



Dear Friend of Yosemite,

Giant sequoias stretch tall across the pages of this Yosemite Conservancy magazine issue. As you read through, you'll find in-depth stories about Yosemite's Mariposa Grove, one of the few places in the Sierra Nevada where those massive, majestic trees grow naturally—and the location of a major restoration project that, thanks to your generous support, is nearly complete.

Since we began working on those stories, the timeline for the grove's reopening has shifted by a few months, from this November to next spring. A series of natural events, including an extraordinarily snowy winter, wet spring and late summer wildfires, shortened the window for restoration work this year. Many of the major components of the restoration are finished or in final phases: Crews have removed much of the pavement, built new pedestrian trails, relocated and restored the former parking area, and created a Mariposa Grove Arrival Plaza at the park's South Entrance. When the snow melts next spring, they'll return to the grove to wrap up remaining work on roads and trails, putting the final polish on this momentous project to protect an emblematic place.

When you next visit the grove, you'll find a thriving, inspiring ecosystem—rejuvenated and resilient, thanks to your gifts. In the meantime, let these stories bring you on a virtual visit to the sequoias, as they settle in for another winter on the Sierra slopes where they have stood strong for thousands of years.

Frank Dean
President, Yosemite Conservancy

YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY

AUTUMN.WINTER 2017 :: VOLUME 08.ISSUE 02

Restoring Nature's Balance in a Legendary Grove

INSIDE

Returning Grandeur & Balance
to Mariposa Grove

Transforming a Sequoia Ecosystem

Expert Insights on Wildlife in
Yosemite's Sequoia Forests

Q&A with the Mariposa Grove
Project's Lead Restoration Ecologist





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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



Restoring a Forest Masterpiece

Inside this issue, you'll find updates on well-traveled bear cubs, plans for the park's newly acquired Ackerson Meadow and several stories about the largest preservation project we have ever undertaken with the National Park Service: the restoration of the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias.

I often marvel that President Lincoln and the U.S. Congress acted in 1864 to protect Mariposa Grove and Yosemite Valley, marking the first time in our nation's history that land was designated for protection and public use. Consider the context for that historic legislation: the Civil War, a deeply divisive era. As my colleague Rolf Diamante, at the George Wright Society, suggests, Lincoln's move to preserve public lands during that tumultuous time aligned with his focus on improving the future for our nation and its citizens, through emancipation, the transcontinental railroad, land-grant colleges, and more.

More than 150 years after the Yosemite Grant Act, national parks, and Yosemite in particular, can still unite us as stewards of places such as Mariposa Grove. Our parks have a way of bringing out the best in us, of establishing common ground and mutual support for their preservation.

During the past century and a half, countless people — including famous figures such as Teddy Roosevelt and Ansel Adams — have found inspiration in Mariposa Grove. The giant trees that John Muir called "Nature's forest masterpiece" have endured for millennia. Like any masterpiece, the sequoias and their habitat need to be carefully preserved, protected and, occasionally, restored. By supporting this project, you have helped write another historic chapter for the grove.

I hope you enjoy this latest issue of *Yosemite Conservancy* magazine. Thank you for making a difference in Mariposa Grove and throughout Yosemite!

Frank Dean

Frank Dean, President

COVER PHOTO The Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias is thriving, thanks to the donor-funded project to restore habitat and tranquility in Yosemite's treasured natural "cathedral."

PHOTO: © JOSH HELLING.



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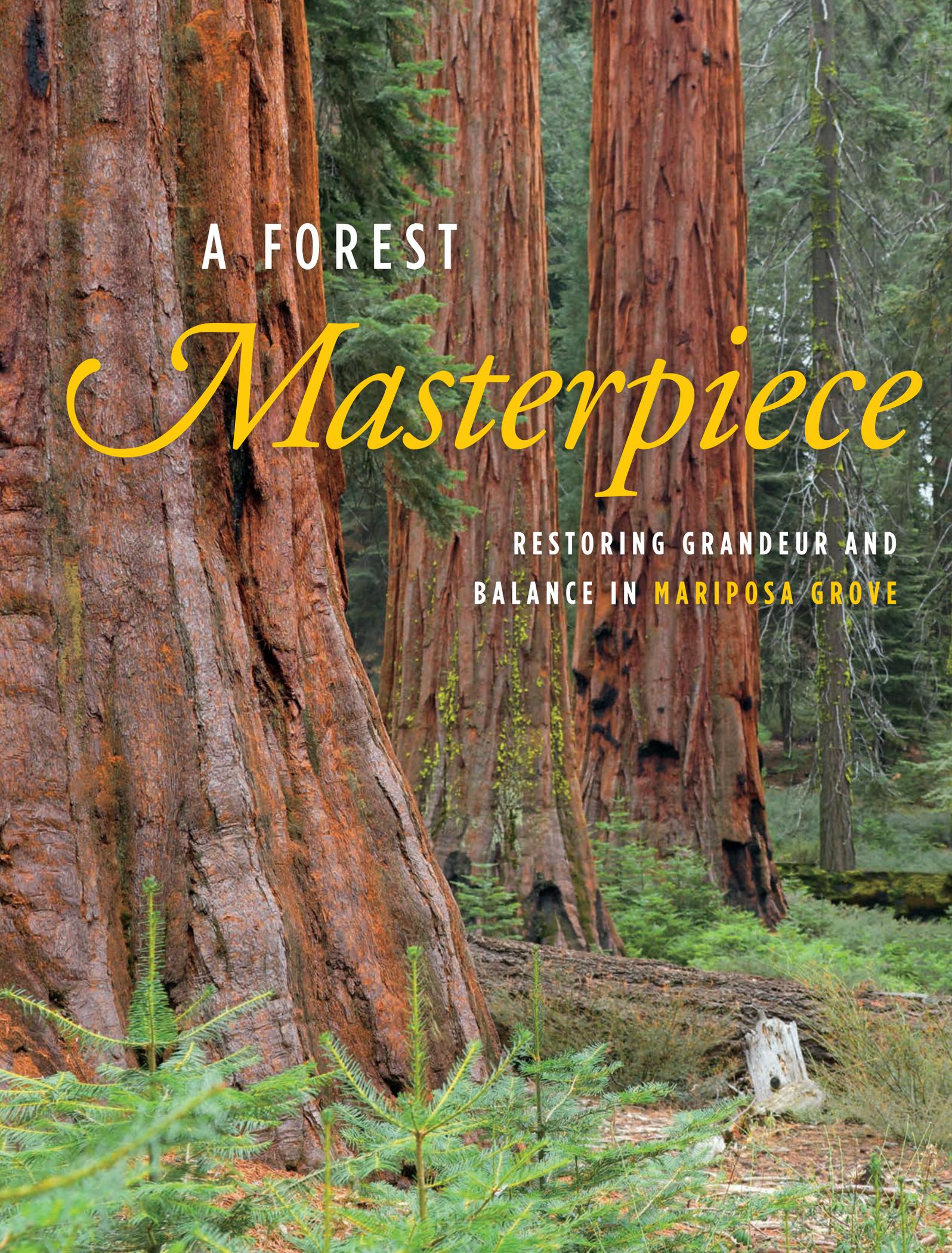
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A FOREST

Masterpiece

RESTORING GRANDEUR AND
BALANCE IN **MARIPOSA GROVE**



“The greatest wonder is that we can see these trees and not wonder more.”

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Wonder. Nearly 140 years after Ralph Waldo Emerson used that word to describe his experience in Mariposa Grove, Yosemite’s largest giant sequoia forest, it remains an apt term for these grand trees, which grow naturally only in California’s western Sierra Nevada.

In recent decades, roads and other development began to sap Mariposa Grove’s awe-inspiring feel and threaten the sequoias’ long-term health. Now, thanks to your generous support, an ambitious project to restore the grove has transformed it back into a setting alive with natural wonder at every turn.

