



JEFFREY PINE **journal**

CARING FOR THE PUBLIC LANDS OF THE EASTERN SIERRA

SPRING /20

IN THIS ISSUE | *Interrupting Wildlife* | *Anybody's Welcome to Criticize* | *Guarding Our Water*





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.

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OF THE INYO** SINCE 1986

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COVER PHOTO: Josh Metten/Ecotour Adventures

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In Memory of Steve McLaughlin

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SYDNEY QUINN

Steve McLaughlin was a multifaceted man of intellect with a wry sense of humor and friendly demeanor. It is humbling and near impossible to portray his contributions to our community on paper let alone honor him with words. Friends of the Inyo was fortunate to have him on the Board of Directors for five years during which time he served as secretary. Steve was the epitome of an engaged and knowledgeable board member sharing his knowledge and love of all things environmental with a multitude of folks. His expertise in reading the Federal Register to sorting out crucial facts in Environmental Assessments was notable. Steve was always willing to testify with his expertise at Inyo County Board of Supervisors meetings and was well respected by that board.

Steve volunteered for many of Friends of

the Inyo's events and became the icon for our popular Breakfast with a Botanist outings. The ultimate teacher, he was always willing to share his vast knowledge of botany or birds both of which he excelled in. No question was too simple or complicated and he humbly repeated facts a multitude of times for some of us. Steve was active locally in Audubon, he was president of the Bristlecone Chapter of the Native Plant Society and led field trips for the Mono Basin Bird Chataqua. He was a member of the Owens Lake Planning Committee. There are several informal plant lists that Steve wrote prior to outings: The Alabama Hills, McGee Creek, Oak Creek and Medicinal plants of Birch Creek where he lived.

In his professional life Steve earned his BS at the University of Washington and his PhD in Botany at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

During his career at UofA he taught courses in crop ecology, economic botany, and plant systemics. Steve also served as curator of the herbarium at the University of Arizona. His main areas of research were drug discovery and new-crop development. Alone or with others, he authored more than a hundred scientific publications and presentations.

Steve and his wife, Jan Bowers, retired to the Owens Valley in 2007 living near Big Pine until 2019. Retirement allowed them both to utilize their extensive knowledge to contribute meaningfully to local conservation. Jan is also an accomplished botanist and skilled birder. She is the author of many books and publications including *Fish Springs and Black Rock, Forgotten Towns of Owens Valley Desert, the Mojave and Death Valley* is a lovely collection of her prose with photos by Jack Dykinga. Jan now lives in Santa Fe.



We are thrilled to welcome Ellen Wehr as our newest member of the Friends of the Inyo board.

Ellen grew up in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York and ventured west for college, graduating from the Evergreen State College in Washington State with a degree in environmental science. Following her passion for the environment, she graduated from Lewis and Clark Law School in Oregon with a focus in water law.

After working on water and land-use issues for a decade in private practice law firms in Sacramento, Ellen now serves as General Counsel for the Grassland Water District, helping to deliver water to the 75,000-acre Grassland Resource Conservation District that includes private, state and federal wildlife refuges in the San Joaquin Valley. The District works closely with federal and state agencies to maximize food and habitat availability to meet the needs of migratory birds utilizing the Pacific Flyway. Habitat served by the District is recognized as a Wetland of International Importance under the RAMSAR Convention on Wetlands and as a Wetland of Global Significance in the Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network.

Ellen's interest in serving on the Board of Directors stems from her love of the Eastern Sierra and a desire to contribute to the organization's work on matters of environmental and water policy, growing our membership base, and helping with programs and campaigns. She has experience in federal land stewardship and education as a former member of the Washington Conservation Corps and an environmental educator in the Catskill Mountains. She volunteers with campaigns led by the Access Fund and has served as a board member for a local non-profit rock climbing group. Her work in California connects her to many others in the water and environmental communities in Sacramento and throughout the state.

Ellen joined us in November of 2019 and hit the ground running on water issues facing the Eastern Sierra, including providing expertise to the Keep Long Valley Green campaign and helping to prepare comments to the Inyo County Board of Supervisors on the Indian Wells Valley proposal to procure water from the Owens Valley.

Ellen lives on fertile ground in midtown Sacramento where she cultivates an urban garden and orchard with her husband Kevin and rescued German Shepherd, Emmylou.



PHOTO: Ellen Wehr

welcome ELLEN WEHR

BY JORA FOGG



in response to
COVID-19

At the time of printing in late March, 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic is increasingly affecting our daily lives and our communities. We know that we are very fortunate at Friends of the Inyo to be able to continue carrying on our work on all of our campaigns, even if it is remotely from our homes via calls, emails, and video conferences.

We want to thank you for your continued support of our programs during these challenging times—we wouldn't be able to do the work that we do without you. Be assured that we have no intention of losing focus or breaking stride in working toward our mission to protect and care for the Eastern Sierra.

Sincerely,

FRIENDS OF THE INYO STAFF & BOARD

WHY DO WE DO IT?

BY ALEX ERTRAUD

“So why do we do it?
What good is it?
Does it teach you anything?
Like determination? invention? improvisation?
Foresight? hindsight?
Love?
Art? music? religion?
Strength or patience or accuracy or quickness or tolerance or
Which wood will burn and how long
is a day and how far is a mile
And how delicious is water and smoky green pea soup?
And how to rely
On your Self?”

The above is a quote from Terry and Renny Russell’s *On the Loose*, my favorite book, published by the Sierra Club in 1967. It is replete with photos of the west partnered with prose written in calligraphy about the natural world and how we humans live in it. It’s a phenomenal read.

