

*April 2003*

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### **Tenth Annual Sierra Nevada Alliance Conference**

August 16 & 17, 2003 *Loving the Sierra: Inspiration for the Decades Ahead* This conference will celebrate 10 years of accomplishments, share ways to turn residents' and visitors' love of the Sierra into winning strategies, and discuss what hasn't happened and what needs to happen in the next 10 years to protect and restore all the qualities we love about the Range of Light. Join us for two days of workshops, field trips, inspirational speakers, and the fun at the Ebbetts Pass Community Center/Independence Hall in Arnold, CA, near Big Trees State Park.

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### **Sierra Forests Under Attack by President Bush**



Bush proposal would increase Sierra timber harvesting up to approximately 600 million board feet a year

On maps of land ownership in the Sierra Nevada, US Forest Service lands are the overwhelming majority. Consequently, the Bush administration's recent attacks to undermine ecosystem management of Sierra forest lands is of grave concern for water quality, recreation, wildlife, old growth, and scenic viewsheds in our Range of Light.

On January 12, 2001, the US Forest Service released a management plan for 11.5 million acres of

national forest land in the Sierra Nevada region - spanning 11 national forests, known as the Sierra Nevada Framework. This plan evolved from a series of ecological events, scientific reports, community discussions and actions. The Framework was an agreement forged by conservationists, scientists, community activists, business owners and interested groups that sought to reduce wildfire threat to human and animal communities, while sustaining local economies and protecting wildlife, old growth forests and water resources. In total, the Framework took 10 years and over 20 million dollars to create.

At the time, the Sierra Nevada Framework was hailed by the Forest Service as a "landmark plan" that would protect old-growth forests, restore habitat for wildlife and protect rural communities from wildfire. While the Sierra Club, Sierra Nevada Forest Protection Campaign and about 76 different conservation groups (many of them Sierra Nevada Alliance member groups) endorsed the proposal, some environmental groups argued it was not protective enough.

This year, the Bush administration has proposed replacing the Framework with a much looser set of guidelines. While the Framework would allow timber harvests up to approximately 190 million board feet, the Bush proposal would ramp up timber harvesting to approximately 600 million board feet. Other elements of the recent Bush proposal include: \* allowing timber companies to cut trees up to 30 inches in diameter across nearly all of the Sierra - these are big trees; \* eliminating a network of old-growth forest preserves that the Forest Service once said were essential for restoring habitat for the California spotted owl and other species.

In an ironic development, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced it will not list the California spotted owl under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The stated reason is that the Sierra Nevada Framework (which the same administration is trying to dismantle) protects the California spotted owl and the old-growth forests they inhabit. 10 years of population tracking studies suggest the owl is declining, and the concern for the stability of the population is still high.

EarthJustice and the Sierra Nevada Forest Protection Campaign are evaluating their options to sue the Fish and Wildlife Service on this decision to not list the California spotted owl. A lawsuit could prove that due to lack of funding, staffing issues and clear political pressure to change the findings, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has made erroneous assumptions and needs to revisit its decision.

The Bush administration has spent more than a million dollars attempting to dismantle the Framework. These dollars could have been spent implementing the plan and treating communities at risk from catastrophic fire.

In addition to attacking national Sierra forests, the Bush administration is also proposing to commercially log extensive areas of the new Giant Sequoia National Monument. Trees up to 30" in diameter would be logged under a U.S. Forest Service draft management plan, impacting some of the most magnificent groves in this monument. The management plan ignores the clear language of the proclamation that says monument lands are not to be opened for commercial logging operations. The draft tosses aside the Forest Service's own science, which finds that logging activities are the main cause of fire risk and severity. To view a copy of the draft plan

online, visit the Monument's website at [http://www.r5.fs.fed.us/giant\\_sequoia/](http://www.r5.fs.fed.us/giant_sequoia/).

The California Wild Heritage Campaign is calling for an alternative approach that would only have tree cutting in the near vicinity of structures and in areas of high human use. The Forest Service could rely primarily on hand thinning and prescribed fire to restore the general forest.

