

# The Island Insider

VOLUME 19, ISSUE #1: MAY 2021



A Special Foothills Forever Edition by Channel Islands Restoration



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## The Foothills are a Local Treasure

I have spent hundreds of hours over many years cataloging and photographing the animals and plants that make the San Marcos Foothills Preserve their home. I discovered more than two dozen plant species, not previously known to occur on the Preserve, and I witnessed amazing wildlife including, bobcats, deer, coyotes, and dozens of bird species. I really love that place!

CIR has been restoring habitat on the Preserve since 2010, working with hundreds of volunteers and our partners in the County to maintain this truly unique public nature preserve. We installed tens of thousands of plants along creeks, and more recently we have been using sheep to control non-native plants that degrade the native grasslands.

CIR's effort to buy and preserve the West Mesa that is next to the County Preserve goes back to the Fall of 2019, when we chose to commission a \$30,000 preliminary appraisal of the property. This kicked off negotiations with the landowner and led to multiple community organizations joining the effort to purchase the property.

We could only imagine getting to this point nearly two years ago, but we are now realizing the dream of the community coming together to raise the nearly 11 million dollars that is still needed by the end of May to be successful. We are proud to have kicked off this latest campaign to save the Foothills, and we are optimistic that our community can save the property!

**Ken Owen**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

*& the Channel Islands Restoration Team*



*Two hikers walk the West Mesa of the San Marcos Foothills, who's geographic, topographic, and climatic position provides a breathtaking sense of place.*

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Channel Islands Restoration - Vol. 19, Issue #1: May 2021

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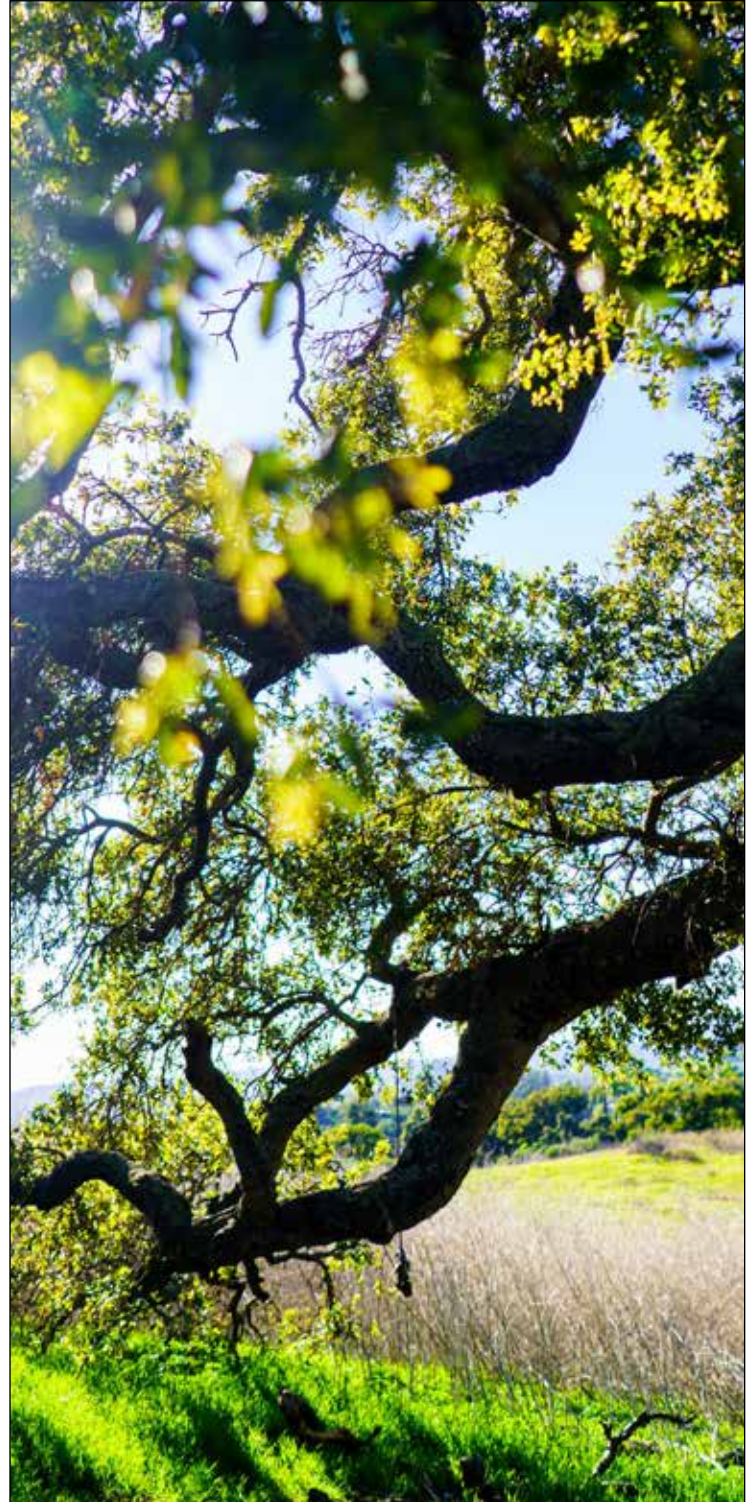
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*The shade of an oak tree that has been growing on the West Mesa of the San Marcos Foothills for over 200 years.*