On your next visit to Mariposa Grove, start at the new Welcome Plaza near the park’s South Entrance. Look for the cross section of a fallen sequoia, and trace the rings back to the tree’s first year: 1149. From there, take a short shuttle ride to the grove’s tranquil gateway, and notice the green splash of plants growing in what was, until recently, a parking area.

As you follow the grove’s naturally surfaced trails, cross wooden boardwalks over sensitive wetland, and learn from educational signs, look up. Observe the gnarled, 209-foot-tall Grizzly Giant, which, at an estimated 1,800 years old, is middle-aged in sequoia terms, and follow the accessible trail to its famous neighbor, ▶

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LEFT Giant sequoia groves are inescapably awe-inspiring. Generations ago, Mariposa Grove helped spark the national parks idea; thanks to the recent restoration, the grove’s flourishing mosaic of sequoia seedlings, towering trees, wetlands and wildlife will instill a deep appreciation for the natural world in all who visit.

PHOTO: © JOSH HELLING.



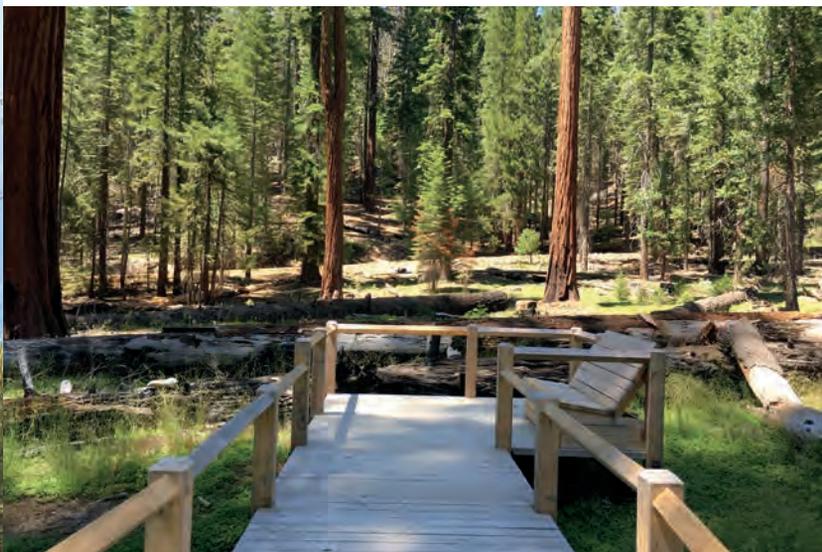
the California Tunnel Tree. Search for birds and squirrels navigating the world above, and soak in the sounds, smells and sights of an ancient forest bursting with life.

Wonder at the size and tenacity of the sequoias — the most massive living trees on Earth. They can stretch nearly 300 feet up from the ground, with trunk circumferences surpassing 100 feet. Over centuries, the nearly 500 mature trees in Mariposa Grove have inched upward and outward, weathering fires, droughts and storms.

That size and resilience has long inspired curiosity and awe. In 1864, Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant Act, setting Mariposa Grove aside as one of nation's first protected landscapes. Fifty years later, Theodore Roosevelt compared the grove to a "great solemn cathedral." John Muir called sequoias "the greatest of all living things."

Those wonder-filled words and ideas from more than a century ago haven't faded; neither have the trees that inspired them. In the decades following Lincoln's legislation, however, a focus on boosting tourism in the grove resulted in paved roads and other infrastructure that disrupted natural habitat and put the sequoias' future in question.

On June 30, 2014, the 150th anniversary of the Yosemite Grant Act, the Conservancy joined the National Park



LEFT A new accessible path invites people of all abilities to experience the enormity of the famous Grizzly Giant, estimated to be 1,800 years old. **ABOVE** At the end of one of the new boardwalks, you'll find this special tranquility area. As you pause to immerse in the grove's sounds and sights, notice the wetland habitat regenerating below.



ABOVE Mariposa Grove's giant sequoias stretch hundreds of feet from root to crown. Thanks to your support, these stately trees can grow and thrive in a natural setting that reflects the wonder they inspire.

Service to break ground on a major collaborative effort: the multiyear restoration of Mariposa Grove. Your generous support provided more than \$20 million for the project, which aimed to reverse damaging impacts and ensure future generations will be able to experience the wonder of gazing up at Yosemite's sequoias.

After years of careful work, of removing asphalt, building new boardwalks and trails, and restoring hydrology, ecological balance is returning in the grove. You'll see it in new plant growth and in fresh fire scars on red-brown trunks. Until relatively recently, fires, a vital part of the sequoia ecosystem, were suppressed in the grove and throughout the park. As part of the restoration, crews integrated controlled burns to help release seeds from sequoia cones and create space for new giants.

As you work your way through the grove, imagine how many others have gazed up in wonder — from the tribes that lived in balance with the trees for millennia, to the youth-program participants who have helped with the recent habitat and trail restoration. Then, consider its future: As plants repopulate once-paved areas, as people move among the trees on pathways that protect roots, as fires help tiny sequoia seeds germinate, Mariposa Grove will continue to shift, regaining balance in a vibrant, ancient section of the Sierra landscape.

As a Yosemite supporter, you are part of that future. The next time you visit, look up with wonder — at the trees, at the rebounding habitat and at the transformation you helped make possible. ■



Learn more about the effort to restore Mariposa Grove at yosemiteconservancy.org/restoring-mariposa-grove



NEW LIFE IN AN Ancient Grove

Transforming a sequoia ecosystem in Yosemite

In a sequoia grove, it's easy to spend most of your time looking up, craning to see the tops of the giant trees. While the canopies are impressive, to understand the trees' strength, you must look down.

A few feet below the surface of the soil, shallow, delicate roots stretch out in a web, drawing in nutrients and hundreds of gallons of water each day, as the slowly melting Sierra snowpack hydrates the soil. Gazing downward, you might notice pairs of sequoias

joined together at the base. Those "couples" form when their roots fuse together underground.

You'll also see leaves and bark strewn on the forest floor. This seemingly mundane carpeting feeds microorganisms that transform plant litter into nutrients for the grove's floral and faunal residents. Look for green shoots pushing up through the saturated soil, many of them sprouting thanks to the squirrels, birds and other animals that spread seeds throughout the grove. See if you can spot

the tracks of larger animals, such as fishers, foxes and deer, who fill key ecological roles as some of the more than 70 species of birds and mammals that make their homes among the sequoias.

Until recently, a glance downward in Mariposa Grove included patches of pavement and heavily trampled trails crisscrossing the ecosystem. You'd have seen drains diverting water from roots and heard the hum of vehicles eclipsing the songs of nuthatches and brown creepers that work their way up and down trunks searching for insects.

With your support, restoration crews and volunteers worked hard to restore the Mariposa Grove ecosystem. They created sustainable trails and drainage systems to help water flow freely through the soil, and they collected seeds from native plants to revegetate once-paved areas. They worked gently around the ancient trees, using a “knife” of compressed air to find sequoia roots before digging. They followed a careful plan but still found surprises, as when they unexpectedly uncovered a stream uniting two sections of wetland that had been bisected by a road.

Sue Beatty, Yosemite National Park’s lead restoration ecologist on the Mariposa Grove project, shares: “This project has made the grove more resilient by protecting soils from erosion and trampling, removing asphalt from the tops of roots, and restoring natural hydrology. Giant sequoias, rare and native only to the west side of the Sierra Nevada in California, rely on melting snowpack. Hopefully, the trees will be in better shape to resist impacts of climate change, such as shifting precipitation patterns, and will continue to grow for hundreds of years to come.”

