGPA at (caution, large PDF file): http://www.inyoplanning.org/projects/documents/CommentsSubmittedfor-theDRAFTPEIR_REGPA.pdf
ACCURATE ENERGY-NEED ANALYSIS MUST BE PART OF THE PLAN

By Joan Taylor

DRECP – Vision Or Illusion?

Encompassing 22 million acres, the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) is the biggest, most complicated habitat plan ever attempted. Here are a few things you ought to know about it.

To give credit, DRECP is a laudable attempt by the California Energy Commission, BLM and others to try to craft a habitat plan for the desert. The trouble is that the California desert is truly one of the last great frontiers in America, so only a tiny fraction of it has been surveyed for species. It’s also a very fragile land where impacts last hundreds of years if not millennia.

So DRECP has been hampered by scant biological data as well as no funding for BLM implementation, by no commitment from desert counties, by BLM’s multiple-use mandate, and by DRECP’s own failure to heed independent science advice. In the face of this, DRECP released a draft plan that is confusing for veteran conservationists and incomprehensible for the general public.

DRECP needs a major overhaul before it can meet the most basic legal standard, and that may actually be a good thing. Several desert counties are still working on revising their general plans for renewable energy, and county participation is essential to the task.

Meanwhile, DRECP can make important fixes now, such as updating its energy-need analysis.

TIMES THEY HAVE A’CHANGED!

In 2008 when DRECP was conceived, mega-solar thermal power plants in the desert were seen as the future of renewable energy. What has changed since then?

Well, for starters, the price of photovoltaic panels (PV) has fallen precipitously. PV used to be $5-$7 per watt installed, but now PV panels cost less than $1 a watt, with permitting and installation costs plummeting as well. Given rising electric rates, soon PV will be too cheap not to install on your roof.

But DRECP has failed to change with the times, and still clings to the notion that we’ll need over twice as much utility scale solar as customer-side (rooftop) PV. Specifically, DRECP assumes we’ll see only 7,000 MW of new customer-side PV in the next 25 years. But think about this: grey and cloudy Germany installed 7,000 MW of PV in one year!

DRECP’s estimate for rooftop PV simply doesn’t pass the laugh test. It also flies in the face of state policy mandating zero net energy buildings starting in 2020.

MOVING THE GOAL POSTS

So how did DRECP determine its asserted “need” for renewable energy in the desert in the first place? This is one of the least understood aspects of the whole plan. It’s complicated, because DRECP wasn’t designed just to ramp up renewable energy. DRECP’s charge is to reduce carbon emissions from electricity sufficiently to keep California on track to achieve its long-term carbon reduction goals.

For this purpose, DRECP created an “energy calculator” to determine future electricity demand and the likely mix of technologies needed to meet the carbon goal in 2040, which is the term of the plan. Then DRECP allocated a portion of the perceived need for utility scale renewables between the desert and the rest of the state.

Unfortunately, DRECP seems determined to achieve a certain result regardless of the facts. Repeatedly during the planning process, Sierra Club pointed out where the DRECP calculator’s assumptions about future electricity demand were flawed. In response DRECP might make some corrections, but then turned around and posited new assumptions that bumped perceived demand right back up again. While repeatedly moving the goal posts to justify large demand for mega-renewables, DRECP continually argues that its energy need assumptions are “conservative.”

But does assuming there will be 18 million electric vehicles in California in 2040, when there are only 13 million state licensed vehicles now, sound conservative? Laudable? Yes. Conservative? No.

Is it conservative to assume retirement of all in-state and out-of-state nuclear power? To assume minuscule amounts of future customer-side PV? To downplay energy efficiency? And to assume there will be no technological advances in renewable technology for the next 25 years?

The bottom line is that DRECP’s energy analysis greatly exaggerates likely future electricity demand while grossly underestimating customer-side PV and other technology that will markedly reduce demand – resulting in a plan that permits way more mega-renewable development in the desert than needed.

As before, the Club will continue to request corrections to the energy analysis. The big question is: will DRECP correct those mistakes, or will it continue to move the goal posts?

SOME GOOD NEWS

Here goes some good news for a change: Even by its own metrics, DRECP is half done. That’s right, and it’s worth counting...
megawatts (MW) to grasp this.

DRECP asserts that 20,000 MW of new utility scale renewables (which equates to well over fifty giant Ivanpah solar projects) are needed in the desert. Although DRECP’s number is exaggerated, for simplicity sake let’s take it at face value for now.

Of that 20,000 MW of new renewables, roughly 5000 MW are assumed by DRECP to be a combo of geothermal plants (needed to balance the intermittent renewables) and of smaller utility scale PV projects sited near electrical substations. Both of these kinds of projects are geographically constrained by where they can be sited, and do not require vast amounts of desert land.

So that leaves 15,000 MW of mega solar and wind proposed in the desert by DRECP. Of that, about 10,000 MW have already been approved, are under construction or have come online in the desert since DRECP’s energy calculator “baseline” cutoff date at the end of 2010. That is huge.

Much of that post-2010 renewable energy is new wind development in the Tehachapi Pass area, which has been industrialized for decades because it is the most predictable and efficient place available to generate wind energy in the desert. So infill, build-out and re-powering of older turbines in the Tehachapi Pass will meet just about any DRECP assumption of need for wind generation in the desert, and at a fraction of the acreage DRECP allots for the purpose.

Thus, planning for new desert wind development can be scratched off DRECP’s list, along with the vast acreages of pristine lands it would have allowed to be industrialized by new wind farms across the desert.

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called the bill (which transferred the management of a parcel of federal land from the Bureau of Land Management to the NPS) a “massive land grab,” and he tried to prevent its passage. With time running out for the 113th Congress, outgoing Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid found a way to finesse the Tule Springs bill through the Congressional juggernaut. He attached it to the must-pass Defense Appropriation Act, with the justification that it protected a critical, low-altitude, flight corridor for Nellis Air Force Base.

Nellis AFB was, in fact, a valuable ally in promoting the creation of the new national monument. In the early 2000s, with the Southern Nevada economy booming, much of the now-protected land was being considered for sale by the Bureau of Land Management to developers, at the request of the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas. Nellis AFB training exercises sometimes call for their pilots to fly low over the Tule Springs corridor, which would not be compatible with residential development. So the Air Force was understandably concerned. As events unfolded over subsequent years, Nellis quietly supported the non-development of the area. As it turned out, the support of the Air Force for the Tule Springs bill played an especially important—perhaps crucial—role in allowing the bill to be attached to the Defense Appropriation Act. The negotiation of military overflight protocols for the new national monument is a detail to be addressed later.

