



CONSERVANCY CONNECTION



Winter 2017



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Interim Executive Director

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Director of Finance and Operations

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Field Manager

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Waves in the River

Letter from the Amargosa Conservancy Board President

Dear Amargosa Conservancy Members and Friends,

Happy New Year from all of us at the Amargosa Conservancy! We are reveling in cooler temperatures and hope you are enjoying a beautiful winter wherever you are.

I am pleased to share with you some exciting new developments that have happened recently here at the Amargosa Conservancy. After our previous Executive Director stepped down last summer, the Board of Directors appointed former Stewardship Manager Tanya Henderson as Interim Executive Director. Tanya started with the Conservancy in October 2015 and has overseen the organization's many ecosystem stewardship projects since that time.

The Board is excited to promote Tanya into this new role. Her previous experience in desert conservation, combined with her love and knowledge of the Amargosa Basin, provide the foundation for her success. The Board is committed to helping Tanya grow as a leader and supporting her development as a new executive director. Tanya will continue to oversee the Conservancy's projects for the coming field season, with the help of our new Field Manager, Celia Demers.

In addition to Tanya's promotion, the Board has promoted Julie Vargo to Director of Finance and Operations. What this means for you is that she is the primary contact for all questions regarding membership and donations. We are also bringing on staff and interns for the many field projects of the upcoming work season, some of which you will read about in this newsletter.

I hope that you will consider making a year-end contribution to the Conservancy. Your membership helps us to manage the basics and day-to-day tasks of carrying out our mission - the hours of balancing budgets and operating our Shoshone office. It also helps us to develop and pursue new programs and opportunities. Our conservation work includes protecting the region's water resources, removing invasive tamarisk, and restoring habitat for the impossibly adorable Amargosa vole. This is in addition to continuing our long-standing policy and advocacy work.

Our team is strong, forward thinking, and eager. We are looking to the future and developing programs for education and the continuation of the land stewardship that we have established over the last couple of years. 🌿

All the best,

Holly Alpert
Board President



Holly Alpert
Board President

Brian Curt Kostors' Amargosa Symphony

This landscape inspires art of many kinds. Recently our heads were turned when Bryan Curt Kostors approached us with a tale of his recent symphonic work, AMARGOSA. Yep, he wrote an orchestral piece inspired by the Amargosa Basin. Here is what he has to say about the piece:

Amargosa, meaning "bitter water," is the name given to both the desert region along the southwestern edge of the Nevada state line and the seasonal river that flows there. Directly west of the Amargosa Desert lies the expanse of Death Valley; the Amargosa River, when flowing, eventually empties into the alkali sink there at Badwater.

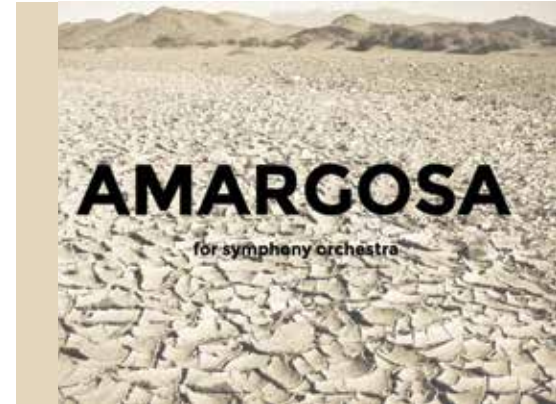
The Amargosa is a foreboding, challenging, and beautiful landscape. Its history is filled with native tribes,

horse thieves, miners, farmers, explorers, grifters, financiers, and a ballerina; of those that have attempted to settle and stay in the region, only a select few have had any success.

The region is dominated by stillness and quiet, demanding respect from the visitor. The Amargosa is quick to show you how insignificant and valuable you truly are.

Melodic elements for the piece incorporate aspects of transcriptions of Paiute and Shoshone songs likely sung in the Amargosa and surrounding areas. These transcriptions were found in the following books:

- Pietroforte, Alfred. Yokuts and Paiute Songs and Culture. Healdsburg, CA: Naturegraph Publishers, Inc., 1965.



- Steward, J. H. Ethnography of the Owens Valley Paiute. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1930.

This piece is dedicated to my friend, Michael Pietrobon.

