

NationalParks

FALL 2013
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THE MAGAZINE OF THE NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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National Parks

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FALL 2013 / Vol. 87 No. 4

COVER IMAGE:

CALIFORNIA SEA LIONS swimming off the coast of Anacapa Island, Channel Islands National Park.

© IAN SHIVE

THE VIEW FROM
CAVERN POINT TRAIL,
LOOKING TOWARD SANTA CRUZ
ISLAND, CHANNEL ISLANDS
NATIONAL PARK, CALIFORNIA.

© IAN SHIVE

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California Dreaming

Photographer Ian Shive has been to dozens of national parks, but he returns to the Channel Islands again and again.

By Ian Shive

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The Life Aquatic

Few people equate New York City with SCUBA diving and environmental education, but for kids at the Harbor School, it's the perfect place to learn about oyster beds, global warming, and a whole lot more.

By Jennifer Bogo

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Hidden Valley

With bike paths, train rides, contra dancing, and farmers markets, Ohio's Cuyahoga Valley National Park isn't like most national parks—and that's why the locals love it.

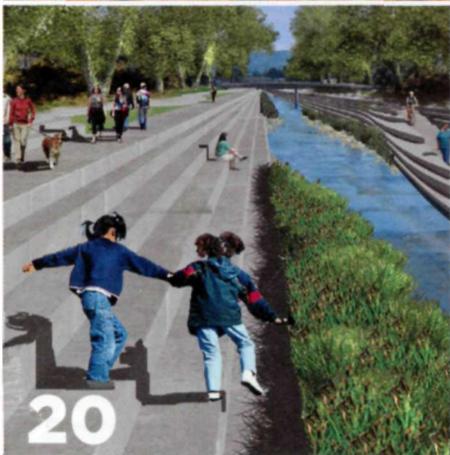
By Melanie D.G. Kaplan

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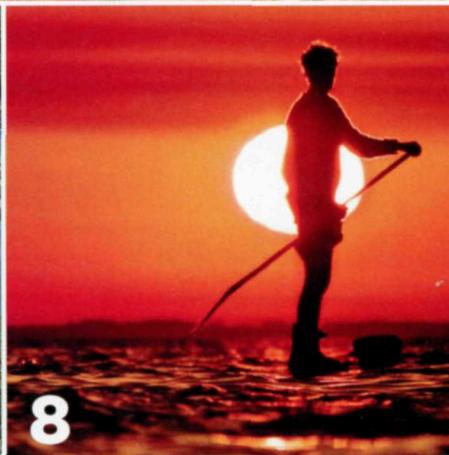
THE COLORFUL ISLAND NIGHT LIZARD, found only on the Channel Islands, appears to have made a dramatic recovery.



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Summer in the City

Nearly one year ago, on October 29, Hurricane Sandy struck the East Coast, affecting thousands of people and damaging more than 70 national park units, including Gateway National Recreation Area in New York and New Jersey.

Essentially neglected since its creation in 1972, Gateway consists of three areas including most of Jamaica Bay on the south-side of Brooklyn and Queens. In recent years, under the leadership of Senator Charles Schumer, NPCA, the Regional Plan Association, Columbia University, and the Van Alen Institute came together with many local community groups and the Borough Presidents of Brooklyn and Queens to craft a new vision for Jamaica Bay. In 2012, these efforts culminated in New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar signing an agreement allowing the City and the Park Service to manage Jamaica Bay together. This summer, Mayor Bloomberg outlined ambitious plans for Jamaica Bay in the City's \$20 billion storm-protection plan, including the announcement of a new conservancy to support the park.

Now, thanks to the Department of Interior, the City of New York, and other partners, Jamaica Bay will be home to a new Science and Resilience Institute, which will study how urban ecosystems contend with storms and rising sea levels, a topic also being studied by a group of New York based students. In partnership with the Park Service, the students explore the murky waters off Gateway with an eye toward re-creating the native oyster beds that once protected New York and New Jersey from wind and water—and could again in the future. (See story, page 38.)

As our urban centers grow and climate change causes more devastating storms, the importance of urban parks, both as places of refuge and as natural barriers against extreme weather, will continue to increase. We look forward to working with the Park Service, the City of New York and the newly formed Jamaica Bay-Rockaway Park Conservancy (to be led by NPCA's board chair, Tom Secunda), to transform Gateway into one of America's most iconic urban national parks.

Theresa Pierno



Editor's Note



© SCOTT KIRKWOOD

TREES FRAME the Washington Monument on the National Mall.

One Tree

Last year, photographer James Balog came to Washington, D.C., to talk about his research on trees and global warming, and I was fortunate enough to see him speak. At the end of his presentation, a woman in the audience asked how we can expect the next generation to care about forests and trees, since more people are moving to urban landscapes and many kids may never set foot in a forest. I loved Balog's response. A few years earlier, he had found a way to rig ropes and climbing gear so he could capture an entire Sequoia from top to bottom by taking a series of photos. When he pasted these photos together, he produced images no one had ever seen before—images that appeared in *National Geographic* magazine and a book that garnered a lot of attention. On the book tour that followed, dozens of people came up to him, some close to tears, to tell him how much they loved trees and forests, which he hadn't expected. But he was even more surprised to discover that many of those people first fell in love with trees not because of a visit to a national park or a forest, but because of one tree. A tree that was in a nearby city park or in their own backyard. A tree they climbed or hung a swing from. A tree where they'd gathered leaves or cones. Or a tree they just sat beneath to read. Sometimes that's all it takes, he said. Just one tree.

And it can happen anywhere. This issue of *National Parks* magazine takes readers to sites in downtown Los Angeles (page 20), New York City (page 38), and just outside Toledo, Ohio (page 46), to illustrate the many ways that Park Service staff are introducing countless people to their "one tree."

Scott Kirkwood
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WHO WE ARE

Established in 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association is America's only private, nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated solely to protecting, preserving, and enhancing the U.S. National Park System.

WHAT WE DO

NPCA protects and enhances America's national parks for present and future generations by identifying problems and generating support to resolve them.

EDITORIAL MISSION

National Parks magazine fosters an appreciation of the natural and historic treasures found in the parks, educates readers about the need to preserve those resources, and illustrates how member contributions drive our organization's park-protection efforts. The magazine uses the power of imagery and language to forge a lasting bond between NPCA and its members, while inspiring new readers to join the cause. *National Parks* magazine is among a member's chief benefits. Of the \$25 membership dues, \$6 covers a one-year subscription to the magazine.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Members can help defend America's natural and cultural heritage. Activists alert Congress and the administration to park threats; comment on park planning and adjacent land-use decisions; assist NPCA in developing partnerships; and educate the public and the media. Please sign up to receive Park Lines, our monthly e-mail newsletter. Go to npca.org to sign up.

HOW TO DONATE

To donate, please visit npca.org or call 800.628.7275. For information about bequests, planned gifts, and matching gifts, call our Development Department, extension 145 or 146.

QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about your membership, call Member Services at 800.628.7275. On a selective basis, NPCA makes its membership list available to organizations that our members find of interest. If you would like your name to be removed from this list, please call us at the number listed above.

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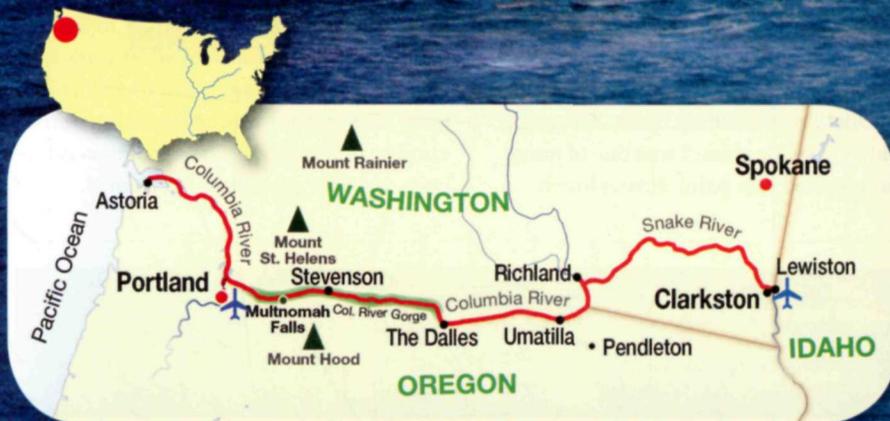
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BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE

I loved the wildlife map in the Summer issue “Where the Wild Things Are”—what a great idea to have something like this handy for travel. But there is one thing readers should note. As a former intern park ranger at Carlsbad Caverns, I can attest to the fact that the bats fly out of the caverns in June and July, too, not just in August, so visitors can enjoy them all summer long.

MONETTE BEBOW-REINHARD
Abrams, WI

DIALING 9-1-1

I enjoyed “Dress Rehearsal” in the Summer 2013 issue. It’s reassuring to know that the National Park System, in cooperation with other like-minded agencies, trains to be prepared for any emergency requiring a search-and-rescue effort. I also appreciate the dedication required of those who arrange and execute such massive search-and-rescue exercises. As an active member of the National Ski Patrol at Holiday Valley ski resort in western New York, I realize a training of this scale must be a huge undertaking.

BERT PROBST
Ellicottville, NY

MOTION PICTURES

I enjoyed Lynda Mapes’ article “Elwha: A River Reborn.” Her story and the photos by Steve Ringman really capture this remarkable undertaking. The book should be a great read. Anyone looking for additional information on the Elwha project should check out “Return to Elwha,” a documentary produced by Jason Jaacks (vimeo.com/59774173). Along with two brothers and two other

friends, Jaacks hiked up to the river’s source and documented a five-day kayak journey down the river to the Pacific. This film is a perfect companion piece to the article and a “must see” for those who care about the restoration of America’s great rivers and salmon—or who simply enjoy a good “man befriends nature” story.

JOHN ROK
Portsmouth, RI

A GLIMPSE OF GENIUS

Many thanks for the recent article on Chiura Obata (“Wood Blocks & Watercolors”). His story is inspiring. It was my great fortune to be an art student at University of California–Berkeley while Mr. Obata was teaching there. Although I didn’t take his class, I was one of many who watched him paint during lunch

breaks. Using soy ink on white paper, he quickly turned out one wonderful painting after another.

I was also lucky enough to see a retrospective of his paintings in Yosemite a few years ago. I truly believe Obata is one of America’s great painters and, sadly, one of its most underrated. Thanks for introducing him to your readers.

DONNA OLSEN
Fremont, CA

CORRECTIONS:

The image of salmon that accompanied the Editor’s Note in the Summer issue was captured on Adams River in British Columbia, and it reflects what park biologists hope to see in the Elwha years from now, rather than conditions in the current ecosystem, where salmon numbers are only starting to rebound.

Send letters to National Parks Magazine, 777 6th Street NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001-3723. **Or e-mail** npmag@npsa.org. Include your name, city, and state. Published letters may be edited for length and clarity.

You'll Fall for Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, too.

"The autumn colors are beautiful and alluring."

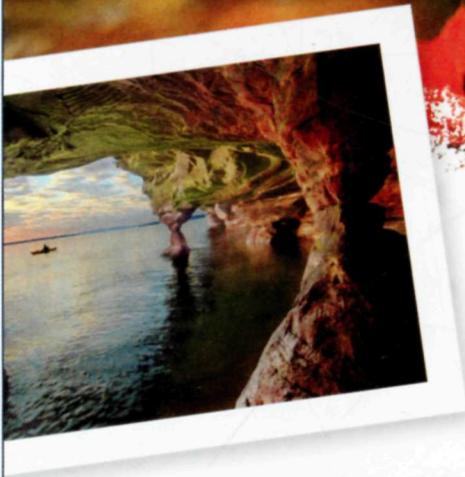
- KATIE N.

"...certain places radiate natural charm...
Bayfield is one of those places."

- EMILY L.

"...a wonderful trip and would do it again in a
heartbeat."

- ARLYS L.



