



BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

Spring/Summer 2016

BMCP Now Part of Sand to Snow National Monument

by David Miller, President of Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

It is done! After many years of hoping, planning, anticipating and preparing, Big Morongo Canyon Preserve (BMCP) has become part of a national monument: Sand to Snow National Monument! On February 12, 2016, President Obama signed a proclamation declaring the Sand to Snow National Monument, 154,000 acres of protected lands set aside for the people to enjoy, appreciate, and steward. And now the detailed planning of how we do all that is getting under way.

Sand to Snow National Monument is co-managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), as both agencies are responsible for lands within Sand to Snow National Monument. Because the BLM is responsible for the lands within our Preserve, BLM will manage our portion of Sand to Snow National Monument.

Now that the proclamation has created the monument, the next step is for the BLM, the USFS, and representatives for all the local and regional stakeholders to come together to establish the management plan. This document will constitute and codify how we all want these lands to be managed. The process can take as long as five years, but we are hoping to get this one done in just over two. The process of developing this management plan involves incorporating existing rules from the various entities managing lands within the new Sand to Snow National Monument. In our case, that covers the rules governing areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs). Since creation of the Big Morongo Canyon

ACEC in 1980, one of the long-range dreams was to see our Preserve become part of either a national park or a national monument. In many ways, becoming a national monument makes the lands more accessible for a much broader complement of managed public uses than if they were in a national park. And now our managed use can be greatly enhanced.

Now that our Preserve is included in Sand to Snow National Monument, our lands will receive a higher level of protection because they become part of the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS), which includes all national monuments, as well as other categories of federal conservation

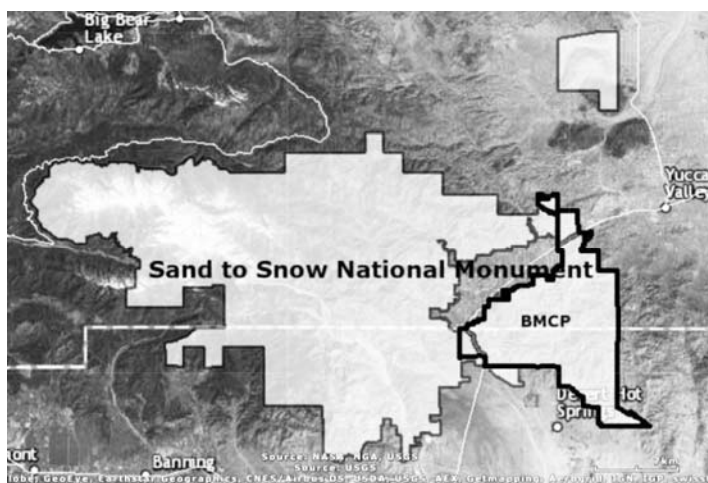
moting growing, healthy wildlife populations.

For BMCP, we are not likely to see big changes immediately, and some of the opportunities we all enjoy here won't change at all. The trail system, our birding, our education program, and our focus on habitat and environment are all characteristics of BMCP that are now likely to see better support and richer protection. On the table are also projects like extending the trail system deep into and through our Little San Bernardino Mountains, as well as a new visitor center closer to the highway, freeing up more land for hiking, birding, and new trails. This visitor center would not only vastly expand BMCP's services, but would also act as a gateway center to the entire Sand to Snow National Monument. These are ambitious plans, which in the past were impossible, but which are now being seriously discussed!

Whatever the future plans bring us, I can assure you that the Friends Board of Directors will not compromise on our principle objective: to keep BMCP a clean, healthy environment for our plant, wildlife, and bird populations. We must never forget we are a Preserve!

There will be much to follow and watch over the next decade. And as these dreams emerge and become real possibilities, the Friends will be the first to see and appreciate the new Big Morongo Canyon Preserve as a proud corner of and the gateway to Sand to Snow National Monument. Stay tuned!

For more details and printable maps visit www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/prog/nlcs/Sand-to-Snow.html.



lands. Within the NLCS, there is only one designation affording more robust protection: Wilderness. Note that the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC, i.e., our Preserve, will retain its designation as an ACEC for BLM management purposes, so the 30 acres of the Preserve that were excluded from Sand to Snow will still be managed as an ACEC.