You can listen to the piece yourself at www.bryancurtkostors.com. 🍀



Birdwatching in Afton Canyon

Afton Canyon Exploration

Eighteen year old Jocelyn Giron, visiting from Victorville, CA, had this to say about her experience in Afton Canyon for the first time:

Maybe someone with little knowledge of the desert might think, "It's just dirt. It's too hot! It's so dry." Even people who live IN the desert might think this if they never go out INTO the wilds. But, for those of us who have the opportunity and take the time to explore the desert, we

know it has so much more to offer. Seeing different types of birds and plants was amazing! Being able to find evidence of animals that were in the same spot we were in, finding their drinking spot, walking a big horned sheep trail... this trip to Afton Canyon was an amazing experience. Also, seeing that there is so much life out in the desert, and so much we can do to preserve it. 🍀

Education Program Gains Momentum

The Amargosa Conservancy was grateful to have a funded Education Intern position from January through May 2016. The position was made possible by donations made in honor of Bonnie Brown's passing.

Intern Jayna Sames gave formal classroom lessons, weekend resource walks, and represented the Conservancy at outreach events in the surrounding community. She reached over 450 people in her

five months. One lasting result was Pupfish Plunge! Developed with our SCA intern Abby Mattson, this bean bag toss game helps teach changes in environment overtime leading to the evolution of today's endemic pupfish.

While we do not currently have a funding source for another Education Intern, the Conservancy is working hard to not lose the momentum that Jayna gained. We will continue to be involved with area schools and to present at local events. 🍀



Jayna and Abby showing off Pupfish Plunge!

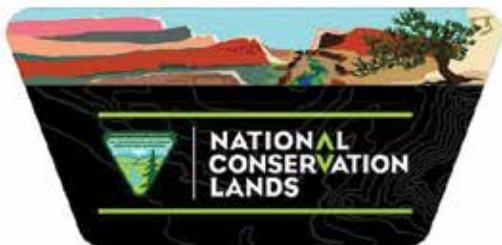
DESERT RENEWABLE ENERGY

What is the Desert Renewable Conservation Plan (DRECP)?

The DRECP is a collaborative effort to address the need to find areas for development of renewable power sources in the California deserts. It arose as a result of the increase in demands for land uses in the deserts: primarily renewable energy, conservation, and recreation. Partners for the plan include Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), California Energy Commission (CEC), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).

So this group made a plan. What's the plan?

The plan is structured in phases. The first phase ended in September 2016, and it's the phase that affects the Amargosa Basin. The BLM signed a Record of Decision updating the California Desert Conservation Act (CDCA). After a process involving much review and public, scientific, and user group input, they finalized the update.



www.blm.gov/nlcs



Map of all areas covered in DRECP process

CONSERVATION PLAN

What does DCREP mean for the Amargosa Basin?

The updates to the CDCA have grand results for the Amargosa Basin. The BLM has a program called the National Conservation Lands. According to the BLM, "The mission of the National Conservation Lands is to conserve, protect, and restore these nationally significant landscapes that are recognized for

their outstanding cultural, ecological, and scientific values."

