



FIELDREPORT

Pacific Region | Spring/Summer 2012



Cadiz Valley Water Conservation, Recovery and Storage Project Update

NPCA and other conservation organizations are opposing the Cadiz Valley Water Conservation, Recovery and Storage Project because of its potential impact to groundwater, air quality and our federal lands. The Cadiz Inc.'s plan is to pump desert groundwater from the Fenner and Orange Blossom Watersheds, transfer it through a 42 mile conveyance pipeline and send it to southern California water districts. The groundwater originates from sources high in the mountains of the Mojave National Preserve, a unique and ecologically important unit of the National Park System.



Above: UC Irvine Students Ryan, Isra and Brian with Seth Shteir in Mojave National Preserve ©UC Irvine Environmental Law Clinic. **Top:** Southeast Anchorage, Bechers Bay, Santa Rosa Island, Channel Islands National Park. © George H. H. Huey

continued on flap

Victory at Santa Rosa

Because of NPCA's long-standing advocacy and commitment to Channel Islands National Park, Santa Rosa Island is now a fully protected part of this national park and open to the public year-round. Santa Rosa is one of five islands that comprise the Channel Islands National Park, known as "North America's Galapagos," and it was purchased for inclusion in this park in 1986 for approximately \$30 million dollars. But because cattle grazing and trophy hunting were conducted on the island, visitation was restricted and park resources weren't fully protected.

The second largest California island, Santa Rosa harbors a great diversity of plant and animal species, including the endemic Santa Rosa Island Fox and the Torrey Pine, one of the rarest pines in the world. In addition, Santa Rosa's beaches provide essential habitat for large colonies of seabirds, seals, and sea lions. Santa Rosa is also known for its archaeological and paleontological resources, including the most complete known specimen of pygmy mammoth, an extinct miniature mammoth that stood only four to six feet tall.

Though Santa Rosa was purchased by the government, its prior owners—the Vail and Vickers family—were allowed to continue occupying the island for 25 years as part of the purchase agreement. Since the families operated a trophy hunting business on the

island, the park was forced to close more than 90% of the island to the public for up to five months each year. The closure also hindered scientific research on the island.

Santa Rosa Island is now a fully protected part of this national park and open to the public year-round.

Concerned about the impacts on the island's natural resources by the non-native animals—including deer, elk, and cattle—NPCA filed a lawsuit with help from the Environmental Defense Center in 1996 to protect stream quality and endangered plants. The lawsuit settlement stated that the Vail and Vickers would have to remove their deer and elk herd by the end of 2011.

Unfortunately, several ill-advised Congressional proposals for Santa Rosa surfaced a few years ago, threatening the park's long-term restoration goals. NPCA, along with Congresswoman Lois Capps and Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, successfully fought these proposals, including one to turn the island into a hunting preserve.

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Great Basin Astronomy Festival June 14–16, 2012



**Beneath this Great Basin sky, too, wondering comes easily,
and thoughts instinctively turn to one's place in the world,
and the world's place in the universe.**

— PAUL BOGARD, AUTHOR & KEYNOTE SPEAKER OF GREAT BASIN'S 2012 ASTRONOMY FESTIVAL

**SAVE
THE
DATE**

Great Basin National Park will host its annual and increasingly popular Astronomy Festival June 14-16, during a new-moon phase under skies noted to be the darkest and best for star gazing in the continental U.S. The three-day festival is chock-full of daytime activities, including Lehman Cave tours to experience total darkness, solar scope viewings, presentations on astronomy basics, lectures on more complex sciences, and a program where children earn Deep Space Certificates. As the sun sets, before the stars are clearly visible, the national park will feature special presentations, including a charming talent show staged by national park staff. Paul Bogard, author of a soon-to-be-released *The Geography of Night: Discovering Darkness in an Age of Light!*, returns to Great Basin as the festival's keynote speaker on the importance of night skies. For more information on this event, check out www.npca.org/greatbasinstars or call Lynn Davis in NPCA's Nevada Field Office: 702.281.7380.

Above: Great Basin's night sky ©NPS

Victory at Santa Rosa continued from cover

Late last year, the trophy hunting operation finally ended and public access was restored. The Park Service is now able to conduct scientific research and habitat restoration projects on Santa Rosa, and future plans include the possibility of a visitor center and enhanced overnight facilities.

NPCA thanks the Environmental Defense Center for its excellent legal counsel and partnership in this multi-year effort to restore this gem within our national park system. We encourage readers to visit Santa Rosa Island for a day or a multi-night trip and take advantage of this new opportunity to fully access and enjoy the Island's beauty and isolation.

Right: The Island fox [endangered species]. This subspecies occurs only on Santa Cruz Island, Channel Islands National Park, California. ©George H. H. Huey



Cadiz Valley continued from cover

Cadiz Inc. plans to pump an average of 50,000 acre feet per year of Mojave Desert groundwater for 50 years, with more intensive pumping in the beginning of the project and tapering off towards the end. During much of this time, the groundwater system will be in overdraft; more water will be pumped than will be recharged. This concerns NPCA, so we recently hired a hydrologist to independently evaluate the science behind these proposals. After reviewing the Draft Environmental Impact Report, the hydrologist characterized the project as "totally unsustainable." He said he had never seen such an aggressive water project in his career.

While the Cadiz Inc. claims that the recharge rate or the amount of water that replenishes groundwater in the Fenner and Orange Blossom Watersheds, is 32,500 acre feet per year, NPCA's initial hydrologic review indicates it is less than half that amount. An additional concern relating to the hydrology of this project is that the cone of depression, the area of groundwater affected by pumping, will continue to expand for fifty years after project pumping ceases, making it difficult, if not impossible, to assess and mitigate for unanticipated consequences on groundwater resources.

NPCA is also working with the UC Irvine Environmental Law Clinic to draft public comments and explore legal options for opposing the Cadiz Project. The clinic, under the direction of Dr. Michael Robinson-Dorn from the University of California at Irvine, enlists the help of advanced law students seeking to gain experience in the field of environmental law. "Providing law students the opportunity to team up with NPCA to protect precious desert resources is precisely the type of experiential, hands-on learning that is a hallmark of UC-Irvine's new law school," says Robinson-Dorn.

The clinic has been instrumental in providing research and expertise to NPCA—and in November and February, UC-Irvine's environmental law students toured Mojave National Preserve and Joshua Tree National Park with NPCA's California Desert Field Representative Seth Shteir. "I knew this case was important from a legal standpoint," says UC Irvine law student Brian Hardingham, "but after visiting the Mojave Desert and observing wildlife, I felt compelled to protect this area's fragile resources."