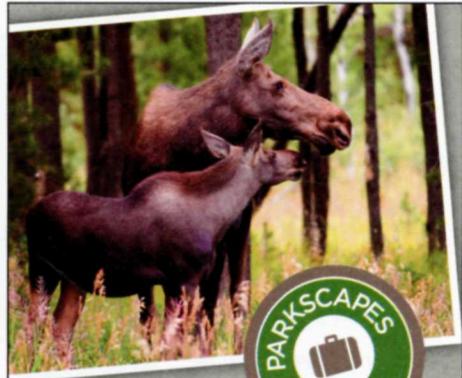
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Photos (from Top): Mother moose with baby in Yellowstone National Park ©Nisch Gevorlyan/Dreamstime; Red Fox in Yellowstone ©Nathan Hobbs/StockPhoto.



Echoes

It's hard to get people invested in saving the rivers if they can't get to them.

Ed Stierli, NPCA's landscape conservation fellow for the Chesapeake Bay, quoted in the Washington Post regarding efforts to improve public access to the Bay. Today, only 2 percent of the Maryland and Virginia shoreline is open to the general public. Learn more at freedomtofloat.org.

You have to wonder, what's the impact when the Washington Monument is closed and the bathrooms are kind of crummy? Will people want to come back?

John Garder, NPCA's director of budget and appropriations, quoted in the Washington Post in response to the cancellation of the annual July 4 concert, fewer police officers, and overflowing trash cans on the National Mall—all results of the sequester. (For more, see infographic on pp. 10-11.)

Tucson loves its Saguaro forests. It's much more visceral than if [vandals] had thrown a rock through a window. It's like they hurt a family member.

Kevin Dahl, program manager in NPCA's Tucson field office, quoted in the New York Times in response to increased reports of vandalism in Saguaro and other national parks, a problem exacerbated by staffing shortages.





NATIONAL PARKS NEED HELP

As NPCA's members know, our 401 national parks represent America's best idea, but recent budget cuts are forcing park superintendents to make some impossible decisions. This infographic, which has already appeared in hundreds of media outlets, spells out some of the more dire impacts.



13%

reduction in funding to operate national parks over the last three years in today's dollars.

★ Loss of \$315 million total



10%

reduction in park rangers and other staff since 2003.



69%

reduction in the Park Service construction account to address maintenance needs since 2003, in today's dollars.





ACADIA

Major Staffing Shortages

Acadia has lost **12 seasonal positions**, reduced seasons for **31 other staff members**, and will not be filling **18** originally permanent but now **vacant positions**. The cuts involve everyone from maintenance crew to biologists, affecting park operations deeply.



GLACIER

Closed Campgrounds

Visitor centers opened **2 weeks late**, and campgrounds **3 weeks late**, affecting visitor numbers and, as a result, park revenue.



FREDERICKSBURG & SPOTSYLVANIA

Fewer Interpretive Rangers

As a result of staffing shortages this year, **1,000 fewer kids** will participate in educational programs, **4,000 fewer visitors** will experience guided walking tours, and **20,000 fewer visitors** will have access to key historic sites like Chatham Manor on most days of the week.



ISLE ROYALE

Special Events Canceled

A **23% reduction** in staff forced the park to cancel spring programs, local library programs, shows, and special events. Estimates show that more than **10,000 students** and **20,000 visitors** were affected.



GOLDEN GATE

Dirty Bathrooms and Languishing Trails

With only **3 maintenance staff members remaining of last year's 11**, trails and roads suffer from a lack of upkeep. Staff are collecting trash and cleaning restrooms less frequently, which hurts not only the visitor experience, but visitation itself.



EVERGLADES

Endangered species at risk

17 vacant positions are not being filled this year, making it difficult to monitor endangered species like the Florida panther and manage invasive species like the Burmese python, which is threatening the Everglades' fragile ecosystem.

National park staff, gateway communities, and families all across America are feeling the impacts of these cuts. Not only is the visitor experience being threatened—so are the hotels, restaurants, and other businesses that rely on those visitors to support local economies. Congress needs to invest in our national parks to ensure they are preserved and protected for the future.

Park advocates can help restore funding to the National Park Service budget by calling their Members of Congress at **202.224.3121** or visiting **www.npca.org/parkfunding**



Sources:

National Parks Conservation Association Data
& National Park Service Data





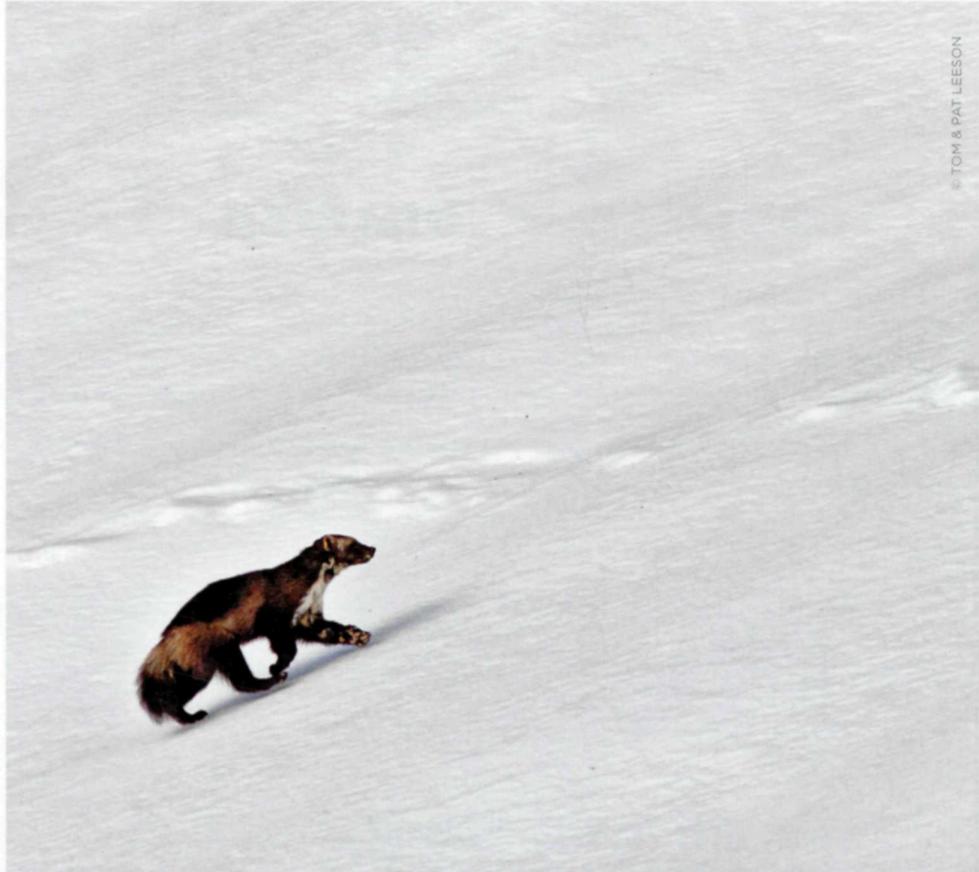
On a Ledge

Wolverines may soon be listed as a threatened species.

In the spring of 2009, a wolverine known as M56 walked out of his home in Wyoming's Teton Range and headed south. According to his tracking implant, he scaled craggy cliffs and fields of talus. He traveled roughly 500 miles over state lines and six-lane highways. On June 26 that year, M56 showed up in the sights of a photographer's lens in Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park—and caused quite a stir. It was the first sighting of a wolverine in the state since 1919, and the first glimpse of a wolverine in the park since its creation

"It was a great illustration of wolverines' scale of movement," says Jeff Burrell, a biologist and Northern Rockies program coordinator for Wildlife Conservation Society, which ran a wolverine monitoring study in the Yellowstone area. It also reminds us, Burrell says, that wolverines are a natural part of Colorado's landscape and rely on the ability to roam across large connected territories.

M56 appears to be the lone wolverine in Colorado, but he may have company soon. In February, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) proposed listing the American wolverine as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Though their numbers are slowly growing, fewer than 300 wolverines populate the United States, and climate-change predictions suggest a drastic reduction of their habitat. According to the FWS, wolverine habitat could shrink by 31 percent by



WOLVERINES ARE SHOWING UP in the Rockies and the North Cascades—evidence of a gradual recovery—but global warming poses a serious long-term threat.

2045 and 63 percent by 2085, potentially threatening the species with extinction.

The agency also announced several other proposals with the potential listing. Unlike more controversial listings, this one would specifically allow human activities, such as skiing, snowmobiling, and logging, to continue in the wolverines' high-elevation habitat, because FWS doesn't believe that wolverines are significantly affected by those impacts. (Hunting and trapping the animals, however, would be illegal.) Another FWS proposal: reintroducing the feisty critters into their native range, starting with Colorado. When the agency solicited public comments this spring, more than 100,000

people weighed in—both supporters and detractors. By February 2014, FWS will decide whether or not to add the species to the list.

"This is a matter of helping wolverines adapt to climate change," says Shawn Sartorius, a FWS biologist specializing in wolverines. "They're not going to adapt to warmer temperatures, but through reintroductions in historic parts of the range where they no longer occur, we can help wolverines establish populations and maintain numbers while they're simultaneously losing some habitat to climate change."

Already, without much—if any—help from human beings, wolverines have staged a shaky but undeniable comeback after

The species' tenacious grip on survival is perhaps a reflection of its shockingly fierce temperament.

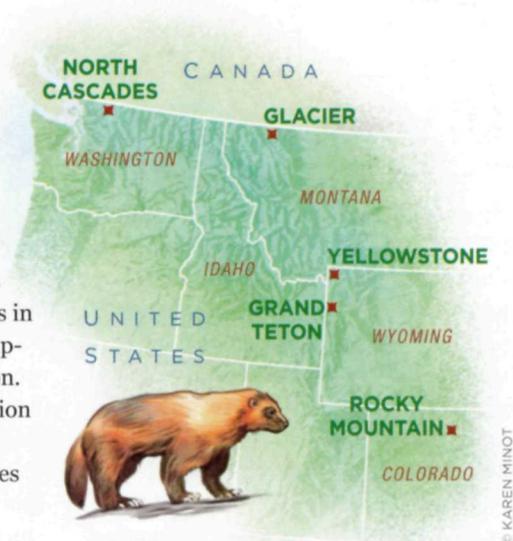
near-extinction in the Lower 48. In the 19th century, trappers caught them for their thick, beautiful fur, which was used for winter coats on this continent and in Europe. Then, in the early 1900s, widespread trapping and poisoning programs largely aimed at wolves and bears unintentionally killed wolverines, nearly erasing them from the country's wild landscapes.

A couple of decades after trapping practices started to change in the 1930s, wolverines from Canada trickled down into Idaho, Montana, Washington, and, ultimately, Wyoming and began to reproduce. The species' tenacious grip on survival is perhaps a reflection of its shockingly fierce temperament. Wolverines are one of nature's gnarliest predators. These mammals, the largest terrestrial member of the weasel family, resemble small bears with bushy tails. Although they rarely grow larger than 40 pounds, they have been known to spar with grizzlies and—when there's not enough small prey, berries, and carrion—attack and kill wounded animals many times their size, like caribou. They prefer to inhabit the mountains' most inhospitable corners: cold, steep, high-altitude areas laden with deep snow. And they've been known to travel as far as 30 miles per day over rugged, remote terrain.

But wolverines still haven't repopulated their full home range in the United States, which also includes the high zones of California's Sierra Nevada, Colorado, and New Mexico. Listing the wolverine as

threatened could spur Colorado Parks and Wildlife to reintroduce the species in the state, which, if approved, could happen within a year or two of the decision. Theoretically, a wolverine reintroduction would transplant healthy individuals from Alaska and Canada to remote sites throughout Colorado.

WOLVERINES LIVE in five national parks throughout the Rockies and the Pacific Northwest.



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“A lot of people believe that if you have wild places, you should have wild things,” says Eric Odell, species conservation project manager for Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Some Coloradans, however, oppose wolverine reintroduction out of concern that regulations to protect them would hamper human activities like skiing or logging, even though FWS officials have no current plans to move in that direction.

A listing wouldn't immediately change much in the ecosystems, since the animals are relatively rare; nor would it immediately change management of the national parks,

Several times a year, reports of sightings filter into the visitor centers of Rocky Mountain National Park.”

which comprise about 12 percent of wolverine habitat in the contiguous United States. (The species currently occurs in Glacier, Grand Teton, North Cascades, Rocky Mountain, and Yellowstone National Parks—see map, page 13.) It would, however, add an extra measure of scrutiny in future planning projects and add another layer of protection.

