



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

MOJAVE DESERT LAND TRUST

ABOUT MDLT

MISSION: The Mojave Desert Land Trust protects the Mojave and Colorado Desert ecosystems and their natural, scenic, and cultural resource values.

VISION: Dark night skies, clean air and water, broad views and vistas, and an abundance of native plants and animals.



MDLT Natural Resources Technician Joelle Hazler with a Mojave yucca in Mojave National Preserve. Photo by Emmalyr Snead

The Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT) protects the unique living landscapes of the California desert. Our service area spans nearly 26 million acres - the Colorado Desert and the entire California portion of the Mojave Desert. Since 2006 we have secured permanent and lasting protection for over 100,000 acres.

We envisage the California desert as a vital ecosystem of interconnected, permanently protected scenic and natural areas that host a diversity of native plants and wildlife. Views and vistas are broad. The air is clear, the water clean, and the night skies dark. Cities and military facilities are compact and separated by large natural areas. Residents, visitors, land managers, and political leaders value the unique environment in which they live and work, and recognize that climate change is impacting the desert ecosystem.

We share our mission of protecting wildlife corridors, land conservation education, habitat management and restoration, and research with the public so they can become passionate stewards of our desert resources.

Only through acquisition, stewardship, public awareness, and advocacy can we preserve these uniquely biodiverse landscapes for future generations to visit and enjoy.



Photo by Cody Hanford

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*Photo of the Chuckwalla Bench
by Joelle Hazher*

MESSAGE FROM THE JOINT EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Dear supporter,

2021 was a landmark year for the Mojave Desert Land Trust. We reached a new milestone in our conservation work, with over 100,000 acres of ecologically significant lands protected across the California desert. From parcels within national park borders to wilderness mountain tops and crucial wildlife corridors, these acquisitions reflect the incredible biodiversity of this region.

As Joint Executive Directors, we took over the helm of the Mojave Desert Land Trust in the fall. We are grateful for the dedication of our predecessor Geary Hund and our passionate staff. We recognize the increasing urgency of this conservation work in light of the myriad threats facing the California desert, and climate change in particular. The California desert ecosystem stores 10% of the state's carbon and land conservation has an important role to play in that process. MDLT acquires intact natural habitats that will sequester carbon into the future.

Together with your support we are ensuring the California desert becomes a vital ecosystem of interconnected, permanently protected scenic and natural areas that host a diversity of native plants and wildlife. In the year ahead we will be putting extra focus on protecting wildlife corridors that connect the desert's conservation lands and help to ensure its long-term ecological stability. By leveraging our state's great national parks and wilderness areas and protecting the crucial corridors that link them,

we can ensure the long-term prosperity of the deserts and the plants, animals, and people that rely on them. In 2021, we welcomed volunteers back after the pandemic to assist with this essential work. Volunteers are integral to our mission. We are very grateful for their services, from monitoring MDLT preserves and cleaning up trash to sowing seeds for restoration projects.

We are excited for more opportunities in the year ahead to connect communities with the Mojave and Colorado Deserts. Among them, a new crop of pupils from the Coachella Valley is now following our Desert Discovery Field Studies curriculum and interns have begun important research in the Women In Science Discovering Our Mojave program.

Will you help us do this work? Sign up via our website to receive our news, become a member, or volunteer. We look forward to serving alongside you.



Cody Hanford and Kelly Herbinson
Joint Executive Directors



MDLT STAFF

(Current at the time of publication)

Madena Asbell, *Director of Plant Conservation*

Ross Beazell, *Natural Resources Tech Trainee*

Alexander Boice, *Natural Resources Tech II*

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Emmalyn Snead, *Natural Resources
Department Manager*

Dayanna Watts, *Accounting Technician I*

*Staff and contractors gather at MDLT in 2021 to welcome new
Joint Executive Directors Cody Hanford and Kelly Herbinson*



OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

LAND ACQUIRED IN 2021 4,156 TOTAL ACRES

1,288
ACRES

IN NATIONAL PARKS



1,564
ACRES

IN WILDERNESS AREAS



129
ACRES

IN MORONGO BASIN
WILDLIFE CORRIDORS



1,175
ACRES

IN NATIONAL MONUMENTS



PLANT CONSERVATION IN 2021

21 NEW SEED COLLECTIONS



8,953 PLANTS GROWN



VOLUNTEER HOURS IN 2021

292
HOURS

STEWARDSHIP



354
HOURS

NURSERY



12
HOURS

OUTREACH
& EDUCATION



LAND CONVEYED IN 2021

66 PARCELS IN NATIONAL PARKS



2,622 ACRES

SAVING LAND

2021 LAND ACQUISITION HIGHLIGHTS

800 acres in the Trilobite Wilderness

This stunning acquisition spans peaks and bajadas in the Marble Mountains volcanic range within Mojave Trails National Monument. Alternating brown striations give the mountains their marbled appearance. The wilderness is home to a stable population of around 150 bighorn sheep and is critical habitat for the threatened desert tortoise.



Photo by Tena Petrovic



Saving a mountain top

Before and after! MDLT acquired one of the last privately owned parcels in the Avawatz Mountains Wilderness, south of Death Valley National Park. Archaeological sites in the area indicate a historical presence of Native Americans, and members of the Shoshone Nation continue to visit these lands for spiritual and cultural purposes. The wilderness also has nine natural springs, helping make this an important link for regional habitat connectivity. A former cell tower at the very top of this 117-acre parcel was successfully removed to return this peak back to its pristine state.



A NEW CONSERVATION MILESTONE

Midway through 2021 the Mojave Desert Land Trust celebrated conserving over 100,000 acres across the California desert since 2006. An interactive storymap explores these special lands and why they were protected. Take a trip through the 100,000 acres by visiting mdlt.org or by scanning this QR code.

Photo by Emmalyn Snead

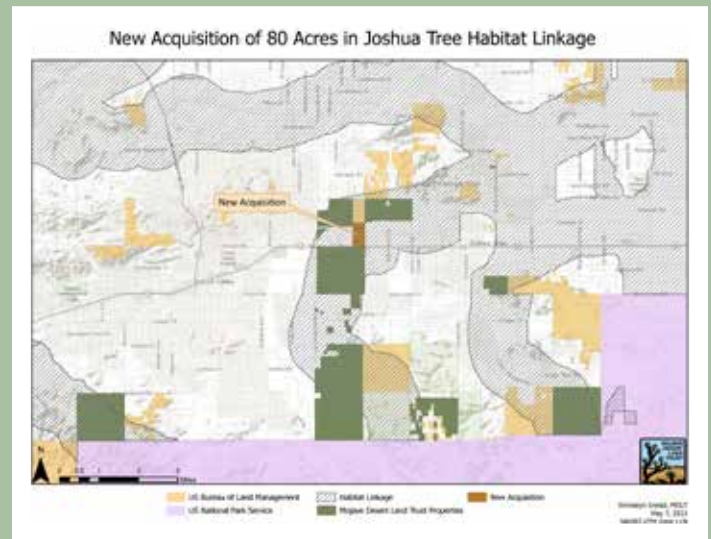


Priority acquisitions for Mojave National Preserve

We help piece together public lands by acquiring privately-owned parcels from willing sellers, restoring the land to its natural state, and maintaining buildings that are cultural assets. Within the boundary of Mojave National Preserve, MDLT transferred ownership of 66 parcels totaling 2,622 acres over to the National Park Service in 2021. During the year, MDLT also conserved another 710 acres. Several of the properties were priorities for the National Park Service due to land management concerns. One 80-acre parcel was in an area known for its cattle ranching. The property contains a historical corral constructed from railroad ties. Another 85-acre parcel has an open mine shaft with a resident hoot owl. The shaft will now be fenced by the California Department of Conservation to preserve the owl's habitat.

