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Celebrate!

Celebrate eight years of continuous work to protect the Sierra as we gather in Yosemite this August. More play, more hikes, and more social time, combined with some serious discussions of collaborative processes and confrontational processes and what success looks like for each.

We can tour Hetch Hetchy, raft the Tuolumne, hike in the starlight, and just talk. John Muir will join us, in the form of the Sierra's Muir expert Lee Stetson, to tell us tales of Yosemite by its most famous visitor and chronicler and strongest protector. We will also be entertained by a string band, and all accompanied by good food and wonderful conversations.

We plan to offer field trips to restoration in the Valley and prescribed burns, and panels on OHVs, smart growth, and stream protection.

With the new administration in Washington, it is a good time to review the processes we have used over the past eight years to protect the Sierra, in terms of what works at the state level and what works at the federal level.

This will be a great place and time to be creative and thoughtful, think tactically and look forward boldly!

Join us August 11 and 12 (and come early on Friday the 10th for a Tuolumne Meadows hike, dinner and more fun!) in Yosemite and celebrate our passion to protect the Sierra, to restore the damage, and to enjoy the parts of the Sierra that we cherish the most.

Jumping Frog Habitat Gets Legs

Phil Chang

Kudos to the Jumping Frog Research Institute and the Center for Sierra Nevada Conservation, member groups of the Sierra Nevada Alliance, whose tireless work has helped to secure 4.1 million acres of critical habitat for the red-legged frog! The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated the habitat last month under federal court order after the Institute, the Center and three other environmental groups sued the agency for neglecting its responsibilities to the frog under the Endangered Species Act. This designation will make it harder for government agencies and private developers to fill or damage wetlands and creeks. And it will provide secure habitat for the threatened frogs to survive and begin to recover.

Red-legged frogs require cool aquatic and riparian habitats with healthy native vegetation to survive and reproduce. Scientists estimate that populations have declined by 95% in the last 150 years and that the frogs have vanished from over 70% of their original range, which once covered much of California. Urbanization, mining, logging, grazing, farming, road building, water diversions, dams, and pollution have had severe cumulative impacts on the aquatic and riparian habitats of the frog. Red-legged frog populations have also been impacted by introduced predators, including bullfrogs, sport fish, and humans seeking frog legs.

300,000 acres of critical habitat were designated in the Sierra, where frog populations are small and struggling. The 300,000 acres are in three large blocks in Plumas and Butte Counties, El Dorado County, and Tuolumne and Mariposa Counties. No critical habitat was designated in Calaveras County where the red-legged frog was immortalized as Mark Twain's "Celebrated Jumping Frog." In counties where significant amounts of private land have been designated as critical habitat the protection will put an additional brake on new development. Developers around the State are already threatening to litigate and attempt to revise the Endangered Species Act.

Private Land Critical Habitat designations in the Sierra: El Dorado 38,193 Butte 15,582 Plumas 6,074

Reflecting on the long haul to reach this designation, Jumping Frog Research Institute Director Bob Stack said "That's one small hop for Frog, one giant leap for Frog-kind!" On a more serious note he emphasized how important the support and letters of countless Sierra activists have been to this designation. Bob looks forward to working towards full recovery of the red-legged frog and will work to create partnerships with ranchers and other local landowners towards that goal.

Executive Director's Letter

Spring in the high Sierra is the best, with corn snow for skiing, crocus popping up, very warm days followed by very cold days so that you never remember where your jackets are, and longer lighter days to lift the spirits. The Alliance is in that time period when we finish the planning for our annual ritual of celebrating our beginnings and our progress and announce the place of our summer gathering – and this year we went for the gold! Yosemite!

It's a word that speaks of the Sierra, recalls reading John Muir, stirs memories of adventures in the Valley, the back country, on the high granitic slabs, in the Village, at Badger Pass, hiking, skiing, floating, camping, eating and more. My memories include sleeping in a tent cabin at Curry in February at 20°, ski awards ceremonies at the Awahnee, a poignant memorial service at Mirror Lake, overnighing at Glacier Point in the gift shop in March, and a special hike with a special friend to Vernal Falls on a misty May day.

