

POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE ASSOCIATION

Voices ^{at the} *Seashore*



Leading from Common Ground

BY ZOE DUERKSEN-SALM



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The last two years have been a time of change around the world and at Point Reyes National Seashore Association (PRNSA). One way that PRNSA has met the challenges of the pandemic is by forming new partnerships—with other organizations and within the board and staff—that advance PRNSA’s conservation, education, and community building goals.

In the spirit of partnering, PRNSA’s Board transitioned to a new “co-chair” leadership model. Blanca Chang Johnson and Seth Rosen were recently elected to co-lead the PRNSA Board. Blanca and Seth bring a complementary set of skills, styles, and life experiences to focus on a shared vision for guiding PRNSA during shifting times.

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Leading from Common Ground

Seth and Blanca share a decades-long connection to Point Reyes National Seashore, but they did not meet until they both joined the PRNSA Board. Both East Bay residents are long-time financial supporters of PRNSA's work, and both share PRNSA's vision of a well-cared for park where all are welcome. This common ground and common love of the Seashore makes it easy for Seth and Blanca to partner together as strong co-leaders of PRNSA.

Seth was born and raised in Southern California yet was drawn to the Bay Area by its amazing natural beauty. "There just aren't many natural streams or forests amongst the desert scrub of San Diego," he says. Seth joined the PRNSA board in 2017 and is now in his second term as a PRNSA Board member. Seth contributes his previous experience leading other nonprofit boards, his love of the Seashore, his passion for equity, and his experience in business and law. On PRNSA's Board, he has led the Development, Audit, and Governance Committees.

Blanca joined the board in 2020 and, in addition to being Co-Chair, she serves as the board's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee Chair. Born in Guatemala and raised in the Bay Area, she has loved the outdoors since childhood. "As the oldest of six siblings, it was



the best place to find quiet solitude," she chuckles, "and it's also always been the best place for connection and a deep sense of belonging." Camping, hiking and backpacking fueled Blanca's love and passion for conservation and education, so after a long STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) career, she gravitated towards leadership and organizational

change. When the pandemic hit, forcing PRNSA to cancel all programs, Blanca quickly advised and supported PRNSA's communications strategy. As a change management professional, her skills were invaluable.

Benefits of Shared Leadership and Vision

The partnership inherent in a shared leadership model is directly aligned with PRNSA's emphasis on partnerships – the benefits of partnering are many! For starters, as Seth notes, "Working with a partner like Blanca makes board leadership less lonely and more fun!" Blanca says the same about Seth and adds, "having co-chairs also means greater inclusion, as more voices aid in sound decision making and provides greater resiliency to the organization."



The pandemic has underscored the value of parks and open space for mental and

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physical health. As Blanca says, “making the park a more welcoming place for all people is more important than ever.”

“The disruption caused by Covid-19 has allowed us the space to reimagine what we are doing,” Seth affirms. “Greater inclusion and improved access to the Seashore is a clear need and directly in line with PRNSA’s mission.”

Partnership in Action

Blanca and Seth first partnered last year in co-leading a task force of the PRNSA Board and National Park Service staff to manage a large unrestricted gift. Thanks to their guidance, the gift is now supporting a range of conservation and education initiatives, including significant work to make the park more inclusive.

“A focus on youth in communities most affected by the pandemic and communities that have historically been excluded from public land has become the driving force behind PRNSA’s education programs,” notes PRNSA Executive Director Donna Faure.

One exciting result is a new partnership initiative of PRNSA, Youth in Parks (YIP). Through this program, PRNSA partners with 13 nonprofit

youth organizations to provide outdoor experiences and lessons at the Seashore for Bay Area youth. These partnerships allow PRNSA and these local youth organizations to co-create programs that expand youth access to public lands by addressing both financial barriers and the need for a sense of belonging.

The partnerships that form Youth in Parks provide the resources for kids to travel together with their teachers and their leaders to spend time in the Seashore. Many of these kids have never been to the park—and some have never been to the ocean—so traveling with their own community allows them to fully experience what the amazing PRNSA educational team has to offer. With each visit to the Seashore, youth feel a growing sense of belonging and step-by-step the park becomes their own.

Through the Youth in Parks program, PRNSA aims to inspire a lifelong love for nature and a desire to preserve public lands. “Creating a love for the Seashore is a great start,” reflected Blanca. “People share what they love, and there’s plenty of park for everyone.”

PRNSA is grateful to Blanca and Seth for their partnership, combining their talents and considerable experiences to help guide PRNSA through these challenging, exciting times. PRNSA is also grateful to our volunteers and supporters for their partnership as the organization grows through overcoming the challenges of the last two years.

Ellen Greenblatt contributed to this article.