Lake Mead NRA Celebrates 50 Years

With the completion of Boulder Dam in 1935 (later named Hoover Dam), the Colorado River began to fill up the reservoir that would become Lake Mead. The Bureau of Reclamation was in the business of building dams but not managing recreation, so they partnered with the National Park Service to manage the recreation side of the reservoir.

Davis Dam was completed in 1951, below Hoover Dam, and the river again accumulated behind the newest dam to form Lake Mohave. The National Park Service, in cooperation with the BOR, now managed two reservoirs and surrounding land for recreational use.

Oct. 8, 1964, Congress passed legislation that formally established Lake Mead National Recreation Area as a unit of the National Park Service, the first national recreation area in the National Park Service system. The 1.5 million-acre park was established for public recreation in a manner that preserves the scenic, historic, scientific and other important features of the area.

Happy 50th Anniversary Wilderness Act

The Wilderness Act was signed into law Sept. 3, 1964, by President Lyndon B. Johnson to provide the highest level of protection for some of America’s most iconic, wild landscapes.

Lake Mead National Recreation Area received designation for nine wilderness areas in 2002: Jimbilhan, Pinto Valley and Muddy Mountains off of Northshore Road; and Black Canyon, Eldorado, Ireteba, Nellis Wash, Spirit Mountain and Bridge Canyon on the Nevada side of Lake Mohave.

“I never thought I would see wilderness designated at Lake Mead,” said Jim Holland, a program and management analyst at Lake Mead NRA who has been employed with the park for 21 years.

“The 1960s was a decade of environmental legislation. Major environmental pushes were being made. The Wilderness Act was one of those unique pieces of legislation that said ‘We are going to put areas aside and protect those areas, not as a national park, but as wilderness,’” he said.

Despite the extra levels of protection, the wilderness areas at Lake Mead NRA are public lands open for recreation. People enjoy wilderness areas for hiking, backpacking, camping, fishing, hunting and more. Visitors are asked to be stewards of these special places to ensure their protection for another 50 years.

They can do this by following the Leave No Trace principles: travel and camp on durable surfaces; dispose of waste properly; leave what you find; minimize campfire impacts; respect wildlife; and be considerate to other visitors.

Spring has Sprung

Predicting the spring wildflower bloom in the Mojave Desert is nearly impossible until it is about to begin. Under ideal conditions the desert floor can explode into a riotous carpet of color.

Wildflower blooms may vary from small colorful patches along the edge of roads to huge fields of vibrant purples, yellows, pinks and orange. Some of the spectacular flower displays are a rarity only occurring every 10 or 20 years. What will 2014 bring?
Bald Eagles common for this time of year

By Taylor Nunley
Public Affairs Assistant

Volunteers and biologists spotted 132 bald eagles as eight survey boats traced the shorelines of Lake Mead and Lake Mohave searching for raptor species.


This is a slight decline since last January’s count of 161 bald eagles, although, park biologist Ross Haley is not surprised by the outcome.

“I expected the number to be down somewhat this year due to the mild winter we are experiencing in the west,” Haley said, “and possibly exacerbated somewhat by the West Nile Virus die-off.”

In late 2013, bald eagles from the Great Salt Lake area near Salt Lake City, Utah, experienced a die-off attributed to an outbreak of the West Nile Virus, which resulted from eating infected eared grebes, according to the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. Haley said this could result in lower numbers being found on lakes Mead and Mohave this season.

This year, surveyors also recorded sightings of other raptors observed, including 19 red-tailed hawks, 16 peregrine falcons, nine northern harriers, one prairie falcon, one osprey, one American kestrel and three unidentified raptors.

“These data certainly make me wish we had earlier numbers being found on lakes Mead and Mohave this season,” Haley said.

The teams hit the waters of the 1.5 million-acre national recreation area shortly before sunrise and concluded the survey around sunset.

At a maximum speed of 15 miles per hour, spotters searched through binoculars for the raptors. Both immature and adult bald eagles could be seen perched on rocky cliff tops, sipping water on the shoreline or soaring in the air.

The Overton Arm at the north end of the park, where the Virgin and Muddy rivers meet Lake Mead, is where the highest count of bald eagles was found. Haley and his team spotted 18 adult and 28 immature eagles in this area. Bald eagles migrate from the north and can traditionally be spotted at Lake Mead NRA from late-November to March.
More Solar Panels Installed at Lake Mead NRA

By Taylor Nunley
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Lake Mead National Recreation Area continues to “Go Green” with the addition of photovoltaic systems that not only ensure energy efficiency, but also provide shade to government vehicles.

More than 600 photovoltaic panels were installed on the tops of three shade structures in an administrative area parking lot. These panels generate energy by absorbing sunlight that is transferred to solar energy that can travel through electrical circuits to power electrical devices.

The 10,205 square feet of panels produce a total output of 158.6 kilowatts, which power the Lake Mead maintenance warehouse, Interagency Communications Center and other nearby offices in Boulder City, Nev.

“This was a great project for a couple of reasons,” said Bruce Nyhuis, chief, park maintenance and engineering division. “It demonstrates the National Park Service commitment to renewable energy. The new PV system will offset approximately 35 percent of the total energy used in our warehouse complex.

“Secondarily, this project has the added benefit of providing shade for vehicles, which really helps keep the interior of our vehicles cooler in our climate, as well as protection from sun damage,” he added.

Lake Mead NRA continues to make green goals. PV panels were added to the renovated visitor center and native plant nursery in 2013. Single-stream recycling bins are being added throughout the park, and the park’s Green Team is promoting recycling, composting and other environmental goals.