

CONSERVATIONIST

Executive director of nonprofit —
Stewards of the Sequoia — fights
to keep public trails open



Compiled by Bakerfield USA Magazine

Chris Horgan created Stewards of the Sequoia in 2004 when, he says, he “saw the writing on the wall” that local trails would suffer closures unless someone spoke up to keep them open.

Now, as the nonprofit’s executive director, Horgan leads a group 2,500 members strong with a “trail appreciation program” that maintains 200 miles of trails each year. The group attends local agency planning meetings and sends thousands of pages planning documents to draft comment letters that are able to preserve access to public lands.

“Unless the silent majority woke up and became involved, we stand to lose access to our public lands,” Horgan said. “Get out and enjoy the great outdoors.”

What’s your favorite trail in Kern County?

That depends on the time of year, and whether I wanted to go for a hike or mountain bike, dirt

Chris Horgan and his dog, Luke, hiking
Barnington, near Biggan Mountain,
Stewards of the Sequoia, 2007.

bike or 4x4. The “Just Outstanding” trail is great. The “Trail of 100 Giants” is a great hike, although that is just outside of Kern, in Tulare County.

For visitors of Kern County, where would you say is a must visit?

Salmon Falls in the spring can be pretty incredible, but more than any one place, adventure and variety is what Kern County offers. Put some food and water in a pack, get out the map and take a trail in a new direction.

What’s the state of public land in Kern?

Our public land is suffering. Over just the past few months, Stewards of the Sequoia has cleared more than 1,100 downed trees that were blocking the trails. There are literally millions of dead trees in areas that have experienced severe wildfires, from the Pine and McNally fires, for example. Brush fields are replacing what were forested areas only a few years ago.

Sadly, these destructive wildfires taking hundreds of thousands of acres did not have to happen. Unnatural wildfires harm the forest watershed and wildlife.

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How has "Stewards" been successful?

Stewards of the Sequoia is the largest on-the-ground volunteer organization in the Sequoia National Forest. We have adopted 18 forest trails and our "trail appreciation program" has performed maintenance on more than 7,100 miles of trails, including clearing more than 3,000 downed trees and building almost 3,000 water bars to reduce erosion.

Stewards have been able to keep many trails from being closed or restricted by working proactively with U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management staff.

Where in Kern do you call home?

Lake Isabella. It provides such a diversity of outdoor experiences — the desert below, the jagged forest peaks above, and the lake in the middle. Folks might not know that driving down to the lakeshore would have been prohibited if not for Stewards working with the Forest Service to find an alternative to closure.

How can Kern residents help with your cause?

There is one thing that has been lackluster, and that is fundraising. We need your donations so we can keep doing what needs to be done to keep your trails open. We are a nonprofit, so donations are tax deductible, and we get more done with \$1 than most groups do with \$100. We can also use volunteers to help on "Stewards Trail Appreciation Days."

There is no charge to become a Stewards member, and to add your name to the growing group of 2,500 people who visit their trails often. More information: stewardsofthesequoia.org

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