

The Mojave Desert Land Trust

Working to keep the Mojave ... *Desert*

P.O. Box 207 • 6847 Adobe Road • Twentynine Palms, CA 92277 • (760)361-6401 • www.mojavedesertlandtrust.org • Winter 2007-2008



INVEST YOUR GENEROSITY IN CONSERVATION

A letter from
President
Claudia Sall

Dear Neighbors,

A year ago we issued a challenge. We asked you to join with us and raise almost \$1,000,000 to acquire Nolina Peak, a beautiful and special square mile of desert wilderness, and donate it to Joshua Tree National Park. All of us accepted that challenge and we did it. We got together and bought Nolina Peak.

Now we need to fund our ongoing operations. This newsletter is a report on those operations. Your gift is an investment. A permanent one. The Land Trust permanently protects land. Join with us and continue to make it happen.

We have accomplished a lot. You joined with us and we purchased Nolina Peak, a scenic and important wilderness of 639 acres that is now in the process of transfer to Joshua Tree National Park for permanent conservation.

With a generous foundation grant, the Land Trust is acquiring important privately owned parcels within Mojave National Preserve, Joshua Tree National Park, and Death Valley National Park. They are being donated to the National Park Service. These "inholding"

lands require long-term stewardship as part of our donation. Your Land Trust is providing the volunteer training and administration for that stewardship.

Your Land Trust also provided direct assistance to survivors of the devastating Sawtooth fire. This included assistance in replanting, education on proper land restoration techniques, as well as education for fire prevention, safety, and habitat conservation.

In the spring of 2007, we became aware of a secret agenda of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to acquire a wide swath of land through wilderness areas on the eastern slope of the San Bernardino Mountains. The DWP plans to install an 85-mile utility corridor. The Land Trust provided necessary organizational assistance to affected residents and concerned citizens. The opposition is now organized. We are upset and concerned that Los Angeles is attempting a bold land grab under the false guise of a "Green Path." It is not green! Obvious alternatives are being ignored.

We need volunteers for these important conservation goals. We also need ongoing operating capital to keep our activities successful.

Invest your generosity in conservation with the Mojave Desert Land Trust. The Land Trust is a 501(c)(3) public charity and your gift is tax deductible. But, it is far more important than a tax deduction. You are providing for the permanent protection of our desert wild lands, for our children, and their children, and theirs.

Thank you for your continued support.

Best wishes,

President, Mojave Desert Land Trust

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

SATURDAY, JANUARY 12, 2008 ~ 10 AM TO 3 PM

A Mary Sojourner Writing Circle

Members \$40 ... Non-members \$60 (includes membership)

This acclaimed southwestern author and NPR commentator will offer a day long Writing Circle in the Meeting Room, Copper Mountain College Library. Interest, not experience, is the only requirement for participation in this workshop. Bring a brown-bag lunch. Delicious coffee provided. *Space is limited.*

SUNDAY, JANUARY 13, 2008 ~ 1 PM TO 2:30 PM

Mary Sojourner and **Susan Lang**, two friends and authors in the Western Literature Series, will read their work and answer questions at Saphiro's ~ 29 Palms' new bookseller ~ 5758 Adobe Road *Admission to this reading is free.*

STEWARDSHIP TRAINING: JANUARY 18-19, 2008

The Land Trust owns over 3500 acres in – Joshua Tree, Death Valley, & The Mojave Preserve. These acres are being donated to the National Park Service under agreements which call for permanent monitoring. Volunteers play a central role in our ability to ensure that they are protected forever.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2008 ~ 10 AM TO 3 PM

Climate Change and the California Deserts

co-hosted by

Defenders of Wildlife & The Mojave Desert Land Trust

Featuring professionals offering valuable insights into the components of desert conservation, management, and sustainable development in the face of climate change. Discussion will follow speakers.

Dr. Robert Wilkinson, *U.C. Santa Barbara*

Dr. John D. Wehausen, *Field Ecologist*

Micah Lang, *ICLEI*

Location: Joshua Tree Community Center, 6171 Sunburst Avenue
\$5.00 donation at the door ~ light food provided.

Registration & Information:

760-361-6401

pat@mojavedesertlandtrust.org

SUCCESSFUL ACQUISITION OF NOLINA PEAK

In May 2007, the Mojave Desert Land Trust completed its purchase of Nolina Peak. Over 450 individuals gave a total of \$90,000 toward the acquisition. A conservation foundation was impressed by the response of Land Trust members, as well as the outstanding qualities of Nolina Peak, and contributed \$700,000 to close the deal.