The new monument protects migratory paths that cross Highway 62, connecting wildlife all the way from Joshua Tree National Park, through BMCP, and high up into the San Bernardino Mountains and the San Bernardino National Forest, thus pro-

Bird's Eye View ... and more

*gleaned from
Dee Zeller*



Driving into the Preserve in early spring (and spring is early this year) there is no need to glance towards the bird feeders for a first glimpse of the bird activity; it is very little. The birds are here, but they are out enjoying nature's spring abundance in the natural habitat.

But as you enter, do keep your eye on the split rail fence posts, where you will see lizards basking in the spring sunshine. You may see, appropriately, "fence" lizards (Great Basin fence lizards), spiny lizards (yellow-backed spiny lizards), and the small western side-blotched lizards.

Dee tells of when the Preserve used to be wetter and hosted wading birds. Back then, Great Egrets would walk up and down the fence line and pick off lizards.

On this late March day, it is "snowing" at the Preserve, as the cottonwood trees release their fluffy seeds into the air. Soon the seeds will start drifting into banks of white fluff.

As we sit on the Zeller patio, a Bewick's Wren lands for a quick second on the decking almost within hand's reach. Is the wren eyeing the bird house close by where Bewick's Wrens have nested in previous years? Dee checks the box, and no nesting material has been added yet. No bird used the bird house last year, but the Bewick's did the year before. Last year Bewick's Wrens instead nested in the black metal box that is part of the hitch at the front of Dee's trailer.

Another wood box near the bird house has narrow slits rather than a round opening for birds to enter. This is intended as a place for butterflies to overwinter. The Preserve has two butterfly boxes, neither of which have ever been used by a butterfly. Seems the butterflies do well enough finding their own overwintering spots without human assistance.

Our Vermilion Flycatchers have arrived, and one pair is already building a nest at Covington Park by the tennis court. Two more males and a female are being seen at the park ball field. Dee says the Vermilions prefer the park, where they hunt off the manicured grass, to the Preserve's natural habitat. Though one year an unusual pair of Vermilions established themselves near the Preserve entrance. Both birds of the pair were young, as indicated by their appearance. The female had a yellow belly instead of the peach belly of a more mature female, and the red of the male appeared blotchy still. Gene Cardiff saw them attempting to mate and said they were just practicing to be adults and probably nothing would come of it—surprise, they successfully raised two young.

An early spring status update on the Preserve's inhabitants: frogs are calling more abundantly this spring than last; deer have returned to the dripper by the bird feeders after being absent since the end of the rut last October; no gray foxes have reappeared at the Preserve; no mountain lion has been seen in the last month, though one appeared nearly weekly from November to February; bear scat is currently being seen, but the bear hasn't bothered the bird feeders; and rattlesnakes are out, mostly on the Desert Willow Trail.

The surprise this spring is that while areas of Morongo Valley received good winter rains, wildflowers at the Preserve are not overly abundant. Typically desert rains can be spotty, and perhaps some spots in the Preserve did not receive as much rain.

The Preserve's associate host, Bob Carlson, is leaving us. Bob has assisted Dee for nine years now. Dee says that Bob "has become part of the place" and that he will miss Bob terribly. Bob has purchased a new home in a retirement community in Idaho, where he can be close to his daughter. What a delight this new, spacious home will be for Bob, who for years lived first on a boat and then in a motor home as he traveled the world. Bon voyage Bob, and thanks for all you have done for the Preserve.

Associate Host now needed for Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

We need someone to live on-site and provide hosting assistance—a friendly person who likes to be out on the trails and enjoys talking to people, as well as assisting with minimal other duties.

- Must own a self-contained RV or trailer
- Free rent
- All hookups provided
- Prefer year round

Please call the Preserve at 760-363-7190 if interested.

