

*April 2002*

## **Inside This Issue...**

- [200 Cameras Spur Participation](#)
- [Ski Areas Scored on Environmental Practices](#)
- [Executive Director's Letter](#)
- [Off Highway and Out of Control](#)
- [Welcome New Member Group Owens Valley Committee](#)
- [Goodbye Laurel Ames & Thank You](#)
- [Alliance Wish List](#)
- [Mark Your Calendars!](#)
- [Lessons Learned Restoring Naturally Flowing Creeks](#)
- [Legislative Watch](#)

### **200 Cameras Spur Participation**

When the Tulare County Board of Supervisors began a comprehensive review of the county's General Plan with a specific focus on foothill growth management, Alliance member group Friends of the Tule River used a creative and effective tactic to involve the community's residents.

The group was awarded 200 recyclable cameras from the Kodak Photo Voice Award for a Forward Vision Project. They put together eight teams to photograph various community and county issues. They then displayed the photos at an exhibit in their office. Pictures illustrated a variety of concerns regarding land use, traffic, housing, commercial development and environmental issues. Longs Drugs donated the processing costs and an opening reception invited everyone to come 'see' issues the General Plan could address. At the end of the exhibit, the photos will be presented as public comment on the General Plan.

"This project opened the minds of many of our community's residents, and opened the door to participation in extremely important decisions by our local government," said Dagny Grant, Director of the Friends of the Tule River.

The project has stirred many groups and individuals. Members of the Springville Chamber of Commerce have applied for a grant to do a community action plan and are using the Forward Vision Project results to demonstrate the community's interest in creating goals and a vision for the community. The Great Valley Center will also be displaying the Forward Vision Project at their conference in May.

For more information contact Dagny Grant, Friends of the Tule River, 559.539.3608 or email:

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## Ski Areas Scored on Environmental Practices



Everyone probably realizes that ski areas play an important role in the Sierra, offering recreation, jobs, and conference/meeting facilities. What some people may not know is that ski areas also play a critical role in the Sierra environment. These multi-million dollar businesses can be good environmental stewards or, in the worse situations, ravage the environment causing air pollution, water degradation and habitat loss. The Sierra Nevada Alliance recently joined a national coalition dedicated to reinforcing the environmental practices of ski resorts, the Ski Area Citizen's Coalition.

This winter the national coalition released environmental grades for 19 California and Nevada ski resorts. The new scorecard is the most comprehensive assessment of California and Nevada ski resort environmental policies and practices. A complete Ski Area Environmental Scorecard, including a break down of each resort's score and documentation of their environmental performance, is available online at <http://www.skiareacitizens.com>.

Resort Grade

Alpine Meadows C

Bear Valley Mtn. Resort C

Big Bear Mtn. Resort C

Boreal C

Dodge Ridge C

Heavenly Ski Resort F

Homewood Mtn. Resort C

Kirkwood Mtn. Resort D

Mammoth Mountain C

Mountain High Resort C

Mt. Rose – Ski Tahoe B

Mt. Shasta Ski Park C

Northstar-at-Tahoe D

Sierra-at-Tahoe B

Sierra Summit B

Snow Summit Mtn. Resort B

Snow Valley Mtn. Resort B

Squaw Valley USA D

Sugar Bowl Ski Resort D

"California and Nevada ski resorts have a lot of room for improving their environmental record," said Ben Doon, Ski Area Citizens' Coalition Research Associate. "We were disappointed with a number of ski resorts' performance. Hopefully these grades will be a bench mark to show resort improvements in the future."

The scorecard evaluates eleven criteria assigned a quantity of points commensurate with its importance in protecting the environment. Criteria applied included avoiding expansion or commercial development into undisturbed forests, avoiding terrain alteration in environmentally sensitive areas, avoiding new snowmaking which uses vast amounts of energy, avoiding water degradation, having environmentally friendly policy positions, protecting wildlife and forests, containing impacts within the ski area boundary, recycling, water and energy conservation, and traffic emissions reduction. The Alliance is working this spring to ensure that the wisdom of Sierra community members is better reflected in the national effort.

When the national coalition first started, they released their first scorecard on November 29, 2000. The initial scorecard only graded two resorts in California and Nevada. Only two years later, the Scorecard now includes 70 ski resorts, 19 of which are in the two Sierra states.