When the land was being considered for disposal by the BLM, a required paleontological survey turned up more than 400 previously unknown vertebrate fossil sites. Also, a biological survey revealed the presence of two sensitive plant species: bearpaw poppy (Arctomecon californica) and Las Vegas buckwheat (Eriogonum cobymbosum var. nilesii). The BLM withdrew the land from immediate disposal, formed a community stakeholders’ group to explore management options, and commissioned a team of land-use consultants to provide professional advice.

Then in 2007 and 2008 the economy tanked, hitting the Las Vegas housing market especially hard. The pressure to develop the BLM land dissipated faster than the pressure in a New England Patriots’ football, and momentum began to build within the environmental community to think big about the future of the fossil-rich Tule Springs land. The concept of a fossil beds national monument began to gain traction, and a citizens’ group—Protect Our Tule Springs (POTS)—was created by energetic local residents to beat the drum. These POTS activists were critical in galvanizing public interest in the fossil resources of Tule Springs, gathering thousands of signatures on petitions to legislators, speaking to community groups and school kids, and button-holing legislators at every level of government. Giant casts of mammoth teeth were touched by countless people as they listened to the pitch for protection of the fossil-rich, crescent-shaped parcel on the northern edge of Las Vegas. Upon hearing about the Ice Age behemoths that populated Las Vegas Valley and were fossilized in the Tule Springs area, the most common response was “I had no idea.” POTS partisans sometimes joked that the national monument they were advocating should be named the “I-Had-No-Idea National Monument.”

Far from a “walk in the park,” the creation of Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument was contingent upon this sequence of events, any one of which could have gone differently and scuttled the effort. Had the Tule Springs bill not finally squeaked through in the waning hours of the 113th Congress—and the waning hours of Harry Reid’s influence as Senate Majority leader—I’m doubtful that it would ever have been created at all.

The new national monument is 22,650 acres (approximately 35 square miles) in extent, stretching northwestward from urban Las Vegas and North Las Vegas approximately twenty miles. Its morphology was determined by the path of Las Vegas Wash, which flows southeastward from Corn Creek Flat into Las Vegas Valley and onward into Lake Mead. The monument shares its northern boundary with the Desert National Wildlife Range.

Paleontologists have been finding fossil bones in the Tule Springs area since the early 1900s, but the site is best known for a major excavation that was conducted there in the early 1960s. Radiocarbon dating had just been developed as a technique for dating such things as charcoal and bones. A group of scientists wanted to use the new dating technique to find out when humans had arrived in North America and whether they had interacted with the now-extinct North American Ice Age fauna, including mammoths,
mastodons, camels, and giant ground sloths. They chose the Tule Springs area to conduct their study.

The resulting 1962-63 Tule Springs Expedition was the first major research project in which radiocarbon dating was used to help scientists interpret their findings and decide what to do next. Part of the justification for creating Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument—beyond the abundance of Pleistocene fossils—is the historical significance of this early use of radiocarbon dating, and the opportunity to interpret this history to the public.

In terms of some of the most compelling paleontological and paleoclimatological research questions of the early Twenty-First Century, Tule Springs is one of the most promising sites in North America. Such questions include: (1) How has the climate changed over the past 100,000 years and what processes have driven these changes?; (2) What caused North America’s magnificent mega-fauna to go extinct?; (3) How did ecosystems in the American Southwest respond to climate change during the Pleistocene; and (4) What can all of this teach us about responses of biological communities to climate change that is happening now? Tule Springs is also an excellent place to engage the public in such questions. For example, evidence of climate change is conspicuous in the walls of the trenches left open from the 1962-63 excavation.

Planning for the development and visitor enjoyment of the new national monument is just beginning. The NPS will post updates at www.nps.gov/tusk.

Steve Rowland is a paleontologist on the faculty of the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

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Joshua Tree bloom

**JTPN’s New Superintendent**

*Continued from page 4*

formation – something they cannot get in Cleveland, LA, or Berlin.”

David feels that the highlight for him at Joshua Tree National Park, so far, was when he met his staff. “I have some of the smartest people in the National Park Service working for me – I can’t believe how lucky I am to have rangers who know so much about desert wildlife, mining history, and bats. Our JOSAR (Joshua Tree Search and Rescue) team has some of the best rescue climbers out there. Seeing our maintenance team in action during the last snow fall was amazing.”

When asked what he felt was the biggest challenge for Joshua Tree National Park, he stated, “We need to always make sure we remain relevant for all Americans. There are still large portions of the population that have not connected to their parks, maybe because their parents didn’t, or they lack the resources to come, or they feel like they just don’t belong. My job is to find ways to reach them and let them know – This is your park. Please come and enjoy it.”

He is concerned about what threatens Joshua Tree National Park and states, “The effects of global warming on the Joshua Tree forest will continue to be an issue of concern. The increase in the weed population associated with air pollution is also a large concern since it increases the number of fires we have in the park.”

“Finding ways to support sustainable energy development in ways that do not threaten or destroy our public lands is a constant worry. As I mentioned earlier, too many people have looked at our deserts as wastelands instead of the amazing wonders that they are.”

When asked about his family and life in the National Park Service, he responded, “Moving around the country to work at different parks has been a blessing, and a real challenge to raising kids. My husband and I have a boy and girl who have now lived in five different park sites across the United States during the last 10 years. We are very anxious to stay put and put down roots. I grew up about two hours west of here in San Diego County and being close to family now is fantastic.”

Roberta Moore is retired from the National Park Service (Interpretive Park Ranger) and is currently on the Friends of Nevada Wilderness Board of Directors. She is the editor of “Wild Nevada: Testimonies on Behalf of the Desert”.

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*David Lamfrom*
Unauthorized Structure Appears in Death Valley’s Backcountry

A Privy In The Eye Of A Storm

Sometime late in 2013, a patrolling Death Valley Park Ranger noted something unusual at one of the backcountry cabins. About a hundred feet or so uphill from the historical cabin was an outhouse. No big deal you might say, but wait; this privy was about to unleash a major debate, as a prickly little detail lurked in the shadows. This outhouse was not authorized by the Park Service nor was it built by the Park Service. In fact, nobody seems to know who did.

The act of building an unauthorized structure within the boundary of park land is a federal violation. An unauthorized structure is in violation of the Code of Federal Regulation (36CFR) 2.10 (b) 5, as it is the installation of a permanent camping facility. This can result in a mandatory court appearance as well as a fine. But how to locate the party responsible for this “not here yesterday but here to day” privy? Not easy. The builder(s) have yet to come forward and witnesses have not yet been found.