If an ecosystem approach to long-term management of the majority of Sierra lands is to occur, active participation and watchdogging by local community, state and national groups will need to continue. The Alliance will keep networking with the forest group leaders and mobilize our own network in support of efforts for sane forest stewardship. Look for future alerts forwarded by the Alliance with how the public can participate.

For more information contact:

\* Craig Thomas, Sierra Nevada Forest Protection Campaign at or visit <http://www.californiawild.org/SierraCampaign.html>.

\* Barbara Boyle, Sierra Club, 916.557.1100 or <http://www.sierraclub.org/victory/frameworkplan.asp>

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### **Ski Industry Association Dislikes Environmental Accountability**



The 2002/2003 Ski Area Environmental Scorecard for the first time found that California/Nevada ski areas averaged higher scores as a group than other regions in the west. Colorado/New Mexico and Oregon/Washington came in a close second and third respectively, while the Idaho/Montana/Wyoming region averaged the worst.

According to the Ski Area Citizens Coalition, California/Nevada outperformed the other regions because 14 out of 19 ski resorts reviewed received quality A, B or C grades. While earning the best score as a region, California/Nevada had a variety of individual performance within the region. Alpine Meadows, Sierra Summit, Snow Summit and Snow Valley earned top scores. Northstar-at-Tahoe received the lowest score in the state, principally because of terrain expansion and huge development plans spanning over 900 acres.

### **California/Nevada Region**

Resort/Grade/Score

Alpine Meadows/A/79.9

Bear Valley Mountain Resort/C/55.1

Bear Mountain Resort/C/57.0

Boreal/B/72.9

Dodge Ridge/C/52.3

Heavenly Ski Resort/D/41.4

Homewood Ski Resort/C/59.3

Kirkwood Mountain Resort/D/41.4

Mammoth Mountain Ski Area/C/47.7

Mt. Rose – Ski Tahoe/B/66.8

Mt. Shasta Board & Ski Park/B/67.8

Mountain High Resort/B/64.5

Northstar-at-Tahoe/F/29.4

Sierra-at-Tahoe /B/72.0

Sierra Summit/A/75.2

Snow Summit Mt. Resort/A/74.3

Snow Valley Mt. Resort/A/74.3

Squaw Valley USA/D/44.4

Sugar Bowl Ski Resort/C/56.5

Fascinatingly, the process of releasing the scorecard has highlighted the inner workings of the National Ski Area Association. Resorts were graded by the scorecard on 10 criteria including terrain expansion or new commercial development on undisturbed land, impacts to environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands and roadless areas, and other factors. If you are a large conglomerate corporation whose business model is dominated by commercial development, you are unlikely to be happy about the scorecard criteria. Perhaps this explains the

internal memo by the National Ski Area Association which rebukes ski areas who participate by sending back surveys for the scorecard.

It is quite acceptable to express dislike of the scorecard and to suggest a different way to add up the criteria. However, the National Ski Area Association's public relations manager has been noted to circulate many made-up myths. Two examples are: a) she stated to a Mountain Forum list serve that "the survey penalizes resorts for constructing employee housing" (myth – employee housing is excluded from development penalties on the scorecard in 2002); and b) she also wrote that "the few resorts who choose to participate are given "A" grades." The fact is that some resorts who filled out surveys still received poor grades.

This hunker down and battle mentality is unnecessary. The Ski Area Citizen's Coalition is hopeful that the ski resorts will reach out and invite us to have a dialog on ways to truly improve their practices and be good neighbors. There is a lot to collaborate on and learn together. Hoping that environmentalists will go away and allow these significant resorts to do as they please is not going to happen.

The Ski Area Citizens Coalition's steering committee organizations include Colorado Wild, the Crystal Conservation Coalition of Washington, Friends of the Inyo and the Sierra Nevada Alliance in California and Save Our Canyons of Utah. For more information visit the Ski Area Citizens Coalition's website at <http://www.skiareacitizens.com>.