Expanding a wildlife corridor

One 80-acre acquisition was right in our backyard! The land borders our headquarters and shares a boundary with Bureau of Land Management and other MDLT properties. These properties preserve a key part of an important habitat linkage leading from Joshua Tree National Park to the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in 29 Palms. In the future, MDLT will work with the California Department of Transportation to establish safe and enhanced ways for wildlife to cross Highway 62. Habitat linkages help maintain genetic variation in wildlife populations, and provide a means for plants and animals to migrate in response to climate change or disperse following a catastrophic event.



Linkage for bighorn sheep

MDLT acquired 480 acres in the Pisgah Area of Critical Environmental Concern, near Barstow. This acquisition secures a section of the Cady Mountains to the west of Mojave Trails National Monument. The rocky hills and washes surrounding the property are home to bighorn sheep and desert tortoise. ACECs exist where special management attention is needed to protect unique natural and cultural resources. Pisgah creates important linkage for wildlife populations to the north and south. Numerous rare and sensitive plants have major populations here including the Crucifixion Thorn.



RESTORING THE DESERT ECOSYSTEM

STEWARDING THE LAND

Restoring the land to its natural state is demanding but rewarding work. MDLT Natural Resources staff and volunteers make a difference by clearing away trash, removing graffiti, maintaining trails, and repairing damage of the fragile desert landscape. In 2021, we restored 40 acres of protected desert and 200 feet of trail. Over 31.5 tons of trash were removed from MDLT lands. Volunteers made this possible, including teams from the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in 29 Palms and Cima Overland Bound Group!

Thanks to the NEEF 2021 Restoration and Resilience Recovery Fund and hard-working volunteers, we were able to tackle a major cleanup and restoration project at our Long Canyon Peak property in the Morongo Basin. At least 60 55-gallon bags full of debris and yard waste were removed, signage installed, and vertical mulching put in place.



Before...

...and after!



Removing trash from MDLT lands

Thank you volunteers!

While we were limited due to COVID protocol requirements this year, we are thankful to those of you who were able to help with the essential activities we were able to safely organize. As well as providing land restoration support, volunteers made a major contribution in MDLT's nursery assisting with contract plant propagation, seed cleaning for a restoration project, expanding the shade growing area, and serving at native plant sales. In a special partnership with The Society for Conservation of Bighorn Sheep and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, volunteers helped ensure more than 5,000 gallons of water were

hauled five miles into Fargo Canyon in Joshua Tree National Park to reach a bighorn sheep guzzler.

Thank you to MDLT volunteers Eric, Ken, Dana, Bruce G., Tim, Carol, Tom, Donna, Alan, William, Kalani, Andrew, Maryana, Paul, Nikol, Susie, Jean, Kurt, Colleen, Jerry, Jeremy, Ryan, Bruce K., Yvonne, Chris, Arch, Carol, Justin, Conrad, Michael, Kara, Hana, Kristen, Bettina, Kenna, Chris, Lauren, Jacilee, David, Leah, Odelia, Caitlin, Mike, Christopher, Daniel, Matt, Frank, Kaeliegh, Mary Ann, and Campbell Hall 10th Grade Class.



Filling the bighorn sheep guzzler

Before...



...and after!

RESTORATION WITH NATIVE PLANTS

A majority of the 8,953 plants grown in MDLT's nursery in 2021 were destined for special desert restoration. As part of a project along the Colorado River watershed, MDLT staff and volunteers collected and grew natives including over 500 blue palo verde (*Parkinsonia florida*, pictured). Plants were also grown for restoration projects for the Antelope Valley Resource Conservation District, Pioneertown Mountains Preserve, Transcon Environmental, Arcadis, and Wind Wolves Preserve.



Photo by Madena Asbell

Boosting seed production for the Bureau of Land Management

The Plant Conservation team made a big leap forward in a 3-year pilot project growing seed for the Bureau of Land Management. MDLT is developing methods for increasing seed yields of native forbs (pictured) for desert tortoise habitat restoration. The desert tortoise is federally listed as a threatened species. New staff hires and improvements to herbivore exclusion fencing and harvesting methods meant we were able to collect 700% more seed for the project in 2021.