The question of, “So why do we do it?/What good is it?” in this context is asked about the outdoor adventures and trials the Russell brother put themselves through. The flat tires on dusty remote roads, running out of food, getting lost, flipping a raft, and so on. I’ve included Terry and Renny’s musings that follow the questions here because I find them beautiful in the way they pair whimsy with the examination of universal truths. But I bring this passage up because of its founding questions; why do we do it, and what good is it? And I’m particularly interested in how we answer these questions vis à vis environmental stewardship.

So, yes, this was all a long-winded way of establishing the foundation of this piece of writing: to provide a bit of context as to why we do the stewardship work we do. I often get questions at our volunteer stewardship events to the tune of, “Why are we doing this?” And due to the nature of the scenario I find myself in when these questions are posed, I do not feel like I do an adequate job presenting a whole, nuanced answer. For better or worse, I hope to convey that more holistic response on these here pages of the Jeffrey Pine Journal.

SO WHY DO WE DO IT?

Friends of the Inyo began doing on-the-ground stewardship work in the early 2000s, in order to complement our policy work with tangible, achievable projects that positively impact the public lands of the Eastern Sierra. And that’s exactly the reason we continue to

do stewardship work, because above all, it directly benefits our ecosystems. The most common act of stewardship we undertake is trail maintenance. Whether it is removing a fallen log, building a check step or waterbar, trimming back overgrown brush, or simply disguising an illegal use trail that has developed, all of our trail maintenance efforts lead to increased ecosystem health. By keeping our trail users on a single, well-designed and maintained trail, we minimize the following: vegetation being trampled by recreators venturing off-trail, erosion and trail-gullying that occurs when trails flood, and less disturbance to wildlife that call the places we recreate home.

And when we engage in trash and fishing line cleanups, we are ensuring that local critters will not get tangled up in the trash we leave behind, and that micro-trash and plastics do not end up in their (or our) bodies.

Besides these tangible results—and this is perhaps the angle I am personally most interested in—we are fostering among our volunteers a connection to the land we all live on. Which I think leads us nicely into the “what good is it?” part of our question.

WHAT GOOD IS IT?

I believe the real value of our stewardship work is not in the pounds of trash we pick up, or number of logs we saw off a trail, or how many miles of trail we maintain (though they are nice), but rather in the quality of hands-on experiences we are able to give to you, our fellow public lands users. Because while trash can pile back up, and more trees may fall across a trail, empowering folks to be part of the care for their public lands is a wholly regenerative use of energy. The “good” is very clear, and will hopefully last many lifetimes. By opening people’s eyes to the possibility of taking actionable measures

STEWARDSHIP

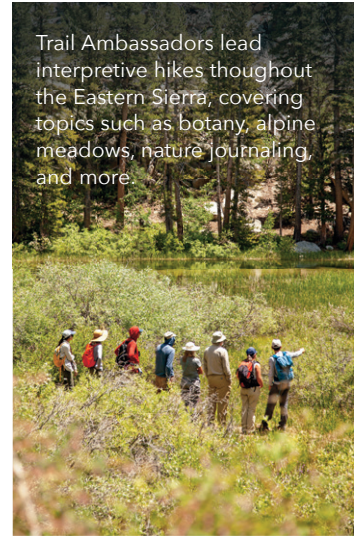
to improve the well-being of the lands they live on and with, we hope to foster a land ethic, a sort of compass for responsible use of the land. This is no new idea, and something the indigenous peoples the world over have known since time immemorial. Here in Payahuunadü (Owens Valley), the Nüümü (Owens Valley Paiute) people are the original stewards of the land, caring for its health and vitality for thousands of years, and continuing that legacy today.

My hope is that the stewardship activities we do empower the folks we work with to consider the land not as an "other", but as an extension of ourselves. By interacting with it in a profound, meaningful way, by acting in service of the land, perhaps we can make that transition from an exploitative relationship with the land, to one that is truly regenerative and symbiotic in nature. May we strive to be like the bird on the rhinoceros' back, caring for the vessel that protects and nourishes us.

There doesn't seem to be any lack of clarity in how I feel about public lands stewardship, and the work Friends of the Inyo's stewardship program does. I feel we do this work for its beautiful nuance and duality. While on one hand we are tangibly affecting immediate positive change on an ecosystem with every water bar we clear or redundant use-trail we disguise, the mere act of engaging the public in the care for our collective lands is instilling in us all a land ethic; an act that will undoubtedly send ripples of positive change well into the future. With all of that in mind, I look forward to seeing you at one of our volunteer events soon. Join us as we effect change that is felt today, tomorrow, and beyond!



Over the years, Alex has fine-tuned his pre-work welcome and safety talks.



Trail Ambassadors lead interpretive hikes throughout the Eastern Sierra, covering topics such as botany, alpine meadows, nature journaling, and more.



Friends of the Inyo Trail Ambassadors and Stewardship Crews work on a variety of projects to improve the quality of experience in the front and backcountry.



Students volunteering at the Rock Creek Lakes Clean Up learn how to properly cut back vegetation from a trail.



Guarding the WATER

BY WENDY SCHNEIDER

One theme that streams through almost every one of Friends of the Inyo's current policy initiatives is water.

