

Balancing conservation and recreation

MILAN MITROVICH^{1*}, COURTNEY L. LARSON², KATIE BARROWS³, MICHAEL BECK⁴, AND RON UNGER⁵

¹*Natural Communities Coalition, 13042 Old Myford Road, Irvine, CA 92602 USA; ICF, 49 Discovery, Suite 250, Irvine, CA, USA*

²*Department of Fish, Wildlife & Conservation Biology, 901 Amy Van Dyken Way, #999, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523, USA; The Nature Conservancy, 258 Main Street, Suite 200, Lander, WY 82520, USA*

³*Coachella Valley Conservation Commission, 73710 Fred Waring Drive, Suite 200, Palm Desert, CA 92260 USA*

⁴*Endangered Habitats League, 8424 Santa Monica Boulevard, Suite A 592, Los Angeles, CA 90069, USA*

⁵*California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Habitat Conservation Planning Branch, P.O. Box 944209, Sacramento, CA 94244-2090, USA*

**Corresponding Author: milan.mitrovich@icf.com*

Key words: California, equestrian, Habitat Conservation Plans, hiking, horseback riding, human dimensions, Natural Community Conservation Plans, mountain biking, trails, wildlife

As California's population has grown to nearly 40 million people, and as the State's beautiful natural diversity draws tourists and explorers from around the world, outdoor recreation has also grown (California Department of Parks and Recreation 2013, 2017; Monz et al. 2019). New equipment and technology enable new activities, such as night-time mountain biking, while social media brings increasing numbers of people to areas seldom visited by people only ten or twenty years ago. With increased time and more sedentary work environments, our society is understandably demanding greater access to more land for outdoor recreation. However, since several species-protection challenges already exist throughout the State due to development, fragmentation, invasive species, altered fire regimes, and climate change, consideration of opening up additional wildlands for recreation presents new challenges to conservation.

Outdoor engagement with natural areas is recognized as a necessary part of people's well-being, yet recreationists are generally attracted to the same high-value open spaces and natural areas that harbor diverse plant and animal communities (Mancini et al. 2018). Accordingly, trails, access points, and associated infrastructure need to be planned and

managed appropriately to complement, rather than diminish, conservation values of lands dedicated to the protection of species and their habitats. In the absence of good planning, recreation-conservation conflicts are increasing, polarizing these two stakeholder groups and eroding their natural affinity and alliance. When conservation and recreation interest groups work together and conservation and recreation lands are planned and managed based on scientific research, a new opportunity emerges for a coordinated approach to protecting California's wildlife while also meeting the demand for high-quality recreational opportunities for diverse user groups.

Recreation and conservation interests would benefit from regular dialogue and collaboration with each other and with federal, state, and local land use authorities regarding regional and local land use planning, acquisitions, and management. A shared, basic understanding of applicable conservation objectives and regulations would provide context and perspective for recreational users and serve to help the two groups work together to ensure each of their interests are served rather than their respective needs being compromised. Without a close alliance among recreation and conservation interests, California risks having insufficient land areas set aside for the thousands of species that depend on California's natural areas, inadequate areas for recreation, and increasing conflicts between conservation and recreation needs. The necessary conversations, research, and determination to collaborate should be embraced and acted upon as soon as possible to help address these needs, reduce the potential for polarization among these stakeholders, and help ensure good land use planning and management decisions are made as development proceeds.

In this essay, we provide an overview of the mechanisms available to implement conservation in California and introduce many of the issues attributed to outdoor recreation when managing for wildlife and natural resources on conservation lands and other public open spaces. We then describe two case studies from our work in southern California that highlight the perceptions and values of outdoor recreationists when visiting conserved lands. The case studies also demonstrate what a successful balance between conservation and recreation uses can look like when moving from conflict to collaboration. We end with a discussion of what is required to achieve that balance and ways to minimize the impacts of outdoor recreation on wildlife and other natural resources.

CONSERVATION CONTEXT

As California's population grew from a few hundred thousand to nearly 40 million people in less than two hundred years, numerous species' populations have declined. Some, like the iconic grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*), are now extinct in the state. Over 450 plant and animal species in California are now listed by the federal or state government as threatened or endangered (CDFW 2019). The cost of species recovery can be enormous, such as the tens of millions of dollars spent to save the majestic California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*; Walters et al. 2010). To prevent further species declines, a number of laws and regulations exist to avoid, minimize, or compensate for impacts of human activities on species. In California, these include the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), the California Endangered Species Act (CESA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), among others. Approximately half of California is federally or state-owned lands with a variety of uses, from national forests and state parks to multi-use areas and reserves. In addition to these areas, an appreciable

amount of land is conserved in California as mitigation under ESA, CESA, CEQA, and other laws and regulations.

Successful conservation leads to the protection of species and habitat and the preservation of natural landscapes. Principal types of conservation lands in California include reserves acquired and managed as part of Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) and Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCPs), national parks and monuments, state ecological reserves and wildlife areas, state parks, lands owned by private entities (e.g., land trusts), lands with conservation easements, and mitigation lands. The relative importance of conservation and recreation values to the management goals of these lands vary. For example, state and national parks generally emphasize recreational uses more than mitigation lands and ecological reserves. Sixteen HCP/NCCPs have been approved in California covering part or all of seven counties. Through the new Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS) Program established in 2017, one RCIS has been approved and an additional eight Regional Conservation Investment Strategies (RCISs) are currently in development or have been submitted for review and approval by the Department of Fish and Wildlife (for more information about RCIS and NCCP programs, see Appendix I). The nine RCISs together will cover part or all of 11 counties. There are also over 130 conservation and mitigation banks in the state, privately held conservation lands, and hundreds of mitigation sites. In total, tens of thousands of acres of habitat have been conserved in California through proactive investments and mitigation. Over one and one-half million acres will be conserved in California under approved HCP/NCCPs, benefiting hundreds of species listed as endangered or threatened under federal and state species protection laws.