Yosemite is the Sierra. The work of so many of our friends and compatriots have led to a new management plan for this most special place, one we hope will survive an unexpected delay, and one that many groups have put in years to achieve. From the High Sierra Hikers to the Yosemite Restoration Trust, from the Sierra Club committee to Mariposans for Environmentally Responsible Growth, from Yosemite Area Audubon to Yosemite Guardian the people who are committed to protecting Yosemite for future generations threw themselves into the years of hard work, endless meetings, late nights poring over huge documents and writing cogent comments that have resulted in a workable plan. Let us salute these and the many others in California's cities and towns who have contributed to assuring that Yosemite remains a place that creates wonderful memories of a spectacular array of nature and of friends and adventures.

Put August 11 and 12 on your calendars – and come celebrate those who do the hard work of protection of the Sierra at Yosemite!

Onward ~ Laurel W. Ames

Sierra Conservancy on Hold

Assemblyman Tim Leslie wanted 100% veto power for counties in the proposed legislation for a new state conservancy for the Sierra, so that any project proposed by the conservancy would be subject to a county veto. That didn't fly with official supporters and he has dropped the bill.

As of publication time, there is no new author. Alliance member groups have weighed in with a number of concerns with the legislation, including the lack of a seat on the governing board for the environmental community, the lack of official inclusion of the local land trusts in the planning process, and a lack of a clear formula for assuring distribution of funds to all regions of the Sierra. Joe Caves, a long-time environmental lobbyist in Sacramento, described the concept as "terminally dysfunctional." The Alliance is awaiting further developments and more member group feedback before subscribing to the legislation.

Congress Rescues Schools from Timber Dependency but Things get Complicated

A simple idea went to Congress. De-couple federal payments to counties for schools and county roads from wildly fluctuating National Forest timber sales in those counties. What unfolded was a years-long power struggle. Timber companies bankrolled a strong campaign to keep schools as a constituency for logging projects. Environmentalists and school supporters without timber ties fought to disentangle school budgets and timber revenues. The final County Payments legislation allows counties to free their schools from timber dependency by choosing a stable, guaranteed annual payment that comes with special project funds to boot.

HISTORY Counties which encompass National Forest land receive annual payments from the federal government. These payments are compensation for property tax revenues lost because the county's private land base shrunk when the Forest was created. These payments are used in California to augment regular public schools budgets and to maintain and construct county roads. Since 1908 a county's payment has been based on receipts from timber sales on National Forest lands within that county. This created an incentive for local governments and schools to lobby the Forest Service to increase the cut.

THIS IS NOW The new stable, guaranteed annual payments being offered to the counties are based on the highest payments received in past years. In the Sierra this will mean that schools and roads will receive payments based on those of the booming timber years of the 1980s. But now they will get the payments without cutting trees! Some counties will increase their annual payments by millions of dollars over the 1999 amount - - Plumas, for instance will receive an extra \$5 million for schools and roads each year, almost 10 times the 1999 amount, but Nevada County will receive only \$110,000.

TWISTS But the new County Payments legislation has some very interesting hooks. When a county takes the new guaranteed annual payment, they must earmark 15-20% of the funds for either watershed restoration, road maintenance or closures, and other Forest Service projects on Forest Service lands (Title II) or for search and rescue, work camps, easements, after- school programs, land use planning, or community forestry projects (Title III).

If a county opts for Title III, then the county designs projects from that list. But, if the counties opt for Title II, the work begins! Title II projects are recommended by a local collaborative Resource Advisory Committee (RAC). The counties get to recommend members for the RAC, made up of five environmentalists, five commodity people, and five citizens, submit that list to the FS and wait for certification. The local FS office will also receive applications to the committees and presumably will oversee the county selections to assure that the committee is as balanced as the legislation intended. If a county chooses not to appoint a RAC, the county automatically gets Title III funds.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS Different counties will make different choices about Titles II and III based on their beliefs about how and whether to manage our public lands, who should make decisions about how special project funds are spent (counties or collaborative committees), and what the most important needs in their community are. Active management or hands off? Consensus decisions or County Supervisors? Watershed restoration or fire planning? Road

closures or search and rescue services?

