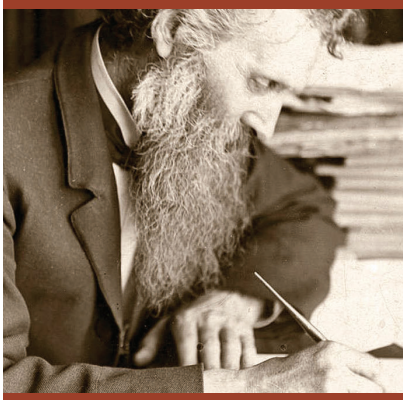
Fall/Winter 2026

JOHN MUIR ASSOCIATION

The View

There is a love of wild nature in everybody, an ancient mother-love showing itself whether recognized or no, and however covered by cares and duties.
- John Muir



The mission of the John Muir Association is to celebrate the life, share the vision, and preserve the legacy of John Muir through education, preservation, advocacy and stewardship, in partnership with the National Park Service at the John Muir National Historic Site.

Tending the Orchards at John Muir NHS

By Keith Park, Horticulturist



John Muir's historically compatible 'Elberta' peach orchard, replanted in 2008. Photo by author.

The orchards and fruit trees at John Muir National Historic Site (JMNHS) are pruned and maintained to be as historically representative of the character of the original Muir/Strentzel-era orchards as possible. During the late 19th century, concurrent with the period when Dr. John Strentzel was establishing the orchard empire that would become the JMNHS, the US Department of Agriculture was actively researching promoting the science of modern agriculture. Prior to the advent of more scientific and yield-based orchard practices, fruit trees tended to be taller, less organized, and harder to harvest… which translated to increased time and effort to harvest fruit for sale. Dr. Strentzel was an avid orchard enthusiast and founding member of the local grange (a collective of farmers and agriculturists where knowledge and information was shared), and as such would have been keenly interested in employing such modern growing techniques in his own orchards.



John Muir NHS apricot tree demonstrating the low-scaffold/open center structural training style for period-appropriate orchard trees. Photo by author.

Today, thanks in large part to our dedicated and knowledgeable weekly Landscape Volunteer cohort, these orchards and the trees within are pruned and sculpted to the same "modern" 19th century standards that Strentzel and Muir would have employed. This style is often called the "open bowl" or "vase" shape, consisting of a short main trunk about 30 inches high with several primary scaffold branches off the trunk. These scaffold limbs are pruned outward from the center to create space in the middle of the tree, which the USDA said increased light exposure into the tree's center for more and better fruiting and ripening, better airflow to prevent disease, and also facilitated picking since all the fruit was lower and easier to reach, creating efficiencies in the labor involved in a fruit harvest. This historic fruit tree shape is still used today, although orchards are now being grown on trellis systems much like grapes, to produce higher yields. Now, hopefully, as you roam the grounds of the JMNHS you can now see our orchards through the lens of 19th century agricultural practices!

JOHN MUIR ASSOCIATION

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National Park Service
www.nps.gov/jomu

Elaine Jackson-Retondo

The John Muir Association (JMA) is the official philanthropic partner of the John Muir National Historic Site.

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President's Message

Linda Vida, JMA President



The John Muir Association (JMA) has had a memorable spring/summer. We celebrated our largest event – Birthday/ Earth Day (BDED) – at the JMNHS on Saturday,April 18, 2026. The JMA in partnership with the National Park Service (NPS) hosts this event each year in honor of John Muir's April 21st birthday and the establishment and celebration of Earth Day.

JMA and NPS welcomed approximately 2,000 visitors to the park that day. Muir surrogate, Frank Helling led the parade into the park following bag pipers. JMA awarded five 2025 Conservation awards *(see P.7)*; had music on the center stage throughout the day; hosted a silent auction with almost 70 items to bid on; and had over 50 vendors offering activities for kids and imparting information about their research or their environmental products or systems.

JMA sponsored a Geology Walk along the Carquinez Strait on June 1st led by local geologist Martin Steinpress with 12 attendees. *(see P.4)*

The JMNHS hosted a free concert in the Orchard on June 6th. The Diablo Regional Concert band played a free community concert of patriotic music in honor of Martinez's 150th anniversary and the United States' 250th anniversary. Seventy-five people attended the concert. The band is considering making this an annual event.

In July, the JMA held two weeks of Mountain Day Camp located on the grounds of the JMNHS for children ages 7-12. Week one was held July 20 – July 24th and week two was held July 27 – July 31st. Total attendance was 45.

