



BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

Winter, 2017/2018

National Public Lands Day at the Preserve: Community Comes Together

To celebrate National Public Lands Day (NPLD), over 100 volunteers of all ages, including Sand to Snow National Monument Manager Jihadda Govan, gathered at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve to donate their time and labor in support of



Youth volunteers saved the day on NPLD!
Photo by Robin Kobaly

our— still new— national monument. This year’s 24th annual National Public Lands Day was a nationwide event held on September 30 to highlight our nation’s public lands through stewardship projects and education programs.

As part of Sand to Snow, Big Morongo Canyon Preserve provides an important link between Southern California’s desert and mountain landscapes. The NPLD event included staff and volunteers from the Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, Bureau of Land Management, and Mojave Desert Land Trust.

After check in and distribution of NPLD t-shirts, participants formed groups to build new fencing at the Education Center, pull invasive plants, perform trail maintenance, and give the visitor parking lot a general clean-up. A big help was the BLM fire crew’s wood chipper, which devoured logs and cut brush, and helped fill the 40 cubic yard trash bin. After the morning’s work, volunteers



Robin Kobaly leads Public Lands Day volunteers on a guided nature walk at BMCP.
Photo by Jo Burdett

were led on educational walks by local naturalist Robin Kobaly, Archaeologist Brit Wilson, and BLM Natural Resource Specialist Joel Miner. Volunteers were treated to a lunch provided by the Friends. Thanks to Burrtec Waste Industries for donation of the trash bin and Lowe’s for providing the fence materials. After a group photo, it was a tired but proud crew that helped make this the preserve’s best and largest NPLD event.

by Greg Hill

Garden Restoration Project Gets Underway by Larry Rosen, with Leslie Burkhardt

Volunteer Larry Rosen has, for the past few years, been looking at the preserve’s butterfly garden and wondering why much of the area had little to no plant growth. He discussed this with Ann Garry, a fellow volunteer, to get some background about the creation of the original garden and gained a good working knowledge of the hard work that went into creating it.

Last year, Joe Zarki, Tom Haworth, Bob Cullen, Bill LaHaye, and Larry, volunteered to test a small piece of land next to the restrooms near the parking area. They planted about six species of native plants found in the preserve that attract butterflies. Most of the plants took root.

This confirmed the thought that the likely explanation for minimal growth in the original garden near the Education Center was a lack of sufficient sunlight. Shade from cottonwoods and other trees was stunting the growth of the garden’s plants.

So, during a visit from the CAL FIRE clean-up crews this spring, former Friends’ Executive Director Greg Hill and Larry had the workers clear brush and overgrowth from an area at the front of the butterfly garden. Afterward, this area began to receive at least 4 to 6 hours of sun a day. This allowed a new extension to the garden that will encourage the growth of any plants that are added. Ev-

eryone in the group took a new interest in revitalizing the area. From this, the current Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden Restoration Project was created.

The goal is to refresh the garden area for preserve visitors, creating an accessible area for visitors who may have difficulty exploring the preserve’s more rugged trails and terrain. Also, the garden will provide opportunities for closer looks at the life cycle of some of the butterflies. It is hoped that the host plants that have been selected will attract butterflies to lay their eggs resulting in a variety of caterpillars.

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BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 16
BMCP Parking Lot at 7:30 a.m.

ALL ARE WELCOME

Birdwatchers are needed for the 118th Annual National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count. It's fun, it's free, and we can use your help.

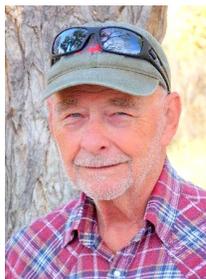
Teams will be formed to bird a variety of habitats within a 7.5-mile radius of the Preserve. At 4:30 p.m. we will gather to tally the day's results and enjoy pizza. The event is free, but donations to Audubon will be gratefully accepted.

Bring binoculars, comfortable walking shoes, layered clothing for changeable weather, lunch, and drinking water.

