

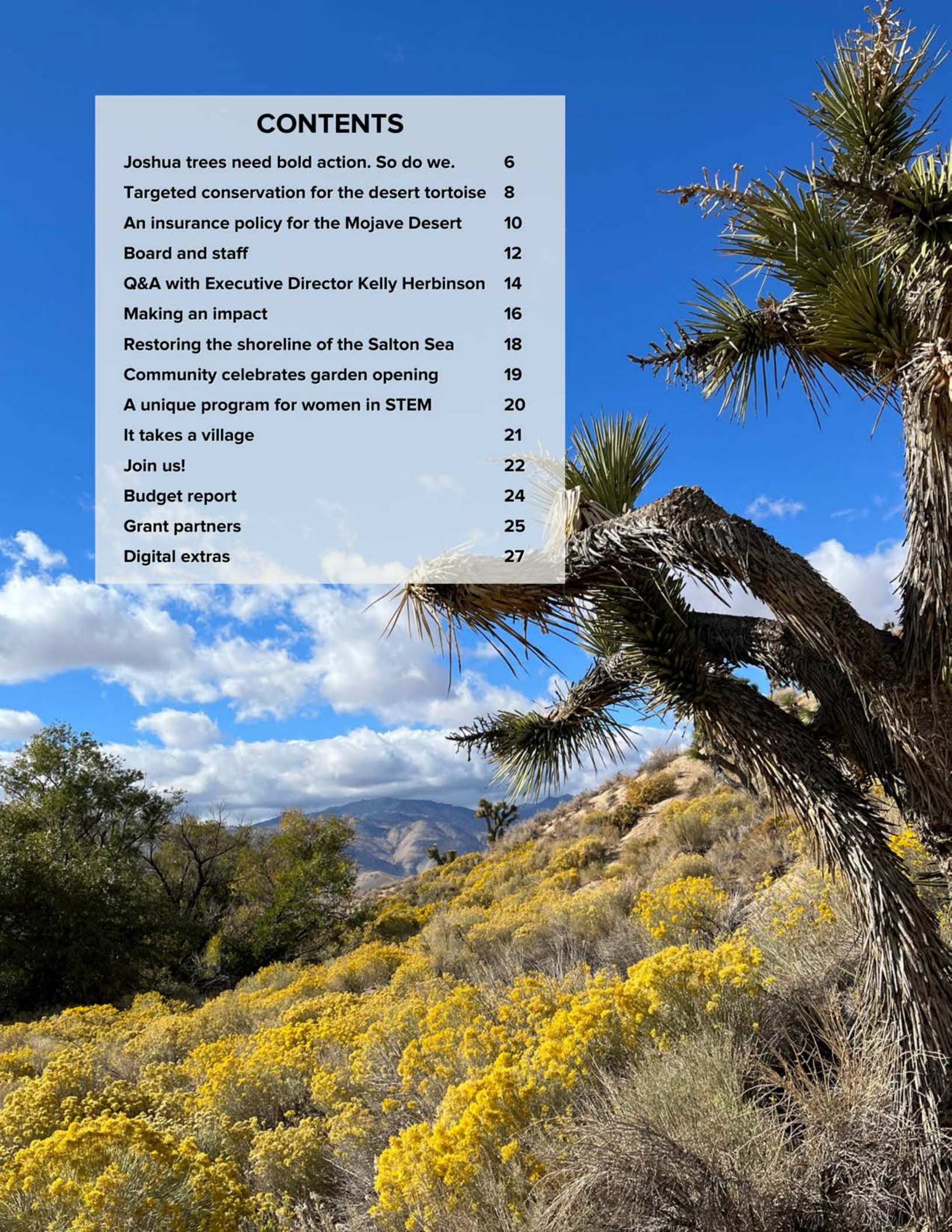


**2023 ANNUAL REPORT**



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We are all involved with what is happening to our planet. I think it is important for us to pause and think about what our relationship to nature has been in the past, and what it could be going forward.

The next decade will bring to the forefront some of the most pressing environmental problems the planet has collectively faced to date. We know that preserving the California desert—one of the country's largest ecosystems—is an important step in rebuilding our planetary health.

The Mojave Desert Land Trust takes on the greatest challenges facing the California desert by permanently protecting land, restoring habitat, and preserving native seeds. We defend the dark night skies, water, and critical species that make up a thriving desert ecosystem. This landscape has a transformative power, and we believe that everyone deserves to access and enjoy it.

In 2024, MDLT officially entered its 18th year. Seeing our organization grow from a small grassroots land trust to where we are today has been incredibly inspiring. We have dedicated the past two decades to building our capacity, nurturing relationships, and refining our conservation strategy to bring us to this pivotal moment.

We recognize this work is only possible through collaboration with the wider community. Our multifaceted approach to conservation plays a huge part in our success, but we would not be here without your support. Time is not on our side, but you are, and together we will make a difference.

Thank you for joining us.