Cattle cross Hot Creek. PHOTO: Jennifer Little

GUARDING THE WATER

The Keep Long Valley Green (KLVG) campaign seeks to protect Long Valley's access to adequate water to support its ecosystem. This ecosystem located in southern Mono County—as it has arisen over the last 100 years—is crucial to the maintenance of the area's ranching and recreation based economy, as well as habitat for the threatened bi-state sage grouse. As of late March, 2020, despite almost 18 months of talks and negotiations, the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (LADWP) had failed to commit in writing to supply water for Long Valley's needs. As this dry winter winds down, the diverse coalition that constitutes the KLVG campaign continues to apply pressure in hopes that LADWP will do the right thing.

The protection of the limited supply of clean water, for use by both humans and wildlife, is the central theme in our campaigns to protect Conglomerate Mesa, the Bodie Hills, and Panamint Valley from the development of industrial-scale mining operations. These operations require substantial amounts of precious freshwater to conduct exploration and drilling activities. Historically,

mining operations—especially gold mining operations as are proposed on Conglomerate Mesa and in the Bodie Hills—have left streams and lakes so contaminated that full remediation is simply not possible.

Concerns over water are also a central theme in FOI's engagement on the development of the proposed pumped storage and geothermal energy production projects in southern Inyo County. Pumped storage facilities tie up large amounts of fresh water, and geothermal facilities can cause contamination of groundwater aquifers. While FOI recognizes the need to develop energy sources that do not rely on fossil fuels, we want to make sure that negative effects on our water supply are avoided as much as possible.

Friends of the Inyo has also engaged, in partnership with Inyo County, to protect the county's water supply from efforts by Indian Wells Valley Water District (IWWVD) to place a "straw" in the Los Angeles aqueduct. Over the last fifty years or so, IWWVD has engaged in agricultural cultivation that has resulted in the depletion of its groundwater aquifer. Inyo County is sympathetic to

the area's plight, however Payahuunadü, otherwise known as Owens Valley, cannot spare enough water to recharge the Indian Wells Valley's aquifer.

And most recently, FOI raised concerns about groundwater aquifer depletion in response to Mammoth Mountain Ski Area's proposal to significantly increase its snow making activity. FOI recognizes the resort will need to increase its snowmaking capacity to remain viable, but we have asked for the implementation of testing and monitoring to ensure the groundwater aquifer will not become depleted.

As we begin to experience more and more profound effects of climate change, experts tell us we can expect more and more erratic weather patterns, leading to more precipitation falling as rain instead of snow. These developments are, and will continue to, compel us to use our water more and more wisely.

SHARING THE WATER

Issues surrounding water in the American West are not new. Water has been a source of community and conflict beyond the 100th meridian for

much longer than the United States has existed. We know that more than one thousand years ago, the Hohokam civilization developed extensive water conveyance channels in what is now the Phoenix valley, and early Hispanic settlers organized around cooperative irrigation ditch associations known as acequias, many of which still operate in rural communities of northern New Mexico¹. Here in Payahuunadü, thousands of years before any European settlers arrived, the native tribes designed, dug, and utilized an elaborate network of ditches and canals to enable farming.

Now more than ever, communities in the American West are exploring ways to stretch freshwater supplies. One strategy that is happily being utilized by more and more communities is the simplest one: conservation. Across the region, water suppliers are recognizing that conservation is the least expensive source of “new” water.

And conservation will be a crucial part of any long-term agreement by LADWP to provide adequate water for Long Valley and the rest of Payahuunadü. You’ve likely heard that a 2015 UCLA study² established that Los Angeles

could, over the next few decades, learn to source almost one hundred percent of its water needs locally. There are three basic measures that will be necessary to accomplish this, and one of them, not surprisingly, is conservation. (The other two are remediation and use of the local groundwater supply, and stormwater capture). While in recent decades we have seen Los Angeles take small steps toward conservation, much more needs to be done before the Eastern Sierra (and the other regions from which Los Angeles imports its water), experiences a decrease in the City’s demand for water. Frustratingly, Los Angeles made notable conservation progress during the last major drought, then engaged in significant backsliding on consumer conservation once the state prematurely declared the drought was over. This backsliding is made more frustrating by the fact that, as if reducing its demand for water imported from Payahuunadü and other regions were not enough, the study found that a reduction in LA’s dependence on imported water would also significantly decrease the region’s demand for energy. Indeed, the study found that Angelenos could lower their city’s greenhouse gas emissions from

water supplies by up to seventy percent by reducing the use of imported water. With the realities of climate change very present, LADWP has a clear and unique opportunity to positively affect their effect on the global climate and water scarcity in the Eastern Sierra. They could improve conditions on a global and local level with one action, and as of yet, have chosen not to.

Across the American West—including in Payahuunadü—as demands for freshwater grow at the same time that supplies of freshwater decrease, we will have to find equitable ways to share the water. It is clear that effective conservation measures will be part of any effective long-term solution. Along with its partner members of the Keep Long Valley Green campaign, Friends of the Inyo hopes that LADWP begins to take more seriously its duty to engage in real conservation measures. In the meantime, we will continue to fight for Mono County’s water.