The people who installed this privy were presumably well-meaning. They, as park visitors and users, must have seen an urgent need for some type of facility, given the growing tissue litter that tends to proliferate around many popular park areas as it did around this cabin. They cared enough to put in considerable work, time, effort, and expense to construct an elegant solution to the problem.

Contrary to what one might expect, this privy is not a cobbled-together affair, but a solidly constructed little building that was designed and installed by someone with extensive knowledge, competency and skills. Attention was paid not only to the details, but also to the visual compatibility with the nearby iconic cabin. The metal fame is solidly constructed and expertly welded. Faux masonry nicely finishes the privy’s exterior walls echoing the local rock used to build the cabin walls. The shed roof has wood decking covered by mineral paper just like the cabin. The cabin door is painted white and so is the door to the outhouse. The privy sits on a solid wood platform and a three foot deep hole was dug into the hard ground underneath. The finishing flourish was the solar powered light installed just underneath the roof by the door so that no one in a hurry would miss the entrance at night. Regardless of what one might think about the unauthorized installation of this structure, the thought and workmanship that went into building it is impressive.

Legal implications aside for the moment, the current dilemma is: “Should this privy stay or go?” The issue has been argued, equally ardently and eloquently, from both points of view, and has given rise to many questions worthy of discussion. If the Park Service were to decide that the pottie will stay, what message would this send to the public? Would additional illicit privies appear at other cabins? And who will maintain these outhouses? This is a critical issue given that the Park Service currently has neither the staff nor the equipment to do so and it was estimated that this particular privy could be filled within a relatively short period of time given the visitation levels at this popular cabin. There is the added problem of visitors using the privy as a garbage receptacle which has happened in other locations.

There are many implications to be taken into consideration since this privy did not go through the usual NPS process of assessment and review. These processes, although time consuming, are in place to avoid causing environmental damage, safety hazards or other unintended consequences. With regard to this privy, no environmental assessment was conducted. No hydrological evaluation was done, which is especially important in this case because the pottie was installed in close proximity to a spring used by wildlife and humans. No archeological assessment was done to determine whether or not archeological sites were being disturbed. No assessment of the impact on the historical cultural landscape was conducted, or on the visual impact since the addition of the outhouse has undeniably altered the site. Also the light over the door certainly has a direct impact on the night sky and surrounding wilderness. One consequence of the privy already noted in the spring of 2014 was significant numbers of flies emanating from the bowels of the structure. “Nothing that a goodly dose of lime wouldn’t cure”, opined one observer. But that would mean introducing yet another substance into an environment that is supposed to be maintained in a relatively natural and pristine condition. In addition not every visitor
knows how to use lime, which could also complicate matters.

Despite its assessment shortcomings, there are park staff who feel strongly that the pottie should stay. They argue it is well built, looks good and is necessary considering high visitation levels, the toilet paper problem and associated other deposits. “The Park Service does not have the funds to build one so why not let it remain where it is?” they say. One person reviewing various aspects of the “let it stay” side wryly concluded: “It didn’t give me heartburn”.

As well as Park staffers weighing in on various sides of the issue, visitors appear to be equally divided, as indicated by countless log-book entries and loquacious discussion on internet forums. Some folks describe the new structure as intrusive and detrimental to the charm of the cabin’s surroundings, others were thrilled to finally see the need for amenities addressed by such a commodious installation. Some fault the Park Service for not having installed a pottie earlier, while others blame the Park Service for not immediately having removed this most offensive structure.

Then, to complicate the tangle of reactions and opinions even further, a third question has entered the fray. “Should the Park Service be installing potties, or condoning existing unauthorized potties, in the backcountry to begin with?” As visitation increases, especially in the backcountry, NPS policy may need to move even more definitively in the direction of “Leave No Trace” or “Carry In, Carry Out”. With regard to this particular issue, this could mean ‘Wag bags’ or other portable ways of dealing with human waste. Some park staff immediately commented that “This would not go over very well with our clientele.” But as park visitation increases and park funding and park staffing decreases, some solution to waste management issues has to be found. There are other wilderness and backcountry sites on federal lands that have implemented “Wag Bags” or other options, with good results.

This also hints at an even larger issue: ‘comfort stations’, and similar amenities, in the front country are necessary and have become an unquestioned aspect of the visitor park experience. But to what extent should this expectation be accommodated in the backcountry, especially if it conflicts with the park’s conservation mandate for preservation of the natural landscape, vegetation, wildlife, and the cultural resources? The question needs to be asked and answered: “When and where does human development end?” In designated wilderness, the answer to that question is clear. But not necessarily so in non-wilderness areas, which is where this cabin is.

Many land management organizations are already faced with similar dilemmas as usage of public land increases. There needs to be further discussion, not only among the land management organizations but also with the people who use these lands. A number of the backcountry structures have a constituency who function as self-appointed stewards. The privy builder(s) are an example of that. It would be useful if a way could be found to open channels of communication between backcountry users and NPS to establish a collaborative relationship. A pulling together of skills and a willingness to achieve common goals could be more productive than the current situation.

Also as park usage increases visitor education may help. Although open channels of communication need to exist for that to happen, many backcountry users do not go into the Visitor Centers. This begs the question: “How to reach them?” For the most part, people want to do ‘the right thing’, but there really is such a concept as loving a landscape to death. Many public land management agencies are confronted with dilemmas like the one described in this article, which requires frank discussion to find acceptable solutions.

Meanwhile, in the eye of the storm, there is a handsome privy sitting quietly and humbly serving its purpose...

“Thank you!” to Death Valley National Park staff Charlie Callagan, Cheryl Chipman, Ryan Gallagher, Kate Geraghty, Josh Hoines, Karen McKinlay-Jones, and Wanda Raschkow.

Birgitta has volunteered in Death Valley National Park since 2008. Currently she and her husband, photographer Neal Nurmi, are working together documenting Death Valley’s backcountry cabins and other structures. Contact Birgitta at Birgitta_Jansen@partner.nps.gov
Continued from page 3
ally no water was approved by GBUAPCD. Both of these resolutions come with the caveat that any settlement cannot violate the Clean Air Act. If there are additional square miles requiring dust control, then that will be so ordered; and if the control method of tillage proves ineffective, then other methods must be used. Current approved dust control methods are sheet flooding, ponding, gravel and managed native vegetation.