John Simpson  
Board President





A lot can happen in a year. Our purpose took on new meaning and urgency in 2023, driven by impacts to two of the desert's most iconic species, the western Joshua tree and the Mojave Desert tortoise. The western Joshua tree became the first native plant in California to be legislatively protected primarily due to the threat of climate change, while the State of California is expected to uplist the Mojave Desert tortoise to Endangered in 2024.

In the years ahead, MDLT will be playing a leading role in the preservation of these two species. Along with a few key partners, we founded the Joshua Tree Conservation Coalition, a new regional body that will work to ensure timely, measurable conservation action is taken to protect the species. To save critical desert tortoise habitat, MDLT is coordinating a three-year project to restore one of the most heavily impacted regions for the state's reptile. The challenges facing these two keystone species are symptomatic of the twin overarching threats facing the California desert—climate disruption and habitat loss.

A third major program will define our work in the decades ahead: The Mojave Desert Seed Bank is undergoing a sizable expansion. Thanks to funding from California's Wildlife Conservation Board, we're doubling our capacity and bolstering this insurance policy against state seed shortages.

You can read more about these significant collaborative efforts for the California desert in this Annual Report, as well as many highlights of the last 12 months.

The California desert is part of the largest relatively intact ecosystem in the US outside Alaska, but it's under significant threat. We are here to ensure this ecosystem remains connected to support the wildlife and people that rely on it every day.

We could not do this work without the support of our community. Together we can make a difference.

Kelly Herbinson  
Executive Director





# JOSHUA TREES NEED BOLD ACTION. SO DO WE.

By Kelly Herbinson, Executive Director

If you are reading these words, you probably have a relationship with Joshua trees. Some of you grew up among them and know them as family. Some of you moved to the desert later in life, at least in part, because of them. Or maybe some of you have never seen one in real life, and you hope to make your way to the Mojave to see their spiny branches warmed by the hot sun.

I remember driving from the coast to Arizona as a kid and winding through the Joshua tree forests bisected by Interstate 15. My sister and I sat quietly taking them in from our respective backseat windows, surprised by the desert holding something so immense—like they had consequence.

They are lucky for their immensity. Unlike a small insect or fungus or plant that's easy to ignore, and may even go extinct with no one ever noticing, it's hard to look away when a species as ubiquitous and unique as a Joshua tree begins to decline. And unfortunately, it appears to be the case, at least in certain parts of their range.

There is evidence that climate change will shift temperature and precipitation patterns resulting in suitable Joshua tree habitat shrinking in this century. A peer-reviewed study famously showed that suitable Joshua tree habitat in Joshua Tree National Park may shrink to 2% under certain climate scenarios. Despite this evidence, both the state and federal governments have so far declined to formally list the species as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, in large part due to uncertainty surrounding the predictive climate science.

California did pass the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act which requires the state to create a western Joshua tree management plan and puts a price tag on Joshua trees lost to development. The resulting funds will be used to protect significant Joshua tree habitat. Although we applaud the state for working towards a solution, we are concerned that the Act won't build enough funding, nor incentivize the innovative programs needed to effectively ensure the long-term viability of the species.



In response, we initiated conversations with our partners including federal and state agencies, researchers, and other nonprofits to envision what is needed to truly protect the Joshua tree.

**Those conversations led us to identify two significant and immediate needs.**

The first is to build a Joshua Tree Conservation Coalition, ensuring communication and collaboration between agencies, land managers, Tribes, researchers, and other stakeholders to take bold, decisive, collaborative conservation action to fully protect the species.

The second initiative is a research project designed to build a comprehensive demographic dataset to monitor the status of western Joshua trees across their entire range over the long term so we can clearly see and measure changes at the population level. The resulting science is imperative for the Joshua tree conservation community to make science-backed land management and preservation decisions.

We at MDLT remain vigilant about the impacts of climate disruption in the desert and we are focusing our efforts on implementing innovative solutions to these problems. We are honored to take a leadership role in long-term protection for the Joshua tree and all of the life that calls the desert home. I can't wait to get started.

We are thrilled to announce that the State of California, through the Wildlife Conservation Board, has agreed to fund these two initiatives through 2025. But we can still use your help! These types of initiatives cost our organization more than we are funded through our grants. If you are interested in supporting MDLT as we take bold, decisive conservation action for our most imperiled and important species like the Joshua tree, please consider a donation today.



## A GRASSROOTS EFFORT

MDLT has been one of the leading organizations mobilizing support in recent years for permanent protection of the western Joshua tree across its range. We gave the community tools to make their voices heard in support of listing the species under the California Endangered Species Act and a rally at MDLT headquarters helped galvanize grassroots action. Hundreds of people wrote to decision-makers and made public comments at state committee meetings.

When the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act passed, we convened a special informational event for the public with representatives of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Center for Biological Diversity, and the U.S. Geological Survey, Western Ecological Research Center. Watch the recording to learn how the law impacts homeowners, where to apply for permits, and what steps we can take to ensure the Act protects the western Joshua tree. Scan the QR code below.





