



# Mission Trails Regional Park News

A PUBLICATION OF THE MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK FOUNDATION Vol. 33, Number 2, Fall 2023



## MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK FOUNDATION

### BOARD MEMBERS

**B. Lane MacKenzie**, President  
**Cynthia Cornelius**, Vice President  
**Lauren Krase**, Secretary  
**Brian Wright**, Treasurer  
**Randall Christison, Esq.**  
**Bruce Folkmann**  
**Ruth Gautereaux**  
**Fred Kramer**  
**Todd Linke**  
**Katy McDonald**  
**Neil Mohr**  
**J. Carlton Morse II, CFP**  
**Adrianna O'Donnell**  
**Betty Ogilvie**

### MTRP FOUNDATION STAFF

**Jennifer Morrissey**, Executive Director  
**Lola Castro**, Gift Shop Sales Associate\*  
**Taylor Crowley**, Communications and Operations Assistant  
**Janet Gavaldon**, Operations Manager  
**Kindra Hixon**, Stewardship Manager  
**Robin Kendall**, Educator\*  
**Alissa Lustgarten**, Lead Educator  
**Emily Springfield**, Educator\*  
**Iris Thompson**, Educator\*

### CITY OF SAN DIEGO STAFF

**Ryan Robertson**, Senior Park Ranger  
**Julie Aeilts**, Park Ranger  
**Chris Axtmann**, Park Ranger  
**Steven Blankenship**, Ranger Aide  
**Jennifer Canales**, Center Director  
**Carmelo Esquer**, Grounds Maintenance  
**Tom Folk**, Grounds Maintenance  
**Jesus Fuentes**, Park Ranger  
**Heidi Gutknecht**, Park Ranger  
**Geoff Hasenauer**, Park Ranger  
**Dan Kimpel**, Park Ranger  
**David Lee**, Center Director

\* Part time

### Visitor and Interpretive Center

(619) 668-3281

**MTRP Foundation** (619) 668-3280

**Email** [mtrp@mtrp.org](mailto:mtrp@mtrp.org)

**Web Site** [www.mtrp.org](http://www.mtrp.org)

### Mission Trails Regional Park

**Foundation, Inc.**, established January 1988, is a non-profit public benefit corporation organized for the purpose of preserving, improving, and maintaining Mission Trails Regional Park.

### Newsletter contributors:

Julene Snyder, Jennifer Morrissey, Millie Basden, Janet Gavaldon, Taylor Crowley and Kindra Hixon

**Design:** Jayna McLeod



## MISSION OF THE MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK FOUNDATION

In partnership with the City of San Diego, preserve and protect the natural environment of Mission Trails Regional Park and provide and promote educational and recreational opportunities.

### MESSAGE FROM Jennifer Morrissey, Executive Director



The falling leaves and cooler weather bring an air of excitement to the park. There's an uptick in visitors, and school field trips are in full swing on weekday mornings. It's heartwarming to see the orange buses come down Mission Gorge Road, knowing that for some students, this will be their first experience in nature.

As some in the Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) community know, I grew up in Stockton, in California's Central Valley, and my parents, East Coasters, moved there for work but also for its proximity to the Sierras and Yosemite. Before too long, my parents acquired some property in the Mother Lode in the Sierra Foothills, an area known for its Gold Rush history.

It's there that I had my first connections to open space. My siblings and I would spend weekends navigating creeks — sometimes believing we saw gold flakes in the water — swaying on a tire swing attached to a gigantic oak, meandering through fields and picking up the fragrant scent of tarweed.

My fondness and passion for Mission Trails stems from these childhood experiences. A desire to preserve Mission Trails as well as make the park accessible to others, including children, drives all of us at the MTRP Foundation. Not only can we foster links to nature, but we work together to create and restore habitat for the enjoyment of humans and, especially, to benefit the park's wildlife.

**It's heartwarming to see the orange buses come down Mission Gorge Road, knowing that for some students, this will be their first experience in nature.**

As you'll read in this issue, there are major

initiatives underway at the park, including the construction of a Bridge for Max to memorialize the young man who tragically drowned while attempting to cross the San Diego River in January 2021. Since his passing, his parents have channeled their grief into action and are leading the effort to build a bridge for the park.

You can also find some of the many highlights of the MTRP Foundation's last fiscal year which was productive and eventful thanks to the support of our staff, Board of Directors, volunteers and donors.

We are entering the most important fundraising season for our organization, and we need community members like you to help the MTRP Foundation deliver on its mission to preserve and protect the park and provide and promote educational and recreational opportunities.

Decades have passed since my carefree adventures in the Mother Lode, but I feel fortunate that today I can help facilitate others' connection to nature and experiences that are golden, no matter one's age.

*Image credits: Cover: Aleesaya Rosario; Maryann Miernicki: Cathy Hayes, xxx; Page 1: Angie Ollman, Jayna McLeod; Page 2: Angie Ollman, Gerry Tietje; Pages 4-5: Angie Ollman; Pages 6-7: Adam Pikielny, Angie Ollman; Pages 8-9: Mark James and Millie Basden; Pages 10-11: Jayna McLeod, Angie Ollman, Mark Foreman, Kari Cureton; Page 12-13: Angie Ollman, Jayna McLeod*

# Nature Enthusiast

## KINDRA HIXON IS EAGER TO DIVE INTO NEW ROLE

San Diego native Kindra Hixon — who came on board to support the education, outreach and stewardship activities of the Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) Foundation— is excited to get to work. She began her tenure with the Foundation in September 2023.