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NEWSLETTER

Editor: Donna Thomas

Spring/Summer 2016

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Nature: The Critical

Ingredient by Cindy Zacks

A couple of years ago my daughter, who will graduate with a degree in biology from UC Santa Cruz this June, shared a pivotal quote with me. The quote, by nature philosopher Vladimir Nabokov, states, "There is a high ridge where the mountainside of scientific knowledge joins the opposite slope of artistic imagination; where precision of poetry and the art of science can meet." She said it reminded her of all the years she watched me with my students, exploring and healing wild places. This was, and is, one of the most profound compliments I have ever received.

There is a multitude of ways to approach teaching students about our earth, some technical, some artistic, some spiritual, but to effect lasting change, one has to touch on all three. Throughout my 23 years as an environmental educator, I have often said my true goal is to guide students toward a love and desire to protect our planet and each other—the science they learn is a happy side effect. But side effects can have lasting effects, and make no mistake, the science is critical. Hooking students emotionally though, opens their minds to the science, to a desire to know the world around them, to a willingness to absorb the science because it explains what they love.

As educators, volunteers, and docents, our challenge is to create that high ridge for students, to teach natural history in an imaginative, artistic way—one that presents science as a form of poetry from the heart. It is hard to ignore the cries of those we love; it is equally hard to ignore the cries of wild places we grow to love. Take children to wild places, and then get out of the way. Be supportive, be their safety net, be a coach, but get out of the way and they will find the connection themselves.

Sadly, many children and teens today do not have these opportunities. Their parents are too busy, too impoverished, or too uncomfortable themselves in natural places. As a result, too many young people today suffer from what Richard Louv, renowned expert on the effects of nature on children, has termed "nature deficit

disorder." Many challenges our young people face today—obesity, chronic illness, attention deficit disorder, emotional instability, to name a few—can be traced, at least in part, to a lack of time in natural places. If we want our children to grow into physically and mentally healthy adults, we have to introduce them to nature.

Big Morongo Canyon Preserve serves as just such a place by allowing youth a space outside to explore their natural environment. Unique experiences offered by Preserve staff and volunteers help students learn biology, ecology, botany, geology, and cultural history. For many students, class trips and summer camps are their first experience in the wild. What's more, this time spent outdoors helps develop independence, confidence, a sense of teamwork, and lays the groundwork for lifelong appreciation of the mental and physical benefits of nature. Extensive research has supported these findings over and over in recent years. I highly recommend Richard Louv's books *Last Child in the Woods* and *The Nature Principle* for an in-depth exploration of the evidence.

We need to find a way to provide children and teens with outdoor experiences, to be surrogate parents for youth who don't have parents able or willing to take them to natural places. Early on I wanted to share my passion for the natural world with young people, to be such a surrogate, so I developed a program at Yucca Valley High School called Field Ecology. We learn the science, but we also restore habitat, camp, hike, backpack, and participate in scientific field research. I've watched these trips change students' lives. I've watched tentative students set up a tent for the first time, sleep outside for the first time, show up wearing orange hazard vests to avoid getting lost, manage discomfort at the surrendering of their phone, or collapse every hundred yards succumbing to their fear of heights or lack of confidence in their bodies while climbing San Jacinto peak. But they all get up. Every student—every one—overcomes their fear, ending the year proud and more confident than before. This confidence transfers to all other aspects of their lives. The one with a fear of heights and significant academic struggles went on to college. Step by step

she worked through community college, then the university. She is now a teacher—and recently contacted me to ask my advice for buying a sleeping bag so she can travel and camp in all types of weather.

Some of my former students have proven the positive impact of early environmental education by "growing up" to advocate for better decision making and permanent protection of the California Desert, including the three new desert national monuments. One, during a brief speech for a local organization mentioned he wasn't sure what to do with his life when he was in high school. He was sitting on the metaphorical fence, considering multiple options, when he enrolled in Field Ecology. The impact the field trips and experiences had was to "push him off the fence—to the greener side." He is now a leader in the environmental protection field.

Other students who never thought they would go to college discovered a desire to pursue higher education in a multitude of fields, such as biology, sustainable agriculture, forestry, and environmental studies. This is because time spent in nature feeds the imagination, motivation, and desire of students to better themselves and the world around them. They are on the ridge—let's help the rest of our young people get there too.

Cindy Zacks is an educator at Yucca Valley High School. The Mojave Environmental Education Consortium awarded her "Environmental Education Teacher of the Year" in 2015.

