

Joshua Tree

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Joshua Tree National Park



Superintendent's Annual Report 2004



Curt Sauer, Superintendent

Lands

Efforts to protect nearly 9,000 acres of the park's southern border in the Coachella Valley were realized in late September when the Nature Conservancy closed on the Cathton property, which was slated to be developed as "Joshua Hills" with 7,000 homes, 12 golf courses, and a variety of retail stores.

The property had been identified as an integral part of the Coachella Valley Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan and many local governments and organizations, including Joshua Tree National Park, National Parks Conservation Association, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy, and the Coachella Valley Associated Government actively opposed development because of the many environmental impacts it would have caused.

Permanent protection of the Cathton property will help achieve several conservation goals important to the park and the Coachella Valley. First, it protects the sand sources that are the lifeblood of the Coachella Valley Preserve's dune system, which provide habitat for many wildlife species, including rare and threatened endemics. Second, it preserves important lower elevation habitat used seasonally by park wildlife and protects the migration corridor linking the preserve and the park. Third, it ensures that the vista from Keys View will not be marred by development.

Through the cooperation of the National Park Foundation, 300 acres were donated to the park.

Special Events

Considerable time and energy was devoted to planning for a regional celebration commemorating the 10th anniversary of the California Desert Protection Act. Working with dozens of partner organizations and individuals from local communities, four days of special events were planned over Veteran's Day weekend, November 11 to 14.

Over 1,000 people attended tenth anniversary events in the communities of Morongo Valley, Joshua Tree, Twentynine Palms, and Yucca Valley. The main event on Saturday, November 13 took place at the Oasis Visitor Center where the first Minerva Hoyt California Desert Conservation Award was presented to Susan Luckie Reilly, and a commemorative mural depicting Minerva Hoyt and her efforts to establish Joshua Tree National Monument was unveiled. Larry Grable, a representative of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, read a letter from the governor, and the Basin Wide Foundation, presented a plaque to the park honoring Minerva Hoyt. Associate Regional Director Marti Leicester spoke on behalf of Regional Director Jon Jarvis. The celebration was attended by surviving family members of Mrs. Hoyt: granddaughters Minerva Kunzel and Daphne Kurchak, and granddaughter-in-law Ruth Griswold.

The National Parks and Conservation Association and the Joshua Tree National Park Association contributed funds to support the event, and the Twentynine Palms Chamber of Commerce provided funds to support an exhibit of historic Stephen Willard photos at the Oasis Visitor Center.

Major Incidents

A search for a camper in July lasted for ten days and involved two county sheriffs departments and over 100 search and rescue volunteers, in addition to park staff. Unfortunately the camper was not found alive and two county rescuers were killed in a motor vehicle accident while responding to this search.

Safety

The accident/incident rate decreased from 4.23 in 2003 to 3.28. Both visitor and employee injuries were down from 2003. Employee motor vehicle accidents were the lowest in five years. Meanwhile, visitor motor vehicle accidents have increased over the last three years.

The primary reasons are speeding and individuals not watching where they are walking, resulting in slips, trips, and falls. There were three visitor deaths: one individual had a heart attack while bicycling, and two campers died of undetermined causes.

Rangers were outfitted with satellite phones to enable better communication with park dispatch; however, due to budget limitations this system was not available in the last quarter of FY04.

Eight hundred seventy-nine hours of safety training was presented to 331 employees in 27 separate classes. Authorized recyclers removed 878 pounds and 819 gallons of hazardous waste generated by the park. One hundred eighteen fire extinguishers were inspected and serviced. Vehicle barriers were placed at the rear of Black Rock Nature Center to provide a safe passage to the campground.

Visitation

Annual visitation remains in the 1¼ million range, with 1,248,103 visitors calculated for the calendar year. This is a 3.1 percent decrease from last year's 1,287,985 visitation figure.

In February, the park began charging a fee of \$5 per campsite at Belle, Hidden Valley, Jumbo Rocks, Ryan, and White Tank campgrounds. Entrance and camping fees amounted to \$1,832,335—of which, \$155,944 came through the campground reservation system.

Special Park Uses

There were approximately 37 film permits issued with 60 days of filming in the park. Seventy-one new incidental business permits were issued and 34 permits for meetings, military training, bolting, and special events and fundraisers. All together these permits generated \$29,176.

Park staff worked with Mojave National Preserve to finish their Special Park Use guidelines and to initiate the transfer of Right-of-Way permits from the Bureau of Land Management to the National Park Service.