Conservation seed bank at work

Thanks to the summer bloom in the Morongo Basin, we made 12 new collections and added 10 new species to the Mojave Desert Seed Bank in September 2021. Utah vine milkweed (*Funastrum utahense*, pictured, top right) seed was one of the collections made on MDLT's Quail Wash property near the west entrance of Joshua Tree National Park where much of the summer precipitation was concentrated. These seeds are an insurance policy for the Mojave Desert.

The seed bank also serves as an ex-situ conservation tool for use in restoration, education, and research in the Mojave Desert region. After the Water Fire in Whitewater Preserve, MDLT provided seeds for interior goldenbush (*Ericameria linearifolia*), bladderpod (*Peritoma arborea*), and East Mojave buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum* var. *polifolium*) to help restore a burned meadow and wetlands (pictured, below right). This special landscape is nesting area for the federally endangered least Bell's vireo and southwestern willow flycatcher.



PROTECTING WILDLIFE

Protecting the prairie falcon

Prairie falcons (*Falco mexicanus*) nest high up in rocky outcrops throughout the arid plains and desert wilderness of the western United States. Human recreational activities in the California desert are encroaching upon their habitat and causing some historic nest sites used by generations of falcons to become abandoned.

Thanks to a generous donation by Prairie Falcon Supporters, MDLT has now established a Prairie Falcon Conservation Program. This work involves setting up a database of active nesting sites (“eyries”) within the California Desert Conservation Area and evaluating threats impacting these majestic birds of prey.

MDLT has also established a Prairie Falcon Working Group in collaboration with local non-profits, wildlife experts, and state and federal agencies.

Photo by Amy Langston



Photo by Steve Shaw



Photo by Jessica Graybill

Tracking desert tortoise

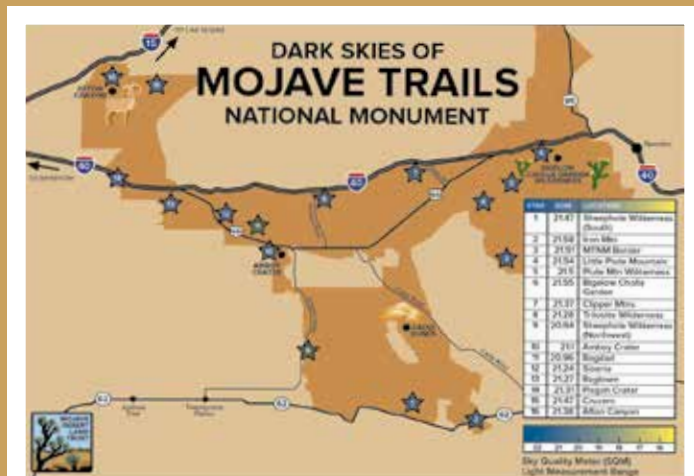
Every year MDLT staff and volunteers head out to the Cady Mountains in the Mojave Desert and the Chuckwalla Bench in the Colorado Desert in search of *Gopherus agassizii* (Agassiz's desert tortoise). MDLT manages thousands of acres in these locations as conservation easements so special status species like the desert tortoise can prosper. Due to habitat deterioration from increased development and raven predation, the desert tortoise population has decreased by 90% in some areas. While sightings of live tortoises are rare, MDLT's surveys are valuable even when tortoises themselves are not found; presence of scat, burrows, and sightings of shell fragments all get reported. Determining the presence—or absence—of desert tortoise helps MDLT and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife understand the conditions and health of tortoise populations and habitat.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE DESERT

Women interns gather new dark sky data

Interns with the Women In Science Discovering Our Mojave (WISDOM) program spent a year studying night sky quality at 16 locations in Mojave Trails National Monument. Their findings provide a new baseline of data about the Mojave Desert. This study was intended to help the Bureau of Land Management in its efforts to seek International Dark Sky Sanctuary recognition for the monument. The findings show the monument can be placed in consideration as a Dark Sky Sanctuary in almost all locations. WISDOM is a program in collaboration with the Bureau of Land Management and funded by the Conservation Lands Foundation. It aims to help engage women in STEM and increase their understanding of environmental science and land management issues.

