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### **A SNEP for YOU!**



The \$7 million Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project Report (all 10 pounds and four volumes of it) is available to Alliance members for the price of the postage. The report includes the Summary, Volume I, Volume II, and the Addendum. If you would like your very own copy, please send

\$5.00 to the Alliance (mention it is for SNEP) and we will box it up and send it off! Happy reading....

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### **Alliance Thank Yous**

We'd like to thank the following people for helping our technology run faster, our website become more useable, our office prettier and more efficient, and our public speaking skills greater:

Dr. Rich Allen, Mark Russell of Amador WebWorks, Jim Castles, Keith Clayton, Mitch Haberman, Jim Hildinger and Deborah Cohen

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### **Building Grassroots Community Capacity**

A State Resources Agency and UC-Davis ProjectAfter all the attention paid to the research and unveiling of the SNEP (Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project) Report a couple of years ago, one might wonder what has happened to all that incredible information.

The fear, of course, is that \$7 million of the taxpayers' money was wasted on a report that is simply sitting on shelves gathering dust.

Well, in some cases, that might be true. But thanks to the efforts of Alliance Executive Director Laurel Ames and others, funding has been allocated in the state budget for SNEP follow-up work.

One project resulting from this "post-SNEP" funding is a joint effort between the state Resources Agency and UC-Davis' Public Service Research Program to help integrate existing data - such as SNEP - and other analytical tools into local resource management efforts and decision-making processes.

UC-Davis contracted with long-time Alliance consultant Kerri Timmer to help identify grassroots efforts in the Sierra that might be interested in and could benefit from such technical

and informational assistance.

Kerri developed an initial list of some 250 collaborative watershed management initiatives, habitat conservation planning efforts, county general plan update processes, and other projects for consideration.

A steering committee representing different Sierra interests helped narrow the list using criteria such as breadth of stakeholder participation, degree of community support, potential benefit from technical assistance, and applicability of issues addressed for other parts of the Sierra.

Based on these criteria, committee members [**Laurel Ames, Tracy Grubbs** of the *Sierra Business Council*, **Betty Riley** of *Sierra Economic Development District*, **David French** of the *Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCRC)*, **Greg Greenwood** from the *Resources Agency* and **Dennis Pendleton** from *UC-Davis*] focused in on three possible pilot projects: *Clavey River Watershed Assessment*; *Truckee River Coordinated Resource Management Plan*; *Traverse Creek Fire Safe & Forest Health project*.

The goal is to enhance the capacity of each project team by providing access to SNEP and other technical expertise and data based on the needs identified by each individual project.

**Clavey Watershed Assessment** The Clavey River Watershed Assessment is an outgrowth of the re-opened Wild & Scenic suitability study process for the Clavey.

As a result of an appeal, the Forest Service established a collaborative Wild & Scenic values study for the river; but this study only looked at the potential 1/4-mile Wild & Scenic corridor.

Now that the suitability study is complete (with a revised recommendation in favor of Wild & Scenic protection), the stakeholder groups - including Alliance members **Tuolumne River Preservation Trust** and **Clavey River Preservation Coalition** - are launching a larger watershed assessment to better understand the condition of and potential threats to the watershed and its resources. This information will be used to help guide future management decisions.

**Truckee River CRMP** This CRMP, which includes Alliance member **Truckee River Habitat Restoration Group**, formed originally to deal with concerns about heavy recreational use on the river near Tahoe City. But involved stakeholders are working to broaden the group's focus to address larger collaborative management issues, such as water quality and TMDLs (Total Maximum Daily Load).

**Traverse Creek Project** Traverse Creek is somewhat typical of other mid-elevation Sierra watersheds, with its many small (1- to 10-acre) parcels intermixed with and surrounded by national forest, creating a high risk of catastrophic fire.

The goal of this project is to develop a model watershed-level plan for comprehensive fuel reduction that addresses cumulative impacts of such activity on overall watershed health.

**Next Steps** UC-Davis is in the process of meeting with each group to establish the liaison

procedures, identify specific technical and informational needs and outline individual working agreements for each project.

Thanks to this project and others like it - SNEP lives on!

Order your Watershed Council Toolkit, the Alliance's new guide to forming multi-stakeholder watershed groups.

Send \$25 (includes tax and shipping) to the Alliance at PO Box 7989, S. Lake Tahoe, CA 96158, or call 530.542.4546.

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## **Land Trusts: Helping Private Landowners Protect Their Land**

*Laurel Ames*



Privately owned riparian corridor along Dry Creek in Nevada County, protected under conservation easement with the Nevada County Land Trust.