Los Angeles is required to remediate the regional health hazard on 48.6 square miles of Owens Lake and may possibly be ordered to treat up to 4.8 square miles more. Work is to be completed by December 31, 2017. Control methods must be water neutral, meaning that any water used must be saved somewhere else within the project. Cultural resources will receive stronger protection through new protocols.

Efforts led by Audubon started in 2007 to draft a comprehensive management plan for Owens Lake that would include dust control, wildlife, mining, grazing and public access. This work morphed into the LADWP Master Project which deals with the dust control responsibility as well as wildlife habitat. The California State Lands Commission asked that the Public Trust Doctrine values of access, esthetics and wildlife be included. LADWP’s Bill VanWagoner responded, “If we can save water then I can get the decision makers to agree to habitat enhancement and protection.”

After years of work, in 2014 a draft Los Angeles Owens Lake Master Project document was released that includes methods of conserving up to 50% of the water used for dust control from the Los Angeles Aqueduct while committing to the 2010 wildlife baseline values. A balance was struck between the need for water by Los Angeles and the need of the return of an historic wildlife resource. Certainly the Public Trust Doctrine victory at Mono Lake in 1983 helped guide the process. “We won at Mono Lake,” Audubon’s Dan Taylor was heard to say.

The Owens Lake Master Project uses a Habitat Suitability Model to establish a baseline of wildlife values that will be inviolate. If a transition to a reduced or waterless dust control method occurs, then any habitat values lost will be added into existing habitat areas on the lake. It is widely felt that areas with high wildlife use will always need to be there into the future. Through the Los Angeles Master Project, vegetated habitats, islands, and foraging areas are being created. Visitors will soon have several wildlife driving routes with interpretive stops explaining the wonder of migration and the natural and human history of the Owens Lake area. In 2001 National Audubon designated Owens Lake an Important Bird Area of national importance. A census of birds in April of 2013 found 115,000 birds on the lake that one day. Of those, 63,000 were shorebirds of 20 different species. April 24-25, 2015 will see the first ever Owens Lake Bird Festival organized by Friends of the Inyo in partnership with Eastern Sierra Audubon and Audubon-California – a hope for the future.

Mike Prather has been residing in Inyo County since 1972 when he and wife Nancy moved to Death Valley to teach in a one room school house. Mike has actively been working on land and water issues in the Owens Valley since 1980 with the Owens Valley Committee (past president), Eastern Sierra Audubon (past president) and Sierra Club (past chapter chair). He currently lives in Lone Pine.
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Apple store where I can go for all of my iPhone and MacBook Air needs, far behind.

After I quickly settled in, I stepped outside to inhale the crisp air and austere sunset. The scorpion seemed to humor me, as I've quickly discovered that there's neither cell phone nor wireless service here.

I'm on my own, with a palette of January days stretching ahead of me, waiting for a flash flood of words to spill onto the page, and hopefully while I'm here, page after page will capture the magic and hardships and transformational journeys I took across the storied Mojave landscape in my younger years, working on fire after fire in some of the remotest geographies in the world, which happen to be in the backyard of the sedate Inland Empire and Coachella Valley.

In the year 2015, it's easy to be seduced by the easy and ubiquitous conveniences and reliance on Internet technology, and it seems a little harder each year for me to climb my way back out into the remote Mojave Desert wildlands I grew up in, lived in for most of my adult life, and know so well, like the inside of my soul.

In fact, I'd argue that the Mojave Desert is part of my soul, a part that never lets me rest, and compels me to a place like this, to slip like a Mojave Green rattlesnake out of the creatively restrictive skin that living in urban environments encases me in, so that I can write the way I really need to write. Here, I can't spend hours watching Netflix, or checking Facebook, or scrolling through my twitter feed for the latest, repetitive headlines, or playing around on my new iPhone6. Nope. Here, the rattlesnakes and scorpions and raw-cut desert views of mountain and alluvial fan will dominate my view, and demand the attention they deserve.

In fact, I'm writing this in the old-west Crowbar Café, the only place open tonight, and I've just helped a young, frightened tourist from Brazil, who drove from Las Vegas and got lost in Death Valley after dark on a night where temperatures are forecast to dip far below freezing, and somehow found his way here.

He said he lost his way because there was no cell phone service out here, and therefore didn't have his map app to use. But I think there's more to it than that. I think the Mojave Desert took over his journey, and forced him to stop, and wander, and, in the end, to really learn to see, before he finds I-15 and returns to the world of built-in answers and predict-abilities. He was overjoyed when I told him that as he heads to L.A. tonight, following the directions I drew on a napkin while sipping turkey soup, that he'll be able to use his mobile device sometime after he passes through Baker.

As for me, I'll head back into the dark desert night, and find my way without street lamps to the Mojave Cabin, where I'll sit with no phone or Internet, and undoubtedly stumble and struggle to evoke a world I once traversed so easily, the world of the burning Mojave, where I never worried about injuries or consequence, never relied on an app to save my life, never thought I'd be mocked by a wire scorpion daring me to write about it all.

I step outside.

Here I am, staring at the cold wire scorpion, and the full moon trembling in the absolutely silent night, void of streetlights, hoping I can remember the way to write about life in the Mojave.

Ruth Nolan, M.F.A., a lifelong resident of California’s deserts, is Professor of English at College of the Desert in Palm Desert. She is editor of No Place for a Puritan: the literature of California’s Deserts (Heyday Books, 2009). An avid California desert defender and scholar, she is also a widely published poet and writer. She writes about the desert for KCET Artbound Los Angeles, Heyday Books, the Riverside Press Enterprise, and for many poetry and literary magazines. She worked as a wildland firefighter for the BLM California Desert District during the 1980s.

Top: Miners shack; Middle: An outbuilding in Shoshone; Bottom: Silurian Valley
FROM SINGING COWBOYS TO SYMPHONIES

Desert Music

We all know that our American Desert has inspired great, distinctly American, art (Georgia O’Keeffe, John Hilton, Maynard Dixon and the “Taos school”, the Palm Springs art colony, etc). The Desert has given us bookshelves of great writing from Major Powell to Ed Abbey and Craig Childs. But what about music? My musing was inspired by a live concert of the Sons of the Pioneers that I recently attended in Loveland, Colo. Their repertoire included some of the most explicitly desert music out there that we have loved all our lives.

