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Google the phrase “turn the page” and you’ll get 2 trillion results, ranging from a Bob Seger video to a Wiktionary definition.

Many of us were only too eager to turn the page on 2020 and, the ongoing struggle with Covid-19 aside, there are myriad reasons to be hopeful in this new year—especially if you’re a conservationist.

The Biden administration has renewed U.S. participation in the Paris Climate Agreement and outlined a comprehensive climate change and environmental justice strategy. The Great American Outdoors Act promises to remedy mountains of backlogged maintenance on federal lands. And the number of young people seeking to protect our natural and cultural resources continues to grow.

This is peak season for student applications to SCA and the year ahead is shaping up to be among our most productive.

This summer, our urban community conservation initiatives will expand to Atlanta with financial support from the UPS Foundation. As in other cities, SCA will provide jobs and career training for young people of color and other marginalized youth residing in and around the Georgia capital.

In Chicago, we’ll host another all-women crew to provide participants with professional field experience devoid of the gender biases that often exist in parks & rec environments. Our Calumet Tree Corps will plant hundreds of native trees to improve local air quality, and we’ll partner with the local U.S. Army Corps of Engineers office to help manage the 320-mile Illinois Waterway.

SCA interns will introduce Metro New York youth to camping and ecology at Gateway National Recreation Area. A climate intern will help the City of Pittsburgh launch an electric vehicle initiative while, in Houston, water quality interns will advance multiple riparian forest restoration projects to buffer city parks from ever-intensifying storms.

At the state level, SCA will begin two new partnerships with Arizona and Maryland State Parks, resume the Covid-curtailed Excelsior Conservation Corps in New York, and engage hundreds more youth through our Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps.

In the west, SCA teams will restore and monitor fire-damaged lands from Northern California to the North Cascades of Washington. In the southeast, scores of SCA members will practice firefighting and trail maintenance in national forests from Texas to Virginia, and graduate with preferred eligibility for federal hiring. And nationwide, our award-winning Career Discovery Intern Program will prepare underserved youth for long-term employment with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies.

There is so much more, from historic preservation to community garden cultivation, that supporters like you make possible…and that young people like those in this newsletter make happen. So please, turn the page, and see how your generosity helps SCA conserve lands and transform lives. Thank you.

STEPHANIE MEEKS
CEO AND PRESIDENT

A Welcome New Page
The Hilton Effect Foundation has announced 23 Covid-19 related grants, including $30K for SCA urban conservation crews. “The communities that are hardest hit by racial and social injustice have also been disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis, environmental pollution, and now COVID-19,” Hilton said in a news release. “The Foundation awarded grants to organizations to advance environmental protection, with a focus on furthering environmental justice and addressing those concerns in underserved communities.”

SCA MEMBERS STAR IN GULF DOCUMENTARY

SCA’s Alabama-based GulfCorps is featured in a new documentary. “Guardians of the Gulf” recently premiered at the virtual LA Femme International Film Festival. The film, executive produced by Mary Kay, Inc., spotlights the many challenges facing the Gulf including hurricanes, oil spills, and overfishing. At the same time, it portrays the “Guardians” who are helping to protect and restore the region’s ecosystems.

GulfCorps, now in its fourth year, is conducted in cooperation with The Nature Conservancy, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, other youth corps, and local partners. View the documentary trailer at GuardiansoftheGulf.com.

HILTON GRANT SUPPORTS URBAN INITIATIVES

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ALUMNI APP LAUNCHED

In January, following a year of research and development, SCA introduced The SCA Network, an alumni mentoring and career-networking app jubilantly described by initial users as a cross between Match.com and LinkedIn.

After joining through either the web-based platform or mobile app, past members can reconnect with fellow alums, seek or act as alumni mentors, and grow their list of professional contacts. The SCA Network was created with input from SCA’s Alumni Council and a grant from The JPB Foundation. To register or for more information, log on at TheSCANetwork.org.
What took you so long, winter?

Every source from the National Weather Service to the Farmer’s Almanac had predicted a thick, white blanket over the northern half of the country (and atypical warmth in the south). But until a powerful, late January storm swept across the U.S., the wild forecasts of snow proved, well, flaky.

That posed something of an editorial quandary at The GreenWay, as we’d planned this story around portrayals of SCA volunteers undaunted by bitter cold and blizzards. Well, the weather may not have met expectations, but these young stewards most certainly did.