# TARGETED CONSERVATION for the *desert tortoise*

By Kelly Herbinson, Executive Director

Humans have paid homage to tortoises and turtles as far back as we have recorded history. Many cultures have held beliefs that the world rests on a turtle's back. If you've seen a desert tortoise, you can see why. We often speak of them as ambassadors, icons, or keystone species, but none of those terms capture the degree to which tortoises resemble wizards. I remember the first time I saw one as a field biologist in Barstow. A tortoise plodded out of a burrow and swung her head to match an eye with mine. It was one of the more magical experiences of my life and led me to dedicate the next few decades to working with them.

Turtles and tortoises are the second most imperiled group of vertebrates on the planet, second only to nonhuman primates. Despite their hard shells, they're fragile and often sensitive to environmental change. The Mojave Desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) is no exception. Our tortoise lives throughout the California and Nevada deserts, and into Arizona and Utah, but severe habitat loss and degradation, over-predation by ravens and coyotes, vehicle strikes, disease, and drought have caused severe population decline. The species was listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1990. Recent data shows their status is not improving. Desert tortoise population density and abundance declined by 38% in just the last 20 years. This continued decline prompted a review of the species' status. We expect to see the State of California uplist the Mojave Desert tortoise to Endangered in 2024.





## What do we do now?

When a species is listed under the Endangered Species Act, its most critical habitat is identified for increased protection. For the desert tortoise, much of that habitat is on federally owned and managed land. The significance of the continued decline prompted an interagency collaboration between the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation known as the Desert Tortoise Recovery and Sustainment Partnership (RASP). The RASP is designed to coordinate a bolder strategy for increased, targeted conservation activities with the goal of ultimately recovering the desert tortoise.

MDLT was honored to be chosen as one of the largest grant recipients in the program's inaugural year, receiving more than \$1 million to restore and protect critical desert tortoise habitat northeast of Barstow over the next three years. In 2023, the first year of the grant, MDLT staff traveled to this remote region for initial ground assessments of tortoise activity and established restoration plans for the focal areas. Recent tortoise scat was discovered during these field assessments—a promising sign! Our three-year goals are to carry out the interagency strategy of establishing large, intact expanses of habitat by clearly delineating and signing legal travel routes in the area, and halting and restoring unauthorized cross-country off-highway vehicle activity and route proliferation that has occurred in this region for several years.

The resulting intact habitat, free from unauthorized vehicle impacts, will support recovery of the desert tortoise populations that historically thrived in this region. Eventually, visitors to these public lands will benefit from clear route signage and confidence that their recreational activities follow the Bureau of Land Management's land management plans.

*We are grateful to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for the generous funding as we continue working with our agency and NGO partners in creating innovative solutions to the complex conservation challenges our California desert wildlife continue to face.*



## HOW CAN I HELP?

We are thrilled to have generous grant funding to support this work, however it doesn't cover all our costs. Donations from members and donors like you provide crucial operating resources that enable us to undertake important conservation programs like this one. If you are interested in strategic conservation of the Mojave Desert tortoise, please consider donating today. We're just getting started and we need your help.



# An insurance policy for the Mojave Desert

Within the California desert region, there are lush oases, rivers, and springs that offer year-round water sources for wildlife. The mountains are home to junipers and firs, and the salty playas have plants that have adapted to the high salinity. Rare species live here that are found nowhere else on the planet. Some of these ecological treasures were lost in the York Fire in 2023.

California's second-largest wildfire of the year burned more than 90,000 acres and damaged over one million Joshua trees within Mojave National Preserve. The Preserve is home to a disproportionately high number of rare and endemic species, and is considered by some biologists to be an area of global significance. MDLT witnessed first-hand the devastation of diverse flora across 560 acres we protect within the Preserve.

Desert ecosystems are not adapted to fire and the impact that a large-scale disaster leaves on the landscape is long lasting. Unpredictable and sparse rains make recovery and restoration challenging. It may take centuries for the desert to recover from a major fire, if at all. And while we cannot reverse the effects of the York Fire in the near-term, there are steps we can take to prepare for the next disaster.





## Before disaster strikes

Seed banking is key to ensuring the survival of our state's ecosystems by making genetically appropriate seed available for the habitat restoration of rare, threatened, and culturally important species. Seed banking is a critical tool for fire preparedness, management, and recovery, but it must be done proactively. Revegetation begins with seeds, but infrequent precipitation in the desert means that seed is not always available when needed. Having seed available from genetically appropriate species is critical to the success of restoration efforts.

A 2023 report by the National Academy of Sciences found there is a lack of adequate seed for restoration in the west, including the Mojave Desert. In May 2023, the California Wildlife Conservation Board awarded a \$3.19 million grant to MDLT to support the expansion of our Mojave Desert Seed Bank. This investment will enable us to collect, process, and store seed representing 300 taxa over the next four years and expand our facility's current capacity to 500 taxa, approximately 20% of the desert's native flora.

We are proud of this unique component of our conservation strategy. Seed collection is becoming a part of MDLT's stewardship standards and will be integrated into how we manage our lands. That's not something you often hear when talking about land management!

Support from our partners allows us to do a wide range of collections for restoration. Over the next four years, we aim to collect over 2,000 pounds of seed and make it available for restoration across the region. This effort plays an important role in long-term conservation as the state aims to protect 30% of California's land and water by 2030.





# BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**John Simpson, President**

Founding member of MDLT, real estate executive

**Abdel Reid, Vice President**

Co-Founder and Managing Partner of Jacobs and Reid

**Peter Brooks, Treasurer**

Former marine, water industry executive, and defense writer

**Geary Hund, Secretary**

Former California Desert and Monuments Program Director for the Wilderness Society, retired senior wildlife biologist for U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and former MDLT Executive Director

**Gwen Barker, Director**

Rimrock Ranch Owner and marketing extraordinaire

**Robyn Helmlinger, Director**

Partner with Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe

**Ron Radziner, Director**

Architect and Design Partner at Marmol Radziner

**Steve Hely, Director**

Television writer, author, and co-host of The Great Debates podcast

**Brad Wilson, Director**

Partner and Chief Executive Officer of Ace Hotel Group and the brand's in-house creative agency Atelier Ace



# MEET OUR TEAM



**"The Mojave Desert is an ecologically diverse, floristically complex, and culturally significant place, full of interesting species with unique adaptations to this arid environment. Working here provides an opportunity for me to work with a talented team to collect and preserve native plant seeds for conservation and restoration of this landscape that I cherish."**

**Patrick Emblidge**  
Seed Program Manager



**"We have a duty to help the next generation see beauty in the desert so they want to defend wildlife and open spaces. I'm proud to be part of their education. Working here allows me to see the faces of students as they learn to explore and build a genuine love of conservation."**

**Mary Cook-Rhyne**  
Education Program Manager



**"The California desert is a remarkable and abundant landscape that deserves protection. In my role at MDLT, I have the privilege of helping others support desert conservation and I am deeply grateful to our generous MDLT community. I am inspired by my colleagues daily and I feel lucky to work toward meaningful goals with incredible experts."**

**Kellie Flint**  
Philanthropy Officer

## **Current at the time of publication:**

Madena Asbell, Director of Plant Conservation  
Ross Bezell, Natural Resources Technician  
Sarah Bliss, Director of Land Conservation  
Alexander Boice, Lands Manager  
Lani Brown, Director of Operations & Human Resources  
Mary Cook-Rhyne, Education Program Manager  
Jessica Dacey, Director of Communications & Public Engagement  
Ella DeMaria, Social Media & Outreach Coordinator  
Patrick Emblidge, Seed Program Manager  
Sasha Escamilla, Seed Bank Field Coordinator  
Kellie Flint, Philanthropy Officer  
Yanina Aldao Galvan, Project Coordinator - Lands  
Robyn Grace, Director of Grants & Grants Administration  
Corina Godoy, Collections Manager  
Jessica Graybill, Content Manager  
Cody Hanford, Deputy Executive Director & Chief Conservation Officer  
Joelle Hazher, Natural Resource Manager  
Kelly Herbinson, Executive Director  
Svetlana Iachkova, Nursery Technician  
Brandy Ivener, Chief Financial Officer  
Krystian Lahage, Public Policy Officer  
Diane Mailey, Director of Philanthropy  
Izabel Martinez, Production Assistant  
Mackenzie Nelson, Outreach and Volunteer Coordinator  
Rylee Nutter, Acquisitions Coordinator  
Lenna Pettersson, Nursery Manager  
Raechel McClellan, Operations Coordinator  
Dustin Scott, Acquisitions Manager  
Kayla Thompson, Natural Resources Technician  
Kirby Urriaga, Field Technician  
Steve Woodall, Membership & Philanthropy Operations Coordinator



## Q & A with Executive Director

# KELLY HERBINSON



“The desert  
changed my life.”



Listen to an extended interview with Kelly Herbinson by scanning the QR code at left. Photo: Kelly Herbinson weighs a baby desert tortoise while conducting field work in the Mojave Desert.

MDLT’s Board of Directors recently appointed Kelly Herbinson as our Executive Director. Kelly has been a fierce advocate of the California desert for decades, as a tortoise biologist, an MDLT board member, and now Executive Director. We took this opportunity to hear her perspective on the work that lies ahead.

### **How did you come to the California desert?**

After graduating college in 2001, I really wanted to explore the country and learn about different animals and ecosystems. My work took me to Montana where I studied endangered trout, and then to northern California where I surveyed for macro-invertebrates. From there, I was offered a temporary job monitoring desert tortoises for a new gas pipeline project in Barstow and that’s where everything began to change.

I remember the first time I saw a wild tortoise emerge from its burrow. I was in love with the way everything in this environment is secretive and spiny.

That was in 2002. The desert changed my life—I gave up everything, moved into my pickup truck, and mostly worked as a desert field biologist until my daughter was born in 2018.

### **How did you get involved with MDLT?**

Early in my career as a desert field biologist most of my work involved surveying tortoises, conducting health assessments on them, or radio tracking them as part of a program to monitor the species’ overall status. I also did a lot of plant and bird surveys. It was really dreamy; I got to camp and hike in the desert for a living and learn about this incredible ecosystem.