All day I faced the barren waste
without the taste of water
cool water!
Keep a-movin Dan
he’s a devil not a man
and he spreads the burnin’ sands
with water

Most of us who have spent a good part of our lives hiking in the desert can personally relate to these lyrics! While not specifically desert music, a number of these classic songs have a distinctly desert vibe:

Lonely but free I’ll be found
Driftin along with the tumbling tumbleweed

The most explicitly desert song they sang, “Ridin Down the Canyon”, paints the desert as a paradise rather than the wasteland of the better-known “Cool Water”:

Cactus plants are bloomin’
sagebrush everywhere
granite spires are standin’ all around
I tell ya folks, it’s heaven
T’be ridin down the canyon
When the desert sun goes down

And we sure can relate to that!

It’s hard to find many desert references in the popular music of the last half-century. Sure, U2 had a celebrated album, “The Joshua Tree”, with a lovely black and white photo on the cover of somewhere in the Mojave, but there’s not much desert in the tracks. Some songs by the Eagles had a somewhat desert vibe and a few lines referring to the desert, most famously “On a dark desert highway/cool wind in my hair”. Don’t those few words stir up happy memories? But the rest of “Hotel California” is about a house of sadomasochism that could just as well be in Miami. The one classic rock song I can think of that is more explicitly about the desert is, of course, America’s “Horse With No Name”:

Ya see I been through the desert on a horse with no name
It felt good to be out of the rain
In the desert you can remember your name
Cause there ain’t no one for to give you no pain

Turning to more ‘serious’ music, we’re again hard-pressed to find much that celebrates the desert, in comparison to the large amount of ‘pastoral’ music that depicts European landscapes where orchestral music was born. With one huge exception, American classical music, historically mostly developed in the Northeast, also has little regard for the desert. One Brooklyn boy who broke the mold was Aaron Copland, with his famous ballet scores “Rodeo” and “Billy the Kid” which, while not specifi-
cally desert music, beautifully convey the vastness and spirit of the West. I've often thought that those two works are the tonal equivalent of Georgia O'Keefe's paintings of New Mexico – amazing how an urban New York composer, could write music which, perhaps better than almost any other, so evokes the very soul of the West of the imagination. I'd also put a few film scores, specifically "Dances with Wolves", in that category.

And now the piece you've been waiting for – the one major composition specifically about the desert that has made it into the standard symphonic repertoire – of course, I'm talking about the "Grand Canyon Suite" (1931) written by one Ferde Grofe, a wonderfully 1930's Hollywood name, that. One whole movement – a shadowy minor-tinged adagio – is titled "Painted Desert". This piece is so well-known, and does such a good job portraying its namesake, that there's nothing much I can add. Did you know that someone once put words to the main leitmotif theme of the work:

Along the trail
The sun is low, the canyon is wide
Hi-yee, hi-yo
We sing a song as we ride

Probably, luckily, those words have faded into obscurity.

I wanted to know more about the Ferde Grofe, the composer of this American masterpiece. I found out some interesting things about him. It turns out he wrote more desert music; music that hardly anyone has ever heard. Born Ferdinand Rudolph von Grofe in New York City (do we see a pattern here?) in 1892, his parents were professional classical musicians; his father an opera singer and his mother a professional cellist. His mother took him to Leipzig, Germany as a youth for a formal musical education where he became proficient at a number of instruments. He left home at age 14, and drifted around in life, working for a while for $2/night as a piano player in a bar, just like the young Brahms! He was continually dabbling in composition.

His big break in life came at age 28 when he landed a gig as a pianist with Paul Whiteman's Big Band group, soon becoming Whiteman's chief arranger by dint of his innate talent. His major accomplishment in this field is the orchestration of Gershwin's celebrated "Rhapsody in Blue" – originally written as a two-piano work. Grofe's 1942 version of that arrangement is the one we hear today on the radio, concerts, and CD's! Reading this, I couldn't help but wonder if some of the most electrifying sounds in all music – the chromatic clarinet howl at the very beginning of the work – is Grofe's genius and not Gershwin's!

By the time he left the Whiteman band, he was a well-known figure in the American music scene, launched on a lengthy career of arranging and composing, including film scores. He became in demand as a film score composer, so much so that in 1945 he moved permanently from New York, where he taught at Juilliard, to Los Angeles. He died in Santa Monica in 1972.

He left a lengthy legacy including film scores, four ballets, chamber works, and orchestral pieces, most of which exist in utter forgotten obscurity, among them "Sonata for Flute and Bicycle Pump" and "Theme and Variations on Noises from a Garage" (you can't make this stuff up). Most of the Desert Music he wrote is collecting dust. Chief among these pieces is "Death Valley Suite", written in 1949, 18 years after "Grand Canyon". It’s supposed to depict the hardships of pioneers traveling through Death Valley. The movements are: "Funeral Mountains", a strange atonal movement in 5/4 time; "49'er Emigrant Train" colorful musical depictions of a wagon trail and an Indian attack; "Desert Water Hole", a medley mixing "Oh Susannah" and the main theme of the suite and "Sand Storm", another atonal movement, featuring a wind machine with a final coda recapitulating the main theme.

I've never heard this but I'd love to!

His other desert pieces are "Requiem for a Ghost Town" (his last composition in 1968), "Dawn at Lake Mead" (1956) and "Valley of the Sun Suite" (1957). The latter was written to celebrate the Salt River Project in Arizona (the Bureau of Reclamation must have loved him!)

A similar version of this article was published in the May, 2014 issue of the Sierra Club's Desert Peaks Section newsletter, Desert Sage.

Bob Michael is a consulting petroleum geologist currently living in Fort Collins, Colo. A native Southern Californian, he fell in love with the Mojave as a child, and has completed the Angeles Chapter Sierra Club’s Desert Peaks list. He misses the desert very much in the Colorado winters. He is currently working on a "bucket list" of exotic deserts (Namib, Atacama, Australia, etc.)
Evolution Of The American Nature Symbol

THE WILDERNESS CONTINENT

"...for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder." – The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald

Nature and culture are the great dialectical forces of the world, the two grand symbols, waging perpetual battle throughout history. America has provided history’s great battlefield for the conflict. There is no time or place in history where the two forces have collided with such force. Feminine and masculine. Intuition and reason. Unconsciousness and consciousness. Black and white. Water and fire. Ocean and mountain. Equality and freedom (embodied in the paradoxical ideals of the American psyche), the dual symbols of America, competing for dominance over each other all the time.

In America, culture arrived at the doorstep of nature. The most modern culture in the world at the time confronting the least modern part of the world, culture confronting nature. Culture in Europe looked at nature across a great ocean and saw the continent as wild and savage. Culture in Europe had perceptions of what wilderness meant: old tales of Ireland and England with dangerous creatures lurking in the woods of European literature. Wilderness became a symbol of the New world to many, and nature images and themes dominated original American art and literature.