National parks play an important role in providing refuge for these animals, and a valuable study area for researchers. In the last ten years, lack of research on wolverines halted FWS efforts to list the species under the Endangered Species Act. Partly as a result, biologists initiated monitoring studies in the greater Yellowstone and greater

Glacier areas. Now, North Cascades is hosting a multiyear study of wolverines and recently debuted new camera traps, which could be used to document the species in more remote places.

“The park is a good laboratory because we don't have any human activities that negatively impact the wolverine,” says Roger Christopherson, a wildlife biologist at North Cascades National Park. “The more we know about them, the better we can protect them.”

Meanwhile, the bachelor M56 is still likely roaming Colorado, perhaps in search of a lady friend. Several times a year, reports of sightings filter into the visitor centers of Rocky Mountain National Park, some more credible than others.

“Visitors know what they are and how unique and special it would be to see one in the wild,” says John Mack, branch chief of natural resources at Rocky Mountain National Park. Often, these sightings wind up being marmots or, in one case, a really muddy badger, but occasionally they do match the description of M56. “They capture people's imaginations.”

Even if wolverines are still largely mysterious and rarely sighted—something unlikely to change with their listing under the Endangered Species Act—their presence seems to have an intangible value. It reminds us that wild places with wild things still do exist, and not only within the confines of our imaginations.

“They're probably one of the most elusive carnivores,” says Christopherson. “But hiking around out there, by gosh, there just might be one watching you.”

—KATE SIBER

THE NUMBERS

100,000 Number of people who commented on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's proposal to add wolverines to the endangered species list

500 Miles that the wolverine known as “M56” traveled from Wyoming to Colorado

300 Number of wolverines populating the Lower 48, based on biologists' best estimates

90 Years that passed between the last wolverine sighting in Colorado and the discovery of M56

63 Percentage of ideal wolverine habitat that could disappear by the year 2085

30 Miles per day wolverines have been known to travel over 12,000-foot-high mountain passes

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THE ISLAND NIGHT LIZARD, found only on the Channel Islands, was once a threatened species, but now numbers in the millions.

COURTESY NAFIS

Night and Day

After 30 years of intense habitat restoration on the Channel Islands, the island night lizard might be ready to come off the endangered species list.

Forty years ago, vast swaths of the Channel Islands looked more like an eroded desert than a national park. Decades of ranching and grazing and the introduction of non-native species had devastated the natural landscape—a landscape once so rich and diverse that it was dubbed “America’s Galapagos.”

It wasn’t just the scenery that suffered. Many of the 145 plant and animal populations unique to the islands took a nosedive, too. Among the most charismatic of that bunch was the island night lizard, originally thought to be nocturnal (it’s actually just secretive).

The species lives up to 30 years, gives birth to live young (versus laying eggs like most reptiles), and boasts some of the most vibrant camouflage in the reptile world, thanks to colorful surroundings. Found nowhere on Earth but three of the eight Channel Islands (Santa Barbara, San Clemente, and San Nicolas), the lizards are extremely vulnerable to predation—barn owls and American kestrels find them especially tasty. So when dense, scrubby hiding places started disappearing across the islands, biologists worried that the lizards might start disappearing, too. *(cont’d)*

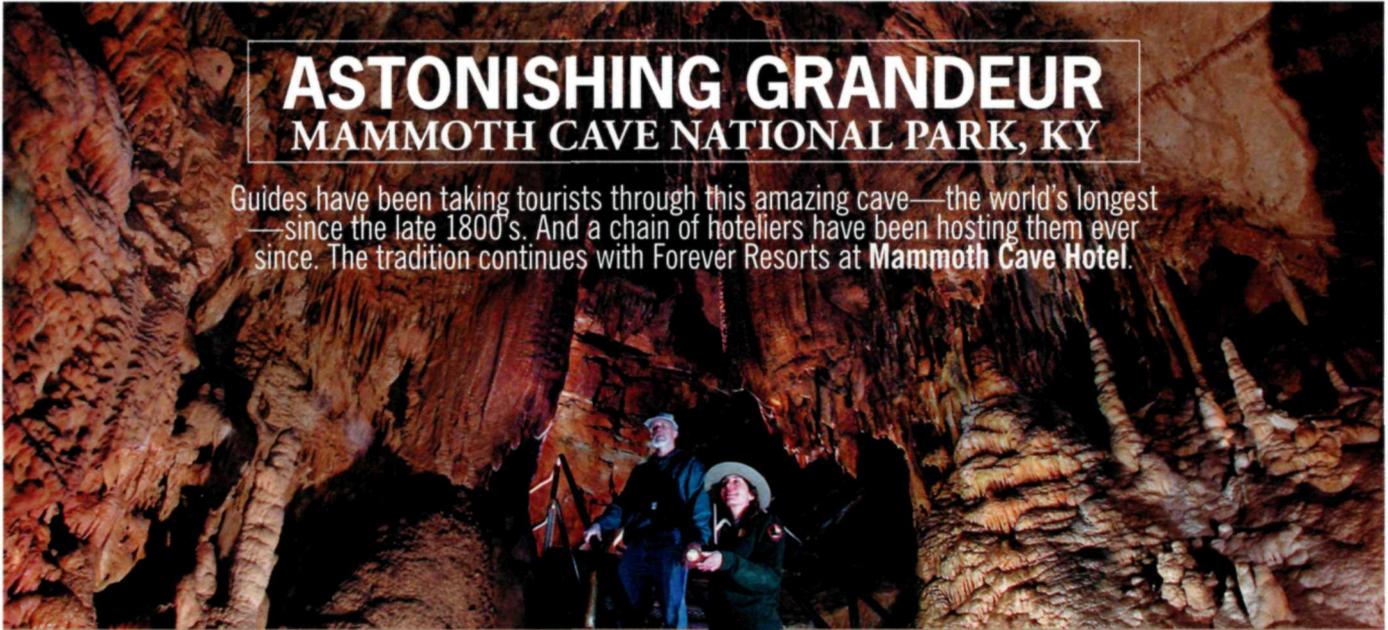
DEFENDING AMERICA

When most people think of the U.S. Navy, they probably think of massive battleships and sailors in crisp white uniforms—not biologists and botanists tromping through wilderness and drafting environmental management plans. But because the Navy owns and manages two of the Channel Islands where island night lizards exist—San Clemente and San Nicolas—the Navy, just like the Park Service, is responsible for protecting all creatures great and small. “We take very seriously our responsibility as environmental stewards,” says Capt. Larry Vasquez, commanding officer at Naval Base Ventura County, which oversees San Nicolas Island. “The recovery of the night lizard at San Nicolas and San Clemente Islands is a prime example of that stewardship in action.”

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service responded in 1977 by listing the species as threatened. And so began an intense, cooperative effort between

start to recover on its own.”

And that’s exactly what happened on the islands. Slowly, the land began to heal, and native vegetation began

“It’s entirely possible that there were always more island night lizards on the ground than we originally thought.” But managing for the species as if it were on the brink wasn’t necessarily a bad thing.

the National Park Service and the U.S. Navy, which owns and manages two of the islands where the lizard occurs (not part of Channel Islands National Park), to restore the land to its original state. They spent decades removing feral cats (originally ranchers’ pets) that preyed on small native animals like the island night lizard and contributed to the extinction of the Santa Barbara Island song sparrow. They also eradicated invasive goats, sheep, and rabbits that, well, multiplied like rabbits. “Removing non-native grazers from a piece of land is one of the biggest restoration actions you could possibly take,” says Tim Coonan, a biologist at Channel Islands National Park. “In a lot of situations, the ecosystem will just

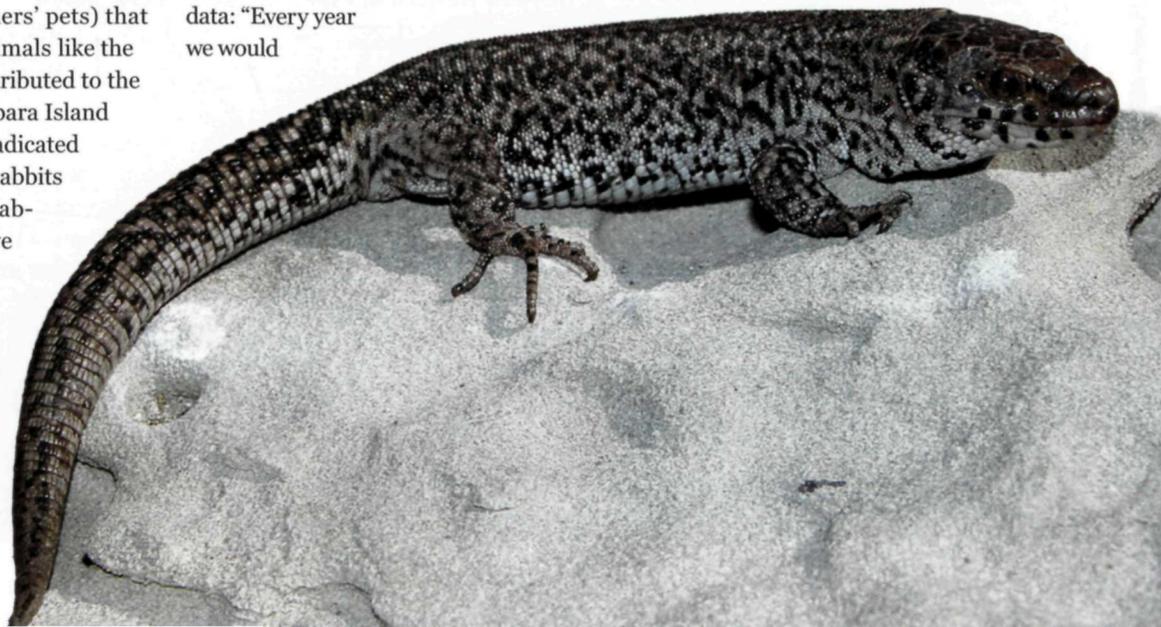
stretching new roots into old territories. (Turn to page 30 to see a photo essay showcasing the islands’ beauty today.)

Fast-forward to the 1990s, when land managers started conducting annual population counts and stumbling on surprising data: “Every year we would

count island night lizards, and they weren’t declining at all; if anything, their numbers were increasing,” Coonan says. It turns out that these lizards thrive at extremely high densities on incredibly small parcels of land—sometimes at more than 1,000 individuals per acre, depending on the vegetation. (This finding is yet another rarity in the reptile world, one that biologists attribute to the species’ sluggish metabolism, which decreases its need for copious amounts of food and space.)

This discovery had bigger implications than simply broadening knowledge of the species alone. It made biologists question whether the island night lizard was ever actually floundering to begin with. “It’s entirely possible,” says Coonan, “that there were always more island night lizards on the ground than we originally thought.”

But managing for the species as if it were on the brink wasn’t necessarily a bad thing, he says. It helped spur a much-



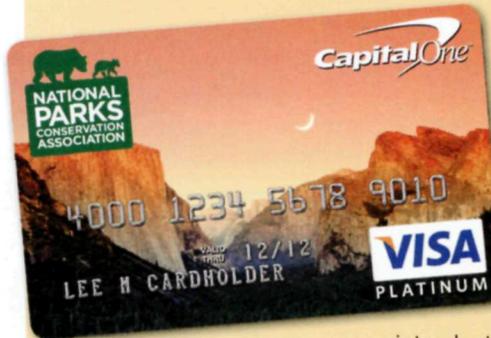
needed landscape restoration, which ultimately benefited other species, and the visitor experience, too. It also helped to establish some peace of mind. "There was a sense of relief when we realized [the lizards] had not been too severely affected by human activities on the islands," Coonan says. "If you can cross one thing off the list of things to worry about, that's good, because the list is long."

In February, the Fish and Wildlife Service drove that success home by proposing to take the island night lizard off the endangered species list. A recent count tallied roughly 21 million individuals on San Clemente Island, 15,000 on San Nicolas Island, and 17,000 on Santa Barbara Island within national park boundaries. As part of the delisting, land managers would be required to monitor the species for at least five more years, but the Park Service will monitor island night lizards on Santa Barbara in perpetuity. Because losing them, Coonan says, would completely throw off the natural balance of these islands, considering the lizards take up so much of the habitat and feed on so many different things—from box-thorn fruit to ground-dwelling spiders.

