



## President's Message

**T**rails are as important as they have ever been. Once a primary means of getting from point A to point B, nowadays they allow us to step away from an increasingly urban landscape and reconnect to Nature.

Many of the trails in the Santa Monica Mountains originated from native peoples primarily seeking sustenance, shelter, and trade. Over time, the native peoples were displaced, but their trails were extended, improved and widened. Early trail builders often paid little attention to grade or long-term sustainability. Over time, however, trail design evolved. The influence of pack animals led to gentler, more manageable grades. Modern techniques have resulted in trails that shed water from the tread instead of funneling it down the trail. Alongside these intentionally built routes, you'll still find dirt roads built by ranchers and "social trails," formed simply by repeated human use—often the most direct path, regardless of impact or grade.

The Trails Council has long been at the forefront advocating for the creation of the Backbone Trail and the maintenance of this and other trails. The forces of nature (rain and fire) create a one-two punch that can obliterate a trail in a brief period. NPS and State Parks employ crews on a seasonal basis, but with so many miles of trail, they cannot do it all. That's where volunteers can make a difference. Together we can extend the reach of these crews, thus helping to prolong the life of our trails.

Working with a trail crew changes how you see the landscape. Fostering a deeper understanding of how trails are built, how they function, and how fragile they can be. It's no surprise that the Trails

Council supports the largest trail work event in the region, Trail Days. We have already reached capacity (250) this year and have a waiting list. Trail Days is just one of more than 50 events that the SMMTC organizes annually, offering opportunities not only to work on trails, but also to learn a little about botany, geology, hydrology, and ornithology along the way.

**Barb Thomas**, the primary organizer of Trail Days, has stepped down from the board after twenty years of dedicated service. During her tenure, Barb was a strong advocate for equestrian interests and served in many leadership roles, including crew leader, vice president, and president. As the Trail Days organizer - 15 years and counting - she has made it one of the organization's most important and successful events.

Her commitment, leadership, and steady presence have left a lasting mark on the organization and on the trails we all enjoy. While she has stepped away from the board, Barb remains committed to our mission, and we are grateful that her passion and support will continue.



Woodland Star  
*Lithopragma affine*

**Don Brusselars** is our new vice president. He has been a crew leader and has organized the Backbone Trek for the past several years. He has held various roles on the board, most notably on the membership committee.

**George Sherman**, a member since 1996, is our new president. He joined the board in 2005 and has served the organization in many roles over the years, including webmaster, crew leader, newsletter editor, and vice president.

See you on the trail! *George Sherman*  
George Sherman, President

## Paws to Action

We're so fortunate to get wildlife action on our property. Almost every night we hear hooting from our favorite male great horned owl and, at times, a female owl responding to him.

But we're also getting coyotes. To watch a coyote, or a coyote pack, is an amazing glimpse into the world of these magnificent animals. The other night we had two coyotes sleeping next to each other and snuggling their noses under their tails to keep themselves warm from the cold winter night.



The color of their winter fur and them all curled up made them look like big cinnamon buns.

We watched and heard four coyotes lifting their heads up and howling and barking their nightly coyote tune. It's our favorite song. We've seen a pack of coyotes playing together and practicing their hunting skills by taking one of our small

plastic rabbits in their mouth, tossing it up in the air and then swatting it with their paws.

We've even seen one suntanning during the day, and then going under our shrub to get some shade because it was too warm. Hmmm.... we do the same thing when we get warm.

**It's important to understand their role in nature. The mice and rats that most of us don't like are delicious and tasty meals for the coyote and give balance to nature.**

It's a treat to see them in our yard and doing their coyote thing. Please try to give them the respect they deserve.

-Denise Pomonik

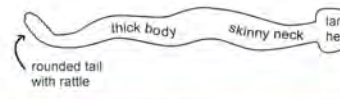
### Northern Pacific Rattlesnake

(*Crotalus oreganus*)

venomous



pupil (black spot) of the eye shaped like an ellipse ↓



### Pacific Gopher Snake

(*Pituophis catenifer*)

harmless



pupil (black spot) of the eye shaped like a circle ●



Illustration by Anoosh Moutafian (anooshbooks.com) in association with Things That Creep (ThingsThatCreep.org)

## Opportunities to Serve

We currently have board openings and always welcome new trail workers and crew leaders. Skills in areas such as grant writing, event logistics, financial stewardship, or project support are also greatly valued. Whether through leadership or specialized expertise, your involvement can help advance our mission and expand our impact.

# TRAIL DAYS

APRIL 17, 18, 19 2026

Trail Days is a weekend for individuals, families, and groups to give back to the parks by helping maintain trails. Partners for this event include California State Parks National Park Service, Santa Monica Mountains Trails Council, CORBA, and Santa Monica Mountains Task Force of Sierra Club.



