

The Minerva Hoyt California Desert Conservation Award

Hosted by:

The Joshua Tree National Park Association (JTNP). JTNP is a non-profit organization, incorporated in 1962 to assist with preservation, education, historical and scientific programs for the benefit of Joshua Tree National Park and its visitors.

History:

Created in 2004, the purpose of this award is to recognize individuals or organizations that have made notable achievements in the areas of leadership, protection, preservation, research, education, and stewardship leading to a significant and lasting contribution on behalf of the deserts of California. Minerva Hamilton Hoyt (1866-1945) was a South Pasadena resident whose persistent campaign to preserve the deserts of southern California persuaded President Franklin Roosevelt and Congress to create Joshua Tree National Monument in 1936.

Eligibility:

Any person or group is eligible to receive the award except for JTNP board of directors or staff and members of their immediate families. Non-residents of California are eligible but nominations must be for conservation accomplishments in the California deserts. Candidates must be at least 18 years old.

Criteria:

Nominees will have made a notable achievement toward conservation of the California desert in one or more of the following areas: 1) provided leadership resulting in legislative action or public policy in the area of desert conservation, 2) advanced research leading to improved conservation knowledge, techniques or strategies, 3) fostered conservation partnerships and collaborations, or 4) created stronger public stewardship through education and outreach activities.

Minerva Hoyt Information: Born in Holmes County, Mississippi in 1866, Minerva Hamilton led a genteel early life attending finishing schools and music conservatories. Her marriage to Dr. Sherman Hoyt led her eventually to South Pasadena where she immersed herself in southern California society and civic causes. She demonstrated talent as an organizer of special charity events and developed a passion for gardening, which introduced her to native desert vegetation commonly used in southern California landscaping. Trips to the desert instilled in Mrs. Hoyt a strong appreciation for the austere beauty and wonderful inventiveness of desert plants that somehow managed to thrive in the harsh climate. She also saw widespread wanton destruction of native desert plant life by thoughtless people who dug up, burned and otherwise destroyed so many of the cacti and Joshua trees that Minerva found beautiful.

Following the deaths of her son and husband, Mrs. Hoyt dedicated herself to the cause of protection of desert landscapes. She organized several successful exhibitions of desert plant life that were shown in Boston, New York, and London. She founded the International Deserts Conservation League, became its first president, and adopted a goal of establishing parks to preserve desert landscapes. Minerva Hoyt was asked by noted landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr. to serve on a California state commission formed to recommend proposals for new state parks. She prepared the commission's report on desert parks and recommended large parks be created at Death Valley, the Anza-Borrego Desert, and in the Joshua tree forests of the Little San Bernardino Mountains north of Palm Springs.

However, Mrs. Hoyt became convinced that the best option for preservation of a large park to preserve desert plants was through the National Park Service. She began a carefully organized campaign to achieve her goal. Mrs. Hoyt hired well-known biologists and desert ecologists to prepare reports on the virtues of

the Joshua Tree region. She was introduced to President Franklin Roosevelt whose New Deal administration became active in the establishment of national parks and monuments as a jobs-creation initiative. Mrs. Hoyt soon developed an ally in Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes.

Minerva Hoyt had a major success when President Roosevelt asked the National Park Service to prepare a recommendation on the site. Problems with the inclusion of certain railroad lands forced a reduction in the size of the proposed park from over one million acres to 825,000 acres in the final proposal. On August 10, 1936, President Roosevelt signed a presidential proclamation establishing Joshua Tree National Monument. Minerva finally had her desert park. Almost 50 years later, on October 31, 1994, President William Clinton signed the Desert Protection Act adding 234,000 acres to Joshua Tree National Monument and promoting the Monument to National Park status.

Past Winners:

Past winners read like a “Who’s Who of Conservation Achievements” and include:

2004 -Susan Luckie Reilly

2005 - Larry & Donna Charpiet

2006- David Myers, The Wildlands Conservancy

2007 - John Wohlmuth, Coachella Valley Association of Governments

2008 - Mark Jorgenson, Anza-Borrego Desert State Park

2009 - Dianne Feinstein; 2010 - Owens Valley Committee

2011- Elden E. Hughes (posthumously awarded)

2012 - Steve & Ruth Rieman

2013 - Dee & Betty Zeller, Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

2014 - Terry Weiner, Desert Protective Council

2015 – Nancy Karl

2016 – Cindy Zacks