The Park Service is also working hard to make sure the species doesn't fade into oblivion on the interpretive front, either. "Santa Barbara is one of our smallest islands, and it's a little harder to get to, so we don't have a ton of visitors," Coonan says. "But we've been talking about island night lizards for decades. They're part of our natural heritage, and some of that heritage has been lost over time, which is why this is a species we should cherish and treasure."

—AMY LEINBACH MARQUIS

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THE PARK SERVICE IS PLAYING A ROLE in the planned revitalization of the Los Angeles River, a vision that replaces miles of concrete with a vital greenway.

A Tale of Two Rivers

A unique division of the National Park Service is connecting residents to trails and waterways where they live, from Atlanta's Chattahoochee River to the Los Angeles River.

The Los Angeles River has appeared in more than a dozen major films and television shows, from "Chinatown" to "Terminator 2," but in most cases cars—not kayakers—are navigating the nearly empty river bottom, which is covered in concrete.

"Los Angeles has a Mediterranean climate, which means we have long, dry summers and short, wet winters, so when it rains, it pours," says Anne Dove, a planner with the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program, a division of the Park Service that connects people

to outdoor experiences. "Historically, when that happened, the L.A. River shifted a lot, and even broke its banks. Back in the 1930s, a really devastating flood event caused a lot of damage, wiping out entire neighborhoods, so the river was channelized in concrete, to lock it in place and move a whole lot of water out to the ocean as fast as possible." As you would imagine, that move sacrificed the natural resource that flowed through the heart of the city. A concrete channel doesn't quite call to mind the romantic image of Huck Finn setting out on a journey. Most L.A.

A look at what the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance unit of the National Park Service accomplished in 2012, with the help of local partners.

2,154
miles of trail developed

1,074
miles of river conserved

70,385
acres of open space and parkland protected

94%
of community partners satisfied

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residents quickly forgot there was a river at all.

Things started to change in the late 1980s, when writer and activist Lewis MacAdams and Friends of the Los Angeles River started reminding people that the waterway was a natural resource that once played a vital role in the community—and could do so again.

In 1990, Mayor Tom Bradley and the City of Los Angeles convened a task force to address opportunities around the river. The Park Service got involved early on in the process, working with the County of Los Angeles to help facilitate the Los Angeles River Master Plan. More recently, the city government teamed up with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to assess the feasibility of removing some of that concrete and restoring the landscape to a more natural setting.

Although Park Service staff on such urban projects don't typically don green and gray uniforms, they do help people find their way to natural areas in a more figurative sense. The national network of nearly 100 professionals scattered throughout the country partners with community groups, nonprofits, tribes, and state and local governments to design trails and parks, improve access to rivers, conserve natural and cultural resources, and create recreational opportunities for all Americans—especially the ones who can't get out to Yosemite and Yellowstone.

In cities like Los Angeles, making a trail requires a lot more than a little dirt, a few saplings, and a couple of shovels.

"Urban areas can be really complex in terms of stakeholders, land ownership, property easements, and regulatory overlays—putting in something as simple as a trail can require quite extensive coordination," says Dove. In fact, the mission of one government agency may contradict

the mission of others that need to sign off. For example, the L.A. County Flood Control District and the Army Corps of Engineers historically focus on flood management and infrastructure, and L.A.'s Department of Water and Power may reserve the right to construct a power line on a given site, because the agency is more focused on conveying electricity than providing outdoor recreation. In the face of the bureaucracy, a neighborhood group that wants to carve a 500-yard trail to the river may not stand a chance.

That's where the Park Service brings its expertise, connecting interested groups, leveraging funding from other

sources, and, in some cases, just offering the effort more legitimacy.

"Our program really represents a 21st-century approach to conservation," says Bob Ratcliffe, chief of conservation and outdoor recreation programs. "Park Service Director Jon Jarvis put it best when he said, 'Our first century was about bringing people to the parks, and our second century will be about bringing the parks to the people.' We probably won't see a lot more large national parks being created, like we did 50 years ago, so the expanded role of the National Park Service is evolving to help communities create special places in their own backyards." (cont'd on page 24)

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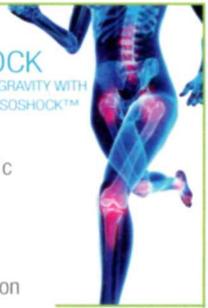
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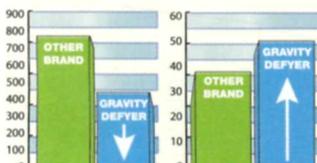
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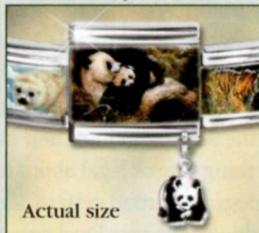
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A NEW SIGHT: An urban explorer paddling the LA River.

“Our program really represents a 21st-century approach to conservation.”

The approach emerged from the environmental thinking that dominated the 1960s, prompting Congress to pass the Outdoor Recreation Act, which charged the federal government with providing high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities for Americans in perpetuity. The Park Service now fills that role, offering expertise on roughly 350 projects each year ranging from day-long paddling events that connect people to local river resources to sprawling trail and greenway projects. (See box, page 20, for some of the numbers.)

In L.A., Park Service staff helped locals identify potential pathways that would connect bikers and pedestrians to the river and other key destinations within the region. They're also working to leverage more federal resources that could be applied to the revitalization project. Funds directed to the L.A. Conservation Corps were put to work in Sepulveda Basin, where a guided kayaking program on summer weekends engaged youth and river guides from the LA Conservation Corps talked about the natural and cultural resources along the river corridor.

On the other side of the country, RTCA staff are trying to help residents of Atlanta, Georgia, take a dip in the Chattahoochee

River. Many Atlanta residents already use the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, which was designated the first national water trail back in 2012. The 48 miles of the National Recreation Area start at Buford Dam on Lake Lanier and include the northern suburbs of Atlanta. But the metro section of the river is still associated with pollution and industrial sites, even though it's much cleaner thanks to the lawsuit filed by the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper; the City of Atlanta responded by spending millions to clean up its aging sewer system. Now, as more people are eager to dip their paddles into the river, they're finding it just isn't very easy to do.

“People just need a piece of dirt to get down to the water safely and legally,” says Charlotte Gillis, a landscape architect working in RTCA's Atlanta office. Without it, kayakers are resorting to ‘guerilla’ tactics—throwing their boats over a highway guard rail, then jumping in the water, getting out of the water and into their boat.” There's nothing safe or legal about it. But the city's topography, road system, and land-ownership challenges have essentially turned these nature-lovers into outlaws. Even if you've got a healthy budget and a 20-foot boat, there are no docks and marinas for you to put it.

Now, there's a community effort to extend the water trail 53 miles downstream through the metro section to Chattahoochee Bend State Park. The Park Service is working with county and city partners to increase the number of safe and legal sites offering access to the river. Organizers are looking to link sites along the trail, including several regional parks, so paddlers can get in and out of the water, stop for a picnic, and enjoy the scenery. The Park Service side of the equation involves producing an inventory of existing and proposed launch sites and providing technical assistance in design and mapping routes. The agency is also helping to create a coordinating committee to oversee the water trail and coordinate its management and maintenance.

“We're trying to build on the success of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, and take the idea downstream to bring a lot more people to the table,” says Gillis. With 83 miles of water trails north of the city, the goal is to add 55 miles that include the City of Atlanta and five metropolitan counties. In the end, the hope is to create more than 100 miles of paddling that link existing and proposed trails throughout the metro area, making a green web that leads in and out of urban areas. The Park Service is working with Chattahoochee NOW, a coalition of conservation groups, economic-development groups, recreation groups, and historical-cultural groups, to move the water trail project forward and also add other river-related projects.

“People familiar with this wing of the Park Service recognize the value that we can add as a catalyst, but the spirit of our program is really to support what's important at the local level,” says Dove, who works on the L.A. River restoration. “In urban areas, people get really excited about the agency's involvement—it bolsters their efforts, just knowing that the Park Service really cares about improving their community.”

— SCOTT KIRKWOOD

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MATT BALAZIK tosses a 70-pound Atlantic sturgeon back into the James River.

Swimming with Dinosaurs

Atlantic sturgeon are making a surprising comeback in the Chesapeake Bay.

FEW PEOPLE KNOW VIRGINIA'S JAMES RIVER as intimately Matt Balazik. Like his father and grandfather before him, Balazik grew up swimming, fishing, and rowing a boat through these waters, and did his part to keep the riverbanks litter-free. Occasionally he'd hear a story about his grandfather catching a small sturgeon—ancient bottom feeders that swam the Chesapeake for hundreds of millions of years. But beyond that, he never gave much thought to them. They didn't even float to the surface when a nearby chemical plant dumped insecticides into the river, killing nearly every living thing (and spurring creation of the Clean Water Act). "My whole family

would have told you that the sturgeon were gone," Balazik says.

Fast-forward to 2007, a year after Congress established the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Balazik is working toward his biology degree at the Virginia Commonwealth University when he receives a call that a dead sturgeon is floating in a nearby creek.

Skeptical, Balazik hops in his boat and takes off down the James River. Ten minutes into the ride he catches something out of the corner of his eye, something big—monstrous, actually—leaping into the air. He stops the boat and waits. Then he sees it again, and again. Clear as day. Big, beautiful, armored sturgeons, arcing and twisting and soaring into the air in a mating dance as old as time. It's as graceful as a water ballet, as powerful as a scene from Jurassic Park—these monster fish (measuring up to 14 feet long and 800 pounds) literally swam with the dinosaurs. In fact, they were once so plentiful that their breaching posed navigational hazards along the James and Susquehanna Rivers.

Balazik was mesmerized. "I'd lived on the river my whole life and had never seen anything like that before," he says. "My dad had never seen it. My brothers, who are 10 years older than me, had never seen it."

Balazik had found his calling: to learn everything he could about the species and use that information to help ensure that it never disappears from these waters again. To prove his commitment, he tattooed a sturgeon onto his arm.

But why, after a decades-long disappearance, were the fish showing up in the Chesapeake again? "It's not like we did something three or four years ago, and suddenly they came back," he says. "Sturgeon must have been successfully

© STEVE HELBER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

reproducing 20 years ago for us to see these fish now.”

The introduction of the Clean Water Act likely played a big role, helping to curb sedimentation from agriculture upstream that once buried fragile eggs. Moratoriums on sturgeon harvesting in the United States helped, too. “We’re starting to see the fruits of that legislation,” Balazik says. “We left the fish alone, and amazingly, they came back on their own. Now we’re just trying to figure out what they’re doing.”

Every fall, Balazik and his team at Virginia Commonwealth University get to work doing just that. In August sturgeon begin their annual journey from the salty Atlantic to the freshwater Chesapeake to deposit their eggs. This movement allows scientists to capture, measure, and weigh the fish, estimate the population size of this federally listed endangered species, and insert tracking tags that monitor an individual’s movements for up to 10 years.

“If we find out that a bunch of sturgeon are congregating in a certain area, then we’ll

These monster fish were once so plentiful that their breaching posed navigational hazards along the James and Susquehanna Rivers.

know that area needs to be protected,” Balazik says. “If we discover spawning grounds, then we know those areas need protection, too, and we can study them and maybe even create more spawning habitat like it. It’s all about being in the right place at the right time. The more we know, the more we improve our chances of getting lucky.”

It’s impressive work, given his shoestring budget. Balazik spends a lot of time volunteering on commercial ships in exchange for donated equipment like ropes, floats, and anchors. He also created a public “adopt-a-sturgeon” program: For \$300, which covers the cost of one tracking device, Balazik will send you updates on spawning events and your adopted sturgeon’s locations. The National Park Service also partnered with the National Oceanic

and Atmospheric Administration to install an innovative buoy system along the Captain John Smith Trail that provides interpretation for visitors, measures air and water quality, and tracks tagged sturgeon.

Sediment and pollution from stormwater runoff continue to challenge sturgeon recovery. And even though sturgeon fishing has been illegal since 1998, the animals can be caught and killed in gillnets meant for species like striped bass. But federal and state agencies are working closely with the James River Association, one of NPCA’s partners in the Choose Clean Water Coalition, to restore sturgeon to their native habitat in Virginia and even create artificial spawning reefs.