New giants in Mariposa Grove are already pushing up toward the sun, their spindly roots reaching through freshly aerated soil. When you stroll along the new boardwalks, listen for the murmur of revitalized streams, and imagine the seedlings slowly expanding, inch by inch, ring by ring. It takes special conditions — ample sunlight, water and healthy soil — for a young sequoia to grow into a thousand-year-old titan. Reversing the impacts of years of tourist activity cannot fully steel the sequoias against every change to come, but it will make them more resilient, as climate shifts. Thanks to you, many more of those seedlings will have a fighting chance. ■

OPPOSITE Giant sequoias are just one element of the Mariposa Grove ecosystem, an intricate web of water-loving plants and animals made more resilient through the recent restoration.

BOTTOM LEFT Plants that thrive in wetland areas, such as streambank trefoil, benefit from ecological restoration in the grove. **BOTTOM RIGHT** In 2015, young stewards from the donor-supported WildLink program gathered native vegetation in the grove; later, crews used those plants to restore habitat among the sequoias.

RESTORATION IN SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK

BEFORE



Several years ago, Yosemite’s Branch Chief, Vegetation and Ecological Restoration, Athena Demetry, worked on a similar restoration in Sequoia National Park’s Giant Forest, where, as in Mariposa Grove, roads and other infrastructure had fragmented the landscape. “One of the earliest outcomes of that project,” she says, “was the recovery of the forest’s wetlands, which, in turn, fueled rapid plant growth. Within a few years, sequoia seedlings began sprouting up in the former parking area.”

AFTER



Mariposa Grove: Then & Now

Mariposa Grove's giant sequoias have long stood as sentinels of the Sierra. As they grew, American Indians walked among cinnamon trunks gathering plants. The sequoias stood strong through the 1800s, as tunnels were carved into trees, and towered over Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir's infamous 1903 camping trip. As tourism soared in the coming years, fire suppression left seed cones sealed, and roads choked roots. Today, those roots reach through soil, brimming with new life, thanks to restored water flow and controlled burns.

Amid all that change, a constant emerges: the indisputable majesty of the sequoias.

PHOTOS: (Bringing Back Balance) (Then) © COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY. (Now) © KEITH WALKLET. (Everlasting Beauty) (Then) © JAMES SMILLIE, COURTESY OF NPS MUSEUM ARCHIVES. (Now) © KEITH WALKLET. (Tunnelled Trees) (Then) © COURTESY OF PHYLLIS A. WILBURN. (Now) © KEITH WALKLET. (Greeting the Giant) (Then) © CARLETON E. WATKINS, COURTESY OF THE ELISHA WHITTELSEY COLLECTION. (Now) © CLAIRE F. MEYLER.





Bringing Back Balance

NOW

THEN Increasing interest in Mariposa Grove brought an influx of vehicle traffic — and, before long, paved roads. Here, early autos line up at the site of Galen Clark’s cabin.

NOW Tree-friendly trails, newly restored habitat and improved hydrology thanks to asphalt removal are returning natural balance to the grove — thanks to you.



Everlasting Beauty

THEN Artist James Smillie captured Mariposa Grove’s grandeur in this 1872 engraving; 142 years later, his work appeared in a Yosemite Museum exhibit celebrating the sesquicentennial of the Yosemite Grant Act.

NOW Many of the human-dwarfing trees that caught Smillie’s attention are still stretching up from their shallow roots. Restoring the grove helps ensure they’ll stand strong for generations to come.



NOW

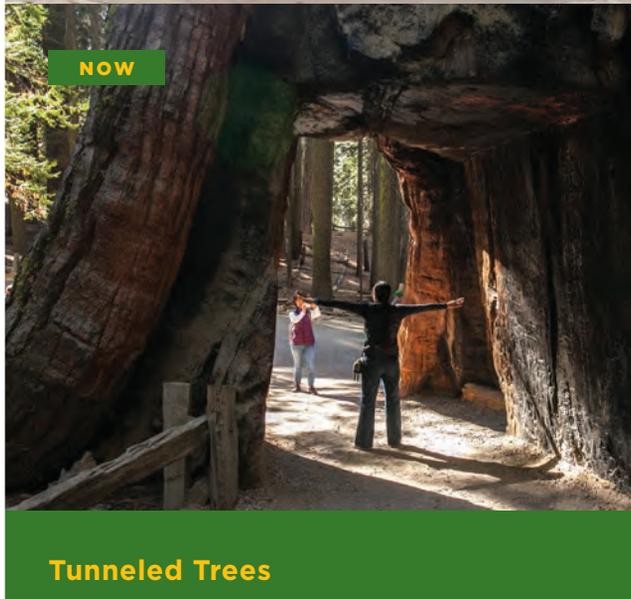


THEN

Greeting the Giant

THEN Galen Clark, the first state-appointed guardian of the lands protected under the Yosemite Grant Act, poses at the base of the Grizzly Giant in Mariposa Grove, circa 1865.

NOW The fire-scarred Grizzly Giant remains a popular modern-day destination for grove visitors (including our staff). Thanks to your support, a new trail makes the legendary tree accessible to all.

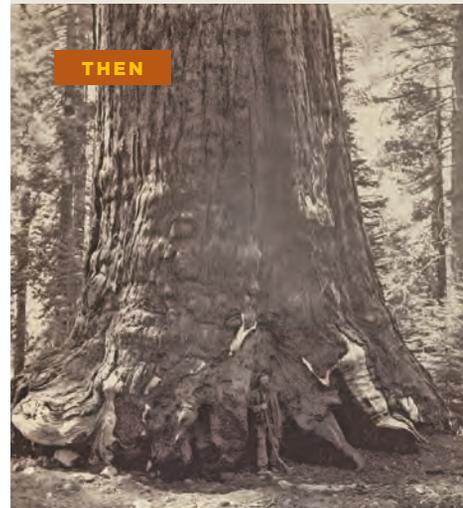


NOW

Tunneled Trees

THEN By the 1930s, automobiles had replaced horse-drawn coaches as the transportation of choice in the park, and families flocked to Mariposa Grove to drive through the Wawona Tunnel Tree.

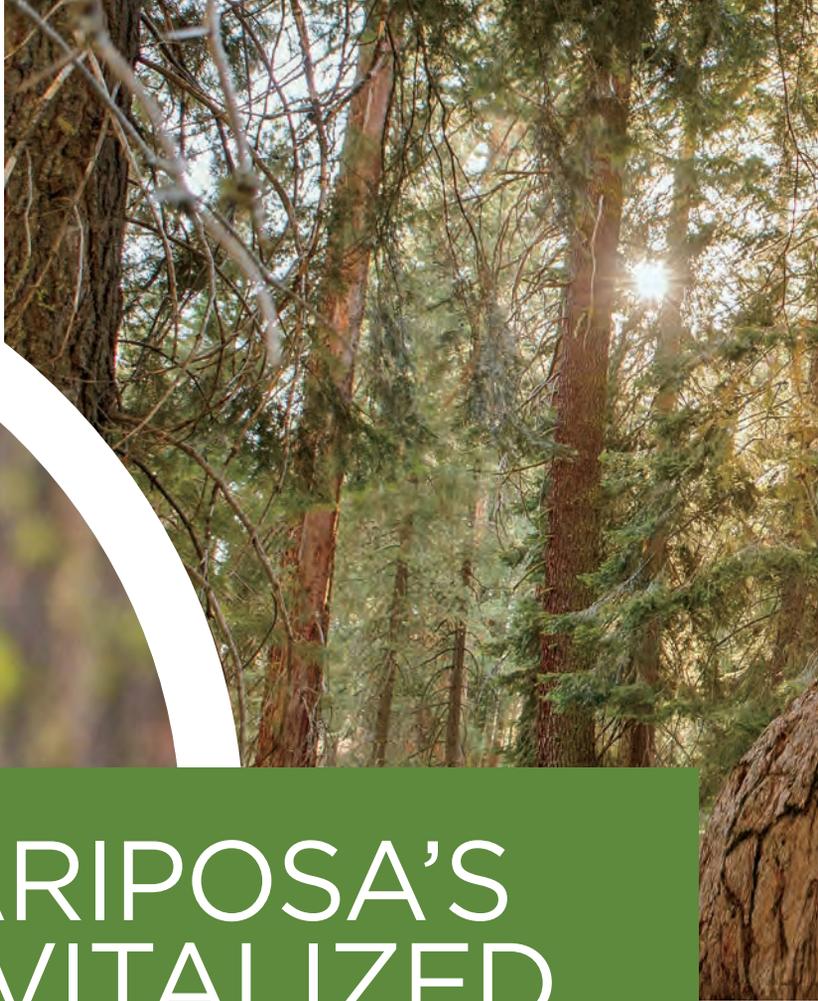
NOW The 2,000-year-old Wawona tree fell in 1969, but the grove’s other carved-out sequoia, the California Tunnel Tree, still stands and — thanks to you — is now reachable via an accessible trail.