If you have questions, contact Joe Zarki at 760-366-8913, or jwzarki@gmail.com.

CHATting WITH DEE... by Leslie Burkhardt

So has Dee gone to the dogs? It's hard to say, but dogs were on Dee's mind the morning that I ambushed (...er, I mean chatted with) him for this column.



Two unaccompanied dogs had recently been chasing a mule deer buck in the preserve. Dee does his utmost to maintain this preserve as a place of refuge for wildlife from human-related encroachments, a place where humans can learn to appreciate the need to preserve natural habitats for wildlife. How many places have these wildlife protections? Too few.

Dee also remarked that some domesticated service animals need to be here for the sake of their human partners who have disabilities mitigated by the presence of service animals. But he hopes that all people who visit the preserve, including those who have service animals, work as hard as he does to minimize human-related disruptions to wildlife during their visit.

Here's a brief excerpt from an online article titled, Accommodating Veterans and Their Service Animals in Your Community.

It is lawful to make limited inquiries about a service animal. According to the ADA, when it is not obvious what the function of the service animal is, you can ask two questions of the animal's owner.

First, you may ask if the dog is required because of a disability. It's important to note that you cannot ask what the disability is, just if the dog is required for the purpose of assistance. Second, you can ask about what task the animal is trained to perform. It is not acceptable to ask for any supporting documentation or certificates for the animal. Finally, if the animal becomes uncontrollable or is not house trained, the ADA allows them to be removed from the public space.

From: <http://blog.assocationline.com/quick-tips-for-accommodating-veterans-and-their-service-animals-in-your-community> (Copied Nov. 10, 2017).

Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

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Leslie Burkhardt, Volunteer Coordinator
Caryn Davidson, Education Director

NEWSLETTER

Editors: Leslie Burkhardt, Joe Zarki

Winter, 2017/2018

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MY TRANSFORMATIVE YEAR by Leslie Burkhardt

For the past 25 years whenever I visited my dad Bill & stepmom Margaret in the high desert, I have delighted in attending the preserve bird walk. The beauty and peace of BMCP never failed to inspire. One of my first jobs while I was in college was working as a part-time volunteer coordinator at an agency that recorded textbooks for the blind. From that day on, I've had so many uplifting memories of working with volunteers. They are quite simply the best of the best. When the part-time volunteer coordinator position was opened, it was an easy decision to turn in my application. I realized that I also would be working side-by-side with much admired Bird Walk Leader and Preserve Host Dee Zeller.

This past year has been nothing less than transformative wonder. Here are just a few highlights that wowed me to my

core:

- Volunteers like Buck Buckley and David Williams who worked independently to fix two major eyesores at the preserve.
- Jane Olson, as volunteer Board Liaison to Staff, who consistently provided above and beyond support to help me acclimatize to my new job.
- Greg Hill organizing and collaborating in the midst of National Public Lands Day with both BLM fire crew members and volunteers to construct the new split-rail fence near the Educational Center.
- BLM staff, specifically the power trio of Jo Burdett, Joel Miner and Tracy Albrecht, who lend hands, hearts and souls whenever possible.
- Robin Kobaly of SummerTree Institute and Britt W. Wilson of the Coachella Valley Archeological Society who, along with Joel, taught us all things about BMCP that no one else knew while leading their respective NPLD walks.

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BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT by Meg Foley

I am thrilled to begin working at the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve – exactly one day, as of this writing! The BMCP is one of the largest public land areas to be entirely run by volunteers. We have been fortunate to have Dee Zeller, and for many years Betty Zeller, act as a round-the-clock presence at the preserve. Realizing the need to provide assistance to Dee and boost our presence at the preserve, we applied for and received grants from the BLM for 3 part-time staff positions– an Executive Director (24 hours per week), a Volunteer Coordinator (16 hours), and an Education Director (24 hours). Greg Hill served as our first Executive Director, and he has agreed to stay connected with the preserve in an advisory capacity. Greg's many years of experience with the BLM was invaluable at a time when the preserve was included in the Sand to Snow National Monument.

