

PCTA Digital Photography Guidelines

In general, there are two different needs, or destinations, for digital photographs. Some are destined for print projects and some are for on-line use. The needs are different for both of these. Since print projects require a higher resolution image, aka - a larger file size, if you have any reason to believe that your photos will ever be used for a print project, then you should be shooting those photos to produce a larger file size. We can make large photos smaller, but we can't make small photos larger.

PCTA trail crews should, in most instances, assume that their photos may some day be used for a print project and shoot them accordingly.

- Digital photos that are to be printed are needed at 300 dots per inch resolution at the size in which they are to be printed. "How does that correspond to what I see on my digital camera," you may ask. Well, an image that is 7 inches by 5 inches would be, correspondingly, 2100 x 1500 pixels. Digital images are typically measured in pixels. A pixel is a tiny square of one color that visually mixes with other pixels to create the seamless color progression that we (hopefully) see in a full-color photo.
- Digital photos that are **solely** for on-line/Web use only need to be 72 dots per inch. A healthy size image for on-line use would be around 600-800 pixels in either height or width. (Unless you have a specific use for it, such as the background image on a Web site, in which case it would probably need to be 1000+ pixels in width.) But please keep in mind that we cannot after-the-fact turn these into photos we can use in print.

"Who would want to use my photo for a print project?"

Well, the PCTA's *Communicator* magazine uses contributors' photos and photos from our photo library every issue. Our December 2010 issue used approximately 52 photos and they all needed to be a minimum size. Our agency partners - the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, National Parks Service, to name just a few - also use our photos of the PCT. For instance, the Forest Service recently produced a new PCT map/brochure and 27 out of the 30 non-map photos that they used were provided by the PCTA. We've had requests from all over the world for images of the PCT to use in outdoor magazines' articles about the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail. Someone in Australia may be reading an article about the PCT with your photo in it, right at this moment.

"So what do I set my digital camera to in order to get the size photo that I want?"

In this less than perfect world, you ideally need to know where your photo is going to end up. We can't expect you have that information when you're shooting your photos, but **we're asking that you assume your photo will at least wind up as a 5x7 inch photo. That will be a 1500 x 2100 pixel image.** Those of you who want to enter the PCTA's annual photo contest, or who would like your photos considered for our calendar, will want to keep in mind that *Communicator* covers and full-page calendar images need to be at least 8x10 inches at 300 dots per inch, which translates to 2400 x 3000 pixels. The *Communicator* also regularly uses full-page photos inside the magazine, so routinely taking 2400 x 3000 pixel images isn't an absurd idea.

"Yeah, but how do I change the image size on my camera - what settings do I use?"

There's no definitive answer to this question; each camera sets the image size a bit differently. Hopefully your camera will tell you how many pixels the image will be for a particular setting. Please note that, if your camera has the option to take "Normal" "Fine" or "Super Fine" photos, pick "Super Fine" please. It produces a higher quality photo (we won't get too geeky on telling you here how that works.) On the digital camera that I'm sitting here looking at (a sweet little Canon PowerShot), I'm offered the option of taking an "S" "M3" "M2" "M1" or "L" image. That would correspond to the smallest ("S") at just 640x480 pixels, to largest ("L") at 3264x2448 pixels. My camera is always set on at least "M2" or 2048x1536 pixels so that I can turn the camera on and quickly take a 7-ish by 5-ish inch photo. Yes, the larger the photo, the more space it takes up on your camera's disk, but these days a one (1) gigabyte (GB) disk (or card) will let you store approx. 500 5x7 inch JPEG photos. I'm more worried about my battery running out than I am about running out of space on my card.

If you ever have any questions about taking digital photos or similar image questions, don't hesitate to contact either: Mark Larabee, *Communicator* Managing Editor, at mlarabee@pcta.org or Daniel Carmin-Romack, *Communicator* Designer & Production Artist, at dcarmin@pcta.org