Thank you to the 2021 WISDOM interns: Lauren Alba, Analisa Brown, Stacey Yoon, Leah Thomas, Giselle Sandoval, and Alison Kalinowski.



A first state conservancy for the desert region

MDLT was one of four co-sponsors of the California Desert Conservation Program, successful legislation that will bring much-needed funding to the region. The bill went into effect on January 1, 2022 and will provide new grant funding to local governments, tribes, non-profit organizations and other entities for biodiversity conservation, cultural and historical preservation, recreation projects, restoration of damaged lands, and climate resiliency projects in the California desert.

MDLT thanks Assembly Member James C. Ramos for authoring and championing the bill and our supporters for urging Governor Gavin Newsom to sign the bill into law.



Photo by Global Eyes Media

Educating the next generation

MDLT's Desert Discovery Field Studies program provides hands-on learning experiences in the classroom for 5th through 12th graders. Nearly 140 students from Yucca Valley Elementary School participated in MDLT's Desert Discovery Field Studies programming in 2021. These interactive lessons highlight the unique ecological and cultural values of the Mojave Desert.

This year, children learned about California desert animals through exercises like the dissection of owl pellets, citizen science, and the use of native flora and fauna by local Native American tribes. During the pandemic, MDLT led eight weeks of virtual science classes, provided all the materials needed to participate and offered fun digital field trips and hikes using Google Earth. In an in-person DDFS Saturday Academy, 63 students in grades 4-6 learned about the difference between rocks and minerals. Funding comes from Anderson Children's Foundation, Society for Science, and Southern California Edison.



Wildlife spotting in the community and dissecting owl pellets. Photos by Mary Cook-Rhyne



Celebrating Latino Conservation Week

This year we celebrated Latino Conservation Week at Whitewater Preserve with our friends from Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas Valle de Coachella, Hispanic Access Foundation, Wildlands Conservancy, and Cactus to Cloud. The interpretive hike was attended by 23 people, and was a chance to enjoy majestic views and unique flora and fauna found in the preserve and learn about the geology of the area.



Photo by Gollin Barrows @Cactuscloud



Miles For MDLT support raises over \$19,000

The Mojave Desert Land Trust's safe, virtual fundraising campaign Miles For MDLT was held during the month of March. Thirty-five people set fundraising and distance goals and reached out to their network to donate money in exchange for them hiking, walking, or running.

Chris Clarke, respected writer and National Parks Conservation Association California Desert Program Director, topped our list of fundraisers with 87 people donating \$3,503 towards his \$3,000 fundraising goal. Local third grade teacher, Celia Stanley, hiked more than 150 miles and raised \$2,040. Aubrey Diehl hiked 185 miles and raised \$1,330. Also noteworthy was Jeremy Joo, who ran 67 miles through Joshua Tree National Park over four days.