I've had the pleasure of serving on the BMCP Board for many years with an incredibly devoted, talented, and truly pleasant group of directors. My tenure on the board coupled with extensive nonprofit experience and involvement in conservation community will allow me to be of immediate benefit as I begin my new role at the BMCP. The board's expertise grew with the appointment of Robin Kobaly. Robin served as both BLM

Botanist for the California Desert District and Preserve Manager at BMCP. A botanist, wildlife biologist, natural history interpreter and Morongo Valley resident, Robin brings unique institutional perspective and experience.

With growing visitation and reduced government support, the Friends need to play an increasing role in maintaining and preserving the BMCP. The education programs will be enhanced thanks to newly hired Education Director Caryn Davidson, who will be busy booking school tours thanks to Jane and Gus Olson's generous \$5000 gift for transportation to bring students to the BMCP. Leslie Burkhardt's success growing the volunteer program allows the Friends' board to consider many exciting projects and programs. The revived Junior Docent program helps to develop the next generation of stewards by working with local teens.

The board of directors will soon begin a strategic planning session to set priorities to guide our activities for coming years. We have many challenging issues, exciting projects, and new directions and programs to consider: citizen science; research; publications; sustaining funding for existing programs and our role in the Sand to Snow National Monument management plans. We have plenty to do!

My Transformative Year (cont. from p.2)

- Patty McCulley, Karen Nelson and Madison braving 3-digit temperatures to help out at Summer Encounter.
- Veteran volunteers who seem to almost spontaneously group together to work on projects like setting up the new Herbarium and restoring the butterfly/hummingbird garden.
- Community partners like Mojave Desert Land Trust and Conservation Lands Foundation who help out in so many small and big ways.
- Assistant Preserve Hosts George and Kathy Cunning congenially holding court amidst steady streams of bird-watching visitors in the Education Center Courtyard.
- On a list that probably has as many exclusions as inclusions, I must also mention the incredibly positive impact of youth on both the spirit and substance of the preserve this past year, especially Girl Scout Troop 111, Jamie Haney's Jr. Docents as well as her Summer Encounter participants, and the phenomenal students of Yucca Valley High School coordinated by instructor Cindy Zacks.

In short, to meet so many people who work to transform and strengthen their community has been such an incredible privilege for me. It has been a year that that will never be forgotten—that inspires me to look forward with great anticipation to all that lies ahead.

NEW BMCP ITEMS ON SALE!

New styles, new colors! And you probably haven't even started your holiday shopping yet!!! Drop by the Education Center any Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Checks or cash accepted. All proceeds go to support projects at the preserve. Laura and Pat are waiting with great big smiles on their faces.

Price	Item
\$40.00	Hoodie, Long-sleeved, zip
\$35.00	Hoodie, Long-sleeved, pullover
\$30.00	Crew sweatshirt, long-sleeved
\$25.00	Polo shirt
\$20.00	T-shirt
\$20.00	Vermilion flycatcher ball cap
\$5.00	Pin
\$2.50	Patch
\$15.00	Tote bag
\$3.50	Note cards

MEET OUR NEW EDUCATION DIRECTOR by Caryn Davidson & Joe Zarki

Big Morongo Canyon Preserve is also happy to welcome a new Education Director. Caryn Davidson comes to the preserve from Joshua Tree National Park, where she was an education ranger from 1998 until she retired from the the National Park Service in September 2017. She also served as liaison for the park's Artist-in-Residence program for 10 years.

Before that, she worked at the Hi-Desert Nature Museum as the Education Director, and taught Desert Studies to GATE students through the Palm Springs Desert Museum's education program. Caryn enjoys hiking, writing poetry, and



teaching and practicing yoga. She has an M.A. in French from UCLA, and worked at the French Consulate in Los Angeles, where she was the assistant to the Press Attachée before moving to Joshua Tree in 1987. She is passionate about exploring the desert with students of all ages, and welcomes teachers to plan a visit to the preserve with their class.

"I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to continue working in environmental education. I want to help students experience the preserve's wonders and get them asking questions that build on what they know, and also lead them to the next inevitable questions."

BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

Big Morongo Canyon– It's Bigger Than You Think! by Joe Zarki

The Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), encompasses 31,000 acres of rugged desert mountains, steep canyons, and riparian bottomlands. It's now also part of the 154,000-acre Sand to Snow National Monument. Threatened and endangered species are found here including the least Bell's vireo, the southwest willow flycatcher, and the Mojave desert tortoise. For the field naturalist there is an endless supply of living things to engage your interest.

As big as the preserve is, it's somewhat ironic that most of the attention is focused on 240 acres of San Bernardino County property as well as the adjacent Covington Park. The arid mountains of the preserve's interior remain largely a mystery to most visitors.

On November 7, Donna Thomas and I embarked on a one-day expedition into the seldom seen part of the preserve when we took the plunge down the very steep Powerline Road to reach Little Morongo Canyon Road. Our hope was to get a better feel for the whole of the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC.

First a little historic digression...the desert lands of the Big Morongo ACEC have an interesting conservation history. In 1928, the area was mentioned as having potential for preservation in the land-

mark California State Parks Report. Minerva Hoyt was certainly aware of the area as she pursued her national park goals during the 1930s, and a significant piece of today's ACEC was included in the 1936 Joshua Tree National Monument boundary. Public Law 81-837, passed in 1950, removed fifteen sections of land along Little Morongo Canyon Road—almost 10,000 acres—from National Park Service management. These lands, now managed by the Bureau of Land Management, were designated as an ACEC in 1982. With the establishment of Sand to Snow, the area has now come full circle in terms of its protection.

But back to our field trip...Donna is something of an experienced traveler in the wilds of the ACEC, and with her knowledge (and her 4WD truck) we gingerly make our way down into the depths of the rugged northeast corner of the preserve. Above the ACEC boundary, a steep narrow ridge separates the upper reaches of the preserve from the Long Canyon area of Joshua Tree National Park. The rocky slopes here are covered with scattered scrub oaks, pinyon pines, and junipers, while mesquite, saltbush, and creosote occupy the canyon bottoms. It's an interesting mix of high and low desert vegetation. Small stands of Joshua trees and Mojave yuccas dot the lower slopes and alluvial fans.

Once on Little Morongo Canyon Road, we pass a number of sites where BLM has tried to repair OHV damage in the ACEC using vertical mulch—tall stands of dead vegetation that trap wind-borne organic material and also discourage OHV trespass into sensitive areas. Nearby, a quad track meanders east up an unmarked canyon. This route leads to Rattlesnake Spring, a remote site just within the northwest corner of the national park. Donna and I decide to strike out for the spring, and our path crosses the heart of twice-designated national monument lands.

Tall four-wing saltbush, puffy yellow blossoms of Mojave rabbitbrush, and brilliant green stems and bright yellow flowers of scalebroom attract our attention. The morning started cloudy and cool so insect and reptile activity are somewhat low, but by midday weak sunshine begins to warm the desert's smaller creatures. California scrub-jays, ravens, Bewick's wrens, Anna's hummingbirds, a California towhee, and the ubiquitous black-throated and white-crowned sparrows are among the birds we encounter. Fighting our way through a dense mesquite thicket (think of the prince in *Sleeping Beauty*), we eventually arrive at a small side canyon that takes us, after some bushwhacking, to a lone cottonwood, indicating we have arrived at the spring. At the lower end of the spring, we are lucky to flush a small covey of mountain quail, the largest and perhaps the most lovely of our native quail. They quickly vanish up a steep hillside reminding us that nature's splendors are often fleeting.

Retracing our steps back down the canyon, our eyes are treated to majestic views across the full length of Sand to Snow, a vista that rivals any found elsewhere in the California Desert. We're already thinking of a return trip next spring to explore the extensive riparian area below McKinney Ranch as it meanders its way down Little Morongo Canyon. The Big Morongo Canyon ACEC has a lot to offer to those who explore its inner reaches—a place so special it's been made a national monument...twice!