¹Consensus Building Institute. (2012). Water in the U.S. American West: 150 Years of Adaptive Strategies. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Civil Works Directorate. <http://naturalresourcespolicy.org/docs/water-in-the-west.pdf>

²Mika, K., Gallo, E., Porse, E., Hogue, T., Pincetl, S., & Gold, M. (2018). LA Sustainable Water Project: Los Angeles City-Wide Overview. UCLA: Sustainable LA Grand Challenge. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4tp3x8g4>

KUTZADIKA^A DAYS

Nüümü-wia-nu-wae taa nana yadoha-wei-du

July 22-26, 2020

**Singing, Drumming, & Dancing (Traditional Round Dance),
Handgames, Chiptuhi, Story Telling, Traditional Foods & Crafts**

Camping Available | Meals Will be Served
Please bring your own tablewear (plate, bowl, cup, fork, spoon)

July 22 **Camp at Pagwi-hu** (Long Valley)
July 23-24 **Walk from Pagwi-hu** to the shore of Mono Lake
Cross the Lake to the Mono Lake Park by boat or shuttle
July 24-25 **Camp at Mono Lake Park** and enjoy the doings
July 26 **Clean Up** and move camp for Mono Lake/Yosemite Walk

To RSVP contact Charlotte Lange at (760) 709-1273 or char54lange@gmail.com

Anybody's Welcome to CRITICIZE

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CEAL KLINGLER

During the last days of 1969, Congress passed a bill that paved the way for a singularly important and oddly indigestible genre of literature, the sort of stuff that might result if you taped shredded elementary school history books together with doctoral dissertations on wasp venom.

The world at large offers no adoring reviews or awards for this literature. The worst examples of it attract the most attention, whereas the best pass almost without comment. Libraries sometimes stock it—never bookstores—but you won't find it in front on the "new arrivals" shelf. Sometimes it takes years to arrive and is best consumed, like a ripe butternut squash, within thirty to sixty days of its publication date.

If you live here and breathe, drink water, or eat food, you might want to read it.

Call this unique form of writing "environmental literature," or maybe "government environmental literature"—documents written to meet requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as well as those that meet state or local requirements passed in NEPA's wake, such as the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Government environmental literature incorporates two simple, revolutionary ideas. One: Decisions have consequences. Two: Look before you light the flame thrower.

NEPA requires federal agencies to consider potential environmental and societal consequences of their actions in advance. If those consequences might be "significant,"* the federal government must inform communities that might be affected, analyze potential significant effects in detail, consider alternatives—including not taking action—and allow the public to comment. Then the decision can move forward. The California Environmental Quality Act goes further: It requires state and local government agencies either to avoid significant impacts in decision-making or to create a plan to ameliorate those significant impacts, if "feasible."*

NEPA affects almost every action the federal government takes, from issuing mining permits to allowing corporations to build solar energy farms or to spray herbicides on public land. CEQA performs the same function at state and local levels in California. When government officials think a project might wreak significant damage, they're required to announce a proposed action to communities that might be affected and to allow opportunities for public comment. These opportunities arrive as short documents posted on government websites, in long environmental impact statements and reports, and in oblique references to other documents.

Therein lies a great privilege and liability for every one of us.

An anesthesiologist once told me his job involved hours of boredom interspersed with moments of great terror. Reading

government literature is like that, except thankfully without as much responsibility and unfortunately without as much control. Prose peppered with passive verbs regularly describes the potential for everything from mining on Conglomerate Mesa on the borders of Death Valley National Park to allowing geothermal exploration on more than 20,000 acres of federal land near Rose Valley, which has limited groundwater supplies.

Perhaps you love someone with asthma, and you worry that new water diversions will leave the Owens Valley awash in cadmium-laced crystals blown from drying alkali wetlands. Or perhaps you adore avocets; maybe you've heard about the 2020 reinterpretation of "unlawful to kill" in the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act as now being lawful—even if tens of thousands of birds are killed—as long as no one says the purpose of the killing was to kill. (Yes, really.) Maybe you spent years of your life trying to protect a small, plump toad that lives in only one desert valley in the entire universe, and they're in danger of being mashed into toad jelly for new solar farms. Maybe the federal government plans to allow an oil pipeline to run through your water supply, even though such pipelines frequently leak.

There's a document for that decision—for now anyway—or there should be.

Sometimes the literature is coy. You have to hunt the relevant document down. It's not well-advertised, or it's only advertised in publications you don't read, or it's hiding in a raft of advertisements. The project summary—think of this as the plotline—might describe the proposed decision from an obdurately oblivious point of view. For instance, the authors who recently redefined "kill" in the Migratory Bird Act expressed concern about prosecuting someone who is innocently "driving a car" or "allowing a pet cat to roam outdoors" rather than noting that the change mainly indemnifies companies that kill thousands of migratory birds in spilled oil and waste ponds.

Sometimes the writing is hard to digest. While reading, I remember an affable cartoon rat's advice from an animated Pixar movie about food and cooking: "If you can sort of muscle your way past the gag reflex, all kinds of food possibilities open up." Once you've choked your way past the acronyms, the possibilities—bitter or sweet—settle in. Exploratory drilling for lithium in Panamint Valley will punch holes in desert wetlands and endanger mesquite groves that sustain silky flycatchers. Proponents of a pumped energy storage project—apparently unaware that water flows to the point of least resistance—proposed tunneling beneath Fish Slough Area of Critical Environmental Concern, a groundwater-dependent alkali slough.

Why comment at all? Why put yourself through what could be a lengthy and uncomfortable reading experience?

For me, it's clarifying to weigh my small discomfort against the places



ABOVE: Fish Slough Area of Critical Environmental Concern (alkali cordgrass in foreground).

UPPER RIGHT: Desert wetlands such as those in Panamint Valley and Fish Slough ACEC serve as vital rest stops for migratory birds and insects and as islands of biodiversity for rare or unique endemic insects. Below, an Owens Valley tiger beetle (*Cicindela tranquebarica inyo*) hunts at Fish Slough ACEC.