THEN



NOW



MARIPOSA'S REVITALIZED GROVE

PROVIDING SANCTUARY FOR YOSEMITE WILDLIFE

BY LISA MURPHY, NATURALIST RANGER AT YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

LEFT Mariposa Grove provides important habitat for the California spotted owl, a state Species of Special Concern that relies on old-growth forests. **MIDDLE** Hollows in large trees and standing dead snags can provide shelter for cavity-dependent species.

OPPOSITE: TOP RIGHT The grove serves as a crucial haven for the Pacific fisher, a tree-dwelling mammal whose population in the southern Sierra Nevada had dwindled to fewer than 300. **MIDDLE RIGHT** At dusk, you might see bats swooping among the sequoias, using echolocation to navigate the grove and hunt for insects.

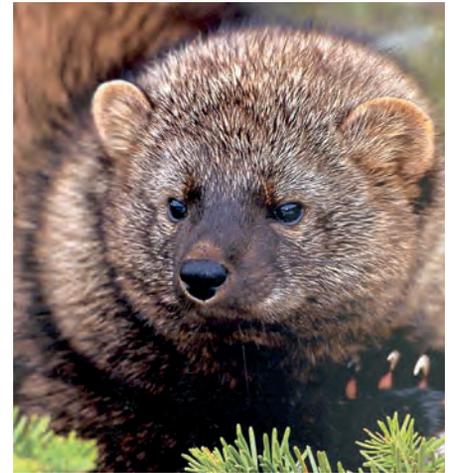
In Yosemite's Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, a single gaze upward through the mystical towers of rust-colored bark and feathery green foliage is enough to inspire a desire to preserve this majestic place. However, the ancient, enormous trees are only one component of the grove's complex ecosystem.

Seventy-eight vertebrate species, including amphibians, birds, reptiles and mammals, are known to inhabit Mariposa Grove. The recent donor-funded restoration in the grove will benefit not only the iconic giant sequoias, but also the many animals that find refuge in and among the trees.

During the restoration, great care was taken to protect habitat for cavity-dependent animals that rely on shelter provided by hollows in large trees and standing dead snags. Pacific fishers use hollows for resting and denning. Spotted owls nest in the cavities. Of the 17 bat species that live in Yosemite, 13 have been found roosting or foraging in sequoia groves. For bats, the high-reaching cavities offer protection



PHOTOS: (OPPOSITE) © JOHN FELIS, (ABOVE) © RYAN ALONZO, (TOP RIGHT) © COURTESY OF U.S. FOREST SERVICE, (MIDDLE RIGHT) © COURTESY OF NPS.



from predators and, possibly, a place to hibernate in winter with consistent temperatures, thanks to the sequoias' insulating mass.

While tree cavities provide essential habitat overhead, the grove's new raised boardwalks are protecting ecosystems underfoot, in the riparian areas where land and water meet. The boardwalks will help restore natural hydrology, allowing aquatic invertebrates to flourish. These water-dwelling creatures nourish animals such as bats, frogs and songbirds, which, in turn, may become food for myriad other species, including spotted owls, peregrine falcons and Pacific fishers.

Alongside these important efforts to protect and restore the landscape in Mariposa Grove, many animals are also benefiting from a shift in the soundscape. For years, the noise from a generator and traffic dominated the lower grove, creating mechanical sounds and vibrations that can negatively affect animals such as owls and bats, which rely on their acute auditory senses to find and capture prey. Pallid bats, for example, can locate food by listening for the movement of insects, picking up sounds inaudible to human ears. Now, with the generator removed, the parking lot significantly reduced and paved roads converted, natural sounds will once again prevail among the sequoias.

When you visit Mariposa Grove, remember this old-growth forest is home to many species. Enjoy the majesty of the grove by staying on the beautifully crafted trail system and respecting the mystical giants — and the creatures that dwell within and among them. ■

LISA MURPHY

Naturalist Ranger & Interpretive Supervisor
of the Mather District of Yosemite

During Murphy's first year as an interpretive ranger for Yosemite National Park in 2000, she had the opportunity to volunteer with the Pierson/Rainey bat study in the giant sequoia groves. She helped collect guano samples from the burn scars of the Merced grove. Throughout the past decade, she has become intimately connected with the ecosystems of the Tuolumne and Merced sequoia groves, seeing them through the many Yosemite Conservancy volunteer projects, the Rim Fire and the drought. She is amazed by the delicate balance and diversity of life these groves support.



“Giant Sequoias are the largest (in total volume) living organisms on earth!”

— SUE BEATTY

Restoration Ecologist at Yosemite National Park



Q&A

WITH A
YOSEMITE
INSIDER

In her nearly 40 years in Yosemite, ecologist Sue Beatty has helped restore and protect habitat throughout the park, including in Mariposa Grove.

Sue Beatty traces her love for the outdoors to her childhood family vacations, which brought her to a different national park each year. She nurtured her passion for public lands and ecology while studying parks and recreation, completing an inspiring internship with the Student Conservation Association, and working toward her graduate degree in natural-resources management. As a restoration ecologist in Yosemite, where she began working in 1980, Beatty is deeply dedicated to restoring balance to natural landscapes.

Q :: What do you love about working as a restoration ecologist in Yosemite?

A :: I love being able to identify a damaged ecosystem and make it better. It's thrilling to restore natural hydrology to a meadow by removing ditches that were draining it, or removing asphalt from sequoia groves. The best part is looking at the results when we are done, knowing the visitor would not be able to tell pavement used to be there, because all they see is a beautiful wetland or a beautiful sequoia grove.

Q :: Why are giant sequoias important to the balance of Yosemite's ecosystem?

A :: Giant Sequoias are the largest (in total volume) living

organisms on earth! They are rare and native only to the west side of the Sierra Nevada in California. They are an amazing species, due to their great size of over 30 feet in diameter and their longevity of living up to 2,000 years. These old-growth forests provide habitat for a variety of rare wildlife.

Q :: Tell us about your work with the Mariposa Grove restoration project. What were the most significant results of this effort?

A :: Most importantly, this project removed roads and a parking lot from giant sequoia habitat, as well as roadside ditches that inadvertently moved precious water away from sequoia trees. It also added accessible trails through the grove where none had been before. By removing a parking lot, gift store and tram tours from the grove, we have transformed the visitor journey to a beautiful and peaceful experience, allowing people to sense the full wonder of these trees.

Q :: What have you learned about Mariposa Grove through Conservancy-funded research?

A :: The Conservancy-funded assessment of Mariposa Grove became the foundation for the restoration plan. For the first time, a complete inventory was conducted of giant sequoias among all age classes, totaling an estimated population of 5,803 individuals of all sizes (seedlings, saplings, juveniles and adults). We learned 81 percent of juvenile sequoias and 68 percent of saplings were growing within 100 feet of wetlands.

