The background of the cover is a full-page photograph of a mountain landscape. In the foreground, there are large, light-colored rocks and patches of green, low-lying vegetation. A calm lake occupies the middle ground, with a few small, tree-covered islands. In the background, a large, rugged mountain peak is partially covered in snow, with other smaller peaks visible to the left and right. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds against a blue backdrop.

**THE JMT WILDERNESS CONSERVANCY**  
ANNUAL REPORT 2020

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Marla Stark

Looking back, never has this generation seen such sinister natural forces at work in our communities. They arrived in contagion and wildfire. With all of our best science, technology and willpower, we could not stop them, much less slow them down. The forces involved were beyond our reach. They tested our body politic and revealed deep injustices as the harm fell hardest on people of color and those less advantaged in our society.



A lethal virus lit up the nation's map with orange and red, spreading with the speed of jet travel across the planet. Then lightening strikes caused over 1,100 wildfires sparking the dry tinder made worse by rising temperatures and the prolonged droughts driven by climate change. The fires claimed four million acres (and counting) of oak woodland, valley foothills and pine forests. The blue sky of a summer's day turned to sepia-toned twilight that showered ashes.

In the face of this, our Conservancy was strangely resilient. We hope you enjoy reading about some of the high notes in this Annual Report. But it was a cohort of four remarkable students from Stanford University that set the tone. They hailed from hometowns across the country, converging to complete and clear the Forest Service's Covid-19 testing and coronavirus protocols. Deploying for nearly 8 weeks of backcountry tours, they navigated the risks of exposure and waves of smoke, without a single hitch.

You all saw the wonderful work these individuals completed in our ArcGIS StoryMap ( <https://arcg.is/1uvT5m> ). The public officials responsible for the JMT backcountry, as well as the hikers traveling through it, were so grateful for their commitment and what their service foretold, a nonprofit focused solely on the backcountry. At the end of the season, these student ambassadors helped raise our credibility as a reliable philanthropic partner and advanced our environmental mission.

I look forward to meeting more of you, hoping you will contribute generously to help us sustain this momentum with your year-end philanthropy. And to those of you who find our mission compelling, we invite you to join us on our annual JMT "Range of Light" Outing next August for a saunter in the Sierra. Please stay safe and well.

*The JMT Wilderness Conservancy is a nonprofit public benefit corporation tax exempt under IRC section 501(c)(3).*

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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*Author, "Hiking the John Muir Trail";  
UC Berkeley, PhD Alpine Botany*

## WRITE YOUR OWN LEGACY

Including the JMT Wilderness Conservancy in your philanthropy is an effective way to support our mission while furthering your own financial goals. Charitable contributions can reduce three kinds of federal taxes: income, capital gains and estate taxes.

For information: **contact Samantha Corti** [Sam@JMTwilderness.org](mailto:Sam@JMTwilderness.org)

Check or Wire Transfer: A check or wire transfer is the most direct means, with added tax benefits this year under the CARES Act.

Use Donor Advised Funds: Set aside money or assets for future giving, get an immediate tax deduction, and then donate when convenient.

Join Our "Fund for the Future": A substantial gift provides financial security for the Conservancy by yielding consistent revenue for our operational needs.

Transfer Appreciated Assets: Transferring appreciated stock or mutual funds is a tax-wise way to fund your gift.

Make a Bequest: Including the Conservancy in your will or living trust can make a lasting impact without affecting your current income level.

We are pleased to announce that  
Bernstein Private Wealth Management  
is the investment manager of our **"Fund for the Future"**.



**BERNSTEIN**

# CURRENT WILDERNESS



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# RESTORATION PROJECTS

## ANSEL ADAMS WILDERNESS

In 2021, the Conservancy will start with the first year of a \$1.6 million dollar, four-year, ecological restoration project in the Ansel Adams Wilderness. This will include extensive work on: 1. impacted alpine meadows; 2. illegal campsites; 3. degrading lake and river banks; 4. disrupted ephemeral watershed; 5. degraded “social” trails; and 6. natural and cultural resource surveys. This will help create a more resilient habitat that can better withstand annual temperature increases and fluctuating snowpack, provide reliable habitat for sensitive species, and allow for sustainable recreation for generations to come.

## EVOLUTION VALLEY

This season, we funded the work of specialized ecologists in completing jurisdictional wetland and meadow delineations for four sensitive and highly-impacted alpine meadows in Kings Canyon National Park. Evolution, McClure, Colby and Upper Colby Meadows adjacent to Evolution Creek had previously been identified among the highest priority candidates for this restoration by a California-state funded environmental study in 2018. The work provided the data collection and project specifications that will be a part of the next four-year restoration project, *below*. Further strategic planning will continue in the 2021 season with the environmental compliance required by state and federal regulations.