“These fish have been around for 120 million years,” Balazik says. “They made it through the mass extinctions just fine—the meteorite, the super volcano, and all of these massive die-offs—and then we almost wiped them out in a few decades. But sturgeon are resilient. If we just leave them alone, they’ll come back and be strong.” **NP**



The Fish That Saved America

Protecting Atlantic sturgeon means protecting a national hero: The Atlantic sturgeon saved Jamestown. “Historical records show that if it weren’t for sturgeon, America’s original colonists would have likely died of starvation,” Balazik says. The fish also helped the nation’s economy recover after the Civil War, when smoked sturgeon fueled pioneers on their westward expansion.

AMY LEINBACH MARQUIS, former associate editor at *National Parks* magazine, is directing a film series about the national parks experience at NPExperience.com.



GIANT SEQUOIAS GAIN CRITICAL MOISTURE from fog rolling through Sequoia National Park in California.

Gentle Giants

The national parks' towering sequoias have thrived for thousands of years. Can they survive climate change?

WHO DOESN'T LOVE A GOOD MYSTERY? Stand amidst a grove of sequoias, the largest trees on Earth, and you'll notice the shade, the peace, and the contemplative silence of other visitors. But you may also notice another novelty: the confounding inability to wrap your mind around the scale and age of these 20-story-tall plants.

Sequoias fascinate us simply because as living things, they surpass our understanding in more ways than almost anything else," says Bill Tweed, the

former chief naturalist of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks and author of *Challenge of the Big Trees*. "They grow so much larger than we do. They live so much longer than we do. They are so much more resilient than we are. They just appeal to human nature in a very fundamental way."

Over centuries, these trees have weathered blizzards and droughts, thunderstorms and forest fires. Despite their longevity, however, giant sequoias will encounter novel challenges this century. Climate change will present a number of new threats, as fires grow more severe and winter snowpack diminishes. Scientists are working to understand how this mysterious species will respond, but many are concerned that the groves won't be able to adapt quickly enough.

"It's highly probable we'll see lots of tree die-off," says Nate Stephenson, an ecologist at U.S. Geological Survey's Sequoia and Kings Canyon Field Station. "Animals can migrate by walking or flying. How do trees migrate? Well, they die in one place and have to reestablish in another."

Giant sequoias currently grow in a narrow belt of the Sierra Nevada in nearly 80 groves, many of which are protected by Yosemite, Sequoia, and Kings Canyon National Parks. These giants top 300 feet in height, live more than 3,000 years, and, according to recent research, put on a greater mass of wood each year.

Already, the tree species that surround sequoia groves are showing signs of stress under climatic changes. Research led by Stephenson, which evaluated 18,000 trees over about 20 years, found that the firs and pines of the Sierra Nevada have been dying at higher rates—and that the increase in mortality

is linked to rising temperatures.

Scientists believe that if temperatures rise as much as projected in California—between three and nine degrees over the next century—sequoias will be threatened, and seedlings would struggle to establish themselves at all.

Young sequoias thrive in environments that are moist but see frequent, mild ground fires. One projected effect of global warming is that the mountains' deep snowpack—a critical reservoir for these giant trees—will melt sooner in the spring, meaning that the groves will need to subsist on less water for longer. A drought of only two years can kill new seedlings.

“It takes a lot of resources and energy to maintain such a massive organism.”

Forest fire patterns also could change. Already, a 100-year history of fire suppression has allowed small plants to grow rampant in American forests, acting as kindling for an increasing number of large, destructive blazes. Mature sequoias can bounce back from fires, even when more than 95 percent of their canopies are scorched; seedlings, however, are wiped out. Under prolonged fire conditions, it could be difficult for any seedlings to grow successfully.

Much is still unknown about how mature sequoias will react in the face of environmental changes—and when. Researchers from Humboldt State University and the University of California–Berkeley are looking for answers with a landmark study of coastal redwoods and sequoias. The team surveyed 16 plots in state and national parks, recorded baseline data on the trees, and established climate-monitoring stations in canopies.

Todd Dawson, a professor at Berkeley and a leading scientist on the study, hopes that the data collected will help conservation organizations, national parks, and legislators make management decisions to protect the species in the future. “It takes a lot of resources and energy to maintain such a massive organism,” says Dawson. “If you change the environment abruptly or in the wrong way, these really big organisms seem to be affected first. That’s why we think these trees could be a pretty

important barometer for monitoring climate changes in California.”

Other scientists, such as Stephenson, believe that mature individuals might be more resilient than pines and firs because they have survived nasty droughts and spent millennia digging their roots deep into cracks in the granite. Over their 100-million-year history, they certainly have endured a lot. Still, they have not faced the speed of change the 21st century brings.

But the Park Service is taking action. In Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, fire ecologists perform prescribed burns to prevent massive forest fires and to create the bare, mineral-rich soil in which seedlings thrive. This summer, Yosemite is launching a \$20-million restoration of Mariposa Grove, which will remove a parking lot, gift shop, and road so workers can restore soil and ensure that water flows through the area more naturally.

Of course, no one knows precisely what conditions this new century will bring, and it’s likely these trees still have a thing or two to teach us.

“The human mind can become habituated to even the most amazing things over time,” says Tweed. “But the more time you spend with sequoias, the more fascinating and compelling they become.” **NP**

KATE SIBER is a freelance writer based in Durango, Colorado.

A GIANT AMONG GIANTS

THE WORLD'S LARGEST TREE BY VOLUME IS GENERAL SHERMAN, A SEQUOIA THAT TOPS

275

FEET IN SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK.

IT IS MORE THAN **36** FEET WIDE AT ITS BASE

HAS LIVED FOR MORE THAN **2,300** YEARS

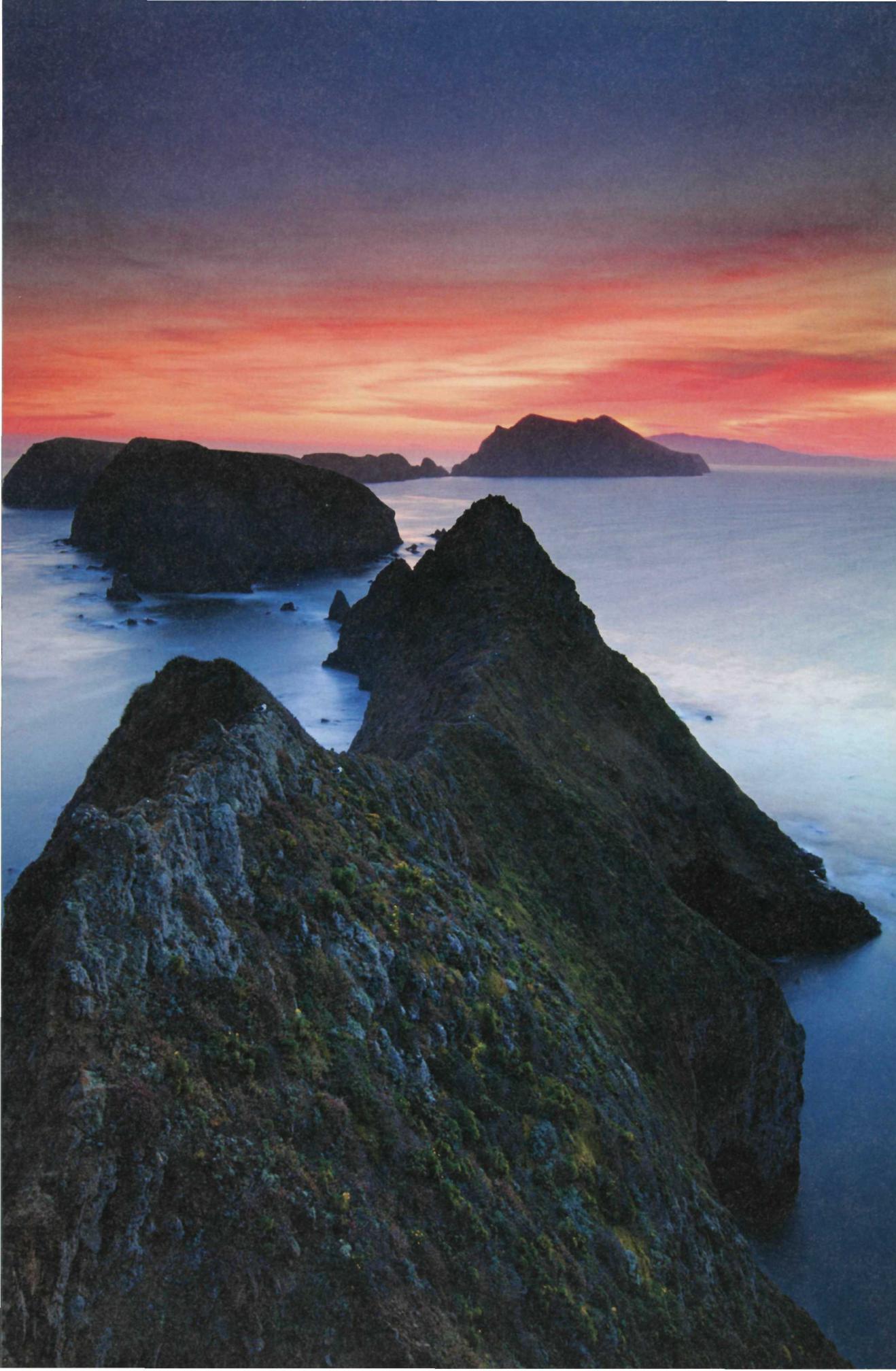
AND HAS BRANCHES THAT EXCEED **6** FEET IN DIAMETER.

An underwater photograph of a kelp forest. The water is a deep, clear blue-green. Sunlight filters down from the surface, creating a dappled light effect. The kelp stalks are long and thin, reaching from the bottom towards the surface. Some stalks have large, reddish-brown, bulbous structures (likely kelp bladders or reproductive organs) attached to them. The overall scene is serene and lush.

The Channel Islands host only about 30,000 visitors a year, but these waters are no secret to the diving community. The kelp forests that fill the quiet coves resemble an underwater redwood forest with hundred-foot-high stalks that reach from the bottom of the ocean to the surface.

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

Photographer **Ian Shive** finds the perfect escape in Channel Islands National Park, just a few miles from Los Angeles, but worlds away from Hollywood.



For the last 15 years, I've been escaping my hometown of Los Angeles to visit a chain of islands that I like to pretend no one knows about—a secret, hidden in plain sight. On a clear day you can see the islands rising up out of the Pacific Ocean, the closest one only 11 miles off the California coast. As the boat travels across the Santa Barbara Channel, the smog and hum of the highway give way to the sounds of waves, dolphins, and seabirds. Within an hour, I'm transported literally and metaphorically to my own private paradise.

Channel Islands National Park comprises five islands with abundant wildlife both above and below the surface of the water. The biodiversity and number of endemic species—23 animals that can be found nowhere else on Earth—have earned it the nickname “America’s Galapagos.” When I walk the coastal trails of the islands, I am reminded of what the mainland California coastline must have looked like before modern settlements: rugged, raw, and windswept.

On Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa, you may have a chance to spot the endangered species known as the island fox (left). This small canine, the size of a house cat, is the islands’ apex predator and its lovable face and squirrel-like antics have made it the star attraction. In 1999, park biologists began pursuing a recovery program that included captive breeding and reintroduction of foxes, removal of resident golden eagles, and re-establishment of bald eagles, leading to one of the most dramatic recoveries ever documented.

The islands aren’t like other national parks with lodges, restaurants, and paved hiking trails. They have a tempestuous personality that can be blisteringly hot and sunny in one moment, then shrouded in fog, secrecy, and mystery a moment later. They are quiet, remote, and unsettled. They are the best of the parks in the most simple form, a preserve isolated by ocean.



The Channel Islands boast plant and animal species above the surface and below, including the Pacific chorus frog (top) and California poppies (bottom), on Santa Rosa Island. Just off the shore of Anacapa Island, colorful starfish, coral, and urchins (middle) illustrate why the island draws so many divers. Right, sunset on Potato Harbor, Santa Cruz Island.