Budget / Finance

Base funding for fiscal year 2004 was \$3,971,900—a reduction of \$229,100 from FY2003. The park received approximately \$4 million from other National Park Service sources such as repair/rehabilitation and cyclic maintenance, as well as the Fee Demonstration Program, the Federal Lands Highway Program, the National Interagency Fire Center, and special grants. Many of the park's accomplishments in recent years have been made possible because of funds from sources other than the park's base budget.

Procurement, Contracting, and Accountable Property

The vacant procurement position was filled this year and the new procurement agent was appointed as a contracting officer with a IIA warrant level. The procurement agent assumed all purchasing duties within the \$2,500 to \$25,000 range.

Property management duties were assigned to the procurement agent. Disposal of excess IT property was completed and disposal of excess vehicles was initiated. Work was begun to verify that the property report is current, correct, and in compliance with applicable rules and regulations.

Human Resources

The park's human resources officer assumed responsibility for the personnel security and suitability adjudications of all NPS positions that handle government money and to work with WASO staff to develop, write, and review bulletins and policies related to human resources and suitability issues. The position was upgraded to GS12 and fee operations in WASO provided 50 percent of the salary costs for the human resources officer position and for one human resources assistant.

As of September 30, the number of encumbered permanent positions in the targeted occupational series 0025, 0193, 0301, 0401, 1010, 1015, and 1640 was 22. Nine, or 41 percent, met the definition of diverse employees. All park employees have performance standards linked to strategic and annual goals.

Employee Housing

Employee housing rentals generated over \$25,000 in revenue. Housing Initiative funds were used to rehabilitate Cottonwood residences #203 and #205. The \$114,500 of improvements elevated the interior condition of the two units to "excellent."

Information Technology

To prepare for the implementation of Active Directory services, the park's 22 remaining computers with limited capabilities were replaced at a cost of \$30,475. Utilizing Active Directory, park computers were integrated into the Pacific West Region domain, which allows regional support personnel access to domain computers. Joshua Tree partnered with nine other parks to form the Mediterranean/ Mojave "help desk." IT specialists at any of the ten parks can provide computer and phone support to park staff at any of the ten sites.

Facilities at Black Rock Canyon were integrated via a T-1 data line to both the main phone system and the park's local area network at park headquarters. Staff at the Interagency Fire Center, nature center, and education office now have access to the same services as those working at park headquarters.

Facility Construction and Renovation

A 4,000 square-foot office building was constructed by park staff to provide offices for protection rangers. A similar structure for maintenance personnel will be built in 2005.

The Fee Demonstration Program provided funding for the rehabilitation of the audio-visual/conference room in the Oasis Visitor Center. Park staff removed dark paneling and obsolete equipment, constructed equipment cabinets, and storage lockers, re-wired for networking and Internet access, constructed acoustic walls and ceilings, replaced carpeting and installed an ADA electronically assisted door.

Road Construction and Repair

Federal Highway Administration completed FLHP Projects 291 and 294, 4R and 3R road projects respectively. These projects combined for the reconstruction of ten miles of park route 12 (Park Boulevard), the construction of 12 new pull-offs and six parking lots.

Emergency repairs were made to 4.5 miles of road-shoulders on park route 12 that were damaged in a series of summer rainfall events. Work included excavating a 2-foot by 3-inch section of road along both outside edges and placing 515 tons of cold mix asphalt.

Cyclic Maintenance funded the slurry seal of asphalt surfaces in the parking lot at park headquarters and along Jumbo Rocks Campground roadways.

Trail Maintenance and Rehabilitation

In partnership with the California Conservation Corps, three young adults were employed in an intern program for one-year. The program provides a diverse maintenance experience and a \$2,000 college scholarship when completed.

Eighteen youth including eight females and ten males were enrolled in the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) program. Joshua Tree partnered with both Great Basin National Park and Channel Islands National Park and the crew assisted both parks with trail construction and maintenance projects.

In addition to maintenance on 28 park trails, the 49 Palms Oasis Trail was rehabilitated utilizing Fee Demonstration funds.

Education

Six hundred seventy-seven education programs were provided for 19,803 students, a new record. The downside of these numbers is that, due to budget constraints, far fewer schools are actually able to bring classes to the park, so 75 percent of our school programs are now conducted off-site, in school classrooms, whereas the ratio of on-site to off-site school programs was closer to 1:1 about five years ago.