OUTDOOR RECREATION

Millions of Californians and visitors recreate outdoors on natural lands within the state each year (Outdoor Industry Association 2019). Examples of outdoor recreation activities include hiking, trail running, mountain biking, horseback riding, backpacking, camping, and motorized activities. The positive effects of outdoor recreation are numerous. Stewardship values are enhanced. Appreciation of nature is magnified as people are exposed to the inherent beauty, complexity, and serenity of natural systems. The next generation of land stewards and conservationists are born out of the experience of being introduced to wildlands when young. Equally important, the mental health benefits of exposure to the outdoors and participation in nature are now well-recognized (Louv 2005; Thomsen et al. 2018). For a society that is increasingly becoming more urban and digital, the restorative properties of nature and the increased social well-being of individuals and communities is ever more important.

Despite these benefits, the negative effects of recreation on wildlife can be profoundly damaging to species and their habitats and must be considered when planning for conservation areas (Hammit et al. 2015). Trails lead to habitat degradation and fragmentation, which increase when visitors go off-trail and informal trails proliferate. Harassment of wildlife, though often unintended, occurs with increased visitation to an area. Less obvious impacts to wildlife, not easily measured, have been tied to noise, light pollution, trash, and other factors associated with recreation activities.

In general, it can be difficult to accept that recreation activities, especially quiet, non-motorized activities like hiking and mountain biking, can have harmful effects on wildlife. Many types of recreation cause little physical habitat change. Perhaps as a result, recreation

was widely assumed to be a “benign use” that is compatible with conservation goals (Knight and Gutzwiller 1995) and is permitted in the vast majority of protected areas worldwide (Eagles et al. 2002; IUCN and UNEP 2014). Many HCP/NCCPs include a general provision that allows for “low-impact nature trails” without strongly defining what that means and what types and levels of use would be acceptable, given the species that are to be protected. The viewpoint that recreation is a benign use may be changing, however. In recent years, researchers have found evidence that a variety of recreation activities and intensities can have detrimental impacts on wildlife (Geffory et al. 2015; Larson et al. 2016; Samia et al. 2017).

RECREATION EFFECTS ON WILDLIFE

Behavior, activity budgets, and physiology

Behavioral reactions, such as flight, flushing, or vigilance are some of the most commonly-observed and studied wildlife responses to recreationists (Larson et al. 2016). Changes in activity budgets have also been observed, with animals typically spending less time in activities such as foraging and caring for young and more time moving or being vigilant when recreationists are present (Schummer and Eddleman 2003; Arlettaz et al. 2015). Physiological responses, such as increases in stress hormones (Arlettaz et al. 2007) or decreased body mass (McGrann et al. 2006), are less obvious to observe, and can occur even when a corresponding behavioral response does not. It is critical not to assume that an animal is tolerant of recreation simply because it does not exhibit a visible response.

Habitat degradation and fragmentation

Recreation can degrade or fragment habitat, resulting in habitat that is otherwise of high quality being used less frequently or not at all. This is particularly concerning in highly fragmented or developed landscapes where remaining habitat is scarce and there is limited opportunity for wildlife to move to alternative areas. Researchers have observed avoidance of areas used by recreationists in species as diverse as grizzly bears (Coleman et al. 2013), wolverines (*Gulo gulo*; Heinemeyer et al. 2019), caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*; Lesmerises et al. 2018), capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*; Coppes et al. 2017), and dolphins (*Tursiops* spp.; Lusseau 2005).

Reproduction, survival, and abundance

Assessing recreation’s impacts on wildlife population abundance or vital rates can be difficult and time-consuming, and is therefore largely unknown. In one of the few studies of population trends in relation to recreation, Garber and Burger’s long-term study (1995) observed dramatic declines in North American wood turtle populations after the area was opened to recreation. Reproductive success is one of the better-studied population vital rates; negative effects of recreation on reproductive success have been observed in several species including elk (*Cervus canadensis*; Shively et al. 2005), penguins (Giese 1996; Lynch et al. 2010), and plovers (*Charadrius* spp.; Lafferty et al. 2006; Yasué and Dearden 2006). However, other studies have found that habituation can moderate impacts of recreation on reproductive success (Baudains and Lloyd 2007).

Community composition and richness

Within an ecological community, species respond to recreation differently. This can lead to changes in community composition if more sensitive species avoid areas with recreation or decline in abundance while the habitat use or abundance of tolerant species remains constant or even increases due to reduced competition. When the sensitive species are native and the more tolerant species are non-native, this can lead to dramatic declines of native species as compared to their non-native counterparts (Reed and Merenlender 2008). Overall species richness can also decline if sensitive species disappear from local communities (Bötsch et al. 2018).

Indirect effects

Recreation can also cause other changes that indirectly affect wildlife, many of which are not well understood. Shifts in diel activity patterns could change the way that species interact with each other or with their environment, potentially leading to increased inter-specific competition during nighttime hours or increased overlap between predators and their prey (Gaynor et al. 2018). Recreation can facilitate the spread of non-native species in freshwater, marine, and terrestrial environments (Anderson et al. 2015), which can have dramatic effects on native wildlife. Recreation activities also often involve infrastructure (e.g., parking lots, maintenance buildings, roads, ski lifts), which can lead to further habitat loss and fragmentation (Nellemann et al. 2010).

Examples of recreation impacts from southern California

Examples from southern California, where much of our work occurs, highlight some of the many ways recreation can impact natural resources. Results of ten years of camera-trap studies on conservation lands in Orange County indicate mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) and coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are shifting the timing of activity due to the presence of humans on trails creating novel predator-prey conflicts for wildlife (Patten et al. 2017). Observed shifts toward more nocturnal activity by both species leads to greater temporal overlap in activity periods between mule deer and their principal predator, the mountain lion (*Puma concolor*; Figure 1). Greater overlap between coyotes and gray foxes (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) has also been observed, leading to predicted changes in predator-prey dynamics.

Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) movement modeling using more than ten years of telemetry data in the 7,284-ha South Coast Wilderness of coastal Orange County highlights the importance of maintaining regional connectivity among isolated parcels and continued exclusion of human presence at culverts and other critical linkage points along the coast (Boydston and Tracey 2018). Within landscapes containing natural areas constrained by development, protected habitat and other high-value open space is a premium for wildlife. Providing for safe, unobstructed passage for wildlife among isolated parcels, especially at culverts and other pinch-points, is essential to enable access to high-value habitat within these otherwise constrained landscapes.

In heavily used open space areas, some wildlife appear to develop a tolerance for regular human activity on trails over time. However, patterns of wildlife habitat use can be disrupted by disturbances occurring outside this regular activity, such as large recreation

events, off-trail visitor behavior, or the proliferation of new social trails, even in areas that traditionally see high levels of visitor use. At a local scale, observations of breeding bird behavior before, during, and after a mountain bike race at a wilderness park in Orange County highlights elements of both sides of this phenomenon (Hamilton et al. 2015). In this example, breeding bird behavior continued uninterrupted in areas experiencing similar amounts of activity along the racecourse during the event as to what was experienced prior. As people gathered in numbers on and off the trail at the designated start/end staging area for the event, evidence suggests behavior was disrupted as the sheer volume and continual

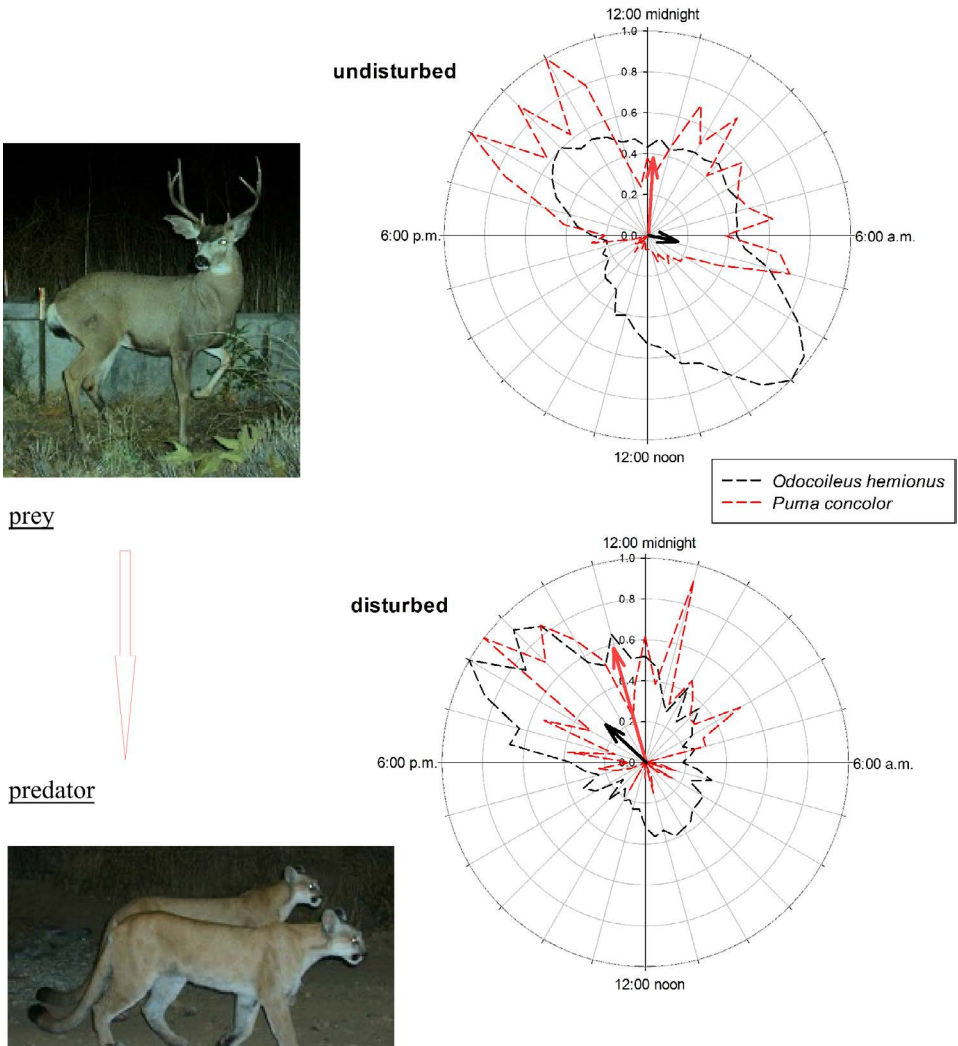


Figure 1. Diel activity of the mule deer and mountain lion with or without human disturbance. Arrows indicate time (direction) and proportional magnitude (length) of mean activity, and the “net” displays the spread of activity on a 24-h clock, binned at 30-minute intervals. Note the prey’s (the deer) nocturnal shift when disturbance was present. (Figure credit: Patten et al. 2019)

presence of people gathered around the staging area was atypical for this location within the park.

CASE STUDY:

UNDERSTANDING VISITOR PERCEPTIONS AND VALUES IN ORANGE COUNTY

To successfully strike a balance, we need to know more about the human perspective of conservation. By surveying visitors to protected natural areas in southern California over the last couple of years, we learned there is potential for a shared vision of nature protection addressing the needs of both conservationists and outdoor recreationists. Clearly the issues are complex, but with good planning and communication, much can be done to support the creation of a collective vision for compatible conservation and recreation.

Natural Communities Coalition (NCC) is the non-profit management corporation overseeing implementation of the conservation strategy for the County of Orange Central and Coastal Subregion NCCP/HCP. Stretching from the Newport Coast to the Santa Ana Mountains, over 20,200 ha (50,000 acres) of conserved lands together with National Forest are embedded within the conservation plan's 84,000-ha (208,000-acre) planning area. The 75-year plan, signed in 1996, was the first landscape-scale NCCP in the state and one of the first multi-species HCPs nationally.