HELD AT POINT MUGU STATE PARK  
**OUR 43<sup>RD</sup> YEAR!**



**WAIT LIST AVAILABLE**  
[www.smmtc.org/TrailDays](http://www.smmtc.org/TrailDays)

# Trail Work



(l-r) Jerry, Don, John

## Highlights:

- **Talepop** – Four events with 42 volunteers & 256 hours of labor over three Saturdays and a Wednesday.
- **Rogers Road** – Worked with the State Parks and CORBA to restore the trail, with 53 volunteers contributing 318 hours over four Saturdays and a Wednesday.
- **Nicholas Flat Trails** – Seven events with 81 volunteers contributing 387 hours over seven Saturdays.
- **Mattingly Trail** - Three events, 45 volunteers & 246 hours.

Agency Report: Stats from 2025-09-01 to 2026-03-27

Agency	Events	Volunteers	Regulars	Casuals	LaborHours
NPS	6	75	59	16	427
State Parks	43	463	337	126	2,595
<b>Totals</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>538</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>3,022</b>

## What Tasks Make Up the Trail Work Event?

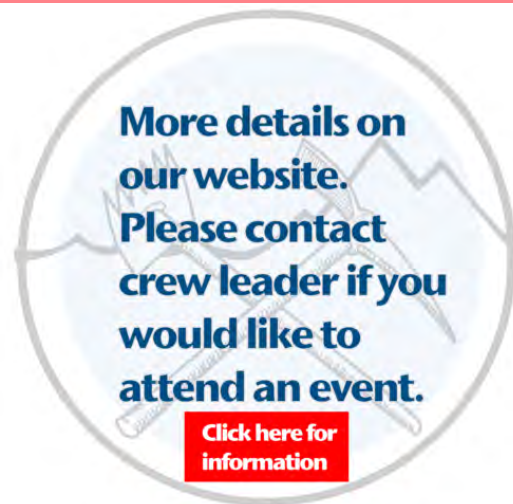
**Brushing:** cutting back overgrown brush to open up the trail corridor. Loppers are used to clip small branches and hand saws are used for larger branches. Cut brush needs to be hidden away.

**Drain repair:** creating paths for water to flow off the trail or clearing out debris that is blocking the flow of water.

**Restoring tread:** reworking the trail's surface by digging it to the proper width, removing organic material, digging out protruding rocks and roots and restoring the trail's outslope.

## Upcoming Events

Start Date	Trail
2026-03-28	Nicholas Flat
2026-04-04	Mishe Mokwa - Circle X Ranch
2026-04-11	Fossil Trail (BBT near Hondo)
2026-04-18	Trail Days
2026-04-19	Trail Days
2026-04-28	Upper Hondo
2026-05-16	Serrano Canyon
2026-05-23	TBD
2026-06-06	National Public Lands Day



# Los Leones Puncheon Project



Several months ago, the Trails council entered a collaboration with State Parks to replace five puncheons which were destroyed in the Palisades Fire (January 2025). What is a puncheon you may ask? In general, a puncheon is a timber boardwalk, built close to the ground to cross watercourses or wet, boggy areas. In this implementation, the puncheons take the form of small footbridges, without handrails, fifteen to seventeen feet in length to cross a shallow streambed.

**The project entails the replacement of five puncheons on the lower Los Leones Trail, which were destroyed by the 2025 Palisades fire. The plan is to parse the project into five sub-projects, with each sub-project to be implemented as an Eagle Scout Project.**

State Parks will provide overall management, technical support and limited Park Staff labor. The Trails Council will provide coordination/management of the Eagle Scout and scouting participants, technical support and onsite project supervision. The Eagle Scout and supporting volunteers, under the supervision of State Parks

Staff and Trails Council volunteers, will organize and provide labor to construct the puncheons. State Parks and SMMTC will share the required expense for the project.

Startup of the project was delayed due to unforeseen issues with material procurement and Eagle Scout scheduling. The program is now well underway. All materials for the first two sub-projects are on hand, and the first puncheon was successfully constructed over the weekend of February 22–23. The second sub-project was completed March 8–15. A third Eagle Scout candidate has surveyed the project and is expected to carry out the third sub-project sometime in May.

This project exemplifies all aspects of the SMMTC mission: commitment to the maintenance and preservation of trails and commitment to our partners and the community. Our financial contributions to the project would not be possible if it were not for contributions from our generous benefactors.



ARC'TERYX

-Jerry Mitcham

**Thank You to Arc'teryx and The Ranch Malibu for funding a significant portion of this project.**

# Point Mugu State Park Signs Project

Designed by Luke Matjas



Designed by Jon Sheldon



Jon Sheldon and crew have continued on their quest to replace signs in Point Mugu State Park. Artist, CSUCI Professor, and trail runner **Luke Matjas has designed** a new series of trail signs that not only inform, but also spark curiosity about other potential destinations ahead.