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**Not a Channel Islands Restoration member? Sign up at [www.cirweb.org/donate](http://www.cirweb.org/donate)**

In addition to supporting habitat restoration, your donation will give you access to tiers of donor benefits, which include invitations to private events, merchandise, virtual talks, and of course our sincere gratitude.



# Foothills Forever Campaign

A fiscal sponsorship fund of the Santa Barbara Foundation

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For more information visit  
**FoothillsForever.org**  
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# About The San Marcos Foothills Purchase and Preservation

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## SAN MARCOS FOOTHILLS

We are working on purchase of the San Marcos Foothills West Mesa which is a privately-owned 101-acre property next to the County-owned San Marcos Foothills Preserve. The San Marcos Foothills Preserve is a 200-acre nature preserve managed by the County Parks Department. Habitat restoration on the Preserve is directed by Channel Islands Restoration, Inc. ("CIR") (<https://cirweb.org/grassland-restoration>).

## PLANNED DEVELOPMENT

The West Mesa property is in Santa Barbara, accessed by "the bridge to nowhere" over San Marcos Pass (Hwy 154), at the north end of Via Gaitero Road. The owners are currently in the process of securing final County approval to build 8 new homes, guest houses, and associated development and landscaping.

## AGREEMENT TO BUY THE PROPERTY

We have an agreement with the owners to purchase the property for \$18 million and protect it forever. This is less than its market value. We need to raise \$20 million to cover the cost of acquisition plus the costs of the campaign and an endowment for maintenance and management of the property. As of March 25, 2021, over 2,700 community members and groups have committed over \$5 million toward this purchase. We have until June 2, 2021 to raise the remaining funds to protect it forever.

## OUR VISION

Our vision is to permanently protect and preserve the 101-acre property and add it to the 200-acre San Marcos Foothills Preserve. Channel Islands Restoration, Inc. ("CIR") and conservation partners in Santa Barbara

Our vision is to permanently protect and preserve the 101-acre property and add it to the 200-acre San Marcos Foothills Preserve.



intend to purchase the property and protect it as a nature preserve forever. We envision managing the property in concert with the existing Preserve, inviting people to walk and hike on the trails, sit on a boulder or under a tree, and enjoy the breathtaking ocean, island, and mountain views, and engage in reflection. We will include members of the Chumash community in the planning, stewardship, and uses of the land. We intend to restore the native grassland using sheep grazing for a few months each year, and to remove invasive non-native weeds as needed.

### WHAT'S NEXT

Foothills Forever Fund, a fiscal sponsorship fund at the Santa Barbara Foundation is collecting tax- deductible donations from the community. The vision is to purchase the property, place a permanent restriction on the deed that prohibits development, establish an interest-bearing endowment that will fund long-term habitat restoration and management, and then convey title of the property to Santa Barbara County or another appropriate entity. The property will be managed as part of the San Marcos Foothills Preserve.