With 3.2 million residents in Orange County (Center for Demographic Research 2019), the demand for outdoor recreation on lands protected for conservation purposes is ever-present and increasing. Equally important is the recognized need and desire by the community to conserve the rich natural heritage of the southern California region. In Orange County, like in other high-value natural areas of the state experiencing rapid population growth, there is a strong need to strike a balance between conservation and recreation.

Recreation management is one of four main tenets of the regional landscape-level conservation strategy managed by NCC. Recognizing the increasing need to address this topic, NCC staff began focused and meaningful conversations with recreation ecologists and then followed with talking directly to park visitors to understand the human dimensions, that is, the motivations, desires, and values of visitors to the conserved lands. Partnering with Dr. Christopher Monz, Professor of Recreation Resources Management in the Department of Environment and Society at Utah State University, the organization surveyed close to 2,000 visitors in the spring and fall seasons of 2017 and in the spring of 2018 to better understand their perceptions, values, and characteristics (Sisneros-Kidd et al. 2019). In this process, the research team used a theoretical framework that allowed for the identification of internal constructs embedded within visitor questionnaires to reveal motivations and define different user groups. Through the work, two principal groups or clusters of visitors were discovered, those who are motivated most by the opportunity to experience nature immersion and those who are more focused on fitness-based recreation.

Surprisingly, given the urban-proximate setting, and in contrast to the expectations of local land managers, by almost two to one, recreationists were looking to experience nature immersion compared to those seeking fitness-based recreation. These visitors were more motivated by solitude and escape, learning about and experiencing nature, spiritual renewal, and the social experience, versus those in the fitness-based recreation group who

were motivated principally by challenge and outdoor exercise. Learning that the motivation and values of most visitors are more in alignment with resource protection than expected, we had to shift our thinking. Rather than focusing on direct conflict between recreation and conservation, we had to reevaluate how the conversation about balancing recreation and conservation is framed. Knowing it is often the most vocal and well-organized user groups who receive the greatest attention, whether from rangers at a local park or elected officials at a public meeting, we recognized it was of value for decision-makers to be informed of the findings and equally consider the motivations, values, and desires of the quiet majority in these public spaces and forums.

Digging deeper into the results of the work, we found people largely recognize the value of habitat and natural resource conservation; however, they too want to be part of the story. People do not want to be left “standing on the sidelines or looking over the fence;” they want to experience the rich natural resources that make California so unique. When asked how satisfied they were in their ability to achieve a variety of experiences during their visit to a park, visitors reported they were often left wanting more when it came to learning about nature and becoming more in touch with their spiritual values.

Visitor responses indicated they experience place attachment. When asked, they recognize the lands upon which they choose to regularly recreate are not necessarily unique relative to other protected areas. However, to them these lands and parks are special, meaningful, and important. Place attachment may be reflected in the high repeat visitation rates of visitors. More than half of those surveyed visited parks more than 50 times within the same year. Furthermore, many of the visitors live within neighboring communities. For almost half of the parks included in the study, more than 25% of visitors live within 3 miles of an entrance location (Mitrovich, unpublished data). To these people, the parks are a recognized and utilized part of their local community’s resources.

Recreation is multidimensional and multifaceted, and we recognize a more sophisticated approach to finding solutions is warranted when seeking to minimize recreational impacts on sensitive natural resources. Impacts and motivations vary by user group, as does the attractiveness of different topography. From the surveys, we learned mountain bikers look to avoid crowds, are most knowledgeable about “leave no trace,” most interested in more trails, and most likely of all user groups to be satisfied in their ability to get away from the demands of life when out on trails. Dog walkers, on the other hand, were least knowledgeable about “leave no trace,” most avoided by other recreational groups, and least satisfied in their park experiences as it relates to their ability to learn more about plants and animals. Some hikers and runners were concerned about the number of mountain bikers they encountered in particular parks and along certain trails. Different topographic features attracted different users. Steep trails that offer high speeds and technical challenges are attractive to mountain bikers but can be off-putting to other user groups. In unregulated spaces popular with the masses and advertised through social media, trails can be degraded and spider, further fragmenting and degrading available habitat. The overlap between areas used for recreation and high-value wildlife habitat may be greatest with nature-based recreationists.

One positive take-home, as we look for solutions, is that visitors in urban landscapes are much more tolerant of crowded conditions than previously recognized by land managers. Parks in Orange County have seen a dramatic increase in use over the last decade, with increases of greater than 50% not uncommon over a 4-year period (Monz et al. 2019). However, at many parks considered to be “crowded” by land managers, over 80% of re-

spondents surveyed did not feel the presence of other people on the trail interfered with their activities or made them feel rushed or slowed them down during their visit. Equally, over 80% of respondents in 2018 did not feel the number of people at the park increased their risk of injury.

Although many folks are comfortable in a more crowded space, not everyone is comfortable with the changing dynamics and increases in observed use experienced over the last decade. Across both before-mentioned measures, there were respondents that felt the number of people at the park during their visit did increase their risk of injury at least some of the time, and other visitors and their activities interfered with their visit. Like wildlife, it appears people's tolerance of novel conditions is not fully universal and may differ across generations, by past experiences, and expectations (Shelby et al. 1983). When coupled with their understanding that off-trail activity is most impactful, the general tolerance of folks to increased visitation rates gives hope as we look for solutions to meeting increased demand while paying the necessary attention to detail to create the recreational opportunities valued by most that continue to honor the shared commitment and need for lasting conservation.

CASE STUDY:

CONFLICT TO COLLABORATION IN THE COACHELLA VALLEY

Now we turn to one example of how a region is addressing the question, what to do when trail users and sensitive species like the same habitat? Like other areas of southern California, the Coachella Valley in the desert and mountain regions of eastern Riverside County has seen a remarkable increase in the demand for outdoor recreation on trails, especially hiking and mountain biking. In this desert resort area, land of more than 100 lush golf courses, demand for golf is flat, while hiking has surged in popularity, in large part due to the influence of social media.