The Alliance joined the coalition to help with research in the Tahoe basin and to expand outreach and education of ski area performance throughout California and Nevada. Other coalition steering committee members include Colorado Wild, the Crystal Conservation Coalition of Washington, Friends of the Inyo in the eastern Sierra, Save Our Canyons of Utah, and the

Greater Yellowstone Coalition in Wyoming.

For more information visit <http://www.skiareacitizens.com>

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### **Executive Director's Letter**

As we prepare this edition of the newsletter, I am struck by the diversity of approaches to protecting the Sierra. The Ski Area Citizen's Coalition is using a scorecard to grade ski resorts environmental performance and raising consumer awareness to encourage good stewardship. The Friends of the Tule River sent 200 cameras out into the community spurring participation in their community's general plan. CORE mobilized hundreds of people to comment on environmental impact statements to try and control illegal off-highway vehicle use. The Tahoe Conservancy is using ecosystem science and bio-engineering to restore the upper Truckee watershed. And then, of course, there are numerous legislative efforts on the state and national level. All these efforts point to an impressive quiver of tactics being deployed to keep our Sierra streams clear, wildlife wild, and communities engaged and healthy.

From the Alliance's seat as a group working to strengthen individuals and groups in the Sierra, as well as be a regional voice for protection and restoration, it's a challenge to keep up on what strategies are working and which ones are not. We hope this issue of Sierra News will not only inform our readers of current tactics and strategies, but also highlight which ideas are working.

I sometimes wonder in my first months as Executive Director of the Alliance how I myself will not get overwhelmed by this whirlwind of activity – and then I remember Laurel. As you'll see from the article on page 5, Laurel Ames has retired. Her last day in the office was March 31. Amazingly, Laurel not only lasted 8 years as Director, but left smiling and still passionate about the Sierra.

So as Laurel heads out to the Dolomites of Italy and numerous Sierra hikes this summer, the staff and board of the Alliance wish her a hearty thank you for her leadership, commitment and years of service to the Alliance and the Sierra.

Sincerely,

Joan Clayburgh

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## Off Highway and Out of Control



In 1998, Judith Spencer and other residents in Arnold, California were concerned about off-highway vehicle (OHV) trespass on their residential streets and private property. There was concern about the dust, noise, environmental destruction, and recreational conflicts in the local forests. To address these issues residents formed Commitment to Our Recreational Environment (CORE).

Policy set in 1991 restricted OHV use to designated trails, and the Stanislaus Forest Service received funds yearly from the California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission to manage OHV use, including the area outside Arnold. However, in 1998, a sixteen square mile area near the town, with 18 miles of legal OHV trails, was already laced with more than 55 miles of illegal user-created trails. To date, two Environmental Assessments for the area of concern had been issued and withdrawn, following a plethora of public comments. Meanwhile, illegal off-highway trails have tripled to over 150 miles and uncontrolled riding, with all the attendant problems, continues outside Arnold. The question arises - who is the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission, and are they effective?

The Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission (OHMVRC) is a California Department of Parks and Recreation board for off-highway vehicle issues that makes policy and approves grants for managing OHV recreation in California. This program, funded by a gas tax, for years granted money promoting off-highway vehicle use and failed to limit environmental destruction, controlling off-highway use, or promoting non-OHV recreation. The program ignored the fact that many users of unpaved roads use them to access fishing, hiking, and camping – not just for OHV riding. The good news is that the program changed.

Paul Spittler, Executive Director of the California Wilderness Coalition, was appointed to the Commission in January of 2000. Terry Davis, Conservation Coordinator of the Sierra Club Mother Lode Chapter is a member of an OHV stakeholders group. Together they have worked with Deputy Director of State Parks and others to broaden the view, goals, and distribution of resources by the state's OHV program.

In 2000, the program adopted stronger regulations governing its grant program. The new regulations require grantees to do extensive monitoring of soil quality, erosion, and wildlife habitat, as well as comprehensive wildlife habitat protection programs, soils loss prevention programs, receive public input, have law enforcement plans and to restore areas damaged by past

ORV use.

This new approach by the Commission has had positive effects. For example, in Arnold, the community has raised repeated concerns and yet the commission in the past had granted over \$5 million to the Stanislaus National Forest Service for OHV operation and maintenance. However, in January of 2001, the Commission voted unanimously to withhold all grant funds for the problem area from the Stanislaus National Forest Service. Instead the Commission gave a \$75,000 grant to the areas Sheriff Department for summer and winter enforcement of trail use in the area.