Around 2008, everything started to shift. Renewable energy projects started coming in and tortoise biologists like me got channeled to work on the project sites. Between 2011 and 2017, I helped manage four or five large-scale translocations of desert tortoises to make way for these new developments. It was brutal. We spent years tracking tortoises and assessing their health before and after their translocations. It was distressing to watch them go through it while seeing their habitat be destroyed.

My fellow biologists and I wanted to find an organization that was protecting habitat to donate to, and together we found the Mojave Desert Land Trust.

I moved to Pioneertown in 2011 and met some of MDLT's board members, and two years later they invited me onto the board. I was thrilled to be a part of this dedicated team and so excited to work in service of desert protection. I still am.

When our former Executive Director stepped down in 2021, the board asked if I would be interested in assuming the position. I decided to pursue the opportunity and became Joint Executive Director with my respected colleague and long-time desert advocate, Cody Hanford. Cody is now serving as Deputy Executive Director and Chief Conservation Officer to better support the needs of the organization.

**What's your vision for MDLT and the California desert in this role?**

My ultimate goal as Executive Director is to maintain the California desert region as a connected, biodiverse, and thriving ecosystem that sustains the people and biodiversity that rely on it. We're living in a pivotal time for conservation.

Three things stand out to me that shape my vision for the future of the California desert:



**“We must act boldly, we must innovate, and we must collaborate.”**

First, climate change is happening. We were already seeing unprecedented levels of biodiversity and habitat loss. Now, we add to that significant climate disruption. We can't do business as usual anymore. We must act boldly, we must innovate, and we must collaborate.

Second, inclusivity is essential. The conservation movement has historically marginalized communities of color, Tribes, different socioeconomic groups, and people with disabilities. We're working to center community and inclusivity in our work to ensure everyone has equal access and a voice, and we're working to engage with local Tribes to make thoughtful conservation decisions.

Finally, *we are nature*. Conservation movements often appear to be prioritizing animals and plants over people, but in reality we are working to protect nature, not only because it has an intrinsic right to exist, but because humans rely on functioning ecosystems for survival. This disconnection from nature directly correlates to poor mental health outcomes. As our country faces rising mental health issues, we're inspired to not only protect habitat, but also to foster the connections to nature that we each are born with. I believe this disconnection is the driving force behind our greatest environmental concerns. And I know that we'll need droves of people who feel connected to the desert to continue fighting for it long after I'm gone.



# Making an impact

## ***Acre by acre***

In a banner year for our land conservation program, MDLT acquired **6,385 acres** in 2023, including parcels within wilderness areas, national parks and monuments, wildlife linkages, and other critical habitat. These lands help maintain genetic variation in wildlife populations and provide a means for species to migrate in response to climate change. We also transferred 2,458 acres to the Bureau of Land Management in two of our project areas; the Old Woman Mountains Wilderness Area and Mojave Trails National Monument.

## ***Restoring the ecosystem***

MDLT manages over 60,000 acres across the California desert, some of which we will steward in perpetuity. Restoration of these lands can require trash and invasive plant removal, trail maintenance, and repair of degraded areas with vertical mulching and erosion control. In 2023, staff and volunteers cleared nearly **seven tons of debris**, ranging from illegally dumped tires to household trash, and installed over 320 linear feet of fencing. During eight wildlife surveys, we documented six live tortoises.

## ***Preserving seed for the future***

The Mojave Desert Seed Bank has over 700 collections of over 200 different taxa. Staff added **52 new collections** in 2023. The special status Death Valley sandmat (*Euphorbia vallis-mortae*) was one of seven new taxa collected from MDLT's Desert Springs properties in Kern County, while our first collection of Indian tobacco (*Nicotiana quadrivalvis*) was made from Palisades Ranch near Victorville. It will be used to revegetate parts of this biodiversity hub.





### ***Getting outdoors***

Nearly **1,000 young people** in Southern California connected with the desert through MDLT's educational programming in 2023. Students took part in experiential learning labs about desert ecology, carried out stewardship, contributed community science about species on MDLT lands, and had artwork and poetry published in the *Cholla Needles: Young Writers and Artists* and *Joshua Tree Voice* magazines.



### ***A dedicated volunteer corps***

Volunteers donated over **4,487 hours** to desert conservation work in 2023. They provided essential support to every area of our programming, from land acquisition to public events. During the year, volunteer service included cleaning seeds from 50 different species, sending 6,000 letters and postcards, growing around 18,000 plants, and removing two tons of debris from our Morongo Basin properties. Turn to page 27 to see who volunteered in 2023.



### ***Native plants for restoration***

MDLT's annual native plant sales are a wildly popular event, reflecting the community interest in growing locally sourced native plants at home because of their habitat value and beauty. This year, **3,857 plants found new homes** at our largest-ever native plant sale. Over 65 species were represented, the biggest variety offered to date.



### ***Advocating for the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument***

MDLT plays an important role in the grassroots effort to designate a new desert national monument. In 2023, staff worked to support the evolving campaign needs, from writing chapters for the report of preservation-worthy features and serving as a host organization for a Chuckwalla Youth Ambassador to hosting a hike to the area for Eastern Coachella Valley residents.