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

In this time of war, I ponder how my work at the Alliance has relevance with issues of such magnitude. I think ultimately all efforts to resolve conflict through peaceful means and to create a just and sustainable future for the next generations is important.

While efforts to protect and restore the Sierra thankfully don't resort to violence – sadly, these efforts are often still battles of a lessor type draining energy and resources. The Sierra Nevada Framework took years of scientific study, collaboration, and 20 million dollars to put in place. As you'll read in this issue, all that progress is stalled – and how we manage our forests is likely going back to court. At the same time, I find the National Ski Area Association staff addressing our ski area scorecard like it is a battle, encouraging resorts not to participate and spreading false statements.

The Alliance will always use a variety of non-violent tactics to enforce the law and defend environmental protections. But at the same time, the Alliance is strongly committed to leading collaborative efforts that build community and relationships as they progress environmental protection and restoration. As long as we see the world as "them vs. us" we battle and ultimately lose. It is only when we understand and respect each other, discover our common goals, and work together that true solutions arise and remain in place.

The Alliance's annual Sun Tzu award reflects this concept. Sun Tzu wrote The Art of War over a

couple thousand years ago - and in the book he writes 'to win without fighting is best.' The Sierra Foothill Conservancy was the recipient of this year's award. SFC works with a diverse range of members of their community and has saved thousands of acres of critical habitat in the Southern Sierra. It is efforts like SFC's that give me the most hope - for the Sierra and the world.

That's why I am very excited about the Alliance's Loving the Sierra conference August 16-17 in Arnold, CA. We will have a number of speakers and sessions focused on cultivating the public's Love of the Sierra to unite our communities and embrace sustainable policies and programs. I hope you will be able to join us!

Sincerely,

Joan Clayburgh

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### **Sign Up for One Year's Free Emailed Alliance Sierra Weekly!**

Get information on Sierra-wide issues of importance. Receive invitations to Sierra-related conferences and events. The Alliance's Weekly does it all each week by email. Each Wednesday's edition includes newspaper articles from around the state, event notices and other items of Sierra interest.

Sign up today – simply email your name, address, phone and email address to - and put in the subject line: Sign up for Alliance Sierra Weekly. We'll put you on the list!

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### **Southern Sierra Summit Highlights: Mounting Pressures and Rapid Changes of Region**



So Sierra participants share their knowledge & expertise

The Alliance organized the Southern Sierra Summit in March 2003 from a recognition that the region is underserved and groups in the area could use more opportunities to network. There are also a number of unique characteristics of the Southern Sierra that deserve special focus.

More than 30 participants, many community group leaders from Mariposa to Tehachapi, shared what are the pressing issues of the region. **Growth and land conversion in the Southern Sierra, driven by state and Central Valley population growth, is of increasing concern.** Rapid growth is leaping ahead of general plans and other planning processes. This is resulting in poorly planned and out-of-character sprawl, lack of adequate infrastructure, reduction in affordable

housing, and conversion of open space/ranchland to ranchettes and starter castles. There is a public attitude in the region that growth is inevitable. Probably the largest determinant of where growth occurs is the existing highway system, making it critical to monitor highway expansion. For this region's counties that are fiscally starved, increasing the tax base through growth is very attractive.

**Water issues are also paramount in the region.** There are numerous illegal water diversions. Watershed groups in the region are just now investigating water quality issues. In most watersheds, higher elevations are in federal ownership and lower lands are privately owned. Many watersheds in the region lack active stewards and most of the few watershed groups that exist are very new and lack adequate resources.

On timber issues, Giant Sequoia National Monument logging plans dominate the region. Air quality is also a growing concern, with agricultural and valley air pollution settling in the foothills. The social issues of the region were identified as a growing loss of people's connection to their environment/land and increasing demographic changes.

**Compounding all these issues are the unique ways the Southern Sierra region is different from other Sierra regions.** Government land ownership dominates the region, while private land ownership is still primarily in large holdings. All towns in the Southern Sierra are quite small. The counties are some of the poorest in California. The great majority of population and political influence is in the Valley part of the counties. The Sierra portions of counties south of Mariposa are represented by less than a single supervisor in almost all cases. There is also a very high percentage of new Californians coming into the Southern Sierra. The climate is drier, the land is steeper, soils are generally shallower and the majority of surface water is in deep canyons.