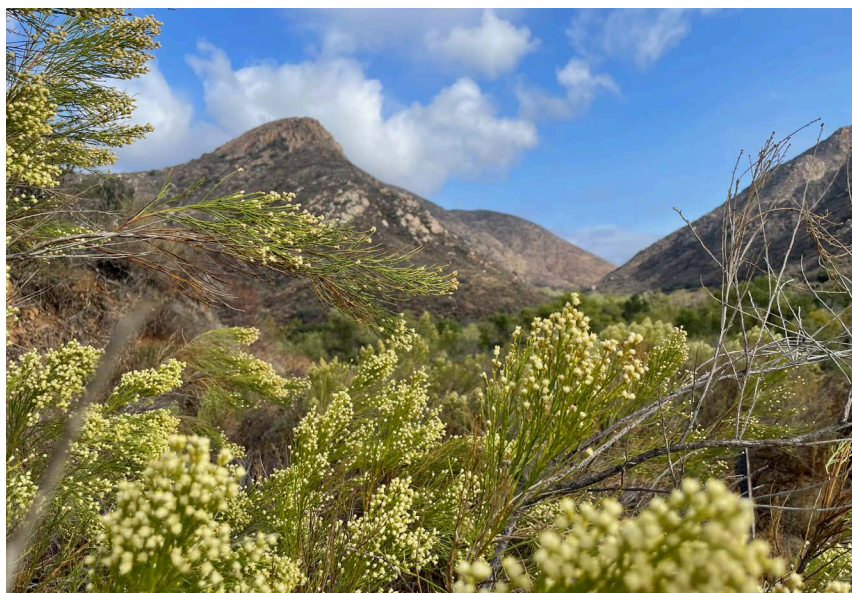
Kindra earned her undergraduate degree from Southern Oregon University, majoring in Environmental Science with a concentration on ecology and has since worked for nonprofits including the Audubon Society and San Diego Canyonlands, as well as environmental organizations in Belize, Catalina Island and Oregon.

“I’m excited to bring my love of the outdoors and for Mission Trails Regional Park to the Foundation,” she says. “It’s all about further supporting the mission and connecting the community to the park, while working alongside an amazing team.”

Kindra is an avid birder and self-described “budding botanist,” who enjoys hiking with her dog Bowie, a German Shepherd/Dalmatian mix.

As she gets settled into her new role as Stewardship Manager, she’s looking forward to engaging with the MTRP community through programs that will include the Foundation’s lecture series. “I can’t wait for more people to come to the park and learn about native plants, habitat restoration and ways they can get involved, either in the park or closer to home.”

She’ll also help with the Foundation’s education program — including building a robust social media presence to educate the public about different aspects of the park, from its wildlife to its Kumeyaay history. One of Kindra’s big projects this fall is to launch the next phase of the park’s Thornmint restoration project, funded by a grant the MTRP Foundation received from SANDAG. She’ll serve as the liaison between City staff and the contractor to help grow areas of the endangered native plant in the park.



## Making Space

### RANGER JESUS FUENTES ISN’T AFRAID TO GET HIS HANDS DIRTY

Just weeks into his new job as a Park Ranger for the City of San Diego, Jesus Fuentes is happy to be outside at Mission Trails.

As an employee with the City for the past seven years, Jesus worked alongside Park Rangers on a variety of projects such as vernal pool restoration and brush management. When the opportunity came up to work at MTRP full time, Jesus jumped at the chance.

“I like fixing the trails and hydroseeding,” he says. “I’m looking forward to removing vegetation that’s blocking trails so that there’s more space for hikers, which gives everybody room to enjoy the park.”

When asked what a typical day as a Ranger might look like, he admits he hasn’t been on the job long enough yet to know for sure. “Well, today I was spraying mustard and stinkwort, which are both non-native invasive species,” he explains. “It’s nice when I can get those plants handled when they’re only an inch tall, rather than having to get out a weedwhacker.”

The job description for a Park Ranger includes enforcing rules and regulations among visitors, habitat restoration and trail maintenance.

“We let people know the reasons why they should keep their dogs on leash, for example. It’s about protecting the habitat as much as it’s about protecting the safety of visitors and the dogs themselves. They understand. There haven’t been any issues to speak of.”

# Every Day is Dog Day

## CAMP HOST AND CANINE COMPANION A HIT WITH VISITORS



Camp host Iiro Yrjola has been on the job at MTRP's Kumayaay Lake Campground since May 2022, but he's been hiking the park for decades. "I've always been an outdoor enthusiast," he says. "We recently

climbed all five peaks in the park in one day — for the third time."

The "we" he's referring to is in reference to his sidekick, Numa, a 12-year-old Malamute that Iiro has had since his canine companion was an 8-week-old puppy. In a happy coincidence, the pair share a birthday: July 8.

Numa has developed his own fanbase since joining Iiro on his nightly rounds checking on campers each weekend, which is when the site is open. "We make sure that fires are being handled appropriately, that people are only burning firewood bundles from stores rather than brush," he explains.

The pair live at the campground, which has 46 sites, on a full-time basis.

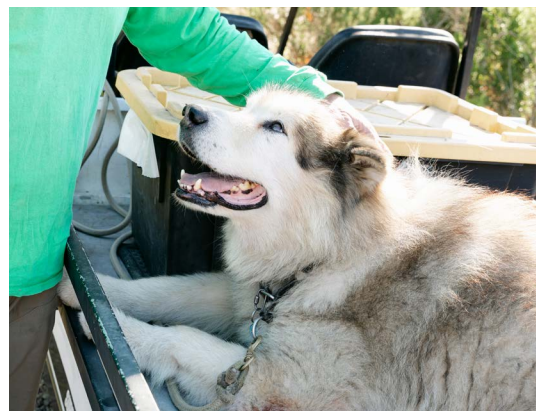
"I hand out placards for the campers' windshields when they check in. There's a space for them to provide feedback, and when they do, they almost always mention that the camp host's dog is the best part of their stay," Iiro says with a hint of pride.

"We get nice compliments about how friendly and helpful we are. People say they feel safe because we check in with our campers throughout their stay."

After things started to normalize in the wake of the pandemic and the park reopened in the summer of 2021, Iiro, who has a fifth-wheel camper, decided that the pair would only sleep in a tent or under the stars for 100 days.

"As it turned out, I liked it so much, we did it for 365 days," he says with a laugh. "I think that most people would be happier if they were closer to nature rather than chasing the next shiny object."

It seems probable that Numa would agree with that assessment.