LOWER RIGHT: 24-hour mining operations disturb the nocturnal patterns of desert animals who can't forage during the day because of high temperatures. Below, a gravid female desert banded gecko hunts for insects.



I love, decide to read or not to read, and remember that all places—no matter who loves them or where—host plants and animals whose lives depend on those places.

Maybe you know something that project proponents don't. Maybe you know of an irreplaceable intermittent desert spring or waterway that would be left out of protections for "waters of the United States" under a new January 2020 decision. Maybe you've observed a unique species of butterfly, or a rare plant in the project area, organisms that biological consultants would miss if they surveyed at the wrong time of year or during a dry year. Maybe you want someone to care early in the process instead of after bulldozers or drilling rigs roll through.

Or perhaps you have something to say about new proposed revisions for NEPA, the ones that insist that "effects should not be considered significant if they are remote in time, geographically remote, or the result of a lengthy causal chain." Effects that last far into the future are usually more significant, not less. Close to half of "premature" air pollution deaths are due to pollution produced in a different state. Every breath in the desert depends, in some part, on the oceans, and we are—every single one of us—the result of a lengthy causal chain. Sometimes we have to remind decision-makers that one of NEPA's missions—for now or the future—is to "fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations."

Commenting on a document isn't supposed to be a vote; simply objecting won't prevent a project from going forward. Even useful comments and observations might be misunderstood or dismissed because they echo something someone else said first.

On the other hand, vote or not, sometimes a broad-reaching federal decision seems to ignore known scientific principles in favor of political donors, or a government official observes that a law is unpopular and needs to be clarified, or he or she says a project must be good because so few people commented early on. In cases like these, particularly when an important policy is being drawn and quartered—air pollution control laws, wetland protection laws, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, or NEPA itself—it might help (maybe you, maybe the nation) to comment. The chances of making a difference are magnitudes greater if you comment than if you don't. It might help to say you, personally, care; that a project will have significant effects on you, personally; that someone or something or some place you love will be hurt. It might help to point out that every place we live in is a place someone else thinks doesn't matter; that this planet is the sum of all such places and more; that this sum of all livable places is the only planet any of us has ever had.

The upshot is that public participation laws like NEPA belong to all of us and serve us only if we use them. Comments don't always make a difference, but every once in a while the differences we make are vitally important. Therefore, sometimes I comment and hope for the best, and sometimes I don't.

Either way, I do try to consider consequences first. There's a tiny group of plump desert toads I visit each spring, and I'd like to be able to look them in the eyes, mostly without shame.

After all, everybody's a critic.

*The terms "significant" and "feasible" contain copious wiggle room.

Ceal Klingler has roamed Eastside peaks, valleys, waterways, and libraries since 1996 and lives with her husband and their dog in the blackbrush to singleleaf piñon transition zone west of Bishop. She is a mostly solitary species, but will sometimes respond to a whistled summons for biologists, writers, or ultrarunners.

Wildlife Interrupted

Scientists are documenting the profound impact of human-powered recreation on imperiled wildlife during the winter.

BY HILARY EISEN, *Policy Director at Winter Wildlands Alliance*

INTRODUCTION BY WENDY SCHNEIDER, *Executive Director, Friends of the Inyo:*

As a hiker, backcountry skier and rock climber, I have long believed that my recreational activities have little or no effect on wildlife. This belief has been based on the fact that these activities do not involve a motor or a machine, and my movement is relatively slow. In recent years, however, I have been made aware that the impact of my quiet recreational activities is much greater than I believed.

As humans seek to occupy and develop more and more land, including for recreational uses, Friends of the Inyo seeks to insure that, here in the Eastern Sierra, the needs of our wildlife are considered. Recreational tourism plays a critical role in our economy. Friends of the Inyo's engagement in management and planning for our Eastern Sierra public lands, (for example in the ongoing development of the management plan for the new Alabama Hills National Scenic Area, or the upcoming development of a winter recreation management plan on the Inyo National Forest) is always based on the best available science, and always seeks to find a balance between the desires of the recreation community and the needs of wildlife. As the following article demonstrates, finding that balance can be difficult.

The Teton Range in Wyoming is a special place for backcountry skiers. Its unmistakable skyline holds some of the best and most iconic skiing to be found in the world. The Tetons are also an important refuge for wildlife. Many species make their home in the Teton Range, including the threatened Teton bighorn sheep herd.

Historically, bighorn sheep were abundant and widespread in the Tetons. Biologists estimate more than a thousand bighorns once lived in the range, although it's impossible to say for sure. Every fall, they migrated out of the mountains to winter

in warmer, drier low-elevation foothills. However, development and human impact have affected the bighorn's annual migration patterns.

Over the past several decades, bighorn sheep in the Tetons have stopped moving to lower elevations for winter in order to avoid humans. Now, they live year-round in the high reaches of the range. As a result, their population has dropped dramatically, to approximately 100 animals. Biologists fear this unique population may go extinct.

For a long time, we've understood that motorized recreation disturbs wintering

wildlife, and land managers often close winter ranges to motor vehicles to protect vulnerable species. However, new research is showing that non-motorized recreation, like backcountry skiing, can disturb wintering wildlife, too.

To better understand why bighorns are struggling in the Tetons, researchers spent two years tracking sheep and people throughout the range. While many factors contribute to their decline, the impact of backcountry skiing is significant. Sheep are sensitive to human activity, especially when they are confined to tiny, windswept





alpine islands. When a skier comes into view, the sheep run, often through deep snow, sometimes for a long time, to find a new “island” with no sign of people. This skittishness consumes more energy than the sheep can afford. Combine this with the ever-present threat of avalanches, and many bighorns don’t survive the winter.