Most visitors take a day trip and depart long before the sun begins to head for the horizon, but camping on the islands is a truly magical experience. To keep it that way, the Park Service has capped the number of visitors who can camp on the three most popular destinations: Anacapa (bottom right), Santa Rosa, and Santa Cruz (top and left). Far away from the light-filled skies of Hollywood, dramatic evening views offer the ideal setting to pause, meditate, and reflect on what the earliest inhabitants of the islands, the Chumash Native American tribe, must have experienced hundreds of years ago.

IAN SHIVE is a Los Angeles-based photographer and recipient of the Ansel Adams Award for Conservation Photography. He is currently working on his third book, *The New Century: Honoring 100 Years of America's National Park Service*.

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the life AQUATIC

By Jennifer Bogo
Photos by Michael Falco

At New York City's Harbor School, students use Gateway National Recreation Area's maritime environment as their classroom—and preparation for life after graduation.

ERICK SOLIS HOLDS AN OYSTER TOAD FISH discovered during a Harbor School dive in Jamaica Bay.

The wind picked up, blowing gray clouds over lower Manhattan, when Julian Perez and Gabriel Soto left the Beaux-Arts landmark ferry terminal and headed for the R train. An hour and a half and three trains later, the two teenagers emerged on a narrow island community in Jamaica Bay, Queens. They walked 10 blocks to Broad Channel American Park, skirted a baseball field, and joined a handful of other students at a cargo van parked along a beach littered with Corona bottles and plastic grocery bags. A feral chicken pecked horseshoe crab eggs from the sand.

It was 3:30pm, two days before the end of the school year, and they still had classwork to do. They zipped into their wetsuits.

Once amphibious in neck-to-ankle neoprene, the students gathered around Joe Gessert, their teacher





HARBOR SCHOOL STUDENTS NATHAN FERENCZY (far left) and Kevin Mejia are helping instructor Joe Gessert (above) and the National Park Service collect data on the oysters that once thrived in New York City's waterways.

and safety dive officer, for a routine briefing. He pointed out the pylons of the six-lane Cross Bay Bridge, and then named the nearest hospital and hyperbaric chamber. "Watch out for lion's mane jellyfish," said Liv Dillon, the other diving instructor. "There's vinegar in the van if you get stung."

Samuel Matias wandered over from a group of men fishing for bluefish and striped bass along the rocky shoreline. He smoked a cigarette, watching with interest. "Man, that's cold!" he said, flinching, as the students waded into Jamaica Bay's waters, in Gateway National Recreation Area.

Actually, it was relatively warm, about 70 degrees. The students, all juniors at Urban Assembly New York Harbor School, had begun diving in 50-degree water nearly a month and a half earlier. They were helping the National Park Service look for existing oysters, the first step in the restoration of reef habitat to the bay. They were also learning problem-solving and other life skills. A public high school, Harbor School

uses New York City's maritime environment to teach students and, ultimately, prepare them for college. It also fosters a unique relationship with an ecosystem that New Yorkers rarely pause to consider. "Most people only experience what's on top of the water," says Perez, who's 16, "and I get to go underneath."

Learning by Doing

There are 581 high schools in New York City and about 60,000 eighth-graders faced with the choice of which one to attend. To help them rank their first 12 choices for a citywide lottery, the Department of Education sends them each a thick book outlining their options. It's daunting. Some students, like 16-year-old Justin Rosales, know they want to attend Harbor School the moment they flip to its description. Others, like Perez, find it at a high school fair. Some have a guidance counselor choose the school for

them, and others just end up there.

Even among the city's highly specialized offerings, Harbor School is distinct. Students attend the usual classes—social studies, science, history—but as sophomores they also choose a career and technical education class in one of six marine fields: ocean engineering, marine systems technology, vessel operations, marine biology research, aquaculture, and scientific diving. That's how they spend their afternoons (and sometimes evenings and weekends).

The students graduate with a professional credential that gives them a running start at an entry-level job or university program. But the hope, says the school's co-founder, Murray Fisher, is that their maritime experiences will also blossom into a sense of stewardship. "Maybe it's played out in their career choice; maybe it's played out by not littering when walking down the street," he says. "Maybe it's not played out at all. But it's very hard, in

**PARK SERVICE SENIOR
BIOLOGIST GEORGE FRAME**

(top) and Harbor School co-founder Murray Fisher (below, talking with students) have created an innovative partnership that not only benefits the parks, but also fuels the school's curriculum.

my experience, for people not to have an environmental ethic if they're not just on and around the environment, but actually doing stuff in it."

Of the school's roughly 420 students, the 42 divers embody this philosophy the most literally. Harbor School is the only public high school in the United States with a scientific diving program recognized by the American Academy of Underwater Sciences. On a practical level, that means its students get certified in best diving practices and learn how to conduct scientific research underwater. In the process, they incorporate a lot of other lessons.

"The kids have to read an enormous amount of material, much of it way outside their grasp, to get their scientific diving certification," says Dillon. They also have to work through complicated formulas to figure out, for example, how long air will last at different depths, temperatures, and pressures. It makes sense to them because it's applicable, Dillon says. "They're intrinsically more motivated to read and write and do math."

Diving with a Purpose

The teenagers slipped beneath the surface of Jamaica Bay, and for several long minutes, only the orange flags they'd left floating in their wake interrupted the flat, wind-whipped plane of water. Then Justin Rosales emerged, dripping, and trudged toward the shore. In one hand he carried an oyster toadfish in a mason jar, and in the other a hermit crab in a drinking glass. This is his 43rd dive, and all of them, he says, have been in low-visibility conditions—which rather than lament, he

credits with giving him a "keener eye."

The students regularly spot vibrant marine life: sea robins, blue crabs, comb jellies, horned blennies, even sea horses. During nesting season, this stretch of beach supports 2,000 amorous horseshoe crabs. But so far, none of the students found what they have been tasked with searching for: native oysters.

Massive oyster beds once lined Jamaica Bay, an 18,000-acre wetland estuary almost the size of Manhattan, and stretched

along the eastern shore of Staten Island to Sandy Hook in northern New Jersey, which together form the three main units of the Gateway National Recreation Area. At the fishery's peak in the early 1900s, Jamaica Bay produced an estimated 700,000 bushels of oysters per year. But overharvesting, dredging, and sewage from a burgeoning population soon began to decimate it. A cholera epidemic that contaminated the city's wastewater officially ended the oyster fishery in 1921, and the 1938 hurricane



“Most people only experience what’s on top of the water

—I get to go underneath.” — Julian Perez



covered any remaining beds with sediment.

The oyster reefs didn't bounce back for the same reason Harbor School's students can't dive for 72 hours after a quarter-inch of rain: The city's combined-sewer overflow system sends untreated waste into the surrounding water during heavy storms. ("The kids are very in tune with the ebbs and flow of the sewer system," says Dillon wryly.) But the estuary's water quality has been improving gradually, and a healthy oyster population could help clean it further

by filtering plankton—perhaps enough to reestablish the vigorous eelgrass community that once supported bay scallops and much higher fish populations. That's the goal of the Park Service, but before it can reintroduce oysters to Jamaica Bay, it first must determine whether any of the city's native oysters (or their hybrids) still persevere there.

"When the national park does any restoration within its boundaries, it's supposed to try to be true to the original population

type that existed because it's adapted to the local environment," says George Frame, a National Park Service biologist at Gateway. "We have to make sure we're not going to replace what's already here and surviving with something new and different."

Just as the Park Service embarked on a three-year project to search for remnant oyster populations, Dillon and Gessert contacted the agency to see if it had any diving needs in Gateway National Recreation Area. With the help of student divers, the

project could expand from the low-tide line to deeper waters. “We couldn’t have conducted this survey without them,” Frame says.

In the past two years, the students have found a dozen and a half oysters—as well as two bay scallops, which the Park Service assumed had disappeared completely. Biologists at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn are now genetically comparing the oysters to those from hatcheries elsewhere along the Eastern seaboard. If their DNA is distinct, the oysters may be endemic to New York. If it’s not, they may be escapees from aquaculture experiments, and the Park Service can go ahead and introduce a strain it thinks is most appropriate—not just for the ecosystem that exists now, but for a future environment shaped by sea-level rise and global warming.

Leaving a Legacy

When Harbor School first opened its doors in 2003, it occupied the fourth floor of an old high school in the landlocked Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn. Now, the school sits in the center of the marine environment its students study, on Governors Island, a 172-acre former Coast Guard base in New York Harbor. To reach it, the students commute every day by ferry, then walk past a stone fort built in 1811. The island’s military history dates back to the Revolutionary War and 22 acres now make up Governor’s Island National Monument.

While the National Park Service lays the groundwork for restoring oysters to Jamaica Bay, the Harbor School and other organizations have blazed ahead with artificial reefs in New York Harbor. The school recently embarked on a 20-year effort, called the Billion Oyster Project, to reintroduce oysters there. Students from all six career and technical education tracks work together to determine which type of artificial reef will best support oysters in



HARBOR SCHOOL DIVER INSTRUCTOR LIV DILLON keeps a close watch as students explore Broad Channel in Jamaica Bay.

the fast-current, low-light, heavily dredged environment—information that will ultimately help implement the comprehensive restoration plan for the Hudson River estuary, which calls for establishing 5,000 acres of oyster habitat by 2050.

The project aims to culminate in oyster-planting days, when vessel operations students pilot boats, maintained by marine systems tech students, to the study sites; scientific diving students install baby oysters (or spats), raised by aquaculture students, on reefs built by ocean engineering students; and students in the marine biology program monitor the sites’ water quality.

But the kids also can see past their individual roles to the reefs’ longer term societal value: Two weeks after Hurricane Sandy, they pressed the case for oyster reefs as wave buffers to the *New York Times*. “For thousands of years, oysters protected coastal regions from strong waves and storms,” they wrote. “If we bring oysters back to New York Harbor we...make our city more resilient to rising water levels and warming oceans.”

April Mims, NPCA’s Northeast program manager points out that 10 national park sites encompassing nearly 27,000 acres lie in the New York/New Jersey harbor (all of which were affected by Sandy). Since Hurricane Sandy, NPCA has emphasized the importance of building a stronger, more resilient shoreline, and investing in aquatic systems. “The fate of this region, and the national parks and all its resources, is inextricably linked to the health of the water,” Mims says. “It’s really important that these young people, who are the future stewards of national parks, and who live in Brooklyn and surrounding communities, are getting this education in aquatic restoration and learning how to preserve and protect our watershed.”

School co-founder Murray Fisher now runs the New York Harbor Foundation, a nonprofit he established in 2010—the year the school moved to Governors Island—to help support the school and the Billion Oyster Project. “Every major city in this

country is on a major water body, with the exception of Las Vegas,” he says. “Most of those water bodies are degraded and most of them have large populations of urban youth that feel disengaged.” In fact, those cities all have better access to their waterways than New York City, he says. Fisher wants to see a maritime school in every coastal city, “but aligned with a restoration project, giving kids responsibility for monitoring, surveying, and restoring their local ecosystem.”

So far, Harbor School’s experiment in education has been a “resounding success,” according to the New York City Department of Education. The school has received three straight As on its own annual report cards—which measure a school’s contribution to student achievement—and its graduation rate is higher than the citywide average. In 2012, 86 percent of its students graduated (compared with 24 percent of seniors at the high school in Bushwick it replaced, which served the same ethnically diverse demographic); 73 of those 75 students had been accepted to college.

Anais Rodriguez is one of the students graduating in the class of 2013. She trained in marine systems technology, and on her very last day of high school ever, she could still be found in the marine-tech workshop, fiddling with the switch on a remote-control boat that she’d taken apart and reassembled in a custom fiberglass hull. She’d grown up fixing cars with her dad, and Harbor School introduced her to working on vessels. Next, Rodriguez hopes to go to SUNY Maritime College to learn how to captain and maintain boats—a profession that never would have occurred to her before. Harbor School melded her love of engineering with a new appreciation of water. “And now,” she says, “I want to make a career out of it.”

JENNIFER BOGO, articles editor at *Popular Science*, has traveled from the Arctic to the Antarctic to find and write science stories.

hidden valley



BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN PHOTOS BY JEFF HALLER/KEYHOLE PHOTOGRAPHY

THE OHIO & ERIE CANAL TOWPATH TRAIL, in Cuyahoga Valley National Park, is popular with bike commuters, locals, and tourists alike. After a long ride, visitors can take in the scenery on the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad.

