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As Lithium Recovery Moves Forward, Will Salton Sea Residents be Left Behind?

by Joan Taylor and Shelby Reeder

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By now you've probably heard of Lithium Valley, the lithium-rich basin at the Salton Sea in Imperial County. The coveted metal is used to produce rechargeable batteries for electric vehicles, provide renewable energy storage and more. As demand for EVs and renewables climbs, so has the demand for lithium.

Lithium mining, whether in the US, South America or elsewhere, has proven extremely destructive of habitat and native cultures. But at the Salton Sea, lithium exists in geothermal liquid under the earth's surface in unusually high concentrations. Corporations believe they can recover it from the hot brine used to run geothermal energy generators and then return that brine to the ground with minimal damage to the environment. Many see lithium as the key to accelerating the shift to electric vehicles and storing energy from intermittent renewables like solar and wind -- resulting in improved air quality and combating climate change. Governor Newsom dubbed Lithium Valley "the Saudi Arabia of lithium."

A quick online search on Lithium Valley reveals a host of articles predicting economic and environmental benefits, as well as the potential to bring jobs to an economically depressed area that was once thriving. Yet there are few articles amplifying the voices of those who live in the area and may be most affected. Some residents are skeptical of the promises of both jobs and green recovery, and feel shut out of the decision-making process. In a recent Op Ed in the Desert Sun, (August 24, 2022) activists Cecilia Dora Armenta and Elizabeth Jaime asked that their communities of North Shore and Salton City be given greater representation in the process:

“We are concerned that the profits that will result from lithium development are more important to decision-makers than our health.

The lives of immigrants, children, and low-income people of color are worth more than the profits of lithium extraction. We experience the climate crisis every day through extreme heat, storms, high energy costs, and poor air quality. Climate solutions must not cause us more problems.”

Once a tourist destination, over the years the Salton Sea has been shrinking due to drought and water diversion reducing its in-flows. Water run-off from agriculture, plus industrial wastewater from Mexico, is largely what sustains the Salton Sea. This carries pesticides, heavy metals and salts, which have ended up in the lake. As the lake recedes, concentrations of these contaminants have ended up in the dusty lake shore and are eventually blown about by the region’s strong winds. Meanwhile the Salton Sea is becoming hypersaline, threatening millions of migratory birds that rely on it as a major stopover on the Pacific Flyway.

The regional air quality is so poor that in 2019, the Imperial County Board of Supervisors declared a local state of emergency ([Cavanaugh, KPBS, 2019](#)).

Back in 2003 the state of California assumed the obligation to mitigate for water transfers from Imperial County to urban users, but dragged its heels. Sierra Club and other enviros fought for decades to spur the state into action, and now the state is finally stepping up to remediate these problems, with dust suppression and habitat creation projects finally getting underway (Taylor, 2017). Ensuring that lithium recovery support this remediation as well as benefit surrounding communities has been a main thrust of enviro activism.

Environmental and social justice organizations remain concerned that residents may be ignored once lithium recovery is in full swing. In an article for the Desert Report (March 2022), Mariela Loera, a policy advocate with the Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, gave voice to residents’ concerns:

“We’ve been told that low-income desert communities will also benefit from the economic prosperity that lithium extraction will bring through employment opportunities. But thus far, promises of prosperity are just promises as we await the facts and enforceable commitments that will ensure that economic development is shared, collaborative, and equitable.”

The government agency tasked with researching and coordinating lithium recovery is the California Energy Commission. It established the Lithium Valley Commission, made up of state and county government officials, public utilities, industry, community leaders and one environmental representative, with the goal of analyzing opportunities and benefits of lithium recovery. The commission holds monthly meetings that are local and open to the public in person or by zoom, so community members can testify and submit comments. Yet Armenta and Jaime say their questions go unanswered.

The Lithium Valley Commission is tasked with producing a report on their findings by October 1st. The report will be translated into Spanish for public review and comment, with three local hearings whose dates have not been set. The question on many residents’ minds: will their concerns be included?

