



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



SEQUOIA
Riverlands Trust
SERVING LAND and PEOPLE

A LEGACY TO PROTECT:

The Economic, Environmental and Health Benefits of Our Region's Public Lands

The Southern San Joaquin Valley benefits from a long legacy of conservation. Nearby Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks have drawn visitors from around the world for over a century. Pixley and Kern National Wildlife Refuges, created in response to a groundswell of local support for wetlands conservation, protect migratory bird habitat and host activities ranging from hunting and fishing to outdoor education and wildlife viewing. And two National Monuments flanking the Southern San Joaquin Valley—Carrizo Plain to the west, and Giant Sequoia to the east—provide landscape-scale protection for ecosystems that host iconic species ranging from the San Joaquin kit fox to the giant sequoia. Thanks to state, local and nonprofit conservation efforts, including the work of Sequoia Riverlands Trust, these lands are part of a growing network of protected areas that contribute to our region's economy, environment and health.

Public Lands Create Jobs and Revenue

Residents of the four Congressional Districts that encompass the Southern San Joaquin Valley spend nearly \$5.5 billion a year on outdoor recreation, and residents of California as a whole spend \$92 billion.¹ Nationwide, annual consumer spending on outdoor recreation has been estimated at \$887 billion, making it a bigger economic sector than household utilities, motor vehicles or pharmaceuticals.² Much of this money is spent on trips to public lands, including our region's own National Parks, Monuments, Forests, and Wildlife Refuges. Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, for example, accounted for over \$94 million in visitor spending in 2018, a revenue stream that supported nearly 1,200 jobs.³ Other natural wonders, from the wildflower superblooms of Carrizo Plain National Monument to rare bird species overwintering at Pixley and Kern National Wildlife Refuges, attract visitors from around the state and nation, often bringing much-needed jobs and revenue into gateway communities.

Public Lands Protect Irreplaceable Natural Resources

Public lands provide a number of environmental benefits as well. Intact watersheds—from forests in the high Sierra, through rangeland and oak woodlands in the foothills, to wetlands on



the Valley floor—can help to filter contaminants from water, manage runoff during winter floods, and contribute to groundwater recharge.⁴ Together with state and local parks, as well as private land under conservation easement, public lands can protect the ecosystems that provide these services. They can also contribute to a network of habitat corridors, linking remnants of wildlands that once stretched across the Valley floor, and from Coastal and Southern California to the Sierra Nevada—connections that will be increasingly important as rising temperatures force many species to seek more hospitable habitat at higher altitudes, or elsewhere in the region.⁵

Public Lands Support Public Health

Public lands have direct benefits for human health. As many of us rediscovered during the lockdowns, wildfires and park closures of 2020, access to nature is a basic human need. Public lands help to meet this need, with benefits ranging from increased rates of physical activity and reduced stress levels to improved cardiovascular and endocrine health.⁶ These benefits are all the more important for communities that have historically borne the brunt of discrimination, making it essential not only to protect public lands, but also ensure equitable access.⁷

In short, public lands are indispensable for our region’s economy, ecology, and wellbeing. But for future generations to benefit from National Monuments, National Wildlife Refuges and other conserved lands, we must maintain their protected status, invest in stewardship, and provide equitable access for all members of the community. The recently-signed Great American Outdoors Act, which directs resources to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and creates a National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (NPPLRF) to address the maintenance backlog on public lands, is a strong start. But we need continuing oversight at the federal level to ensure that these commitments are kept, and that LWCF and NPPLRF funds are spent in ways that support our region’s needs. For more information, please contact Sequoia Riverlands Trust at info@sequoiariverlands.org.

¹ Outdoor Industry Association. 2017. California; California 16 th Congressional District; California 21 st Congressional District; California 22 nd Congressional District; California 23 rd Congressional District. Available at <https://outdoorindustry.org/state/california/> and <https://outdoorindustry.org/state/california/#fyl-cdd>.

² Outdoor Industry Association. 2017. California (comparison to national statistics). Available at <https://outdoorindustry.org/state/california/>.

³ Thomas CC, L Koontz, and E Cornachione. 2019. 2018 National Park Visitor Spending Effects: Economic Contributions to Local Communities, States, and the Nation. (Natural Resource Report NPS/NRSS/EQD/NRR—2019/1922). Fort Collins, CO: National Park Service. As reported by Headwaters Economics. Available at <https://headwaterseconomics.org/dataviz/national-park-service-units/>.

⁴ For an overview of the water treatment and storage potential of wetlands across the region, see Duffy, W.G. and Kahara, S.N. 2011. Wetland Ecosystem Services in California’s Central Valley and Implications for the Wetland Reserve Program. *Ecological Applications* 21(3): S18-S30.

⁵ Southern Sierra Partnership. 2010. Framework for Cooperative Conservation and Climate Adaptation for the Southern Sierra Nevada and Tehachapi Mountains. Available at <http://www.southernsierrapartnership.org/ssp-framework.html>.

⁶ Gladwell, V.F., Brown, D.K., Wood, C., Sandercock, G.R., and Barton, J.L. 2013. The Great Outdoors: How a Green Exercise Environment Can Benefit All. *Extreme Physiology and Medicine* 2(1): 3. Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3710158/#>.

⁷ Serrano, F. and O’Connell, D. 2020. Public Lands Advocacy and Local Communities in the San Joaquin Valley. Available at <https://centralvalleypartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Public-Lands-Advocacy-and-Local-Communities-in-the-San-Joaquin-Valley.pdf>.