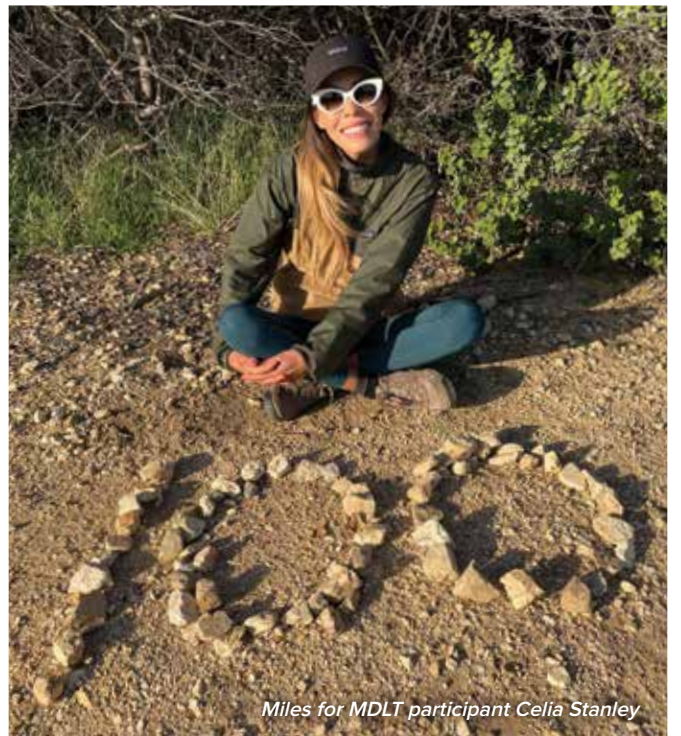


Marking Native American Heritage Month

The Native American Land Conservancy's celebrations of Native American Heritage Month included a Campfire Talk at MDLT headquarters. NALC Executive Director Robert Przeklasa and Sarah Bliss, Cultural Resources Manager for the Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians, talked about the history of Indigenous people in the Morongo Basin, the past and present threats to traditional ways of life, and the work of the NALC in land conservation and stewardship today. We were honored to also have members of the Payniktum Singers (pictured) sing bird songs about the migration story of the Payniktum clan of the Cahuilla people. The songs are traditionally sung by the clan from sunrise to sunset for three nights.

Each of these fundraisers received gift cards from Teva as well as hiking apparel from Patagonia. Collectively, participants raised \$19,360. Participants included:

| | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| <i>Alexander Boice</i> | <i>Jeremy Joo</i> |
| <i>Susy Boyd</i> | <i>Maria Lopez</i> |
| <i>Dick & Lani Brown</i> | <i>Meagan & Marilyn Mays</i> |
| <i>Miranda Buckley</i> | <i>Colleen McGrath</i> |
| <i>Alison Grace Cliath</i> | <i>Brynn Metheney</i> |
| <i>Matt Case</i> | <i>Juliette Page</i> |
| <i>Louise Chicoine</i> | <i>Allison Pengilley-Wimmer</i> |
| <i>Chris Clarke</i> | <i>Jamie Pricer</i> |
| <i>Aubrey Diehl</i> | <i>Jacob Robinson</i> |
| <i>Anna Dining</i> | <i>Ross Rogers</i> |
| <i>Liz Gonzalez Negrete</i> | <i>Andria Sanchez</i> |
| <i>Jessica Graybill & Patrick Dale</i> | <i>Diana Shay Diegl</i> |
| <i>Cody Hanford</i> | <i>Celia Stanley</i> |
| <i>Cindy Holland</i> | <i>Jessica Thorpe</i> |
| <i>Geary Hund</i> | <i>Kaeliegh Watson</i> |