A trip from the mountains through the foothills confronts us with the '90s picture of sprawl, as the valley towns march toward the foothills and the classic California landscapes of rolling hills, oak woodlands, grassy slopes and lichen-covered rocks are replaced by subdivisions, golf courses and strip malls.

One strategy for protecting the Sierra from poor development is to acquire land or conservation

easements from private landowners.

If a landowner sells or donates an easement - in essence giving up certain future rights such as subdividing or development - he or she can often reap quite a tax break while still keeping the land in private ownership and retaining the ability to pass it on or sell it in the future.

Fortunately, there are organizations in the Sierra that are using this tool to assure that certain lands are permanently protected, that landowners get financial and tax relief, and, in some cases, that important restoration work is undertaken.

Local land trusts provide conservation opportunities for landowners who love their land and want to protect it for their family, their community, the land's natural values, and for future generations.

The Nevada County Land Trust (NCLT), for example, is working to protect riparian corridors along three major stream systems noted for their habitat and species diversity.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Packard Foundation and matching funds from The Nature Conservancy, NCLT is working with interested landowners to craft conservation easements that will protect important streamside habitat and facilitate animal migration along these creeks.

The Truckee Donner Land Trust is assisting in negotiations with the state Department of Parks & Recreation and private landowners along privately owned Shallenberger Ridge (the scenic backdrop to Donner Lake) to protect 2,500 acres along the ridge face and extending into neighboring Emigrant Canyon.

This effort would connect the existing Donner Memorial State Park to the Pacific Crest, allowing for forest rehabilitation and protection of potential cutthroat trout habitat.

The Tuolumne County Land Trust (TCLT) is working with the Trust for Public Land and other organizations on an important acquisition project at Yosemite Junction (where Hwy. 108 meets Hwy. 120).

Phase I of this project includes protecting 252 acres of an 863-acre parcel zoned for development in this heavily traveled northern route into Yosemite Valley. The parcel is especially important, as it includes a western terminus of the Table Mountain formation, as well as a variety of special status botanical and biological species.

While acquisition is an important source of funds for willing landowners, restoration and management is a critical piece of the land trust's role in the Sierra.

The American River Conservancy (ARC) is deep into such restoration efforts on a recently purchased 131-acre mature oak and pine forest between Placerville and Coloma. ARC is working to turn roads back into trails, remove Scotch broom and other invasives, and install interpretive kiosks describing the botanical diversity and other important resources of the area.

In addition, national land trusts, including the Trust for Public Land (TPL), American Lands Conservancy (ALC) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), are becoming more active in the Sierra, providing an influx of energy and expertise to the locals.

For example, in the foothills of Mount Lassen, TNC negotiated a conservation easement on the 36,000-acre Denny Ranch that will permanently protect the area from development. The working ranch has spectacular habitat, including vernal pools and blue oak woodlands that support California's largest migratory deer herd, as well as endangered winter-run Chinook salmon.

Over on the east slope of the Sierra, TNC completed its Hope Valley project by conserving Clover Valley, a 400-acre area near Blue Lakes that is surrounded by the Eldorado National Forest and abuts the Mokelumne Wilderness.

The Sierra Nevada Alliance has a strong interest in promoting the work of local land trusts.

To determine how best to help, we are convening a series of meetings to identify common issues, common needs and the level of interest in possible networking assistance for these local organizations.

Our initial efforts have been met with support and enthusiasm. And, thanks to the American River Conservancy, there will be a work session held in Coloma in February for the land trusts active in the Sierra.

**SIERRA LAND TRUSTS** Amador Land Trust, Jackson American River Conservancy, Coloma Dry Creek Conservancy, Roseville Feather River Land Trust Four Creeks Land Trust, Visalia Kaweah Land Trust, Three Rivers Lassen Land and Trails Trust, Susanville Nevada County Land Trust, Nevada City Nevada Land Conservancy, Reno Paradise Ridge Land Trust, Chico Placer Land Trust & Nature Center, Auburn Shasta Land Trust, Redding Sierra Foothill Conservancy, Prather Truckee Donner Land Trust, Truckee Tule Oaks Land Trust, Springville Tuolumne County Land Trust, Sonora

**REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LAND TRUSTS** California Rangeland Trust American Land Conservancy The Nature Conservancy Trust for Public Land

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### **Member Group Success Stories**

Alliance member groups are having huge successes all over the Sierra. From obtaining state funds for watershed restoration efforts to campaigning for the park and water bonds, grassroots groups are working to focus funding and attention on conservation of the Sierra's natural

resources.

**The Sierra Buttes/Lakes Basin Coalition** has had success on two fronts: not only did a Yuba County Superior Court judge temporarily bar construction of a cabin on a private property inholding in the Tahoe NF, but the Coalition and the **Truckee Donner Land Trust** are also closing in on a land acquisition deal to protect the spectacular Sardine Lakes area from development.

