

YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY

SPRING.SUMMER 2020 :: VOLUME 11.ISSUE 01

INSIDE

Restoring Yosemite's Meadows

Protecting Pollinator Habitat

Finding Your Inner Naturalist

Nature Journaling 101



**YOSEMITE
CONSERVANCY**

Providing For Yosemite's Future

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OUR MISSION

Yosemite Conservancy inspires people to support projects and programs that preserve Yosemite and enrich the visitor experience.

PRESIDENT'S NOTE



In the months since we started working on this issue, daily life — from Yosemite to San Francisco and far beyond — has changed dramatically. With the uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, we're deeply grateful for the enduring support of our Conservancy community.

Yosemite closed to non-residents in March. Amid the sudden quiet, the park woke up from winter. Waterfalls filled with snowmelt and rain. Migratory songbirds returned from the south. Black bears rambled more openly than usual.

With our originally planned spring programs and events canceled, we've been working to bring Yosemite to you. Two stories in this issue feature members of our Yosemite-based team, Cory Goehring and Lora Spielman, who have been working with colleagues to create nature webinars, art tutorials and other resources to help you connect with the park from home.

Throughout this issue, you'll see how vital your gifts are in protecting Yosemite's ecosystems and inspiring new park stewards. While factors related to the ongoing coronavirus outbreak will affect some of our 2020 grants to the park, many donor-supported projects have moved forward this spring. Park experts are surveying cliffs for peregrine falcons, analyzing the health of Sierra forests, developing new exhibits and educational materials, and more.

And, as you'll read in this issue, projects you've made possible in recent years continue to make a difference. Thanks to you, native flowers are blooming into a refuge for pollinators in the Valley. Healthy habitat is flourishing in restored wetlands. Decades of data from Yosemite-based songbird studies are fostering new insights into avian populations.

The extent to which our projects and programs will be impacted by the pandemic remains to be seen, but we know that our strong partnership with the park and your steadfast support will ensure that essential research, restoration, education and other work will continue.

We remain profoundly thankful for your generosity, and we hope these pages prompt happy memories of your own park experiences and inspire you to stay connected to Yosemite and to nature, no matter where you are.

Frank Dean

Frank Dean, President

COVER PHOTO Pink milkweed blooms in a Yosemite Valley meadow. By supporting efforts to plant milkweed and other native flowers in the Valley, Conservancy donors are helping to improve habitat for key pollinator species. Learn more on p. 8.



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Mending MEADOWS

Saving Yosemite's vital wetlands, with your support

From Glacier Point, the meadows on the floor of Yosemite Valley look like simple green patches. If you step onto the Valley's meadow boardwalks, a more complex scene emerges. Red-winged blackbirds trill; water ripples in a frog's wake; a mouse scoots under a mosaic of plants — sedges, showy milkweed, cow parsnip — stretching up from damp soil. ➤



Why meadows matter

What makes meadows such biodiversity magnets? The secret's in layers of earth functioning as a natural sponge to soak up water and nutrients.

Sierra Nevada meadows are often wetlands — and *wet* is the key element. As they store, filter and slowly release water, Yosemite's more than 3,000 meadows provide hydration, food and shelter for aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, and they help prevent flooding and erosion.

Yosemite's meadows offer significant ecological value — and captivating views — but they're vulnerable to impacts from human activity. Roads and culverts disrupt water flow. Hikers inadvertently squash plants or transport invasive seeds. Climate change threatens the meadows' main water source, the Sierra snowpack.

In Yosemite, the specifics of saving meadows vary, but they often involve collaboration among biologists, botanists, archeologists, hydrologists and others; removing “stressors,” such as infrastructure; and planting native vegetation.

Addressing historical impacts

In the early 2000s, a donor-funded project to restore **Cook's Meadow** focused on the lingering effects of 19th-century agricultural endeavors, when Valley wetlands were drained for grazing and farming. Park crews removed a roadbed, ditches and invasive plants; put in boardwalks and educational exhibits; and replanted the meadow with native vegetation.

Several years later, attention turned to **Wawona Meadow**, where crews filled in sections of a wetland-draining, 1,600-meter-long ditch, dug by the Civilian Conservation



Minimize Your Meadow Impact

Yosemite's meadow restoration crews work hard to follow Leave No Trace principles as they rehabilitate wetland ecosystems. Follow their lead, while you're hiking in and around meadows:

- Stay on formal trails.
- Don't pick flowers or other plants.
- Brush off your boots to avoid transplanting invasive seeds.
- Pitch tents on dry, durable surfaces, not on wet meadows.
- Give wildlife plenty of space.
- Pack out food scraps and other litter.

Corps in 1936; soon, water was flowing in areas that had been dry for decades. At **Crane Flat**, our volunteers helped park crews remove asphalt and other infrastructure — remnants of a logging railroad — to reconnect a fragmented meadow ecosystem.

Protecting habitat

Saving meadows often preserves critical habitat for at-risk plants and animals. In recent years, our donors have propelled efforts to ensure the long-term health of **Ackerson Meadow**, which supports western pond turtles, rare monkeyflowers and other vulnerable species, and of wetlands near **Lower River Amphitheater**, in eastern Yosemite Valley, a prime location for threatened California red-legged frogs.

Meadow restoration can protect cultural resources, too: At **Royal Arches Meadow**, donors funded an effort to save the Valley's only source of tule, a traditional basket-weaving material, by removing invasive Himalayan blackberry, conifers and abandoned infrastructure.

Improving hiking experiences

Many donor-funded meadow projects have focused on helping people experience healthy ecosystems safely and sustainably. Sometimes, that means adding boardwalks, so hikers can wander across wetlands without trampling plants. Look for donor-funded boardwalks in the Valley's Stoneman, Cook's and Sentinel meadows, and, soon, near Lower River Amphitheater.