Citations:

Armenta, Cecilia Dora and Elizabeth Jaime. Aug. 24, 2022. We are More than an Experiment for Lithium in the Desert. The Desert Sun. <https://www.desertsun.com>

Cavanaugh, Maureen. Oct. 23, 2019. Imperial County Declares Emergency at Salton Sea. KPBS. <https://www.kpbs.org>

California Energy Commission/Lithium Valley Commission: <https://www.energy.ca.gov>

Loera, Mariela. March 2022. Climate Justice at Lithium Valley. Desert Report, Sierra Club California and Nevada Desert Committee. <https://desertreport.org/march-2022-latest-issue/>

Taylor, Joan. July 2017. Salton Sea - Preserving a Tomorrow. Desert Report, Sierra Club California and Nevada Desert Committee. <https://desertreport.org>

September Trail Talk

Trail Talk: Inland Water 101

September 21, 2022 | 7:00 PM



With a global drought looming over and emerging contaminants threatening our water supply, a conversation and understanding about our water system is more important than ever. Please join Western Municipal Water District Vice President Gracie Torres for our September "Trail Talk" on "Inland Water 101 and Important Water Sites in the San Gorgonio Chapter."

As always, the Trail Talk presentations will be held virtually via Zoom on the third Wednesday of the month: You must register on the [Sierra Club San Gorgonio Outings and Events web page](#) to receive your Zoom link. Previous topics are available on our [YouTube channel](#).

October Trail Talk

Trail Talk: Hiking the Camino in Europe

October 19, 2022 | 7:00 PM



Have you ever wanted to take some of the great hikes of Europe? Find out how with our own Joseph Amador during his October Trail Talk, "Hiking the Camino in Europe." An experienced hiker and backpacker, Joe will describe what it is like to plan and walk the great pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago in Spain and Portugal.

As always, the Trail Talk presentations will be held virtually via Zoom on the third Wednesday of the month. You must register on the San Gorgonio Chapter's website (outings and events listing) for this event: sangorgonio2.sierraclub.org. To receive your Zoom link, register [here](#).

The Ten Pathways to 30 by 30

by Vicky Hoover

Since the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) back in April released their final “Pathways to 30x30” blueprint for how California will achieve the ambitious goal of protecting 30% of our lands and waters by 2030, our Sierra Club CA 30x30 Task Force is moving to the next phase of our campaign: how we will influence implementation of the state’s 30x30 plan toward the strongest protection possible.

To understand better how CNRA wants to proceed on implementation, our 30 by 30 task force is taking a close look at the “Ten Pathways to 30 by 30” described in the main “Pathways” Document.

What ARE their ten listed action steps? YOU can learn about them with us!

The first emphasis is "Regional"; that is conservation needs to be tailored to a specific part of California--no one size fits all.

Second, comes the call for "strategic land acquisitions". Yes, clearly acquiring key conservation lands is essential and may underpin many other ways to make progress. However, it generally costs the most money: we can't buy up all the land we wish to.

Third, voluntary "conservation easements". Buying lands isn't always possible--due to unavailability or expense--but easements across lands, for corridors, can sometimes substitute.

Fourth--better conservation of lands that are "already public". Yes--how about working for stronger designations on our public lands--such as more national monuments or wilderness on federal lands--or maybe more state wildernesses? And more protective management of those lands.

Fifth--Institutionalize "advance mitigation". This one always sounds medicinal to me--a bit formidable--but it just means that because some necessary development projects will have impacts we can't prevent, we need to assure durable protection for more than just 30 percent of lands--we need to make up for unavoidable harm.

6. Restoration and stewardship. Of course! it's not all new lands to protect: we must work to restore ecological integrity to damaged lands and provide strong stewardship overall.

Seventh--Strengthen Coordination Among Governments. Absolutely vital--get the feds and state lands managers to cooperate and work together--they have done little enough of that in the past.

Number 8: Invest for maximum conservation: Wise move. If you're spending money on conservation, do it in a way that gets the most bang for the buck.

Number 9: Complementary conservation measures: Ok--that means not every conservation action will yank up the total of lands protected BUT can help in other useful ways to boost effectiveness of our 30x30 measures.

Finally, the tenth pathway: evaluate, monitor and adapt. Check to make sure what you're doing is really helping -- if not--adapt to make it better.

Not a bad list. What is working in YOUR Chapter?

And what else is the 30 by 30 task force up to?

Coming up, we are supporting lobbying efforts around the state budget to secure more funds for 30x30, refining the Local each Chapter's Conservation Priorities to zero in on those priorities ripe for action now; and we're ramping up our campaign's communications efforts to get the word out about our work—here are some useful links:

[CA 30x30 Facebook](#)

[CA 30x30 Local Conservation Snapshot Feature - Instagram](#)

[CA 30x30 Local Conservation Snapshot Feature - Facebook](#)

To get involved in your Chapter, contact Vicky Hoover, co-chair, CA 30x30 task force (Vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org)

Moreno Valley Group Update

by Ann McKibben, Secretary & George Hague, Conservation Chair

Look for our Moreno Valley Group fall newsletter with our fall group executive committee election ballot during the first half of October. Please take time to read our news and mail your ballot to us in the return envelope that we have provided.