Joshua Tree plans to seek grants to fund the transporting of students to the park in the future. As two of the four school districts served by the park have high minority enrollments, facilitating park experiences for these children is a priority for building future park supporters among these rapidly growing demographic groups.

A FY04 Parks As Classrooms grant allowed Joshua Tree to convert two popular curricula, “Mojave Desert Discovery” and “Desert Issues” to digital format for more efficient production and distribution to educators. Both are now available on CD-ROM and will soon be downloadable from the park website.

Visitor Services

A wide variety of interpretive programs and other services provided visitors with increased knowledge and appreciation for Joshua Tree National Park. These are summarized below:

<i>Service</i>	<i>Contacts</i>
Visitor Center Contacts (3 facilities)	199,815
Formal Interpretation	14,669
Informal Interpretation	7,026
Junior Ranger Program	1,173
Community Programs	4,768
Loan Materials	1,144
Audio Visual & Electronic Media	39,022
Publications Distributed	166,100

A standardized sociological study of Joshua Tree National Park’s visitor population was conducted by the National Park Service Social Science Program operated from the University of Idaho. During the week of April 3-9, 700 visitors completed questionnaires giving the park current demographic data and profiles of visitor preferences. This Visitor Use Project (VSP) was funded with Fee Demonstration funds and replaces the prior survey done in 1991.

Exhibits and Publications

Planning and design for Phase I of a project to replace all park wayside exhibits was completed and will move to production in FY05. Planning and production for Phase II is scheduled for completion in FY05 with installation of all wayside exhibits in FY06. A major focus of the wayside project in 2004 was pursuing environmental compliance for the installation of the wayside panels together with planned amenities such as several improved parking areas and short trails.

Harpers Ferry Center converted the park’s unigrid folders to digital format, which allowed for additional artwork and revised text to be added on the front page and updates to be made to the map. This was the first substantial revision of the park’s unigrid folder in over 20 years.

Once again Joshua Tree provided editorial and publication services for the Pacific West Region’s newsletter on sustainability, Green Voice. The park will publish one more issue then the regional office will assume this responsibility.

Public Information

Park staff developed public information about two major incidents that occurred during the summer. The search for 18-year-old Eric Sears took place in late July and quickly dominated park operations for its 10-day duration. Over 40 media and news outlets covered the story at its peak and several park employees were involved in supporting media coverage of the incident.

In late August, two staff members were detailed to assist with organizing a media event for the re-opening of Death Valley National Park following the worst flash-flooding the park had experienced in recent memory.

Desert Tortoise Outreach

Park staff assisted the Desert Managers Group (DMG) with the planning and development of an inter-agency information and outreach program centered on the threatened desert tortoise. A major focus in 2004 was obtaining funding for the program. Grants were received late in the year from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, the California Department of Fish & Game, and the California Recreational Off-Road Vehicle Commission. The conservation organization, Defenders of Wildlife, agreed to assist with the implementation of the program and an information and outreach coordinator will be hired in 2005. The interagency program will be coordinated from Joshua Tree National Park.

Joshua Tree National Park Association

In 2004 Joshua Tree National Park Association (JTNPA) grossed \$647,064, a 2.5 percent increase over 2003. Aid to the National Park Service was increased by 32 percent for a total of \$148,915, including a 30 percent increase in personnel services at park visitor centers. For the first time, membership in JTNPA reached 400, which generated over \$10,000 in revenue.

The JTNPA created the Minerva Hoyt Desert Conservation Award, which recognizes, individuals or organizations that have made notable achievements in the areas of leadership, protection, preservation, research, education, and stewardship leading to a significant and lasting contribution on behalf of the deserts of California. The first award was presented at the 10th anniversary of the Desert Protection Act celebration on November 13. In addition, the association sponsored a traveling exhibit of Stephen H. Willard's photographs of the California desert landscape that were instrumental in assisting Mrs. Hoyt in her crusade to have this area protected as a national park unit.

Association-published Joshua Tree National Park Geology won the 2004 Association of Partners for Public Lands Media and Partnership Award. March, 2004 saw the publication of the revised edition of Joshua Tree Desert Reflections by Stephen Trimble. With dazzling photographs and a lyrical narrative, this book serves as a comprehensive introductory guide to Joshua Tree National Park.

The 2004 Joshua Tree National Park Annual Competitive Research Grant awarded financial support to two research projects. "Paleontologic Investigations in the Eastern Pinto Basin" will provide a thoroughly documented, well-researched fossil record of the park. "Phylogeography of the California Tree Frog in Joshua Tree National Park" will provide valuable information on the relationship between *H. cadaverina* populations within the park and those outside the park.