### WHY BUY THE 101-ACRE SAN MARCOS FOOTHILLS WEST MESA PROPERTY?

1. **Help Create 300 Acres of Contiguous Wildlife Habitat.** The San Marcos Foothills are home to wild animals including hawks, kites, owls, kestrels, songbirds, coyotes, bobcats, deer, and many others. Many native birds and other wildlife utilize this grassland. The San Marcos Foothills



are recognized as being important grassland habitat in Santa Barbara and Goleta. Buying the West Mesa will expand the existing San Marcos Foothills Preserve, preserve the native grasslands in perpetuity, and allow restoration to improve its wildlife habitat values.

2. **Honor Chumash Heritage.** Enable future Chumash stewardship, ritual and ceremony on this property.
3. **Maintain Open Space.** The foothills are an open space buffer that is visible from throughout Santa Barbara and Goleta. The West Mesa provides a beautiful visual backdrop for Santa Barbara at the base of the Santa Ynez Mountains.
4. **Provide Environmental Education Opportunities.** Public access to this land will allow children and adults to explore and learn in nature close to home.
5. **Protect the Trail Experience of walking in nature.**

### CONTRIBUTE

To make a tax-deductible contribution to the *Foothills Forever Fund, a fiscal sponsorship fund at the Santa Barbara Foundation:*

**Checks** payable to: *Santa Barbara Foundation*, with *Foothills Forever Fund* in the memo line.  
Mail to: Santa Barbara Foundation, 1111 Chapala St #200, Santa Barbara, CA 93101

**Donate on-line** at [FoothillsForever.org](http://FoothillsForever.org)

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**For more information:** [info@foothillsforever.org](mailto:info@foothillsforever.org) • **Mary Rose (805) 448-0663**

## A Legacy of Protection & Preservation

1960: Shoreline Park



1996: The Douglas Preserve



1998: Carpinteria Bluffs



2005: Sperling Preserve



2012: Hot Springs Canyon



2015: Veronica Meadows



Continue the Legacy  
2021: San Marcos Foothills West Mesa



# The History of Grassland on The Foothills

Elihu Gevirtz  
Senior Ecologist

The San Marcos Foothills Preserve is a 200-acre open space of rolling grasslands, oak woodlands, and shaded creeks. These types of habitats are important to our local wildlife, but they have largely been taken over by invasive weeds. The Foothills contain one of the largest grasslands in our area, but much of the preserve is dominated by non-native grassland species which greatly reduce the quality of habitat that these grasslands can provide - thereby reducing the numbers of species that can live on the Preserve.

Tule elk were once common in the Santa Barbara area, but today are most commonly found in the Central Valley.

In the distant past, ground sloths, mastodons, wild horses, mammoths, and other pre-historic megafauna inhabited this region. Grasslands evolved alongside these creatures and adapted to not only be able to withstand trampling, grazing, and soil disruption, but to thrive and outcompete other plants for space and nutrients.

In more recent history, elk and deer were common grazers in the Santa Barbara area before being displaced when ranchers brought livestock into the Santa Barbara foothills. While grazing patterns of these managed livestock was not a perfect replacement for native grazers, cattle, sheep, and other livestock effectively filled a similar role to their pre-historic counterparts.

Livestock were taken off the Preserve in 2008, which was quickly followed by the Jesusita Fire of 2009. The fire left much of the Preserve's grasslands open, allowing for quick-growing invasive annual grasses to establish themselves, without interference from grazers, and exclude native plants. Many of our native perennial grasses take the time to grow deep root systems that enable them to regrow after their above-ground parts are grazed.

Conversely, invasive annual grasses are adapted to grow quickly after the first rain of the season, produce and drop their seeds, and then die off. After any sort of

large disturbance (e.g., wildfires or mudslides), a thick mat of invasive grasses can grow quickly and inhibit the growth of any of our slower-growing native grasses.