From bike paths to contra dances to fresh, local fare, Cuyahoga Valley National Park offers a quintessential Midwest experience.



I drove into Ohio's Cuyahoga Valley National Park on a warm spring evening with my Japanese folding bike in tow. The first clues that this wouldn't be a typical national park visit: No main gate, no entrance fee, and no friendly ranger with a map to set me on the right path. So, where to begin? The Winking Lizard, a popular watering hole in the town of Peninsula, seemed like a good place to contemplate the matter.

To visualize this park, imagine a 33,000-acre, oblong slice of Swiss cheese covering a section of northeastern Ohio, between Cleveland and Akron (see map, page 50.) The Swiss cheese holes are small pockets of privately owned non-park land. And this is where I found myself that first night—in the biggest of the holes, sitting at the Lizard bar, across the room from a large glass aquarium containing an iguana named Heisman.

Before long, two local landscape designers were helping me plan my adventure. They told me about the river and the region's farming history, but mostly, they sang the praises

CONTRA DANCING AT THE BOSTON TOWNSHIP SCHOOL HOUSE and the farmers market in How Meadow offer charming rural experiences that are vanishing throughout much of America.



of biking on the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail—including bike-at-night events and Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad’s Bike Aboard program.

When I stood to leave, the chattier of the pair opened his colorful duct tape wallet, and I expected him to hand me a business card. Instead, he pulled out an orange heart, slightly asymmetrical, like it was cut out by a schoolboy. I flipped it over in my hand and realized it was a reflective sticker intended for my safety on the trail. “Put it on your bike,” he said. “Or your helmet.” I laughed. “I’ll do that,” I said. Then I headed back into the park, where I unpacked my bags, made a plan for the following day, affixed the sticky little heart to my bike, and fell sleep to the sound of a waterfall.

An Everyday Park

When I travel, I like to visit small towns. And parks. But I don’t remember any destination offering both with the seamlessness

I found in Ohio’s only national park. Relatively young among its peers, Cuyahoga Valley has already become a trailblazer, demonstrating how a national park visit can be quotidian, not just once-in-a-lifetime. As one local told me, “How many times do most people go to Yosemite? You ask people here how often they visit our park, and they say, ‘Every day.’”

On a map, it’s easy to distinguish Cuyahoga’s backbone: a bundle of vertical lines comprising rivers, canals, railroads, and scenic roads. Once a key player in our inland waterway system, the Ohio & Erie Canal began operating in 1827, when towns like Peninsula boomed with boat-making activity. But the canal’s use declined after the introduction of the railroad, and it was abandoned completely after the Great Flood of 1913.

In the 1960s, the Cuyahoga Valley was threatened with major development. Meanwhile, the Cuyahoga River’s claim to infamy was that it burned—multiple times—thanks to all the debris and sewage it carried. But it was the 1969 fire that helped inspire our

first Earth Day, and it wasn’t long before locals began fighting to save the river and the land that surrounded it. In 1974, Congress created Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, and in 2000, it became a national park.

Today, the Towpath Trail stretches 84 miles through the Ohio & Erie Canalway, about one-quarter of which runs through the park along the Cuyahoga River Valley. More than 125 miles of hiking, biking, and horseback riding trails line the park, and conservation efforts have led to the repopulation of wildlife such as coyotes and eagles. Early in my visit, noticing how urban sprawl lurked at the park’s borders, I got the sense that this landscape was protected just in the nick of time.

Two Wheels and Dance Shoes

Early the next morning, I left the Inn at Brandywine Falls and walked toward the sound of rushing water, just a few hundred yards

away. The 65-foot waterfall is one of the park’s main attractions, along with the Ledges Trail and Beaver Marsh. It’s just feet from a road, but it didn’t take me long to hike deeper into the woods, where the loudest noise was a swaying branch that I mistook for a creaky door.

After my hike, I returned to the inn for breakfast with two other guests—European medical sales reps taking a detour from work—and the owners. George and Katie Hoy have been running the house for 25 years. I asked George what draws people to the park, and he said, “It’s not any one thing that brings people to the park. It’s the diversity of things.”

Intending to tackle that diversity, I began what would become a routine during my four-day visit: I drove into Peninsula, parked my car, unfolded my bike, and set off on the towpath. Crushed limestone crackled under my tires as I passed school groups, commuters, and runners. I pedaled under a canopy of trees, over a boardwalk, past a marsh, and along the river.

As one local told me, “How many times do most people go to Yosemite? You ask people here how often they visit our park, and they say, ‘Every day.’”

More than anything, biking here is practical. It’s more direct to reach some spots by bike than by car, and every few miles along the path, I found something of interest—a visitor center, an exhibit, a short hike. Seven miles north of Peninsula, I ended up at a spot where volunteers were using chainsaws to remove invasive plants like honeysuckle from the side of the towpath.

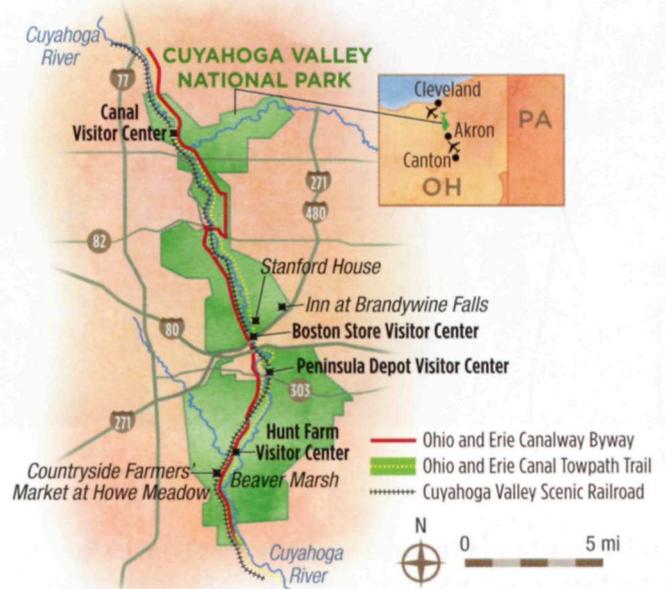
Just before sunset, I headed to the old Boston Township School House for a contra dance. “People wonder what a park ranger is doing at a contra dance,” Rebecca Jones announced at the beginning, wearing a long ranger skirt and flat dance shoes. She explained that people in the Cuyahoga Valley have been gathering to dance for 200 years. “It’s only a dance,” she reminded us. “If you mess up, just give your partner the most beatific smile, and if he doesn’t forgive you, don’t dance with him again.”

A band called Hu\$hmoney kicked off the night with a reel, and the caller began with our instructions. My first partner wore a blue bandanna around his forehead and was suitably forgiving. Later, during a refreshment break, I learned that one man drives an hour to the event each week and is known as much for his homemade cookies as his dance moves.

A Little Country, a Little Rock ‘n Roll

Several times each day during my visit, an obliging local informed me that I was only 30 minutes from Cleveland’s Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. I also kept hearing that Cuyahoga Valley was an “urban park”—after all, it’s within a one-hour drive of more than 4 million people in Cleveland, Akron, and Canton. But as I drove and biked about, I was convinced otherwise. Only in the country do you find hand-written “eggs and firewood” signs, train passengers and bystanders who wave at each other, and lines of motorcyclists leaning into windy roads. On the way to dinner one night on a busy street, I saw a happy-go-lucky goose straddling the double yellow line—country all the way.

If that isn’t proof enough, consider the land. Cuyahoga Valley,



© KAREN MINOT

where hundreds of farms once dotted the landscape, is the only national park that sets up long-term leases with locals who practice sustainable agriculture within its borders. Today, the park partners with the Countryside Initiative, which works with 11 small farms, including a picture-perfect goat farm and a pick-your-own berry farm. One evening, I went to a lecture on herb gardening at the Spicy Lamb Farm, which transports its flock of sheep to “mow” various urban grassy areas. A couple days later, I had lunch at Sarah’s Vineyard, which grows nine grape varieties and hosts a wine festival every summer.

Many of the farmers participate in the Countryside Farmers’ Market, and I hit the first one of the season on a Saturday morn-



A SHORT, EASY HIKE leads visitors to Bridal Veil Falls, which is most picturesque right after a heavy rain.



I spent the 13-mile trip daydreaming about a better world, in which Bike Aboard trains were always available.

INSTEAD OF SELLING GAS TO MOTORISTS, M.D. GARAGE now hosts art exhibits and offers free compressed air for bicyclists, who can also jump aboard the train when their legs get weary.

ing. On the way, I pulled over to the side of Bath Road to see the great blue heron nests, a bustling, Dr. Seuss-like scene that had been described to me as “pterodactyl meets airport.” The gangly birds, with wingspans of nearly seven feet, flew in and out of the heronry, soaring, circling, and landing with such grace that they seemed no weightier than an origami crane. On one sycamore tree, I counted 39 nests. It was tempting to stay and watch the herons all day, but I eventually pulled myself away from the squawking and chattering and headed to what could only be described as the human equivalent—the lively scene at the farmers market.

I fueled up with a sampler of pierogies, award-winning goat cheese, crunchy hemp seeds, and fresh fruit, and headed back to Peninsula to catch the train. At last, I was taking the locals’ advice and checking out Bike Aboard. For \$3, you board at any of the train stations (waving one hand means “hello”; waving two hands means you want to board with your bike), travel as far as you want in one direction, and bike back—or vice versa.

My fold-up and I waited with a dozen other riders as the train

blew its whistle and pulled into the station. We handed our bikes to a guy who stowed them in an empty train car, then the cyclists got comfortable in the adjacent car.

I sat next to another first-timer, a young woman with a pink Cleveland Browns backpack and blue nail polish who told me all about composting. Forty-five minutes later, at the last stop, I exited and began my return bike ride. Between looking for eagle nests and stopping for snacks, I spent the 13-mile trip daydreaming about a better world, in which Bike Aboard trains were always available to transport cyclists after a one-way ride.

Back in Peninsula, I stopped at the Winking Lizard to see if I could find the bequeather of the reflective heart, to tell him about my ride. He wasn’t there, so I drove south in the park toward the Beaver Marsh, a former junkyard that was cleaned up by volunteers... and beavers. I parked my car, unfolded my bike, and hit the towpath one last time. I couldn’t find the beavers either, but I stood on the boardwalk and saw a Baltimore oriole and a cardinal, and I watched lily pads flopping in the breeze. At dusk, I pedaled back to the parking lot and drove off—the fold-up bike and orange heart in the back of the car, leaning into the curves of the country roads.

Continued on page 54



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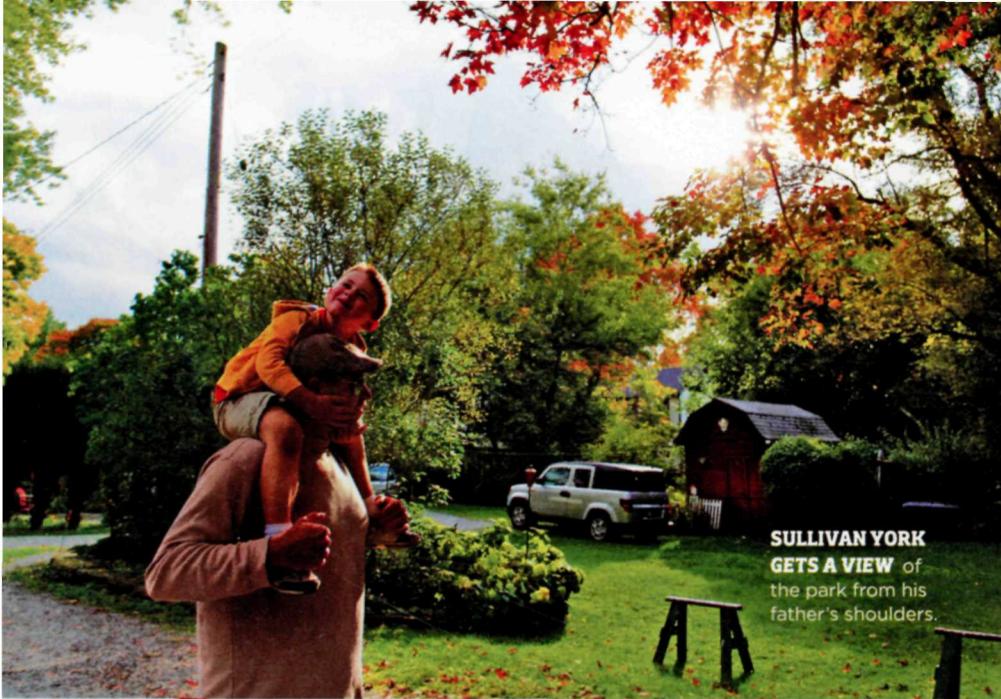
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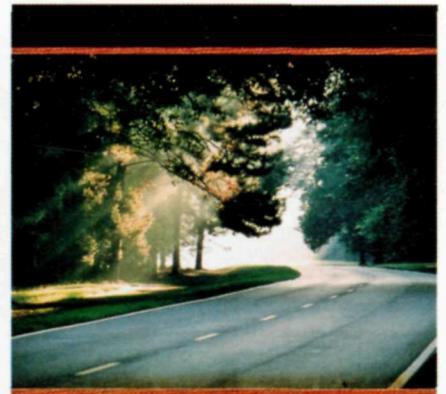


SULLIVAN YORK GETS A VIEW of the park from his father's shoulders.