Our group needs a new treasurer and we hope you will consider volunteering for this position. Please email us at movalleygroup@yahoo.com if you are interested in helping us out, have questions and/or are willing to give it a try. We have people who will help you with any questions you may have if you are willing to take on the position.

More group hikes are being planned for November and December. Christina Torres, our Moreno Valley Group Outings Chair, is looking forward to the winter months as the cooler weather will signal doing some of her favorite hikes in the low desert in the Palm Springs area. If you want some insight into some of these hikes, along with desert hiking safety, you can go to the San Gorgonio Chapter's YouTube channel to see the presentation she did last year on Desert Hikes and Safety along with recordings of many of the other "Trail Talk" Zoom meetings that were done by other chapter hike leaders and guest presenters. Links to the YouTube channel, and to sign the waiver to attend one of her hikes, or other chapter hikes can be found on the chapter website. Please go to our [web page](#) to RSVP.

Photo: San Timiteo Hike by Christina Torres



San Jacinto Wildlife Area/Villages of Lakeview

(SJWA/VOL): The nearby 10,000 acre San Jacinto Wildlife Area (SJWA) operated by the Department of Fish and Wildlife is adjacent and east of Lake Perris. There are threatened/endangered plants and animals that depend on this habitat for their survival. It is also used by 24 species of raptors which includes five species of owls. The Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count usually spots more than 140 different species which places the SJWA and surrounding lands in the top 1% or 2% of all inland areas in North America for the number of species. The very large Villages of Lakeview (VOL) development was approved on the southern border of the SJWA about six years ago. With the help of the Center of Biological Diversity, the San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society and our Moreno Valley Group of the Sierra Club we have been litigating the project with the goal of protecting the SJWA and its special resources.

MoVal 2040—Moreno Valley General Plan Update (GPU)

& Climate Action Plan (CAP): On July 15, 2021 our Sierra Club filed a lawsuit against the city of Moreno Valley on their approval of the GPU and CAP. A big part of the litigation is pointing out the need to reduce poor air quality and Greenhouse Gas (GHG) impacts on the health of people—especially children and the elderly—as well as the environment. Hopefully litigation will correct and/or improve the environment for Moreno Valley residents. **In June 2022 the California state attorney general, Rob Bonta, joined our litigation. He issued a press release in which he stated, “We’re intervening today so that those communities do not continue to bear the brunt of poor land use decisions that site warehouses outside their doors.”** Your Moreno Valley Sierra Club volunteers and our attorney, the city, as well as the attorney general's office are in settlement talks.

Moreno Valley Business Park Warehouse (MVBWP): The Moreno Valley Business Park warehouse is proposed at the southeast corner of Ironwood Avenue and Heacock Street, in the same shopping center as the new Sprouts. The warehouse's diesel trucks will significantly impact not only families as they travel on adjacent roads, but also the SR-60/Heacock interchange as well as the entrance to the shopping center. It appears this litigation is heading to court.

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Edgemont Commerce Center Warehouse (ECC): This warehouse would be located at the southwest corner of Day Street and Bay Avenue which are narrow two-lane roads. It would be only 10 feet from homes and across the street from others. It will require a zone change to allow this warehouse to be built. The census tract containing this project and family homes is already in the worst 1% of areas in all of California for air pollution and other socioeconomic impacts. Contact city planner Julia Descoteaux (juliad@moval.org) to be added to the contact list for future meetings and documents. More information [here](#).

Moreno Valley Business Center (MVBC): The MVBC is the latest warehouse project and is very close to the ECC warehouse (which is mentioned above) along Day Street in Edgemont. On the east side of the project, homes are **adjacent** to the site; north are a few homes across a narrow two-lane road; and to the west a few homes are across a narrow two-lane road. The census tract containing this project site shows its residents in about the **worst 1% of areas in all of California for air pollution and other socioeconomic impacts**. The project site is owned by the city. Both the Sierra Club and CCAEJ filed appeals on July 25, 2022 of the Planning Commission's 3-1 vote to approve the project. **Contact planner Julia Descoteaux (juliad@moval.org) to be placed on the mailing list and make comments prior to the city council meeting which has not yet been scheduled.**

Please consider making a donation to our local Sierra Club (P.O. Box 1325, Moreno Valley, CA 92556-1325) to challenge these unhealthy warehouse projects being built near people's homes. Thank you to all of you who have already donated to help us make them less harmful to Moreno Valley residents, especially children.