Today, much of the 50 acres of grassland on the Preserve is dominated by invasive non-native grasses, which form a thick homogenous thatch that excludes native growth, inhibits ecosystem nutrient cycling, and provides poor habitat for grassland-dependent birds and other wildlife.



*The San Marcos Foothills Preserve is a 200-acre open space of rolling grasslands, oak woodlands, and shaded creeks.*



*Tule elk were once common in the Santa Barbara area, but today are most commonly found in the Central Valley.*





# The Sheep are Baaacckk

## About Our Sheep Grazing Restoration Program

*Studies have shown that annual grasses can be suppressed with targeted grazing.*

### **An Efficient Form Of Restoration**

Channel Islands Restoration has been restoring habitat at the San Marcos Foothills Preserve since 2010 and this year was no exception! In partnership with Cuyama Lamb, our sheep grazing program helped to restore the 50 acres of grassland that would have otherwise been seen as a monumental task. Sheep grazers on the Preserve can do the work for us naturally and we have been using sheep to graze the 50 acres at high intensity and short durations for the last several months.

### **Why Grazing?**

Native grasses evolved over hundreds of thousands of years together with grazing by native animals. The native grasses are adapted to being stepped on and grazed by large animals and these disturbances encourage regrowth and vitality that contributes to the health of the ecosystem. When sheep graze on the grasses, it stimulates the grasses to grow above ground and below.

Livestock grazing has been used to manage grasslands for thousands of years. In recent years, it has begun to be used as a holistic resource to restore native grasslands in western states. Grasses reproduce with seeds and annual grasses have a short life cycle. Studies have shown that annual grasses can be suppressed with targeted grazing. Also, native purple needlegrass responds favorably to high intensity-short duration grazing. Needlegrass is also susceptible to competition from non-native species, and when growing among non-native annual species, it benefits from grazing because competition from these annuals is reduced. Removal of thatch increases the amount of bare ground and increases the establishment of needlegrass seedlings. Patches of bare ground are used by birds and other animals as part of their habitat complex.

Grazing creates a mosaic of grassland in which some areas have bare ground between native grasses, and other areas have some thatch between grasses with which ground nesting birds can build and hide nests. The sheep grazing is designed to change the habitat for the benefit of the native birds.

# San Marcos Foothills West Mesa – Now or Never

Wayne R. Ferren Jr,  
CIR Board Member

The West Mesa of San Marcos Foothills in Santa Barbara County is situated at the confluence of many important features contributing to the widespread interest in preserving the site. Transition is an important theme used to describe the foothills: they are located along the south coast of Santa Barbara County, one of the important geographic and biological transition zones in North America.

The area is transitional between the warm, dry elements of Southern California and the moist, cool elements of Northern California, which extend to the adjacent northern flanks of the Santa Ynez Mountains. As a result of these topographic and climatic features, many species reach their northern, southern, or western geographic limits here, creating

a unique mixture of species and vegetation. This transition also is home to many species including those that are restricted to the region's characteristics. The foothills are positioned centrally within this important, biologically rich, uniquely situated landscape.

The San Marcos Foothills also are positioned topographically between the high montane habitats and vegetation of the Santa Ynez Mountains to the north, such as chaparral, and the lower coastal habitats and vegetation along the Santa Barbara Channel of the Pacific Ocean, including beaches, dunes, marshes, and coastal sage scrub.

This transitional elevation creates a perspective unlike other geomorphic and geologic expressions along the coast. Furthermore, seasonally warm, interior breezes and cool

onshore flows provide dramatic changes in local weather patterns, from dense foggy mornings to clear sunny days, and the many transitions between -- important features of the Foothills.

The combined geographic, topographic, and climatic position provides a breathtaking sense of place. The Foothills are where they are because of nature's forces interacting to create a space central to the many transitions in the region: the crossroads of nature, history, culture, and the future.

The West Mesa of the San Marcos Foothills, with its characteristic grasslands, combines these many features in a way rarely represented and still extant, an important and urgent conservation opportunity that will be lost without the immediate purchase of the West Mesa.



