

Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area
(courtesy of NPS)

Western National Parks Association | FY20 Annual Report

Western
National Parks
Association



In partnership with the National Park Service (NPS) since 1938, Western National Parks Association (WNPA) advances education, interpretation, research, and community engagement to ensure national parks are increasingly valued by all.

Overview

When life is disrupted by crisis, as it was in 2020, some people see opportunities—for change, for action, for introspection—they might not otherwise. The same is true for organizations. Because of the pandemic, WNPA lost \$10 million in revenue and furloughed a significant number of staff during FY20. But that painful episode has inspired a renewed determination to provide visitors with a deeper park experience.

WNPA supports national parks directly with financial aid and indirectly with staff, sales, and organizational support. In FY20, we provided \$6.7 million in direct and indirect aid to parks, and awarded \$93,000 in scientific research grants. In 2020, years of research on the threat that exotic fish pose to native springsnails at Blue Point Spring in the Lake Mead National Recreation Area, and audio monitoring of the threatened Mexican spotted owl and yellow-billed cuckoo at Walnut Canyon National Monument, came to fruition.

As the pandemic took hold, we worked closely with NPS to retrofit our retail operations to accommodate slowing foot traffic in our stores and keep staff and visitors safe. Where possible, sales floors were adapted to allow social distancing. Plexiglass barriers were installed between cashiers and customers, fixtures and furniture were cleaned daily, and high-touch items were kept out of reach. At Chiricahua National Monument, operations were moved outside, and sales at White Sands National Park and El Morro National Monument were transacted under a covered walkway and through a visitor center window. These efforts were replicated at other parks, with bold signage guiding visitors through our stores and reminding them that the park experience, at its core, is meant to nourish us physically, as well as spiritually and intellectually.



Change in operations at Walnut Canyon National Monument Park Store (courtesy of NPS).



White Sands National Park

Funding Activities That Aid Management, Preservation, and Interpretation of Parks

Exotic Fish Pose a Threat to Native Springsnails at Blue Point Spring

In 2018, WNPA funded a baseline study of *Pyrgulopsis coloradensis*, an aquatic springsnail found only at Blue Point Spring, a naturally occurring spring at Lake Mead National Recreation Area. The size of the tip of a ballpoint pen, springsnails are threatened by exotic fish that have been dumped indiscriminately into the spring over many decades. In the 1950s, Blue Point Spring was used by traders to raise tropical aquarium fish.

Dr. Jef Jaeger and Chenoa Wilcox, both researchers at the University of Nevada—Las Vegas, led a study with representatives from the US Fish and



Looking down at Lake Mead National Recreation Area from Fortification Hill (courtesy of NPS). (Additional photos courtesy of the research team unless otherwise noted.)

Wildlife Service, NPS, and the Nevada Department of Wildlife to evaluate the springsnail's seasonal distribution, relative abundance, and habitat associations, as well as to create a plan to remove exotic fish from the spring.

At eight-week intervals, from August 2018 to September 2019, they monitored springsnail populations at a 20-meter-long site, separated into two pools by a weir—a structure that acts both as a dam and a monitoring station for the spring's flow rate.

After a year of research, Dr. Jaeger and Wilcox found that, above the weir, populations of both *P. coloradensis* and another springsnail species, *Tryonia infernalis*, were genetically diverse and robust, with the springsnails numbering in the thousands. Very few individuals of either species, however, were found below the weir. The researchers also discovered that, during one 10-minute feeding alone, one convict cichlid fish consumed more than two hundred springsnails.

The researchers determined ultimately that maintaining the integrity of the weir would be a crucial step toward keeping invasive fish away from the springsnail.



Researchers at Lake Mead National Recreation Area studying the impact of nonnative fish on the native springsnail population, a species that doesn't exist anywhere else in the world.



The endemic springsnails are only about the size of the tip of a ballpoint pen.

Passive Audio Monitoring of Federally Threatened Mexican Spotted Owl and Yellow-Billed Cuckoo



Overview of Walnut Canyon (courtesy of NPS).

This WNPA-funded project at Walnut Canyon National Monument enabled NPS natural resources staff to identify and locate important nesting and roosting areas for two federally listed threatened bird species—the Mexican spotted owl and the yellow-billed cuckoo—by using portable audio recorders and birdsong-recognition software.

Both bird species communicate to potential mates and defend territories by projecting a series of calls unique to their species. Passive audio surveys at Walnut Canyon National Monument (WACA) led to the discovery of nine owl nesting and roosting sites, including the first documented nesting activity since 1994.

The audio data possess considerable information describing the owl's biology and life history characteristics: courtship and nesting calling behavior, food begging and exchanges, territorial defense and disturbance responses, and nestling vocalizations.

Eight park units combined surveyed 115 unique sites for bird activity, resulting in more than forty-four thousand total survey hours and six thousand total bird call detections.



Western yellow-billed cuckoo at Montezuma Well, Arizona (Photo Courtesy of Gary Botello).



A Mexican spotted owl (courtesy of NPS).

"I'd like to call out WNPA for the way they support science. It's park-centric and aligns with the needs of researchers. I'm really grateful for their support, because it has allowed us to do great science over the past decade."

Don Swann, wildlife biologist at Saguaro National Park

Education: WNPA Goes Digital

In March 2020, as parks started to close at the beginning of the pandemic-induced lockdown, WNPA went digital to keep members, donors, and visitors connected to the parks. We provided 360-degree virtual tours and webcams so that park lovers could continue to enjoy the splendor of the parks. We ramped up our social media efforts to include a daily theme, such as Wildlife Wednesday, Storytime Saturday, and Sunset Sunday, while sprinkling our feeds with fascinating facts about plants and wildlife. We also shared 96 educational videos that reached thousands of viewers. History enthusiasts, animal lovers, and curious visitors found something to love on WNPA's Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube platforms.


