



## Project Report for Volunteer Trip Yosemite National Park May 12 – 18, 2019

### Executive Summary

Twelve volunteers and two volunteer trip leaders contributed 378 hours of volunteer labor from May 12 through May 18, 2019, primarily assisting the National Park Service in maintaining approximately 9 miles of trail, of which 6 miles was the Valley Loop trail near El Capitan and Bridalveil Falls, 1.5 miles of trail was the Happy Isles loop between Half Dome Village and the Mirror Lake trailhead and 1.5 miles was the Mirror Lake trail.

The National Park Service (NPS) Trail Crew, working under the supervision of Jeremy Brown and Joe Meno, provided guidance and oversight of the trail maintenance. Additionally, for two days, the NPS Trail Crew joined the efforts of Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) volunteers with the California Conservation Crew (CCC). The trail maintenance completed by the NPS Trail Crew and ConservationVIP® volunteers was successfully completed. Shown below (in red) are the trails ConservationVIP® volunteers revitalized, including paths that were damaged by the harsh winter experienced by the park. According to NPS trail crew, there were an estimated 10-15 times more fallen trees within Yosemite than in an average winter due to an increased snowpack and winds. Volunteers and the NPS Trail Crew, along with the CCC, repaired or built approximately 240 water drainages, pruned and brushed back shrubs and saplings, and cleared thousands of pounds of debris from fallen trees.



## **Detailed Report:**

### **Day One – May 12, 2019 (Orientation)**

Volunteers arrived Sunday, May 12, 2019 in the early afternoon. All volunteers were welcomed by the trip leaders and assistance was provided to get their tents set up at Upper Pines Campground. Due to flooding in the valley, the Yellow Pine Special Use Site for Volunteer Groups was unusable so the NPS provided three accommodating sites in the Upper Pines Campground. Once all volunteers arrived, an orientation to Conservation Volunteers International Program and the work to be conducted during the upcoming week was provided to the volunteers. Volunteers were provided the opportunity to ask questions about Yosemite, ConservationVIP® and the work. Volunteers introduced themselves, where they traveled from and why they chose to volunteer in Yosemite. By mid-afternoon, the volunteers and trip leaders were becoming well acquainted and started to have a familial sense that would last throughout the week. Dinner and an evening campfire on the first night provided a further opportunity for everyone to get to know each other.

### **Workday 1 – May 13, 2019**

Volunteer project trip leaders Patrick Murphy and Dale Walker met with NPS Trail Crew Supervisor Jeremy Brown, Joe Meno and Dave Patrick the morning of May 13th. The ConservationVIP® volunteers ate breakfast with the NPS crew before driving to the trailhead to begin trail maintenance. Before leaving for the day's work, a safety briefing was conducted and a shared value of doing the job safely was discussed. Because of the extremely harsh winter, Joe and Jeremy of the NPS Trail Crew, provided a demonstration on repairing and building drainages for the ConservationVIP® volunteers. Joe also provided context on the importance of water drainages to the conservation and maintenance of the trail. The ConservationVIP® trip leaders emphasized the importance of safety that covered, among many items, the preferred way to carry tools and the importance of hydration, rest and sunscreen.



At the trailhead off the Valley Loop Road just before El Capitan straight, the NPS Trail Crew and ConservationVIP® volunteers met with the CCC. The ConservationVIP volunteers broke out into two groups comingled with the CCC and set out along the trail with tools, mainly shovels and rakes, provided by the NPS Trail Crew. Throughout the day the NPS crew toggled between ConservationVIP groups to aid and assist the volunteers, working side-by-side and ensuring the volunteers were satisfied with progress of the trail.

Throughout the day volunteers were encouraged to take frequent breaks, drink and snack frequently, and to work at their own pace. As the day progressed all volunteers were diligent about both the trail work they accomplished and the safety of themselves and those around them. Along with wearing eye protection, gloves and sunscreen, rakes and shovels were carried with caution. The first day of work began at a slow pace while volunteers acclimated to the higher elevation and were becoming familiar with the nature of the work being completed on the trail. The Valley Loop trail is at approximately 4,000 feet elevation, considerably higher than what most volunteers were accustomed to. After the first day the ConservationVIP® Volunteers had repaired and maintained approximately 3 miles of trail and were impressed by the amount of standing water that was drained from the trail.



The weather on this day was pleasantly between 65 - 75 degrees and sunny or partly sunny skies but was unfortunately not indicative of the weather later in the week. The work was completed under the tower El Capitan wall, with volunteers happily viewing the wall throughout their workday.

#### **Workday 2 – May 14, 2019**

The NPS Trail Crew met with the volunteers and leaders at Upper Pines campground to enjoy time with volunteers before leaving for the trailhead at 8a.m. Once at the trailhead the group discussed individual and group safety before equipping with shovels and rakes provided by the NPS Trail Crew. The NPS Trail Crew reminded the Volunteers about the importance of trail maintenance on the trail and the natural aesthetic that is needed after a large amount of repairing drainages or pruning shrubs is completed.



Repairing drainages is needed to clear water from the trail. When there is standing water on the main thoroughfare of the trail, hikers often bypass the trail and trek over natural growth. This damages the surrounding flora and plant life. Trail pruning is needed because overgrowth on the trail pushes trail hikers and stock off the trail and onto the natural growth just off the trail. The natural growth could be conserved just feet off the trail by consolidating hikers onto an established trail.

The natural aesthetic of the trail is maintained by attempting to make the drainage repair and pruning look as natural as possible. This is accomplished by shoveling wide, natural looking swells or pruning shrubs to the roots and placing cut branches out of sight of the trail.