*A lone coyote roams the San Marcos Foothills during the day.*

# Meet The Foothills Forever Executive Team

## CINDY KIMMICK

I went on my first CIR volunteer trip in 2006, have been on the board since CIR attained non-profit status, and began taking school groups to the islands in 2012. I later became a National Park Service work leader. I recently went back to school for a Masters in Biology from a zoo-based program, focusing on restoration ecology and community based conservation. I will be retiring soon from my day job as a systems analyst at UCLA to focus on volunteer work for CIR and the Los Angeles Zoo, especially in the areas of environmental education and outreach.



## KEN OWEN

I am the co-founder and Executive Director of Channel Islands Restoration and have more than 20 years of experience managing large-scale ecological restoration projects in sensitive natural areas on the California coast. My experience in education spans 30 years, instructing the public on topics such as ecology, plant identification, and habitat restoration techniques. I am proud of Channel Islands Restoration for having initiated our efforts to save the West Mesa and am humbled that we have such a great team to help us achieve our goal. I am optimistic and enthusiastic that our community can save this property!



## DANI LYNCH

I am the founder of Save San Marcos Foothills and began my environmental activism journey at age 14 when I joined Greenpeace as a volunteer. I soon took another simple yet powerful step in my activism by adopting a vegan lifestyle. Realizing my life's purpose in doing environmental work, my seva quickly became dedicating time and financial contributions to The Nature Conservancy and various other environmental organizations for the next two decades of my life. My sincere compassion and love for the Earth and all its inhabitants fuels my drive to protect and preserve open spaces and wildlife for future generations. In addition to my environmental activism, I have a background in permaculture and organic gardening.



## MARIANNE YEAGER

haku, I am Marianne. I have a background in the medical field and have gone back to school. My focus is Forensic Psychology all while learning Chumash Ethnobotany. I wholeheartedly love and advocate for San Marcos Foothills West Mesa. I believe open spaces are crucial to our mental health as well as physical health. The Foothills is rich with history, much like the rest of Santa Barbara and Goleta. These open spaces are what make Santa Barbara so desirable. The Foothills must be preserved forever!



## PETER SCHUYLER

I am fortunate to have grown up and lived in wild open spaces throughout Santa Barbara county. Open spaces have formed the essence of who I am today. San Marcos Foothills provides a refuge to balance modern life's sometimes frenetic pace. Expansive sunsets, bird songs, unexpected pockets of wildflowers and limitless horizons make me smile. As our region's population grows and people live in increasing tight conditions, I truly believe it is essential to provide everyone in our community the chance to experience solitude and a sense of wildness on a regular easily accessible basis. San Marcos Foothills allows that.



## MARC CHYTILO

I have been involved with the Foothills since 2000 as a public interest advocate and lawyer. With training and experience in field biology, I finds the Foothills an exciting laboratory for wildlife and natural resources. The West Mesa is strategically located with views of a number of important places throughout the region. I have been involved in efforts to save many of the South Coast's protected open spaces and have played a central role in securing the option agreement and the campaign to save the San Marcos Foothills.



# A Multi-Year Journey to Eradicate Tamarisk:

And a First Person Account of CIR's Santa Ynez River Trips

**Phil White**  
CIR Board Member

It was the photo of the Santa Ynez River that came into my inbox last January that ultimately made me sign up for the CIR tamarisk eradication trip. The gorgeous photo shows a crew of backpackers walking along a deep pool in the river, with the blue of the sky reflected in the pool. "Volunteer Sign-up is Now Open!" I was hooked, and having recently completed my vaccination regimen, I was ready for just this kind of adventure.

I had known about CIR's tamarisk trips for a long time as a member of CIR's board, but I had never participated on one. Here was my chance. I signed up right away and was accepted for the last five-day trip in March.

Because of COVID and the need to prevent the introduction of exotic plant and animal species into the river system, special precautions were imposed. First of all, no carpooling was allowed – we each needed to drive our own four-wheel drive vehicle into the backcountry, and social distancing (plus being outdoors the whole time) was the norm for the duration of the trip.