**The Truckee River Habitat Restoration Group** once again held its hugely successful Truckee River Day, which now includes the Truckee River symposium, an evening educational event. More than 800 volunteers planted native plants, restored stream channels, built trails, and cleaned up the river.

People of all ages participated in the restoration of Lake Vera, a summer camp compound two miles from Nevada City. **The Sierra Nevada Group of the Sierra Club (SNG)** received a grant from the Alliance's Futures Fund project in 1998 to remove non-native plants and replant native wildflower, grasses, and alder and wild rose bushes. Welcome help came from the Student River and Environment Action Movement (STREAM), a group of Nevada Union High School freshmen. "We're just delighted to get some youth in our aging Sierra Club," said SNG's Jim Hurley.

**Protect American River Canyon's (PARC)** long-standing effort to return the middle fork of the American River to its original streambed and close the dangerous diversion tunnel just above Auburn has caught the eye of the state Attorney General's office, which recently wrote a letter to Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt supporting PARC's position.

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### **New Member Groups**

The number of Alliance member groups continues to grow and grow! Since the last newsletter, we welcome three new groups:

**Friends of the Trails**, established in 1997, works to keep the recreational trails of Nevada County available for the future. While many of the trails have historically been used by the public, some are partially on private land and their use has, in some cases, been restricted as new landowners move in. Friends of the Trails pursues all means to keep these trails open to thoughtful, non-motorized use, including negotiating with landowners, working with the Nevada County Land Trust on acquisition, public education, and, as a last resort, litigation.

**The Walker Lake Working Group (WLWG)** was founded in 1992 by a group of local citizens

to fight for the preservation of Walker Lake, a remnant of a Pleistocene-era fresh water lake, in Mineral County, Nevada. The group's mission is to acquire sufficient water for the lake to insure its survival as a viable habitat for its native fish, the Lahontan cutthroat trout, the Tui chub, and the Tahoe sucker, and as a recreation area. But the lake is a primary source of water for the Great Basin and is now one-fifth the size it was in the 1950s. Yet WLWG chairman Louis Thompson says that the group "recognizes that upstream economies depend on agriculture and irrigation, and we don't wish to jeopardize that. We believe there is enough water in the Walker Basin system to support profitable agriculture and still supply enough water to maintain a healthy river and lake."

**Sierra Foothills Audubon** has almost 900 members, primarily in Placer and Nevada Counties. The group holds bi-monthly meetings featuring relevant and interesting speakers, produces a bi-monthly newsletter, and takes frequent birding trips (37 in 1999!). The group's Education Committee focuses on taking programs to local schools and organizing a public birdwatching trip each January. Its Conservation Committees work collaboratively with other conservation organizations as well as agencies on both policy and on-the-ground issues.

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### **President's Letter**

*Stan Weidert*

I recently had the privilege to spend a week in the Lone Pine area of Owens Valley. It was nice to return to the southern and eastern Sierra Nevada. As usual, the scenery and vistas were truly spectacular there.

Before moving to the northern end of the range, I lived in southern California and spent many days in the southern Sierra backpacking the High Sierra from Mt. Whitney to Mammoth. It is only since moving north that I have come to know the Sierra north of Yosemite, beyond just the quick drive through the region.

However, since I have lived in the north now for 27 years, I have come to know most of this very special mountain range from one end to the other. Although the range does have differences from east to west, from north to south, from low elevation to high, and from watershed to watershed, it remains a very well-connected geologic and ecologic unit.

These distances, differences and numerous watersheds help explain the reason for the many and varied groups that have interest in protecting the Sierra Nevada. All our member groups are needed to protect the range.

I came to the Board of the Sierra Nevada Alliance with an appreciation for both the range as a



whole and for the broad diversity of its subunits. While the Alliance works on the broader range-wide efforts, it is essential that the local groups continue their work.

I commend all who are working to protect the Sierra Nevada and look forward to working with you. Best wishes - Stan

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### **Watershed Management Council Offers Leadership in Restoration**

The need for a neutral forum for thoughtful discussion of what statewide watershed restoration management would look like in California spurred the Watershed Management Council (WMC) to offer a series of three forums to the policy wonks, agency types, and local watershed groupies working in California on various watershed programs.

The first forum featured a discussion of statewide watershed programs in Massachusetts, Oregon and Washington. Leaders from these different programs filled the group in on where the energy came from (the citizens and activists), how the state got involved (through a leader who believed and had the stature to bring the state to the table) and how their watershed groups are funded (state budgets).