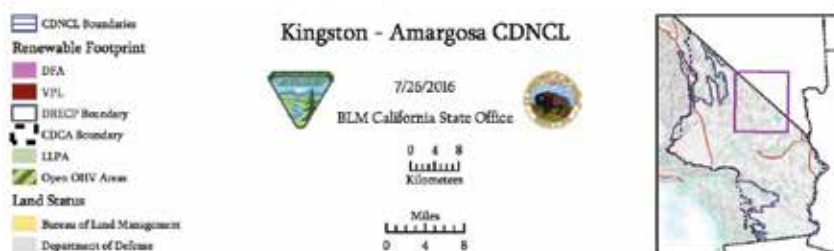
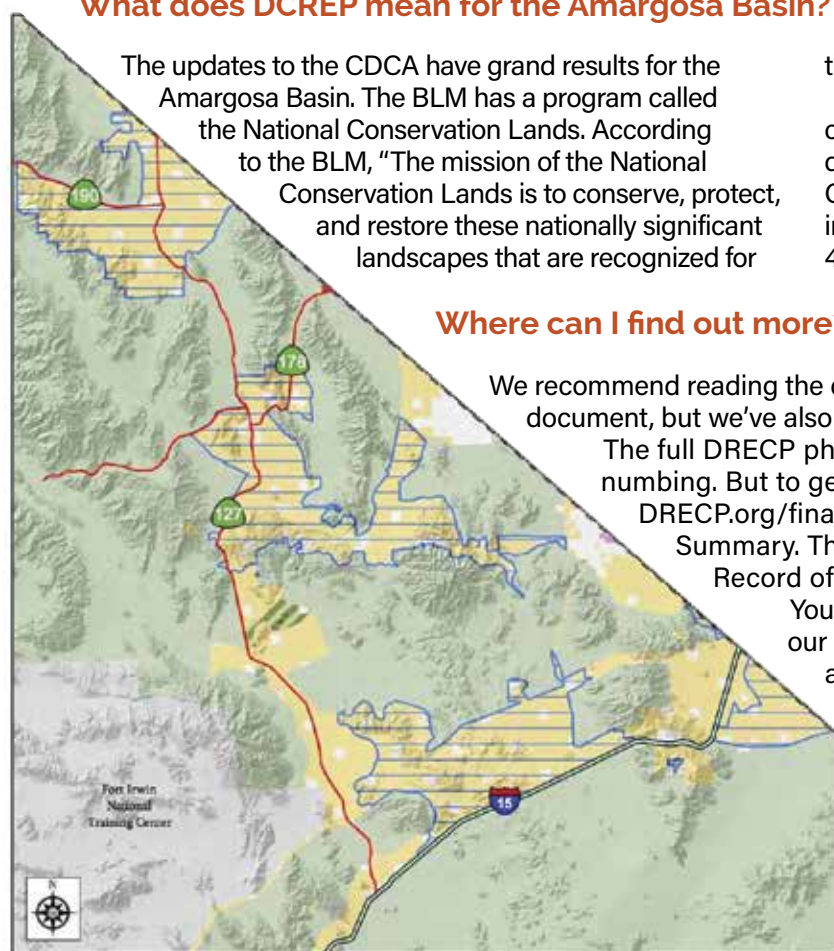
Recognizing just how much the Amargosa contributes culturally, ecologically, and scientifically, the BLM has now designated almost all of the Amargosa Basin as National Conservation Lands. The total acreage of BLM land protected in the Kingston-Amargosa subarea of the DRECP is now 433,000 acres.

Where can I find out more?

We recommend reading the description of the Kingston-Amargosa area. It's in a giant document, but we've also put it on our blog: www.amargosaconservancy.org

The full DRECP phases and decisions can be pretty extensive and mind numbing. But to get more info without distilling down the full plans, go to DRECP.org/finaldrecp. The first PDF available in the list is the Executive Summary. This document will give you a great overview of the Record of Decision.

You may also want to read the appendix that describes our region. We have posted it on our blog at amargosaconservancy.org/kingston-amargosa-region



Map of designated National Conservation Lands in Amargosa Region

BY THE NUMBERS

BLM DRECP Total Area:

10,818,000 ACRES

BLM National Conservation Lands in CA:

6,527,000 ACRES

National Conservation Lands in the Amargosa-Kingston Subregion:

433,000 ACRES

SHOSHONE PUPFISH

Photo by Nancy Good

During the ice ages, the Amargosa, Mojave, and Owens Rivers flowed to Lake Manly. This was a 100 mile long, 600 foot deep freshwater lake that once filled the floor of Death Valley. In today's warmer, drier world, aquatic habitats have become smaller and disconnected.

Descendants of fishes that once ranged over vast areas are now isolated in fragments of their former habitat. Over tens of thousands of years, some of these survivors evolved into new species and subspecies. Take, for example, the Amargosa Valley including Ash Meadows. Today this area hosts a surprising tally of 8 living species and subspecies of fishes. At one time, it had two additional fishes that have now been driven to extinction by human activities!

One of the survivors is the Shoshone pupfish (*Cyprinodon nevadensis Shoshone*). It is only

known from the outflow of Shoshone Springs. Museum specimens were first collected by the 1891 Death Valley Expedition. However, they were not recognized as a unique subspecies before Robert Rush Miller, a graduate student at UCLA, began work on them in 1939. Miller, on his way to becoming one of the biggest names in southwestern fishes, distinguished them from their nearest relatives the Amargosa pupfish and the now-extinct Tecopa pupfish based on their slimmer body shape, fewer and larger scales, and reduced numbers of fin rays. Breeding males have their own special shade of turquoise evident from January through September. You can view the fish along a trail system between the Death Valley Academy and the swimming pool in Shoshone.