## Outdoorsy in the Extreme

Mission Trails Ranger Geoff Hasenauer came on the job this summer, and he's eager to become intimately familiar with every square inch of the park.

The native San Diegan grew up in Pacific Beach and Bay Park and spent 23 years as a city lifeguard. Over the years, he spent time working at most of the city's beaches, with many of the years based on duty covering a broad swath of La Jolla.

"It was a challenging and pristine place to work," he recalls. Among his duties were instructing junior lifeguards, conducting ocean, cliff and fast-water rescues and the operation of all sorts of watercrafts.

When he made the U.S. National Lifeguard Team by excelling in paddleboard racing, he subsequently traveled to Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Tahiti for competitions.

After a stint as a high school teacher, baseball

coach and junior lifeguard instructor, Geoff became a city ranger in 2011 in Mission Bay. "That was mainly municipal code enforcement," he recalls. "We were dealing with quality-of-life crime and security." In late 2017, he moved to Colorado to be close to family and became a ranger for the city of Fort Collins, Colorado, working for both developed parks and open spaces.

When he returned to San Diego and got hired on at Mission Trails Regional Park, it was like coming home. "I've always loved Mission Trails," he says. "Back in the day, I hiked here and ran Cowles Mountain often."

Now that he's part of the MTRP team, Geoff is hitting his groove. "I love it. There's a good group of rangers here. Plus, I'm learning things about trail and habitat restoration, which is balanced out by physical tasks. It's a perfect fit for me."



Serra, Chief Rodent Control Officer at the Visitor Center, pictured with MTRP Ranger Heidi Gutknecht



# A Purrfect Position

## MTRP'S CHIEF RODENT CONTROL OFFICER IS ON THE CASE

While Serra has a very important job at the MTRP Visitor Center, her pay is quite reasonable: the occasional treat tossed her way, along with breakfast, lunch and dinner.

As Chief Rodent Control Officer, the short-haired tabby mix can often be found snuggled up near the desk of Park Ranger Heidi Gutknecht, who adopted the cat in August of 2014 from a rescue group in San Diego that got her from a Los Angeles shelter.

"She belongs to the Foundation, actually, rather to any one person," explains Gutknecht. "People do joke that I'm Serra's mama, but I think she hangs out with me because I spoil her with treats. Even though she's about 11 years old, she still gets the zoomies like a kitten."

Honored with a photo on the wall just to the left of the Visitor Center front desk, Serra is a hit with visitors, but tends to retreat to the staff area when the amount of people in the facility gets overwhelming for a kitty.

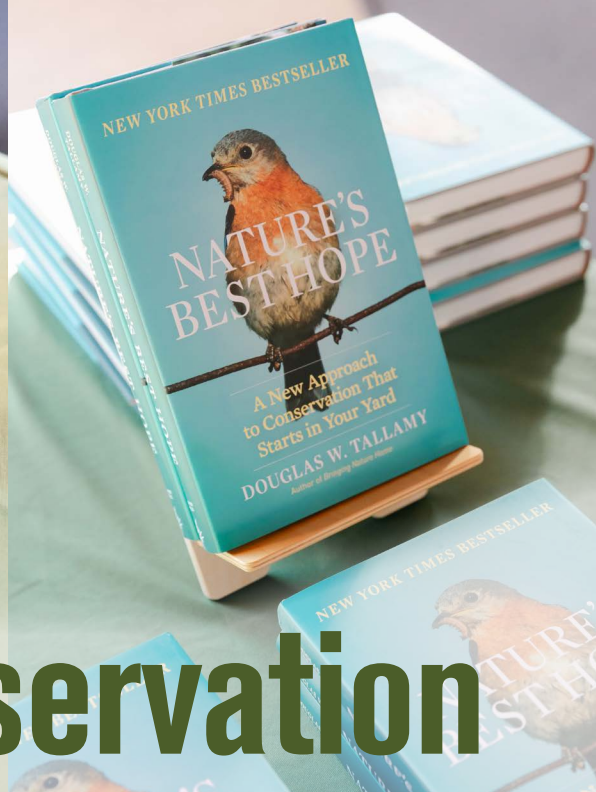
But every Wednesday when Gutknecht starts her work week, Serra comes running. "She'll jump up for snuggles and put her paws up on my shoulders."

The fourth in a line of feline mousers who have all been indoor cats — to protect them from predators and keep birds and other wildlife safe — Serra is named after MTRP's Father Junipero Serra Trail. Two of her predecessors — Fortuna (1998-2001) and Kwaay Paay (2001-2013) — were named for peaks in the park. The most recent mouser before Serra, 'Enyaa (2013-2014), was named the Kumeyaay word for "sun" because she was such a "ray of sunshine."

Gutknecht has been a Park Ranger for the City of San Diego since 2001 and joined MTRP in 2005. Her work involves everything from assisting with wildlife releases when animals have been rehabilitated and are ready to go back to the wild, to habitat restoration. The end goal is to serve as a steward of the park and its resources.

Serra does her part by keeping the critters out of the Visitor Center. "She never eats the mice," Gutknecht says. "She leaves them out, often on the mat just inside the staff entrance. It's like advertising. 'Look what I got!'"





# Grassroots Conservation

Acclaimed author and professor Doug Tallamy has advice on how to save nature, and ourselves

BY JULENE SNYDER

It was a full house at the Visitor Center this September, when Douglas Tallamy — an acclaimed *New York Times* best-selling author and professor of entomology and wildlife ecology at University of Delaware — staged two presentations that explored the ways that people can adjust the landscaping in their yards to help to better sustain plants, animals and the planet itself.

He envisions a future in which homeowners not only enhance local ecosystems but work toward ultimately creating a 20-million-acre network of viable habitats that would serve as corridors that connect natural areas to benefit flora, insects, birds and all living things.

Attendees received a copy of Tallamy's first book, *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard*, which outlines his vision for a grassroots approach to conservation.

"Nature is a series of specialized relationships, but today, these relationships and nature itself are on the ropes," explains Tallamy. "As a society, we have not listened to Teddy Roosevelt, who

gave us some good advice in 1908." When the then-President heard that Arizona was planning to mine the Grand Canyon, he traveled there, admired the majesty and beauty of the site, and said, "Leave it as it is."