JMA staffed a booth at the annual Beaver Festival held in Susana Street Park on June 13th and in partnership with the Martinez Chamber of Commerce hosted a mixer at the JMNHS Visitor Center on August 20th. This event was attended by Martinez local business people.

JMA sponsored a booth in the Kite Zone at Martinez's celebration of its 150th anniversary on August 29th.

JMA has been very busy this spring & summer. JMA is planning additional events this fall.

Please visit our website (www.johnmuirassociation.org; Instagram @johnmuirassociation.org and follow the John Muir National Historic Site programs at www.nps.gov/jomu.

Please contact me if you have questions or ideas for collaborative projects.

Lindavida55@gmail.com or 510-917-8648.

NPS Update

By Elaine Jackson-Retondo, NPS Acting Superintendent



Earlier this summer, we said goodbye to Superintendent, K Lynn Berry who departed for Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area located in the Atlanta Georgia metro area to serve as their superintendent. This brought K Lynn's four-year tenure at JMNHS, Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site, Rosie the Riveter WWII Home Front Historical Park, Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial, and more recently Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail to a close.

Elaine Jackson-Retondo stepped in as acting superintendent at JMNHS and the four additional National Park Service (NPS) units in June. Elaine is in her 25th year of service with NPS. Her permanent position is with the NPS Regional Office located in San Francisco, where she manages the Cultural Resources and Science Division, which supports parks throughout the Pacific West and implements NPS historic preservation responsibilities at the regional level through the National Historic Landmarks and other programs.

Elaine has welcomed the opportunity to serve as acting superintendent and is committed to continuing work with the JMA.

By J.R. Earnest, Supervisory Interpretive Ranger



For the last sixteen years J.R. Earnest has worked at San Francisco Maritime NHP and like all Park Rangers, he wears many different flat hats throughout the day. He manages the Special Park Use Department, works as the fabricator for the Exhibits Department, and gives Interpretive programs aboard historic ships from the 19th century. The highlight of his career has been regularly taking visitors sailing aboard the schooner Alma. He is proud to have been part of the team that won the regional award for Achieving Relevance Through Interpretive Media and Technology. This team expanded access to the Park for homebound individuals by giving live virtual tours and partnering with Virtual Photo Walks.

Having grown up in a gateway community outside Yosemite, the National Parks have been a lifelong inspiration for him; he knew early on they would be his home but also his career. J.R. will be serving as the Supervisory Interpretive Ranger for John Muir NHS. He is excited for the opportunity to help share the legacy of Muir's work with the visiting public.

Geology Field Trip

By Todd Banks, Participant

Martin Steinpress, geologist, introduced the rocks and geology environment surrounding the Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline to fourteen plus JMA members and guests during a JMA-sponsored geology walk.

Steinpress emphasized the challenging geology of the Bay Area, call the Franciscan Complex (Formation). Humorously, he said that "no geologist can really figure out the Franciscan Complex rock formations." Millions of years ago, the Franciscan rocks were scraped from the deep ocean floor and smashed up against our then continental margin. The modern surface rock is now a geologist's nightmare, having been scrambled and distorted.

Many different rocks, all distorted and twisted, are immediately visible while strolling along the Regional Shoreline paved trail. The group moved westward from one outcrop to another for ½ mile along the road. At each stop, Martin explained the geology and stated that "geologists love road cuts."

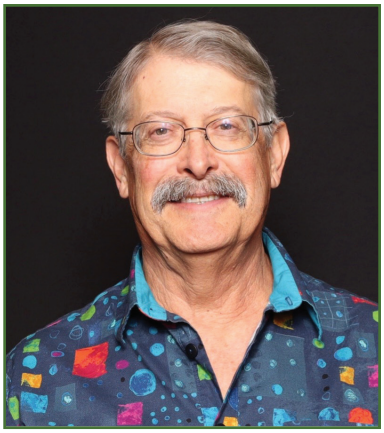
Throughout the talk, Steinpress made the rock descriptions accessible to a general audience. He explained how mud and sand from the ocean floor were transformed into shale and sandstone. He detailed the resulting further alteration of some of the shale and sandstone into crystallized rocks as they were heated and pressured and driven deep under the earth's surface. Then, these crystallized rocks were squished up to the surface. Novices and geology enthusiasts alike enjoyed this event.