The decisions that counties make or don't make are not cast in stone. If a county has not appointed a RAC by May this year, they will only be eligible for county project (Title III) funds in 2002. But they can change their minds and appoint a RAC for the next fiscal year if they decide they want to see money spent on Forest Service projects. And, for further flexibility, counties can mix and match - - they can opt for both Title II and Title III funds in one year, save up funds for multi-year projects, or stick to one decision for the life of the program. But, they must tell the Governor by September of each year what it is they are going to do with the federal payment for the next year.

SIERRA ISSUES AND UNCERTAINTIES Most Sierra counties are hedging their bets, creating a RAC, but opting for Title III funds this year. Some counties have balked at spending their money on Forest Service projects. Some are challenged to fill slots within the three categories for the RACS. Some are afraid to open up a collaborative can of worms. It is predictable that counties that cannot execute a good solicitation process for their RAC will not end up with a good RAC. The Forest Service has cautioned counties to think about the need to develop win-win projects in order to keep the six year program alive. And no one knows how this new program will fare in the new administration budget.

Because of the opportunity provided by this program to fund new watershed restoration projects on federal land, the Alliance will keep you informed of this program as it unfolds.

Title II or Title III?

Title II projects are collaborative: · Restoration · Maintenance · Stewardship projects, within or benefiting Forest lands.

These projects will be recommended by a Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) whose 15 members represent local commercial, environmental, and community interests.

Title III projects are selected by county governments and fall into six categories: · Search and Rescue and Emergency Services · Community Service Work Camps · Public Access and Conservation Easement Purchases · Forest Related After-School Educational Programs · Fire Prevention Education and County Planning Needs Related to Public Lands · Community Forestry Projects

Grassroots Groups Go!

Congratulations to **High Sierra Hikers, Mariposans for Environmentally Responsible Growth, Yosemite Audubon and Yosemite Restoration Trust** who invested many hours in assuring that the final plan for Yosemite National Park went a long way toward protecting the very special environment that is Yosemite. Thanks to your hard work! The downside is that the local Congressmen, Radanovich and Doolittle, have asked the Bush administration to delay the plan. These guys want more cars, more facilities, more traffic . . .

Bristlecone Chapter of CNPS is celebrating after a quick letter-writing campaign attracted the help of Senator Barbara Boxer to convince the astronomers and the Inyo National Forest to abandon efforts to build a high-altitude observatory in a roadless area. However, as David Pritchett notes, if Clinton's Roadless Area Protection plan is deep-sixed, the observatory proponents could be back again.

PESTER (Preserving the Eastern Sierra Tradition of Environmental Responsibility) produces a widely read weekly e-mail alert to the eastern Sierra that provides late-breaking news and agenda items for more than 60 local environmental issues in Mono County. ESAN, the Eastern Sierra Agenda Network, has increased citizen action exponentially. Our next newsletter will describe the network in great detail – a success like this could be duplicated in every community in the Sierra. Contact Elizabeth Tenney at if you can't wait to get going on your network!

Next Futures Fund round announcement is expected by late June. Member groups watch your e-mail! Eligibility will include paid-up dues, for the first time.

Amador Land Trust received a grant to hire their first Executive Director. The Amador Community Foundation noted that the grant would contribute to "the community's overall well-being".

Note new websites: **Echo Lakes Environmental Fund** at <http://sites.netscape.net/elefecho/homepage>; **Friends of Sierra Rock Art** at www.sierrarockart.com; and the **Sierra Nevada Group** of the Sierra Club at www.motherlode.sierraclub.org/sierranevada.