Q :: How have Conservancy donors helped protect and preserve Mariposa Grove?

A :: The restoration of Mariposa Grove would not have happened without Yosemite Conservancy. Donor support from beginning to end helped facilitate everything from initial data collection, to design development and construction, enabling the park to implement the very best plan to restore giant sequoia habitat and improve the visitor experience, including the addition of accessible trails for visitors with disabilities. Thanks to your support, this legacy project will enhance the natural and cultural resources for future generations. ■

“The Conservancy-funded assessment of Mariposa Grove became the foundation for the restoration plan.”



As a central player in the Mariposa Grove restoration, Beatty helped bring natural ecological balance back to the sequoias' habitat, giving new giants the chance to germinate and grow.

Give the Gift of Yosemite

Share your love for Yosemite this holiday season with a gift from the Yosemite Conservancy bookstore. Every purchase helps us preserve and protect Yosemite for generations to come.

Conservancy donors receive a 15% discount with code HOLIDAY2017*

Shop now at yosemiteconservancy.org/shop

*Code valid through Jan. 31, 2018; online purchases only.



RESCUED AND RETURNED

BRINGING A TRIO OF ORPHANED BEARS
BACK TO YOSEMITE

As Yosemite's hundreds of black bears roam the park, their natural patterns and instincts sometimes collide with human activity. Too often, those meetings end badly for the bears. Last July, three five-month-old cubs were orphaned when a car hit their mother on Tioga Road. She was one of nine bears killed by vehicles in the park in 2016.

Recognizing the cubs would struggle to survive alone, biologists brought them to a wildlife-rehabilitation center at Lake Tahoe. The trio stayed there with minimal human contact for the next six months. Cubs from Yosemite had been sent to such centers before, but this trio's story stands out. For the first time, biologists would be able to monitor the bears once they returned to the park, thanks to Conservancy donor-funded GPS collars.

In late January, Yosemite-based staff and volunteers skied the newly collared, hibernating

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Bears, used to ranging freely through meadows and forests, rarely slow down when they reach a road crossing, making them vulnerable to speeding cars. This yearling bear was one of three orphaned by a vehicle collision on Tioga Road in July 2016.



On a clear day in early 2017, a group of 30 National Park Service and Conservancy staff and volunteers silently skied the three bears to a den tree in Yosemite.

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bears into the backcountry and nestled them into a den below a tree. While the trio dozed beneath the snow, the bear team put finishing touches on Keep Bears Wild, a new donor-supported website.

On March 4, 2017, exactly nine months after their mother's death, the bears, now yearlings, emerged. GPS data traces their next few months. After sticking together for a few weeks, the bears began to separate. By early June, shortly before the pre-programmed collars dropped off, they had established their own ranges, carving out color-coded perimeters on the bear team's map.

Thanks to a collaborative effort and your support, >

PHOTOS: (OPPOSITE) © KEVIN FOX, (TOP) © JAKE SCHWARTZ, (RIGHT) © COURTESY OF NPS



Remote cameras captured the cubs' first foray out of their den in early March, as they explored their snow-quilted habitat.



National Park Service and Conservancy staff and volunteers gathered around the den tree where orphan bears were returned to their natural habitat in Yosemite.

the siblings are back in their native habitat. Like any yearlings, they're learning to navigate the park and forage for food, as they prepare for their second winter, facing greater challenges, because they did not get to learn the landscape at their mother's side.

As the yearlings explore and grow, we can all help ease their journey by working to live in balance with bears. Simple steps, such as storing food, driving slowly and keeping a safe distance from wildlife, can help ensure the trio's story, and the stories of hundreds of other bears in Yosemite, can continue to unfold. ■

 Learn more about efforts to keep bears wild at yosemiteconservancy.org/keep-bear-cubs-safe

KEEP BEARS WILD

What can we do to live in better balance with bears? Thanks to your support, the Yosemite bear team created a go-to resource: KeepBearsWild.org. The website includes a map of vehicle-bear collisions, and offers plenty of tips for protecting wildlife in Yosemite and beyond.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Store food (and all scented items) in bear-proof food lockers or canisters.

Drive slowly and alertly on all park roads.

Keep your distance (at least 50 yards) if you see a bear in the wild.

Scare bears off if you see them in campgrounds or other developed areas.

Report sightings to a ranger (or call the Yosemite Save-a-Bear hotline: 209-372-0322).



MEADOW SCIENCE

STUDYING BIODIVERSITY IN A NEWLY PROTECTED PLACE



Researchers waded into the water in Ackerson Meadow to collect environmental DNA, a key tool for detecting aquatic species such as the California red-legged frog.

Scientific surveys have documented an enormous array of life in newly protected Ackerson Meadow, including at least 37 acres of rare plants.

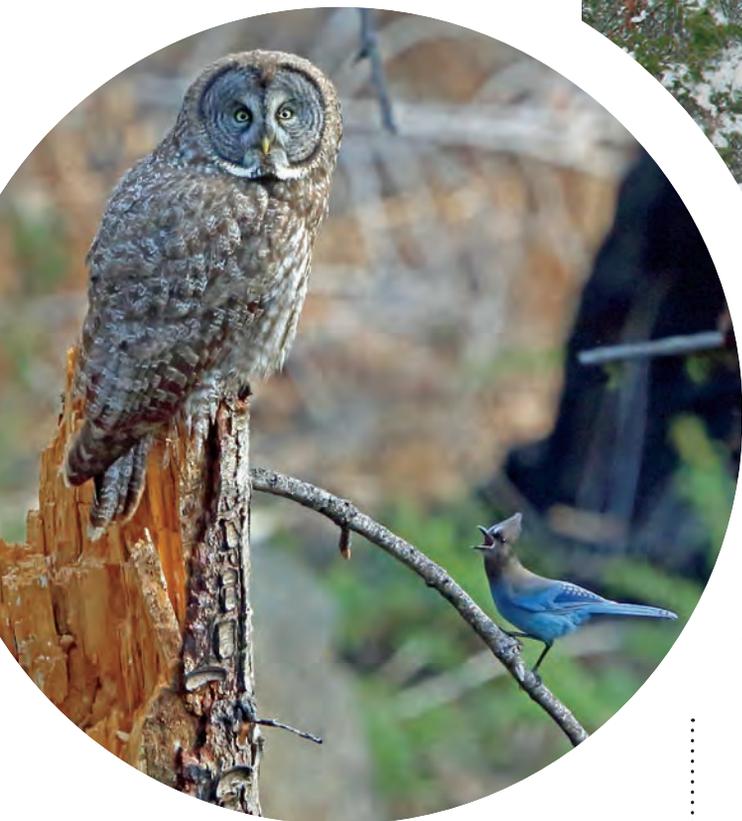
What's so special about meadows? These spongy patches of lush vegetation cover just 3 percent of Yosemite's total area, but they support an enormous array of plant and animal species.

In September 2016, with your support, Yosemite added Ackerson Meadow to its protected landscape. Researchers are eager to learn more about the flora and fauna that live in this once privately owned 400-acre meadow. They have been using in-person surveys and remote cameras to identify meadow-dwelling plants, including invasive species, as well as many mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles that rely on the wetland habitat. By documenting the meadow's biodiversity, scientists are collecting valuable information to guide future research and restoration projects in this newly protected place.

You can help preserve Ackerson Meadow, too: If you visit, remember to "Leave No Trace" by staying on trails and taking nothing but pictures. ■

ADVENTURES AMONG GIANTS

GUIDED EXPERIENCES IN YOSEMITE'S SEQUOIA GROVES



LEFT Yosemite Conservancy guides can help you listen and look for animals that live in sequoia groves, from rare owls to common jays. **RIGHT** When winter snow buries the trails, strap on some snowshoes to experience the grandeur of Yosemite's sequoia groves in the park's quietest season.



