

# Karen Telleen-Lawton: Shout-Out to Channel Islands Naturalist Corps

CINC volunteers help lead the way in promoting sustainable use of park and sanctuary resources

By Karen Telleen-Lawton, Noozhawk Columnist | Published on 06.11.2012 4:32 p.m.



It takes awhile for new designations to find their way to common observance. If I reminded you that February is Black History Month and March is Women's History Month, you most likely would say, "Duh." But you might not know that April was National Volunteer Month — it's still in the category of "huh?"

Its significance became real for me this year when the [Channel Islands Naturalist Corps](#) was named the 2011 Federal Volunteer Program of the Year.

The CINC has been my husband's and my enjoyable and rewarding "empty-nester" activity for the past seven years. The first year we accompanied [Condor Express](#) whale watch tours, acting as informal interpreters. We were the captain's "on the deck" marine interpreters for visitors from around the world. Did you know that one-third of the world's marine mammal species frequent Santa Barbara's coastal waters? If you haven't been on a whale watch recently, get down to the harbor now! The humpbacks and blues are currently making it whale soup out there.

The following year we trained to lead day hikes on each of the [Channel Islands National Park's](#) five islands. You wouldn't believe how often it's the first such trip for Santa Barbarans and Venturans.

These days we typically spend several days at a time on one of the islands. As the federal budget has tightened over the years, volunteers have become increasingly important in reaching out to visitors in the face of shrinking park staff.

The corps was created in 1996 as a joint effort between two federal agencies — the [Department of Interior](#) (Channel Islands National Park) and the [Department](#)

of Commerce ([Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary](#), part of the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#)).

That cooperation allows them to leverage resources to accomplish what we as volunteers do — interpretation, resource protection, and programs in maritime heritage and research. We educate visitors about the culturally rich and biologically diverse resources and promote sustainable use of park and sanctuary resources. Moreover, we love our island time.

If you saw us in our blue CINC uniforms, we'd likely be leading a hike, talking to visitors on a boat, photo-identifying whales or weeding out invasive plant species with a park restoration biologist. But the opportunities are endless, and that variety is one of the reasons David and I signed on as volunteers.

Others in the group participate in management plan reviews, attend advisory council meetings, represent CINC and CIMS at community events and school science fairs, catalog orcas off the coast, sample algal blooms in cooperation with [UCSB](#), and support efforts at intertidal monitoring. There are 140 of us with such a low attrition rate that training programs are held only every few years.

CINC naturalists accompany almost all of the public boat and air tours, which depart out of the three major ports accessing the Channel Islands. [Truth Aquatics](#) and Condor Express share the concession out of the [Santa Barbara Harbor](#), while [Island Packers](#) and Captain Don (805.969.5217) run tours out of Ventura and Oxnard harbors. [Channel Islands Aviation](#) in Oxnard flies to [Santa Rosa Island](#).

The [Federal Volunteer Program](#) award was one of many categories awarded by [Take Pride in America](#). Take Pride is a Department of Interior nationwide partnership program to “promote the appreciation and stewardship of our nation’s public lands.” The goal is not cost savings, but in promoting volunteerism on the public lands, taxpayers save millions of dollars.

CINC volunteers alone donated up to 30,000 hours in 2011. This translates to more than \$600,000 of labor support and the equivalent of 16 full-time employees. Toot toot!

— *Karen Telleen-Lawton’s column is a mélange of observations spanning sustainability from the environment to finance, economics and justice issues. She is a fee-only financial advisor ([www.DecisivePath.com](http://www.DecisivePath.com)) and a freelance writer ([www.CanyonVoices.com](http://www.CanyonVoices.com)).*