Geology Walk Carquinez Strait

By Martin Steinpress, Geologist

Local geologist, educator and JMA member Martin Steinpress recently donated a geologic field trip to our silent auction. Martin holds a B.A. in Geology from UC Santa Barbara and an M.S. in Geology from the University of New Mexico, along with post-graduate studies in Water Resources Management. Before retiring, he built a distinguished career as a California Professional Geologist and Certified Hydrogeologist, geology instructor, and environmental consultant. Martin currently shares his expertise through classes, public talks, and field trips focused on geology, plate tectonics, and earthquakes, including at Mt. Diablo Adult Education (https://mdae.mdusd.org/programs/lifelongeducation) and CSU East Bay Concord's Osher Lifelong Learning Program (https://www.csueastbay.edu/concord/olli.html).

On June 1st Martin led a group of 14 for a 2-hour geologic field trip on Carquinez Scenic Drive west of Martinez. We examined roadcuts where Martin discussed the rock types, depositional environments and deformation of ~60-million-year-old sedimentary rocks of the Paleocene Vine Hill Sandstone. We then walked the George Miller Regional Trail for a picnic lunch at an overlook where Martin discussed the ancient Pleistocene Lake Corcoran in the Central Valley, the formation of Carquinez Strait and John Muir's investigations of the geology and glaciology of Yosemite Valley.



This fall Martin will present a lecture for JMA entitled "John Muir, Geologist and Glaciologist" focused on Muir's major contributions to the scientific understanding of the evolution of Yosemite by glacial processes. Largely self-taught, Muir conducted rigorous empirical fieldwork in Yosemite and elsewhere to develop multiple lines of evidence of glaciation. Through numerous publications, he directly challenged renowned Harvard professor and California State Geologist Josiah Whitney's hypothesis of a sudden tectonic collapse of the valley. This presentation will highlight Muir's unrecognized legacy of scientific insights that laid the groundwork for modern Pleistocene geomorphology in western North America.

Martin will also lead another geologic field trip for the 2027 JMA silent auction to examine rocks and structures on Mt. Diablo. Watch for this announcement.

Finding Calm in Nature

By Nicole Hope Sylvester, JMA Board Member

There is something remarkable that happens when we intentionally slow down outside.

Whether you are walking a trail, sitting beside a creek, or simply standing beneath a favorite tree, nature has an incredible ability to help our minds and bodies shift out of constant doing and back into simply being.

Research continues to show that spending time in nature can lower stress hormones, calm the nervous system, improve attention, and boost our mood. But one of the biggest benefits is not just being in nature. It is actually noticing it.

When we become fully present, we give our brains a break from replaying the past or worrying about the future. Instead, we reconnect with what is happening right now.

The next time you are out on the trail, try these two simple practices.

Wake Up Your Five Senses

As you walk, gently bring your attention to each of your senses.

What are five things you can see?

What are four things you can hear?

What are three things you can feel? Maybe it is the warmth of the sun, the breeze on your skin, or the texture of the trail beneath your feet.

What are two things you can smell?

What is one thing you can taste?

This simple exercise brings your attention back to the present moment and gives your busy mind something real to focus on. Many people notice they feel calmer, clearer, and more connected after just a few minutes.

Feel Yourself Grounded

Pause for a moment and notice your feet connecting with the earth.

Feel your weight being supported beneath you. Imagine roots slowly growing from the bottoms of your feet deep into the ground, anchoring you with every breath.

As you breathe in, imagine drawing in steadiness and calm. As you breathe out, let stress melt away into the earth.

Whether or not you picture the roots, simply feeling the solid support beneath your feet can help your nervous system recognize that, in this moment, you are safe.

Nature has a quiet way of reminding us that we do not always have to rush. Sometimes the greatest gift we can give ourselves is simply to pause, breathe, notice, and allow ourselves to become part of the landscape instead of just passing through it.

I hope your next visit to one of our beautiful parks gives you a chance to slow down, reconnect, and experience the calm that has been waiting for you all along.

"In every walk with Nature one receives far more than he seeks." **– John Muir, *Steep Trails***

Support John Muir NHS as a WNP Park Protector

By Lindsey Smith, WNP

If you've visited the bookstore at John Muir National Historic Site, you've already encountered Western National Parks (WNP), an official nonprofit partner of the National Park Service. Through WNP's Park Protector® membership program, you can help support educational programs, research, interpretation, and community engagement at John Muir NHS and more than 70 other national park sites.

With their $25 annual membership, Park Protectors enjoy benefits including a 10% discount at WNP's 65+ locations and 500+ public land sites, invitations to exclusive events, special member deals, and more.



At John Muir NHS, Park Protector memberships have supported Junior Ranger activities, annual celebrations, and interactive tours, inspiring future generations to love and protect our public lands.

