

FINAL REPORT

WILDERNESS FOREVER GRANT

NATIVE AMERICAN LAND CONSERVANCY

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Cover Page: The Old Woman “Statue” in the Old Woman Mountains Wilderness

Introduction

The goal of the program was to encourage the youth to take to heart through their heritage the cultural value of wilderness management for present and future generations. To that end, the NALC designed, organized, and implemented two, two-day field trip for youth and elders to the NALC's Old Woman Mountains Preserve, to the adjoining BLM Old Woman Mountains Wilderness Area, and to the Mojave Trails National Monument. The first field trip took place May 14-15, 2016 and was narrated in our Interim Report for the project (see Field Trip 1, below). The second field trip took place November 5-6, 2016 with a new group of participants to the same general location (see Field Trip 2, below). The second field trip was originally schedule for October 29-30 but was delayed due to inclement weather in the eastern Mojave Desert.

Field Trip 1

- Date of field trip: May 14-15, 2016
- Location: Old Woman Mountains Preserve (Eastern Mojave Desert) and BLM Wilderness
- Total number of youth: 15
- Number of hours each participant spent in wilderness: 28

The project completed one, two-day field trip on May 14-15, 2016 to the NALC's Old Woman Mountains Preserve in the eastern Mojave Desert. The field trip participants included project director Kurt Russo, field instructor Sean Milanovich, field assistant Jeff Johnson, a total of fifteen youth, and elders Clemencia Calderon, Cyril Snake, and David Malgra. The participants included community members from the Cahuilla, Lanape, Ojibway, Lummi, and Chemehuevi tribes. A total of twenty-four youth were originally scheduled to take part in the trip but nine had to cancel due to emergent and unavoidable conflicts. On the second day of the field trip we were joined by Frazier Haney, Executive Director of the Mojave Desert Land Trust, his Director of Education Monica Mahoney, and two Board Members of the NALC.

Day One of the field trip focused on the cultural setting and heritage of the Old Woman Mountains Preserve, including its history of use and occupation by Native peoples. The youth were taken to Painted Rock to learn the significance of the pictographs and rock art in and around the Shaman's Cave. They were also taken to another part of the Preserve and shown pottery shard that can still be found scattered on the ground as well as *in situ* on the site, and learned about the ancestral lifestyle of the Native peoples of the eastern Mojave Desert. This module was held in an area of the Preserve where the participants also discussed the importance of wilderness areas for preserving natural and cultural heritage landscapes. From this location they could see seven different wilderness areas and a viewscape that includes mountain ranges along the Colorado River. After sunset and the evening meal the youth gathered around the fire at their base camp at Painted Rock. For the next three hours they were told about the importance of sacred Salt Songs that speak to the ancient history of the Native peoples of the area. The knowledge-keepers sang Salt Songs, discussed their meaning, and engaged the youth in learning these songs. The evening discussion also included ancestral Star Stories, including those about the Bighorn sheep that can still be found in the Old Woman Mountains Preserve.

The second day of the event focused on the natural heritage of the Preserve, including its wealth of ethno-botanical resources. The participants walked the newly-created 1½ mile ethno-botanical trail in the vicinity of Painted Rock and were shown plants that were used for food, clothing, and medicine. They were then taken to another area on the Preserve where they learned more about the richness, abundance, and habitat of the plant and animal communities. During their time in this area they joined in follow-up discussion of the surrounding Old Woman Mountains Wilderness and the significance of wilderness areas for the protection of Native American natural and cultural heritage resources. They were also introduced to the joint BLM/NALC restoration programs now underway in this part of the Preserve. The final two hours on the Preserve were dedicated to a talking circle. During that time they spoke about what they felt and learned about the history and use of the area, the importance of staying connected to their ancestral landscapes, and the importance of wilderness areas such as the Old Woman Mountains Wilderness for preserving Native American natural and cultural heritage resources.