But today, leaving things as they were is no longer an option. "There's only about 5% of most places in the U.S. that are anything close to their original pristine ecological state," says Tallamy. He points to practices like logging, developing, damming rivers, polluting natural resources and introducing non-native plants for the dire straits we find ourselves in.

"In short, we've carved up the natural world into tiny remnants of its former self, each of which is too small and too isolated," Tallamy notes.

While the threats to the earth and its inhabitants are omnipresent, he says there's good news to be found. "We can save our insects, we can save our birds,



we can save nature and thus ourselves, but we're going to have to change the way we landscape to do it. Living with nature is an option, and I argue that it's now the only viable option left to us, so we need to get on with it."

The ways that individuals can enhance our own and shared environments include landscaping for caterpillars, which provide vital nutrients for many types of birds. "Plant choice matters," he says. "The plants that we choose to put in our landscapes are going to make all the difference." Tallamy's own efforts to



bringing insects to his 10-acre property have resulted in more than 1,000 species of plants that support insects that serve as food for birds.

"Most people don't own 10 acres," he allows. "But this can work in suburbia and in urban yards." In fact, he points to one Chicago homeowner who turned a .10-acre lot adjacent to one of O'Hare airport's runways into a haven for 116 species of birds by adding 16 native plant species to their yard.

Tallamy is also encouraged by certain urban environments, such as the High Line in Manhattan, which is a tourist destination, not least because of the native plants that have been cultivated

there. "Millions of people go to this little bit of nature in the middle of downtown Manhattan," he says. "It's an amazing success story."

Those words of hope are refreshing in these days of calamitous climate emergency. "If thoughtful native plantings can bring life back to the middle of Manhattan, I'm convinced that we can do this absolutely anywhere."

Tallamy's appearances at Mission Trails were presented by the MTRP Foundation, with generous support from Saving Birds Thru Habitat, a Michigan-based nonprofit organization that promotes creating backyard habitat for its many benefits.

Learn more at [homegrownnationalpark.org/tallamys-hub](http://homegrownnationalpark.org/tallamys-hub)

## EASY WAYS TO SUPPORT HABITAT

- **Plant native!** Go to [Calscape.org](http://Calscape.org) to find plants native to your area. Your local nursery may carry natives and if they don't, request them! Two native-only nurseries are Native West and Neel's Nursery.
- **Reduce or eliminate harmful pest control methods around your home.** Install an owl box to encourage natural rodent control and only use pesticides made from natural ingredients.
- **Save water by installing low-maintenance plants (like native species) in your garden.**
- **Create a space to welcome wildlife by setting up bird feeders, birdhouses, and nesting areas.**
- **Turn off non-essential outdoor lighting.** Light pollution impacts migrating birds and other wildlife. San Diego is located on the Pacific Flyway and millions of birds fly over the area during migration seasons. Switching off lights provides more natural, darker skies for these nocturnal migrants, as well as your year-round wildlife neighbors.

## MORE RESOURCES

- **Stay up to date with the San Diego Chapter of the California Native Plant Society** for local events, plant sales and lists of local nurseries that carry native plants.
- **Learn more about plants and our native habitat by going on an MTRP Trail Guide-led walk!** There are many plants at Mission Trails that flourish in home gardens.
- **Learn how switching off outdoor lights can help wildlife and reduce regional light pollution.** Read more on the websites of Dark Sky International and San Diego Audubon.

# A Bridge for Max

Family turns tragedy into hope  
after loss of their son

BY JULENE SNYDER

Finding a way to embrace the light after the darkest hours imaginable seems impossible. But Ben LeNail and his wife, Laurie Yoler, made a conscious decision to turn outward to be in the world after the sudden death of their son in 2021.



"In the days after, we knew we had to have a project that embodies who our son Max was and what he cared about. A legacy project," says Ben. "There's so much need in the world. We needed to find a project that would be beneficial to the human condition — that's going to alleviate pain and suffering in the spirit of what brought him joy, which was the outdoors."

Toward that end, the couple has worked to transform their grief into action, spearheading a drive to build a "Bridge for Max" for hikers at Mission Trails Regional Park to use to cross the San Diego River at the site where their son lost his life.

Just 21 years old, Max LeNail was an accomplished climber and athlete. A pre-med student at Brown University on the cusp of graduation when the pandemic hit, he left his study abroad program in London to return to the U.S.

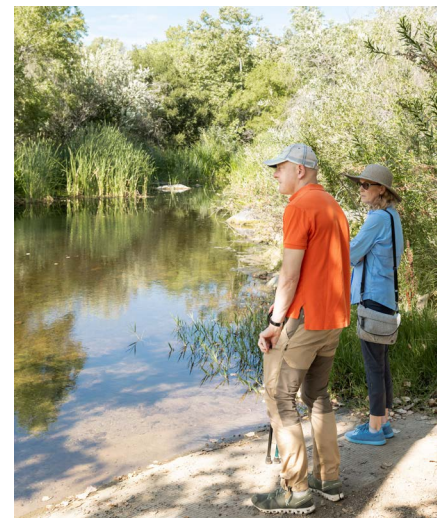
"His dream was to go to medical school and become a pediatric neurologist. He'd spent three or four summers at Stanford Medicine, doing research," recalls Ben. "I have a neurodegenerative disease, which is what inspired him to do research in neurology."

Max organized a pod of outdoorsy Brown University students to take advantage of the flexibility offered by remote learning to get the best of both the academic and natural worlds.

"They spent the summer of 2020 in the eastern Sierra, close to Mono Lake, where there's a lot of rock climbing and bouldering," Ben explains. In the fall, the group migrated to Bend, Oregon, close to Smith Rock, a climbing mecca, before relocating to San Diego in January of 2021.

When Max discovered the trails at Mission Trails Regional Park, he was ebullient. "He wrote to me and said, 'I found basically a piece of heaven. It's beautiful, very rugged, very big, and perfect for running,'" Ben recalls. He believes that January 29, 2021, was Max's third run at MTRP. "He would go up KwaayPaay, then North Fortuna and come back through the San Diego River crossing," he explains.