On another front, a new state bill, AB 2274 authored by Assembly members Keeley and Wyland, incorporates recommendations by the OHV stakeholders group to provide more funding for law enforcement, conservation and restoration of damaged areas.

But even if AB 2274 passes and with a more balanced approach by the state program, the question remains for each community: who will balance OHV trail use with community and environmental concerns? On the ground management decisions still lie with the land owners, often the Forest Service or BLM. Will Arnold see illegal trails triple again in the next ten years to 450 miles of trails in a sixteen square mile area while public comments pile higher and higher calling for reform? Will the leadership of the legislature and state commission convince landowners to manage for all recreational users and the environment? Probably not without the continued leadership of local groups throughout the Sierra and nation.

For More Information contact:

Commitment to Our Recreational Environment (CORE, Arnold, CA; Phone or fax: 209.795.2012; Email: Web: <http://www.core-group.net>

Terry Davis, Mother Lode Chapter of the Sierra Club, Sacramento, CA; Phone: 916.557.1100; Email: [coordinator@sierraclub-sac.org](mailto:coordinator@sierraclub-sac.org); Web: <http://www.motherlode.sierraclub.org>

Off Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission, Sacramento, CA; Phone: 916.324.5801; Email: Web: <http://www.ohv.parks.ca.gov>

For more on AB 2274 see <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov>

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## Welcome New Member Group Owens Valley Committee

Photo by Stephen Ingram



The Owens Valley Committee is a local group of concerned Eastern Sierra citizens working to protect and restore natural systems in the Owens Valley through science, education and public advocacy. Active since 1984, the Committee's recent focus has been the restoration of 60 miles of the Lower Owens River destroyed in 1913 due to water diversions by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP).

Prior to the water diversions on the Owens River, the area provided extraordinary natural beauty and was a stopping place for migrating birds. Even today, hundreds of winter geese and tens of thousands of shorebirds stop off at Owens Lake and Owens River.

In 1997, an agreement was reached between Inyo County and Los Angeles to return water to the Owens River to restore a diverse and self-sustaining habitat. In addition, Inyo County and Los Angeles agreed to cooperatively manage water export. However, as the Owens Valley Committee website notes, "legal agreements aren't everything." The Owens Valley Committee is providing strong citizen oversight of both Los Angeles and Inyo County to ensure implementation and restoration proceed on schedule.

The latest focused campaign of the Committee regards the LADWP proposal to unilaterally triple the size of a pumpback station. Such action would threaten restoration of the Lower Owens River and its delta. The Owens Valley Committee is fighting this proposal to ensure that adequate water is allowed to flow and add to the delta's 1,100 acres of wetlands. The LADWP proposal to expand the amount pumped back into the Los Angeles aqueduct and out of the Owens area violates the landmark 1997 agreement with Inyo County.

In a victory last March, the federal EPA agreed with the Owens Valley Committee and concluded that LADWP's proposal for an increased pump station is not well-supported. Available evidence strongly suggests Los Angeles prefers this alternative in order to build future capacity for additional water exports from Owens Valley.

For More Information contact:

Owens Valley Committee, Mike Prather Drawer D, Lone Pine, CA 93545 760.876.5807; Email: <http://www.ovcweb.org>

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## Goodbye Laurel Ames & Thank You

Photo by Mitch Haberman



After the first announcement that Laurel Ames, the Sierra Nevada Alliance Executive Director of eight years, was retiring, David Breninger of the Placer County Water Agency sent back a note indicating the Alliance didn't know Laurel Ames if we thought she was retiring. So to be clear, Laurel is formally retired from the Alliance staff – but certainly not from lending her voice, leadership, and passion for the Sierra.

Laurel was hired to be the first Executive Director of the Alliance in 1993, and the Alliance's first office was her kitchen room table. Since those days Laurel has led the Alliance to be an organization of over 81 member groups spanning the entire Sierra from the pines of Quincy to the rivers of Kern county.

Laurel successfully lobbied for millions of dollars in state and federal funding for Sierra watershed work. She started the Alliance's first mini-grant program providing support to over twenty-two groups throughout the range. Her ability to work with diverse interests initiated a partnership with the Regional Council of Rural Counties, which together produced strong principles of watershed protection adopted by the State Water Resources Control Board. These are just a few examples of her achievements.

Most notably – the Alliance, starting as an idea at a conference, is an organization over eight years old and still going strong.