Moreno Valley Trade Center (MVTC): The Moreno Valley Planning Commission voted to deny this project at its October 28, 2021 meeting. After delaying the appeal, the project was considered for approval at the June 21 city council meeting. The location of this proposed massive 1,263,271 sq. ft. warehouse is west of Redlands Boulevard, south of Eucalyptus Avenue, and north of Encelia Avenue and includes Hall Nursery. The land is zoned for homes, across the street from family homes and adjacent to land zoned for future homes. At earlier hearings the residents who would be forced to live across the street from this massive warehouse did a good job of expressing their disapproval of the project as did some of you.

We will have more information in our next group news. When it is before the city council again, please email the city council members to communicate that neighbors and the city do not need this warehouse.

Compass Danbe Centerpointe Warehouse Project: The Sierra Club filed our lawsuit on this project on February 17. The 389,603 square foot project site is located south of Alessandro Boulevard between Frederick Street and Graham Street. The warehouse is across the street from a charter school, apartments and homes. The project's Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) indicates that trucks accessing or exiting the project site may also use the city-designated truck routes along Frederick Street, Heacock Street and Alessandro Boulevard to travel to and from State Route 60. **Nine schools are located within 1/4 mile of City-Designated truck routes that could/would be used by the proposed project.** Our attorney submitted a comment letter detailing our concerns about the project. We are currently in settlement talks to try to lessen project impacts on people and the environment.

Heacock Street Commerce Center (HSCC): The Heacock Street Commerce Center is a proposed warehouse project located at the southeast corner of Heacock Street and Gentian Avenue. It is the latest warehouse that impacts nearby homeowners. The two warehouses total 873,967 square feet and are adjacent to homes—**some only 20 feet away**—and requires another General Plan Amendment (GPA) from land zoned for homes/commercial. The following link <https://www.moval.org/cdd/documents/about-projects.html> has information on the project. Because of the project's location, toxic diesel trucks will more than likely use Heacock Street as their direct path to SR-60, resulting in them passing at least three schools that are adjacent to Heacock Street. **Please email city planner Jeff Bradshaw (jeffreyb@moval.org) and request to be sent all environmental documents as well as notices of meetings for this project.**

If we all do our part to let the city know we think the decision makers are wrong in placing all the warehousing near residents, then perhaps Moreno Valley would join the cities of Riverside, Jurupa Valley, Colton, Chino, Pomona and Norco in putting a pause on more warehousing until they more fully analyze/understand their impacts on the residents.

Big Bear Group Update

by Ellen Kesler, Chair

Fall is in the air up here with the changing of the tree colors. The rains this summer were marvelous...what will this winter bring? I'd better start the snow dance early!

We have two more general meetings left and as I write this, our speakers are "not in cement" yet.

August found us participating in the local "Adventure Days" again at the Discovery Center, even though the Center hasn't finished remodeling and the inside isn't open to the public. At our booth, we offered visitors the opportunity to make pinecone bird feeders using peanut butter. It's a joy to open the world of nature to people who may never have experienced it. Our Conservation Chair, Ed Wallace, led people on hikes in the nearby area.

Happy Fall everyone!

"In every walk with Nature, one receives far more than he seeks." - John Muir

Sierra Club

Member Exclusive

Watch your mailbox for our special voting issue! The print issue includes Sierra Club candidate endorsements for our upcoming elections, as well as information on voting for our own San Gorgonio Chapter Executive Committee.

Not a Sierra Club member? Join by October 4th to receive our special issue! Go to sangorgonio2.sierraclub.org and click "Join Now" on our home page.

Please Vote!



Santa Margarita Group Update

by Margaret Meyncke

On Saturday, August 6, 2022, our Santa Margarita Group met for their summer executive meeting at Winchester Creek Park, Temecula. We began with a special recognition for a dedicated and very active volunteer, Caren Hanson. Caren is the leader for our Native Plant Team. She gave us a tour of the pilot project at the Park and showed off the educational sign that she purchased by applying for a City grant. The garden is beautiful and hosts other visitors flying by - butterflies!

Caren has expanded her efforts by providing information about butterfly gardens to everyone who asks, including local libraries, businesses, schools, and homeowners. She continues to contact city officials and other entities. Caren is now working to make changes at the State level. She is currently looking for someone to sponsor a bill that would require developers to plant native plants for their landscaping.

Other discussions at the excom centered on the Friends group of the San Jacinto Wildlife Area. Pam Nelson and Shea Millan have been working to see what can be done to protect it. It's a good "30x30" land conservation project since it supports endangered species and is 20,000 acres.

