



ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

WHILE many species can move northward or to higher elevations to escape rising temperatures, Joshua trees are very slow to migrate.

Coming to Joshua trees' rescue

As the symbolic desert succulents struggle against climate change, loss of habitat and increasingly intense wildfires, California is scrambling to complete a conservation plan

BY NOAH HAGGERTY

When a renewable energy company started razing thousands of Joshua trees this month to make way for a sprawling solar farm, it kicked up a firestorm of outrage among Mojave Desert residents and activists.

It was a public display of the prickly dilemma that conservationists face as they fight to preserve western Joshua trees. While the state is nearing completion of a draft conservation plan later this year, both climate change and solar projects are threatening the iconic trees' desert habitat.

Climate scientists predict that by the end of the century, western Joshua trees will be able to survive on only 10% to 25% of the land they now inhabit. And as the Mojave and Colorado deserts continue to grow



IRFAN KHAN Los Angeles Times

A JOSHUA TREE burns in the Bobcat fire in 2018. Wildfires can wipe out sizable percentages of all living Joshuas in a single season.

hotter and drier, the succulents will probably disappear almost entirely from Southern California — including from Joshua Tree National Park.

The problem, experts say, is that while many species can move northward and to higher elevations to escape increasing temperatures, Joshua trees are very slow to migrate and can't keep up.

"Joshua trees are in this triple-squeeze pinch," said Christopher Smith, a professor of biology at Willamette University who co-wrote a 2023 paper exploring how to balance solar development and Joshua tree conservation.

First, there's climate change, Smith said. Next, there's habitat loss due to urbanization and solar development. Finally, there's increasingly intense wildfires — which can wipe out sizable per-

[See **Rescue**, A9]

Justices toss deal in opioid lawsuit

Supreme Court rejects a bankruptcy judge's \$10-billion settlement because it shields the Sackler family.

BY DAVID G. SAVAGE

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Thursday rejected a mass settlement related to the nation's opioid crisis that would have paid an estimated \$10 billion to victims, hospitals, states and others and shielded the Sackler family from further liability.

By a 5-4 vote, the justices ruled that a bankruptcy judge does not have broad power to arrange a mass settlement of thousands of claims that includes protections for people who are not bankrupt.

The justices were split in an unusual way. Justice Neil M. Gorsuch spoke for the majority, while Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Brett M. Kavanaugh dissented.

"Our only proper task is to interpret and apply the law as we find it; and nothing in present law authorizes the Sackler discharge," Gorsuch said.

"We hold only that the bankruptcy code does not authorize a release and in-

[See **Opioid**, A6]

Idaho abortion ban dealt a setback

The Supreme Court allows emergency procedures for now.

BY DAVID G. SAVAGE

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court retreated Thursday from ruling on Idaho's near-total ban on abortions, leaving in place a judge's order that for now allows doctors to perform abortions when necessary in medical emergencies.

The justices in an unsigned order said they had "improvidently granted" Idaho's appeal in its dispute with the Biden administration over emergency care.

A draft of the order was inadvertently posted on the court's website on Wednesday.

Justices were sharply divided when they heard the case in April. Justice Amy Coney Barrett accused the state's attorney of giving shifting answers on whether certain emergencies could justify an abortion.

The justices were unable to agree on a majority ruling.

[See **Abortion**, A6]

How Legos went from humble toy to lucrative listing on black market

Local heists spotlight high-dollar hobby and its unique community.

BY DANIEL MILLER AND SUMMER LIN

The hooded man darted past shattered glass, his headlamp illuminating the rare collectibles housed in display cases that lined the walls of Bricks & Minifigs in Whittier.

"Ninjabo" Ultra Violet (Oni Mask of Hatred). Percival Graves ("Harry Potter" Series 1). Velociraptor with Sand Green Back ("Jurassic World" Blue).

Those sought-after Lego mini-figures were among 600 or more stolen on May 3. In a predawn spree that lasted

little more than a minute, the thief stuffed a garbage bag with about \$10,000 worth of figurines before sprinting to a waiting car and speeding off.

The heist was one of seven carried out at Bricks & Minifigs outlets across the Southland since April, a \$100,000-plus crime spree that, on the heels of other similar incidents, has rattled the growing — but cloistered — world of Lego collectors and merchants.

"Ten years ago I just couldn't have imagined it — I did not think our little hobby was the kind of thing that would attract that kind of crime," said Graham E. Hancock, editor of Blocks, an enthusiast magazine. "The idea that they are taking advantage of really dedi-

[See **Legos**, A12]



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BIDEN, TRUMP FACE OFF AGAIN

Signs in Atlanta tout the presidential debate before Thursday's event. Scan this code to read our coverage at latimes.com and in our eNewspaper, where subscribers get an exclusive "LATEXtra."



Pardon for many gay ex-troops

President Biden grants clemency to those convicted under former sodomy ban. **NATION**, A5

Lakers draft Knecht, James

Team picks Tennessee wing, LeBron's son in first and second rounds, respectively. **SPORTS**, B10

Walgreens may close more shops

CEO of ailing drugstore chain says "changes are imminent" for 25% of its stores. **BUSINESS**, A8

Weather

Partly sunny. L.A.Basin: 85/62. **B6**

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EPA 'upwind' air rule is rejected

Jurists, in split decision, block limit on Midwest states' pollution that affects the East Coast. **A5**

SEC loses stock fraud weapon

High court curtails the agency's use of administrative hearings to penalize fund managers. **A5**



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