In 2008, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) approved the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan (CVNCCP) with a 75-year permit. Like other efforts in California and beyond, it was a visionary effort to balance conservation and development. The plan encompasses an area of almost 500,000 ha (1.1 million acres) from Palm Springs to the Salton Sea and beyond. Implementation of the plan is overseen by the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC), made up of elected officials from participating cities, Riverside County, local water districts, and other agencies.

However, several years earlier, the conflict between trail users and agency biologists nearly derailed the CVNCCP. During development of the plan, proposals by state and federal wildlife agencies to impose seasonal closures on some trails galvanized trail users to organize and turn out in large numbers at public hearings. The proposal to close trails centered on concerns about the impacts of trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*), a state and federally listed endangered species (Figure 2). In response, trail users read scientific literature, interviewed bighorn sheep biologists, and questioned the scientific basis of the trail restrictions. They used their newfound knowledge and spoke passionately about their concerns to elected officials, often quoting published scientists.

When the CVNCCP was approved in 2008, it did not include the trail closures that had been envisioned. Public input from trail users convinced decision-makers to avoid these measures. It also convinced conservation planners that a full trails management plan needed

to be developed for the CVNCCP. Unfortunately, the process also left trail users alienated and with a lack of trust in the state and federal wildlife agencies. Wildlife agencies were suspicious of trail users' motivations. It would be years before these attitudes changed. Trail users seeking nature immersion, who could have been a natural constituency for support of the conservation proposed by the CVNCCP, continued to question the scientific basis of the trails plan. Even after the CVNCCP was completed and fully permitted, the lack of trust remained.

To provide a forum for input from trail users and local governments, the final CVNCCP called for formation of a Trails Management Subcommittee, composed of a representative from each of nine cities involved in the CVNCCP, the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla In-



Figure 2. In some areas of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, seasonal trail closures are in place to allow bighorn sheep and other wildlife access to waterholes during the hot summer months. (Photo credit: CDFW)

dians, trail user groups (mountain bikers, hikers, equestrians), environmentalists, biologists from CDFW, USFWS, Bureau of Land Management, and other land management agencies. The group was charged with providing recommendations on trails management, annually reviewing the status of bighorn sheep, and communicating trails-related information to stakeholders. Their tasks required them to develop a shared understanding of relevant conservation objectives and regulations while they worked together to accomplish their charge.

A dedicated group of volunteers, the subcommittee took their responsibility seriously and worked hard. Meetings were well attended and often animated. Passions flared, and sometimes sparks flew. On occasion, meetings devolved and became acrimonious and full of

conflict. Trail users continued to question the scientific basis for trails management actions proposed by “the agencies.” Agency biologists doubted the trail users’ commitment to the protection of bighorn sheep and were reluctant to share data. Unfortunately, throughout the process, scientifically rigorous data on the effects of trail use on bighorn sheep was limited. The studies needed to understand the relationship between trail use and bighorn sheep had not been done. The CVNCCP was approved in 2008, the year the recession hit and resources for local, state, and federal agencies were further limited by lack of funding.

In 2011, the conflict between recreation and habitat ended up in the state legislature when CDFW closed the upper portion of the very popular Bump and Grind Trail to protect bighorn sheep. Though not a trail which offers the experience of solitude, the Bump and Grind provides a great cardio workout, with hikers numbering more than 1,000 some days. Questioning whether any studies to prove that hikers have an impact on the endangered bighorn had been presented, trail users went to their state legislators. Ultimately, a compromise was worked out and Governor Brown signed legislation in October 2013. The upper Bump and Grind is now closed for three months during the sensitive bighorn sheep lambing season, from February through April, and open for the remaining nine months of each year. The Coachella Valley Conservation Commission worked with CDFW to install a fence to discourage off-trail travel and educational signs about bighorn sheep.

Despite the challenges, the Trails Management Subcommittee persevered. They worked through the challenges, developed more trust, and learned to work together. They completed an update to the 2008 Trails Management Plan in 2014. The updated plan emphasizes the adaptive management approach described in the CVNCCP. It calls for research on the relationship between bighorn sheep habitat use and trail use, prior to construction of new trails. Technology has made such research more feasible, especially in the rugged and remote terrain of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. Since 2015, GPS collars have been placed on bighorn sheep, providing data on their movements and habitat use. The CVCC is now working on a study of bighorn sheep and trails, led by Dr. Kathleen Longshore of the U.S. Geological Survey and funded by a grant from CDFW. The trails subcommittee is actively involved with researchers in the development of the study protocol and review of all data. Field work began in fall 2019, with volunteers collecting data on recreational trail use and researchers comparing the human use data with bighorn sheep collar data.

Conflict has been replaced with collaboration. Although all of the best practices were not used initially, when they were used, they became lessons learned. If people understand why, they are more likely to go along with regulations (Marion and Reid 2007). Furthermore, when the need for regulation or constraints are understood, constraints can become a positive as they provide the basis for best practices and assure access via responsible use.

WHAT IS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE BALANCE? WHAT WORKS?

Several land management decisions are being made today with long-term implications for the state of biodiversity and human wellness within California. Without collaboration among recreation and conservation interests, California risks insufficient lands being set aside for the benefit of protecting species, insufficient lands for recreating, and poorly located lands for both purposes, with people and other species suffering the consequences. Recreation and conservation stakeholders need to talk and work with each other and with

ecologists and land planners early and often in the regional visioning and land planning process to ensure both interests get what is needed in a way that strikes a balance for species and habitat protection, and people's access to the outdoors.

To achieve a better land use future for conservation and recreation outcomes, we recommend early investment in working relationships. Increased early communication among all stakeholders, land planners, and managers, together with basing decisions on the best available science, can help reduce land use conflicts, the loss of species, and lower-quality recreation experiences. Groups should accept there will be situations when they collectively agree to disagree. However, the long-term commitment to work together will increase the likelihood of achieving goals and objectives for all interests. Most land conserved through public funding sources and/or mitigation and all HCP and NCCP properties have some form of Resource Management Plan (RMP) and/or Conservation Easement attached to them. It is critical RMP's are developed with a "clean slate" to identify critical sensitive species, regional context, and wildlife linkages up front. This, in turn, identifies potential areas appropriate for trails and other recreational uses, thus reducing debate and conflict later.