A new research program, Desert Ecology Research, was established to promote research specific to the ecology of the Joshua tree and desert fan palm oases, roadrunner physiology and behavior, and the antiquity of the creosote bush.

The Desert Institute increased student participation to 438, offering 50 classes in FY 2004. In addition to a highly successful lecture program held at the quaint Old Schoolhouse in Twentynine Palms, which brought in over 400 attendees, a new lecture series of three programs was tested at Black Rock Campground, attracting over 125 attendees.

The Joshua Tree National Park Annual Art Festival sponsored in April exhibited the works of approximately 25 artists, attracted over 1,000 visitors, and generated revenue for the JTNPA of over \$4,000.

Joshua Tree National Park and the Joshua Tree National Park Association (JTNPA) agreed to enter into an expanded agreement that would allow JTNPA to raise donated monies to support park operations. A two-day seminar on partnerships was conducted at Black Rock Nature Center to identify this process.

New Chief of Resources Management

The Resources Management division saw a major change in leadership this year with the retirement of Dr. Hank McCutcheon midyear. Steve Gibbons, from the Seattle office of the Pacific West Region provided interim direction of the division for a few months, followed by Chief Ranger Judy Bartzatt assuming temporary responsibilities through the rest of the calendar year.

Vegetation Management

Planting and monitoring the survival of transplants continued between the Geology Tour Road and Cap Rock section of Park Boulevard and in the Hidden Valley/Barker Dam area. Planning for the next road improvement project, the section from Cap Rock to Keys View, was initiated. Joshua trees and other plants that will need to be transplanted were identified and final modifications were made to the plan.

The Center for Arid Lands Restoration started plants for future revegetation components of park road reconstruction projects, as well as for Ft. Irwin and the Bureau of Land Management.

Wildlife Ecology

The park began a four-year re-survey of a 1970s long-term study plot in the Pinto Basin. Biological assessments for the proposed Indian Cove borrow pit restoration and the Fire Management Plan were submitted to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Desert tortoise monitoring (including transmitter-tagged individuals) occurred along Federal Highways project 291 (Geo Tour Road to Cap Rock) during the construction phase.

A baseline study of ravens was initiated using a variable circle point count methodology to compare natural areas versus high visitor-use areas (i.e. campgrounds). The study concluded that while there were no differences between these two areas, there was a higher than natural number of ravens in the park.

The park initiated California treefrog surveys focusing on 49 Palms Oasis and Rattlesnake Canyon, but including Willow Hole, Johnson Springs, and Smithwater Canyon. Results from this study show that their distribution is restricted from historic locations and current populations are very low. The two largest threats to their location within the park are amount of water and disturbance by visitors (i.e. squishing).

A guzzler survey was initiated to determine the efficacy of these systems in wilderness and their impacts on wildlife—primarily bighorn sheep.

Physical Science

Air quality remains the most visibly impacted of the park's resources. Efforts continued to secure funding and partnerships for a second air quality monitoring station in the Cottonwood Spring area.

Groundwater investigations were undertaken to track how proposed "water banking" in the Pinto Well area by Metropolitan Water District would impact water resources inside the park.

Four illegal dumps were cleaned up removing 9,000 pounds of material. Sixty-six incidents of resource damage by off-road vehicle riders were investigated.

Archaeology, Ethnography, Cultural Landscapes & Paleontology

A policy for monitoring archeological sites was developed and implemented. Six incidents of damage to archeological resources were documented with one misdemeanor conviction.

The cultural cyclic maintenance program addressed stabilization issues at Ryan Ranch, Pinto Wye arrastra, and Eagle Cliff mine, as well as facilitating the transmittal of historic personal property associated with the El Sid mine. A bat-gate was installed on the Golden Bell mine and Mine 19. A paleontology study of the Pinto Basin was initiated through a partnership with the San Bernardino County Museum.

Museum Collections

Cataloging of backlogged museum collections continued at the Western Archaeological Conservation Center. The park completed a Museum Management Plan and initiated efforts for the development of an emergency procedures manual for the museum. The development of an integrated pest management plan for the Key's Desert Queen Ranch was initiated.

Environmental Compliance

The park initiated several categorical exclusions associated with a number of permits for conducting scientific research, incident business activities, and cyclic maintenance activities. Environmental assessments were initiated for the park's fire management plan, installation of wayside exhibits, and reconstruction of Keys View Road.