Photo Gallery

- 1st Row: Pottery shard found on the ground and *in situ*
- 2nd Row: Participants examine rock art and learn about history of use of the area
- 3rd Row: Participants at the base of Painted Rock learning about its history
- 4th Row: Cave at Painted Rock and interior rock art



Photo Gallery (continued)

1st Row: Site Monitor/Steward demonstrates mulching a damaged area; section of interpretive trail

2nd Row: Cultural Historian shares knowledge of ethno-botanically significant plants

3rd Row: Panoramic view from the OWMP looking east to the Colorado River (far horizon)



Field Trip 2

- Date of field trip: November 5-6, 2016
- Location: Old Woman Mountains Preserve (eastern Mojave Desert), BLM Old Woman Mountains Wilderness Area, and the Mojave Trails National Monument
- Total number youth: 23
- Number of hours each participant spent in wilderness: 28

The project completed one, two-day field trip on November 5-6, 2016 to the NALC's Old Woman Mountains Preserve in the eastern Mojave Desert and the adjoining Bureau of Land Management Wilderness Area. The field trip participants included project director Kurt Russo, field instructor Sean Milanovich, field assistants Jeff Johnson and Clemencia Calderon, and a total of 23 youth and young adults. The participants included community members from the Cahuilla, Mission Creek, Lummi, and Chemehuevi tribes, as well youth and young adults from the African-American and Hispanic communities. We were joined by Mike Ahrens, Supervisor of the Needles Field Office (BLM), Beth Ransel, the newly-appointed California Desert District Manager for the Bureau of Land Management, and Robert Paull, Board Member of the Native American Land Conservancy. In addition, an African-American Cathedral High School Student from Palm Springs participated in the trip and is now producing a video that captures the experience of the two-day event.



One of Two Cohorts on the Field Trip

Day One of the field trip focused on the natural and cultural heritage resources in the intersection of the BLM Old Woman Mountains Wilderness, the Old Woman Mountains Preserve, and the newly-designated Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM). The participants learned about the history, unique flora and fauna, and the protective management goals of the surrounding BLM wilderness area. The day hike provided the participants an opportunity to experience first-hand the dramatic landscape of the 1.2 million-acre wilderness area. They also received an orientation to the seven other wilderness areas and the MTNM that can be seen from this portion of the OWMP, and how this vast landscape played—and continues to play—an important role in the cultural life of tribal community and the broader American public. In the evening the participants went on a night walk for several hours to experience the great silences of the wild, then joined with the trip leaders to share their thoughts around the campfire and to learn more of the oral history and ancestral songs associated with the Old Woman Mountains.

The second day of the event focused on the wealth of ethno-botanical resources in the BLM wilderness and the OWMP. The participants walked the newly-created 1½ mile ethno-botanical trail in the vicinity of Painted Rock that crosses into the BLM wilderness area, and were shown plants that were used for food, clothing, and medicine. They were then taken to another area on



the Preserve that intersects with the BLM wilderness area where they learned more about the richness, abundance, and habitat of the plant and animal communities. During their time in this area they joined in follow-up discussion of the surrounding Old Woman Mountains Wilderness and the significance of wilderness areas for the protection of Native American natural and cultural heritage resources. They were also introduced to the joint BLM/NALC restoration programs now underway. The final two hours on the Preserve were dedicated to a talking circle. During that time they spoke about what they felt and learned about the history and use of the area, the importance of staying connected to their ancestral landscapes, and the significance of wilderness areas such as the Old Woman Mountains Wilderness Area for preserving natural and cultural heritage resources. After leaving the Preserve the participants were taken to another part of the Mojave Trails National Monument-the Cadiz Dunes. The youth spent two hours on the dunes and were introduced to the flora and fauna and how protective management helps preserve this unique landscape.



Measurements and Assessment of Success

The measurements of success of the program include:

- 1) promoting the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and the importance of wilderness areas for protecting natural and cultural heritage resources;
- 2) providing field experience in the identification of culturally-significant flora and fauna that benefit from the wilderness management;
- 3) introducing the participants to the traditional uses of plants and their significance to their community;
- 4) sharing through traditional songs, ceremonies, and stories the cultural, ecological, and historical significance of the Old Woman Mountains; and
- 5) engaging partnerships on the field trips with the participation of the BLM management staff, the Mojave Desert Land Trust, and *Pa'ayish Neken*;

The program succeeded in achieving its goals but not without some challenges and disappointments. The main challenge was logistical on the second field trip. Due to persistent inclement weather in the eastern Mojave Desert the second field trip had to be repeatedly postponed. Although the program achieved its goals there is always room for improvement in how to engage the youth, especially those unaccustomed to camping in wilderness areas. It

would have benefited the program to have spent more time prior to the field trips providing a more thorough orientation for the youth and their parents. We are now revising the curriculum for the program to include an orientation component.