Enter a sequoia grove, and almost immediately, you'll sense the immensity of the trees and the intricacy of the ecosystem. Explore alongside a naturalist guide — someone to give deep insight into the grove's ecology and history — and the moment grows even richer.

Through our Custom Adventures, you can enjoy a personalized, naturalist-led journey in Yosemite's three sequoia groves in any season. In spring, you'll see the bright splash of white dogwood against dark sequoia trunks. In summer, the groves offer shady havens far from more heavily visited areas in the park. In winter, they're intensely peaceful, perfect for snowshoeing.

IF YOU GO

Merced Grove

TREES

32 mature sequoias

TRAILS

3 miles (round-trip) from trailhead near Crane Flat

TO DO

Find the ranger cabin that once served as a summer retreat for park superintendents.

Tuolumne Grove

TREES

24 mature sequoias

TRAILS

2.5 miles (round-trip) from trailhead near Crane Flat

TO DO

Crawl through a hollow fallen sequoia (or take pictures at the edge, if you're not a fan of small, dark spaces).

Mariposa Grove

TREES

500 mature sequoias

TRAILS

2 miles – Washburn Trail (from the south entrance to Mariposa Grove)

1/4 mile (round trip) – Big Trees loop

TO DO

Take in the views from the tranquility boardwalk, pass through the California Tunnel Tree, or picnic at Wawona Point.



To create your Custom Adventure for this winter or any season, contact

adventures@yosemiteconservancy.org



PHOTOS: (OPPOSITE) © NIGEL VOADEN, (ABOVE) © NANCY ROBBINS.

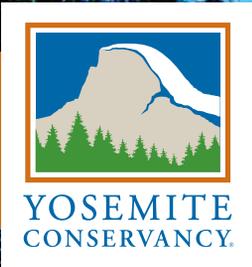
As you explore with a naturalist, you'll cross boardwalks over wetlands, or glide softly over snow, while learning about the vital watershed that allows sequoias to grow in this part of the world. You might explore the stories behind "tunnel trees" and historic cabins, or venture to the scenic overlook above Mariposa Grove. Your personal guide can point out signs of resident wildlife, inviting you to listen for songbirds and woodpeckers, look for paw prints or, in winter, search for hints of the subnivean animals that live under the snow.

Whether you go one-on-one with a guide or bring a group, a custom trip means exploring the sequoias at your pace. No matter what season you choose, pack your curiosity, and prepare for a memorable journey. ■



Ready to find your adventure?

Visit yosemiteconservancy.org/custom-adventures



2016 Annual Report

CHAIR & PRESIDENT'S NOTE

Dear Friend of Yosemite

As an organization, we've learned a lot during more than nine decades of partnership with Yosemite. One constant stands out: People such as you, who are willing to donate personal resources to help protect natural ones, play a crucial part in preserving our park. We're grateful for your support in 2016, which funded 34 new grants and was a key part of more than \$18 million in total aid to Yosemite.

Thanks to you, opportunities to reflect on and celebrate Yosemite abounded in 2016 — starting on day one. On Jan. 1, we helped kick off the National Park Service's 100th year by joining a Rose Parade equestrian unit honoring the role horses and mules play in our parks.

Warmer weather brought our theater and art programs, which served more than 12,000 visitors in 2016, and a diverse crop of projects, including sequoia and songbird research, trail and habitat restoration, and a special exhibit for the Yosemite Museum's 90th anniversary. Meanwhile, our naturalists helped visitors connect with the park through backpacking trips and day hikes; overall, our Outdoor Adventures team coordinated 290 expert-led outings last year.

As the year drew to a close, temperatures waned, but your impact did not. Thanks to your gifts, 400-acre Ackerson Meadow became Yosemite's newest protected habitat; local students discovered their nearby national park; and crews made major strides in Mariposa Grove, where a new trail system and regenerated habitat are rejuvenating the ancient forest that helped inspire the national park idea.

As we look forward to many more decades of working to preserve Yosemite, we reflect with gratitude on all your support has made possible. Thank you for making a difference in your park!

Philip L. Pillsbury Jr., *Chair*

Frank Dean, *President*



Please enjoy highlights of our 2016 Annual Report.
The full-length report can be viewed on our website at
yosemiteconservancy.org/annual-reports

Your Gifts at Work

2016 HIGHLIGHTS

More than 42,000 donors contributed to our mission in 2016 — and each made a meaningful difference in Yosemite. Your gifts funded trail and habitat restoration, fueled fieldwork to study and protect rare species, expanded access to historic collections, and much more. You also helped us offer 645 unique opportunities for people to enrich their Yosemite experience through theater shows, art workshops and expert-led adventures.



The nine Youth in Yosemite Programs you supported in 2016 helped more than **25,000 young people** connect with the park.



By renting out **10,500 bear-proof canisters** for food storage, our Wilderness team provided visitors with an easy-to-use tool that helps protect Yosemite animals. Rental fees support wildlife management and other projects.



While rerouting poorly drained sections of the iconic John Muir Trail in **Lyell Canyon**, restoration crews built 1,320 feet of new trail on dry, durable ground and restored 94,560 square feet of meadow habitat.



Biologists working to restore **amphibian and reptile species** released 10 western pond turtles and 2,000 California red-legged frog tadpoles in Yosemite Valley, and introduced endangered Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frogs to two high country lakes.



Safety-focused grants funded two new tent cabins to house **Search and Rescue (SAR) volunteers**, who help with 200–300 missions annually, and supported the **Preventive SAR program**, which completed a record 37,000 visitor contacts in 2016.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Statement of Financial Position

As of Dec. 31, 2016

ASSETS

Current Assets

Cash & Investments	\$12,034,097
Receivables & Other Assets	\$2,125,939

Total Current Assets \$14,160,036

Pledges Receivable, Net of Current Portion	\$758,515
Furniture & Equipment, Net of Accumulated Depreciation	\$574,498
Land Held for Future Use	\$764,200
Deposits	\$14,500

TOTAL ASSETS \$16,271,749

LIABILITIES

Current Liabilities

Accounts Payable & Accrued Expenses	\$822,030
Grants Payable to Yosemite National Park, Current Portion	\$563,861

Total Current Liabilities \$1,385,891

NET ASSETS

Unrestricted*	\$12,811,849
Temporarily Restricted	\$1,060,300
Permanently Restricted	\$1,013,709