We were required to carefully clean the vehicles' undercarriages, tires, and wheel wells of any dirt or mud that could harbor exotic pests such as the invasive New Zealand mud snail, and our hiking shoes



*Killing Tamarisk roots and all!*

needed to be carefully brushed and cleaned of seeds and dirt and then be frozen for 48 hours. And finally, we each needed to bring all our own food and supplies for the five days.

Why eradicate tamarisk? *Tamarix ramosissima*, also known as saltcedar, is one of the most invasive plants in the western US (and the world).

It is native to Asia and the Mediterranean region but is now well-established here.

According to the California Invasive Plant Council, tamarisk "is associated with dramatic changes in geomorphology, groundwater availability, soil chemistry, fire frequency, plant community composition, and native wildlife diversity."

Two of the most commonly displaced native plants are cottonwoods and willows, which provide habitat for such threatened birds as the Least Bell's Vireo (LBV). A single mature tamarisk tree can draw up and transpire 100 to 200 gallons of water per day, reducing streamflows and adding to the stress on threatened aquatic species like the red-legged frog and the arroyo toad. One mature tree is capable of producing 500,000 seeds in a year, which wash downstream and germinate on sandbars and the sides of river channels, quickly expanding the problem. These are very bad plants.

The solution: kill them. One at a time. CIR has been battling tamarisk in the backcountry for years. This year, the battle continues with a \$133,233 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Los Padres National Forest. The grant requires a 50% match from the grant recipient, and that's where the value of CIR volunteer labor comes into the picture.

Our initial group was eight people, three CIR staff and five volunteers. The leader was Operations Manager Doug Morgan and he was assisted by CIR technicians Sarah Spellenberg and Sarah Scrivano. Volunteers besides me included James from Seal Beach, Christina from Santa Ana, and Caleb and Jim from Santa Barbara. In camp, we were joined by two backpackers from South Carolina and Tennessee, who became excited about the

tamarisk project, making us a crew of ten.

Doug, with more than 50 years of Los Padres backcountry experience, ran a tight ship – a very professional organization, and the two Sarahs, working quietly under the radar, made everything function smoothly and efficiently. CIR's one-ton four-wheel drive truck (paid for by the generous contributions of members), was packed with all the tools and safety gear needed for the challenging work. Without the staff and vehicles we have, CIR would not be able to take on projects like this.

I don't know about other organizations that take on restoration work like this, but it is clear that CIR offers great organization, the right equipment, physical strength, knowledge of the flora and fauna, concern for safety, and an obvious passion for making the world a better place.

On this trip, Doug and the Sarahs showed us that they know the names and characteristics of many of the plants and animals with which we crossed paths. The ability to know which plants and animals are rare or important (and shouldn't be touched) seems like an important CIR advantage over a crew that is maybe ignorant about what is right in front of them.

*Continued on Page 14*



*Sometimes we have to climb mountains to get to the creeks.*

*All Santa Ynez River Photos by Sara Scrivano and Caleb Stumberg.*

But back to the trip:

Leaving Camino Cielo on the morning of the first day, we caravanned down the winding dirt road into the river canyon and set up camp at Middle Santa Ynez campground, an idyllic grove of ancient oaks next to the Santa Ynez River. Soon arrived Valerie Hubbartt, Resource Officer for the Santa Barbara District of the Forest Service.

Valerie educated us about the important and threatened species in the river, including the arroyo toad, red-legged frog, two-striped garter snake, and the western pond turtle. She led us down to the river and pointed out a garter snake, a tree frog, and a large mass of red-legged frog eggs. You could tell that she was very happy to have us there improving the habitat for these rare creatures.

After Valerie drove away, Doug gave us a safety briefing and then put us right to work; and work started with a long several mile hike along the river bottom to the target section. For the most part, there are no trails and the hikes required boulder-hopping and bushwhacking and navigating wet sections.