As a conservation organization that speaks for the backcountry ski community, Winter Wildlands Alliance is uniquely positioned to advocate for winter wildlife conservation. We work with public land management policy experts who are well-versed in using policy tools to protect winter wildlife habitat from human impacts. We’re passionate about skiing, but we recognize that people are mobile and have a range of options of where to ski. Wildlife don’t have that same luxury. It’s our responsibility to ensure recreation doesn’t negatively impact wildlife.

Protecting winter wildlife habitat has long been a conservation priority on both public

and private lands because it’s critical to ensuring wildlife populations persist. A 2019 study in the northern Rockies found that both motorized and non-motorized winter recreation disturbs female wolverines, causing them to stop using areas within their home range where lots of recreation occurs. An animal’s home range is defined as the region that encompasses all the resources an animal requires to survive and reproduce. Home ranges are never bigger than what an animal truly requires, so anything that causes an animal to lose or stop using part of its home range is cause for concern.

Winter is a tough season for almost every critter, and animals are sensitive to human activities whether we’re on foot or astride a motor. Food is scarce. It takes a lot of energy to stay warm and move around. It’s also when many females are pregnant, and late winter and early spring is when many species give birth. As conservation-minded skiers who value wildlife, we have a responsibility to work with land managers and biologists to

ensure that our recreation isn’t harming the wildlife we share the landscape with.

The answers are still being developed. Right now, we’re working with land managers, other conservation groups, winter recreationists, and biologists to develop management recommendations that the Forest Service can use during winter travel planning to protect wolverines while continuing to provide winter recreation opportunities.

Likewise, this winter in the Tetons, we’ll be working with skiers, biologists, land managers, and wildlife enthusiasts to find a way to protect the Teton bighorn sheep herd. If you would like to get involved or learn more, attend one of the collaborative meetings and help us figure out the best course forward for the sheep and skiers of the Teton range.

For more information, contact Hilary Eisen at Winter Wildlands Alliance or the Teton Bighorn Sheep Working Group at TetonSheep.org.



Partner Profile

ADAM BARNETT

BY ALEX ERTAUD

In early March of 2020, Stewardship Director Alex Ertaud sat down with Adam Barnett, the Inyo National Forest's Assistant Public Services Staff Officer. This conversation dives deep into the ins and outs of the two organization's working relationship. It is always a pleasure to chat with Adam and I hope you enjoy!

ALEX ERTAUD, Friends of the Inyo: I am here with Adam Barnett, of the Forest Service. Thank you for sitting down with me Adam. Just to start things off, when was the first time you came to the Eastern Sierra? And I guess in this case, the Inyo National Forest.

ADAM BARNETT, Inyo National Forest: I'll have to think about that one for a minute. It probably would have been 2006, [20]06 or [20]07, something, when I first came down to work for the Forest Service in California.

AE: And you were working for the Inyo [National Forest]?

AB: I was working for the research branch of the Forest Service, in Davis. I did that for three years out of graduate school. I'm sure during that time at some point, I came over to the Eastside to explore.

AE: Awesome. Before we go any further, what's your official title with the Inyo National Forest?

AB: Assistant Public Services Staff Officer.

AE: Perfect.

AB: Whatever that means [laughing].

[...]

AE: What drew you to the government side of public lands? Both through the National Park Service, and now the Forest Service. What drew you to that?

AB: Well, I think like a lot of people, I got started by enjoying spending time outside. I grew up in rural New England, cross country skied a lot, and hiked, and biked with my family and friends. It was

just always something that was part of what I did. So when I learned that you could do that sort of thing possibly for work, that sounded pretty cool. I came out West, and took a fire job, and realized that the mountains and everything were a lot higher up here. There was a lot more to do outdoors, and it was a lot more exciting, so I stayed.

AE: So as you work through...how many different positions have you had with the Forest Service at this point?

AB: I think this is my fifth?

AE: We went through your job title earlier, and it's a bit of a mouthful. But what do you see...I mean you're kind of our (Friends of the Inyo) liaison, as a non-profit, with the Inyo National Forest. Is that correct?

AB: It is.

AE: So we were very excited for that. How do you see non-profits being involved in the Forest Service in the year 2020, and where we are now?

AB: I think that partner organizations, including non-profits, are an essential part of [the] Forest Service's ability to get anything done anymore. Besides...well even firefighting; even the most basic things require partners at this point. But certainly recreation management, and wilderness stewardship, resource protection work, all require partners, including non-profits, to support field staffing, and find money, pretty much everything.

AE: So do you enjoy that part of your job? I think you're probably more office-bound than you would like these days, but is that a part of your job you find rewarding?

AB: Yeah, I think...

AE: Obviously, I guess that's kind of biased, because I am asking you the question. It's like I'm asking you if interacting with me is rewarding.

AB: [Laughing] Right, well I wouldn't be here if that wasn't something I wanted to do. It was pretty obvious that that was a need at the Inyo [National Forest], trying to find somebody to help fill [that job]. I've had a lot of experience doing that kind of work with external partners over the years, and I do like that part, honestly, because it's more interesting when you're working with people with different perspectives, different abilities, different ways of looking at things than the way that folks commonly do when they're inside a large bureaucracy. So I really enjoy having a mix of nonprofits to work with, other non-federal agencies, private sector organizations, all that stuff together makes a much more interesting and also creative and usually fruitful mix of people and ideas.