Welcome New Member Groups

Blue Mountain Community Renewal Council in eastern Calaveras County supports citizen-driven projects that improve their community health and well being, economic security, and the integrity of the ecosystem in the surrounding areas of Glencoe, Rail Road Flat, West Point, and Wilseyville. The BMCRC was born out of a year-long community renewal effort, utilizing the Rocky Mountain Institute Sustainable Community Development process that involved the direct support of the Sierra Nevada Alliance and the Foothill Conservancy. The BMCRC provides community residents with technical assistance, administrative support, training, public relations assistance, project planning assistance and financial support to plan and implement projects consistent with their vision of the community, as developed by the community, through sustainable community development processes. To contact BMCRC: 209.293.7160; e-mail: P
ALIGN=LEFT>**Northern California Regional Land Trust** was founded in 1990 in Chico under the former name of Parks and Preserves Foundation. The name change to NCRLT represents the intention to embrace land conservation in a broader, more regional and multi-faceted context. For now, the immediate focus of activity is still within the northern Sacramento Valley, the western slopes of the southern Cascade Range, and the northern Sierra Nevada Range in the Butte County area. In the near future they will be able to promote and encourage conservation efforts on a larger geographical scale. To date, the Northern California Regional Land Trust has placed approximately 350 acres of land into conservation easements in the

foothills of the northern Sierra. To contact NCRLT: 530.894.7738; e-mail: P
ALIGN=LEFT>**Restore Hetch Hetchy** is the boldest restoration project in the Sierra, as the group takes on a long-term vision of restoring the famous Hetch Hetchy Valley to its natural condition. Their vision is to allow "one of nature's rarest and most precious mountain temples" to be available for public enjoyment, to be reintegrated into its natural ecological and biological systems, and to provide for scientific exploration. Their goal is to accomplish a "win-win" outcome for Hetch Hetchy Valley, and for the cities of the Bay Area and the Turlock and Modesto Irrigation Districts that rely on Hetch Hetchy water and power — drop for drop, kilowatt for kilowatt, and dollar for dollar. To contact Restore Hetch Hetchy: 209.379.9334; e-mail: BR>

Losing Blue Oaks

"The oak woodland communities of the western Sierra Nevada foothills are the most vulnerable of the widespread vegetation types as a result of greater access by humans and of their continuing potential for urban development," says the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Report. (Vol I, page 18).

Our blue oaks are integral to our vision of the Sierra foothills, that classic California landscape of rolling, oak studded hills that are emerald green now and will be glowing golden in the fall. Any drive through the Mother Lode is through that oft-photographed scene. And north and south of the Mother Lode, the oaks are even more numerous, in large part due to the reduced population pressures in those areas.

Blue Oaks are that oak species (*quercus douglassi*) that live on the western edge of the Sierra foothills, and, in fact, are the indicator of the dividing line between the Sierra Nevada and the Central Valley. Blue oaks like thin rocky soils that are waterlogged in winter and bone dry in summer – that's the foothills!

But the vulnerable blue oaks are under siege due to the substantial increase in development in the foothill counties, much of which occurs in the swath along the lower edge of the Sierra that is the blue oak woodlands. The growth of the foothills is phenomenal – in 10 years Placer County population increased 43.7%, Madera by 39.7%, Calaveras by 26.7% and El Dorado by 24%.

WHO PROTECTS OAKS?

A new piece of legislation moving through Sacramento these days is AB 242, from Assembly Member Helen Thomas, that provides \$5 million from last year's park bond for oak protection. That act won't release funds in a county unless the county has an enforceable oak protection ordinance.

While some foothill counties have oak protection guidelines, most do not even have guidelines, let alone ordinances, to assure that critical oak woodlands are not overrun by new development, or decimated by firewood cutting, or ripped out for vineyards.

But oaks are not on many radar screens - the Board of Forestry and Fish and Game have failed to

respond to pleas from the public to protect oak trees. In utter frustration at the lack of official action, the California Oak Foundation filed a state oak protection lawsuit and, if that fails, will start an initiative next year to tell lawmakers and agencies that oaks are a part of our heritage and had better be protected.

The vanishing blue oaks are important to Sierra history, to our foothill habitat, and to our scenic vistas. Check with your local land trusts to see what you can do in your area to protect the blue oaks through easements or acquisition. And check with your county planning commission to see how sturdy your local oak protection rules are.

We urge you, who cherish the foothill blue oaks, to raise the consciousness in your community: · Write a letter to the editor reminding our neighbors and community of the Sierra's oak heritage and the oak landscape that plays such an important role in that heritage. · Urge everyone to act locally to protect the blue oaks in their community.

Tell your county Supervisor to start work today on an oak protection ordinance.