His friend Zoe Gates described Max in a story she wrote for *Backpacker* as an "athletic, capable outdoorsman" who was "the strongest climber I knew (and the most supportive partner), incredibly fit, and very, very smart."



When Ben, alongside Max's mom, Laurie, got a call that night from his roommates that Max was missing, the couple jumped into action to create a search and rescue effort.

"It was astounding," Ben recalls. "We had 800 volunteers, which so exceeded our best expectations. It was the San Diego trail runners, the mountain bikers, the hiking society, the churches, the Boy Scouts, all these clubs and associations. It all went viral via word of mouth. We ended up having a huge number of people in every area of the park."

**"We're proud to help to improve and beautify this park," Ben says. "The universal kindness of the people of San Diego has left Laurie and I feeling surrounded by the love of so many wonderful people."**

"I believe that Max died instantly," Ben says. "I think tragedy happens when things line up perfectly to cause maximum harm. That day, he went running alone, and he either had not read or had not fully understood the weather forecast. He was very lightly dressed, and he really pushed himself in terms of both distance and speed. He found himself at South Fortuna with ominous clouds. Ten minutes later, he was at the river. There was a prodigious hailstorm. I think he became very scared and was probably very cold. There is very little cover in the park and his car was just five minutes away."

"Even though the river looked very ominous, he went for it. And he either drowned or died of hypothermia, which can happen when your body is very warm from exertion, and you go into a body of water that's very cold."

After Ben and Laurie returned to their home in Palo Alto, the couple made three instinctive decisions right away. "One was to be completely turned outward, to be in the world completely turned toward others," he explains.

"The second was to be very close to Max's friends. They were shattered because they loved him so much. It's stunning for a young person to learn that somebody they thought was invincible has died. We wanted to make sure they were having a healthy grief and could find meaning despite that grief."

"The third was to have a project that is beneficial to mankind and to the human condition. That's what A Bridge for Max is all about."



**Above:** Ben LeNail with, from right, Councilmember Raul Campillo (D-7), Erika Ferreira, Deputy Director, Open Space Division, and Ed Christensen, Regional Manager, Open Space Division

**At left:** Ben LeNail with Cindy Cornelius, Vice President, Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation

In May of 2021, the project was unanimously approved by the Mission Trails Regional Park Task Force and Citizens' Advisory Committee, and steps including environmental studies, permitting and planning are well underway. A few months later, a \$1.5 million grant from the State of California was allocated to the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation to fund the construction of a pedestrian and bicycle bridge across the San Diego River near the San Diego River Crossing Trail.

"We're proud to help to improve and beautify this park," Ben says. "The universal kindness of the people of San Diego has left Laurie and I feeling surrounded by the love of so many wonderful people."

---

**To contribute, go to [mtrp.org/donate](https://mtrp.org/donate).**



# Discoveries in Mission Trails

**iNaturalist lets anyone connect to nature while helping scientists**

BY MILLIE BASDEN

On an ordinary October day, I was walking along a familiar trail in Mission Trails Regional Park. The colorful wildflowers present in spring had long since faded away, but all around me the park was ablaze with the yellow flowers of Fascicled Tarweed.

I had seen Fascicled Tarweed many times before, but something prompted me to stop and photograph one of the plants. I then posted the photos on iNaturalist, an online database for sharing observations of wildlife. I thought this would be just one more observation of Fascicled Tarweed.



But when the observation was reviewed by Dr. Jon P. Rebman, the Curator of Botany at the San Diego Natural History Museum, he identified the plant as San Diego Tarplant, a much less common plant that's considered vulnerable because of its limited distribution and loss of habitat.

I went back and looked more closely at all the yellow flowers along that trail and found that while most of the plants were the more common Fascicled Tarweed, poking out among them were a handful of plants with flowers that were larger and had more rays, both features of San Diego Tarplant. My ordinary October day had turned into a day of discovery! I learned something

new, and the data from my observation of San Diego Tarplant helped improve knowledge of the plant's distribution in our county, including its previously unknown presence in the park.

Anyone can participate in iNaturalist and make their own discoveries. iNaturalist connects people to nature and generates data that is available to scientists who are working to understand and protect flora and fauna. To get started, download the iNaturalist app and create a free account. Those without smart phones can visit

[www.inaturalist.org](http://www.inaturalist.org) and open an account there. For guidance in how to make observations, visit the iNaturalist "help" section. Now users can spend a few minutes adding observations to iNaturalist whenever they're out in the park.

The identity of the plant or animal that's observed doesn't need to be known before submitting it: During the upload process, iNaturalist's "computer vision" prompts users with suggestions for their findings. Of course, it's a good idea to give the prompts a reality check, since you may find that occasionally the algorithm thinks that the caterpillar you observed is a black bear or something else far-fetched.

When the observed species is unknown, it's perfectly fine to identify it in general terms as "plant" or "mammal" or "insect."

After observations are uploaded, the fun is only just beginning. Observations are reviewed by the iNaturalist community and other users can add identifications to them. And those who have questions or want to discuss the observation with others can use the comment field on the observation or send a private message using the messaging feature. Clicking on a username provides a look at their profile, which may provide information about their background and interests.

There are many very knowledgeable amateur naturalists who are active on iNaturalist as well as professionals who are experts in their fields. It always amazes me when I receive feedback on a submission from the expert who literally wrote the book on the subject of my observation.

While sometimes observations cannot be identified, users can optimize the chances by taking photos that are well-lit and in focus. Take photos of the entire plant or animal (showing the surrounding environment) as well as close-ups showing features such as the bill of a bird; the leaves, flowers, seeds, and/or fruit of a plant; the veins of an insect wing; the eyes of a spider. With practice, it becomes clear which photographs are needed for different organisms. In general, plan to take multiple photos from different angles, but always be sure that you are doing so safely and remember to stay on authorized trails.