Early American settlers had arrived in a vast piece of nature where old cultural forms no longer worked and a new culture had to be invented. As Roderick Nash observes in Wilderness and the American Mind, living on the edge of what they took to be a vast wilderness, they re-experienced the insecurities of the very first farmers and town builders. There was, initially, too much wilderness for appreciation. Understandably, the wild people of the New World seemed “savages” and their wild habitat a moral and physical wasteland fit only for conquest and transformation in the name of progress, civilization, and Christianity.

And too, the perception of nature in early America possessed a deep resonance with the European concept of wilderness in Western thought. As Nash observes, nature was instinctively understood as something alien to man, an insecure and uncomfortable environment against which civilization had waged an unceasing struggle. “The Europeans knew the uninhabited forest as an important part of their folklore and mythology. Its dark, mysterious qualities made it a setting in which the prescientific imagination could place a swarm of demons and spirits. In addition, wilderness as fact and symbol permeated the Judeo-Christian tradition. Anyone with a Bible had available an extended lesson in the meaning of wild land. Subsequent Christian history added new dimensions. As a result, the first immigrants approached North America with a cluster of preconceived ideas. This intellectual
legacy of the Old World, brought to the New, not only helped determine initial responses but left a lasting imprint on American thought.”

During his 1831 trip to America, Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in his journal that “living in the wilds, (the pioneers) only prizes the works of man” and are “insensible to the wonders of inanimate nature and they may be said not to perceive the mighty forests that surround them till they fall beneath the hatchet. Their eyes are fixed upon another sight, the ... march across these wilds, draining swamps, turning the course of rivers, peopling solitudes, and subduing nature,” American frontiersmen rarely judged wilderness with criteria other than the utilitarian or spoke of their relation to it in other than a military metaphor.” They were locked in a battle with nature and wilderness.

THE WILDERNESS POND

As America grew, with her tiny settlements in the wilderness becoming towns and then cities, the perception of culture in America also grew. The nation was becoming civilized. Culture in America that was first associated with escape from natural wilderness became associated with domination over it. In effect, culture began to surround the nature in the same way that nature surrounded the early settlements of America.

The original roles of nature and culture began reversing themselves. In this reversal, it became increasingly important to escape from culture rather than from wilderness. The reversal of these roles can first be seen in the Transcendental Movement of the 1830 to 1850s. Traditional history and scholarship explains the movement as a result of events such as quarrels with the Unitarian church, questioning of established cultural forms, and reactions to Lockean-influenced intellectualism of the period. Yet underlying these popular notions was an attempt to find a new place for nature and the meaning of wilderness within a growing, “civilized” nation.

Attempts to reclaim our connections with nature first centered on Ralph Waldo Emerson and his essay “Nature” but were soon based within a group of intellectuals called Transcendentalists who met regularly at the Transcendental Club at Harvard. Their ideas were circulated in their journal called The Dial. Later, their ideas were put into practice at the utopian communes of Brook Farm and Fruitlands. But these first efforts at altering the perception of nature proved to be short-lived failures for the most part.

It was the experience of a man living alone in nature (rather than a movement, a club, or a commune) that eventually brought recognition of nature and the wilderness experience into American culture. In 1845, not long after the end of the Transcendental Club and the failures of the communes, Henry David Thoreau went to live on a small pond in Concord, Massachusetts for two years. The book Walden (1854), which he wrote from his experiences alone in nature, offered the best contemporary expression of the how nature was perceived. Rather than something to be escaped, as the early settlers viewed it, now it was something to be lived within and culture was something to escape from.

Walden was not a financial success. Americans were too preoccupied with sectional rivalries and racial issues leading up to the Civil War to take much notice of the book. While Thoreau wrote in his essay Walking that “in wildness is the preservation of the world,” many Americans were beginning to concern themselves with the preservation of the nation. And too, new events such as Darwinism, pragmatism, and a growing, industrialized America were occupying the attention of the nation.

Although the movement was in decline, the experience of nature continued to find expression in other cultural outlets, particularly in art and literature of the time. The Hudson River School of painting celebrated the symbolism of nature in vast landscapes of the new continent. Key painters of the school were Thomas Cole (1801-1848), Frederic Church (1826-1900) and Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902).

While painting celebrated nature, literature of the time represented more of the conflict between the symbols of nature and civilization. For example, Huck’s raft in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885) represents nature while the steamboat represents civilization. As Huck exclaims, “But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and civilize me, and I can’t stand it.” In Melville’s Moby Dick (1851), the tranquil ocean represents nature while the monster lurking within it represents civilization. The two forces clash in the work of other famous American authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson, T. S. Eliot, John Dos Passos and Eugene O’Neil. The leitmotif is so prevalent that it becomes a cliché of American writing.

Perceptions of nature and the idea of wilderness would continue to evolve in America. In 1862, the year of Thoreau’s death, a 24-year-old student at the University of Wisconsin named John Muir discovered the writings of Emerson and Thoreau for the first time. The discovery was a life-altering experience for him and the symbolism of nature and wilderness would soon be associated not with Thoreau’s pond but rather the majestic high Sierra Mountains. And, in 1898, a professor of art history at Rutgers named John Van Dyke wondered out into the southwestern deserts and from his experiences wrote a book called The Desert (1901). While the desert had previously been the epitone of a deadly wasteland, this book, with its lyrical accounts of the land, was instrumental in changing our perceptions.

So our perception of nature and the idea of wilderness continued to evolve in America. First, all America was a wilderness and then a pond in Concord was wilderness and then the Sierra mountains. In the 20th century, the desert became the new wilderness. While culture has moved into the desert, at the beginning of the 21st century, it is still a new wilderness, still a grand symbol of nature in a pervasive culture that needs places for escape.
For any questions concerning an outing, contact the leader. For questions about Desert Committee outings in general, or to receive the outings list by e-mail, please contact Kate Allen at kj.allen96@gmail.com or 661-944-4056. For the most current listing, visit the Desert Report website at www.desertreport.org and click on outings.

The Sierra Club requires participants to sign a standard liability waiver at the beginning of each trip. To read the Liability Waiver before you choose to participate, go to http://www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms/, or call 415-977-5528 to request a printed version.

The Sierra Club California Seller of Travel number is CST 2087766-40. (Registration as a seller of travel does not constitute approval by the State of California.)