The second forum took a different tack, talking about "expectations" of different watershed program participants. Expectations for accountability, flexibility and incentives were astonishingly different, even among participants working in the same programs! State and federal funding red tape, the Legislature's need to know how the public's money is spent, the differences in defining the "success" of restoration - - all discussions revealed the disconnects between the players as to the definitions and the expectations.

The Watershed Management Council is an organization that represents professionals and agencies in the once-arcane but now-growing field of watershed management. A non-profit whose mission is "advancing the art and science of watershed management," the WMC has bravely entered into the California dialogue on watersheds. With their non-aligned position (other than their commitment to science-based restoration) and their academic approach, they have used their statewide and national connections to highlight the issues surrounding a potential statewide program in California at a most appropriate time in the life of the watershed restoration effort.

The Council's last forum will be held this winter. WMC's quarterly publication, *Networker*, is available at <http://watershed.org>

For more info on watershed management, consider attending "Managing California Watersheds:

A Statewide Conference," Sponsored by UC Extension on Mon., April 3 at the Sacramento Hilton. Call Linda Pike at 530-757-8878 for registration info.

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### **Watersheds: Plan First!**

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Most watershed activists are doers. They want to get involved in projects - projects that will yield hard results in their watershed.

As a result, many groups launch into specific restoration activities with little or no planning, especially if those activities can serve as a vehicle for getting funding.

**STOP!** Before you go too far down the project path, please take to heart our plea for watershed planning and assessment.

Assessments help groups to focus on the areas of greatest need. And, they provide a justification and basis of evaluation for specific project planning and funding.

The good news is - there is money available for watershed planning and assessment through various state, federal and private sources, such as CALFED, SWRCB or the EPA.

Since a watershed consists of both the stream or river and all the land that drains into it, watershed assessments need to look at both stream conditions (water quality, structural elements, temperature, etc.) and streamside or upland conditions (deteriorating roads, non-point source pollution, land use activities, etc.).

On top of the actual biological, chemical and structural conditions, thorough assessments must also consider the social, cultural and economic conditions within the watershed.

As River Network's Kevin Coyle describes, the assessment identifies both the resources that exist in the watershed - from rare natural habitats to prime development sites - and the areas where there may be conflicts from a management perspective.

This information allows stakeholders to work together to prioritize potential restoration actions and document changes or improvements in the watershed resulting from specific management practices or restoration activities.

Using the data collected in the assessment, groups can then develop action or work plans for

addressing management and restoration issues.

Such plans typically start with a general statement of the desired future condition of the watershed and the group's basic plan for achieving that vision. These statements are fleshed out with specific project goals and measurable objectives, as well as a timeline and implementation budget.

With this preliminary work in hand, you are ready to apply for funding and tackle on-the-ground restoration efforts.

For more info on Watershed Planning and Assessment, see the Sierra Nevada Alliance Watershed Council Toolkit.

Other resources include:

Oregon Watershed Assessment Manual, available through For The Sake Of The Salmon at 503-223-8511 or at [www.4sos.org](http://www.4sos.org)

### **You Can Restore Your Least Favorite Erosion Spot**

*Kelley Moore*



In October the Sierra Nevada Alliance, AmeriCorps, and the League to Save Lake Tahoe teamed up with local citizens to restore an eroding road cut in South Lake Tahoe.

We led the restoration effort for the community in honor of national 'Make a Difference Day.'

I made a presentation at the League to Save Lake Tahoe's main office, talking about 'Our Watershed' and explaining erosion and fertilizer damage to the lake.

The discussion after the presentation showed how interested the public is in protecting the environment.

The California Conservation Corps, the restoration arm of the AmeriCorps program, donated the

use of tools for the project. And Troy Alexander, from the El Dorado Department of Transportation, donated his time, as well as erosion blankets, stakes, seeds, fertilizer, and pine needle mulch.

After two hours of hard work the group completely restored a 50' by 10' eroding road cut. The restoration work included fertilizing the barren soil with organic, slow-release fertilizer, seeding with native seeds, placing pine needle waddles and erosion blankets, and finally covering the area with a pine needle mulch.

The day was a success and participants had a lot of fun while learning about restoration.

This same event could easily take place in any region of the Sierra. The County Departments of Transportation restore road cuts as part of their job and they are usually happy to offer supplies and guidance when someone else wants to do a part.

There are also other available resources such as revegetation specialists who may be able to donate supplies.

Perhaps there is a road cut near your home or a neighboring road which is in need of restoration. You have the power to stop the erosion and protect your local watershed! By getting supplies donated and advertising your event to attract the public, you, too, can restore an eroding road cut in your neighborhood while educating local citizens as to the benefits of doing so. Go for it!

For more information on organizing your own erosion restoration project, call Kelley Moore at 530.542.4546.