When we first spoke with Caleb Miguel Awe last November, he admitted to some trepidation. “Nobody likes 40 below,” he noted.

Caleb was just beginning his second straight winter as a sled dog intern at Denali National Park and Preserve, so he was already acquainted with Alaskan climes. More recently, we caught up with him on the heels of a thwarted backcountry patrol.

“We were headed to the toe of East Fork Glacier,” he says, “to see if conditions were good enough to retrieve some glacier stakes,” which are used to measure melt, or ablation. “We spent our days mushing from one ranger’s cabin to the next. We’d sleep there for the night with the dogs and move on. Unfortunately, we were unable to make it very far. There was very little snow and most of the ice was unreliable so we made the decision to turn around.”

Denali’s “canine rangers” have helped personnel safely navigate this vast park for the past century. The huskies’ instincts are tuned to the ever-changing environment and, unlike mechanized transport, the dogs never seem to break down.

Along with fellow SCA members Mitch Flanagan and Lida Wise, Caleb cares for 28 dogs, maintains the kennels, and conducts field patrols and studies. “If I were a permanent employee, this would be the pinnacle,” he states, but as an intern he is focused on learning as much as possible from his colleagues. “Human and dog,” he points out.

Teams consist of at least three mushers (a combination of experienced park rangers and SCA interns) and up to eight or more dogs per sled, plus safety gear, food, water, and a means of communication. Caleb has worked extensively with race dogs in the past, and puts the patrol dogs in a class by themselves.

“They’re bigger. They’ve got a lot more power. The dogs are happiest when the snow is deep and the trail just feels so new. It’s incredible to watch these dogs breaking trails like it’s nothing!”

When asked if there were surprises beyond the relatively mild weather, Caleb mentions the pace of wilderness. “Things seem to move a little slower and smaller details stick out more.” That, he adds, can sometimes lead to jarring returns to base. “Last year, we came home from a patrol to news of a pandemic. This year, we came home to news of an insurrection.”

ADIRONDACK EMPIRE

At over six million acres, the Adirondack region of northern New York is the largest protected natural area in the Lower 48. Annual snow accumulations in the ‘Daks routinely reach 100 inches yet here, too, winter arrived with uncommon restraint, which gave an SCA team more time to quarry stone for future trail projects. Still, it wasn’t easy.

“Working outdoors for eight or 10 hours in zero degree temps and carrying metal tools or icy stones takes as much mental stamina as physical,” notes Adirondack Corps Coordinator Rebecca Kambic.

SCA members have helped protect the Adirondacks for more than 20 years, working out of a basecamp on Little Tupper Lake in the Whitney Wilderness area. This year’s Winter Corps signed on through February following an extended summer season. Member Jake Westrich, a 24-year old from Houston, says when the weather cooperates, they work the trails. Otherwise, they stay close to home, stacking firewood and conducting repairs. “Some of our cabins need new interior walls,” Jake says, “so we just cut, sanded, and treated dozens of boards. We will install them in the coming weeks.”
The Dak’s Corps alternately splits rock and firewood.

Whether splitting rocks or wood, team members see their work as essential. “I’ve been hearing in the news that the outdoors—specifically Adirondack Park and the High Peaks region—is being loved to death,” observes Kaitlyn Gunter, 22, who grew up two hours to the south. “To preserve the Adirondacks, we need to limit our human impact. The building and use of sustainable trails along with the other tasks that SCA members do across the country is vital to bettering the way in which we interact with the environment.”

“Working outdoors for eight or 10 hours in zero degree temps and carrying metal tools or icy stones takes as much mental stamina as physical.” REBECCA KAMBIC

“This place has changed my life for the better and I’m happy to suffer a perpetually-runny nose to give back to it,” adds Kay Emery of New Hampshire. “My love of wilderness and my worry over the natural world’s precarious future motivate me day-to-day as we spend hours upon hours doing labor-intensive conservation projects.

Although they work together, the team is careful to follow stringent Covid-19 safety precautions, including a 14-day quarantine when they returned from visiting their respective families over the holidays. Located some 30 miles from the nearest town, Kaitlyn believes “we have the best living situation a person could ask for while riding out a pandemic.”

Of late, corps members report daily sightings of a red fox, whose tiny tracks interlace the snowy compound. It is an idyllic if isolated setting…which prompts the query: What stops you from becoming Jack Nicholson in The Shining?

