



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

California
2022: Annual Manager's Report

King Range National Conservation Area



Map



Accomplishments

The restoration of the Punta Gorda Lighthouse, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is a significant accomplishment for the King Range National Conservation Area (NCA) in 2022. The much-needed restoration work improved the deteriorating condition of the historic lighthouse and increased the safety of the site for the thousands of visitors who experience the lighthouse each year. The work included repair to the concrete lighthouse structure, the internal metal stairs, the metal lantern, and to the historic wood interior trim and shelves. The project required biological monitoring to be conducted alongside restoration work to assess all disturbance effects on the adjacent elephant and harbor seal colonies.



Challenges

The King Range NCA faced several challenges in 2022, none of which compare to the tragic death of a BLM volunteer from a large wave that crashed on shore at Black Sands Beach while on a training hike. As a result of the tragedy, the community came together and replaced a warning sign that is posted at the Black Sands Beach Trailhead. Several additional corrective actions have been implemented to safeguard against future incidents. This includes the development of additional safety signage at coastal access sites, updating the King Range NCA map and guide, updating internal training protocols, changing the recommended tide height threshold for one of the “impassible” zones on the Lost Coast Trail, and increased presence of BLM staff and volunteers at trailheads to share important safety information.



A less significant challenge facing the King Range NCA was reduced coastal access at Mal Coombs Park in Shelter Cove. The trail and wooden steps that had provided access down to the ocean were undermined from heavy surf during winter storms and were removed due to safety concerns. Staff installed a temporary path and handrail further from the erosion, which will buy some time to develop a permanent improved path. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) engineering staff assessed the site and developed

a new site plan with a stairway structure that will better weather the storms and erosion issues. The King Range NCA applied for Great American Outdoors Act funding to implement the improved access plan, but determination of funding may not be known until 2024. The King Range will continue to pursue funding sources to complete this important access project.



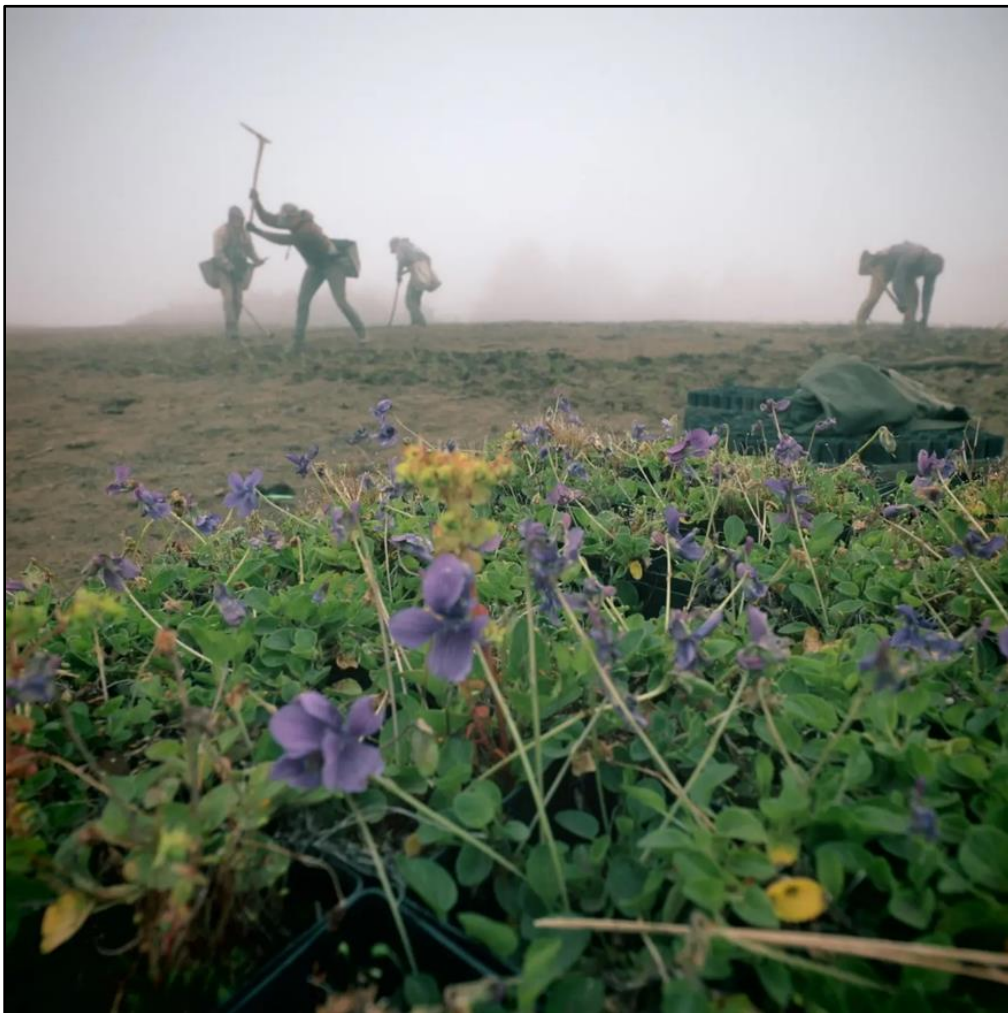
Visitors

The King Range NCA received 130,793 visits in 2022. This was a decrease of 11,983 visits since 2021 but is more consistent with visitation numbers prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Total King Range NCA visits include all sites and all visits, such as overnight wilderness visits, the day use sites in Shelter Cove, visitors to Black Sands Beach for a day, and dispersed use, such as hunting, camping outside of campgrounds, driving the backroads, and target shooting. Funding was acquired from the California State Coastal Conservancy to expand low-cost camping opportunities at Mattole Campground from 14 campsites to 23 campsites and to increase the number of parking spaces. The restoration of the historic Punta Gorda Lighthouse, a popular day hiking destination from Mattole Campground, has enhanced visitor safety and overall experience.