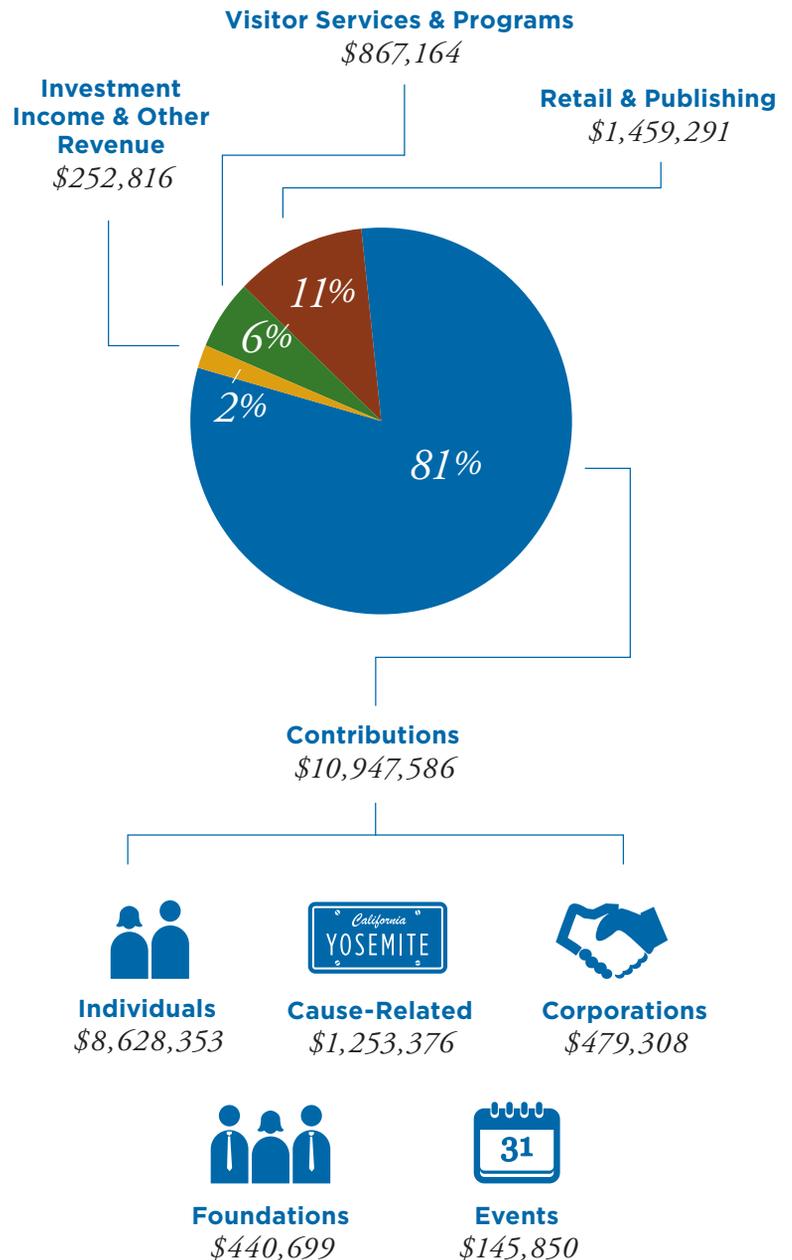
Total Net Assets \$14,885,858

TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS \$16,271,749

*Reserves are maintained to meet future grant obligations to Yosemite National Park.

Support & Revenue

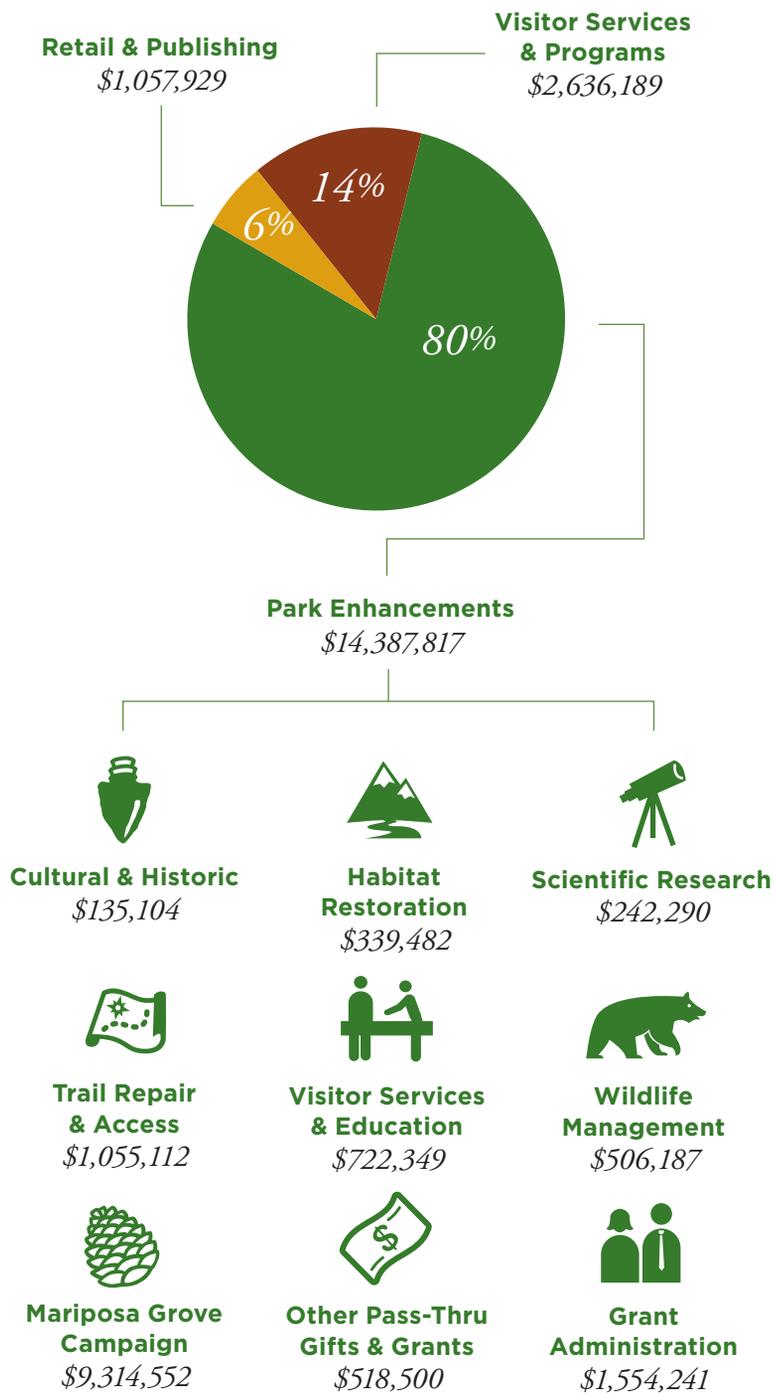
\$13,526,857



Dec. 31, 2016

Aid to Yosemite National Park

\$18,081,935



Statement of Activities

As of Dec. 31, 2016

SUPPORT & REVENUE

Contributions	\$10,947,586
Retail & Publishing	\$1,459,291
Visitor Services & Programs	\$867,164
Investment Income &	
Other Revenue	\$252,816
TOTAL SUPPORT & REVENUE	\$13,526,857

EXPENSES

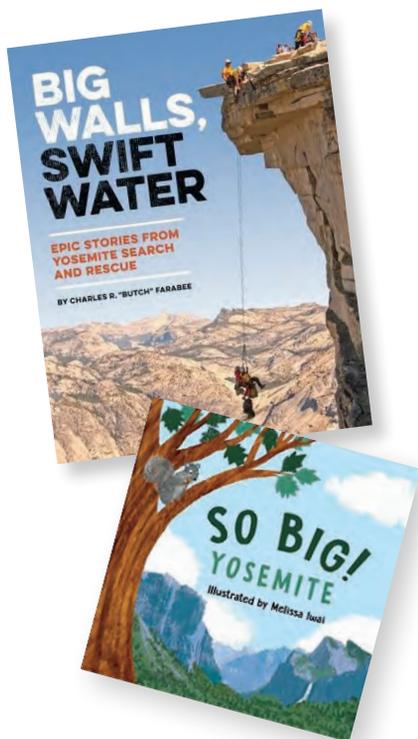
Aid to Park

Park Enhancements	\$14,387,817
Retail & Publishing	\$1,057,929
Visitor Services & Programs	\$2,636,189
Total Aid to Park	\$18,081,935
Administrative	\$993,104
Fundraising	\$1,395,643
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$20,470,682



GIFTS THAT DO GOOD

HOW YOUR YOSEMITE SOUVENIR HELPS PROTECT THE PARK



From postcards and books, to accessories and apparel, the Yosemite Conservancy store — located online and in 10 retail locations in visitor centers throughout the park — is the best place to purchase a souvenir by which to remember your visit. For the Conservancy, it’s also a valuable place to inspire stewardship for Yosemite.

