

*December 2004*

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### **Sierra Conservancy Established**

Tim Palmer



Mt. Whitney

Sierraconservationists had a lot to celebrate this fall. In August of 2004, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law AB 2600 creating a Sierra Conservancy. The new agency created under the Laird-Leslie Sierra Nevada Conservancy Act will manage, acquire and conserve public lands in the Sierra.

At one celebration in November, The Sierra Fund presented the Sierra Nevada Alliance an award for the role the Alliance played in establishing the Conservancy. Also honored, in addition to the Alliance, were the Sierra Business Council, Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council and the Mono Lake Committee.

The Sierra Nevada Alliance was honored for keeping the Sierra conservation movement abreast of the legislation and providing a strong grassroots base to advocate for the Conservancy. The Alliance helped build an endorsement list of over 100 groups and inspired our members to walk the halls of the California capitol to talk about the on-the-ground needs and potential of a state conservation agency dedicated to the region. Our network shared real world stories from throughout the region and illustrated the dire need for state support.

One example of the power of this network of conservation groups was seen at the capitol in July

for a Sierra legislative education day. Steve Robinson, President of Mountain Meadows Conservancy and new board member of the Alliance, told a great story of the Sierra's need for state support. At Mountain Meadows Reservoir Steve was told he could eat the fish but that he should wash his hands before eating his sandwich when fishing. This is because of the high e-coli level from cattle standing in the shallow portions of the lake. The solution to this problem is helping the ranchers by providing fencing so the cattle can not get down into the lake – a project a Sierra Conservancy could help fund. Sierra Nevada Alliance members brought many other stories of Sierra problems and possible solutions that a state conservancy could assist with.

**How the Sierra Conservancy is Set Up** The new agency will have a board of directors made up of thirteen voting board members. Three board members will be appointed by the Governor, one by the Secretary of the Resources Agency, one by the Director of Finance, one by the Speaker of the Assembly and one by the Senate Committee on Rules. Six board members will be County Supervisors from the Sierra and each Supervisor will represent a subregion of the Sierra composed of 3-4 counties. This Sierra Conservancy board will be established by March of 2005.

Once the board of directors is in place, the Conservancy will hire an Executive Director in the late summer or fall of 2005. Then the organization and board will develop programs and a strategic plan. The Sierra Conservancy has many program areas it can assist with.

It is directed to:

- Increase opportunities for recreation and tourism.
- Protect, conserve, and restore the region's physical, cultural, archaeological, and historical resources.
- Aid in the preservation of working landscapes.
- Reduce the risk of natural disasters such as wildfires.
- Protect and improve water and air quality.
- Advance environmental preservation and the economic well being of the Sierra.

The Sierra Conservancy does not have eminent domain powers or regulatory powers. The Conservancy can also not own land but may provide grants and assistance to land trusts and other non-profit partners to acquire lands.

The critical difference this year in getting the legislation passed lies with many people. The Sierra Fund, an environmental community foundation, lead our coalition effort in the capitol. Special thanks goes to the legislative authors and their staff: Assembly Member Laird (D-Santa Cruz) and chief of staff Clyde McDonald and Assembly Member Tim Leslie and his staff person Jed Medefind. Recognition also goes to the Sierra Business Council for creating widespread and diverse support for a conservancy.

The Sierra Nevada Alliance now looks forward to working with our member groups to introduce the new board of directors and staff of the Sierra Conservancy to challenges and opportunities throughout the range. We hope to establish a vibrant and constructive partnership between our conservation network and the new Conservancy. Over the next year the Alliance will track the establishment of the board and staff and lend our collective knowledge to help guide the agency

to effectively protect and restore our natural environment.

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### **Over a 100 New Water Monitors Trained in Sierra**



Water Monitors on the Carson River

When you think of Sierra rivers and lakes you think of crystal waters. You envision scenic pictures of fly fisherman peacefully casting out over sinuous waters. You imagine swimming and boating and water skiing in clean, healthy, cold lakes. But years of mining, grazing, timber harvesting, road building and development have impaired many Sierra waters. And while many studies have been done to track down pollution and impairments – much remains to be done to identify the sources of problems. As important, water monitoring needs to be done to determine if restoration and protection efforts are effective.

There are not enough paid staff at local, state and federal agencies to monitor all of the Sierra's 24 major watersheds. Luckily, there probably are enough residents and visitors who love their rivers, lakes and streams to help fill this monitoring gap. And that's why the expansion of the Sierra Nevada Alliance Watersheds Program to train volunteer river monitors is so exciting.