Remaining Blue Oak Habitat

Remaining blue oak habitat mapped by the UC Santa Barbara Vegetation Gap Analysis Project in conjunction with oak-pine woodlands. The map includes all the habitats that occupy at least 10-15% of the local landscape and is based on the California Wildlife Habitat Relationship habitat types.

Sierra Watershed Groups Get Staff Infusions

Four new local Watershed Coordinators will be coming to the Sierra thanks to Department of Conservation (DOC) grants to Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs). These new Coordinators will provide a welcome boost to watershed restoration and protection efforts in the North Fork American, Truckee, Upper Merced, and Upper Truckee River watersheds. The DOC received 78 proposals from across the state and divided \$2 million among the 30 top ranking applicants.

The four grantees in the Sierra received between \$66,000 and \$82,000 each to fund a full-time staff person for up to 16 months. In the North Fork American and Truckee watersheds these new Coordinators will provide new capacity to established watershed groups which are already having an impact in their streams and forests. In the Upper Merced and Upper Truckee watersheds the new Coordinators will be important catalysts in convening new watershed groups. Sierra Nevada Alliance Watershed staff will be working with these Coordinators during the critical early stages of assembling these groups.

The great strength of collaborative, stakeholder-based watershed groups is that they connect many diverse organizations and individuals to improve ecological, economic and social conditions on a watershed scale. But because most participants come to watershed groups as representatives of some other organization, these collaborative partnerships often have no staff of

their own. Much of the work of a watershed group is done by volunteers during their free time or by agency personnel in the time that they can carve out after their primary duties are completed. Coordinator funding provides watershed groups with the staff capacity they need to be truly effective. Coordinators in the four Sierra watersheds that received grants will play key roles in: · establishing new watershed councils · providing public education about watersheds · developing sound collaborative processes for their watershed groups · performing watershed assessments · developing watershed protection and restoration strategies · securing funding for erosion control and stream restoration projects · implementing watershed protection programs · obtaining needed technical expertise · overseeing and coordinating on-the-ground projects

12 other Watershed Coordinator proposals from the Sierra region were not funded this year. The Alliance will offer to work with RCDs if they need staff to launch new watershed initiatives, providing assistance in seeking other grants and offering "start-up" coordination support as available.

According to Dennis O'Bryant, DOC's RCD Program Grant Manager, successful proposals demonstrated a clear conceptual linkage between a new Coordinator and benefits to a watershed and were submitted by Resource Conservation Districts that had developed strong partnerships with other local organizations and with state and federal agencies. DOC was also looking for proposals that described clear criteria to measure the performance of watershed groups and the new Coordinators.

Alliance Watershed Program Update

Watershed groups close in on grants

In the last 10 months the Alliance has been delighted to provide direct support to people who are working to create new collaborative, stakeholder-based watershed groups in their Sierra communities. Our Watershed Coordinator, Phil Chang, works with interested local watershed leaders to educate their communities about watersheds, organize new collaborative processes, assess and plan for their watersheds, and secure grant funding.

Two of the watershed groups that the Alliance has worked closely with are poised to pick up major grants in the next few months. Members of the Alpine County Carson Watershed Group and the Cherokee Watershed Group of Butte County have worked with Phil to articulate their priorities for their watersheds and he has committed these ideas to paper as grant proposals for them.

The Alpine County Carson Watershed Group has requested \$200,000 of Proposition 13 funds to assess the condition of 75 miles of stream corridor in the California portion of the upper Carson Watershed. This proposal was ranked second for funding through the Prop 13 Watershed Protection Program in the Lahontan Region and has been forwarded on to the state-wide competition.

The Cherokee Watershed Group has requested \$72,000 from the CALFED Watershed Program to investigate concerns about heavy metal contamination through Citizen Monitoring; compile

existing studies and data for the watershed into a summary document; perform outreach and education; and build a formal, broad-based, collaborative stakeholder watershed organization. The proposal has advanced to the second, and final, round of the competition.

Alliance brings on second watershed coordinator

The Alliance will be able to provide more support to new watershed initiatives starting this summer! For the second year in a row the Sustainable Communities Leadership Program will offer the Alliance a graduate student Fellow to work with new watershed groups. If you would like our assistance with starting a new watershed partnership in your area let us know!