We also recommend establishing appropriate monitoring programs that are used to evaluate conservation and recreation outcomes and modify management plans to better achieve the original goals and adjust to changing conditions. The wide variety of nature-based recreational activities, timing and frequency of those activities, and numbers of people that participate in them, all result in a complex array of potential effects. Adding to that is the complexity of behavioral responses and sensitivities of different species to those activities. Recognizing this complexity and planning according to research findings that are available, and the anticipated growth or other changes expected, can help planners create conservation areas and recreation areas positioned to avoid future conflicts.

Opportunities to be inclusive and reach out to stakeholders as partners in the long-term management of protected lands are numerous. By simply involving everyone up-front, community members can be engaged early in the planning process and contribute to the search for solutions. Volunteers can help to enforce site rules using peer pressure. They may also be able to help with site maintenance, monitoring, and identification of possible management actions, such as when monitoring information indicates a problem exists. An open phone line to land managers is essential and over time naturally builds relationship and trust.

How can effects be minimized?

Using good science in the decision-making process is key, as is making data transparent and remembering the importance of educating the public throughout the process. Planning efforts should search for and incorporate relevant scientific findings. Despite the variability in species responses to different types and intensities of recreation, researchers have identified some ways to minimize the effects of recreation on wildlife:

- Monitor and prevent unauthorized trail creation and off-trail use. Many animal species respond more strongly to recreationists in unexpected places, such as off-trail (Stankowich 2008; Heinemeyer et al. 2019), so increasing the predictability of human presence by constraining people to the existing trail network may help mitigate negative effects.
- Limit nighttime access to parks and trails. Since people are primarily active during the daytime, many animal species avoid interactions with people by increasing the proportion of their activity that takes place at night (Gaynor et al. 2018). While the

implications of this shift for foraging success and interspecific interactions are largely unknown, limiting activity to daytime hours may be a way for humans and wildlife to coexist in parks and natural areas. Nighttime recreation is growing in popularity but may prevent animals from temporally avoiding people, and should be limited in general, and probably all together avoided in urban-proximate wildland areas where the existence of refugia is already severely limited spatially.

- Leave areas without trails, both within individual properties and at landscape scale. For the most part, research has not yet identified ‘safe’ levels of human activity that result in minimal negative outcomes for wildlife. Some species appear to respond to very low levels of human activity and would benefit from blocks of trail-free habitat; in one example, mountain lions, coyotes, and bobcats increased nighttime activity and decreased daytime activity in locations with levels of use as low as two people per day (Wang et al. 2015).
- Plan access points and infrastructure carefully. Parking lots and other facilities can increase the level of use at corresponding trails (Larson et al. 2018). On the other hand, a lack of parking space at popular trails can result in public safety issues if visitors park along busy roadways. Improper parking can also impact habitat, which can cascade to impact wildlife as well.
- Use seasonal trail closures during sensitive periods. For many species, the most sensitive period is the breeding period, when disturbance can lead to reduced reproductive success (Bötsch et al. 2017), which in turn can result in population declines.
- Collect visitor use data. Without some knowledge of the intensity and distribution of recreational use, it is difficult for managers to know where and when impacts on sensitive wildlife species may be occurring. Monitoring equipment can be costly to purchase and maintain, but basic measures like periodic manual counts at parking lots or trailheads can be helpful in tracking trends, and there are promising emerging approaches using information that visitors share on social media platforms, mobile devices, and fitness applications (Fisher et al. 2018; Monz et al. 2019; Norman et al. 2019).
- Consider diverse visitor perspectives and values. Employ contemporary scientific approaches so key components in the human dimension of recreation (e.g., perceptions, characteristics, and motivations) can be understood more formally and inform a planning process for long-term sustainable use.
- Determine thresholds of acceptability of key indicators of resource and social conditions. Recognize “carrying capacities” exist for protected lands and their identification is a key component in the planning process and essential to developing a range of possible management actions, from the spatial and temporal separation of different types of recreational uses to acceptance and identification of high and low intensity use areas within the greater protected open space network.

An opportunity is emerging to expand upon local successes and encourage a new dialogue among agencies, conservationists, and recreationists, both at the local level and regionally, in support of the expanded protection of natural lands throughout California. We encourage interested parties to continue to learn more about the use of conservation planning tools and visitor use management made available through the CDFW and USFWS, and Interagency Visitor Use Management Council (Appendix I). Forming partnerships allows stakeholder groups to work together to plan ahead of growth and build regional conservation

strategies for the increased protection of natural lands, addressing the long-term conservation needs of California's natural resources and the strong desire of people to experience nature.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank P. Unger for organizing our first collective conversations on the topic of balancing conservation and recreation and orchestrating our participation in a special session at the *California Trails & Greenway Conference* in April 2019 where many of the ideas communicated in this essay were first presented. We thank A. D'Antonio, S. Lucas, C. Monz, and A. Sisneros-Kidd for providing helpful reviews of the essay.