TAMARISK ERADICATION IN SALINE VALLEY
March 14-17, Saturday-Wednesday
Join Ridgecrest BLM Wilderness Coordinator Marty Dickes and help eradicate tamarisk in an Inyo Mountain canyon west of Saline Valley. Meet 10 a.m. Sat. at the intersection of Hwys 395 &168 north of Big Pine and drive into Saline Valley (high clearance vehicles preferred). Work Saturday afternoon then drive to Saline Hot Springs to camp. Sunday and Monday are full workdays. On Tues there will be a hike to a spectacular local attraction. Leader: Kate Allen, kj.allen96@gmail.com, 661-944-4056.

GHOST TOWN EXTRAVAGANZA
March 14-15, Saturday-Sunday
Explore the ruins of California’s colorful past in this spectacular desert landscape near Death Valley. Camp near the historic ghost town of Ballarat (flush toilets). Sat. a challenging hike to ghost town Lookout City with expert Hal Fowler who will regale us with tales of this Wild West town. Return to camp for Happy Hour and a special St. Patty’s Day potluck and campfire. Sun. a.m. a quick visit to the infamous Riley townsite. Group size strictly limited. Send $8/person (Lygeia Gerard), 2 sase, H&W phones, email address, rideshare info to Ldr: Lygeia Gerard, P.O. Box 721039, Pinon Hills, CA 92372, 760-868-2179. CNRCC Desert Committee

SERVE AND DISCOVER THE CARRIZO PLAINS
March 14-15, Saturday-Sunday
We pray for winter rains, and if they arrive we can look forward to spring wildflowers in the Carrizo Plain National Monument. Our service on Saturday will either remove or modify sections of fence to facilitate the mobility of pronghorn antelope. These residents prefer to crawl under rather than jump fences to escape predators. Sunday will be, at the choice of the group, either a hike in the Caliente Range or else a tour of popular viewing areas in the plains. Leader: Craig Deutsche, craig.deutsche@gmail.com, 310-477-6670. CNRCC Desert Committee

DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK - SPRING WEEKEND
March 18-22, Wednesday-Sunday
Visit Death Valley when temperatures are mild and wildflowers may be blooming. Hike to waterfalls including oasis-like Darwin Falls, through stunning desert canyons including Titus Canyon, visit ghost towns and mining areas, and explore some lesser-known but truly fantastic areas outside of the Park. Tour Scotty’s Castle. Hikes are rated moderate to strenuous with several hikes off maintained trails, some require short sections of rock scrambling and minor exposure to heights. The hikes range from five to ten miles, with elevation gains up to 500 feet. Cost of $60/person includes 4 nights of camping and tour of Scotty’s Castle. Group size limited to 15 people. Contact leader for reservation information. Leader: Rich Juricich, rich.sierraclub@pacbell.net, 916-492-2181. Sacramento Group/CNRCC Desert Committee

FIRST DAY OF SPRING HIKE
March 20, Friday
Celebrate the first day of spring with a 3-4 mile roundtrip hike through the Baldy Mesa area south of Phelan. This is a beautiful natural area full of birds, plant life, and other desert flora and fauna. Winter rains may mean early spring flowers. Socially paced, 2-3 hours, mostly level ground. Meet 8:30 a.m. at the southwest corner of Phelan Rd. & Wilson Ranch Rd. in Phelan (92371). Bring/wear layered clothing, hat, hiking boots, snacks, water, and camera! Friendly dogs welcome. Leader: Lygeia Gerard, 760-868-2179, Goody2shz@yahoo.com. Mojave Group/CNRCC Desert Committee

OLD WOMAN MOUNTAINS SERVICE TRIP
March 27-29, Friday-Sunday
Join Mojave Group and the CA/NV Wilderness Committee for our annual desert wilderness service project with the Needles office of BLM. This year’s is in the Old Woman Mountains—we’ll work on restoring a 5-mile stretch of Sunflower Spring Road or development of an interpretative trail of the area. BLM is
partnering with Native American Lands Conservancy here, and we’ll enjoy a joint campfire and stories with their tribal elders Saturday night. Central commissary, contact Vicky Hoover 415-977-5527 or vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org. CA/NV Wilderness Committee/Mojave Group

SANFORD/MORMON TRAIL HIKE
March 27, Friday
Hike on this historic trail before the Forest Service closes this section to public access. We’ll hike through the beautiful Baldy Mesa area of the southern Mojave Desert, an area overflowing with natural and historic resources, to an overlook offering a spectacular view of the West Cajon Valley. Harold Gabriel of Wagon Train Ranch, a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of the historic trail, will present a brief but fascinating history. 3-4 miles round trip, less than 500’ gain. Meet 8:30 a.m. at Desert Community Bank, 4895 Phelan Rd, Phelan, CA 92371. Bring/wear layered clothing, a hat, hiking boots, lunch/snacks/water, and camera! Leader: Lygeia Gerard, 760-868-2179, Goody2shz@yahoo.com. Mojave Group/CNRCC Desert Committee

MOJAVE NATIONAL PRESERVE OUTING
April 10-13, Friday-Monday
Meet on Friday April 10 at Amboy Crater at noon and hike up the crater for lunch. Primitive camping Friday night near Granite Pass. Saturday head to Kelso Dunes for a hike up the dunes. Sunday visit the Kelso Depot and then the lava tube with camping at Midhills Campground. Monday we can hike to Cima Dome on the way out. All hikes are moderate (easy to some). Saturday night we will have a potluck (optional). There are no services in the preserve. Contact leader Carol Wiley at desertlily1@verizon.net or 760-245-8734. Mojave Group/CNRCC Desert Committee

EARTH DAY HIKE
April 22, Wednesday
Celebrate Earth Day with a 3-4 mile roundtrip hike through the Baldy Mesa area south of Phelan. This is a beautiful natural area full of birds, plant life, and other desert flora and fauna. Winter rains promise a great flower display. Socially paced, 2-3 hours, mostly level ground. Meet 8:30 a.m. at the southwest corner of Phelan Rd. & Wilson Ranch Rd. in Phelan (92371). Bring/wear layered clothing, a hat, hiking boots, snacks, water, a pad to sit on the ground, and camera! Friendly dogs welcome. Leader: Lygeia Gerard, 760-868-2179, Goody2shz@yahoo.com. Mojave Group/CNRCC Desert Committee