Profile of Youth Served

- Total Number of Youth: 38
- Number, Ethnicity, Gender, and Age of Youth Served: 27 Native American (14 male, ages 7-19; 13 female ages 10-17), 10 Hispanic (7 male, ages 12-23; 3 female ages 16-18), 1 African-American (16 years of age)
- Total number of hours/ youth spent in wilderness: 56

Quotes from the Field Trips {names withheld by request}

1. “I don’t want to leave. Everything is so quiet and beautiful. Thank you for bringing me home.” (Native female youth)
2. “I read about places like this. I didn’t know much about wilderness before coming here. I learned so much. We should stay longer.” (Native male youth)
3. “I really liked the songs and stories we heard last night. It made the land come alive for me.” (Native male youth)
4. “I was upset when we got here. It took so long in the car and my cell phone didn’t work. But after awhile I really liked it. I thought deserts were, like, barren places. Now I know better.” (female Hispanic youth)
5. “I enjoyed the wilderness walk last night. It was so special. It’s like you could really see so much, even though it was dark. I want my family to come out here with me.” (female Hispanic youth)

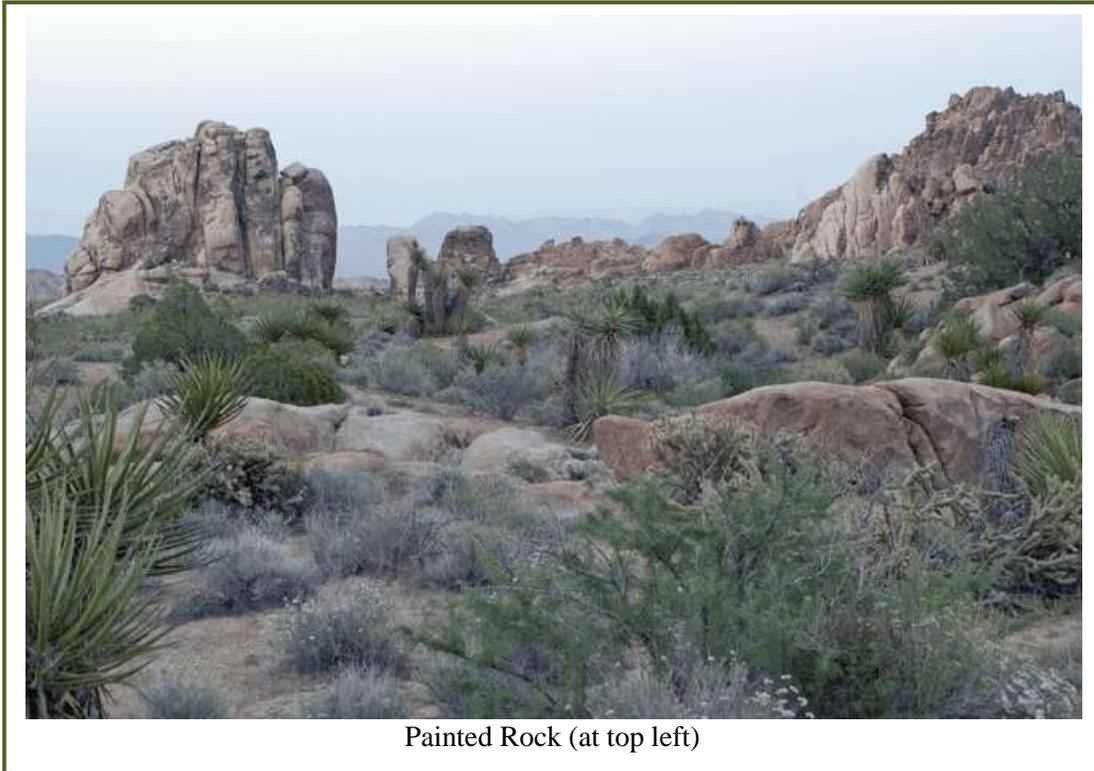
Story 1: A Night Walk in a Storied Landscape

