

Nolina Peak: A Conservation Campaign to Preserve 639 Acres in Joshua Tree

Nolina Peak - The Opportunity

Opportunity arrives, and when it is a great opportunity, you grab it. In 2006, the Land Trust was told about 639 acres for sale in Joshua Tree bordering Joshua Tree National Park. The sellers wanted the land to be protected – would we help? We would, and here is why.

These pristine acres are part of a greater whole – Quail Mountain – largely protected as wilderness within Joshua Tree National Park. This section, jutting into the rapidly growing community of Joshua Tree, was zoned for one house per 40 acres, each house to be reached by roads fragmenting the steep slopes.

The peak, rising 900 feet from the desert floor, is a desert wild land of ancient nolinias, Joshua trees, Mojave yuccas, piñon pines, juniper, and scrub oaks. It is a high altitude ecosystem with a full suite of plants and animals. The land carries the scars of fire and drought as well as millions of days of hot sun and cold night skies. Serrano Indians have hunted its slopes and cowboys have pastured their cattle at its base. The mountain has supported the growth of individual nolinias for hundreds – perhaps thousands – of years.

The Campaign

During the campaign to acquire Nolina Peak, we met both residents and visitors alike that also valued this magnificent ridgeline for its untouched view shed and open space. Rather than see a housing development erase this treasure, over 400 individuals and families joined with the Land Trust and shared the vision of saving Nolina Peak. Many gave substantial donations beyond their comfort level to build an acquisition fund of approximately \$90,000. Acknowledging this community support, and sharing the belief that Nolina Peak's flora and fauna were important to National Park boundaries, a conservation foundation with a strategic vision for the desert provided the additional funds to acquire Nolina Peak on May 5, 2007.

Celebrations of Success – Protection forever

On June 21, 2008 Land Trust supporters came together on top of Nolina Peak to give thanks. The event was convened and blessed by the words and flute music of Serrano elder, Ernest Siva. Tony Soares, a local potter using traditional materials and techniques, provided an olla (a clay vessel) which was filled with the names of all those who contributed, campaign mementos, and pieces of nature, and the olla was buried. Remarks by Curt Sauer, Superintendent of Joshua Tree National Park, promised that Nolina Peak would come under the permanent protection of the National Park Service. Mojave Max, mascot for the threatened desert tortoise, greeted us at Black Rock Visitor Center, where a reception continued the joyous celebration.

On October 3, 2008 the Federal Register noticed the Joshua Tree National Park boundary change, officially drawing Nolina Peak within the protective embrace of the Park Service.

The Legacy

A walk to the top of Nolina peak (1.5 miles of fairly gradual slope) rewards with the best view of the Morongo Basin (north) and deep into the Quail Mountain Wilderness (south). Be on the lookout for wildlife! Our thanks to our community and to all those who supported the Nolina Peak acquisition.