

**EASTERN
SIERRA
REGION**

**VISITOR
CONNECTION
PACKAGE**

A Framework
for the Development
and Implementation of
a Regional Voice for
Sustainable Recreation
in the Eastern Sierra

20/21



Funding for this project has been provided by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, an agency of the State of California, under the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access For All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68) and in support of the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



Public lands in the United States hold the creation stories, burial grounds, and ceremonies of Indigenous people who were killed or forcibly removed from their ancestral homes during territorial acquisition.

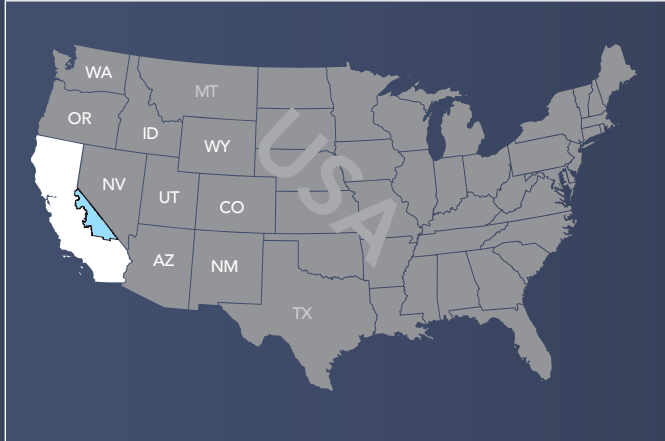
Many tribes, comprised of different bands, live in the Eastern Sierra region, caring for their native lands as they coexist with the ongoing impacts of colonization. Past or present tribes and bands associated with the region that this effort is aware of include, but are not limited to, the Miwok, Mono Lake Kutzadika'a, Mono/Monache, Nüümü (Paiute), Newe (Shoshone), Timbi-Sha, Utu Utu Gwaitu Paiute, and Washoe.

Two Nüümü terms describe the region and provide important context to ideas offered in this document. The first is Pamidu Toiyabe (Western Mountains), and the other, more widely known, place name is Payahuunadü (The Place Where Water Flows).

This acknowledgement is an invitation to all organizations, residents, and visitors to recognize the way this history has shaped the present as all parties work together in anticipation of a better future.

THE EASTERN SIERRA REGION

- UNITED STATES
- CALIFORNIA
- THE EASTERN SIERRA REGION



VISITOR CONNECTION PACKAGE

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INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Sierra & the Visitor Audience

The Eastern Sierra is a high-desert landscape in California that shares a common border with the state of Nevada. Composed of three California counties (Alpine, Mono, and Inyo), the region is defined by the Sierra Nevada mountain range, the western terminus of the Northern Basin and Range.

More than 90% of the region's 17,148 square miles is managed by federal government agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the Bureau of Land Management. The principal owner of the region's private property, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, acquired more than 450 square miles of farm and ranchland in the early years of the 20th century to secure water rights for the City of Los Angeles. The remaining private property and gateway communities are dispersed across the region, home to a permanent population of about 35,000 residents.

Unparalleled opportunities for outdoor recreation have compelled visitation for many generations. The Eastern Sierra hosts both the highest peak and lowest valley in the 48 contiguous United States, as well as the oldest living thing on Earth. Annual visitor estimates range between 4 and 7 million, principally from Southern California, but from across the country and around the globe as well. Visitation drives the region's recreation-based tourism economy and represents the primary challenge as well as the essential opportunity for achieving regional economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

Sustainability challenges are exacerbated by the fact that no one “voice” speaks for the Eastern Sierra as a region and communicates directly with its multimillion-member audience. The region’s assets are managed by a variety of public agencies and private interests, yet while they aspire to work together, they are organized by conflicting and often contradictory missions. Profit inevitably clashes with stewardship; local and regional needs are subsumed by national policy interests legislated many thousands of miles away; each private interest, public agency, user group, and advocacy organization has its own voice, made possible by the availability and accessibility of contemporary technology. With no agreed-upon or consistent messaging for sustainable regional recreation, inconsistency, fractured communications, and confusion is inevitable. Visitors’ resulting behavior is predictably incompatible with stewardship practices.