It was dark when the youth and the elder went out from the light of the campfire into the light of a waxing crescent moon. They made their way from the Preserve onto the BLM wilderness land stopping to look up at the night sky. They were shown the Orion Constellation and told the story of the ancestral ties to the Bighorn sheep that live on these lands. They walked in silence, asked to listen to the night sounds. “That was a coyote!” one young man said. He was right. “What was that?” a young girl asked. “An owl,” she was told. “Probably an Elf Owl.” They were told how important wild land is for the Elf Owl that is now threatened throughout much of its range. In the distance they could make out the outlines of nearby mountains. “Look out there,” the elder said. “See what you see, now? This is how it looked to our people hundreds and hundreds of years ago!” The youth held in that moment the feeling of wild land and what it means to preserve and protect it. They could envision what ancient peoples saw, hear what they heard, feel what they felt, and, for some, sense their presences. And in that solitary moment of the brilliant silence of the Milky Way—a felt-sense they will likely long remember—they understood the importance of great silent and wild places to past, present and future generations.



Chemehuevi Archival
Rendering of Bighorn Sheep
in the Orion Constellation

Story 2: A Visit With the Ancestors



Painted Rock (at top left)

The following true story was shared with the youth on the second day of the field trip. It helped them understand the spirit of place that inhabits the vast, ensouled landscape of the BLM Old Woman Mountains Wilderness and the Old Woman Mountains Preserve.

The other day Matthew [a Chemehuevi elder] and I rode out here to Painted Rock together. On the ride out he said, "All we need is to see a Bighorn sheep," also saying he would call quail. When we arrived at the Painted Rock we split up and I left him to be alone. After a while I went to check up on him from a distance. He was talking in *Nuwu* and singing Salt Songs. At one point I heard his Quail Call. Just then from across the wash about fifteen to twenty baby quail came from the bushes and headed over toward Painted Rock and Matthew. As I was taking in a view of the whole area I ended up looking in the direction of Painted Rock. There on top of a small bolder was a Bighorn sheep standing over him. Matthew was silent for about fifteen minutes when two crows flew in from the north and were right over him calling out. Matthew then began to sing again in *Nuwu*. The Bighorn sheep looked in his direction as Matthew sang. While sitting there sharing space with this amazing animal and Matthew, the energy was very powerful and inspiring. The Bighorn hung out for another fifteen minutes on his stony perch above Matthew and then he was gone.



Bighorn at Painted Rock

Final Thoughts

It has long been known and understood that learning experiences in the out-of-doors has a more enduring value. It has certainly been common knowledge since my student days in the College of Forestry at the University of Montana. This is without doubt true for Native youth, particularly when the learning takes place in landscapes of cultural importance to their people. The project field trips linked the historic importance of these historic ties with contemporary efforts to provide protective management for these natural and cultural heritage resources. Put another way, the participants were in a position to feel and hear about the importance of wilderness in the context of the history of their people in a rich learning environment. Moreover, other communities of color that participated found this felt-experience of the Native youth deeply meaningful and inspiring. In addition, the participants came to better understand the importance of cross-cultural collaboration—between cultures and land managers—not only in the material evidence, but also in the deep respect that was evident to everyone between the NALC and the Bureau of Land Management.

It is a lesson never too late, or too early, to enjoy.

Expenditures

	<u>WF Budget</u>	<u>WF YTD</u>	<u>Remaining</u>	<u>NALC Budget</u>	<u>NALC YTD</u>	<u>NALC Remaining</u>
Director Kurt Russo	\$2,360	\$1,750	\$ 610	\$ 140	\$ 140	\$0
Instructors	3,840	3,840	0	----	----	----
Field Assistant	----	----	----	1,792	1,792	0
Program/Curriculum Advisor	----	----	----	640	640	0
SUV Rentals/Fuel	1,800	1,895.50	-\$95.50	----	----	----
Food	<u>2,000</u>	<u>1,810.51</u>	<u>189.49</u>	----	----	----
Total	\$10,000	\$9,296.01	\$703.99	\$2,572	\$2,572	\$0