My attire included long pants and shirt, wide-brimmed hat, gloves, snake chaps, boots, and safety glasses, and we carried our day packs with lots of water, lunch, and cutting and grubbing tools. On previous survey trips, patches of “tam” had been identified and locations recorded with GPS coordinates. We headed for those sections but also came across many other recently germinated smaller plants and even some older trees that had not been previously spotted.

There are two types of “kills.”

The smaller ones can be pulled by hand, following loosening around the roots with digger tools. Some of the smaller tams were no more than a few inches above the ground, but when pulled up had roots two feet or more in length. You can really see how they are so effective at drinking up water and drying out rivers and streams. Pulled plants were relocated away from the water to prevent new rooting.

The larger trees are too big to pull, sometimes growing in connected thickets with many heads. The technique used was to grub out around the base of the trunks to

expose them and then cut the trunks with loppers or hand saws.

Needless to say, this is very hard work, and we did work hard, day after day. On some days after a long day of hard work, we were able to soak our sore and tired bodies in one of the two local hot springs. And returning to camp, after we each cooked our own dinners, we congregated for a socially distanced campfire, with storytelling (Doug is a master), and music accompanied by two guitars and the Tam Killer Singers. Hard work yes, but fun too.

We were reminded that this is wild country. We saw a big rattlesnake, and bear tracks in the river bottom, and one night we heard a mountain lion scream just beyond our campground.

The scorecard: In total, we pulled and killed nearly a thousand of the smaller tamarisks, and cut and treated nearly 300 stumps. One at a time. Additional areas of the river system were surveyed and the locations of tamarisk recorded for future eradication trips. In short – a very successful trip.

Yes, this is hard work, but knowing that our efforts are making the Santa Ynez River system and the Los Padres National Forest a better environment for both plants and animals, including some that are very rare, it is very satisfying work, and once again, I came away very proud to be associated with Channel Islands Restoration.



*A California Tree Frog sits inside a rock at the bottom of a stream.*

## More Photos From Our Santa Ynez River Trips



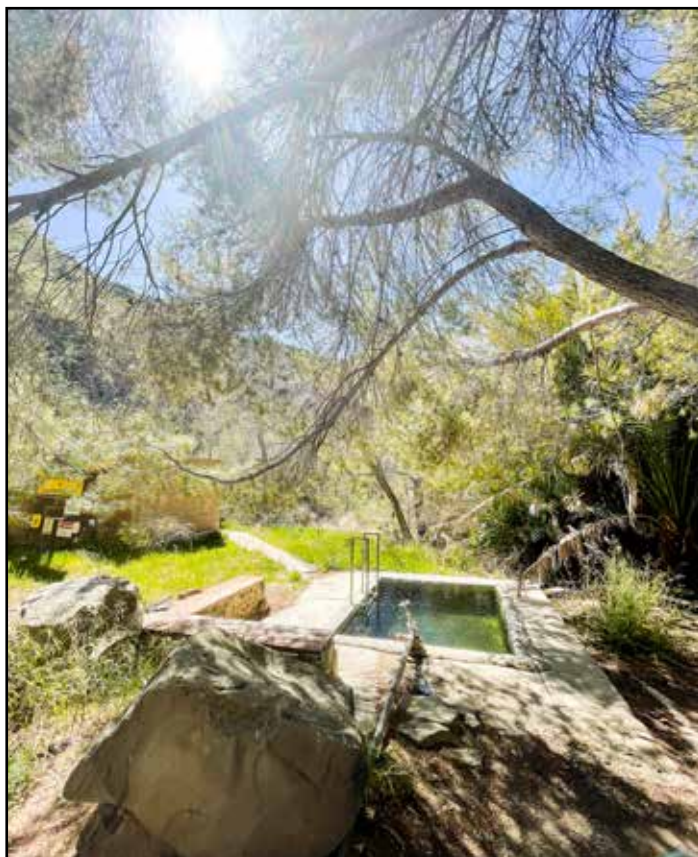
*A quiet camp morning before work started.*



*A fossil rock above the view of "The Jungle"*



*A purple lupin blooms out in the backcountry in April.*



*Big Caliente Hot Springs - where we relaxed at the end of work.*



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# The Island Insider

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