DEATH VALLEY WILDERNESS RESTORATION
April 23-25, Thursday-Saturday
Help clean up a couple of non-historic military plane wrecks near Hunter Mountain. 4 WD required, possibility of car-pooling. Meet Thursday afternoon at the junction of Hwy 190 and the South Saline Valley Road. Work Thur. afternoon and all day Friday. Getting to the work sites requires a very short hike on Thur, and a 2-mile moderately strenuous hike on Friday. On Sat, we most likely will be free to do a hike in the area. Camping is primitive, bring food, water and a trowel or shovel for personal use. Leader: Kate Allen, kj.allen96@gmail.com, 661-944-4056. CNRCC Desert Committee

SERVICE IN THE CARRIZO PLAINS NATIONAL MONUMENT
April 25-26, Saturday-Sunday
This trip is scheduled late in the wildflower season, and we pray that rains have produced a wonderful and long-lasting display. Our service on Saturday will remove or modify sections of fence to facilitate the mobility of pronghorn antelope. Sunday will be, at the choice of the group, either a hike in the Caliente Range or a tour of popular viewing areas in the plains. This is an opportunity to combine carcamping, day-hiking, exploring, and service in a relatively unknown wilderness. Contact leader for details: Craig Deutsche, craig.deutsche@gmail.com, 310-477-6670. CNRCC Desert Committee

MANZANAR/LONE PINE LAKE TRIP
May 1-3, Friday-Sunday
Join us at our beautiful creekside camp in the High Desert near Lone Pine. Saturday, a moderate 6 miles roundtrip hike with 1600’ gain, from Whitney Portal to beautiful Lone Pine Lake, followed by Happy Hour, a potluck feast and campfire. Sunday, we’ll caravan to Manzanar, the WWII Japanese internment camp north of Lone Pine, to visit the museum with its moving tribute to the internees held there during the war. Group size strictly limited. Send $8 per person (Lygeia Gerard), letter-sized SASE, phone number, email, and rideshare preferences to Leader: Lygeia Gerard, P.O. Box 721039, Pinon Hills, CA 92372, 760-868-2179, Goody2shz@yahoo.com. Mojave Group/CNRCC Desert Committee

COYOTE GULCH BACKPACK
June 19-24, Friday-Wednesday
Backpack 30 miles through some of the best of Utah’s red rock, with shear high-walled canyons and cathedral-like campsites. Trip starts with obtaining permits at the Escalante visitor center. 4-5 miles of travel each day. Most of the hiking is moderate, but requires wading back and forth across the creek. One steep trail to bypass waterfalls. There are side trips so bring a small day pack. This is the warm season, but usually quite pleasant. Trip details and agenda available on sign-up. Limit 12. Leader: David Hardy, email preferred, hardyhikers@embargmail.com, 702-875-4826. S. Nevada Group/CNRCC Desert Committee
DRECP – Vision Or Illusion?

Continued from page 9

As for solar, since 2010 there have been about 6500 MW mega-solar projects built or approved in the DRECP area. The preferred DRECP alternative assumes about 12,000 MW of big solar, so by that metric they are more than half done. Interestingly, if DRECP acknowledged that even just the minimum amount of rooftop PV would be installed over the next couple of decades to meet existing state mandates for zero net energy buildings, there would be little if any need for more mega-solar in the desert.

Bottom line: DRECP can no longer justify allocating two million acres of the California desert as renewable development areas. The remaining acreage needed for mega-renewables is a fraction of what DRECP contends, even if it doesn’t budge from its exaggerated need assumptions. Proposed renewable development areas can and must be reduced to focus on truly disturbed areas and avoid natural public lands.

**FINAL NOTE: DRECP CONSERVATION, VISION OR ILLUSION?**

Is your head swimming now? Let’s close with DRECP’s treatment of habitat conservation, which is regrettably another confusing aspect of the plan!

Normal habitat plans compensate for development by preserving adequate habitat in perpetuity to offset impacts of development and ensure long term protection of species. But DRECP relaxes the standard, by reducing the current ratio for acres of compensation land compared to acres of development and by also allowing both private lands and “actions” on BLM lands to be used for compensation. This is a problem, because DRECP does not require even BLM “compensatory” conservation lands to be protected in perpetuity.

Moreover, the bulk of DRECP’s proposed conservation for species impacted by renewable development consists merely of new BLM conservation designations. These are BLM land use plan amendments, with no new funding and no permanence.

To compound the problem, most of the new BLM conservation designations under DRECP are also overlaid with new motorized recreation designations, and are afforded only 25 years or less immunity from renewable development. In its draft agreement with the state regarding DRECP, BLM’s multiple use mandate trumps conservation. BLM can amend its conservation designations after 25 years, or much sooner, because BLM can vacate the agreement upon 90 days notice.

What does this all mean? As drafted, DRECP would give a blessing for hundreds of thousands of acres of renewable energy development in the California desert without any long-term guarantee of conservation on BLM lands, which comprise the vast majority of DRECP-proposed conservation areas. BLM can erase its obligations to the state with the stroke of a pen, whereupon it would be free to amend away habitat protections, just as it has done so often in the past for consumptive users.

Let’s be honest, DRECP’s conservation is largely illusory. The desert deserves better.

Joan Taylor has been a desert activist for Sierra Club since 1970, a stakeholder in DRECP for five years, and Chair of the Club’s CNRCC Desert Energy Committee since 2008.

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NEXT DESERT COMMITTEE MEETINGS

THE SPRING MEETING will be held May 9-10, 2015 at Mission Creek Preserve near Palm Springs. Craig Deutsche will chair.

THE SUMMER MEETING will be August 8-9, 2015 at the Nelson group campground in the White Mountains. Interested in chairing? Contact Terry Frewin at terrylf@cox.net

We encourage local citizens in the area to attend, as many of the items on the agenda include local issues. Email Tom Budlong at tombudlong@roadrunner.com or call 310-476-1731 to be put on the invitation list.
Published by the Sierra Club California/Nevada Desert Committee

All policy, editing, reporting, and graphic design is the work of volunteers. To receive Desert Report please see details on the back cover. Articles, photos, and original art are welcome. Please contact Stacy Goss (stacy.goss@comcast.net, 408-248-8206) about contributions well in advance of deadline dates: February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1.

OUR MISSION
The Sierra Club California/Nevada Desert Committee works for the protection and conservation of the deserts of California, Nevada and other areas in the Southwest; monitors and works with public, private, and non-profit agencies to promote preservation of our arid lands; sponsors education and service trips; encourages and supports others to work for similar objectives; and maintains, shares and publishes information about the desert.

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www.sierraclub.org/membership

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