While purchases made through our store have always benefitted the park, in 2016, we took this a step further by moving design and production processes of many products in-house to produce unique, one-of-a-kind retail items visitors can’t find anywhere else. “We want to tell the story of our mission more visibly in the products we are selling,” shares Adonia Ripple, director of Yosemite operations. And our commitment to conservation doesn’t stop there.

By removing the need for third-party vendors, a larger portion of proceeds from retail purchases is now directly routed to help fund trail restoration, habitat preservation, youth programs and enhanced visitor services throughout Yosemite.

Whether you’re looking for the perfect holiday gifts for your Yosemite-loving friends or family members, or you simply want to treat yourself to that cool new T-shirt, hat or souvenir patch, feel pride that your purchase gives back — more than ever before — to protect the park you love. ■

 Shop now at yosemiteconservancystore.com

Spring Gathering 2018

A Yosemite celebration for the entire family!

March 23-26, 2018

There is no better place to celebrate the splendor of spring than in Yosemite Valley, surrounded by blooming dogwoods, rushing falls and donors who share your passion for the park. Bring the entire family for a full schedule of guided walks and presentations by Yosemite experts, engaging activities, a picnic lunch and a special closing reception.

For John Muir Heritage Society donors, the fun continues with the Saturday evening reception and dinner at The Majestic Yosemite Hotel and additional Sunday activities.

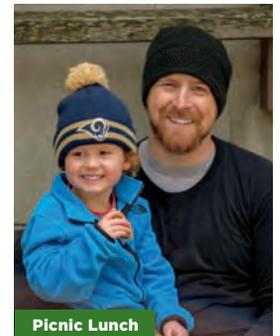
Registration will be open at the end of January. For more information, please contact Kelda McKinney at kmckinney@yosemiteconservancy.org or 415-434-8446 x329.



Photography Walks



John Muir Heritage Society Dinner



Picnic Lunch



Behind-the-Scenes Programs



Park Ranger-Guided Tours



Naturalist Hikes



Family Activities



Plein Air Art Classes

Thank You, Donors

Yosemite Conservancy gratefully acknowledges the individual donors, foundations, businesses and volunteers who supported the restoration of Mariposa Grove with gifts of \$2,500 and more. In partnership with the National Park Service, your contributions totaling \$20 million have made possible this ambitious, multiyear effort to return grandeur and balance to one of the world's most iconic ecosystems. Thanks to our generous donors, we're proud to preserve giant sequoias, restore sensitive wetland, protect wildlife and enrich the visitor experience in Mariposa Grove — today and for future generations.

\$1,000,000 & More

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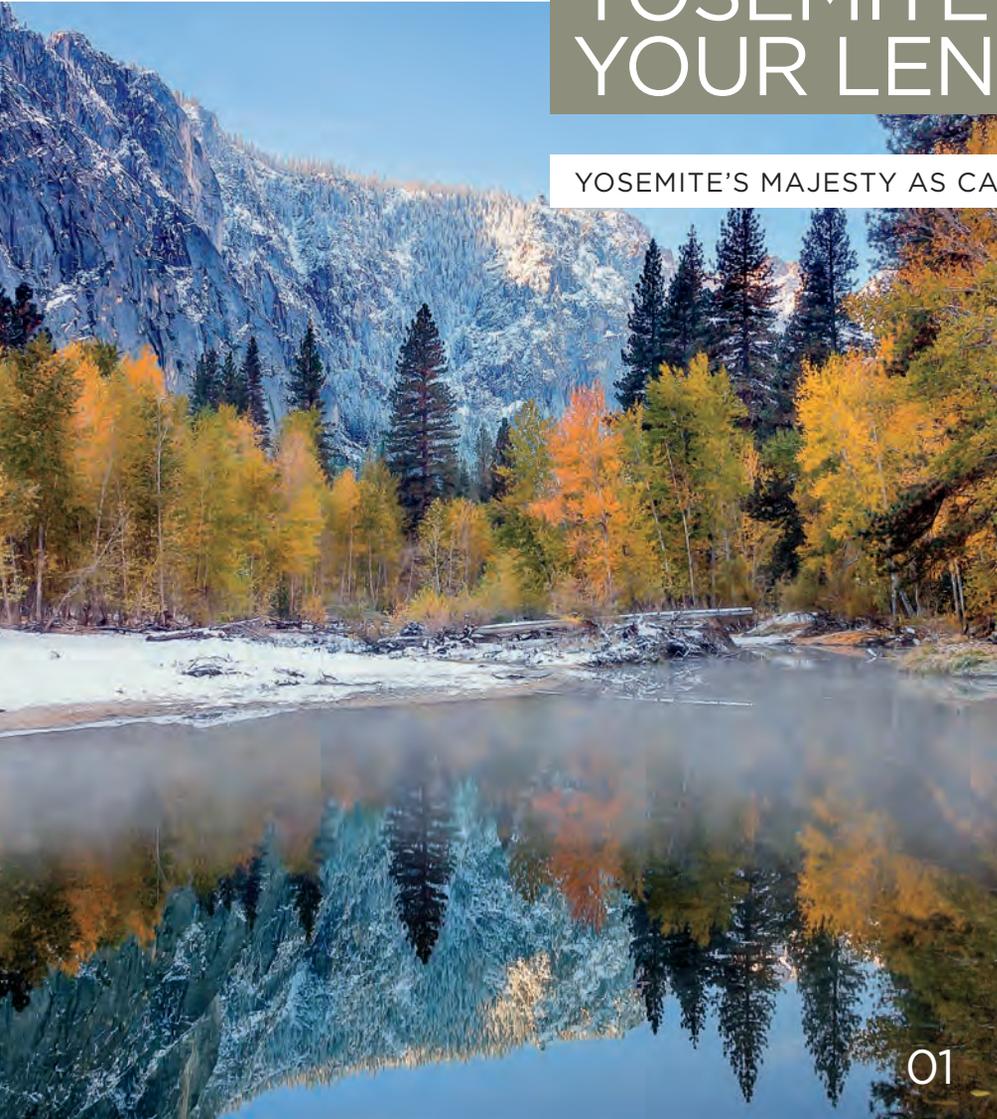
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Jennifer & Greg Johnson
CAMPAIGN CO-CHAIRS

YOSEMITE THROUGH YOUR LENS

YOSEMITE'S MAJESTY AS CAPTURED BY OUR SUPPORTERS



01 Fall Color in Yosemite Valley

PHOTO © BRANDON SUMMERILL

02 Bridalveil Falls Into Mist

PHOTO © BRANDON YOSHIKAWA

03 Birthday at Badger Pass

PHOTO © EDMARIA RODRIGUEZ

04 Half Dome in Winter

PHOTO © JOHN REYNOLDS

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@yosemiteconservancy.org.



YOSEMITE CONSERVANCY

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published twice a year.

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**YOSEMITE
CONSERVANCY.**

Ways to Give

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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Isabelle Luebbers

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415-434-8446 x313

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209-379-2317

yosemiteconservancy.org/volunteer



Yosemite Conservancy
101 Montgomery Street, Suite 1700
San Francisco, CA 94104

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



PHOTO: © NANCY ROBBINS.

How Will You Remember Yosemite?

Once you fall in love with Yosemite, your connection to the park never fades. By remembering Yosemite in your estate plan, you can ensure future visitors will have the chance to create their own lasting memories of the park. When you make a gift to Yosemite Conservancy through your will, trust or retirement plan, you'll be joining the Legacy Society, a group of thoughtful donors whose planned gifts help preserve this treasured place for generations to come.

To learn how you can leave your legacy to Yosemite, contact Debra Holcomb at dholcomb@yosemiteconservancy.org or 415-434-8446 x319.

yosemiteconservancy.org/plannedgiving