In spring 2019, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, an agency of the State of California, awarded a grant to the region for the Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Initiative, to include a deliverable titled “Connection to the Visitor Audience.” Later that same year, the Visitor Connection Working Group was established, comprising 28 representatives of regional organizations with a vast and diverse range of expertise engaging with the visitor audience, from destination marketing organizations to recreation user groups.

Convened in a series of workshops over 14 months, and charged with identifying the components of a communications program to articulate a unified voice for the Eastern Sierra rooted in sustainable recreation and stewardship, the Visitor Connection Package that follows is the work product of the Visitor Connection Working Group. This package represents the foundation of a stewardship-focused communications program (the Visitor Connection Program), to be further developed with refined messaging and strategies for implementation beginning with its Guiding Principles.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

THE VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM SHOULD:

- ★ Focus on stewardship education and the celebration of local culture.
- ★ Be reliable, implementable, and forward thinking.
- ★ Utilize informed and collaborative decision-making.
- ★ Employ a phased approach to develop tools and capacity.
- ★ Leverage existing communication assets to engage visitors throughout their “sequence of encounter.”
- ★ Not compete with existing efforts in the region.

1

COMMUNICATION ASSETS

The first task of the Visitor Connection Working Group was for each organization to self-report information on their existing **communication assets**, channels, and capacities, including inventories of current stewardship programs and events. The resulting data provided insights into each organization's abilities to reach an audience, while also underscoring their limitations. Understanding the parameters of regional communications makes it possible to identify each agency's appropriate role in the voice for the Eastern Sierra.

The information shared by the Working Group illuminated which channels are most frequently used, and their potential reach, as well as which organizations are currently promoting stewardship through events or messaging. While coherent and consistent communications are needed to effectively encourage the visitor audience to embrace stewardship behaviors, understanding the degree to which existing channels may be utilized to promote a culture of stewardship informed many of the final recommendations for the Visitor Connection Program.

-
- All VCWG organizations provided information through an informal self-reported survey in January and February of 2020.
 - Not all representatives have access to the data within their organizations and thus were unable to report certain elements.
 - This is not a representative inventory of all assets in the region, but only those of participating organizations.