Participants agreed that one long-term goal is to create capacity within Southern Sierra communities to react to change in a positive way that reflects values agreed upon by the communities. Other goals included preserving the rural character of Western foothills, creating an ethic of protecting and restoring the natural resources, having comprehensive planning for each community/county, and maintaining the natural character of public lands.

Communicating with, educating, inspiring and involving under-privileged and under-represented members of our communities and state were also identified as important for the future. Participants wanted their conservation movement to embrace diversity growing within the Hispanic community. They also wanted to ensure a broad offering of recreation opportunities for a variety of abilities and incomes – while respecting and protecting the natural landscape and environment. Sierra values need to be economically appreciated.

Participants committed to communicate on a regular basis, increase their understanding of common issues, expand outreach to other individuals and groups and meet again as a group as necessary. **The mounting issues and rapid changes facing the Southern Sierra necessitate greater resources, more focused attention from outside the region, and expansion of communication and capacity within the region.** The Alliance is excited to continue to work with the Southern Sierra region to meet challenges of protecting its unique combination of culture, landscape and habitat.

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## Sun Tzu Awarded to Sierra Foothill Conservancy



Mary Biskup receives the Sun Tzu Award

The Sierra Nevada Alliance awarded the Sierra Foothill Conservancy (SFC) the 2003 "Sun Tzu Award" for outstanding leadership in cooperative conservation. The award was presented by Alliance Board members Bill Center, Terry Manning and Scott Kruse at the Southern Sierra Summit. The award is given to one group based in the Sierra each year, and reads a quote from the book Art of War written in 500-300 BC: "To win without fighting is best."

"We are honored to accept this award," said Mary Biskup, Board President of SFC. "We have worked hard since 1996 to provide local, community-based support for the preservation of open space and wildlife habitat. We are proud to be recognized for our successes and seen as a leader in the Sierra."

The Alliance chose SFC to be the recipient for a range of successes. The staff of SFC have donated time and expertise to form and lead the new Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council, which joins together land trusts to share experience and knowledge and speak as one voice on Sierra issues related to land protection. SFC has preserved and stewards thousands of acres of the southern Sierra foothills of Fresno, Madera and Mariposa counties through working with willing landowners on easements and transactions. Finally, SFC helped start a collaborative, multiple stakeholder Millerton Area Watershed Coalition to assess and restore the rivers, lakes and streams of the area. In all efforts, SFC has brought diverse interests together to foster cooperative conservation.

"The Sierra Foothill Conservancy is one of the best land trusts in the Sierra," said Terry Manning, Sierra Nevada Alliance board member. "They've united their diverse community and inspired land trusts with their expertise and successful efforts throughout the entire Sierra."

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### **Futures Fund 2002 Supports Capacity Building, Education and Restoration**

The Robert and Lois C. Braddock Charitable Foundation funded for the second straight year \$5,000 to be awarded as Future Fund Grants. Thanks to this support, the Sierra Nevada Alliance offered another round of Future Fund competitive mini grants to assist grassroots member groups in the Sierra. The Alliance has awarded 43 grants since the program was first funded in 1997. This year's recipients awarded in January were:

- Amador Land Trust for a strategic planning process to increase the organizational capacity by planning for the long-term on how best to serve their community.
- Eastern Sierra Land Trust for a strategic planning process for a long-term plan to help them define themes for their future activity, determine how to hire professional staff, and recruit needed resources to meet their vision.
- Friends of Squaw Creek for a project to collect pine needles from local citizens of Squaw Valley for use in an erosion control project to improve water quality.
- Protect American River Canyons for their American River Youth Adventure Project for 6th through 12th grade students to learn life sciences, natural history, and cultural history of the American River through field trips including an art component.
- Restore Hetch Hetchy for promotion of an educational and recruitment video describing their win-win approach for restoring Hetch Hetchy Valley.
- Tuolumne County Land Trust for this 10-member volunteer board to do a direct mail campaign to increase their organization's visibility and recruit local financial and volunteer support.