**One of the primary objectives was to illustrate not only the trail system within the interior valley, but also the available exit routes**, ensuring that trail users can navigate confidently rather than wandering aimlessly on previously unsigned trails. Eight of the signs have graphics with an appropriate “You are here” indicator to better convey information to the public.

Several signs remain to be installed in La Jolla Valley. Signs for Serrano Valley will be in the next phase.



Photo: Jon Sheldon



## **Briefly describe something interesting or unique about your background?**

I was raised in the San Fernando Valley with my aunt and uncle. Growing up I was never exposed to the great outdoors. I never would have anticipated having a career with the National Park Service (NPS). It has been gratifying and a life changing reward to have landed in such a wonderful job. I am also blessed to be the mother of two beautiful children.

## **Is there a project you did that you are proud of? Describe it.**

I am very proud to have been part of the completion of the Backbone Trail. For over 28 years I have been part of a team that met a goal that many had dreamed of. I participated in the planning, design and construction which included installing bridges, culverts, retaining walls and the removal of 40 square miles of brushed trail corridor leaving no trace of it! My work on the Backbone Trail gave reality to a dream. In 2016, on the 100th birthday of the NPS, the Backbone Trail was recognized as a National Recreation Trail.

## **What is your favorite thing about your work?**

I love working in the mountains!! One of my favorite things about my job is that it helps me stay healthy. It kind of forces me to stay in shape! So, I pretty much get paid to work out and beautify the trails throughout the Santa Monica Mountains! How cool is that! Right? It has become such a big

part of who I am. I enjoy sharing the knowledge I've gained. I'm glad to witness and know that the places I love and work at will be preserved because there are so many who take pride in protecting them.

## **What do you hope to accomplish/or have accomplished by doing the work you do?**

By constructing and maintaining trails it allows the public to connect with nature, whether it be to exercise or recharge your mind and spirit. It's therapeutic and healing!

## **What is one way your job makes a difference to the public/to wildlife?**

Performing the job I do allows me to protect and preserve the natural resources for present and future generations to enjoy.

## **Briefly describe your connection to nature and/or the outdoors.**

Throughout the 28 plus years I have been a trail blazer, it has educated me in the importance of protecting our environment. I am also passing on my enthusiasm for nature to my children and all who are part of my life. The trails that I've helped maintain and construct are some of the places where I will leave a part of me on this earth forever.

*- Roger Young*

## Individual Membership

- Annual - \$35     Family - \$60
- Lifetime - \$360 Can also be paid over 3 consecutive years @ \$120 per year

## Business Membership

- Supporter - \$100
- Patron - \$250
- Benefactor - \$500

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_



Dues are on a rolling 12-month basis. Membership dues are effective the first of the month following receipt of funds; membership will be effective for 12 months. Please make your check payable to SMMTC and mail it to P.O. Box 345, Agoura Hills, CA 91376. Memberships can also be purchased on our website using Paypal.

[Make a Donation?](#)

*SMMTC is a tax exempt, non-profit organization under IRS code 501(c)(3)*  
Tax ID: 95-3911604

**Thank you for your continued support!**

## Board of Directors

- George Sherman, President**
- Don Brusselars, Vice President**
- Peter Sullivan, Treasurer**
- Roger Young, Secretary**
- Robert Bittner**
- Denise Pomonik**
- Livia Szoke**
- Vanessa Ting**
- Vacant**
- Ruth Gerson, President Emerita**

## Upcoming Events

- 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Trail Days** — April 17<sup>th</sup> to April 19<sup>th</sup> 2026
- 21<sup>st</sup> Backbone Trek** — May 2<sup>nd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> 2026
- Annual Dinner Meeting** — October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2026

### Board Meetings (Currently held via Zoom)

*Board Meetings are open to the public and are on the 4th Thursday of the month at 7:00 pm. There are 3 exceptions: No meeting in August; Nov & Dec, meet on 1st Thursday.*

## Generous Supporter:

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## CONTACT US

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REVISED: APR 6, 2026	George Sherman, Newsletter Editor Jon Sheldon, Ruth Feldon, Proof Readers	

*Our newsletter is published twice a year, in spring and fall.*

### OUR STORY

Since 1969, the Santa Monica Mountains Trails Council has been the only organization devoted to representing all trail user groups in the Santa Monica Mountains. We are a volunteer nonprofit organization, dedicated to establishing, preserving and maintaining the public trail system throughout the Santa Monica Mountains and adjacent areas through education, advocacy and partnership with public and private sectors. We coordinate with various government agencies to enhance and preserve the trail system. We assist in negotiations with property owners regarding trail alignments. We promote public awareness and build, monitor and maintain trails.