AE: Yeah, you mention the creative part. Do you find that your job is particularly creative in that way? I think sometimes when you're in large organizations, or businesses, or anything, sometimes creativity gets lost a little, because it is difficult—just inherently—to do, to be creative and flexible, while also managing a giant pool of stuff. So is that something you're drawn to in your job?

AB: Yeah, I think creativity in the Forest Service has a lot to do with problem solving in an environment of scarcity. So it's not quite the same thing as being able to express yourself as an individual, it's more about how to make stuff happen when you basically have to figure it out.

[...]

AE: What do you see in kind of, going forward, for partner organizations that work with the Forest Service. What would you say is the big thing coming on the horizon?

AB: Well, I mean I don't know what the big thing is. I think what I've seen over the years is a progression of the agency and partners working together, in that we're moving past the phase of really there [being] one partner and the Forest Service working together to find money to do one project. We're well into the more mature phase of developing long term, more complex relationships among multiple partners that work together to develop programs that are going to last. And that's just like federal agencies have to learn how to work together, you know, partner organizations have to learn how to work together as well, and negotiate the overlaps, or differences in their missions and their priorities. So just a more sophisticated level of cooperation is what's needed I think at this point, because we're facing more complex, more expensive problems, that affect all of us and our communities. Like fire management, of course, but also growing demand for recreational opportunities, recreation infrastructure, while budgets shrink, and more people want more stuff.

AE: I think that recreation part is really interesting, and something that we [Friends of the Inyo] think about a lot. Is that a heightened consideration? I know fire [is] obviously very important, but the sheer numbers of recreation, is that something the Forest Service is particularly...I don't want to say concerned, but I will.

AB: Well so, sustainable recreation management is something that has been a priority of the Forest Service for a long time. What it's called has changed over the years, but I think it's pretty clear that the agency is responsible for providing a lot of recreation access and opportunities for people, while at the same time protecting public lands from unmanaged use. So, here on the Inyo [National Forest], recreation is even more of a big deal than it is on some national forests around the country, because it's so closely tied to the economy here, and there's so much legacy recreational infrastructure in the Inyo National Forest that was built in the [19]70's, and none of it meets current preferences that the public generally has now, or meets accessibility standards in many cases. There's a lot of stuff, that contributes to there being a very significant need for support for recreation infrastructure improvements here.

AE: So Friends of the Inyo has been around a while. "Since 1986", I think our sticker says. During that life, the relationship with the Forest Service has seen different iterations. What is the importance of Friends of the Inyo from the INF's point of view? Because obviously I hope we're a good partner, but what benefit and value do we provide to the Forest Service? Again, probably an inherently biased question coming from me.

AB: [Laughing] So I worked on the Sierra National Forest a couple of jobs back, so I actually worked a little bit with Friends of the Inyo on projects at that point too. You know, that was a time when Friends of the Inyo was doing a lot of Travel Management implementation work. Helping with road closures and restoration work. When I first came over here...well I've worked on a lot of National Forests, and I've seen different ways of managing off-highway vehicle use and the roads system and the trails system. And as soon as I got here, it was pretty obvious that there was a lot of good restoration work had been done, a lot of good management that had been done over the last decade or so. And I know that Friends of the Inyo was an important part of that. That Friends of the Inyo helps with the capacity needs. You know the Forest Service can find money, Friends of the Inyo can find money; especially on the Inyo, it's difficult for Forest Service to hire seasonal employees to do field work, and Friends of the Inyo helps augment capacity with their crew that you can hire often easier, and more quickly and efficiently than the Forest Service can, which is a huge benefit. And then, so now, with Friends of the Inyo working with the Forest Service on trail stuff, and public education through [the] Trail Ambassador program, it's also augmenting the Forest Service's capacity by having people out in the field, who can talk to visitors, and provide them with information, and help them, and also do the maintenance on trails. So I can see from last summer, even, the trails that the Trail Ambassadors work on regularly, you can tell, that they're being regularly maintained. Rather than just once a year, somebody gets out on it, and does the initial trail clearing. You can see the difference, over the course of a summer, when somebody's actually keeping the drains clear, keeping the rocks off the trail, keeping the brush cut back, keeping the shortcuts blocked, you can see that over the course of a summer, because trails change, as people use them. So I credit Friends of the Inyo with a bunch of that, for our major trails, that get a lot of use. A little bit of help, in terms of field staff, like four Trail Ambassadors, can go a long way, if they're out there all the time, all summer long, so it's a huge help.

AE: Well I appreciate that. I'm glad the work stays. Sometimes, especially, as you mentioned, in a dynamic work environment that we work in, it's nice when it can stay throughout a whole season, and the work shows a difference, and it doesn't just get washed away by the next rain, or snow, or what have you.

AB: And then the volunteer projects also are huge. I mean having Friends of the Inyo be able to organize, plan, support projects, lead projects, basically do everything for major volunteer projects is an enormous help to the Inyo [National Forest] too. Because there's very few people here, on the Forest Service-side that are available to do that, put that work in. So Friends of the Inyo's stewardship projects are a big help that way too.

AE: I really enjoy those volunteer projects. And you came out to many of our volunteer days this summer.

AB: Yeah that was fun.

AE: It was a great Forest Service representation at the events. It was awesome. And so I really appreciate that y'all, you and the whole staff, have shown support for what we do, and that makes it more fun, and makes us feel good about the work that we're doing.