Keeping habitats and hikers happy can also require relocating trails. With donors' support, crews have successfully moved trails out of wetlands at Lukens Lake, Upper Cathedral Meadow and Lyell Canyon. Next up: shifting a deeply rutted stretch of the popular John Muir Trail/Pacific Crest Trail out of **Ranger Meadow**, near the Tuolumne Ranger Station, and onto drier ground.

A clear outcome of these and other donor-funded meadow restoration projects is visible all over Yosemite: healthy, biodiverse wetland ecosystems. The next time you're enjoying the view at a restored meadow, see how many plants and animals you can spot, picture snowmelt soaking soil and anchoring a complex web of life, and remember that by supporting restoration work, you help ensure these ecological superstars are as resilient as possible. ■



ABOVE Conservancy volunteers work on a restoration project in Tuolumne Meadows. Our volunteers play an essential role in protecting meadows throughout Yosemite, by removing invasive plants, eliminating informal "social" trails that disrupt wetlands, planting native flora and more.



ABOVE A donor-supported project rerouted a deeply rutted section of trail to save a meadow near Cathedral Peak. Similar Conservancy-funded efforts have relocated trails and restored habitat in other popular hiking areas, such as Lyell Canyon.



BLOOMS FOR BUTTERFLIES

An oasis for monarchs and other pollinators takes root in the Valley

On August 4, 2016, a few dozen students sporting neon vests and gardening gloves gathered in Cook's Meadow. Rangers explained the goal for the "Youth in Yosemite" stewardship day: improving habitat for pollinators, such as bees and butterflies.

Pollinators are an essential component of any ecosystem. They fuel plant reproduction and provide sustenance for other animals. Nurturing native plants in the Valley, the students learned, could help struggling pollinators — especially monarch butterflies.

Equipped with shovels and seedlings, the students dug in, carefully planting milkweed and yarrow, wrestling out armfuls of invasive mullein and bull thistle, and creating a pollinator-friendly haven, one plant at a time.

On that summer day in 2016, the most recent count of monarchs west of the Rockies had put the population at about 293,000 butterflies; by late 2019, it was below 30,000 — a decline of more than 99% from the 1980s, according to the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. Scientists point to habitat loss, spurred by drought, development and other factors, as a key driver in that decline.

ABOVE Milkweed is the only "host plant" for monarch butterflies, whose caterpillars rely on the leaves as their sole food source. With support from Conservancy donors, park botanists and volunteers have been planting native milkweed in Yosemite Valley to ensure monarchs have access to this vital floral resource when they arrive in the park.

Western monarchs winter along the Pacific coastline, breed in inland meadows, and rely on a single plant, milkweed, to support their young. As a stopping point on the monarchs' annual migration, Yosemite Valley's protected meadows could be a refuge for the imperiled butterflies.

Not long ago, some of the park's prime pollinator areas had become "fly-over territory," devoid of shelter and nutrition, park botanist David Campbell explains. Invasive plants, such as cheatgrass and Himalayan blackberry, had displaced milkweed and other native vegetation. With your support, the park is reviving pollinator habitat in the Valley, including in Ahwahnee and Cook's meadows, near the Rangers' Club, and at Cascade Falls.

"We can make sure that, when a monarch makes it to Yosemite, it finds a safe haven," Campbell says. "We can restore their habitat, pulling one weed at a time and planting one native flower at a time."

One plant at a time adds up. Since 2016, more than 2,000 volunteers, including our work week crews and hundreds of students from NatureBridge and Conservancy-funded youth programs, have helped sow 16 acres of native flowers, treat 40 acres of invasive plants, and collect hundreds of thousands of seeds to grow in a local nursery.

"In every seed, there is hope."

The results are visible. Milkweed, lessingia, goldenrod and other native flowers blooming in restored areas are attracting a variety of pollinators, including bees, wasps and skippers — and monarchs.

There are far fewer of the butterflies in the park than in years past, but seeing the regal orange insects gives Campbell hope. With your support, he and others are ensuring monarchs can safely rest, eat and lay eggs in the Valley, which could mean more butterflies born in Yosemite, adding to the overall population. Each monarch, and each milkweed, can make a difference.

As one student intern wrote in 2016, as he reflected on carefully teasing milkweed seeds from their fluffy pods: "In every seed, there is hope."

Thanks to your support, hope for monarchs and other pollinators, and for the ecosystems they help anchor, dwells in each seed collected, in each flower planted and in every inch of meadow restored. And if you find yourself in the Valley on some future summer day, you might just see that hope taking shape, in pink milkweed petals, in a striped caterpillar or in orange butterflies winging west. ■



LEFT Conservancy volunteers work with park botanist David Campbell to improve pollinator habitat in the Valley in October 2019. Transforming habitat isn't the only goal of this Conservancy-supported project: Campbell and fellow project leaders have also worked to educate people about the pollinators' plight, by teaching volunteers about the context and value of their work, and by delivering "impromptu ranger talks" on monarch migration and meadow restoration, as curious visitors pause to observe. **RIGHT** Two middle school students from Parks in Focus, a donor-supported youth program, plant native flowers in Yosemite Valley during a special stewardship day in August 2016.

Studying Songbirds

In 1990, Yosemite opened its first MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) research station, in Hodgdon Meadows. Three decades later, there are seven MAPS stations in the park, and hundreds across the U.S. and Canada.

Yosemite's MAPS program, which Conservancy donors have supported since 2008, has captured data on tens of thousands of individual birds, resulting in an immense trove of information on avian biodiversity, migration and breeding, and on how birds respond to changing environmental conditions.

We're sharing some snapshots from Yosemite's MAPS stations — and gratitude to our donors for continuing to support this critical research.



Meet some of the birds that have stopped by Yosemite's MAPS stations in recent years: yosemite.org/maps.

ACKERSON MEADOW

Researchers have observed diverse avian species at Ackerson Meadow, home to Yosemite's newest MAPS station. Studying the meadow's birds will inform efforts to restore this ecosystem, which became part of the park in 2016 and could provide vital habitat for willow flycatchers, a state-endangered species once thought to have vanished from the Yosemite area.