Joshua Tree National Park has initiated the steps needed to incorporate Nolina Peak into the Park. The National Park Service indicated that “acquisition of the property will enhance resource protection of adjacent park areas, as well as expand the public’s opportunities to enjoy the view shed and open space.” The transfer of Nolina Peak is expected to be completed during the first half of 2008.

Most people recognize Nolina Peak because of the tall communication tower located on a one-acre site at the top. It is reached by going south on La Contenta from Highway 62 in Yucca Valley, California.

The 639-acre parcel rises to an elevation of 4,890 feet. Its vegetation includes: Joshua trees, Pinyon pines, Junipers, Nolina, Mojave yucca, scrub oaks, and a wide variety of cacti, brush, and grasses. Keep your eyes open—desert bighorn sheep, mule deer, coyotes, bobcat, and cougar visit the site.

Desert naturalist, Pat Flanagan, reports that Nolina Peak is home to Mountain Quail. The Audubon and the American Bird Conservancy Watchlist 2007 (<http://web1.audubon.org/science/species/watchlist>) includes the Mountain Quail on its “yellow” species list of birds that are either declining or rare. This bird is unique in the quail family because it makes seasonal migrations up and down the slopes of mountains. Urbanization is its greatest threat, and the protected status of Nolina Peak will help ensure its future in Joshua Tree National Park.

Nolina Peak is informally named for the presence of very old stands of Parry nolina, *Nolina parryi*, a desert member of the Lily family. To quote Elizabeth Van Zandt, retired interpretive specialist for Joshua Tree National Park:

“...look for these plants with their stiff, sword-like leaves that spring fountain-like from a wide base rosette.... the female flowers have large, showy bracts that can range in color from ivory through pale rose or green. These bracts tend to last in a golden papery form for months, leading people to believe they are in bloom much of the year. They are definitely the showpieces of Nolina Peak.”

The acquisition of Nolina Peak creates a permanent open space break between the communities of Yucca Valley and Joshua Tree. Under its immediate zoning classification more than 15 homes could have been constructed on the site. Now it will form a scenic frame around the developing southeast quadrant of Yucca Valley and act as a protected wildlife habitat for the enjoyment of visitors to the park and the maintenance of a healthy biodiversity throughout the area.



Bray Property, Lanfair Valley

JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK, DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK, & MOJAVE NATIONAL PRESERVE

*Land Trust Administers Grants
for Inholding Acquisitions*

The Mojave Desert Land Trust is acquiring private land holdings within Joshua Tree National Park, Death Valley National Park, and Mojave National Preserve. A conservation foundation is supplying funds for the acquisitions. Since receiving the initial grant in late 2006, the Land Trust has closed 54 acquisitions of land totaling over 5,300 acres. More acquisitions are currently in escrow. The acquired lands are ultimately conveyed to the National Park Service for the permanent protection of their natural and cultural assets.

The Trust is working closely with land consultant Shelton Douthit, of Shelton Douthit Consulting. They provide many years of experience in acquisition management for land trusts. The consulting team asks landowners within the parks, on behalf of the Land Trust, if they are willing to sell their parcels at fair market value. When willing sellers are identified Douthit’s team facilitates the purchase.

These land acquisitions have several important advantages for the preservation and protection of our desert wildlands. First, the national parks are our most experienced land managers for the conservation of land. By consolidating holdings within the national parks, this conservation administration is more effectively and efficiently managed. Second, many of these inholdings are sensitive lands for cultural resources, scenic values, wildlife habitat, and wildlife corridors.

The Mojave Desert Land Trust

Our Mission:

To protect the Mojave Desert ecosystem and its scenic and cultural values.

The Mojave Desert Land Trust is a 501(c)(3) public charity.

Board of Directors:

Claudia Sall
John Simpson
Jane Smith
Danny Sall
Mindy Kaufman

The Mojave Desert Land Trust

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Skilled preservation of these added lands helps to maintain the vital biodiversity that is needed for healthy ecosystems. It is expected that these acquisitions will become even more important as we experience the effects of climate change.

One recent acquisition of 320 acres is located in the Mojave National Preserve. This land links the pinyon-juniper highlands of the New York Mountains with the Watson Wash drainage and is an important wildlife corridor. The site also possesses habitat for plants and animals, and is the location of an historic homestead.