Thanks goes out to Marc de la Vergne (Planning and Conservation League), Geoff McQuilkin (Mono Lake Committee), Teri Olle (CALPIRG), Terry Manning (Sierra Los Tulares Land Trust), Randy Barrow (Maidu Group of the Sierra Club), and Alexis Pelosi (Steeffel, Levitt & Weiss) for their participation in this year's Selection Committee.

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### **Watershed Groups Team Up with Students and Scientists to Monitor Stream Health**

Assessing the health of Sierra rivers, lakes and streams can seem overwhelming, involving technical methods with expensive equipment and requiring hundreds of hours. But a number of methods are fairly simple and yield valuable information, such as flow measurements and measuring pH. One option for watershed groups on a low budget and with limited staff is teaming up with students and teachers – and the Global Learning and Observation to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE) school program is a perfect partner to do this.

For students, GLOBE provides the opportunity to learn by taking scientifically valid measurements in the fields of atmosphere, hydrology, soils, and land cover. Students collaborate with scientists and report their data on the Internet. GLOBE trains teachers to help students

improve their achievement in science and math, and in the use of computer and network technology.

If you wonder about the scientific validity of the program – look at the federal interagency partners who lead the effort: National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), National Science Foundation (NSF), EPA and the U.S. State Department. There are many Sierra Nevada schools already participating in the GLOBE program, and it's easy to sign up a school if they are not already involved.

The Upper Merced Watershed Coalition has teamed up with GLOBE students and coordinators. On National Clean Water Day the Coalition and GLOBE students did testing on two sections of the Merced River and submitted the data to a national database. The second partnership is for a Citizen Monitoring program on the Merced River. The Watershed Coalition is matching their monitoring protocols to GLOBE's to be able to swap data, and the local GLOBE coordinator is recruiting students to do the water monitoring.

As Nancy McConnell, an Upper Merced Watershed Coalition coordinator, shared, " When you first hear kids are doing monitoring, people may not want to take it seriously. But our experience was that the GLOBE students took their data gathering very seriously. They followed the protocols and were well trained."

To find out more about GLOBE visit: <http://www.globe.gov/fsl/welcome/welcomeobject.pl>

## **Off-Highway Vehicle Commission Wins Applause for Balancing Resources and Recreation**



Non-motorized recreation in the Sierra

In the last year the California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission (OHV Commission), which for the first time in its 30 year history has an environmental majority, has made some major decisions that have gained applause by community groups and outdoor enthusiasts alike.

A portion of the State fuels tax, roughly \$30 million a year, goes into a special fund to provide off-road opportunities while protecting the environment. Each year the OHV Commission makes grants primarily to BLM and Forest Service for their off-road programs. In the past, the overwhelming majority of these funds went to promote off-road vehicle trails and use and not to environmental protection from off-road abuse. This past year, the OHV Commission responded to critics in the legislature and public that hikers, cross country skiers and other non-motorized users are paying the bulk of these taxes and expect the Commission to support a more balanced approach to protecting natural resources while serving the off-road motorized community.

This year grant monies were only given to Forest and BLM units that balance these interests. As a result, no winter grants were received by three national forests: the El Dorado, Humboldt Toiyabe, and Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. The environmental representatives on the commission tried to get these forest units money for the law enforcement and the conservation portions of their budget but were not successful.

Without any grant funds, money for grooming trails for snowmobiles in these forests was not received. Interestingly, commercial snowmobile operators in many of these areas paid for the grooming themselves this year and many had paid for the grooming prior to the grant program. Grants for summer OHV programs were similarly awarded only to those areas embracing the balanced-use philosophy.

The OHV Commission has received significant correspondence from the off-road vehicle groups in opposition to this new approach. Please write a letter to the OHV Commission applauding their recent management decisions. For more information contact Snowlands Network at <http://www.snowlands.org> or the Center for Sierra Nevada Conservation at 530.333.1113.