INSPIRING YOUNG SCIENTISTS

Hundreds of young students have learned about bird research during educational visits to Yosemite MAPS stations, and dozens of early-career biologists have gained valuable experience while working as interns and field technicians.



ADVANCING RESEARCH

Yosemite's MAPS stations have contributed to advances in avian research. Since 2014, park scientists have used GPS-equipped "backpacks" to track the migration routes of black-headed grosbeaks. Other recent research used a quarter-century of Yosemite data to study how birds' breeding habits shift in response to rising temperatures and decreasing snowfall.



COLLECTING DATA

At the seasonal bird-banding stations, researchers follow strict MAPS protocols, as they set up mesh mist nets; document each captured bird's species, sex and age; and attach tiny aluminum identification bands to birds' legs.



MORE ABOUT MAPS

The Institute for Bird Populations initiated the MAPS program in 1989 to monitor avian demographics and inform conservation. From Yosemite to Nantucket, all MAPS researchers follow the same procedures to capture and record data on birds across the continent. In concert with its sister program, MoSI (*Monitoreo de Supervivencia Invernal*), which operates in the southern U.S. and Latin America, MAPS helps us understand how bird populations and their habitats are changing.

STORY FROM THE FIELD:

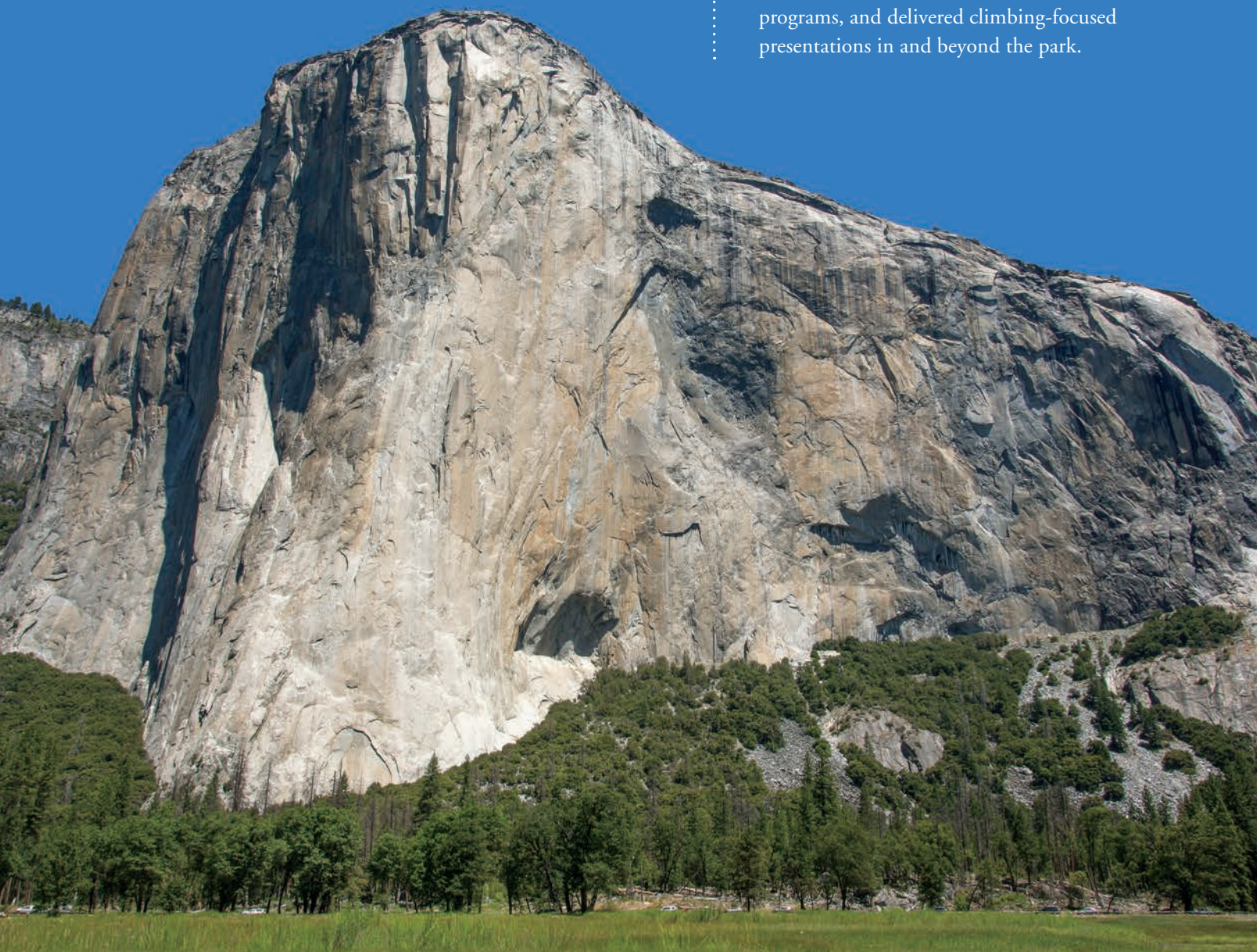
Exploring a Vertical Ecosystem

Climbing El Capitan to support
science and stewardship

Yosemite's cliffs might not seem particularly hospitable, but the vertical ecosystem supports plenty of life:

lichen, tree frogs, peregrine falcons and more. Climbers see that world up-close — and last year, Matthew Bernstein got to help study and protect it.

Bernstein was one of seven climbers who spent six months volunteering through the Conservancy-supported Yosemite Climbing Stewardship program in 2019. As a Climber Steward, he improved approach trails for climbing routes, helped lead Ask a Climber programs, and delivered climbing-focused presentations in and beyond the park.



He also spent a lot of time on the walls — including a memorable four October days on El Capitan’s Triple Direct route, when he joined climbing ranger Brandon Adams and biologist Nicky Bunn to pitch in on three projects focused on studying and stewarding the vertical wilderness. Their goals: Survey for bats, collect seeds and clean up the route.