Any observation made in the park is automatically included in the Mission Trails Regional Park Biodiversity Project on iNaturalist. A project is a "collection of observations under a common purpose" and provides park managers with information about the presence or absence of a species in the park. It is also a way for park visitors to become more familiar with the plants and animals that others have seen in the park. Find the project by using the search box on any iNaturalist webpage or under the "projects" tab in the app.

To date, more than 4,000 users have uploaded almost 100,000 observations from within park boundaries. Please add your observations to iNaturalist. You never know what discoveries can be made in the park!

**Opposite page:** Margined calligrapher fly on lemonade berry, Oak-loving bolete mushroom, Planthopper nymph, and Fascicled Tarweed

**This page, clockwise from top right:** California mantis, jumping spider, tufted globetail, Trupanea actinobola



## Taking iNaturalist to the Next Level at MTRP

**6:30PM, Thursday, November 30**

**MTRP Visitor Center**

**Registration: \$10**

**Register online at [www.mtrp.org](http://www.mtrp.org) or call 619-668-3280.**

Have you heard about iNaturalist (iNat)? It is an online social network where amateur and expert naturalists come together to share observations and learn from each other's findings.

Join Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) Trail Guides and iNat aficionados Millie Basden, Patricia Simpson and Mark James as they provide tips on using iNat and share how to hone your skills on the platform. This presentation is intended for individuals with some iNat experience and is not a beginner's introduction. Questions? Contact the MTRP Foundation at [events@mtrp.org](mailto:events@mtrp.org).

2022-2023

## MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK FISCAL YEAR HIGHLIGHTS

Since its incorporation in 1988, the Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) Foundation has enriched the lives of San Diego County residents and visitors and has advocated for and helped to steward Mission Trails, one of the largest urban parks in the United States.

**During the fiscal year that ended on June 30, 2023, Mission Trails welcomed more than two million visitors who hiked, walked, mountain biked, enjoyed the Visitor and Interpretive Center, and participated in educational public programs. The nonprofit MTRP Foundation works in partnership with the City of San Diego to preserve and protect the park and provide and promote educational and recreational opportunities.**



🌿 In September 2022, The Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP) Foundation announced that it received a **\$2 million grant** to acquire land currently in private ownership that will be added to Mission Trails Regional Park. The MTRP Foundation received this directed grant from the San Diego River Conservancy, an independent, non-regulatory state agency established to preserve, restore and enhance the San Diego River area. This is the first grant the MTRP Foundation has received for land acquisition; the land will be donated to the City of San Diego to become part of MTRP.

There are many more parcels within the park's boundaries, and the MTRP Foundation and City are working together to acquire them as funds are available.

🌿 A charter of the MTRP Foundation is to support habitat. Since 1986, the Foundation has organized the park's **annual Arbor Day**, marked each first Saturday in December, and last year, 10 trees were sponsored and planted at Kumeyaay Lake Campground (KLC). Other support activities included funding plants and materials for habitat restoration, as well as for sustenance for the volunteers who work on the habitat crews. Trail maintenance is another key need at the park; the Foundation funded needs for this endeavor including the purchase of the new pontoon bridge at KLC.

🌿 The MTRP Foundation **supports the park's volunteers and recruits, trains and manages the Visitor Center volunteers** who staff the front desk and the Gift Shop. The Foundation also supports City of San Diego volunteers at the park, including the Trail Guides, providing financial support for their training and interpretive Discovery Tables, subsidizing their uniforms and promoting their programs.

🌿 Along with the management of the Visitor Center volunteers, **the Foundation covers the cost of some building maintenance and is responsible for the upkeep of the Center's exhibits and equipment.** We are grateful to Las Patronas for funding for the purchase of a new digital playback system in our theater to make the free films screened there easier to access and enjoy.

🌿 Now with 10 full- and part-time staff, **the MTRP Foundation will continue to provide enriching educational programs and raise much-needed funds for the park.** The organization is also responsible for communications about the park to the community and does so by managing the park's website, through electronic communications, social media, news coverage and outreach. During FY22-23, the Foundation sent 49 e-communications to its 14,500 contacts, boasting an email open rate of 46%. The park's website had more than 150,000 unique visitors.

🌿 Mission Trails Regional Park marked **National Public Lands Day** on September 24, 2022. Volunteers joined the Rangers' monthly Park Beautification crew to assist with spreading mulch, pulling weeds and litter abatement, and all attendees were invited to take the Clean Air Pledge as part of the Foundation's participation in California Clean Air Day, funded by the Coalition for Clean Air.



🌿 Education is a lifelong endeavor. The MTRP Foundation hosted **a series of lectures** over the course of the year at the Visitor Center. Among the offerings were a talk on creating a backyard habitat that's a haven for songbirds and multi-media presentations about mountain lions and bats by naturalist and author Don Endicott.

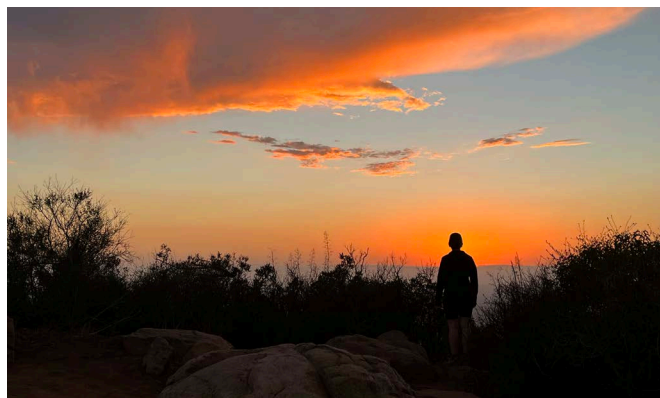


🌿 **The inaugural cohort of Eco Ambassadors** — 20 high school students who were selected from nearly 100 applicants — met on Sunday afternoons to learn from experts in subjects including biology, soil ecology, meteorology, wildfire science and environmental and climate science. The program will have two additional programs this fiscal year. The Eco Ambassadors program is funded by longtime MTRP Foundation supporter SDG&E.