AB: Right, and we should feel good, and we should be having fun.

AE: I agree.

AB: That's why I go.

AE: It's a good time. Our mission statement is, "Protecting and caring for the public lands of the Eastern Sierra." So I always like to ask, what does that mean to you?

AB: Well I mean, that's kind of my job. My mission statement too, I guess, at least with respect to recreation and wilderness management, just because those are the areas I specialize in. But of course it applies to the full range of natural resource management as well that a lot of other people on the Forest Service-side work on, like wildlife biology, or botany, or whatever. So yeah, I mean, that's my job, I think too, just like Friends of the Inyo. At least that portion of what I do.

AE: But is there anything...because, you know, you seem like someone who is very passionate about your work, so is there anything beyond your profession...I guess is there any personal meaning to you in that ["Protecting and caring for the public lands of the Eastern Sierra"].

AB: Oh yeah. Well I mean, I've stayed with this line of work my whole career because it has personal meaning to me. But it's the outdoor part. It's working with people in the field, it's doing stuff in the National Forest, outside, interacting with the public, and the place, and experiencing that firsthand. Being able to do stuff, hands-

on work, and all that good stuff. I enjoy all that. I just ended up in an office eventually, because that's kind of what happens.

AE: Right, that's kind of how it works out. Is there any one experience, be it for work, or on your personal time, that sort of crystallizes why the work you do, here in the Eastern Sierra matters to you? Or matters however you want to think of it, in a more global sense?

AB: I mean, I think, every time that I do a project with volunteers and partners, drives home that value of that, of what the work. I think that, more than anything, captures the point of why people enjoy the Inyo [National Forest] and why people come here, to recreate or to live, and why they're willing to spend their weekend giving back instead of doing something else. So pretty much any volunteer project where there's a bunch of people who get together and enjoy spending time together, doing some usually pretty routine or not very exciting work by itself, but it's pretty fun when you're out, in a beautiful place, enjoying it with some other people.

AE: Awesome. [...]

AE: Well, we'll leave it at that, and I thank you for your time, and sitting down with me.

To find out what question Adam asked Alex to end the conversation, and to read the rest of their conversation in its entirety, head over to friendsoftheinyo.org/blog.



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Looking east across Lee Flat and into Death Valley National Park. PHOTO: Kyle Hamada



Enjoy the expansive views of Conglomerate Mesa. PHOTO: Ken Etzel



The old mining road is growing more faint but continues to be a scar on the landscape. PHOTO: Ken Etzel

GET OUT

Navigating the Old Mining Road at Conglomerate Mesa

DIFFICULTY: MODERATE

BY BRYAN HATCHELL

In February, 2020, longtime desert advocate, Tom Budlong, and I ventured out to Conglomerate Mesa for a routine monitoring trip. While I have been to Conglomerate Mesa countless times, only once before have I explored the since restored mining road from the 1980's. On our way, we bumped along a rocky but manageable road in Tom's vintage Land Cruiser with over 500,000 miles on it. Tom knows how to take care of his vehicle. This trip is just as much a backroad driving adventure as it is a hike. If you enjoy old desert roads, putting your high-clearance, 4WD vehicle to the test, and capping off the trip with a hike, this is the excursion for you.

Getting There

Strap in for a 2.5 hour drive from Lone Pine. Navigation to this location requires a bit of skill and a mid-to-high clearance vehicle, such as a pick-up truck with beefy tires. Head eastbound on Highway 136 just south of Lone Pine. This will turn into Highway 190 once you pass the community of Keeler. Follow the road for roughly 35 minutes until you reach Saline Valley Road, directly across from Centennial Road, located at 36.331000, -117.715035.

Drive along this road for about 10 miles at which point you will arrive at a bit of a hidden left turn which is located at 36.48650, -117.70788. Do not continue north at this point. You will hit a terribly rocky, tire-eating road. Once you make this left turn, you are now off of Saline Valley Rd, venturing westward along the early stages of the old drill road. There are minor splits in the road but stay on the straight obvious path. Follow this road until it ends with a small dirt roundabout and park here. While the road technically continues on, it is blocked

off and is inaccessible by vehicle. You must now venture on foot. If you struggle to locate where to park, log these coordinates into a mapping application or your GPS device, and you will be taken there: 36.49544, -117.74893. From this parking area, you will see the trail/restored mining road.

Being There

Soak it in. This is a view of Conglomerate Mesa that not many people get. Explore new vantage points as you wind back in time and imagine the Paiute and Shoshone people harvesting pine nuts, or miners and mules lugging charcoal up the hill to Cerro Gordo. Tom and I set up the path looking for evidence of mining-related ground disturbance like rock sampling and hand trenches. Tom is swift for a man his age and I grew to appreciate his rustic yet practical style when wielding wooden canes as hiking sticks rather than fancy carbon fiber trekking poles. This trail is an out-and-back route that can be as long as you desire. The road varies from moderate hill climbing to flat hiking and winds along the Mesa for about 2.5 miles. Don't hesitate to hop off the road/trail to get views. If you are there in early summer, keep an eye out for blooming desert plants such as the rare California Monkey Flower or the Inyo Rock Daisy, or give a Joshua Tree a gentle hug.

What to Bring/Wear

Sturdy boots, hiking pants, camera, mid-to-high clearance vehicle, one liter of water per anticipated hour spent hiking and one gallon of water per person per day, plenty of food and snacks, sun protection, at least one spare tire, an emergency satellite device.

thank you

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