Each day, the trio searched for signs of bats along the route. They stopped climbing in the early afternoons, so Bunn could record ultrasonic calls from bats emerging at dusk. By gathering data on bat species that roost on El Capitan, they were contributing to a Conservancy-supported study of Yosemite’s flying mammals. Results will help the park identify and manage areas that might be susceptible to the westward spread of white nose syndrome, a deadly fungal disease that disrupts bats’ hibernation cycles.

As they climbed, the team also collected seeds to support UC Merced-based research on monkeyflowers in steep environments. Bernstein, who had the chance to collect and label a batch of seeds high on the route, appreciated being able to contribute to the research, even without a background in botany: “It felt good to use the climbing skills I’ve developed on El Capitan to help with research specific to plants growing on the formation.”

When not gathering scientific data, Bernstein, Bunn and Adams turned their attention to another element of vertical ecosystems: the traces people leave on the walls. They cleaned up litter and removed rusty climbing hardware, including about 20 pitons. Many climbers clip into old pitons without realizing how precarious they are, Bernstein says; he removed some that likely would have crumbled under the weight of a falling climber.

The Triple Direct climb was Bernstein’s last patrol as a Climber Steward. “Cleaning up the face I love the most in the park seemed like a suitable ending to one of the most rewarding six-month stretches of my life,” he says.

After four days, 3,000 feet and three unique projects, he ended that climb with a sense of the role he and other climbers can play, not just in keeping the walls clean, but also in contributing to scientific research to better understand and protect the vertical wild.

Bernstein and the team worked on a wall, but you don’t have to be a climber, biologist or ranger to play a part in protecting ecosystems, in Yosemite or elsewhere. Strive to limit your impact on the natural world — and, when you can, leave it cleaner than you found it. ■

OPPOSITE Yosemite’s famous granite walls beckon adventurous climbers — and support a vibrant vertical ecosystem. In October 2019, Climber Steward Matthew Bernstein spent four days on El Capitan surveying for bats, collecting monkeyflower seeds and removing abandoned climbing gear.



ABOVE Biologist Nicky Bunn uses special recording equipment to capture and analyze bat calls, as flying mammals emerged from their rocky roosts at dusk.



ABOVE Bunn collects monkeyflower seeds during the October 2019 El Capitan climb. The team found seed pods on ledges and in cracks at all elevations on the cliff. (LNT tip: Unless you have a special research permit, leave seeds where you find them — on big walls or elsewhere!)



ABOVE With support from our donors, climbing rangers and researchers surveyed 20 routes for signs of bats in 2019. In addition to recording calls, they used endoscopes to peer inside rocky nooks — one endoscope survey found this roosting Mexican free-tailed bat.

“These programs give the next generation a seat at the decision-making table for public lands.”

— MIRELLA GUTIERREZ
Yosemite Interpretive Park Guide

Q&A

WITH
YOSEMITE
INSIDERS



ABOVE Socorro Cardoso (top) and Mirella Gutierrez (bottom), graduates of the Conservancy-supported Yosemite Leadership Program, have both pursued careers in the National Park Service. “I would not be where I am today without these programs,” Gutierrez says.

As undergraduates at University of California, Merced, Mirella Gutierrez and Socorro Cardoso participated in interconnected programs our donors support: the Yosemite Leadership Program (YLP) two-year course and 12-week internship, and the on-campus, student-run Wilderness Education Center (WEC). Now, like many YLP and WEC alums, they’re pursuing careers in public lands.

After spending two summers working with Parks in Focus, a Conservancy-supported youth program, Gutierrez became a Yosemite interpretive park guide in 2019. Last year, Cardoso helped launch the donor-supported *iAventura Yosemite!* program; she then became a park ranger and Marin Headlands education program manager at Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Q :: How has your YLP/WEC experience shaped your career?

Cardoso :: Not long ago, I didn’t know what a national park was. YLP and WEC not only exposed me to national

parks, but also gave me mentorship and tangible tools that help me inspire low-income students and families to establish sustainable relationships with parks and natural lands.

Gutierrez :: As a child, I thought I would be a teacher or a lawyer. I had plenty of outdoor experiences, but park ranger was not a job I knew existed. The rangers I met through YLP made me feel like I mattered to national parks, which helped me build a strong sense of stewardship. I wanted to be that connection for others.

Q :: You both studied natural sciences at UC Merced. How have your park experiences affected your understanding of the natural world?

Cardoso :: Working in parks gives me the chance to turn abstract ecological concepts into tangible ones. The biologist in me is curious to observe how biotic and abiotic factors maintain ecosystems; the educator in me is ready to show others how everything in an ecosystem is connected. My park experiences have also shown me the significance of acknowledging the indigenous people who shared these ecosystems.


Gutierrez :: I’ve learned so much about how park resources interact and how we are managing them. It can be hard to see how heavy our impact is on the world. But the more I’ve learned about Yosemite, the less I feel that weight. I’ve seen historic photos of domestic sheep in park meadows, and I am amazed to see the same meadows today, lush with grasses,

birds and butterflies. Sometimes we forget how robust ecosystems are. I have the privilege of working with those systems in Yosemite and educating others about them.

Q :: Why are educational programs, such as YLP, important for parks?

Cardoso :: Programs like YLP, WEC and *¡Aventura Yosemite!* uplift people of all ages, ethnicities and abilities to take ownership of a park's natural and cultural heritage. They helped me discover my own sense of environmental stewardship — and my career.

Gutierrez :: These programs give the next generation a seat at the decision-making table for public lands. YLP pulls together diverse individuals with a shared stewardship mission; that diverse mentality is critical for managing parks and other places. YLP has given me and others the opportunity to have our voices heard and prepare for careers in the parks. ■

 This Q&A has been edited for length and clarity. Read an extended version online: [yosemite.org](https://www.yosemite.org).



ABOVE Before joining the NPS, Gutierrez led photography-oriented camping trips for middle school students in Yosemite through the donor-supported Parks in Focus program.



Explore a new perspective.

Delight in a fresh narrative.

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Yosemite Conservancy Publications, 2020

Browse our books at shop.yosemite.org

New Grants for 2020

TRAIL REHABILITATION & ACCESS

CCC: Restore Merced Watershed Trails	\$200,000
CCC: Restore Tuolumne Watershed Trails	\$200,000
Restore Legendary Valley Trails	\$200,000

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Keep Bears Wild: Campground Food Lockers	\$80,000
Protect Endangered Bighorn Sheep	\$55,300
Protect Peregrine Falcons	\$40,000
Save At-Risk Amphibians	\$404,911
Save the Sierra Nevada Red Fox	\$100,000
Survey Mountain Lion Populations	\$150,000

HABITAT RESTORATION

Keep It Wild: Restore Yosemite's Wilderness	\$150,000
Protect Monarch Habitat	\$89,900
Reroute and Restore: Tuolumne's Ranger Meadow	\$32,580
Restore Yosemite Valley Wetlands	\$73,711

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Analyze Forest Health With Lidar Data	\$75,000
Study Songbirds in Yosemite	\$60,000
Wilderness Research: PCT and JMT	\$78,600

CULTURAL & HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Bridgeport Indian Colony:	
Document Tribal History in Yosemite	\$20,020
Celebrate Climbing History: New Exhibits	\$50,000
Explore Gender Equity in the Park's Past and Present	\$85,000
Keep Horses at the Heart of Yosemite	\$40,000
Research Yosemite's African American History	\$63,424
Restore Historic Curry Orchard	\$60,683
Restore the Historic Rangers' Club Fireplace	\$23,901

VISITOR SERVICES & EDUCATION

Adventure Risk Challenge:	
Empower Future Stewards	\$80,000
Ask a Climber	\$59,000
Big Oak Flat Entrance: Design Visitor Exhibits	\$125,000
Create a Modern Trip-Planning Video	\$22,689
Develop Pop-Up Visitor Education Programs	\$30,000
Expand Yosemite's Multilingual Media	\$73,368
Junior Ranger Programs	\$125,000
Mariposa Grove Road: Install Automated Gates	\$50,600
Parks in Focus®:	
Inspire Youth Through Photography	\$23,946
Parsons Memorial Lodge Summer Series	\$20,000
Preventive Search and Rescue: Keep Visitors Safe	\$51,500
Valley Wilderness Center: Modernize Exhibits	\$59,500
WildLink: Connecting Teens to Nature	\$30,000
Yosemite Climbing Stewardship Program	\$100,000
Yosemite Falls Parking: Improve Wayfinding	\$48,500
Yosemite Leadership Program and Wilderness Education Center	\$179,675
Yosemite Valley Bike Share	\$30,000
Yosemite Village: Planning for the Future	\$50,000

TOTAL **\$3,491,808**

Green represents Youth in Yosemite Programs.

TRAIL TALK

PRESERVING ECOSYSTEMS THROUGH
HIKER RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

By studying how people use the John Muir Trail within and beyond Yosemite's boundaries, researchers aim to gather valuable information to shape strategies for managing and protecting this popular route and the ecosystems it traverses.

Yosemite's trails offer access to river canyons, montane meadows and windswept peaks. If those trails could talk, they might describe the beauty and biodiversity around them, or share insights about the thousands of hikers who tread them each year — and offer tips for how people can minimize their ecological footprints.

Trails can't speak for themselves, but two current donor-funded efforts put them at the center of conversations about protecting ecosystems.

With your support, researchers plan to study hiking and backpacking activity on the increasingly popular John Muir



Trails can't speak for themselves, but two current donor-funded efforts put them at the center of conversations about protecting ecosystems.



PHOTOS: © YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY/KEITH WALKLET.

and Pacific Crest trails. By surveying hikers and modeling travel patterns, they'll gather data to help the park manage the trails and surrounding habitat.

Meanwhile, at the Valley Wilderness Center, your gifts will help the park replace outdated exhibits with fresh materials that emphasize stewardship and safety, and that encourage visitors to enjoy and respect nature, whether they're taking a quick stroll or a 211-mile through-hike.

By funding research and education, you're ensuring the resilience of Yosemite's ecosystems, from the Valley to the high country — and of beloved trails that offer access to those remarkable places. ■



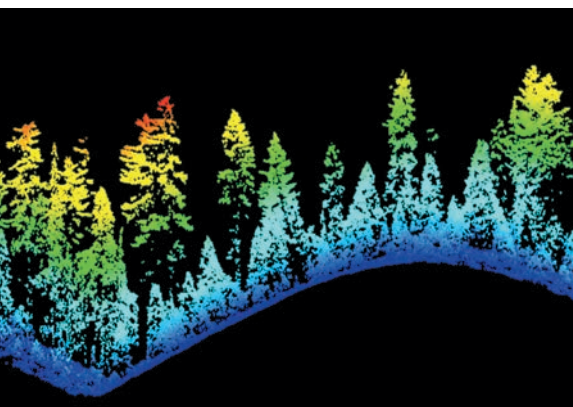
ABOVE New exhibits at the Yosemite Wilderness Center, in Yosemite Valley, will encourage people to practice good stewardship wherever they go in the park, including by using proper food storage techniques.



MAPPING YOSEMITE'S FORESTS

LIDAR HELPS SCIENTISTS STUDY SIERRA

TREESCAPES FROM ABOVE



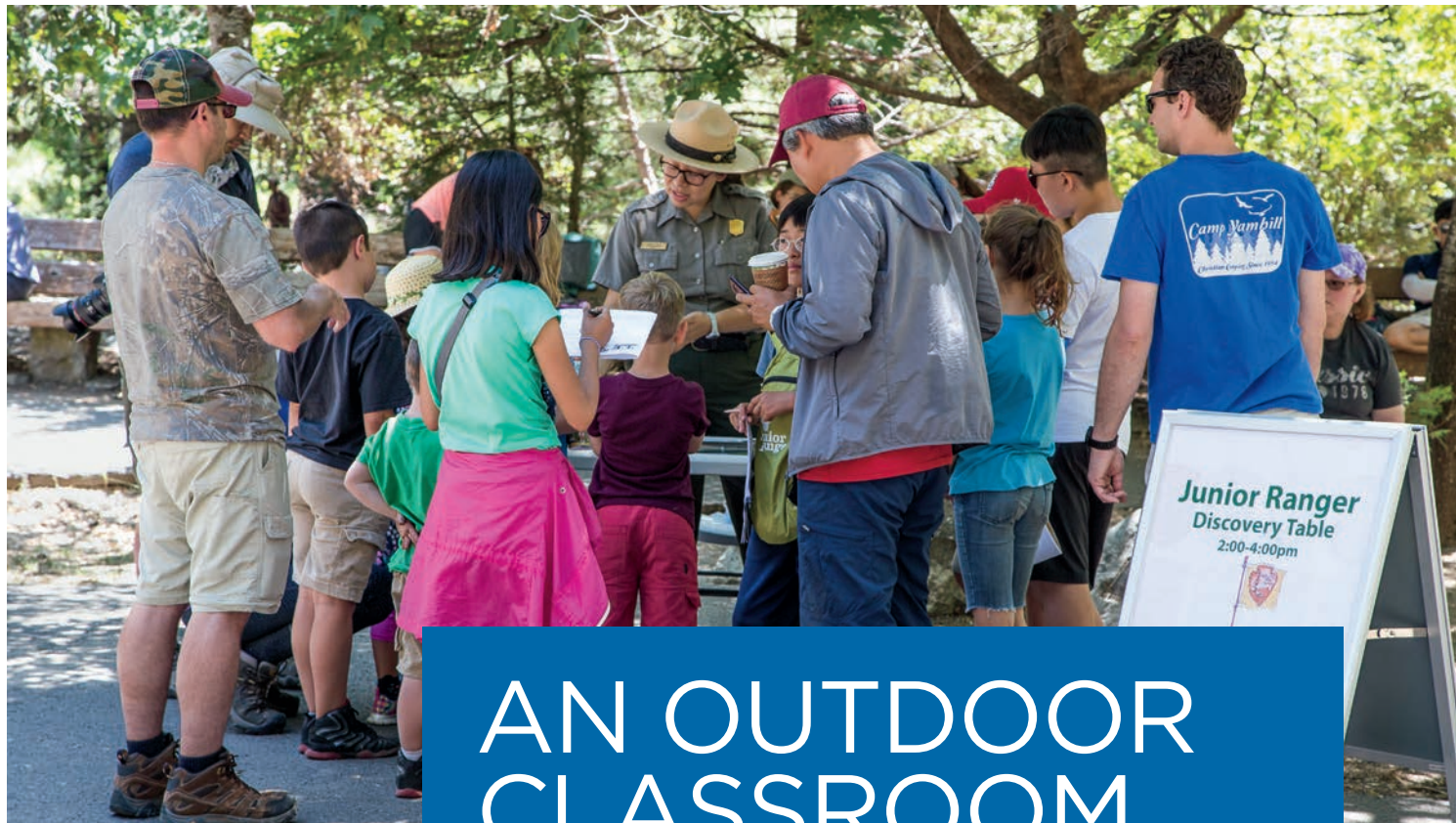
ABOVE Data from airborne lidar devices can be used to create detailed forest visualizations, as in this sample image. Scientists in Yosemite and across the Sierra are using lidar data to study forest structure and health.

ABOVE How have wildfires affected Yosemite's forests? Which areas might offer high-quality habitat for rare wildlife? With your support, researchers are using laser-based technology to learn more about the park's trees.

In Yosemite, it's easy, as the saying goes, not to see the forest for the trees — especially from the ground. When you're surrounded by massive sequoias and lofty pines, how can you see the big arboreal picture?

With your support, researchers plan to take a fresh look at park forests — from above, thanks to data from airborne lidar devices. Lidar technology uses lasers to measure the distance to an object, such as a tree. Scientists can use the measurements to create 3D forest maps; spot hazardous dead snags; identify areas that could benefit from prescribed burns; find suitable habitat for owls, fishers and other wildlife; and more.

Results from the Yosemite-focused lidar analysis will contribute to a large-scale effort to assess forest health in the Southern Sierra, ultimately helping the National Park Service and other agencies manage, restore and protect forest ecosystems. ■



AN OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAMS INSPIRE NEW STEWARDS THROUGH FUN, HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES

Last July, a young visitor addressed a Conservancy employee who was enjoying a snack by the Valley Visitor Center: “I see that you are eating an apple. I am completing my Junior Ranger handbook!”

“How cool!” she replied. “What are you learning?”

“Learning?” the little boy scoffed. “I’m not learning!”

As far as he was concerned, the self-guided handbook didn’t constitute learning. It was summer, after all, and he was having fun.

Of course, he *was* learning, about public lands, plants and animals, and stewardship. With your support, Yosemite’s Junior Ranger programs engage — and educate — young visitors through interactive activities. Kids examine pinecones during ranger talks, watch wildlife-themed puppet shows and sketch ecological observations. To reach even more children and families, rangers plan to add Spanish-language activities.