The Alliance staff looks forward to calling Laurel and getting her advise. While she is excited about numerous high alpine adventures in her retirement, Laurel continues to serve on the California Watershed Network steering committee and receive calls from legislative staff and others for help. So don't mistake the word retirement to mean inactive – simply unpaid.

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### **Alliance Wish List**

The Alliance office needs additional equipment and furniture:

· Small Desk · Office Chairs (5) · 2 Computers (PC) Pentium II or better · 4 line phone system

If you have any of the above items (or other office equipment) you would like to donate, please call the Alliance at 530.542.4546 or email:

[Table of Contents...](#)

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### **Mark Your Calendars!**

Sierra Nevada Alliance Conference

August 17 & 18, 2002

Camp Richardson, South Lake Tahoe

Join us for workshops, field trips, and amazing speakers to learn and discuss how forests, wildlands, wildlife habitat, and rivers, lakes and streams could be affected by future water demands.

Book your own accommodations early!

See Annual Conference section on our website.

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### **Lessons Learned Restoring Naturally Flowing Creeks**

Over twelve watershed groups are busy throughout the Sierra working to protect and restore their rivers, streams and lakes. One organization that has been doing restoration work in the Tahoe Basin for years is the California Tahoe Conservancy. Steve Goldman, Natural Resources Program Manager for the Conservancy, has learned important lessons when planning and implementing restoration projects.

One telling example is with Cold Creek, a tributary of the Upper Truckee watershed. In 1989, Steve was asked to sit in on a process for designing Cold Creek's wildlife habitat and creek restoration. Because he felt he was not an "expert" in stream restoration, he deferred to the federal engineers who professed to understand how to recreate a naturally-functioning creek. After the project was implemented, Steve observed the banks eroding and wildlife ponds filling with sediment, and appealed to participating agencies. The agencies were initially reluctant to do anything about it because they didn't understand why the problems would continue to worsen.

Steve then enlisted the help of Dave Rosgen, a stream restoration specialist and colleague of Luna Leopold, one of the world's leading authorities on fluvial geomorphology—the science of how rivers form. Rosgen conducted a week-long course in Tahoe on stream restoration and geomorphology for a diverse set of city, county, state and federal agency staff and consultants involved in restoration in the Tahoe basin.

Agencies developed a greater understanding of naturally functioning creeks and rivers following Rosgen's demonstrations during the week. The class went on field trips to healthy and unhealthy streams and rivers. From hands on exercises they learned that the initial Cold Creek "restored" channel had too steep a bed gradient and was too deep to be stable. Spring flood flows could not go overbank into the meadow, and the channel bottom was below the root depth of the bank vegetation.

With new information and a new attitude among the people and agencies involved, Steve spearheaded a three year design process that, in 1994, led to the successful, naturally-functioning restoration of the creek. Today in 2002, Cold Creek has survived both wet and dry winters and continues to be a healthy, functioning creek.

One of the lessons learned is that in order to successfully restore creeks and rivers, knowledge from a variety of disciplines is needed, including fluvial geomorphology, hydrology, engineering, fisheries biology, botany, and wetland ecology. Another key lesson is that project managers and specialists from different disciplines need to work together cooperatively and respect each other's knowledge.

To learn more about the work of Dave Rosgen, check out Wildland Hydrology at <http://www.wildlandhydrology.com> or contact them at 970-731-6100. Courses and publications are offered.

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### **Legislative Watch**



AB 2734, authored by Assembly Member Pavley (D-Agoura Hills) promotes water conservation in California. The Sierra Nevada provides over 60% of California's drinking water. In the face of population growth, expanding development, and global climate change, the Sierra will see increasing demands on our water. To preserve the health of Sierra aquatic ecosystems and recreational uses, state level water conservation must become a priority. AB 2734 requires conservation fixtures on plumbing such as low flow toilets before a transfer of ownership. The bill would also require cities and counties to adopt local water efficient landscape ordinances for

public agencies and large developments.

Another bill to watch is AB 1972, authored by Assembly Member Frommer (D-Los Angeles). AB 1972 requires consumer confidence reports which are mailed to consumers by their water departments to include a description of health concerns for contaminants found in the water supply. These reports would not only educate urban water users about the source of their water but also shed light on the problems existing in watersheds. Urban support for clean source water could be a stepping stone to more state resources for collaborative Sierra watershed work to restore and protect rivers, lakes and streams.

For more information visit: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov>