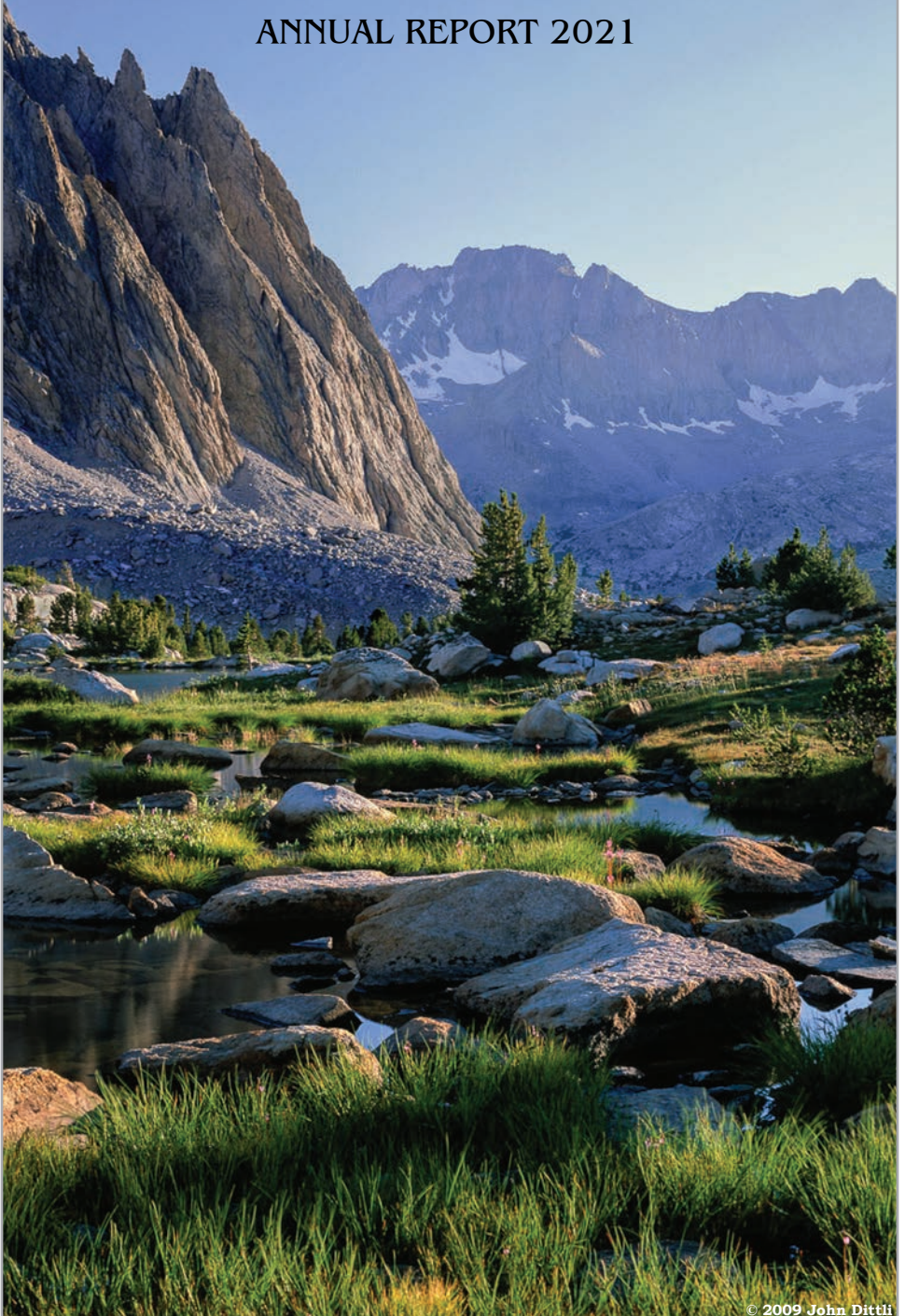


# THE JMT WILDERNESS CONSERVANCY

## ANNUAL REPORT 2021



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*Mount Stanford, Kings Canyon National Park*

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Marla Stark



This year has been a bellwether of change. For the first time, the environmental challenges we face across the planet have risen to top priorities. A common refrain is that we are running out of time. There is an urgency to take action.

For the JMT Wilderness Conservancy, we have come of age. The necessary federal and state relationships are familiar and strong. The level of trust is high. We have delivered on our promises. Our team listens thoughtfully and partners successfully to pull major projects together and cooperatively launch them. Our undergraduate interns arrive in the backcountry well-trained and ready to work. The data they collect is fully accepted by agencies long skeptical of accuracy and reliability. We are the nonprofit to call when long-deferred yet vital restoration projects are taken off the shelf.

Taking action locally in the central Sierra Nevada has been the right thing to do. Five years ago, I accompanied some close friends to hike 90 miles of the John Muir Trail from Independence to Florence Lake. Having done most of my backpacking while in my 20's, I was able to see the region through mature eyes. Its critical importance was obvious when seen from the thin air of those mountain passes—immense watersheds, widely diverse habitat, a web of impossibly lush meadows and wetlands, clear cold water flowing everywhere in waterfalls, lakes, rivers and streams.

But I also could see that the wilderness was quickly degrading from high use and extreme weather events. It is happening within my lifetime—a blink of an eye in generational terms. My own adult children can see the growing environmental damage.

In 2021, this Conservancy is making a difference. With our programmatic partnerships well-established, we now must turn to your philanthropic support. Two major projects are under way: in the Ansel Adams Wilderness and in Kings Canyon. Our JMT Internship Program is successfully launched. There are at least three more major project areas in the queue just waiting for funds. And our organization needs your support to meet growing demands.

Please consider this mission in your giving plans. Your dollars will have an outsized impact. Our Conservancy is doing boots-on-the ground environmental work and educating qualified young leaders.

Thank you for your consideration.

*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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**Elizabeth Wenk**  
*Author, "John Muir Trail" (5th Ed.), "Wildflowers of the High Sierra and John Muir Trail" (2nd Ed.); UC Berkeley, PhD Alpine Botany*

## JOIN OUR EFFORT

Please give to help us restore and conserve the wilderness and ecosystems along the JMT. Not only will you join committed environmental philanthropy, your choice of giving may reduce several kinds of taxes, including income, capital gains, and estate taxes.

Please visit our website or contact [Toby@JMTwilderness.org](mailto:Toby@JMTwilderness.org) to discuss which giving options may be best for you.

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



# CURRENT WILDERNESS



## ANSEL ADAMS WILDERNESS

**Project Area:** The Ansel Adams Wilderness north of Mammoth Lakes, along 15 miles of the John Muir Trail from Shadow Creek to Donohue Pass.

**Project Goal:** Ensure robust natural water systems, revitalize habitat to balance recreational uses, and implement ecological recovery strategies to improve regional resiliency against the impacts of human traffic and climate change.

**Why this work matters:** This region is the source watershed for the Owens River and the north fork of the San Joaquin River. Home to the iconic Thousand Island Lake and Banner Peak, backcountry visitation has skyrocketed. In 2018 alone, the Inyo National Forest reported a more than 250% increase in visitors to the area. Recovery plans use durable long-term restoration methods.

### *2021 Season Achievements:*

- ✿ Restored over the 300-acres containing degraded terrain that contribute to water contamination and habitat destruction;
- ✿ Deployed three undergraduate research interns for 8 weeks in the backcountry to monitor work, to collect critical data and survey traffic for management strategies;
- ✿ Constructed a new log pedestrian bridge and repaired damaged riverbanks and riparian terrain up and downstream along Shadow Creek;
- ✿ Deployed six newly-funded rangers for education at the restoration sites and enforcement throughout the region.

# RESTORATION PROJECTS



## KINGS CANYON/EVOLUTION VALLEY

**Project Area:** The wilderness along 25.5 miles of the JMT from Sallie Keys Lake in the Sierra National Forest to Muir Pass in Kings Canyon National Park.

**Project Goal:** Restore approximately 1,500 acres of upper alpine meadows, connected riparian zones, talus watershed basins and stream-side assets from Selden Pass descending to Evolution Valley and climbing up to Wanda Lake.

**Why this work matters:** This is the heart of the San Joaquin River watershed, an area of enormous ecological and economic value. Because of its fame and relatively easy access from Fresno and Florence Lake, the region is one of the most heavily impacted by high recreational use. Its high elevation makes it vulnerable to impacts from extreme climate-driven weather.

### *2021 Season Achievements:*

- ✿ Supported a meadow/ wetland delineation report on several key assets from Sallie Keys Lake southward to Evolution Lake;
- ✿ Assisted an archaeological survey on many areas of planned disturbance for the 8-years of restoration work, infrastructure improvements and trail re-routing;
- ✿ Deployed three JMT interns in the region for 8 weeks from mid-July to late August;
- ✿ Completed data collection coordinated with the USFS and NPS specialists for GIS-located damaged areas as well as impact surveys.



# MAKING IT WILD AGAIN

Our mission is to repair the environmental damage along the JMT region from decades of heavy recreational use and extreme weather events. We focus on the aquatic assets: lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands and lush meadows. This is the “vascular system” for these high alpine landscapes and is essential to its ecological health and sustainability.

We fund the capital investments needed to restore the degraded land to its natural and “wild” state. Infrastructure improvements, such as trail re-routing away from sensitive assets or new bridges and durable crossings prevent further damage from occurring. These measures allow habitat to recover and invite the return of many rare and endangered species. Reintroduction strategies become feasible.

In the high elevation of the central Sierra Nevada, work is arduous and must be completed in the few summer months when terrain is free of snow and frozen ground. To be effective and durable, **a project may take 8 years or more to complete.**

## 2021 Season Restoration Sites



*Aerial view of Shadow Lake, Shadow Creek corridor, and Ediza Lake in the Ansel Adams Wilderness. Sites that underwent passive or active restoration July - August 2021 are represented by red dots. All sites shown above were illegal and impacting sensitive habitat and aquatic assets.*

# STEWARDED LEADERSHIP

Started as a way to account for the use of public funds in our field work, the JMT Internship Program is now a central pillar of our mission. With each passing year, we have seen these undergraduates learn and grow in their environmental majors and as individuals. The 8-weeks of backcountry experience have proven to be inspiration for a lifetime of environmental leadership in whatever career they may pursue.

Our JMT intern cohorts are assigned in three-person teams to remote regions along the JMT a hundred or more miles apart. They spend 8-weeks in wilderness carrying everything they need to survive in their backpacks, working alongside federal specialists and scientists.

In years preceding a major project launch, they help collect data for statutory compliance and permits. In succeeding project years, they monitor and report on progress, help with field work and collect the data needed to refine management strategies.



*Inyo National Forest specialists assessing a site for rare and endangered plant and animal species.*



*Restoration crews working on a highly-impacted site along the Shadow Creek corridor.*



*Constructing a durable log bridge buttressed with granite slabs & boulders.*



*Interns discuss wilderness management with the Inyo National Forest head ranger.*



## 2021 ANSEL ADAMS WILDERNESS OUTING

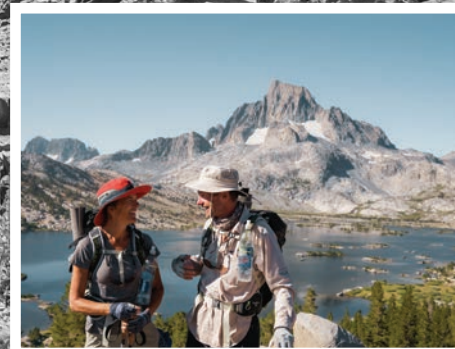
This August, we completed our 3rd annual hike through the Ansel Adams Wilderness from Mammoth Lakes traveling north over Donohue Pass to Tuolumne Meadows. Hosting a group of our leadership donors, we hiked 37 miles of the JMT in 5 days stopping to see our first large-scale restoration project along the meadows, wetlands and river banks of this iconic region. Around the evening meals, we met the federal forest professionals who are responsible for this wilderness and chatted with our JMT Intern Cohort.



We also host a second more challenging hike, the Trans-Sierra Nevada Outing, which covers 50 miles from Bishop on the eastern Sierra to summit Muir Pass descending through Evolution Valley. Cancelled this year because of wildfire smoke incursions, this hike offers an on-the-ground introduction to our second major restoration project getting underway in Kings Canyon.

With all our gear on pack-mules, these hikes give those interested in this Conservancy a chance to see our work in action while considering transformational multi-year levels of support.

**We look forward to hosting both JMT Outings next season!** Both Outings require guests to be fit and ready for high elevation, and are strictly limited in number of participants.





# JMT INTERNSHIP PROGRAM



*Our Kings Canyon JMT Intern Cohort: Kelly, Isabelle & Eliana.*

From our first season with the JMT Internship Program, it was clear the well-trained and well-prepared undergraduate research interns were working effectively to support the field projects. The federal scientists and specialists they met quickly capitalized in using their capable hands to collect the raw data needed for statutory compliance and effective management strategies.

Our partnership with Stanford University has expanded. We started with the School of Earth, Energy & Environmental Sciences for recruiting, but soon received applications from the School of Engineering and Biology Department as well. These field internships with significant scientific engagement resonate across campus in many disciplines. We are now working with the *Bill Lane Center for the American West* in developing graduate teaching opportunities for our intern alumni, thus extending the reach of their experience to students interested in pursuing environmental careers. Other projects to bring students to the broader JMT region are being discussed, such as a 5-day tour for the “Alternative Spring Break” program.

The JMT Internship Program is now essential to the management and accountability of our wilderness restoration projects. Three-person cohorts will multiply in number as new project areas are added. This is a unique experience in environmental learning and leadership. We believe every profession and discipline will need to be informed by environmental awareness and possess a focus on sustainability in the future.



## *Soirée for the Sierra Nevada*



This October, we held our first annual *Soirée for the Sierra Nevada*. It was a glittering gala designed to inform and inspire leadership around the immense value of the central Sierra Nevada to California and the nation. Original enlargements of Ansel Adams’ iconic photography graced the floral displays around the exquisitely-beautiful Carolands Château to highlight our mission. The extraordinary music of Stanford Jazz floated in the air. People mingled in the marble halls chatting until after midnight.

For those of you who were there, perhaps it was the sheer pleasure of being together socializing on a topic of common cause. Wade Crowfoot, Secretary of California’s Natural Resources Agency, captured the moment when he called this Conservancy “small but mighty” in its mission to fund capital improvements across the 2.8 million acres of fragile wilderness. Our JMT Interns from Stanford University spoke about their unique and inspiring backcountry experience. We could see a new generation of environmental leadership taking shape. It all combined to make for an intimate and magical night. We look forward to hosting this event again next year!



*Wade Crowfoot meets with Claire Freeman, our Manager of Grants & Field Programs, and our JMT Internship alumni.*



*Rae Lakes, Kings Canyon National Park*

*(Candidate site for future restoration: Woods Creek to Glen Pass)*



**THE JMT WILDERNESS CONSERVANCY**

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

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