From a botanical perspective, with more than 6,500 native plants, California is among the most special places on Earth. It is the most diverse U.S. state. About 60% of California’s acreage, the area under Mediterranean climate conditions (excluding desert habitats), has been selected as one of the world’s 36 Biodiversity Hotspots. More than 30 percent of the state’s plants are considered endemic and are found nowhere else.

Yet, many plants and habitats in California are seriously threatened. Remarkably, more than 35% of the state’s flora is considered rare and is included in the California Native Plant Society’s (CNPS) Rare Plant Inventory. By 2060, California’s population will grow by more than 30% and Southern California will add more than 6 million new residents. Native plants and their habitats will come under increasing pressure in the coming decades from the likes of urbanization, climate change, recreational impacts and a whole host of other threats.

Drawing upon his nearly 20 years of experience as a professional botanist and more recently as the lead conservation staff for CNPS, Nick will reflect upon his recent work in Southern California, and since January, statewide. His talk will focus primarily on two places, Tejon Ranch and Paradise Valley, where large-scale development projects threaten irreplaceable habitats. These projects (and others) serve as bellwethers for how our flora will fare in the coming decades. Nick will then review a variety of emerging threats, from wind projects in Santa Barbara and Lake Counties to a new proposed dam in Del Puerto Canyon. The coming years will mark a turning point for the state’s biodiversity. Nick will guide us on a path through which California continues to be a conservation leader while growing gracefully.

Nick Jensen is CNPS Lead Conservation Scientist and coordinates the activities of the Conservation Program. Nick earned his BS degree in Environmental Horticulture at UC Davis, and his PhD in botany at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden/Claremont Graduate University. As a graduate student, Nick produced the first Flora of Tejon Ranch and studied evolutionary patterns in perennial Streptanthus (jewelflowers). Nick has worked for CNPS, as a Vegetation Program Assistant, and Rare Plant Program Director, as well as for the U.S. Forest Service, Chicago Botanic Garden, and the private consulting industry. An avid Botanist, teacher and volunteer for many California native plant organizations he has also served on the Board of the Southern California Botanists and as its president in 2015-16. Nick is a fellow of the Robert and Patricia Switzer Foundation in recognition of his leadership as an environmental scientist and in his free time, he enjoys cooking, hiking, rock climbing, and photographing wildflowers, activities that are often not mutually exclusive. Earlier this year, Nick described two new species of jewelflower in Southern California.