TravelEssentials

Between the cyclists, trail-runners, locavores, photographers, and train enthusiasts, Cuyahoga Valley is already a pretty colorful park. But there's nothing quite like the colors of autumn. With daytime temperatures in the 60s and 70s, there is perhaps no better time to get your hike, bike, and train on. Century Cycles (www.centurycycles.com) offers \$9/hour rentals and holds free Night Rides along the Towpath Trail (Sept. 14, 28; Oct. 19). Ohio Canal Corridor will host the 22nd annual Towpath Marathon, Half Marathon, and 10K (www.towpathtrilogy.net) on October 13. The Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad (www.cvsr.com), which operates year-round, has become a favorite way to see the park. Seasonal trains include Bike Aboard (runs through Oct. 27); Ales on the Rails (five-beer sample; \$47-\$82; Sept. 20, Oct. 4, Nov. 2); Grape Escape (five-wine sample; \$57-90; Sept. 27, Oct. 11, Nov. 9); and the Canalway Flyer (birding train and lunch; \$40; Oct. 6). The Countryside Farmers' Market at Howe Meadow runs Saturdays through October 26. There are two places to stay in the park: The Inn at Brandywine Falls (www.innatbrandywinefalls.com), an old farmhouse with hiking trails just outside the front door (rooms and suites with full breakfast \$139-\$325); and the Stanford House (www.conservancyforcvnp.org/space-rental), another restored farmhouse and former hostel with beautiful wood furniture from Reclaimed Cleveland (private or shared rooms with continental breakfast \$50-\$125). One of the best meals in the park: Sarah's Vineyard (www.sarahsvineyardwinery.com). The closest airports, both about a half-hour away, are Cleveland Hopkins International Airport and Akron-Canton Airport. Amtrak's Capitol Limited, which runs between Washington and Chicago, stops in Hudson, about six miles from the town of Peninsula.

When **MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN** isn't on the road, she can be found riding her bike around Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.



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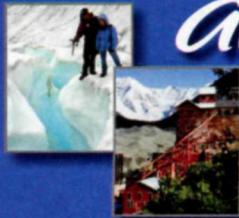
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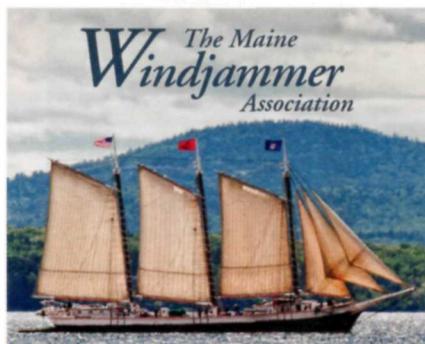


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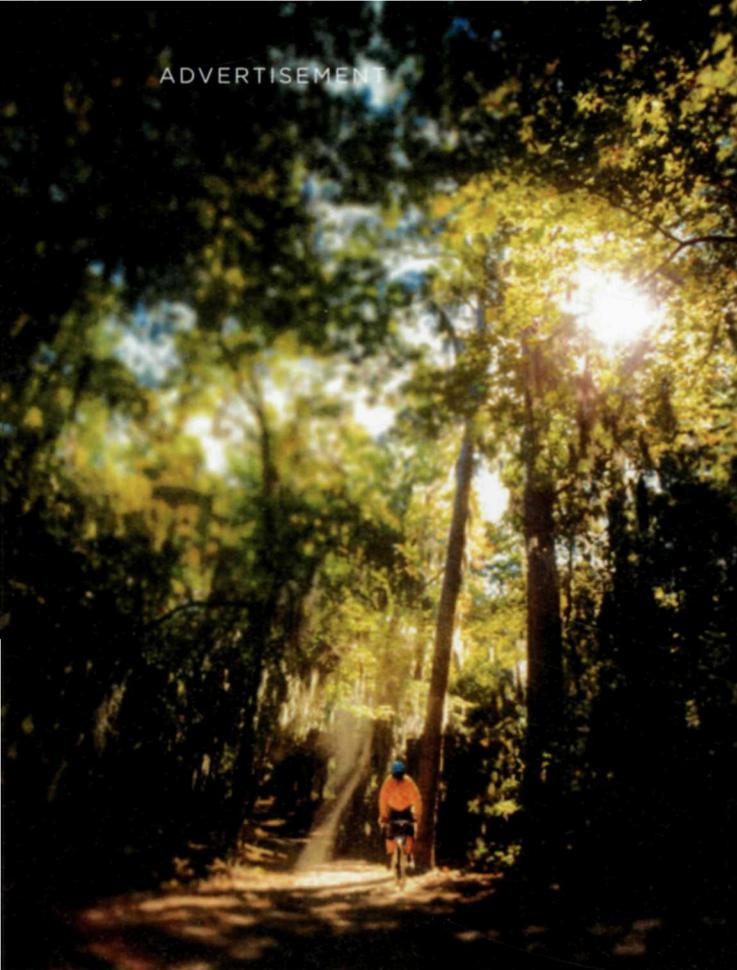
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Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Sebastopol House is now a museum open to the public. Built in Greek Revival style by highly skilled slaves, it is one of the best preserved "limecrete" structures in America, and rests in one of the oldest towns in Texas founded by Texas rangers. It boasts a mystery dungeon and a secret water-cooling system. Also on exhibit are artifacts from Wilson Pottery, the first business in Texas owned by freed slaves. Open Thursday through Sunday, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. To learn more, go to www.visitsequin.com.



Front porch of the Sebastopol House Historic Site
Courtesy City of Seguin

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JULIAN ALDEN WEIR in his studio, standing in front of "The Letter," circa 1910. Below, "Spring Landscape, Branchville," watercolor, 1882.



First Impressions

A Connecticut farm tells the story of painter Julian Alden Weir, who helped introduce Americans to Impressionism.

IN 1882, NEW YORK CITY ART COLLECTOR Erwin Davis became enthralled with a landscape painting owned by a young artist named Julian Alden Weir, created by an unknown painter. Davis had already hired Weir to bring back some of the earliest French Impressionist works from his recent trip to Paris. Not satisfied, Davis also wanted this one particular painting. So he made Weir a special offer: a 153-acre Connecticut farm in exchange for the painting and \$10.

Recently married, Weir already owned land in the Adirondacks, which he rented to affluent urbanites who tried their luck as "gentleman farmers." But Davis' estate and its proximity to Weir's home of Manhattan were too enticing to pass up. In June of 1882, Weir stepped off a train in Branchville, Connecticut, to explore this farm perched atop Nod Hill. He would paint a small masterpiece, "Spring Landscape, Branchville," that would be the start of a 40-year love affair with this sylvan space, one that would alter the course of American art history.

Today, this serene pastoral setting in southeastern Connecticut, an hour's drive from Manhattan, is home to the only park unit devoted to American painting—the 60-acre Weir Farm National Historic Site. New York City residents who make the drive soon find city sprawl replaced by large estates and manicured gardens. When you arrive in Branchville, now a section of the Town of Ridgefield (the park's acreage is in both Ridgefield and Wilton), continue up Nod Hill Road and you reach the New England of yesteryear. Century-old barns and a homestead still stand, stone walls are built around fields of swaying grass, and a large pond is lost in a canopy of tall maples and birches. They would become the fodder for Weir's ambitious body of work.

"There are several artists like Weir who have been called the fathers of the American

Impressionist movement, but Weir was certainly at the heart of it,” says Erica Hirshler, senior curator of American paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. “Weir was an important figure in the translation of this radical French style into what became a celebrated American aesthetic,” and he achieved much acclaim in his lifetime.

Initially, Weir found the French Impressionist movement to be repugnant. When he first encountered the bold palette and loose brushstrokes of Monet, Manet, and Degas at a Paris exhibition, he wrote a letter to his parents noting that it was “worse than the Chambers of Horrors” and it left him with a headache.

Weir’s early paintings in Branchville reflect an appreciation for the scenery of rural life—dogs sleeping in the tall grass, his wife Anna sitting on the steps that lead to the house. By the latter half of the 1880s, Weir began to show an interest in painting landscapes, possibly due to the influence of his friends and fellow painters, Childe Hassam and John Twachtman, who often visited the farm to fish and paint the grounds. These weren’t the grand theatrical landscapes of his American predecessors, Thomas Cole and Frederick Church, but intimate

“There are no rules in art except those which your own feelings suggest.”

portrayals of pasture, thickets of trees, barns, and meandering stone walls.

When his wife died during childbirth in 1892, Weir painted fewer and fewer figures and started to embrace the outdoors through en plein air painting, which would become the hallmark of Impressionism. “There are no rules in art except those which your own feelings suggest. He who renders nature to make one feel the sentiment of such, to me, is the greatest man,” Weir once wrote.

Weir produced more than 450 paintings, a few of which are on display in just about every major American art museum. According to Linda Cook, the park’s superintendent, Weir’s large body of work is a key reason for the park’s designation in 1990.

“The landscape retains its original integrity as a farm. All the barns, home, gardens, and studios are intact,” says Cook.

Walk inside the visitor center to see a short film on Weir and photographs of the artist standing with Childe Has-

sam and John Singer Sargent on the grounds. (Along with Hassam, Weir co-founded “The Ten,” a group of the leading American artists of the turn of the last century who would exhibit works together.) Then immerse yourself in the natural setting that inspired Weir and his friends. Trails lead to barns, a sunken garden, the pond across the street, and his studio and house, which will be open to the public for the first time this October, following restoration work. After Weir died in 1919, his daughter, Dorothy Weir Young, continued the artistic legacy at Weir Farm along with her husband, sculptor Mahonri Young, whose studio is also on display.

Not surprisingly, many of the visitors to Weir Farm today are artists. “Our mission is to continue to inspire the American public through the experience of art,” says Cook. “When you manage a park designed to inspire, you’re going to do everything you can to accommodate professional artists as well as the artist in everyone.”

Amateurs are welcome, too. Every Sunday from May through October, a professional artist offers instruction to visitors, free of charge, and Park Service staff provide free supplies. After all, the most memorable souvenirs are the ones you create yourself.



THE APPLE AND THE TREE

Julian Alden Weir’s father, Robert W. Weir, was a painter and professor of drawing at the United States Military Academy, West Point. One of his students was James McNeil Whistler, who became famous for his work, “Whistler’s Mother” (1871).

Boston-based writer **STEPHEN JERMANOK** writes regularly on the arts and the outdoors for *The Boston Globe*, *The Washington Post*, and *Men’s Journal*.



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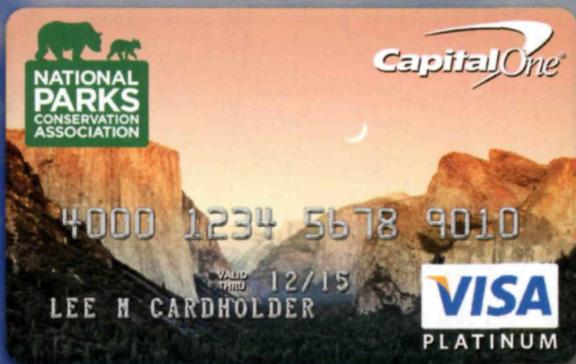
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