Every year, tens of thousands of children earn Yosemite Junior Ranger badges. They might not realize they’re learning, but they leave the park with a greater appreciation for nature and their role in protecting it. ■



TOP Since our donors started supporting the Junior Ranger program in 2008, it has expanded to new locations and added activities, such as spring break events and “Discovery Tables.” **BOTTOM** After completing Junior Ranger activities and taking a pledge to learn about and protect parks, young visitors get their own wooden badges. *This year, Yosemite rangers have been leading special programs for kids on social media. Follow @yosemitekids to learn more!*

NATURAL CONNECTIONS

OUR LEAD NATURALIST SHARES INSIGHTS FROM
HIS YEARS OF EXPLORING YOSEMITE'S ECOSYSTEMS



LEFT Cory Goehring, Yosemite Conservancy's lead naturalist, has spent a decade getting to know the park. Joining the Conservancy team is "the best way I can think to help share and protect the place that I love so dearly," he says.


MIDDLE Goehring and our other naturalists draw on their extensive Yosemite knowledge to help people learn about the park's diverse ecosystems. This spring, he's been creating new online resources to help you stay connected to Yosemite from afar.



Cory Goehring has spent more than a decade immersed in Yosemite's natural wonders. As our new lead naturalist, he's looking forward to helping others experience Sierra ecosystems through Outdoor and Custom Adventures.

Ecologically speaking, Yosemite is "in a class of its own," Goehring says, with stunning landscapes that support more than 1,400 species. On a Conservancy adventure, you could spend hours examining a meadow, hike through some of the park's five life zones, or explore "sky islands."

During his years in the park, Goehring has gotten to know the park's seasonal "moods." Spring, for example, "is Yosemite taking a deep



“Spending time outside is a great way to rekindle our deep-rooted connection to the natural world.”

— CORY GOEHRING
Lead Naturalist

PHOTOS: (LEFT) © COURTESY OF CORY GOEHRING. (MIDDLE) © FORTLOINTAIN. (RIGHT TOP TO BOTTOM) © YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY. © KRISTIN ANDERSON.

inhale and exhaling with life,” he says. Waterfalls fill with snowmelt, migratory birds return, and Sierra chorus frogs perform nightly symphonies.

In any season, opportunities to observe park ecosystems abound. But, Goehring says, “The more you know, the more you see.” On a Conservancy adventure, with a Yosemite-savvy naturalist by your side, you can ask questions that deepen your understanding of your surroundings.

Goehring has found his “sense of place” in Yosemite. Now, he’s excited to inspire others to find a similar connection, as they learn about and protect the park.

“We all have the potential to connect with the natural world,” he says. “We just need to discover the thing that brings out the naturalist in us.” ■



Stay in touch with Yosemite from wherever you are!

Goehring and his Conservancy colleagues are creating special content to help you deepen your connection to the park from home.

Visit [yosemite.org](https://www.yosemite.org) and follow us on social media to find short videos about Yosemite animals and plants (including a look at **colorful spring flowers**), park-themed art projects, educational activities for kids, and much more.

We’ll be sharing new webinars, notes from the natural world, inspiring Sierra sights and sounds, and other resources regularly this summer — check back often!



Facebook & Instagram:

[@yosemiteconservancy](https://www.facebook.com/yosemiteconservancy)

Twitter: [@yoseconservancy](https://twitter.com/yoseconservancy)





PHOTOS (TOP) © LORA SPIELMAN (BOTTOM) © YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY/LORA SPIELMAN

NATURE JOURNALING 101

TIPS FOR CREATIVELY CONNECTING WITH NATURE



Park Art, From Anywhere

We hope to welcome you for a future art class in the park. In the meantime, find inspiration in the natural world where you are — and join us online to make park art from home.

Visit [yosemite.org](https://www.yosemite.org) and follow us on social media to find online watercolor workshops, fun craft projects, coloring pages and other resources.

ABOVE With a few simple supplies, you can capture your outdoor observations in a nature journal. (Pictured: a scene Spielman painted on a 2019 backpacking trip). **LEFT** Visitors learn about nature journaling during a Conservancy workshop in 2019.

Field guides and binoculars might be the standard tools for ecological exploration, but Lora Spielman, our Happy Isles-based art center coordinator, adds another item to the list: nature journals.

Whether you're soaking up fresh air in your back yard, out for a quick day hike or embarking on a long backpacking trek, keeping a nature journal can help you tune in to your surroundings in a deeper way. Spielman offers a few tips for getting started:

- 1. Gather supplies:** a sketchbook, pencils and pens. For more flair, add colored pencils or a watercolor kit.
- 2. Pick a place to sketch.** Write the date, location, weather and sounds. Do you hear water, birds or wind?
- 3. Draw or paint whatever grabs your attention** — deer grazing, a rocky ridge, a lone flower — and jot down observations or thoughts.
- 4. Leave No Trace.** Pack out pencil shavings and other litter, including any paint-contaminated water.

Making a nature journal is a great way to tap into your creativity and capture your observations — and, as you'll read at left, our art team is working on lots of other ideas to help you connect with nature through art, from anywhere. ■



Protecting Her Favorite Place

Why donor and volunteer Barb Coulter gives back

Barb Coulter remembers when she knew Yosemite was her “favorite place on Earth.” In August 1997, she had just finished her first high country hike: the High Sierra Camp loop. She called a friend to describe the experience, and she choked up.

“Yosemite grabbed me,” she says. “Few places have given me that feeling.”

Coulter has embraced her favorite place over the years, whether hiking up Mt. Hoffmann, relaxing at Housekeeping Camp, or dedicating time and resources to protect Yosemite. Since 2004, she has been a steadfast volunteer in our San Francisco office; she also supports the Conservancy as a monthly and legacy donor, a Yosemite license-plate owner, and an enthusiastic champion who encourages others to get involved.

“I’m doing as much as I can to support something that means so much to me,” Coulter says. She appreciates seeing the impact of her gifts, including at Tenaya Lake and Mariposa Grove, and in ongoing work at Bridalveil Fall. She hopes such tangible outcomes will inspire others.

Her support — and yours — ensures Yosemite remains, as she says, “a natural masterpiece” for future generations. ■



TOP & BOTTOM Dedicated Yosemite Conservancy donor and volunteer Barb Coulter has logged countless miles while exploring the park she loves, both on her own and during Conservancy events. “Yosemite is a natural masterpiece,” she says, “where everything came together at the right place and the right time.”