LITERATURE CITED

- Anderson, L. G., S. Roccliffe, N. R. Haddaway, and A. M. Dunn. 2015. The role of tourism and recreation in the spread of non-native species: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLoS ONE* 10:e0140833.
- Arlettaz, R., S. Nusslé, M. Baltic, P. Vogel, R. Palme, S. Jenni-Eiermann, P. Patthey, and M. Genoud. 2015. Disturbance of wildlife by outdoor winter recreation: allostatic stress response and altered activity–energy budgets. *Ecological Applications* 25:1197–1212.
- Arlettaz, R., P. Patthey, M. Baltic, T. Leu, M. Schaub, R. Palme, and S. Jenni-Eiermann. 2007. Spreading free-riding snow sports represent a novel serious threat for wildlife. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 274:1219–1224.
- Baudains, T. P., and P. Lloyd. 2007. Habituation and habitat changes can moderate the impacts of human disturbance on shorebird breeding performance. *Animal Conservation* 10:400–407.
- Bötsch, Y., Z. Tablado, and L. Jenni. 2017. Experimental evidence of human recreational disturbance effects on bird-territory establishment. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 284:20170846.
- Bötsch, Y., Z. Tablado, D. Scherl, M. Kéry, R. F. Graf, and L. Jenni. 2018. Effect of recreational trails on forest birds: human presence matters. *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* 6:1–10.
- Boydston, E. E., and J. A. Tracey. 2018. Modeling resource selection of bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) and vertebrate species distributions in Orange County, southern California. U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 2018–1095, Reston, VA, USA.
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). 2019. Threatened and Endangered Species Protected under the California Endangered Species Act. California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Sacramento, CA, USA. Available from wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/CESA (Jan 2020).
- California Department of Parks and Recreation. 2017. State Park System Statistical Report 2016/2017 Fiscal Year. Sacramento, CA, USA. Available from www.parks.ca.gov/pages/795/files/16-17%20Statistical%20Report%20FINAL%20for%20web.pdf (Jan 2020).
- California Department of Parks and Recreation. 2013. State Park System Statistical Report 2012/2013 Fiscal Year. Sacramento, CA, USA. Available from <https://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/795/files/12-13%20statistical%20report%20final%20inter>

net.pdf (Jan 2020).

- Center for Demographic Research. 2019. California State University, Fullerton, USA. Available from: www.fullerton.edu/cdr/ocff.pdf (July 2019).
- Coleman, T. H., C. C. Schwartz, K. A. Gunther, and S. Creel. 2013. Grizzly bear and human interaction in Yellowstone National Park: an evaluation of bear management areas. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 77:1311–1320.
- Coppes, J., J. Ehrlicher, D. Thiel, R. Suchant, and V. Braunisch. 2017. Outdoor recreation causes effective habitat reduction in capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*: a major threat for geographically restricted populations. *Journal of Avian Biology* 48:1583–1594.
- Eagles, P. F. J., S. F. McCool, and C. D. Haynes. 2002. Sustainable tourism in protected areas: guidelines for planning and management. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK.
- Fisher, D. M., S. A. Wood, E. M. White, D. J. Blahna, S. Lange, A. Weinberg, M. Tomco, and E. Lia. 2018. Recreational use in dispersed public lands measured using social media data and on-site counts. *Journal of Environmental Management* 222:465–474.
- Garber, S. D., and J. Burger. 1995. A 20-year study documenting the relationship between turtle decline and human recreation. *Ecological Applications* 5:1151–1162.
- Gaynor, K. M., C. E. Hojnowski, N. H. Carter, and J. S. Brashares. 2018. The influence of human disturbance on wildlife nocturnality. *Science* 360:1232–1235.
- Geffroy, B., D. S. M. Samia, E. Bessa, and D. T. Blumstein. 2015. How nature-based tourism might increase prey vulnerability to predators. *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 30:755–765.
- Giese, M. 1996. Effects of human activity on adelic penguin *Pygoscelis adeliae* breeding success. *Biological Conservation* 75:157–164.
- Hamilton, R., D. Kamada, and B. Leatherman. 2015. Biological observations and recommendations – Whiting Ranch Ultimate Time Trial, Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park, Orange County, CA. Report by Hamilton Biological to Natural Communities Coalition, Irvine, CA, USA.
- Hammitt, W. E., D. N. Cole, and C. A. Monz. 2015. *Wildland recreation: ecology and management*. Wiley Blackwell, Chichester, West Sussex, UK
- Heinemeyer, K., J. Squires, M. Hebblewhite, J. J. O’Keefe, J. D. Holbrook, and J. Copeland. 2019. Wolverines in winter: indirect habitat loss and functional responses to backcountry recreation. *Ecosphere* 10:e02611.
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). 2014. *The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA)*. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge, UK.
- Knight, R. L., and K. Gutzwiller. 1995. *Wildlife and Recreationists: Coexistence Through Management and Research*. Island Press, Washington, D.C., USA.
- Lafferty, K. D., D. Goodman, and C. P. Sandoval. 2006. Restoration of breeding by snowy plovers following protection from disturbance. *Biodiversity and Conservation* 15:2217–2230.
- Larson, C. L., S. E. Reed, A. M. Merenlender, and K. R. Crooks. 2016. Effects of recreation on animals Revealed as Widespread through a Global Systematic Review. *PLoS ONE* 11: e0167259.