Four "minimum tool" analyses were reviewed covering Eagle Cliff restoration, guzzler cameras, hazmat removal, and an illegal dump cleanup. All were approved except the Eagle Cliff restoration.

Research

Research permits were issued for both new and recurring projects. In addition, the USGS Colorado Plateau Office assisted with mammal surveys to locate kangaroo rats, ringtails, and long tailed weasel. There are no

final results to date. The USGS Reno Office finished a three-year bighorn sheep study in the Queen Mountain. The project focused on 11 collared sheep and analyzed visitor use and habitat use of the sheep.

Law Enforcement

Staffing levels were maintained at ten commissioned rangers and thirteen visitor use assistants. This reflects one vacancy. High profile patrols were conducted in areas with traditionally high visitor use. Entrance stations and campgrounds were staffed during extended hours for Halloween and New Year's weekend. Educational contacts were a priority in climbing areas. The staff continues to work to increase the activity of the volunteer equestrian patrol to increase contacts with the area's large equestrian community.

Rangers cultivated relationships with the California Highway Patrol, Riverside and San Bernardino County Sheriff-Coroner's Office, and the U.S. Marine Corps. Many incidents were worked cooperatively based on improved relationships with surrounding agencies. A special presentation was made in February to U.S. Attorney Debra Wong for her office's support of our operations. The park sponsored cooperative training with the U.S. Attorney's Office, U.S. District Court Pre-Trial Services, U.S. Forest Service, and San Bernardino County Sheriffs.

Rangers documented and prosecuted 27 incidents of criminal damage and vandalism, over 13 drug related incidents, over 15 alcohol related violations, 13 disorderly conduct violations, one aggravated assault (with hands and feet), 21 larceny and thefts other than motor vehicle, and 108 traffic violations other than DUI and 176 Natural Resource violations other than ARPA.

One ranger was detailed to the DOI Homeland Security Watch office. Weapons of Mass Destruction training was completed for all ranger staff.

Search and Rescue and Emergency Medical Services

Park rangers responded to over 470 cases, including 33 Basic Life Support incidents, 13 Advanced Life Support incidents and 19 Search and Rescue events involving 36 lost visitors. Search and rescue costs exceeded \$111,000.

Rock Climbing

The Climbing Committee was disbanded in the summer due to the sunset date of the Park's Advisory Committee, however, the staff continues to work with Climbing and Environmental Organizations to foster continued support for the implementation of the Backcountry Management Plan.

A study of rock climbing in the park including an evaluation of the potential impacts of climbing on natural resources was completed. Preliminary results from this study are being used to help reduce future impacts, such as those caused by "social trails."

Wilderness and Backcountry

A seasonal ranger was hired for six months to patrol trails, the park boundary, and archeological sites for resource violations. Sixteen miles of park boundary were posted and barriers were placed to prevent off-road travel. During December, the park hosted wilderness training taught by staff from the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center. In addition, a Leave No Trace workshop was conducted for staff, local students, and organized groups. Specialized Leave No Trace programs for climbers were conducted at Hidden Valley Campground.

Wildland Fire

Wildland fires within the park were immediately suppressed and no significant acreage was burned. Our firefighters provided support to national, regional and local fire fighting efforts. Call-outs included 40 wildland fires, four traffic collisions, four emergency medical services calls, three searches, two prescribed burns, six trips to provide support to the BLM Glamis Operation during high visitation and holiday weekends, and seven opportunities to cover for other stations.

Captain Steve Elenburg received the DOI Valor Award for saving the life of a news reporter during the Old Fire in southern California in the fall of 2003.

In April, Mojave Preserve's Fire Management Officer began supervision of the fire program at Joshua Tree. The Fire Management Plan EA was completed and sent to the regional office for review. The Fire Program Assistant position was vacant for most of the year, with most administrative responsibilities transferred to the Mojave Preserve fire office.

The assistant engine operator position was vacated in early August, and expects to be filled prior to the next fire season. We had three seasonal firefighters on the crew in 2004, two of the three had prior experience. The park continues to support one candidate in the NPS Apprentice program.

The park sponsored one 40-hour Basic Firefighter class, three 16-hour Fire Refresher classes, and one Advanced Firefighter class. Approximately 100 students completed the training. Personnel from the Black Rock fire center provided instruction during the DOI Fire Engine Academy. The park's fire program received an "above average" overall rating during the fire readiness review.