# Restoring the shoreline of the Salton Sea

In recent decades, the Salton Sea has suffered from declining inflows from the Colorado River because of water diversions to coastal California, evaporation, and the impacts of climate change. The Salton Sea is California's largest lake by surface area and provides a unique saline habitat for fish and birds. However, as the Sea recedes, the salt concentrates threaten the livelihood of fish and impact migratory birds' ability to rest, feed, and nest. As more of the lakebed becomes exposed, the potential for wind-blown dust increases.

The Salton Sea area is home to a diverse community of residents now vulnerable to the impacts of poor air quality. Despite its ongoing deterioration, the Sea remains a critical resource for wildlife along the Pacific Flyway, a diverse chain of habitats ranging from Alaska down the western half of North America all the way through the southern tip of South America. This wetland serves both resident and migratory birds, leading to some of the highest levels of avian biodiversity in the southwestern United States.

The Mojave Desert Land Trust has partnered with the California Botanic Garden and the California Department of Water Resources on the state's Vegetation Enhancement Project, a significant restoration project to revegetate the receded shoreline of the Salton Sea. As part of the restoration efforts, MDLT staff and volunteers grew 15,253 native plants in 2023 to help with dust suppression and habitat restoration.

The project involved solarizing 40 cubic yards of potting mix and filling over 18,000 pots which were then sown with seed from species adapted to high salinity. To further increase their saline tolerance, the plants were irrigated with salt water. A portion of the plants has been delivered to the California Botanic Garden where they will be cared for until they are ready to be transplanted. This project is continuing in 2024 and we look forward to sharing the progress.





# Community celebrates garden opening



**“We are gathered here to celebrate hope.  
This garden represents possibility.”**

**Kelly Herbinson, Executive Director**

In December, the Mojave Desert Land Trust and community members proudly commemorated the official ribbon-cutting of the Mojave Desert Discovery Garden. What once was a heavily compacted parking lot now blooms with plants and pollinators flourishing in their native home. With 95% of the plants grown on-site, the garden is the culmination of years of collaboration with partners, our supporters, and the high desert community.

Above: John Simpson, MDLT Board President; Marina West, Mojave Water Agency Division 2 Director; Madena Asbell, MDLT Director of Plant Conservation Programs; Gina Alvarado, Program Associate, San Manuel Strategic Philanthropy; Kelly Herbinson, MDLT Executive Director.

To date, the project has been possible thanks to funding from the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, Mojave Water Agency, Horne Family Foundation, the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust, JW Marriott Desert Springs, and support from donors around the world. It is the result of countless hours of hard work served by our volunteers and AmeriCorps members, Marines from the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in 29 Palms, and local Eagle Scouts. JT Lab helped design the signs and Whitewater Rock and Supply and Sustainable Northwest Wood provided landscaping supplies.



A unique program

# FOR WOMEN IN STEM

“The WISDOM program provides a uniquely enriching way for women to gain field experience, leadership skills, and most important of all, the connections to the natural and human community around us. And that is the most powerful relationship that we can nurture, our relationship to ecosystems and the roles we will play in the protection of these landscapes for generations. It starts with uplifting marginalized voices and recognizing there are so many strong leaders in our community.”

Elizabeth Paige

Former Intern, Dark Night Skies project

For the last five years, the Women In Science Discovering Our Mojave (WISDOM) program has been helping to change the face of the scientific community working in the California desert. MDLT’s innovative internship provides women with a vital stepping-stone into conservation science, a field where they have been historically underrepresented. To date, the WISDOM program has served 33 interns, of which 87% self-identify as a person of color.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), women comprise only 29% of the world’s scientific researchers. Women of color face unique challenges entering the field. The WISDOM internship provides women from underserved communities with opportunities to engage in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields by gaining experience and conducting scientific research.

From beetles to bighorns, springs to starlight, WISDOM interns have provided new baseline data about biodiversity within Mojave Trails National Monument. A 2023 Bureau of Land Management article noted, “The WISDOM program creates opportunities for burgeoning women scientists to explore the Mojave Desert and gain valuable field experience to assist in a career path as future scientists and desert advocates.”

*WISDOM is a collaboration with the Bureau of Land Management and is supported by the Conservation Lands Foundation.*





# It takes a village

Conservation is a community effort. Few Mojave Desert Land Trust properties exemplify this like Caliente Creek, an important landscape not only for habitat restoration and scientific research, but also for public access for surrounding communities.



Here, mountain ranges merge with the desert floor as rolling hills of blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*) and gray pine (*Pinus sabiniana*) share soil with desert sagebrush scrub. MDLT acquired these 1,440 acres within an ecological transition zone in 2022 in partnership with the Trust for Public Land. Since then, working directly with on-the-ground land stewards, MDLT has begun developing a land management plan that goes beyond the traditional models of stewardship. With the help of local volunteers, MDLT has initiated a plan that incorporates community input and participation. Community members themselves are the stewards of the land at the Caliente Creek Preserve.