🌿 During the school year, the MTRP Foundation leads efforts for educators in the region to bring their students to the park for **no cost field trips**. The guided one-day field trips for grades K-8 include a nature hike, a tour of the Visitor Center — which includes an educational scavenger hunt, exhibits and video/presentation as time allows, and bus reimbursement. The focus of each age-appropriate offering includes habitats (K-grade 2), Kumeyaay culture (grade 3), ecosystems of MTRP (grades 4-6) and biodiversity of MTRP (grades 6-8). During the 2022-2023 school year, the MTRP Foundation welcomed more than 3,000 students to the park on field trips; the program is generously funded through a grant from The Conrad Prebys Foundation.



🌿 In March, **City of San Diego and the MTRP Foundation staff hosted an awards ceremony for the park's volunteers**, organized and underwritten by the MTRP Foundation. At the event, Councilmember Raul Campillo (District 7) presented a proclamation naming March 18, 2023 as MTRP Volunteer Appreciation Day in the City of San Diego. Following a buffet dinner, 40 volunteers received awards for their dedicated service including two 30-year service awards.



🌿 In May, **a reception and awards ceremony was held celebrating those whose photos were selected as finalists in the MTRP Photo Contest**. This year, 283 entries were submitted; the 105 highest-scoring images were displayed at the Visitor Center. Marking its 30th anniversary year, the MTRP Photo Contest received partial funding from the City of San Diego.



🌿 **Trail Tykes has been a resounding success this year.**

Since its launch in Spring 2022, the popular program for children from 2- to 5-years-old takes place every second and fourth Sunday and Monday in the Visitor Center, and welcomed more than 928 children and their families. Presented and funded by the MTRP Foundation, each themed offering includes a read-aloud story — sometimes in both English and Spanish — as well as a craft or activity.



🌿 Over winter and this summer, the MTRP Foundation offered **a variety of day camps** for children entering first through sixth grades. The camp included Wild Transformers, for grades 1-3; Makers in Nature Art Camp (ages 6-10) and Nature Investigators (grades 4-6). More sessions are planned for next summer.



🌿 The MTRP Foundation's **Holiday Marketplace** returned in the fall of 2022. The fundraising event took place at the Visitor Center and featured local makers and small business owners, who showcased and sold their work to support Mission Trails.

🌿 An important source of income for the MTRP Foundation and, by extension, the park, is the Foundation's **Facility Rental Program**. During the last fiscal year, MTRP Foundation staff booked and managed 42 evening rentals and 143 daytime rentals, and was the site for weddings and other celebrations, corporate retreats and government agency meetings.

🌿 In addition to Facility Rentals, the **Visitor Center Gift Shop** provides income to help the Foundation fulfill its mission. During the last fiscal year, the Gift Shop had its biggest sales ever with nearly 5,000 in-person and online sales. The Gift Shop's most popular item continues to be the 5-Peak Challenge T-shirt. A new MTRP sweatshirt and beanie were introduced last fall, and new T-shirts and water bottles are being created in time for the coming holiday season.

🌿 The MTRP Foundation managed all the **art programs on display at the Visitor Center**, which showcased artists or groups of artists. Their work included wall-hung, two-dimensional and three-dimensional pieces. In the 2022-23 fiscal year, nine separate art exhibitions were on view.

MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK FOUNDATION, INC.

# Statement of Financial Position – June 30, 2023

## ASSETS

Cash	118,976
Receivables	660
Investments	2,920,189
Other Current Assets	31,215
Fixed Assets, net	210,335
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,281,375</b>

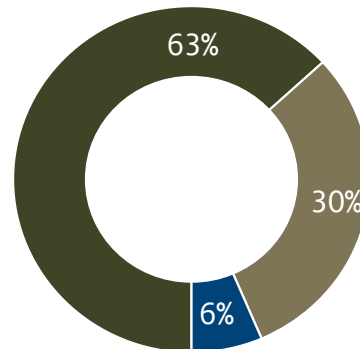
## LIABILITIES

Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses	46,249
Deferred Revenue	10,047
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$56,296</b>

## NET ASSETS

Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	
Undesignated	453,084
Board Designated	1,927,165
<b>Total Unrestricted</b>	<b>2,380,249</b>
Net Assets With Donor Restrictions	844,830
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>3,225,079</b>
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>\$3,281,375</b>