EYES & EARS

8M+

in-person interactions

YR



SOCIAL MEDIA



1.2M+

Facebook followers



649,188

 → Instagram followers

194,210

 → Twitter followers

54,013

 → Pinterest followers

→ Other digital platforms in use: Vimeo, YouTube, LinkedIn

31M+

webpage views

YR



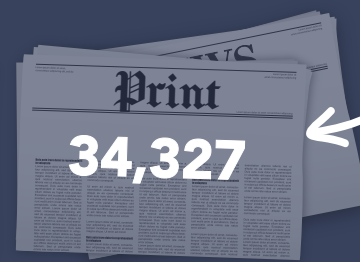
NEWS

Total number of email newsletter subscribers

637,832



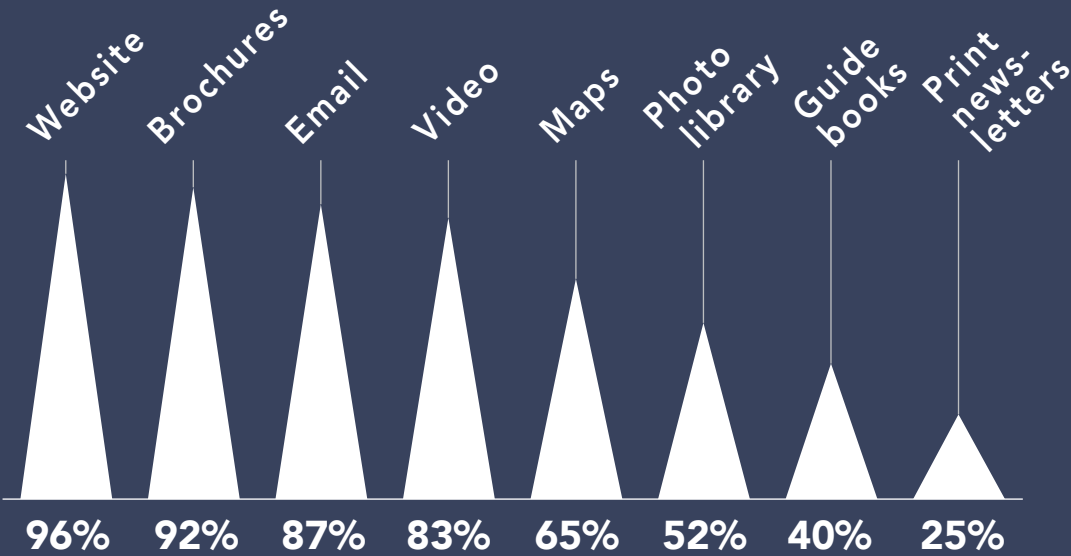
34,327



Total number of print newsletter subscribers

CHANNELS

Percentage of organizations using:



REGIONAL EVENTS

EVENTS ACROSS THE REGION*



STEWARDSHIP

63%

ARE CURRENTLY PROMOTING STEWARDSHIP THROUGH EVENTS OR MESSAGING

Of participating organizations...



2

CONNECTING WITH THE EASTERN SIERRA VISITOR

Visitors to the Eastern Sierra are members of a well-established and reliable community that regularly travels from all parts of California and the world to enjoy the region’s recreation activities and destinations. The goal of the Working Group is not to encourage new visitation, but rather to effectively communicate with the existing multimillion-strong visitor audience. When addressing a collective of this size and sophistication, it made sense to explore the use of traditional marketing tools to establish a foundation for future communication efforts: an opportunity statement and a persona.

The **Opportunity Statement** presented herein identifies the need for Eastern Sierra organizations to work together, to harness the emotional connections that the visitor audience has for the region, and to focus all parties on the urgent need for sustainability through the creation of a culture of stewardship.

Persona: The Eastern Sierra Visitor presented herein describes visitors who have already made their decision to come to the Eastern Sierra and focuses on their positive, idealistic, and aspirational characteristics. While personas typically are created to reflect various archetypes, this version is broad and includes a visitor from outside the region as well as a resident, both of whom are participating in recreation- or tourism-related activities. This persona focuses on the connections that the Eastern Sierra delivers to all—a foundation for communications focused on stewardship for a much-beloved landscape.

An opportunity statement is a carefully crafted explanation of a current undesirable situation, its impacts, and the ideal preferred state.

Source: <https://projectbliss.net/opportunity-statement/>

A marketing persona is a detailed “fictional” representation of an actual user and is applied in the early stages of product development or product redesign.

Source: <https://digitalagencynetwork.com/how-to-create-personas-for-marketing/>

OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

By working together as a network of regional organizations, we strive to leverage sought-after recreation experiences in the Eastern Sierra and emotional connections to the region for the purpose of preparing and educating both visitors and residents to embody a respectful mindset, promote visitor dispersion, and motivate stewardship behaviors, directly contributing to the sustainability of natural resources and gateway communities.

PERSONA: THE EASTERN SIERRA VISITOR

This person is motivated by the enjoyment and experience of time spent outside, regardless of whether they are exploring for the first time or going the distance to be distanced.

This visitor balances their personal ways of connecting to the outdoors with community- or family-oriented activities. This includes a wide variety of outdoor activities and ways of accessing them.

They seek out beautiful and unique natural resources throughout the region.

This visitor sees the Eastern Sierra as a special place where they seek connection to the land, family, friends, ancestors, history, tradition, or themselves. The importance of these experiences compels them to leave their regular environment and spend their time, energy, and money in this pursuit.

While this person looks for connection in ways that are specific to them, they may or may not be aware of the complex history of the region or the realities and experiences of other visitors and local residents.

They expect to be able to re-create their positive experiences in the Eastern Sierra, and that the Eastern Sierra will always be here for them.

3

FRAMING A REGIONAL MESSAGE

Words and images, often enhanced with sound, are the currency of contemporary communications and the essential elements of a voice that speaks on behalf of any region.