Lead land monitor volunteers Alice and Marci set out regularly on horseback to survey the area. Alice says, “It gives us a chance to see nature as nature is supposed to be. I’m hoping people will be interested and motivated to participate in all of this. It’s the cycle of life.”

Caliente Creek’s oaken grasslands bring a set of stewardship challenges different from MDLT’s usual desert properties. This is where first-hand experience with the land comes in. As ranchers, the community understands the importance of keeping the land healthy and protecting open space. MDLT will be using prescribed grazing as a fire prevention management strategy on portions of this property. Grazing livestock consume the invasive grasses before they form seeds, reducing the amount of invasive species in the seed bank and allowing the native wildflowers to re-establish. We will be working closely in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy and The Tejon Ranch Conservancy on grazing best practices for ecosystem restoration.

MDLT Director of Land Conservation Sarah Bliss explains, “The community’s role and connection to the preserve is integral. With access to the preserve crossing into neighborhoods, the property is interwoven in the landscape of the community. We are working to balance community needs with our mission to preserve and steward these lands in perpetuity.”



Above: Residents examine geologic specimens during a lesson conducted by Education Programs Manager Mary Cook-Rhyne. Left: A blue oak at Caliente Creek.



# Join us!



"I have had the privilege of being part of MDLT since the beginnings in 2006, as a supporter, volunteer, and member. The passion, dedication, and expertise of MDLT has made a distinct and noticeable difference in the health and protection of these beautiful desert lands for the future enjoyment of all. Grateful I am to be part of these efforts."

Diana, Member (Desert Lover)



"The Mojave Desert has been my favorite space for contemplation, peace, joy, silence, dark skies, adventure, and solace... a place to share, breathe, and meditate. I have volunteered for different events and organizations, and have found MDLT to be the best organization to volunteer for and be a member of. I am thankful for having the honor and fortune to participate in some of their work, and I hope I may continue to have such good luck."

Jaime, Member (Desert Member)



"I am an MDLT member because the Mojave Desert is full of treasures and natural oddities that we, as inhabitants of this earth, must protect. The Mojave is a magical place and holds a special place in my heart."

Erin, Member (Desert Discoverer)

"The Mojave Desert is a vast and magnificent desert environment that's constantly under threat by climate change, development, and mining interests. Because it is such a unique environment it must, must be protected from depredation on all sides. Once desert lands are gone, we can never get them back, so we must fight to save them."

Libby, Desert Star

**Create a lasting impact for future generations by joining the Desert Stars planned giving society.**

Email [donations@mdlt.org](mailto:donations@mdlt.org) for more information or scan the QR code at right.





# Thank you to our donors!

We are deeply grateful for the many people and organizations that supported MDLT in 2023.

To see our full list of donors, please scan the QR code below.



## YOU CAN PROTECT YOUR LAND!

Donations or bargain sales of land can significantly reduce legal and tax liabilities to property owners while protecting the land itself. Lands identified as strategic conservation priorities are accepted as conservation land donations, whereas others may be accepted for their financial value. If you are interested in donating land, please contact our Acquisitions team or scan the QR code to the right to learn more about donating or selling your land to protect habitat.



“The Protect The Mojave shirt was an idea my friend Brandon and I collaborated on as an Earth Day project to channel awareness and support for environmental conservation, especially for a unique and sensitive area like the Mojave Desert. I am a third-grade teacher, and supporting organizations like MDLT aligns with my commitment to education. Beyond the classroom, I am a native plant enthusiast and an avid hiker and camper, seeking solace and inspiration in the quietude of wilderness.”

Celia, Supporter

If you are interested in becoming a sponsor or donating a percentage of sales to the Mojave Desert Land Trust, please email [donations@mdl.org](mailto:donations@mdl.org).