Thanks to a federal Clean Water Act grant (319h), we provided six watershed groups water monitoring equipment and funding to start volunteer water monitor programs. But money and equipment are only part of the recipe. The key ingredient to a successful program is training. The Sierra Nevada Alliance worked with the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) to train over 130 volunteer water monitors up and down the range in six months.

Diane Cross with SYRCL led the trainings along with Alliance Watersheds Program Coordinator Megan Suarez providing training materials and guidance to develop their monitoring programs. Six watershed groups in the Sierra gathered together volunteers for an orientation, training day and first field-monitoring day for their communities. The trainings taught volunteers how to measure pH, air and water temperature, dissolved oxygen, conductivity and other measures of river health. Volunteers were taught protocols to ensure their data will be accepted by state and federal water programs. The California Clean Water Team has provided great guidance and

assistance.

An example of the program is Upper Merced River Watershed Council's trainings. Organizers signed up and trained 40 volunteers. These volunteers are monitoring twelve sites quarterly. The program is so popular in the community that more people volunteered than the group had imagined. They are now purchasing more equipment to accommodate all their monitors. The Sierra Nevada Alliance is providing funding to the group to purchase this additional equipment and support additional coordination time.

"I like being part of community working together for a greater good, and trying to leave behind something better than when I arrived. And, I like to know what the heck my boys are swimming in!," said Michael McDonald from the Wolf Creek Community Alliance. "

The Sierra Nevada Alliance hopes to expand this program in the future to train even more monitors throughout the region. With ongoing monitoring we can guide smart decisions about restoration, protection and further assessments. It's a great bedrock of any water stewardship program.

*Funding for this project has been provided in part by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) pursuant to Assistance Agreement No. C9979204-02-0 and any amendments thereto which has been awarded to the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) for the implementation of California's Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Program. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the USEPA or the SWRCB, nor does mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation for use.*

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

Happy New Year! I can only hope your New Year looks as promising and amazing as the Sierra Nevada Alliance's does. The Alliance is heading into 2005 with additional staff, new board members, greater support and ambitious plans. It's very exciting.

This newsletter gives you some indication of that gangbuster energy. Our programs are going great. We just completed training over 130 new volunteer water monitors and distributing over 40 sets of monitoring equipment [Page 1]. We raised support for and hired a new staff person to begin in January for our Sierra Smart Growth Campaign. Our Sierra Environmental Water Caucus got started and completed a great research needs paper and attracted leading researchers to discuss their work and advise us on how to fill the gaps [Page 3]. Our annual conference this year had the greatest attendance and diversity of age and interests participating ever [Page 3].

And we celebrated the establishment of the new Sierra Conservancy – an agency that is dedicated to raising resources and providing conservation support throughout the region. Our work was even honored on this effort. [Page 1]

Most amazingly, we have added on more talented, enthusiastic, and wise people to guide our organization on the board and advisory board. And best of all it is adding because the former talented and committed board members have committed to staying involved on our Advisory Board. [Page 5]

Now imagine coupling all this talent with an ambitious plan and vision. In the last newsletter we shared our new strategic plan. Since its completion we also developed a Development Plan that charts how we will double the income and staff in three to four years to achieve our strategies. Our newly completed Marketing and Communication Plan lays out how we will attract more people to join us on this journey.

I invite you join me in dancing with great joy on New Years and throughout January as we look forward to the future of the Alliance and the Sierra Nevada!

Cheers, Joan

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### **11th Annual Conference Inspires Teens to Seniors**



Assemblymember Laird Addresses Conference

In August of 2004, 150 people attended another successful Sierra Nevada Alliance annual conference. This year's event was in South Lake Tahoe and inspired and informed teens to octagenarian conservationists. Assembly Member John Laird (D-Santa Cruz) received a standing ovation for his key note address and efforts establishing a Sierra Conservancy. Mr. Laird spoke about his love of the Sierra and his family cabin in Alpine County. Joan Clayburgh, Alliance Executive Director, recognized Assembly Member Laird for illustrating how residents outside of the Sierra can take a leadership role in preserving the Sierra for future generations.

Nine workshops at the event covered topics from how climate change is impacting habitat corridors to how to recruit volunteers. Friday night highlighted a new GIS database for the Alpine Watershed Group that logs historical photos, monitoring data, and other Upper Carson River information on a user-friendly map. This tool was developed with support from the Sierra

Nevada Alliance.