Our Climate Committee has been working on a campaign with other climate nonprofits to pressure banks to stop investing in fossil fuels. David Marrett and Shaul Rosen-Rager have been visiting Chase Banks and speaking with bank managers and holding protests there.



Our Conservation Committee continues to work with the Santa Ana to Palomar Mountain Alliance (S2P) to support wildlife crossings at I-15, south of Temecula. A wildlife bridge or undercrossing is being planned, as well as enhancements to the current crossing under I-15 at Temecula Creek. S2P is an alliance composed of agencies and NGOs directed by a steering committee. The Nature Conservancy is the lead and we are part of the steering committee that meets quarterly.

Upcoming events: Dr. Gordon Pratt will be hosting his annual native plant sale on Oct. 1st along with a book signing. He recently completed a book on Joshua tree invertebrates. This event is always a fun adventure since it is held at his multi-acre estate in SE Anza. The views, tour, food and music are a great addition to the special plants that are available.

Be sure to attend the presentation by our vice-chair and summer intern, Shea Millan, on Sept. 1st, 6:30 pm as part of our Speaker Series. She will discuss the San Jacinto Wildlife Area's history and current status. Go to the Chapter Website for information.

Any questions? Contact me: pamela05n@yahoo.com

Photos by Pam Nelson



Outings Highlight: Hanna Flat Hike, Big Bear

Date: Sat, Oct. 8, 2022; 8:00 AM

Location: Grays Peak Trailhead, Fawnskin

Rating/Distance: Moderate/7-8 miles

Hike Leader: Judy Atkinson, Big Bear Group

Contact: judy5723@gmail.com

Hike Registration: [Register online](#)

About the Hike

Join hike leader Judy Atkinson on a beautiful fall hike in Big Bear! The Hanna Flat hike will be a moderate, non-canine, 7 - 8 mile, out-and-back hike with about 800 ft. of elevation gain. The hike begins at the Gray's Peak trailhead but will take a turnoff after the first climb and head north toward the Hanna Flat Campground. While this hike can be completed as a longer loop trail, our Hanna Flat hike will be an out-and-back trip with a break for a snack or lunch. The trail offers open views and rock formations, and is usually very pretty in October. An Adventure Pass is required to park at the trailhead.

Bring: 2 liters of water, snack/lunch, hat, sunscreen, wear layers clothing, hiking boots and poles if you like to use them.

Contact the hike leader for more information on directions and carpooling.

About the Leader

Judy has been a Sierra Club member for 13 years and has served as a hike leader since 2014. She decided to volunteer when she saw a need for moderate weekend hikes that would fit into the busy schedules of those who work fulltime. Judy leads hikes throughout Big Bear and the San Bernardino Mountains from spring through fall, and in Yucaipa, Redlands, and Whitewater when temperatures drop in the winter.

Judy is an enthusiastic hike leader who loves our local mountains and deserts. When asked about her favorite hike, she could hardly choose just one.

"I have a lot of favorite trails!" Judy said. "But probably Santa Ana River trail is my favorite for the variety. There are several sections, you can go out and back, shuttle it, there are creeks and views, and we can go out to eat at The Oaks restaurant afterward."

Her other favorites: "Bluff Lake/Siberia Creek and Johns Meadow are fantastic for flowers. The views are great at Morton Peak, Gray's Peak and Skyline Trail."

As with many of our Sierra Club hike leaders, Judy says that what she likes best is the people. "I like meeting new people and getting them interested in hiking. I enjoy talking to other hikers and showing them beautiful places to hike locally."

Join Judy and make some new friends on the trail!

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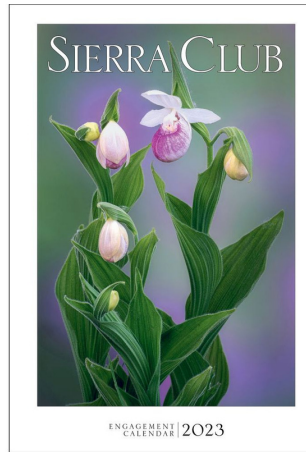
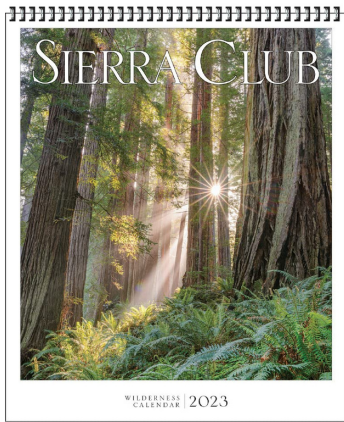
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