Westrich, the tall Texan, slowly smiles as he leans in and replies, “All work and no play makes Jake a dull boy.”

LESSONS FROM BIG SKY

Suzanne Tarkulich arrived at Big Hole National Battlefield in Montana last October. In her first few weeks, the Oberlin College graduate spent her off-time visiting nearby Yellowstone, Grand Teton, and Glacier National Parks, as well as Craters of the Moon National Monument. “To do as much as I could before winter really set in,” the public education intern says.

Her Battlefield colleagues had warned they’d seen the mercury plummet to as low as -55 F, yet in mid-January temps hovered near 50 above. For Suzanne, the moderate weather was merely a bonus. The Monument’s mission was the real draw. “They do a good job here of telling the story of a historically marginalized group,” she states, “and that really excited me.

Big Hole commemorates a moment in the late 19th century conflict between the Nez Perce Tribe and the U.S. government. Early one morning, Army soldiers attacked the Nez Perce as they slept. When the gunfire ended, some 90 Tribe people were dead, as were 30 servicemen. “It’s a remarkable story that offers an important lesson for the state of our country today,” Suzanne asserts.

The Nez Perce Flight of 1877 came as the government forcefully relocated the Tribe from their ancestral homelands to a reservation in Idaho. “But even shortly after the Flight and the battles that took place,” she states, “the Nez Perce people put an emphasis on forgiveness.”

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Today, the Tribe and the National Park Service are working together. By mutual agreement, recently installed Big Hole exhibits tell the story of the clash without rancor. “We try to emphasize the importance of understanding the other side,” Suzanne explains. “It’s about mending relationships.”

The coronavirus cancelled Big Hole’s annual Coyote Camp, a series of educational field trips for local schoolchildren, prompting Suzanne and other staffers to develop a self-guided tour and numerous virtual learning experiences. “Our team is relatively small,” she explains, “and in spring, we typically get more interest from schools than our staff can accommodate, so we’re hoping this will serve as a good alternative.”

There’s still plenty of winter to go before the vernal equinox, however. In recent weeks, Suzanne says it has become significantly colder and “the snow is piling up.” But she doesn’t mind. The 24-year old has just booked another tour of Yellowstone. This time, by snowcoach.

Many scientists contend human-influenced climate change is behind global warming trends, though not all agree. And we’re not saying the unseasonable weather across much of the northern tier is entirely the result of greenhouse gases.

What we are saying is this: no matter the challenge, SCA members are up for it. No matter what crops up, these young people will roll with it. And no matter the temperature, our participants will endure it.

In the words of “Game of Thrones” author George R.R. Martin, “Nothing burns like the cold.” In the hearts of SCA volunteers, however, a passion burns that warms the spirit all year long.

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT:
Steve Edwards

In the waning days of 2020, a letter containing a wonderful offer arrived at SCA.

Steve Edwards of Los Angeles wrote to advise us that his hobby was collecting and cleaning lightly-used backpacking and camping gear. The Eagle Scout and lifelong Boy Scout volunteer and leader enjoyed outfitting Scouts and other groups who otherwise could not afford decent equipment, and he wanted to extend that same offer to SCA.

We polled our community conservation programs in cities across the country and identified a need in Houston, where we loan a lot of gear to local participants and our cache was showing significant wear and tear. Steve dipped into his collection and, at his own expense, shipped enough equipment from LA to Houston to outfit an entire SCA crew for backcountry adventures: 12 backpacks, 11 daypacks, 12 sleeping bags, 11 sleeping pads, and three tents.

“Knowing that this winter, an SCA crew is nourishing ocelots, bobcats, 450 types of plants, and 400 bird species with its service at the Santa Ana National Wildlife Reserve in south Texas,” he says, “I’m proud to play a small part in the big things SCA is accomplishing.”

Steve’s interest in service and philanthropy has been nurtured throughout his life and he credits the Scouts for a lot of that. He learned to hike and camp as a Boy Scout, and learned sailing as a Sea Scout on the Mississippi River. He enjoyed his college summers (1969-73) working at Philmont Scout Ranch, a 137,000-acre backpacking mecca in New Mexico that now hosts 20,000 Scouts each summer. He continues to recruit college-age Scouts each year for the Ranch’s summer staff. He’s also involved at home officiating sailboat racing on Santa Monica Bay and supporting World Harvest, his local food bank.