Sign up to become a Park Protector the next time you're visiting the park or online at **ParkProtector.org**. For more information about WNP, visit **wnp.org**.

JMA News

Karen Lissa Najarian (1953 – 2026)

By Rick Najarian

Karen Najarian passed away peacefully surrounded by her family just prior to her 73rd birthday. She was a kindred spirit with the High Sierra and countless friends who shared her passion for off-trail life.

Karen was a graduate of Arroyo High School in San Lorenzo and received a Bachelor's Degree in Bacteriology from UC Berkeley before training as a licensed Clinical Laboratory Scientist (CLS).

After working many years as a CLS, Karen pursued a career as a backcountry backpacking guide in Yosemite National Park. Her passion for all things High Sierra coupled with a true gift for bringing out the best in people found her changing lives, one trip at a time. Karen moved on to other passions in photography, sewing, and creative writing after more than 13 years as a guide. Prior clients from across the country continued to insist that she and a few of her guides put together an annual trip on the east side of the Sierra.

Karen was active in the Diablo Valley Camera Club, served on the Board of Directors of the John Muir Association, was a Girl Scouts leader, an off-trail backpacker, a prolific writer and former member of the Contra Costa Sheriff's Search & Rescue Team.

Karen is survived by her husband, son, daughter, and grandson, as well as her brother, sister and a host of nieces and nephews. She will be sorely missed by her family and a host of friends, far and wide.



Photograph by Rick Najarian

Conservation Award Recipients 2025

By Linda Vida, JMA President

The John Muir Association (JMA) acknowledged five Conservation award recipients in 2025 at the Birthday/Earth Day Celebration (BDED). I want to highlight the recipients' outstanding work. (There are more complete writeups on the JMA website/Conservation (johnmuirascsociation.org, click on Conservations awards.)

JMA is now accepting nominations for Conservation Awards that will be presented in April 2027. All nomination information is on the JMA website. It's very easy to nominate an individual or an organization and self-nominations are accepted. Due date is February 1, 2027. If you know of a person or organization deserving of this award, I encourage you to submit an application.



Ricardo Black: *Environmental Education*

Ricardo is a Soil Scientist, Certified Interpretive Guide, and California Native Plant Certified Landscaper. He cherishes the opportunity to connect people with the natural world at Pacheco Marsh. Ricardo works for John Muir Land Trust (JMLT) and creates interpretive programs for all age groups. He takes groups on wildflower and mushroom walks from shoreline properties at Pacheco Marsh to the Delta at Hoover Ranch to the uplands of the Franklin Ridge and Harvey and Carr Ranch.



Jonathan Braun: *Conservationist of the Year*

Over the last 45 years, Jonathan has been an unwavering advocate for and leader in preserving public lands in Marin County. Jonathan is among the few rare individuals who have dedicated their lives to a vision of public land and preservation. He has been a member of the San Anselmo Open Space Committee since its inception in 1981 and was recently re-appointed to his 12th- four year term.



Jill Harcke and Sue Barry: *Conservation Lifetime Achievement*

Over 20 years ago Jill Harcke and Sue Barry created John Muir Mountain Day Camp for the youth of our community to experience the world as John Muir. Camp is held at the John Muir National Historic Site where children learn to unplug and experience days without electronics, television, computers or cell phones. Instead, campers explore and learn about nature while they are immersed in the life, thoughts and times of John Muir. The Camp's motto is "no child is left inside".



Etinosa Igunbor: *Habitat Restoration*

Etinosa is an environmental scientist, policy advocate, and restoration practitioner. Over the past seven years, Etinosa's conservation activities have focused on advancing nature-based solutions, wetland and forest restoration, soil carbon monitoring, and inclusive environmental governance. He is currently a PhD researcher in Ecological Sciences at Old Dominion University, where his research centers on coastal wetlands and living shoreline restoration on the East Coast.



Mantrap Lake Loon Conservation Project: *Resource Preservation*

Mantrap Lake, located in central Minnesota, hosts a remarkably high density of breeding loons. Mantrap's twisting shorelines, abundant bays, and natural aquatic vegetation allow these highly territorial birds to breed successfully in high densities. The last 40 years, there has been a remarkable effort by local volunteers to bolster loon reproduction by building nesting platforms for these birds. This is an outstanding model of citizen-led conservation efforts.

JOHN MUIR
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John Muir Mountain Day Camp 2026













Save the Dates

April 24, 2027
Birthday/Earth Day

Photographs by Thomas Rinpel