When asked to describe the Eastern Sierra using only **words**, the Visitor Connection Working Group provided a brainstorm of 16 candidates. Through discussion and further refinement, these evolved into four **themes** articulating what the Eastern Sierra is, what visitors expect it to be, and the stewardship ethic the Working Group hopes to inspire in the Eastern Sierra visitor.

The Working Group conducted a similar exercise using only **images**, pairing the four themes with a selection of photographs and then sharing their rationale for these choices. The images and rationales define the Working Group's values for the characteristics of visual messaging to be used to represent the Eastern Sierra.

These words, themes, and images will provide a strong foundation for the development of sustainable-recreation messaging campaigns to connect with the Eastern Sierra visitor audience using an authentic and unified regional voice.

WORDS THAT DESCRIBE THE EASTERN SIERRA

scenic dramatic
nature significant magnificent lasting
adventure connection
escape expansive timeless tradition
unique grand

MESSAGING THEMES FOR THE EASTERN SIERRA

RESPECT - APPRECIATION - STEWARDSHIP

ESCAPE - ADVENTURE - SURPRISE

MEMORY - TRADITION - CONNECTION

EXPANSIVE - DRAMATIC - TIMELESS

ALIGNING IMAGES WITH THEMES

RESPECT - APPRECIATION - STEWARDSHIP



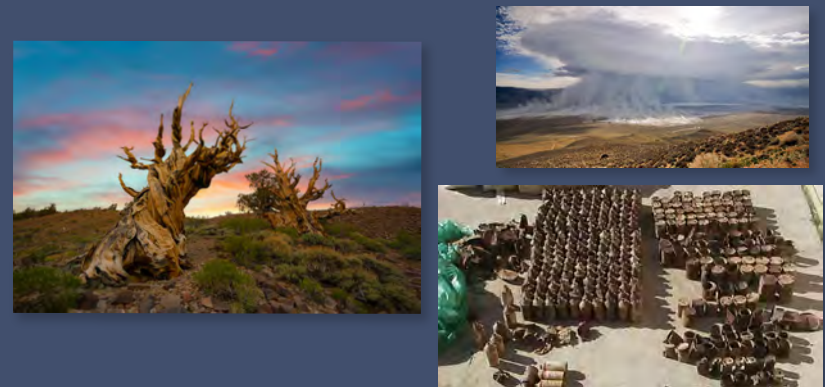
ESCAPE - ADVENTURE - SURPRISE



MEMORY - TRADITION - CONNECTION



EXPANSIVE - DRAMATIC - TIMELESS



RESPECT - APPRECIATION - STEWARDSHIP



Rationale for image selections:

- This image represents Respect. The “shame game” does not work to inspire people to do the right thing and to take appropriate actions; this image demonstrates mutual support and empathy, as well as community and engagement. While the image is obviously out of context for the Eastern Sierra, its values resonate. To be specific to our area, the image needs context outside of the immediate moment—a connection to all of the positive messages, but representing the unique timeline and cultures of the Eastern Sierra, and embracing multiple generations.

- This image represents Appreciation. It articulates the enduring and ancient nature of the Eastern Sierra. The clean, clear, and direct image aligns with Eastern Sierra values of strong character and constancy. It would benefit from the inclusion of human beings and the articulation of the human relationship to these values that are unique to the region. The bristlecones, as the world’s oldest trees, command respect and appreciation and need stewardship.

- This image represents Stewardship. It portrays a positive image of human beings actively engaged in caring for the land. For the Eastern Sierra, images of stewardship should include activities of education and interpretation, and should also represent multigenerational and multi-cultural efforts.

ESCAPE - ADVENTURE - SURPRISE



Rationale for image selections:

- This image represents Escape and Surprise. The radio dish is a “cool curiosity”—not what folks expect to see in the Eastern Sierra. On the other hand, the night-sky view is a regional feature. It is something that many people and places do not have, and it makes us think about the possibilities of what is out there. There is an interesting connection to the Consortium For Dark Skies and their focus on stewardship of the night sky. Even the sky needs protection.