PHOTOS: (TOP) © BEN ODOM. (BOTTOM) © YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY/KIM COULL



ABOVE After working with Yosemite Conservancy to shape a new “Animals of the Sierra Nevada” funding initiative, The Dorrance Family Foundation made a generous grant to support efforts to study and protect native amphibians in the park. One of the species at the heart of the work: threatened California red-legged frogs, seen here after being released in Yosemite Valley in 2019.

PHOTOS: (RED-LEGGED FROGS) © YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY/AL GOLUB.

Saving Sierra Amphibians

A foundation’s funding initiative supports critical wildlife work

On their inaugural Yosemite trip in October 2019, siblings Bennett Dorrance Jr. and Ashley Kaplan, like most visitors, were impressed by the park’s size and beauty. Perhaps unlike most visitors, they also found inspiration in some of Yosemite’s smallest residents: frogs and toads.

The siblings were in Yosemite on behalf of The Dorrance Family Foundation. They serve as board members — along with their parents, the foundation’s founders — and are spearheading a funding initiative focused on protecting at-risk Sierra Nevada animals.

An appreciation for the natural world runs in the family, Bennett



LEFT In October 2019, representatives from The Dorrance Family Foundation — siblings Bennett Dorrance Jr. and Ashley Kaplan (at left), who serve on the foundation's board, and Executive Director Carrie Ostroski (at right) — joined park scientists to learn about projects focused on saving Sierra amphibians. "Getting to see the frogs up close in Yosemite and seeing how the biologists are doing such amazing work to support them — that was really inspiring," Bennett said.

PHOTO: © YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY/MARION INGERSOLL



RIGHT The Dorrance Family Foundation's amphibian-focused grant will help biologists protect the park's population of endangered Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frogs, including by testing for chytrid fungus and moving frogs to suitable high country lake habitat. PHOTO: © COURTESY OF NPS.

says, and his parents' longstanding commitment to conservation is etched into the foundation's priorities. He sees the "Animals of the Sierra Nevada" initiative as an intergenerational endeavor.

"We wanted the entire family to be involved," Bennett says, adding that they chose wildlife as a theme that would engage the youngest family members — his and Ashley's respective children. They also embraced the opportunity to help "keystone species," which are essential to healthy ecosystems.

To start, they're concentrating on amphibians, an easy-to-overlook linchpin of Sierra ecosystems. In addition to supporting amphibian conservation in the southern Sierra and foothills, the foundation made a generous grant to study and protect three at-risk species in Yosemite: California red-legged

frogs, Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frogs and Yosemite toads.

During their 2019 Yosemite visit, Bennett and Ashley met with biologists and observed amphibian work firsthand. They experienced the interconnected landscape that supports the Sierra's native frogs and toads, and they learned how agencies are working together to protect animals and ecosystems.

Long term, Bennett says, they hope to leverage the funding initiative to propel collaboration and education: "We want to bring more awareness to the idea that all these ecosystems, from the Sierra Nevada to the California coast, are interconnected, and that we have to approach conservation with a holistic view." ■

Inspired by The Dorrance Family Foundation story?
Give today at yosemite.org.

Donor Events and Activities

A GENEROUS COMMUNITY

Yosemite Conservancy donors receive invitations throughout the year to join National Park Service leaders and expert naturalists on project tours, hikes and site visits; at private receptions and dinners; and at other special events inside and outside the park. These gatherings provide opportunities for donors and friends of the Conservancy to connect with other like-minded individuals who are passionate about making a difference in Yosemite.

For more information about our donor events and activities, please contact Alison Dombroski at adombroski@yosemite.org or 415-434-8446 x333.

Monterey



A reception at the Monterey Museum of Art, featuring David Hockney's Yosemite exhibit.

Wine Country



John Muir Heritage Society donors enjoy an afternoon with leaders from the Conservancy and Yosemite National Park.

Tuolumne Meadows



John Muir Heritage Society donors on a bridge over the Tuolumne River during a guided walk with naturalist Pete Devine.

Tuolumne Meadows



Donors with naturalist Dan Webster during a hike to Gaylor Lakes.

Fall Colors



Trey, Gisele and Lawson Rankin

Fall Colors



John Campbell, Ann Berg, Deputy Superintendent Teri Austin and Ron Berg

YOSEMITE THROUGH YOUR LENS

PHOTOS FROM OUR YOSEMITE COMMUNITY



01 Liberty Cap and Nevada Fall

PHOTO BY © JOSH HIRSCH.

02 Rockfringe Willowherb

PHOTO BY © ANTHONY SCOTT.

03 Gaylor Lakes Nap

PHOTO BY © TOM REINART.

04 Four-Legged Rangers

PHOTO BY © DANA ANDRESEN.

Show us your Yosemite photos!

These images were captured by Yosemite fans like you. We're always looking for photos to feature in our social media, newsletter and magazine — and we'd love to see your shots! Share your favorites with us on Flickr, Facebook and Instagram, or email them to community@yosemite.org.



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YOSEMITE
CONSERVANCY

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THERE ARE MANY WAYS you and your organization can support the meaningful work of Yosemite Conservancy. We look forward to exploring these philanthropic opportunities with you.

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Follow the Conservancy on
social media to stay in touch on the go.



PHOTO: © YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY/KEITH WALKLET.



Create Your Yosemite Legacy

Make a lasting investment in the future of Yosemite with a legacy gift to help protect this special place for generations to come.

Naming Yosemite Conservancy as a beneficiary in your will, trust or bank account ensures the park remains well preserved and accessible. Your gift will become part of the legacy fund, which makes meaningful work possible far into the future.

To learn more about creating a legacy for Yosemite, please contact Catelyn Spencer at cspencer@yosemite.org or **415-434-8446 x319**.

yosemite.org/plannedgiving