- Larson, C. L., S. E. Reed, A. M. Merenlender, and K. R. Crooks. 2018. Accessibility drives species exposure to recreation in a fragmented urban reserve network. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 175:62–71.
- Lesmerises, F., F. Déry, C. J. Johnson, and M.-H. St-Laurent. 2018. Spatiotemporal response of mountain caribou to the intensity of backcountry skiing. *Biological Conservation* 217:149–156.
- Louv, R. 2005. *Last child in the woods: saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Algonquin Books, Chapel Hill, NC, USA.
- Lusseau, D. 2005. Residency pattern of bottlenose dolphins *Tursiops* spp. in Milford Sound, New Zealand, is related to boat traffic. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 295:265–272.
- Lynch, H. J., W. F. Fagan, and R. Naveen. 2010. Population trends and reproductive success at a frequently visited penguin colony on the western Antarctic Peninsula. *Polar Biology* 33:493–503.
- Mancini, F., G. M. Coghill, and D. Lusseau. 2018. Using social media to quantify spatial and temporal dynamics of nature-based recreational activities. *PLoS ONE* 13:e0200565
- Marion, J. L., and S. E. Reid. 2007. Minimizing visitor impacts to protected areas: the efficacy of low impact education programs. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 15:5–27.
- McGrann, M. C., G. R. Wright, R. J. Dial, and A. M. McGrann. 2006. Off-highway vehicle impact on the flat-tailed horned lizard, *Phrynosoma mcallii*, in the Colorado Desert of southern California. *California Fish and Game* 92:67–80.
- Monz, C., M. Mitrovich, A. D'Antonio, and A. Sisneros-Kidd. 2019. Using Mobile Device Data to Estimate Visitation in Parks and Protected Areas: An Example from the Nature Reserve of Orange County, California, USA. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*.
- Nellemann, C., I. Vistnes, P. Jordhøy, O.-G. Støen, B. P. Kaltenborn, F. Hanssen, and R. Helgesen. 2010. Effects of recreational cabins, trails and their removal for restoration of reindeer winter ranges. *Restoration Ecology* 18:873–881.
- Norman, P., C. M. Pickering, and G. Castley. 2019. What can volunteered geographic information tell us about the different ways mountain bikers, runners and walkers use urban reserves? *Landscape and Urban Planning* 185:180–190.
- Outdoor Industry Association. 2019. *Outdoor Industry Association, Boulder*. Available from <https://outdoorindustry.org/article/outdoor-industry-association-releases-state-by-state-outdoor-recreation-economy-report/> [Sept 2019].
- Patten, M. A., J. C. Burger, and M. Mitrovich. 2019. The intersection of human disturbance and diel activity, with potential consequences on trophic interactions. *PLoS ONE* 14:e0226418.
- Patten, M., J. Burger, and M. Mitrovich. 2017. *Assessing effectiveness of adaptive recreation management strategies and evaluation of core NCCP/HCP habitat areas*. Final report for California Department of Fish and Wildlife Local Assistance Grant #P1482109.
- Reed, S. E., and A. M. Merenlender. 2008. Quiet, nonconsumptive recreation reduces protected area effectiveness. *Conservation Letters* 1:146–154.
- Samia, D. S. M., L. M. Angeloni, M. Bearzi, E. Bessa, K. R. Crooks, M. D'Amico, U. Ellenberg, B. Geffroy, C. L. Larson, R. Loyola, A. P. Møller, S. E. Reed, B. Sadoul,

- G. Shannon, Z. Tablado, D. Zacarias, and D. T. Blumstein. 2017. Best practices toward sustainable ecotourism. Pages 153-178 in D. T. Blumstein, B. Geffroy, D. S. M. Samia, and E. Bessa, editors. *Ecotourism's Promise and Peril*. Springer International Publishing, Cham, Switzerland.
- Schummer, M. L., and W. R. Eddleman. 2003. Effects of disturbance on activity and energy budgets of migrating waterbirds in south-central Oklahoma. *The Journal of Wildlife Management* 67:789-795.
- Shelby, B., T. A. Heberlein, J. J. Vaske, and G. Alfano. 1983. Expectations, preferences, and feeling crowded in recreation activities. *Leisure Sciences* 6:1-14.
- Shively, K. J., A. W. Alldredge, and G. E. Phillips. 2005. Elk reproductive response to removal of calving season disturbance by humans. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 69:1073-1080.
- Sisneros-Kidd, A., A. D'Antonio, N. Creany, C. Monz, and C. Schoenlebner. 2019. Recreation Use and Human Valuation on the Nature Reserve of Orange County, California: 2017 and 2018 Data Collection Summary and Project Report.
- Stankowich, T. 2008. Ungulate flight responses to human disturbance: A review and meta-analysis. *Biological Conservation* 141:2159-2173.
- Thomsen, J. M., R. B. Powell, and C. Monz. 2018. A systematic review of the physical and mental health benefits of wildland recreation. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 36(1):123-148.
- Walters, J. R. S. R. Derrickson, D. Michael Fry, S. M. Haig, J. M. Marzluff, and J. M. Wunderle Jr. 2010. Status of the California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) and efforts to achieve its recovery. *The Auk* 127(4):969-1001.
- Wang, Y., M. L. Allen, and C. C. Wilmers. 2015. Mesopredator spatial and temporal responses to large predators and human development in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California. *Biological Conservation* 190:23-33. doi:10.1016/j.biocon.2015.05.007
- Yasué, M., and P. Dearden. 2006. The potential impact of tourism development on habitat availability and productivity of Malaysian plovers *Charadrius peronii*. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 43:978-989.

APPENDIX I: AVAILABLE CONSERVATION PLANNING AND VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT TOOLS

Natural Community Conservation Planning

The Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) Program promotes collaborative planning efforts designed to provide for the region-wide conservation of plants, animals, and their habitats, while allowing for compatible and appropriate economic activity. <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Planing/NCCP>

Regional Conservation Investment Strategy Program

The Regional Conservation Investment Strategy (RCIS) Program encourages a voluntary, non-regulatory regional planning process intended to result in high-quality conservation outcomes. The Program consists of three components: regional conservation assessments (RCAs), regional conservation investment strategies (RCISs), and mitigation credit agreements (MCAs). <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Planning/Regional-Conservation>

Conservation and Mitigation Banking

Conservation and mitigation banking in California is overseen and undertaken by several Federal and State Agencies. The Banking Program coordinates with other agencies and stakeholders to develop statewide policy and guidance for the establishment and operation of conservation and mitigation banks. <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Planning/Banking>

Biogeographic Information and Observation System (BIOS)

BIOS is a system designed to enable the management, visualization, and analysis of biogeographic data collected by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and its Partner Organizations. <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/BIOS>

Areas of Conservation Emphasis (ACE)

ACE is a CDFW effort to analyze large amounts of map-based data in a targeted, strategic way, and expressed visually, so decisions can be informed around important goals like conservation of biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and climate change resiliency. <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/Analysis/Ace>

Visitor Use Management (VUM) Framework

VUM is a toolbox for visitor use management and addresses conservation issues. The framework also includes topic areas like capacity, indicators and thresholds, as well as the importance for monitoring recreation use. <https://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/VUM/Framework>