BMCP NEEDS VOLUNTEERS TO WORK WITH CHILDREN

Our Preserve badly needs more people to maintain the level of our important Education Program.

If you enjoy working with children, we need your help. You will receive the materials and training you need to work with our youth.

For more information or to volunteer, please contact Jane Olson, janeelleno@aol.com.

Beyond Birds—Watching Morongo’s Butterflies

by Joe Zarki

Birdwatchers at Morongo are fortunate indeed. Each year they are able to see hundreds of resident and migrant birds in a delightful desert riparian setting. However, that’s not to say there aren’t days when the temperature gets warm, the wind is calm, and the bird life suddenly takes an extended break. What’s a dedicated birder to do when birds no longer want to cooperate? Well, Nature has a ready answer. When birds are taking their midday siesta, this becomes the perfect time for another group of astonishingly beautiful creatures to take wing. Of course we’re talking about butterflies.

Varied habitats that make the Morongo Preserve such a good place for birds also make it a great location to see and learn about Southern California butterflies. These lovely insects have amazing life stories, they are easy to see and photograph, and there are excellent resources and opportunities available for the dedicated amateur naturalist to learn about butterflies and contribute to their conservation.

Butterflies are part of the order Lepidoptera, a large group of insects having wings with colored scales. Moths are by far the most numerous of the “leps,” with literally hundreds of thousands of species worldwide. However, many are dull-colored, difficult to identify in the field, and very hard to master as a group. Butterflies, by contrast, are generally colorful, fall into fairly easy to recognize groups, and come in numbers (about 700-800 species in North America) that are within the grasp of many field enthusiasts.

Here at Morongo, more than 60 butterfly species have been recorded, and some 20-30 additional species are likely to occur across the Preserve’s 30,000+ acres. Part of what makes them so interesting is that we still have much to learn about Morongo’s butterflies. Bob Cullen has been studying butterflies at Morongo for some years now. In 2011, Bob put together a homemade booklet listing 45 species that he had photographed. Bob’s booklet includes common butterflies, such as marine blue, checkered white, and painted lady, but he has also

found many uncommon species, such as bramble hairstreak, mylitta crescent, and giant yucca-skipper. Dr. Gordon Pratt has done field investigations at Morongo and found a number of rare species for the area, including pale swallowtail, Palmer’s metalmark, and Arizona powdered-skipper. Dr. Pratt also found eggs of the gorgon copper on long stemmed buckwheat. Curiously, no adult coppers have yet been seen at the Preserve.

One intriguing butterfly reported from the Preserve is the little yellow, *Eurema lisa*. This relative of the sleepy orange is a rare stray in Southern California and was collected at the Preserve by Bob Allen while working under a contract from The Nature Conservancy. It has not been found at Morongo since 1992. Better known is the Lorquin’s admiral. This striking Nymphalid is perhaps the Preserve’s “official” butterfly. It is easily found in willows on the Marsh, Mesquite, and Canyon Trails.

From now until late fall, butterflies will be active every sunny day at Morongo. Perhaps the best location to see a variety of butterflies at the Preserve is along the Mesquite Trail where there is a good mixture of riparian and xeric plants. When yerba santa is in bloom, the trail is alive with butterfly activity. The start of the Canyon Trail is another excellent spot to watch and photograph butterflies, as many species seek minerals in the damp soil at the start of the trail.

You can help add to our knowledge of butterflies and moths of the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve by contributing your observations at the website iNaturalist (www.inaturalist.org). A Project called Lepidoptera of the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve has been created to collect observations by local naturalists. So far 24 observations of 21 butterfly species have been posted on iNaturalist. By the time you read this, there should also be a project on iNaturalist for Birds of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve.

Lastly, Joshua Tree National Park will hold one of its annual North American Butterfly Association (NABA) counts on April 16. Modeled after the Christmas Bird Count, the NABA butterfly counts (www.naba.org) are held each year during seasons of peak butterfly diversity. Local counts take place

at Joshua Tree National Park (two in spring and one in the fall) and at Big Bear (in late June). Contact Joe Zarki and Marilyn Lutz at lutzarki1@verizon.net for more information.