At the Annual Dinner the Alliance also presented awards to outstanding leaders in the range. The Sierra Fund received the Frank Wells Last Best Place award for their leadership in advocating for the Sierra Conservancy. Michael Killigrew, former President of SYRCL and long time activist in Nevada City received the Tissiack Award posthumously for his impressive actions and inspiration to the Sierra conservation movement during his lifetime. Judith Spencer received the Frank Wells Last Best Place Award for her leadership in winning stronger protections from out of control Off-Highway Vehicle use in the Stanislaus National Forest. Lynn Sadler, director of the Mountain Lion Foundation, received the Mount Whitney award for her outstanding leadership on the Sierra Nevada Alliance board of directors.

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### **Water Caucus Evaluates State of Water Research in Sierra**

The Sierra Environmental Water Caucus, which the Sierra Nevada Alliance facilitates, convened a day long workshop in mid July to learn what leading research institutions are investigating in the Sierra that may help efforts to protect and restore Sierra rivers, lakes and streams. Associate Professor of UC Merced and researcher with Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory Phil Duffy presented on climate change impacts to the Sierra. He confirmed that the Sierra snows are predicted to shrink due to climate change and that this has major challenges for water management and conservation. His work is helping model impacts to provide information for local management planning. Fraser Shilling of UC Davis presented maps that he and Professor Bob Johnston created showing that "very low density rural residential" development is zoned throughout the Sierra foothills. He expressed concern that these low densities have impacts on wildlife, plant communities, water quality & supply, fire risk and damage, and various ecosystem processes. Joe O'Hagan, Public Interest Energy Research director of the California Energy Commission presented on dams and relicensing efforts and the research PIER was funding. One project PIER is funding is to improve runoff forecasting to maximize hydropower production and water supply while meeting other needs. The second panel discussed how their institution determines their research agenda. Panelists were Sam Traina – Director of UC Merced's Sierra Nevada Research Institute, John Tracy – Director of the Desert Research Institutes Watershed Environmental Sustainability Center, Jeff Mount – Director of the Center for Integrated Watershed Science and Management at UC Davis, and Greg Taylor — Professor of Geological and Environmental Sciences at CSU Chico. The one message that came through clearly was their research focused where funding was available. Sierra Environmental Water Caucus members will keep in touch with these leading researchers. This day emphasized to Caucus members the importance of shaping funding opportunities. For a copy of the SEWC Research Needs paper, email BR>

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### **Ski Area Voluntary Efforts Still not Compensating for Development Impacts**

The Sierra Nevada Alliance participated once again in the Ski Area Citizen's Coalition (SACC) in the release of their annual Ski Area Environmental Scorecard. This year's Scorecard graded 77 ski resorts throughout the western United States. Based on a comprehensive set of 24 criteria, the Scorecard unearths the environmental friendliness of each resort. Ski Area's are one of the major industries in the Sierra and often a significant manager of public lands. This year's scorecard gave more positive points to voluntary conservation measures such as use of wind power, biodiesel and water conservation. The scorecard this year also takes away less points for negative activities the further back in time they occurred. For example, if one ski area is currently proposing logging old growth forest for ski runs or development and another logged old growth five years ago, the ski area conducting the more recent logging gets less points.

"Unfortunately, raw scores failed to improve by much despite giving more weight to non-development related environmental activities such as conserving water and using wind power," stated Jeff Berman, Executive Director of Colorado Wild.

An independent study released this August affirmed the SACC's methodology for the Scorecard. Professors Jorge Rivera (George Washington University) and Peter de Leon (University of Denver) published a study in a peer reviewed journal analyzing ski industry environmental impacts and the National Ski Area Association's Sustainable Slopes program. Entitled "Is Greener Whiter? Voluntary Environmental Performance of Western Ski Areas (Policy Studies Journal, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2004)", the study concluded that in the case of industry's voluntary Sustainable Slopes program, "participant ski areas appear to be correlated with lower third-party environmental performance ratings." The researchers concluded that the ski industry's Sustainable Slopes program lacks third-party oversight, does not have sanctions for poor performance, and does not involve specific environmental standards.

For more on the scorecard, to see individual resorts scores throughout California, and/or to send an email to your favorite ski area on this issue visit <http://www.skiareacitizens.com>.