Partnerships

The King Range NCA has several strong and long-standing partnerships that are vital to accomplishing many important projects. Additionally, volunteers contributed 4,181 hours in the King Range NCA. Three projects stand out as examples of the work accomplished with partnerships or volunteers in 2022:

1) Invasive species treatments continued through funding acquired with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) King Range NCA and Wilderness Invasive project. Work was accomplished in partnership with the Mattole Restoration Council (MRC) and Friends of the Lost Coast (FOLC). MRC's backcountry invasive weeds crew of seven people conducted manual removal to treat invasive species populations using Pulaskis, shovels, Weed Wrenches and hand pulling. Work near Shelter Cove has been accomplished with volunteer days coordinated by BLM and FOLC that has focused on removing ice plant, fennel, pampas grass, and other invasive, non-native species found in BLM coastal recreation sites.



2) Through partnership with the King Range Alliance, volunteer “trailhead hosts” communicated with hundreds of visitors about coastal safety and tide hazards while collecting visitation data at Mattole and Black Sand Beach trailheads during busy holiday weekends.

3) Fifteen Sierra Club volunteers spent five days working on trail maintenance and marine debris collection on the Lost Coast Trail.



Science

In 2022, BLM and watershed restoration group partners completed a decade-long effort to restore three miles of the lower Mattole River and estuary. From 2012 to 2022 over \$3 million in grant funds were awarded to implement an array of projects aimed at improving the health of the ecosystem, with a focus on habitat for imperiled salmon and steelhead. In total, 1,800 feet of estuary slough channels were excavated and connected to the river, 500 whole trees were added using helicopters and heavy equipment to form complex wood jams, and 15,000 willow cuttings and 17,000 native plants were planted to add integrity to previously barren river islands and terraces.



Additionally, the Arcata Field Office fisheries biologist and two Watershed Stewards Program members partnered with the Mattole Salmon Group to complete salmon and steelhead population monitoring in the Mattole River and its tributaries. In the winter months surveyors documented the presence of redds (egg nests), live fish, and carcasses, and in the summer months surveyors conducted snorkel surveys to document the presence or absence of each species across the watershed.

Climate Impacts

Many cultural and recreational resources along the King Range NCA coastline are vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as large storm events that erode coastal bluffs. In response, the King Range NCA is working with the geospatial team at the BLM-National Operations Center (NOC) in Colorado to collect and process data to better understand how climate change is affecting the King Range coastline. The BLM collected high resolution photos during an overflight in 2020 and is combining these photos with available LiDar (remote sensing method used to measure variable distances to the Earth) data. This data shows the rate of erosion, or in some cases the rate of accretion, of soils along the coastline. Additional data was captured in July 2022 using a handheld GeoSLAM (Simultaneous Location and Mapping) scanner which

allows for data collection and 3D mapping without the need for GPS. The BLM will continue to create a long-term data set to quantify erosion rates in order to monitor trends and changes to the coastline over time. This will assist with adaptive planning efforts and to mitigate climate impacts when possible.



Climate Resiliency

Work continued on the \$4.4 million CalFire California Climate Investment (CCI) Forest Health grant, which covers the 1,200-acre Phase 1 of the King Range Forest Health and Community Protection project. Beginning in 2021 and running until 2025, the grant will reduce hazardous fuels and thin overstocked forests within feet of many roads and trails within the King Range NCA to improve overall forest health and increase climate resiliency. Biomass produced by the project is currently available to the local community for firewood collection with an online permit system. With the grant, the King Range NCA also began planning for Phase 2 of the King Range Forest Health and Community Protection project, which will treat an additional 1,500 acres adjacent to roads and trails.



Social and Environmental Justice

The Friends of the Lost Coast (FOLC) has continued to provide skilled environmental educators and teachers to present hands-on lessons in classrooms. The curricula for K-6 grade was designed specifically to be place-based for southern Humboldt County and includes monthly themes with correlating lessons for each grade level, building on a student's cognitive development and prior knowledge as they progress through the school year. Topics include science inquiry, rivers and oceans, archaeology and culture, geology, ecology, interrelationships, processes, energy, and watersheds. In the 2021-2022 school year, 96 lessons were taught in six Southern Humboldt schools to 1,120 students. During the Covid-19 pandemic FOLC worked on providing lessons online for students and also uploaded the entire curriculum for teachers and environmental educators to use in their own classrooms. Additionally, the Lost Coast Hikes & Lectures program is now online and Spanish speaking interpreters are now available to serve at in-person hikes and lectures.



Events

It was a successful year in the King Range NCA filled with many events. The highlights were two Artist-in-Residence programs in which artists lived and worked in the King Range NCA for 4 weeks to produce a collection of NCA inspired artworks. Each session included two community workshops, one for youth and another for adults, and a gallery showing where the community came out to view the artist's work. Additionally, the King Range NCA was one of five BLM locations to host Native American jazz musician and trumpeter Delbert Anderson and his band, D'DAT, during the 2022 Painted Mountains Tour. D'DAT visited for three days, during which time they met and played music with local Bear River Band tribal members, led a workshop with the Whitethorn community, and entertained a large welcoming crowd in the Shelter Cove Community Clubhouse. Lastly, the Bear River Band continued the tradition of holding the Salmon Return Ceremony at the Mouth of the Mattole River in April and November.





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