“In every volunteer activity, I’ve contributed something but I’ve always received more satisfaction, camaraderie, and excitement in return,” Steve states. “Sure, I could scale another 14,000-foot peak but putting 24 sixteen-year-old feet on that same summit is a bigger thrill.”
At Joshua Tree National Park, the writing was on the wall more than a decade ago. Or, more accurately, on the screen, in the form of digital, time-lapse projections.

“If you looked at the map,” notes Park Vegetation Manager Neil Frakes, “by the end of this century, the entire park was in red, indicating there wouldn’t be any suitable habitat for Joshua trees.”

The culprit? Climate change. Vast regions of the park that had supported Joshua trees for 2.5 million years were growing less hospitable and wildfires were becoming more frequent. But now, after 10 years of modeling the effects of higher temperatures, scientists are relying on a team of SCA volunteers to help save the park’s eponymous yuccas.

Their efforts are trained on a handful of climate change “refugia” —areas that theoretically will be less susceptible to warmer climes due to higher elevations, precipitation rates, and other factors. These refugia, however, face a challenge of their own: non-native grasses. “Invasive grasses cause fires to burn at a higher intensity,” Neil notes. “That’s the concern: this nexus of climate change, fire, and invasive plants.”

Less than a year after a grass-fueled blaze burned more than a million Joshua trees in nearby Mojave National Preserve, the SCA crew will spend the next 12 weeks clearing established stands of Joshua trees—so-called “habitat islands”—of invasive cheatgrass, red brome, and other exotic vegetation. Park officials estimate the SCA team will effectively defend some 6,400 Joshua trees.

For SCA Co-Leader Jennifer Reiner, this is the 13th crew she has supervised since 2014. The SoCal native says it’s also one of the most meaningful. “When people think of the desert, it’s either cacti or Joshua trees,” she notes. “We need these magnetic species drawing people into these landscapes.”

The 30-year old says one measure of success will be “meeting park expectations, doing a high quality job, with minimal impact on the habitat at large.” Another will be ensuring her crew members “feel a sense of purpose…and that their experience has closure and value.”

“This is a really, really complex challenge,” Neil stresses. “They’ll be hiking to a site, maybe two or three miles on a trail, carrying tools, and bagging up and carrying out materials.

“Doing this work is incredibly expensive and the grant SCA obtained to help us accomplish it is absolutely critical.” Project funding comes from the National Park Foundation.

By planning for your future, you can help secure theirs...

Learn about charitable options that enable you to make a legacy gift to SCA while possibly enjoying valuable tax, estate planning and financial benefits for yourself and your loved ones. Visit SCA’s new and detailed charitable planning website at plannedgiving.thesca.org.
ALUMNI PROFILE: Amanda Hughes-Horan

You probably know Amanda Hughes-Horan’s work even if you don’t know Amanda. Her firm, Interpretive Insights, creates a lot of the educational signage found in parks, along trails, and at scenic turnouts. As stated on the company website, “We understand the power of interpretation to make a difference, and we’ll help you… connect people with the natural world.”

Amanda’s own connections with nature solidified in 1989 when she took an SCA internship in Oregon. “Working with spotted owls high up in the Cascades confirmed my passion for wildlife and conservation,” she says. The experience also helped her earn entry into Colorado State University’s graduate program in Wildlife Biology.

“Applying to SCA was really one of the best things I ever did to further my professional career,” Amanda states. “I listened to my heart and followed my dreams. SCA gave me the opportunity to really experience field work as a wildlife biologist and I will always be grateful.”

“I distinctly remember standing on a tree stump in a clearcut, howling at the full moon one night deep in the Cascade Mountains. It was sublime. Our team had been listening for spotted owls all evening, the night was clear, the stars bright, and I will never forget the feeling of exhilaration as we listened to the echoes of our howls ringing around the mountains.”

Soon after earning her Master’s degree, Amanda became an interpretive planner with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and 15 years later launched her signage business. She’s proud to be both an alumna and donor, giving monthly through SCA’s “Trail Builder” program.

“SCA is one of the finest non-profit organizations in this country today,” Amanda declares. “The program has grown so much since I went through, yet it still gives people a precious opportunity to challenge themselves, to find their passion, to build their careers, and also to meet other people who share their dedication to conservation.

“I owe so much to the organization and feel it’s most certainly my time to ‘pay it forward.’ I wouldn’t be where I am today without SCA.”

Make your gift today at thesca.org/tgw