Spectacular vistas reward those who explore Big Morongo's remote hinterlands. Photo by Joe Zarki

BIG MORONGO CANYON PRESERVE

Garden Restoration Project Gets Underway (cont. from p.1)

Joe has created a specific list of plants that will attract butterflies we see around the preserve. With the help of Bill and Ann, a final list has been formulated. This past spring and summer, Bill has been walking the trails making notes of plant locations that are in seed or about to seed. He and others are collecting samples on a continuing basis. The seeds are placed in brown paper bags, tagged with names and stored, ready for a trip to the nursery.

Joel Miner, BLM Natural Resource Specialist has been our invaluable "go-to guy" for this project. He arranged a seed propagation project with the nursery at The Living Desert through the Bureau of Land Management. We all are very excited about this collaboration. The Living Desert has all the expertise needed to get our young native plants started. The garden group had their first meeting with the nursery, on September 26, to drop off seeds collected in the preserve



Local birds are flocking in droves to the redesigned garden water feature. Photo by Leslie Burkhardt

and discuss the coordination of the garden restoration project. We sat down with Bob Linstead, the nursery's propagation specialist; Kirk Anderson, Curator of Gardens; and the Director of Conser-

vation Peter Siminski. Bob also gave us a tour of their native plant nursery. On Nov. 7th Bob Linstead and Kirk Anderson met with Larry and Ann at the preserve to view the project firsthand and provide additional suggestions for the project.

The latest improvement has been the repair and re-design of the garden water feature. When George Cunning, Assistant Preserve Host, returned in October from his summer assignment in Yosemite, he and Larry rolled up their sleeves and created a striking, new water feature that is now the focal point in the garden. What do the animals think who have been sipping from its gurgling waterfall? They LOVE it!

So, as you hike by the Education Center in the coming months, please join the butterflies, hummingbirds, and other wildlife, and check out the progress of this ongoing restoration project.



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 STUDENT ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP
- \$ 35.00 INDIVIDUAL/FAMILY ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP
- \$ 100.00 INDIVIDUAL/FAMILY SUPPORTER MEMBERSHIP
- \$ 750.00 INDIVIDUAL/FAMILY LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP

ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS:

- \$ 10.00
- \$ 20.00
- \$ 50.00
- OTHER _____

NEWSLETTER (WINTER, SPRING/ SUMMER, FALL ISSUES)

- EMAIL MAIL NEITHER

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 materials are also provided to visitors from these funds. Donations to the Friends also support education and environmental programs and are fully tax-deductible in accordance with IRS and state laws.

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

GO GREEN...to choose the digital option for receiving your newsletter, call the Preserve.



CALENDAR

AT BMCP

DECEMBER – MARCH

Gate open 7:30 a.m. to Sunset

365 days a year

WEDNESDAY BIRD WALKS

Bird walks are held each Wednesday throughout the year excluding Thanksgiving Eve, Christmas Eve or Day, and New Year's Eve or Day. From October through March, walks begin at 8 a.m. From April through September walks start at 7 a.m. Bring your binoculars and spend the morning strolling the trails with knowledgeable local bird walk leaders. Meet at BMCP parking lot. Beginning birders welcome.

SATURDAY BIRD WALKS

Bird walks held on the third Saturday of each month only from October through May, excluding Christmas Eve or Day, and New Year's Eve or Day. From October through March, walks begin at 8:00 a.m. In April and May, walks start at 7:00 a.m. No Saturday bird walks are held from June through September. Same format as Wednesday bird walks.

UPCOMING EVENTS

December 16, Christmas Bird Count. Saturday, 7:30 a.m. (see p. 2 for details).

February 10, Sand to Snow National Monument 2nd Anniversary Open House

February 16-19, Great Backyard Bird Count (see: <http://gbbc.birdcount.org>).

Monthly, 4th Saturdays and Sundays, Volunteer Work & Learn Program. See Friends of BMCP Forum, Volunteer Information.

Check www.bigmorongo.org for information and updates on future events.