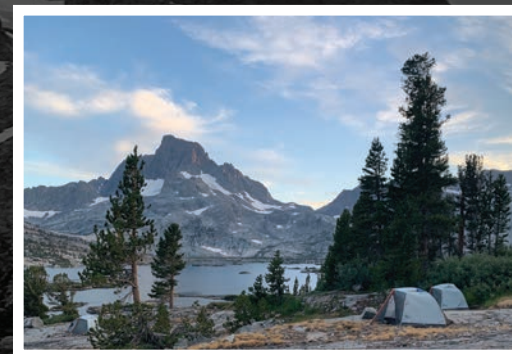
## KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARK

An estimated \$1.6 million restoration project in Kings Canyon National Park will restore the four alpine meadows listed above, the wetland and crossing below Wanda Lake and the ephemeral watershed on Darwin’s Bench above Evolution Lake with construction of a new class one trail. This project will mitigate years of high-use impacts through these high alpine regions and support several endangered species. This includes camera traps to assess the numbers and health of the elusive Sierra Nevada red fox (*vulpes vulpes necator*) and habitat support for the mountain yellow-legged frog (*rana sierrae*). Final data collection and surveys for the project will be completed in the 2021 season through an internship program at University of California Merced.

## 2020 JMT "RANGE OF LIGHT" OUTING ( August 6 - 11 )



In August, we could not have had a more engaging group of people on our annual JMT Outing, including Wade Crowfoot, Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency. After a reception at the Ansel Adams Gallery in Yosemite Valley, we shuttled to our hotel in Mammoth Lakes. Starting the next morning, we walked the JMT northwards 35 miles through the Ansel Adams Wilderness to spend four nights on the trail, escorted by our trusted mule team. Around the evening meals, we met the forest professionals who care for this wild landscape and chatted with our JMT Intern Cohort. We had time on the trail to debate the great issues of our nation, exchange stories of our own adventures in wilderness, stopping to silently take in the rising peaks, rushing waters and fleeting wildlife of the Sierra Nevada. The trip bound us all in friendship and a common wish to conserve this landscape. *(Limited to 12 "Range of Light" donors.)*



# JMT INTERNSHIP PROGRAM



Left to right: Hannah Young, Spearfish, SD; Megan Belongia, Omaha, NE; Jamie Holmstrom, Woodside CA; Claire Freeman, JMT WC Manager of Grants & Field Programs; and Phoebe Richardson, Swarthmore, PA.

In partnership with Stanford University, the JMT Wilderness Conservancy launched an internship program that provides essential support for a \$1.6 million, four-year, multidisciplinary restoration project we are funding in the JMT region next season. This past July, we began with baseline data collection, site assessments, and project development in the most highly-congested areas in the Ansel Adams Wilderness/Inyo National Forest.

Our four JMT Interns, supervised by Claire Freeman, Manager of Grants & Field Programs, spent eight weeks in the field working alongside the Inyo National Forest wilderness leadership and scientists. Although they encountered a few extra challenges with COVID-19 risks and smoke from wildfires, their work continued efficiently and without any issues. These students will receive academic credit toward their majors in the Earth Systems Program and in Environmental Engineering.

We believe the JMT Internship Program is an important way to inspire future environmental leaders. Our first year was a huge success, thanks to this extraordinary team and funding from the S.D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation!!



## CAMPSITE INVENTORIES

The team completed a thorough survey and inventory of illegal campsites and fire circles across 17.5 miles of the JMT. Many remote areas had never been inventoried before. Each site was GPS/GIS located, described and classified for the comprehensive regional restoration work that is planned in the next four years.



## BRAIDED TRAILS & DAMAGED MEADOWS

All braided and recessed trails were similarly catalogued, described and GPS/GIS located across the region. They were found in sensitive habitat, through fragile meadows and along watershed and drainages. The data will be used to specify restoration plans suitable for each type of terrain.



## ARCHEOLOGY & ENDANGERED SPECIES

Many archeological sites were noted and shared with the Forest Service archaeologist. Here obsidian flakes which are unique to the Mammoth area indicate the presence of indigenous hunters millennia ago. In addition, the team mapped the native habitat of several state and federally-listed species for recovery efforts in the next four years.



## ENCOUNTER SURVEYS

The team completed much-needed Encounter Surveys to track and interview the number of daily visitors to each region. The interns captured data about group size, permit restrictions, travel patterns and lengths of stays that will inform ranger deployment and campsite needs, as well as permit management and enforcement.

## LOOKING BACK



May 17, 2020 marked the 105th Anniversary of the John Muir Trail, the oldest recreational hiking trail in America. It was created by California law in 1915. As many of you know, the coronavirus forced cancellation of our commemorative Gala at the Carolands Château this year. An effective vaccine and broad adoption across the State may allow us to honor this milestone in the future.



For now, please enjoy our new JMT interactive map, the result of extensive study of the historical records around the JMT's construction from 1915 to 1938. This map shows the route that best combines the historic spirit of the JMT's original planners along with current environmental and managerial concerns. We are beginning to incorporate indigenous routes and place names to reflect the ancient history of the area's many tribes.

[JMTwilderness.org/map](http://JMTwilderness.org/map)

## LOOKING FORWARD



Photos © 2009 John Dittli



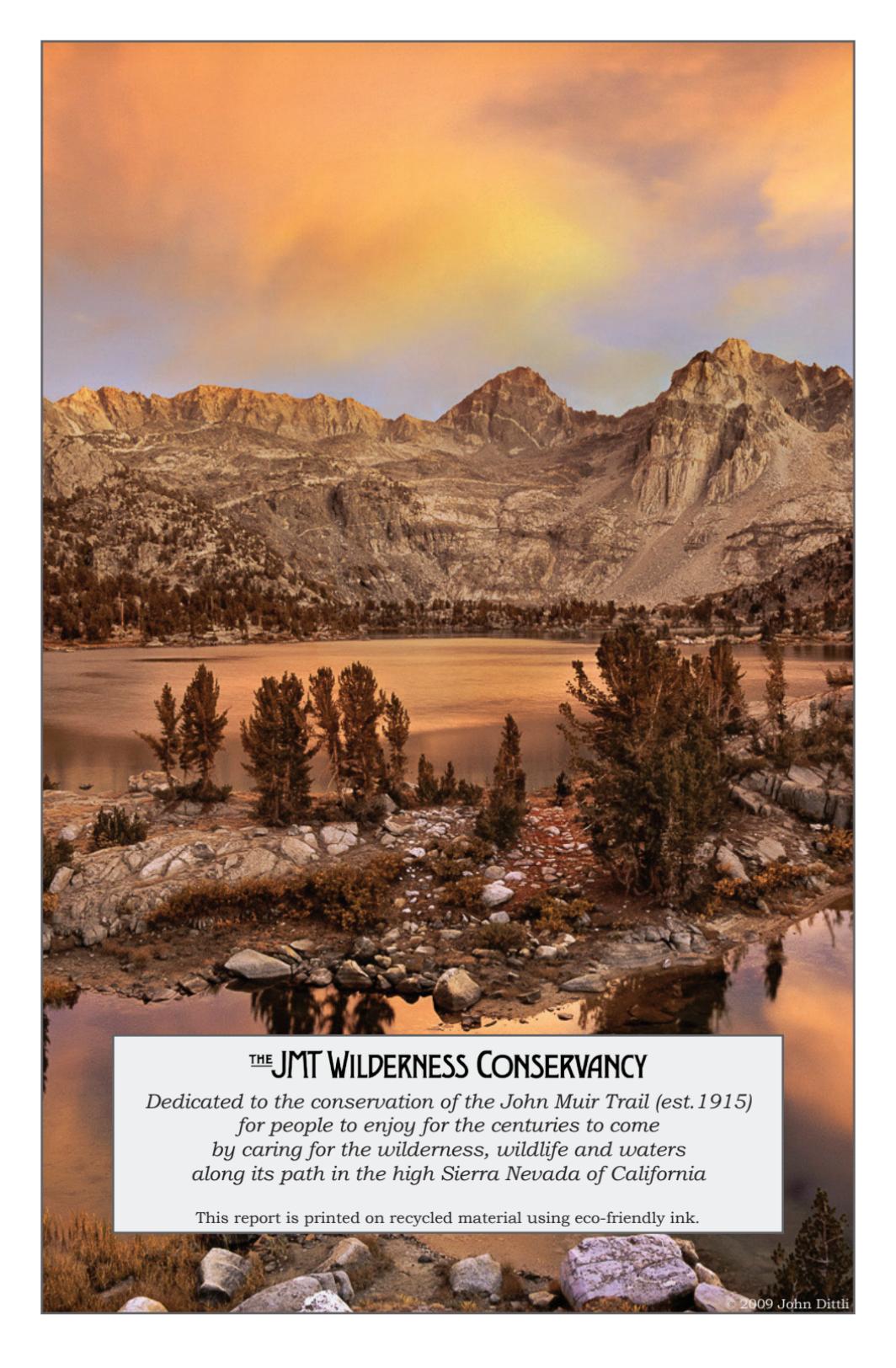
There is a great deal of work across the JMT that has been delayed or deferred because of changing priorities or budget shortfalls. Our federal partners, primarily the Inyo National Forest and Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks, are leading the way to identify the projects most in need of our funding support. Below are only a few.

In Kings Canyon, the area adjacent to Rae Lakes (*pictured on back cover*) is in need of multi-disciplinary restoration. This area includes the range of the Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep which is in need of surveys and management to support its population health and possible expansion across the region.

Another quadrant of Kings Canyon near Forester Pass has been assessed for multidisciplinary restoration. High-use impacts have been detected from the Upper Basin to the historic crossing at Junction Pass. Wetlands, habitat and watershed there need attention to restore ecological health.

This year, we began an effort to curate the history of indigenous cultures who have lived in and explored the Sierra Nevada for millennia. Following up on discoveries of obsidian flakes this season, we are coordinating with the Inyo's archaeologists and will be reaching out to tribal leaders to collect the diverse stories and place names across the region.

Many other projects are overdue and waiting. With your support, we can move forward. **Please consider a generous donation!**



**THE JMT WILDERNESS CONSERVANCY**

*Dedicated to the conservation of the John Muir Trail (est. 1915)  
for people to enjoy for the centuries to come  
by caring for the wilderness, wildlife and waters  
along its path in the high Sierra Nevada of California*

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