So next time you’re at the Preserve, take a careful look around; it’s not just for the birds.



Lorquin’s Admiral



Dammer’s Dotted-Blue



Queen

BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

CALENDAR

AT BMCP

APRIL – AUGUST

Gate open 7:30 a.m. to sunset

365 days a year

WEDNESDAY BIRD WALKS

Every Wednesday at 7:00 a.m. and continuing through the summer. Bring your binoculars and spend a couple of hours strolling the trails with birding experts. Beginning birders welcome.

SATURDAY BIRD WALKS

At 7:00 a.m. on the third Saturday in April and May (April 16 and May 21). Same format as Wednesday Bird Walks.

BMCP Weather by Ray Yeager

Again, the big story is still all about drought, now in its fifth year. With weather records that go back 80 years for our local desert, only once have we experienced a four-year drought, and this was in the late 1940s. The Morongo Valley's October through March historical average rainfall has been 6.05 inches, and in the same current period, only 4.00 inches were recorded. The 3.31 inches that were recorded in January seem to have been enough for a decent wildflower season.

Average temperatures are also at a record high. February was the warmest on record, and as of the last week of March, Morongo Valley's average March high is 72°F, 4°F above normal.



FRIENDS OF
BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

Yes, I Want to Help

PLEASE RETURN YOUR TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION TO:

FRIENDS OF BMCP
P.O. BOX 780
MORONGO VALLEY, CA 92256

NAME(S) _____
MAILING _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____
ZIP _____
EMAIL _____

ENCLOSED MEMBERSHIP DUES:

- \$ 25.00 INDIVIDUAL ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP
 \$ 35.00 FAMILY ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP
 \$ 250.00 LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP

ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS:

- \$ 10.00 \$ 50.00
 \$ 20.00 OTHER

BECOME A MEMBER OF FRIENDS OF BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) association organized solely for the advancement of programs at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve/Area of Critical Environmental Concern. The primary purpose of the Friends is to enhance wildlife viewing, wildlife protection, educational programs, and recreational opportunities provided by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) within the Preserve. The Friends provide ongoing support of the Bureau's conservation, education, and recreation programs within Big Morongo Canyon Preserve. The Friends achieve these goals by raising funds, accepting donations, recruiting volunteers, and assisting the BLM in the planning, creation, and maintenance of programs and facilities at the Preserve.

All donations received from visitors are used by the Friends to purchase materials for trail construction, benches, signs, and displays. Maps, trail guides, brochures, and educational and informative printed material are also provided to visitors from these funds.

Donations to the Friends are tax-deductible and are not used to cover overhead or operational expenses.

As a Friend, you will receive an annual summary of accomplishments and, if requested, new environmental education materials and programs made possible through the donation fund. Friends of BMCP are invited to attend the annual fall general membership meeting. As a special thank you, new Friends receive a unique BMCP embroidered color patch. Lifetime members also receive a canvas Preserve tote bag in addition to two BMCP color patches.

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NEWSLETTER

is published by
Friends of BMCP

P.O. Box 780
Morongo Valley, CA 92256

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the Preserve



BMCP Recognizes Outstanding Service

On March 15, 2016, the Preserve's volunteers gathered to recognize Greg Hill, former BLM Manager of the Preserve, and Bob Carlson, long-time Associate Preserve Host, for their outstanding service to BMCP. The Friends Board of Directors periodically singles out volunteers who have given an extra measure of themselves to support the Preserve and adds their names to the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve Recognition Rock. Metal plaques with the new inductees names were unveiled at the gathering.

Greg Hill for years managed all the many ways in which we partner with the BLM and, most importantly, was one of the principle architects of the Sand to Snow National Monument, which now includes BMCP.

Bob Carlson has been an integral partner with Dee Zeller for years in maintaining the Preserve and keeping the daily operations running smoothly. His dedication has reached across 24 hours, 7 days a week.



BMCP recognizes Greg Hill and Bob Carlson

(l to r): David Miller, President, Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve; Greg Hill; Bob Carlson; and Dee Zeller, Big Morongo Canyon Preserve On-site Manager