## EXPENSES



## Program Services

\$391,693

## Management and General

\$188,362

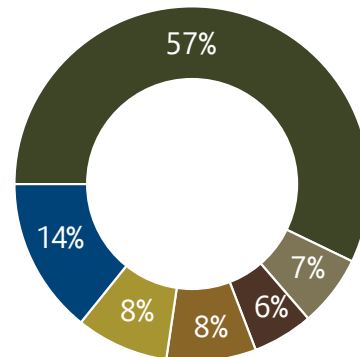
## Fundraising

\$39,915

## Total Operating Expenses

\$619,970

## SUPPORT & REVENUE



## Individual Contributions and Grants

\$490,667

## Gift Shop Sales

\$55,829

## Program Fees

\$47,234

## Visitor Center Bookings

\$70,158

## Investment Income, net

\$72,419

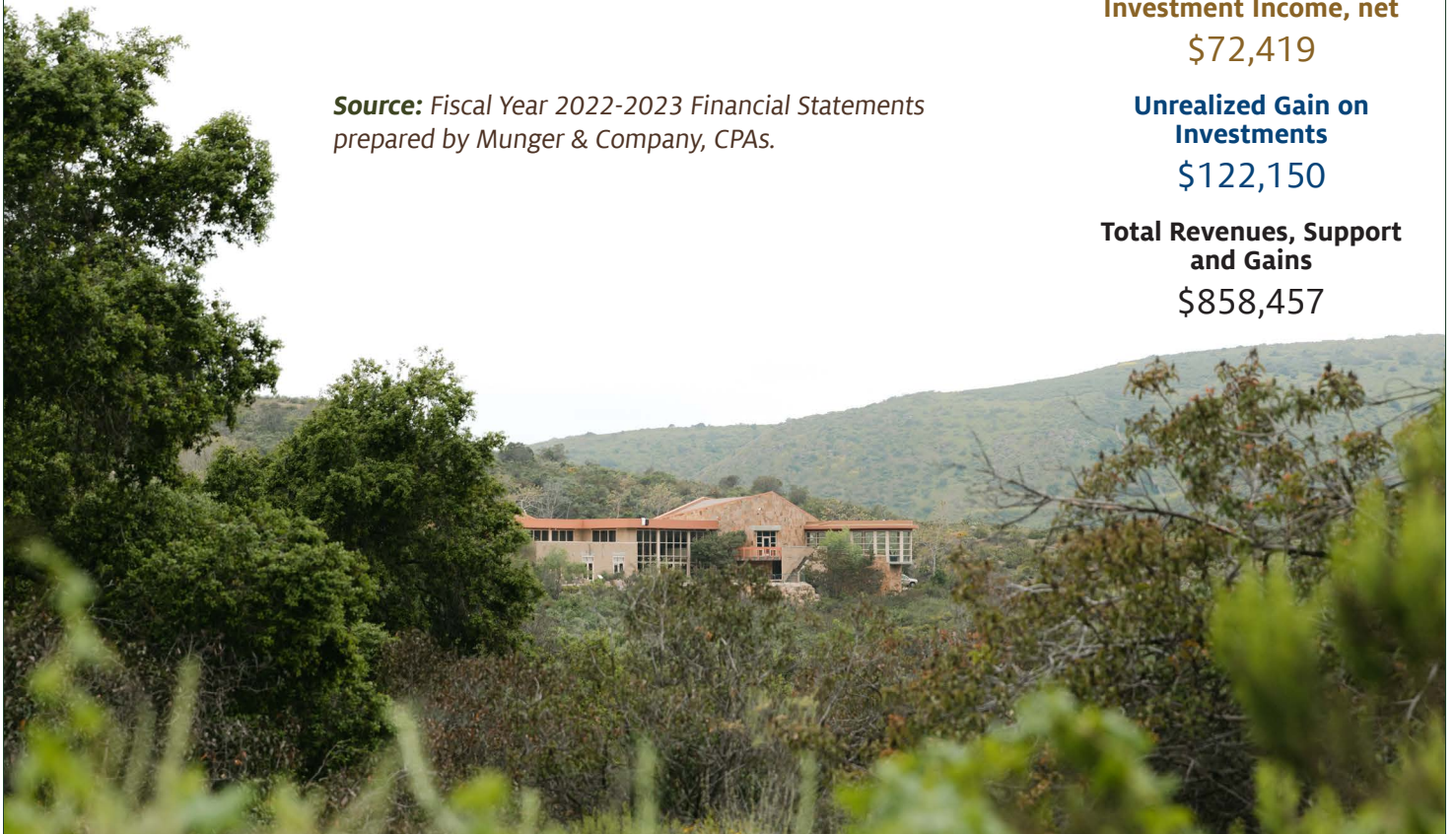
## Unrealized Gain on Investments

\$122,150

## Total Revenues, Support and Gains

\$858,457

**Source:** Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Financial Statements prepared by Munger & Company, CPAs.





**Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation**  
ONE FATHER JUNIPERO SERRA TRAIL  
SAN DIEGO, CA 92119

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
SAN DIEGO, CA  
PERMIT NO. 658

## THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

Thank you to the following community members and organizations for their donation to support the Mission Trails Regional Park Foundation during its last fiscal year, July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023.

### **TRUSTEE** \$50,000–\$100,000

The Conrad Prebys Foundation  
The Max LeNail Memorial Bridge Fund ✱  
The Parker Foundation

### **BENEFACTOR** \$25,000–\$49,999

Hervey Family Fund ✱  
San Diego Gas & Electric

### **SPONSOR** \$10,000–\$24,999

City of San Diego  
County of San Diego  
Karen and Jerry Eisman  
Barbara and Paul Koury  
Steven R. Prewitt Trust ✱

### **STEWARD** \$5,000–\$9,999

Jill Badousek  
Celina and Benedetto Brunetto  
Kevin Casey and Carol McDonald-Gibson  
William O. Evans Trust  
Toni and Stephen Gautereaux  
Target

### **PATRON** \$2,500–\$4,999

Anonymous  
Benevity Fund  
Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Gookin  
Sally and Jeff Toister

### **FOUNDER** \$1,000–\$2,499

Anonymous  
Patrick Abbott, Ph.D.  
Linda and George Arsenault  
Coalition for Clean Air  
Jeremy Cowperthwaite  
Alexander Donofrio  
Glenn E. and Maxine W. Farber  
Shary and Bruce Folkmann  
Linda and Bob Gordon  
Roderick Innes  
Patricia T. Johnson  
Kiwanis Club of Tierrasanta  
Foundation  
Cynthia Kobulnicky  
Angie and Brian McNeece  
Martha and Chuck Moffett  
Ruth Savage  
Steve Seaborg  
Sempra Energy Foundation  
Luann and Brian Wright

### **TRAILBLAZER** \$500–\$999

Anonymous  
Marc and Kim Bellaart  
Carrier Johnson + Culture  
Paul and Shawna Cloward  
Ernest Doring  
Teresa Filippi  
Koji and Angela Fukumara  
Ellen and Doug Goepfert  
Rob and Lauren Hotz  
Chris Kemmerer  
Ben Lenail and Laurie Yoler  
Eleanor Lynch, Ph.D. and  
Patrick Harrison, Ph.D.  
B. Lane MacKenzie  
Georg Matt and Ana M. Navarro  
Su and Neil Mohr  
Michael R. and Patricia Desilet Pent  
Ryan and Maria Story  
Paul H. Stuverud  
Janet Trentacosta  
Michael Wu

***Make a contribution of any size to support the park through the MTRP Foundation. Use the enclosed envelope or make a gift online at [www.mtrp.org](http://www.mtrp.org). For questions related to the donor list, please contact the MTRP Foundation at 619-668-3280.***

✱ Denotes gift made through the San Diego Foundation.