In the years following discovery, Shoshone pupfish declined so much that they were presumed extinct

in 1969. For that reason, Shoshone pupfish were not listed under the Endangered Species Act. Around 1985, a small number of pupfish were rediscovered by a fish biologist visiting the land owner, Susan Sorrells. Shortly thereafter, Susan and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife began working together to restore habitat and ensure a future for Shoshone's native fish. They created pond habitats, moved fish upstream into the restored habitats, and for a while a operated a captive breeding project at UC Davis and UNLV.

In 2013 Shoshone Development Corporation obtained a federal Desert Fish Habitat Partnership grant enabling them to successfully expand the occupied habitat almost 100-fold. For more good news and information about Shoshone pupfish recovery, visit: amargosaconservancy.org/habitat-restoration 🌿

QUICK FACTS:

THE AMAZING PUPFISH...

- Can be found in extreme and isolated habitats.
- Are a type of killifish.
- Forage from sunrise to sunset, and are dormant at night.
- Primarily eat cyanobacteria, but can consume a variety of other foods.



IN THE FIELD

Vole habitat after restoration

As the country turns towards winter, in our corner of the desert, we are ramping up for our field work season. Our new field manager, Celia Demers, has joined us for the season while Acadia National Park, her summer employer, is too frozen for trail work. Celia has an extensive background not only in conservation field work and the nonprofit sector. As you will see below, we are going to put all of her experience to use in leading and managing our wide variety of stewardship projects.

We are eager for the arrival of our four person crew of Student Conservation Association interns who start work at the new year and continue through the spring. The selection process for our intern field crew was difficult because we had an amazingly qualified pool of applicants to choose from. We are expecting a lively and fun season with Alison, Banle, Rhyan, and Sam! Also on the roster for the winter field work are groups of young conservationists from the Nevada Conservation Corps and an SCA Wild Corps crew.

Here's a brief look at our ongoing and upcoming projects:

- **Vole Habitat:** Last year, we broke ground on two new habitat areas in Shoshone Village. The transformation of fallow land to vole inhabited land is a long process, and we are continuing to guide the

marshes towards becoming great living quarters for the endangered Amargosa Vole (*Microtus californicus scirpensis*). We are working with the "Vole Team" (an ad-hoc group of scientists, land managers and other stakeholders) in an ongoing effort that began with planning a restoration project and securing funding and now continues with the habitat creation and management. Next we will construct a boardwalk and install signs to help share the story of the Vole and explain the role of the marshes.

- **China Ranch Trail:** This season will bring the completion of the construction of the Willow Creek to Amargosa River trail. At the trailhead we will install interpretive signs, and then finalize the tread of the trail itself. As the Conservancy has been involved with project since early 2013, it will be with great joy (and some sadness to be done) that we officially close the project and open the trail this spring. Made possible by the State of California's River Parkways Grant Program, this project has added not only better public access to Amargosa Canyon (via the trail that starts at China Ranch), but has added invaluable data and increased knowledge of our delicate desert riparian ecosystem by supporting multi-year bird studies and tamarisk treatments.

- **Sperry Wash Restoration:** A project that we will dig into this year is a restoration effort in Sperry Wash. After noticing Off Road Vehicle tracks in the Wild and Scenic portion of the Amargosa River, we acquired funding to help clarify the 4WD route between Dumont Dunes and the old talc mines in the Kingstons. The Conservancy will be working with the Barstow BLM, Student Conservation Association's Wild Corps Crew, and our own field crew to install a post and cable fence to help guide riders to designated pathways. The Conservancy crew (and any volunteers who are interested!) will also be restoring some impacted areas by disguising vehicle impacts. Hopefully this will discourage further off-route exploration and allow the desert a chance to heal. 🌱



Great Old Broads for Wilderness on a volunteer work day



Maintain this beautiful landscape with
your gift to the Amargosa Conservancy.

To find out more about membership, visit www.amargosaconservancy.org/support, call us at 760-852-4339, or email info@amargosaconservancy.org. You can also return the included envelope with your donation.