- This image represents Escape. It is a big landscape shot. The person jumping brings to mind escape and freedom. This picture was chosen to represent the areas of the region that are desert, with less of an alpine feeling. The group intentionally did not select the traditional photos that might already be represented in regional marketing and communications. The group also discussed whether to show negative, but realistic, images, such as long lines at the grocery store, as a way of setting expectations and suggesting more-sustainable visitation decision-making, but did not select any of the negative photos offered.

- This image represents Surprise and Adventure. It features a juxtaposition of swimming and ice in the water. This is unexpected; it’s not the normal alignment. The group discussed the desire to show human-powered and back-country options rather than lift-assisted activities as a way to represent this theme. The large group discussed the need to be aware of the negative safety message of a single swimmer or solo adventurer; promoting this is not advised by regional search-and-rescue programs. Additionally, the notion of solitude is not a realistic representation of many popular destinations.

MEMORY - TRADITION - CONNECTION



Rationale for image selections:

- This image represents multi-generational family use. It's important to represent a wide range of ages. Images that are close enough to show faces help represent people in the act of connecting with each other. They don't have to be actually doing their activity; images of people reminiscing afterwards really convey the experience of connecting and making memories. It's also important that the landscape where the adventure is occurring is unique to the area, not generic. Fun and joy are important qualities to convey.

- This image represents Tradition in general. Traditional Native American handicrafts, which are unique to the region and something visitors would be interested in knowing more about, are especially important, as long as anything Native is represented respectfully (e.g., no images of petroglyphs). It shows someone executing a skill correctly, which speaks to the fact that any imagery should carefully avoid depicting anyone exhibiting incorrect etiquette or recreation behavior.

- This image represents Tradition and inclusivity; that everyone is welcome is an important message. It's important to show a wide diversity of uses. Many activities have traditions here.

EXPANSIVE - DRAMATIC - TIMELESS



Rationale for image selections:

- It is not clear if this is an image of dust, smoke, or some natural weather event, but it is clear that, whatever it is, it is large and looming. That uncertainty prompts powerful discussion about impacts to the land and people, such as climate change, and provokes thoughts and questions about how our actions contribute to solutions or to furthering the problem. This image conveys the theme and an important issue, but the group did not know how to communicate what people should do to address it.

- This image of a bristlecone pine is an apt symbol of nature's timeless beauty and shows one of the unique elements in the region. The surrounding landscape contrasting with the sky, combined with the angle of the photo and colors, brings out the other parts of the theme: Dramatic and Expansive. Another quality the group identified as important for visual associations with the Eastern Sierra is "authentic" or "real" images without filters. Nature can speak for itself, and it's important to avoid the misleading impression that the land is not impacted by visitation.

- The group liked the irony of how at first it seemed like carefully laid-out historical artifacts, but, thinking about what the artifacts are, it was clear that it is actually rediscovered trash from the past. The group felt that this image allows for deeper consideration of what story our trash tells by prompting questions about human impacts, such as: "How long will your trash stay?", "Who will find your trash?", and "What does your trash say about your time?" This felt especially important after seeing increased visitation and different kinds of trash due to COVID-19.

4

IMPLEMENTING THE VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

Drawing on their combined expertise and experience, the Visitor Connection Working Group provided input on the desired communication tools and the necessary components of a viable program to establish and maintain a regional voice that communicates the message of sustainable recreation to its audience. These insights have been organized into a recommended **Visitor Connection Program** with three phases, each building on the previous and incorporating priorities identified by the Working Group.

The phased approach is a practical one, allowing for flexibility and incremental growth to scale, including both immediate and long-term actions.

The Visitor Connection Program highlights three fundamental program needs identified by the Working Group for the program's success: funding for staff and technical support; formation of an advisory committee; and securing of commitments from regional organizations to participate in the Program and amplify its messaging.

