



## Project Report for Volunteer Trip Yosemite National Park September 8 – 14, 2019

### Executive Summary

Twelve volunteers, two volunteer trip leaders, and one trip leader-in-training contributed 427.5 hours of volunteer labor from September 8 through September 14, 2019, assisting the National Park Service in maintaining approximately 1.5 miles of trail between Tioga Road and Tamarack Flat Campground.



The National Park Service (NPS) Trail Crew, working under the supervision of Joe Meno, provided guidance and oversight of the trail maintenance. The trail maintenance completed by the NPS Trail Crew and Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP) volunteers was successfully completed. Shown below (in red) is the

trail on which ConservationVIP volunteers repaired damaged drainages and completed a trail maintenance run (pruning back brush, scaling the trail tread, and maintaining drainages). Volunteers and the NPS Trail Crew pruned and brushed back hundreds of saplings and other hard trunked plants encroaching on the trail corridor, repaired or built approximately 38 water drainages, some were 4-5 feet wide and 4-5 feet deep.



In addition to the quantifiable and statistic driven outcomes for the trip, the volunteers and trip leaders accomplished and experienced difficult-to-measure outcomes that contribute to conserving and sustaining special places. Each volunteer learned trail maintenance skills and the philosophy behind them. As a result, the volunteers will view trails with a critical eye and will be better able to recognize lands in their own backyards that could use help. Importantly, the volunteers also spent time with and learned about the fine people who work for the National Park Service who are both passionate and dedicated to their work. It is important to recognize that our National Parks are a treasure that require care and protection to ensure they are wild and available for future generations.

Volunteer trips are group trips that occur in a social setting where 15 strangers became friends for a week. Many of those bonds will extend beyond this trip. This group bonded quickly and remained so for the duration of the trip. They also collectively showed a desire to experience Yosemite fully and seemed to enjoy the planned activities and their own explorations during their free time. They often enjoyed moonlit hikes or trips to the river together. They laughed and expressed concern for each other. They reminded each other to carry tools properly and worked as a team on each project.

## Detailed Report

### **Day One – September 8, 2019 (Orientation)**

Volunteers arrived Sunday, September 8, 2019 in the early afternoon. All volunteers were welcomed by the trip leaders and assistance was provided to get their tents set up at the Yellow Pine Special Use Site for Volunteers. Once all volunteers arrived, an orientation to Conservation Volunteers International Program “ConservationVIP®” 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. This group started laughing and never really stopped.

### **Workday 1 – September 9, 2019**

Volunteer project trip leaders Ed Eads and Dale Walker, along with leader-in-training Shelley Sankey, met with NPS Trail Crew Supervisor Joe Meno, and his crew the morning of September 9th. 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 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 in the Tamarack Creek Campground, a safety briefing was conducted and a shared value of doing the job safely was discussed. 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 trail was at approximately 6,000 feet elevation, considerably higher than what most volunteers were accustomed to. After the first day the ConservationVIP® Volunteers had repaired and maintained 11 water drainages and were impressed by the work completed. The volunteers formed a special bond early on during this trip and it led to excellent teamwork, shared concern for safety and each individual's well-being, and effective task completion.

The weather on this day was indicative of the week's weather, with temperatures reaching between 75 - 85 degrees and sunny or partly sunny skies with the morning starting out cool at around 50 degrees; true mountain weather. The group worked on the same sections of the Tamarack Creek Trail all week and enjoyed a truly marvelous area that many park visitors will never see.



**Workday 2 – September 10, 2019**

The NPS Trail Crew met with the volunteers and leaders at Yellow Pine 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 volunteers gathered fallen trees, boulders, and smaller rocks to fill areas where water had eroded trail drains and were eroding the trail. Repairing these drainage features ensures safe passage through the trail corridor and protects the integrity of the surrounding area. The NPS Trail Crew reminded the volunteers about the importance of trail maintenance and completing projects with finishing touches to preserve natural aesthetic at the work site, as well as locations where materials were gathered.

Repairing drainages helps 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. This is an important component of Leave No Trace ethics and helps to ensure the sustainable use of trails everywhere.



Before: Significant erosion as water moved down hill and picked up speed, thereby carving out the area directly in front of the large boulder.



After: Eroded area filled with rocks; several very large rocks were placed to help slow the water as it traveled downhill.

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 swales 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 8 drainages. In addition, volunteers used a grip-hoist (winch) to move two trees and dragged another using approximately 7 people to support two of the drainage repairs. The work completed by the volunteers was labor intensive but was completed with camaraderie and energetic cohesiveness.

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

### **Workday 3 – September 11, 2019**

The NPS Trail Crew met with the volunteers and leaders at Yellow Pine campground. The NPS Trail Crew mingled with the volunteers and had breakfast before departing for the worksite at 8:00 a.m.

Once at the worksite, the volunteers continued to complete large drainage repairs along the trail, completing some large projects started on workday 2 and completed an additional 4 drainage features.



Before



After

### **Workday 4 – September 12, 2019**

We started the day with Joe sharing that the group had already accomplished all of the goals the NPS had set for them, so the work accomplished today would be an above-and-beyond expectations. The group spent the day on a trail maintenance run – clearing smaller drainages, pruning back plant growth encroaching the trail corridor, and scaling the trail.

Joe of the NPS Trail Crew, provided a demonstration on pruning and brushing back plants, including buckthorn and other shrubs and saplings, for the ConservationVIP volunteers. Joe also provided context on the importance of pruning to the conservation and maintenance of the trail. All volunteers had the necessary tools, safety gear and nourishment for the day of trail maintenance on the Tamarack Creek Trail.

By this point in the week, volunteers felt comfortable with the trail maintenance work and were able to contribute 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 week of trail work was informative, tiring and inspiring for the volunteers. The tremendous spirit and cohesiveness of this group led to their completing more work than expected. On workday 4, the group completed a trail maintenance run along approximately 1.5 miles of trail and repaired 15 additional water drainage features.

On the way back to Yosemite Valley, one of the vans stopped and a group of volunteers visited Tuolumne Grove. The group also enjoyed a visit by Yosemite National Park Volunteer Program Assistant Sandy Hernandez. She spoke to the group about volunteering and the National Parks. Sandy thanked the volunteers for their service and contribution to Yosemite National Park. She also presented the volunteers with a memento to thank them for their service.



**Rest Day – September 13, 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 wonderful to hear the experiences that provided rest and added 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 14, 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 Yellow Pine Campground was empty and the volunteers had left, with many vowing to return.

**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 Yellow Pine Campground 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 – Darian and Herbert

under the leadership of Joe Meno and Dave Patrick, 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 427.5 hours of volunteer labor, maintained 1.5 miles of trails, repaired 38 substantial water drainages, cleared many pounds of debris from fallen trees, and most importantly, made many new friends and countless lasting memories!

The wonderful spirit of this group made this trip special and contributed to the enjoyment and safety of every person involved with the trip. Thanks again, it was wonderful to travel with you!