Volunteers contributed a full day of labor which included repairing approximately 75 drainages over 3 miles of trail. In addition, volunteers pruned back shrubs and re-established the trail where it had been washed out and less traceable. After workday 2, approximately 0.5 miles of the 2.5-mile trail had been brushed back.

After dinner the volunteers enjoyed a campfire while talking about the impact they were already making after two days.

### **Workday 3 – May 15, 2019**

The NPS Trail Crew met with the volunteers and leaders at Upper Pines campground to discuss a change in the nature of work and where the work would be accomplished. Volunteers would begin working on the Happy Isles loop, clearing debris from fallen trees. The NPS Trail Crew brought additional staff with chainsaws to cut downed trees into removable sizes. Jeremy and Joe of the NPS Trail Crew provided a discussion on

safely working near chainsaws and distributed ear protections for the volunteers. Again, the NPS Trail Crew mingled with the volunteers and had breakfast before departing for the worksite at 8:00a.m.

Once at the worksite, it was clear that there were thousands of pounds and dozens of



trees that needed to be cleared. The volunteers instantly began moving debris to the nearby road, so the NPS Trail Crew could use a front-end loader, excavator and dump truck to remove the debris. The brush piles were so large, that they began to become one long pile of debris piled along the side of the road, hundreds of feet long.

Volunteers continued to clear debris throughout the day, eventually making their way to the trailhead for the Mist trail. At this junction, the

volunteers moved back to trail maintenance of drainage repair, scaling and general maintenance work. By the end of the day the volunteers had completed the trail all the way beyond the Mirror Lake trailhead and were removing debris cut by the NPS Trail Crew.

On workday 3 the volunteers finished another 1.5 miles of debris clearing and trail maintenance which was rewarding because of the visual nature of the work completed and the volume of debris cleared.

The weather turned rainier on this workday, and volunteers completed most work under their protective rain gear. The temperature ranged from the upper 30's into the 50's.

#### **Workday 4 – May 16, 2019**

Because the volunteers were on their fourth day of trail maintenance, Joe, the NPS Trail Crew lead, discussed less about the nature of the work, but more about his philosophy of trail maintenance. Joe provided context on the importance of the water drainages to the conservation and maintenance of the trail and how to make them effective and beautiful, as if no work was completed there. All volunteers had the necessary tools, safety gear and nourishment for the day of digging water drainages around Mirror Lake.

By this point in the week, volunteers felt comfortable with the trail maintenance work and were able to contribute more effectively and efficiently. There was a strong sense of camaraderie on the trail between the volunteers and the NPS Trail Crew. The volunteers continued to have a focus on group safety, with frequent water and snack breaks and safety with tools. The work was completed in the shadow of Half Dome and volunteers were thanked by many hikers using the trail.

The week of trail work was informative, tiring and inspiring for the volunteers.



### **Rest Day – May 17, 2019**

Friday, the last full day of the trip was set aside as a rest day. The volunteers were asked to keep the leaders informed of their intentions and any trip(s) planned for the day. Each volunteer chose their activities and places to visit to round out their experience at Yosemite. Many of the volunteers made plans with other volunteers as friendships continued and in recognition of the importance of traveling/hiking with a partner(s).

At the end of the day it was very enjoyable to hear all the experiences and places visited to add to the volunteers' memories of Yosemite. That evening after a delicious dinner, the enthusiasm and kindness shared amongst the volunteers was wonderful and there was a sincere and warm feeling of accomplishment and togetherness.

### **Travel Day – September 18, 2019**

Volunteers started the morning breaking down their camp, enjoying breakfasts, loading their gear into their vehicles and saying goodbye to new friends. By late morning Upper Pines Campground sites for the volunteers was empty and all volunteers had left.

### **Logistics**

The NPS Trail Crew provided all tools for all work projects. The trip leaders drove the volunteers to the trailheads where work was completed. The volunteers hiked and worked under the supervision of the NPS Trail Crew.

Volunteers and Volunteer Project Leaders camped at Upper Pines Campground sites 95, 96 and 97 in Yosemite Valley. All volunteers brought their own camping gear, tents and protective wear.

Willow Creek Catering provided all meals in a timely and tasty fashion. Conservation Volunteers International Program contracted with the Willow Creek Catering to provide cooked breakfasts and dinners, and to provide food for volunteers to prepare their own lunches to take to the work site. A cook tent and cook truck were set up adjacent to the campsite. Sufficient water and drinks were provided at all times. Two chefs prepped, cooked and served a total of 255 meals for the volunteers throughout the week.

### **Summary**

All volunteers, who quickly became good friends and shared the common bond of “sustaining some of the world’s greatest landscapes and cultural sites,” made a lasting impact on the Park and positively influenced the NPS Trail Crew. All NPS Trail Crew that worked with the volunteers were inspired by the commitment from each individual and the organization. Conservation Volunteers International Program and volunteers give special thanks to the Yosemite National Park Trail Crew under the leadership of Jeremy Jacobs and Joe Meno, Yosemite National Park Trails Manager Dave Kari, Yosemite National Park Volunteer Coordinator Sally Kintner, and Yosemite National Park Volunteer Program Assistant Sandy Hernandez for their commitment to the Park and our volunteer projects. Volunteers also thank the Willow Creek Catering company for their outstanding assistance with food preparation, delivery, and timely service.

Volunteers completed 378 hours of volunteer labor, maintained approximately 9 miles of trails, repaired or built approximately 240 water drainages, cleared thousands of pounds of debris from fallen trees, and most importantly, made many new friends and countless lasting memories!