Miles for MDLT participant Celia Stanley

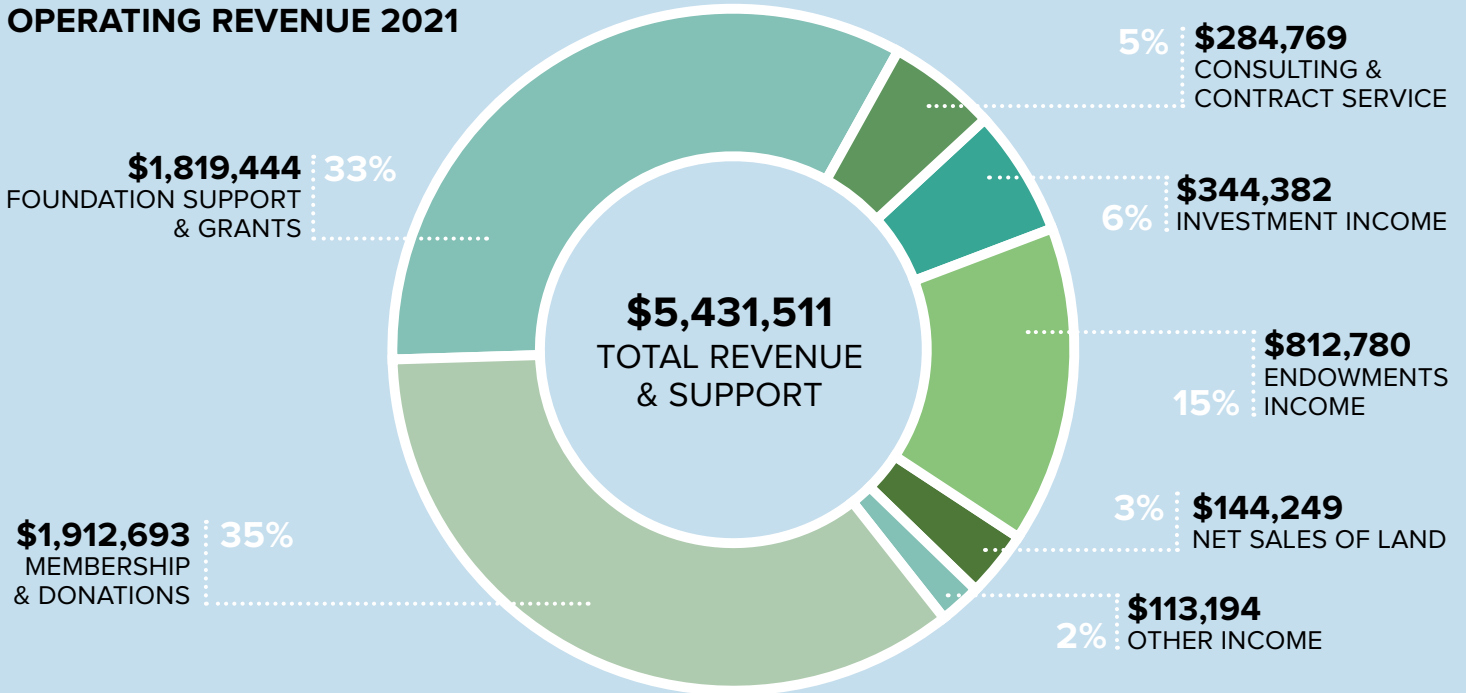
GRANT PARTNERS

The following foundations and agencies supported the programs and services of the Mojave Desert Land Trust with generous contributions in 2021:

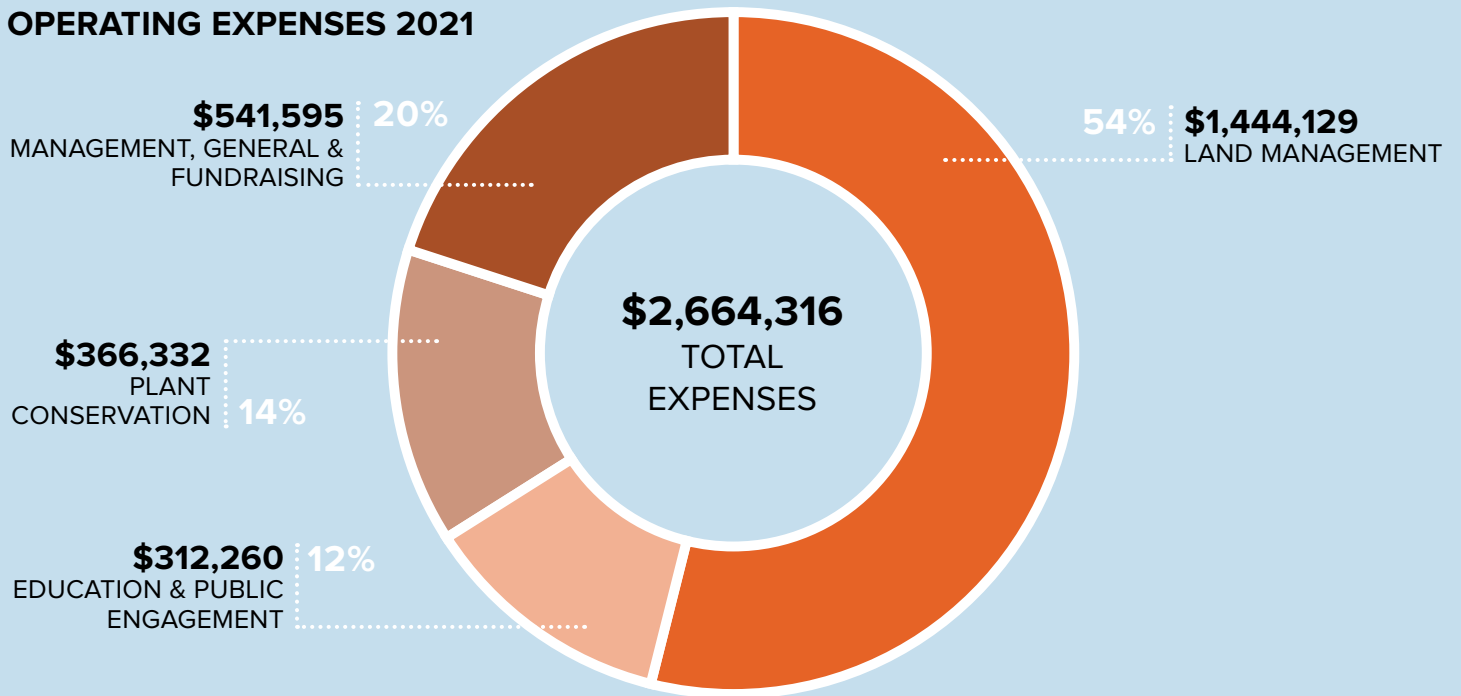
Anderson Children's Foundation
Bureau of Land Management
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Mojave Water Agency
National Environmental Education Foundation
Pew Charitable Trust
Resources Legacy Fund
San Manuel Band of Mission Indians
Society for Science
Southern California Edison
The Fund for People in Parks
Tides Foundation

BUDGET REPORT

OPERATING REVENUE 2021



OPERATING EXPENSES 2021



| | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| From Operations | \$ | 2,767,195 |
| Land Held-for-Conservation | \$ | 1,749,462 |
| CHANGE IN NET ASSETS | \$ | 4,516,657 |



*Sunrise over an MDT property in Mojave National Preserve.
Photo by Emmalyn Snead*



DONORS

We are grateful for the many people and organizations that supported the Mojave Desert Land Trust through donations from January 1 – December 31, 2021.

\$1.5M +

In 2021, an anonymous donor gave two extraordinary gifts to the Mojave Desert Land Trust: one in the amount of \$750,000 for general operating support and a second in the amount of \$750,000 in support of the seed bank.

\$30,000+

Malcolm McCann

Prairie Falcon Supporters
Stasher, Inc.

\$10,000 - \$29,999

Robyn & J. Andrew Helmlinger
Steve Hely and Laura McCreary
Ron Radziner

\$5,000 - \$9,999

Estelle Delgado
Janice & Eric Parker
Mary Beth Redding
Steve Shaw
Elizabeth Szabo
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California Turtle & Tortoise Club

\$1,000 - \$4,999

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\$500 - \$999

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Vince Calanoc
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Michel Cicero
John Cwikla
Aaron Dodson
Judy Fair-Spaulding
Carole Fallucca
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Soap Plant, Inc.
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Wildlands

In-kind
Teva

\$100 - \$499

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Andrew Alden
Sybel Alger
Greg & Paula Anderson
Cynthia Anderson
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John Asbell
Madena Asbell
Ashley Atkinson
Sung B. Auh
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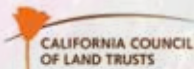
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