Before March 2020, 1,551 visitors had attended 31 in-person programs at The National Parks Store in Tucson, Arizona. For people who missed being able to attend in-person events, we emailed digital programming guides every week. These guides provided educational content and resources related to NPS monthly themes. Past topics include Explore Biodiversity in National Parks; Music in the Parks; and Let the Power of Parks Help Put You at Ease.

**THE
NATIONAL
PARKS
STORE**

**DIGITAL
PROGRAM**


Due to the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), WNPA has temporarily paused operations at The National Parks Store. We miss seeing you at our weekly programs and would like to stay connected with you. These weekly "digital programs" are for you to enjoy until we can see you again in person! Until then, stay safe and also check our website for news and resources: wnpa.org/news.

May the Forest Be With You!





Background: Today is May 4 and for any *Star Wars* fans out there, you probably know "May the forest be with you" is a spinoff of "May the force be with you," the phrase said to

Example of The National Parks Store digital program guide.







An example of WNPA social media post


 **wnpa_1938 • Following**
Chaco Culture National Historical Park

 **wnpa_1938 #WindowWednesday // #DoorWednesday?** featuring the architecture at Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

📍 Chaco Culture National Historical Park / 📷: @cliftonwanders via @nationalparkgeek

Tag us or use #wnpa1938 for the

 Liked by nationalparkpatchlady and 204 others
1 DAY AGO

Add a comment... Post

Junior Rangers



Ranger-led hike with youth in Santa Monica Mountains National Recreational Area (courtesy of NPS).

See updated COVID-19 policy for The National Parks Store and more. [LEARN MORE](#)

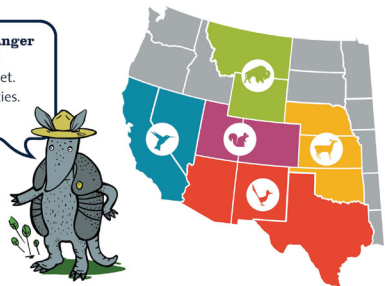
[Western National Parks Association](#) [Events](#) [Shop](#) [About](#)

Junior Ranger Jamboree

Explore. Learn. Protect. . . from anywhere!

Become a Junior Ranger in three easy steps!


1. Download the booklet.
2. Complete the activities.
3. Mail it to the park.




[Central Plains](#) [Mountain](#) [Northern Plains](#) [Pacific West](#) [Southwest](#)

The Western National Parks Association (WNPA) Junior Ranger Jamboree lets you become a National Park Service (NPS) Junior Ranger from anywhere! Some of these national parks might be close to you, and some might be far away, but all you need to join the WNPA Junior Ranger Jamboree is a computer, internet access, and a printer.


To join the WNPA Junior Ranger Jamboree you will need to print out a Junior Ranger Activity Booklet and complete the fun activities, like taking a walk in your neighborhood, answering scientific questions, and interviewing an NPS park ranger over the phone or by email. Some parks will even mail you a Junior Ranger certificate and badge if you finish your booklet (read each park's page below for the rules).




Lake Mead National Recreation Area





Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail



Montezuma Castle National Monument







WNPA invests in engaging programs for young people. We partner with NPS to develop and distribute Junior Ranger booklets—an initiative that has recruited a cadre of young outdoor enthusiasts—for some of our parks. To maximize their reach, we provide links to the booklets from our website. In a three-year span, WNPA has provided enough activity booklets and badges to help NPS swear in forty-thousand Junior Rangers.

Community Engagement: Connecting New Generations with Public Lands

Black History Bingo Night

On Saturday, February 22, Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site celebrated Black History Month with a bingo night. Participants played on Black American heritage-themed bingo cards, and park rangers called out bingo numbers while also providing facts and historical information about Black Americans who shaped US history. WNPA is proud to help fund events like this one, which combine education with a celebration of Black Americans and their cultural contributions.

Community Youth Paddling Program, Big Thicket National Preserve

The Community Youth Paddling Program recruited participants from local communities in Southeast Texas, especially those close to the preserve. On free, ranger-led kayak trips, groups of children, teenagers, and young adults had opportunities to learn new skills, to test their independence and teamwork, and to take on stewardship projects that strengthened NPS's work in the preserve. WNPA also funded the training of a young-adult instructor and guide for the kayak trips.

Holiday Book Drive at The National Parks Store

Over the 2020 holiday season, WNPA collected 2,381 books for donation to Literacy Connects, a nonprofit based in Tucson, Arizona, during a book drive that focused especially on children's books. The National Parks Store in Tucson hosted the collection for used books and newly purchased books at the store. The donated books will be used in programs that promote early literacy, school readiness, independent reading, and increased vocabulary and fluency.



Courtesy of NPS.



Big Thicket National Preserve protects an incredible diversity of life as its waterways course through nine different ecosystems (courtesy of NPS).



WNPA Publishing department delivers donated books to Literacy Connects library manager Violet Kennedy (courtesy of Literacy Connects).



Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument
(courtesy of NPS).

Since our founding in 1938, WNPA has provided \$120 million, as of FY20, in aid to our partner parks to fund NPS education, interpretation, research, and community engagement.

wnpa.org

Western
National Parks
Association