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM



GROUP'S RECOMMENDED TOOLS & CHANNELS

Face-to-Face Interactions

Website Landing Page

Branded Digital Outreach Toolkit

Regional Handbook

Pop-Up Information Kiosks

Signage on Highway 395



ACTION PLAN

Secure funding for Phase I

Identify and coordinate regional face-to-face communication opportunities

Website: Build, develop, and maintain

Create turnkey content for Digital Outreach Toolkit with assets for social media, newsletters, and email lists

Create Regional Handbook content with training program for frontline employees

Coordinate Pop-Up Information Kiosk program

Coordinate Signage Implementation

Develop Visitor Connection Program Strategic Plan

Initiate research to better understand visitation audience and maximize messaging efficacy

PHASE I

PHASE II

PHASE III

**PROGRAM
NEEDS**

PHASE III

PHASE II

PHASE I

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM



VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM



GROUP'S RECOMMENDED TOOLS & CHANNELS

Website Upgrades

On-the-Ground Programs

Local Host and Ranger Programs

Out-of-Region Ambassador Partnerships

Analog Collateral

Regionally Coordinated Map Series

FAQ Handheld Product

Posters/Flyers

Business Card directing visitors to landing page and stewardship message

Expand Digital Collateral

Strategic digital ad buys

Toolkit expansion



ACTION PLAN

Secure funding for Phase II

Website upgrades made as required

Work with Advisory Committee and local organizations to develop on-the-ground priority programs

Create content for analog collateral, oversee production, coordinate distribution

Create additional digital collateral to be determined by Phase I Strategic Plan. Recommendations include video, radio ads, podcast, ad buys, and additional turnkey graphics

Ongoing research to better understand visitation audience and maximize messaging efficacy

Phase I ongoing:

Continued management

Review and refine program elements

PHASE I

PHASE II

PHASE III

PROGRAM NEEDS

PHASE III

PHASE II

PHASE I

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM



VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM



GROUP'S RECOMMENDED TOOLS & CHANNELS

Expanded Content for Stewardship Education and Celebration of Local Culture

Support and Incentive Program

Visitor Connection Research Program

Other tools and channels to be determined



ACTION PLAN

Secure funding for Phase III

Create expanded content for stewardship education and the celebration of regional culture

Develop grant-based financial incentives for engagement from non-profits, businesses, and other elements of the community

Ongoing research to better understand visitation audience and maximize messaging efficacy

Phase I & II ongoing:
Continued management
Review and refine program elements

PHASE I

PHASE II

PHASE III

PROGRAM NEEDS

PHASE III

PHASE II

PHASE I

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM



VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM



VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM will require:

- Budget
- Advisory Committee
- Organizational commitment to use recommended tools, channels, and action plan



VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM funded positions will include:

- Program Coordinator
- Field Coordinator
- Technical Support
- Consultant Support (as needed)

PHASE I

PHASE II

PHASE III

PROGRAM
NEEDS

PHASE
III

PHASE II

PHASE I

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

5

ABOUT

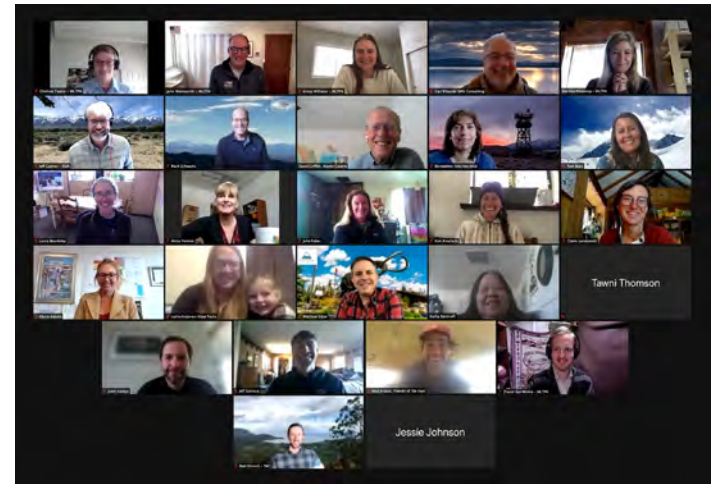
The Working Group

From destination marketers to recreation user groups, this document captures the input and thought leadership of 28 organizations with expertise engaging with the region's visitor audience. Carl Ribaudo of SMG Consulting developed the strategic framework and provided facilitation services over a 14-month process to create this Visitor Connection Package.

The Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Initiative is grateful for the contributions and participation of the following:

Alabama Hills Stewardship Group, Kathy Bancroft
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Disabled Sports Eastern Sierra, Laura Beardsley
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Eastern Sierra Four Wheel Drive Club, Mike Sornborger
Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, Jeff Gabriel
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Mono County, Alicia Vennos
Mono Lake Committee, Geoff McQuilkin & Claire Landowski
National Park Service, Bernadette Johnson
Pacific Crest Trail Association, Ben Barry
Town of Mammoth Lakes, Stuart Brown



The Visitor Connection Working Group, February 2021

The Sustainable Recreation & Tourism Initiative



In the spring of 2019, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy's Governing Board demonstrated a pioneering commitment to rural California's outdoor recreation economy and natural resources by authorizing Proposition 68 funding for the "Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Initiative," a project to benefit the Conservancy's Eastern sub-region, including Inyo, Mono, and Alpine Counties.

The Initiative supports the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership in its goals to, "... design, plan, implement, and report out projects to improve and maintain recreational opportunities as well as restore ecosystems to their natural resiliency and functions." The Initiative is composed of four tracks, or areas of focus, with specific deliverables: Regional Recreation Stakeholder Engagement; Climate Adaptation & Resilience Assessment; Connection to the Eastern Sierra Visitor Audience; and Project Development & Prioritization for Funding.

<https://mltpa.org/essrp/sustainable-recreation-and-tourism-project>

Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership



The Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership is a unique and locally generated public/public partnership between Eastern Sierra governments, state agencies, and federal agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and the Bureau of Land Management.

Please view the webpage to see a list of current partners.



<https://www.essrp.org/>

Carl Ribaud, SMG Consulting

Carl Ribaud is the President and Chief Strategist for SMG Consulting, a tourism and recreation consulting firm located in South Lake Tahoe. The firm specializes in cooperative approaches to tourism challenges and opportunities. SMG provided a variety of services, including meeting content development, research, facilitation, and strategic direction.

<https://www.smgonline.net/>

Mammoth Lakes Trails & Public Access Foundation



The Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access Foundation, MLTPA, is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization incorporated in 2007 as a public benefit corporation in the State of California. MLTPA has been engaged with local and regional issues of sustainable recreation and collaboration in California's Eastern Sierra since its inception and provides technical support to a regional public/public recreation-based solution, the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership.

MLTPA provided a variety of services including grant and project management, meeting content development, research, meeting convening, public and participant communications, and document production.

<https://www.mltpa.org/>

For More Information

About the Visitor Connection Package:

<https://mltpa.org/essrp/sustainable-recreation-and-tourism-project/visitor-audience>

About the Sustainable Recreation & Tourism Initiative:

<https://mltpa.org/essrp/sustainable-recreation-and-tourism-project>

About the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership:

<https://www.essrp.org>

About SMG Consulting:

<https://www.smgonline.net>

About MLTPA:

<https://mltpa.org>

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Cover & Land Acknowledgement:

Alabama Hills - S. Fouts

Page 18, Photographs Left to Right:

Kneeling - Shmuel Thaler/Santa Cruz Sentinel

Black and white bristlecone - Sean Bagshaw
www.outdoorexposurephoto.com

Trail work - Friends of the Inyo

Page 19, Photographs Left to Right:

Night sky - Michael Ver Sprill | Dreamstime.com

Jumping person - Connie Terry

Ice swimming - Christian Pondella
www.christianpondella.com

Page 20, Photographs Left to Right:

Fishing - Town of Mammoth Lakes

Native American baskets - Travel Nevada

Adaptive outing - Chelsea Taylor

Page 21, Photographs Left to Right:

Dust storm - Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District

Bristlecone sunset - Neutronman | Dreamstime.com

Organized historic trash - NPSPhoto/Tom Alex

Pages 9, 23-25:

Crowd background vector -
macrovector_official www.freepik.com

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