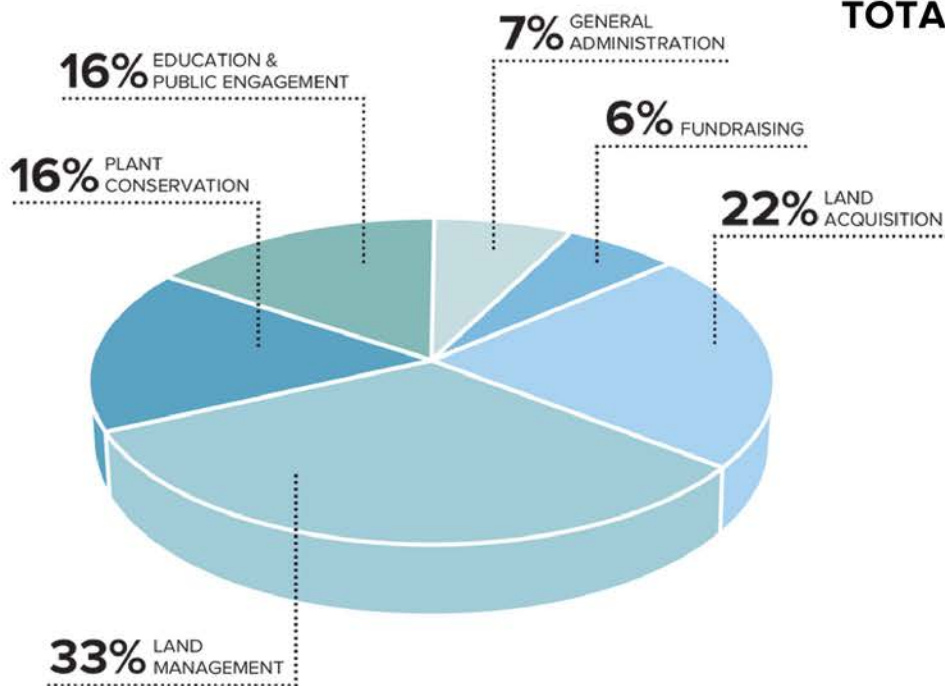
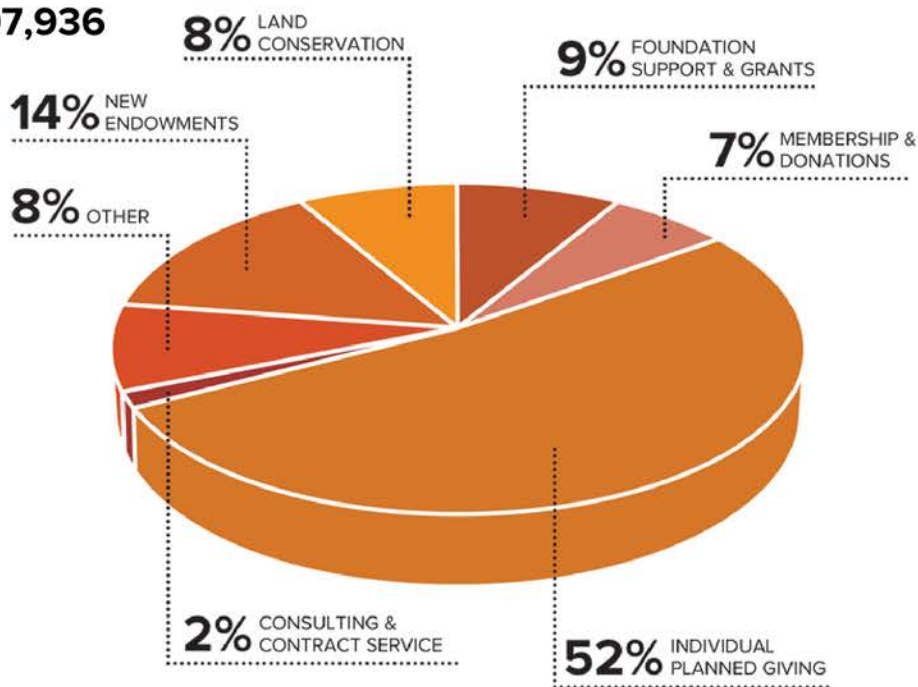


# BUDGET REPORT

## TOTAL REVENUE: \$6,307,936

MDLT's 2023 revenue consists of generous donations from individuals totaling over \$3.6 million, along with the continued support from foundations, corporations, and government agencies. Our reported revenue excludes realized and unrealized gains and losses from investments.

Excluded from this report is \$5.5 million in grants to further support our work from foundations and government agencies; these awards support MDLT from 2023 through 2027. A major component to these awards was funding for our Seed Bank.



## TOTAL EXPENSES: \$3,260,943

Expenses demonstrate MDLT's work and dedication to land acquisition and conservation stewardship, and providing education and outreach programs throughout the year to support the preservation and restoration of the California desert.

The financial information presented for 2023 has yet to be audited. MDLT's Board of Directors elected to shift our fiscal year to July 1 – June 30, effective in 2024. MDLT will be financially reporting January to June of 2024 as a 6-month period.

The Mojave Desert Land Trust is exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Our mission is supported through individual donations, foundations, corporations, government agencies, and investments. We are deeply grateful for your support.



The following foundations and agencies supported the programs and services of the Mojave Desert Land Trust with generous contributions in 2023:

Bureau of Land Management

California Department of Fish and Wildlife

California State Parks

California Wildlife Conservation Board

Center for Plant Conservation

Conservation Lands Foundation

Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation

Inland Empire Community Foundation

Mojave Water Agency

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Resources Legacy Fund

San Manuel Band of Mission Indians

S. L. Gimbel Foundation,  
a component fund at The Inland Empire Community Foundation

Tides Foundation

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Western Conservation Foundation







# THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!

“The work that MDLT volunteers carry out is critical to our mission at every turn. Through the donation of time, expertise, encouragement, and curiosity, volunteers help us look forward to a brighter future and look back fondly at what we have already achieved. Thank you to the teachers, veterans, mechanics, artists, chefs, nurses, travelers, and concerned individuals who have banded together with us to protect and conserve this place we call haven and home.”

Corina Godoy, Collections Manager



Scan the QR code to see who volunteered in 2023 or to get involved.

Visit our digital newsroom to stay updated on new projects and announcements.



Check out MDLT's YouTube channel for wildlife sightings and informative videos.



Support MDLT with a one-time donation or learn about other ways to give.



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