Acquisition of these inholdings requires ongoing skilled professional stewardship by the Land Trust. The first group of 31 enthusiastic volunteer stewards attended training at Joshua Tree National Park in October 2007. Shelton Douthit and selected staff from the Park conducted the classes. The volunteers acquired skills in the use of handheld GPS Global Positioning Units, monitoring of properties for cultural resource protection, and landscape, plant, and animal preservation. They also received training in recording threats to the landscape from garbage dumping, illegal intrusions, landscape alteration, and invasive plants.

The establishment of baseline climate conditions, and the measurement of changes to that condition over time, will assist in our understanding of the effects of climate change in the desert. It is nice to know that these lands are being protected forever.



First Stewardship class in Joshua Tree National Park, October 2007.

SAWTOOTH FIRE

Educational Response

In July of 2006, the Sawtooth Fire complex raged through the desert along the flanks of the San Bernardino Mountains. Recognizing that the desert was now facing new fire regimes, complicated by changing climate patterns and years of invasive plant growth, the Land Trust initiated a public education program in the schools. The National Park Service, the NPS Fire Department, Wildlands Conservancy, and the High Desert Living Arts Center joined the Land Trust in visiting every school in the Morongo Basin. Over the next year, the students learned about the causes of fires, the increased risk of fires due to invasive grasses and brush, how to prevent and report fires, and how to restore the lands that have been burned. One important lesson was to avoid clearing the land after a fire. The burned trees and brush, if left in place, provide a new home for animals and a maximum opportunity for vegetation to get a fresh start.

LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF WATER AND POWER

Another Land Grab in the Desert Wilderness

In 1974 Jack Nicholson and Faye Dunaway starred in *Chinatown*, an action thriller which told the story of Los Angeles' theft of water in the Owens Valley, destruction of an important agricultural economy, and unscrupulous promoters of Los Angeles real estate. The "bad guys" were the predecessors to today's Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. Their efforts left behind abandoned farms and homesteads, empty school houses, dry ditches, and a huge dry lake bed which continues to be a major micro dust polluter throughout the West, in defiance of numerous court orders.

Charges are now flying that DWP is at it again, although this time it is a grab for a power line corridor rather than water. In December 2006, DWP submitted an application to the Bureau of Land Management for a new 500kV electrical transmission corridor. They claimed to have consulted with the County of San Bernardino as well as the Wildlands Conservancy, the land manager for wilderness in the area. No such consultation took place.

When news of the pending acquisition became public in March 2007, the local reaction was anger at the lack of consultation, and serious concern about its far-reaching effects on the scenic, cultural, and natural values of the land.

DWP's plan is misnamed the "Green Path North" project. It will carve a wide 85-mile swath of disturbed land from a starting point northeast of Palm Springs, across the Big Morongo Canyon Wildlife Preserve to Yucca Valley, and north through the wilderness to connect with the existing power grid in Hesperia. Over 30 miles of additional access and construction roads would be built. It is not a green path.

The Land Trust provided organizational assistance to a citizens action group, the California Desert Coalition (CDC), which sprang up in opposition to the Green Path North project. Initial opposition by the County and by local towns and organizations is focused on the apparent failure of DWP to consider effective alternatives to destroying these sensitive and "protected" lands.

Wildlife habitat would be destroyed, wildlife corridors would be fragmented and divided, view sheds for hundreds of miles would be scarred by giant towers, major systems of soil erosion would be created, and private property owners would lose the enjoyment of their land. Visit www.cadesertco.org and www.stopgreenpath.com for more information.

The Land Trust is working throughout the region to bring this issue to the public. It is also working with The Land Trust Alliance and other national organizations to bring reason and long-range planning to this nation-wide energy "feeding frenzy."

As for our region and the LADWP: Desert wild areas will not become the dumping ground for Los Angeles' search for inefficient and cheap solutions to energy problems, particularly when sound alternatives are available. *Chinatown* will not be repeated.



"When we got the news [a DWP survey marker had been secretly installed near their home] we were pretty devastated."

— Pamela Galvin and Steve Molton

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Three Ways You Can Participate in The Mojave Desert Land Trust

Become a member • Help buy land that counts • Give a gift that involves friends and relatives

Annual Membership

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$250-499 | Sponsor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100-249 | Friend |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50-99 | Patron |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$25-49 | Individual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____ | Other |

Members enjoy:

- The opportunity to directly preserve wild lands in the desert
- A periodic newsletter with Land Trust updates and desert news
- Desert tours and hikes
- Volunteer opportunities
- Educational programs

“I think it far more important to save one square mile of wilderness, anywhere, by any means, than to produce another book on the subject.” –Edward Abbey

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