### **The Top Ten Most Environmentally Friendly Ski Resorts:**

- Aspen Mountain Ski Resort, CO, Grade=A
- Buttermilk Ski Resort, CO, Grade=A
- Aspen Highlands, CO, Grade=A
- **Alpine Meadows, CA, Grade=A**
- Sundnace Resort, UT, Grade=A
- Mount Bachelor, OR, Grade=A
- Wolf Creek Ski Area, CO, Grade=A
- **Sierra at Tahoe, CA, Grade=A**
- Timerline Ski Area, OR, Grade=A

- Winter Park Ski Area, CO, Grade=B

### **The Top Ten Least Environmentally Friendly Ski Resorts:**

- Crested Butte Mountain Resort, CO, Grade=F
  - Vail Ski Resort, CO, Grade=F
  - Breckenridge Ski Resort, CO, Grade=F
  - Copper Mountain Ski Resort, CO, Grade=F
  - Crystal Mountain Resort, WA, Grade=F
  - Silver Mountain Ski Resort, ID, Grade=F
  - Brainhead Ski Area, UT, Grade=D
  - Keystone Ski Resort, CO, Grade=D
  - **Kirkwood Ski Resort, CA, Grade=D**
  - Grand Targhee Ski & Summer Resort, WY, Grade=D
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### **Sierra Nevada Alliance Welcomes New Board & Advisory Board Members**

The strength and character of many organizations is reflected by the leadership. The Alliance's new board and advisory board members show the organization has depth.

Steve Robinson represents the northern Sierra. Steve is founder and President of Mountain Meadows Conservancy based in Westwood California (Lassen County). Steve has been a resident of Westwood for 31 years. His work with Mountain Meadows Conservancy has been to restore and protect the largest mountain meadow in the entire Sierra. Steve often travels with his wife Judy to Alliance conferences and meetings.

Tanya Africa represents the Tahoe-Truckee area. Tanya is the Associate Director of the Truckee Donner Land Trust and former Associate Director of the Sierra Business Council. Tanya was born and raised in Reno Nevada and has called Truckee California home now for five years. Tanya loves to cook, hike, ski, and mountain bike in the Tahoe-Truckee area with her partner David and their dog Sam.

Mark Kleinman joins the board from Sacramento California. Mark is the Director of Strategy & Planning at Crocker/Flanagan, an award winning communications firm. Mark is also on the board of the Sacramento Valley Conservancy and formerly a board member for the Pacific Rim Trail Association. Mark and his wife have a family cabin in Tahoe and a true passion for the Sierra. Prior to Crocker/Flanagan, Mark was a history professor at University of Wisconsin – and left his tenured post because he missed the Sierra so very much.

These three board members are filling seats left by Stan Weidert, Scott Kruse, and Lynn Sadler. Their wisdom, humor, and commitment will not be completely missed however since all three

agreed to serve on our Advisory Board! The Advisory Board provides guidance and expertise to the Alliance. Four new members recently joined the Advisory board in addition to outgoing board members.

Jan Chatten-Brown brings extensive environmental law experience to the organization. Jan lives in Los Angeles and is the Senior Partner at Jan Chatten Brown and Associates Environmental Law Firm. Jan also served as the Southern California Gubernatorial appointee to the California Tahoe Regional Planning Agency during the time when their Regional Plan was developed. Jan shares a love for the Sierra with her husband Jack.

David Bunn brings extensive wildlife management experience to the Sierra Nevada Alliance. David works at the Wildlife Health Center at UC Davis managing the Wildlife Diversity Project. David also served four years as Deputy Director for Legislative Affairs for the California Department of Fish and Game and was the consultant to the California Senate Committee on Wildlife and Natural Resources. David grew up backpacking in the Sierra and now shares his love of the region with his two children and wife in Davis.

Tom DeVries brings extensive media experience to the advisory board. Tom lives in Emeryville and is the Executive Producer and President of DeVries Media. Tom DeVries has worked for and/or published in The New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, and others. He has also worked as a writer, producer and reporter for many television networks. Tom raised his children in Mariposa and still has a home in the Sierra.

Betsy Reifsnider fell in love with the Sierra Nevada when she climbed Lone Pine Peak during college. Every job she's held has linked her to the Sierra — as conservation coordinator for the Sierra Club Angeles Chapter, as legislative deputy working on Mono Lake issues for L.A. Councilmember Ruth Galanter, as associate director of the Mono Lake Committee, as water conservation manager for the US Bureau of Reclamation, and as executive director of Friends of the River. She now works as a private consultant, with the Sierra still in her territory. Betsy lives in Sacramento with her husband Bob.

These new members join advisory board members Laurel Ames, Jim Baetge, Patty Brissenden, Martha Davis, Kerri Timmer, Tom Martens, and Cristi Bozora-Creegan.