

February 1998

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Air Quality Improvement Initiative

The Planning & Conservation League (PCL), a statewide coalition of citizens and conservation groups and a member of the Alliance, is sponsoring a statewide ballot initiative for the November 1998 ballot which would provide tax credits for voluntary investments in vehicles and equipment that will reduce air pollution in California.

In terms of Sierra impacts, the initiative is directed toward reducing NO_x (nitrogen oxide) emissions and particulate matter, two of the factors at the heart of the destructive effects of air pollution on both our health and the health of our forests and plant communities. For example, scientists have discovered that air pollution from the burning of fossil fuels (including motor vehicle and diesel engines) is the major cause of acid rain, which impairs tree growth, severely impacts high mountain lakes, and can be carried by rainwater to further affect surface run-off and soils.

PCL encourages conservation organizations to support this measure. For more information, call Steve Jacoby at PCL: 916-444-8726, ext. 6.

Endorsers: American Lung Association, Environmental Defense Fund, Sierra Nevada Alliance, California Native Plant Society, Greenbelt Alliance, League to Save Lake Tahoe, National Audubon Society, Natural Resources Defense Council, and more.

Board Briefs

Linda Blum was a panelist at the Great Lakes Forest Alliance conference on Timber & Tourism. An article of hers on how local citizens can initiate resource protection efforts also will appear in the Northern Lights Foundation's Chronicle of Community, winter issue.

Katherine Evatt and Foothill Conservancy sponsored a public meeting featuring the reporters who did the Stockton Record series on "Sierra Sprawl."

Jane Baxter, of Range Watch, has racked up the miles, attending two meetings in Washington, DC on grazing issues.

Board Member Profile

Harriet Burgess, president and founder of American Land Conservancy and an Alliance board member for the past two years, has directed national land conservation initiatives in the Sierra for years, both for the Conservancy and for the Trust for Public Land.

Prior to founding the American Land Conservancy, a non-profit land acquiring organization, Harriet served as senior vice president and western regional manager for the Trust for Public Land, where she assembled numerous acquisitions that benefited the Sierra range. In fact, it was through Harriet's efforts that nearly 26,000 acres of private inholdings in Hope Valley and the Carson-Iceberg Wilderness Area were transferred into public ownership.

Only three years after forming ALC, she completed the largest land exchange ever undertaken by the Department of the Interior - called the Nevada Land Exchange - which included the acquisition of the Galena Resort Company property.

The Galena Resort Company parcel had been slated for development as a skiing and gambling resort. Today, from the Mt. Rose Highway, the property offers dramatic views of craggy cliffs and peaks as well as easy accessibility for summer hikes and winter cross-country skiing.

Getting Acquainted: American Land Conservancy

There are few threatened landscapes in the Sierra Nevada that Harriet Burgess and the American Land Conservancy (ALC) have not attempted to save.

The ALC is a non-profit organization dedicated to acquiring sensitive lands from willing sellers. ALC is an Alliance member, and Harriet Burgess, its founder, has been on the SNA board since 1996.

In one recent project, the ALC helped the Carson Valley community improve public access between Carson Valley and the Job's Peak area.

When activists feared that residential construction was forming a barrier along the Sierra front that could forever block access into the mountains from the east, the ALC helped the community raise over \$55,000 toward the purchase of a 2-acre trailhead site from a willing seller.

Residents and visitors to the Lake Tahoe Basin have profited, as well, from ALC's work. ALC announced on January 2, 1998, that it had successfully brokered a deal to transfer ownership of the historic Thunderbird Lodge to the public as part of an ongoing land exchange with the Federal government.

The 140-acre estate, located on the lake's eastern shore, was built in 1938-1941 by George Whittell, a land baron from San Francisco. "The property is the largest single, privately-owned parcel with lakeshore frontage in the Tahoe Basin," says Burgess. "Its preservation was extremely important not only for its scenic and historic beauty, but to allow the University of Nevada, Reno to develop an important research facility that will even further ensure the environmental viability of the region."

This extraordinary property is now being managed by the Forest Service and University of Nevada, Reno to be preserved for its important resource values and for the public's enjoyment.

You can reach the ALC at: 456 Montgomery Street
Suite #1450, San Francisco CA 94104; 415-403-3856; email:

Green Money (excerpts reprinted with permission from the Trust for Public Land)

STATE PROGRAMS

Agricultural Land Stewardship Program: Provides grants for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements. Contact: Office of Land Conservation, 801 K Street, MS 13-71, Sacramento CA 95814, 916-324-0862.

CALFED Bay-Delta Program: Funds ecosystem restoration for Delta tributary watersheds. Local, state and federal agencies, non-profits and individuals eligible. Contact: CALFED Bay-

Delta Program, 1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1155, Sacramento, CA 95814, 916-657-2666.

Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program: Grants for mitigation of environmental impacts of transportation facilities. Local, state, or federal agency, non-profit, or public/private partnerships eligible. Contact: California Resources Agency, 1416 Ninth Street, Room 1311, Sacramento, 95814, 916-653-5656.

Habitat Conservation Fund/Local Agency Grants: For acquisition, restoration, and enhancement of wildlife habitat and natural areas. Only local public agencies are eligible, although non-profits can partner. Contact: California Department of Parks and Recreation, P.O. Box 942896, Sacramento, 94296-0007, 916-653-7423.

FEDERAL PROGRAMS

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation: Funds for acquiring significant resource lands for the protection and restoration of sensitive fish, wildlife and plant species. Federal, state, and local agencies and non-profits eligible. Contact: NFWF, 116 New Montgomery St., 2nd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105, 415-778-0999

North American Wetlands Conservation Act: Eligible projects include acquisition and restoration of wetlands, among other activities. Proposals accepted twice a year in April and August and should be directed to the Coordinator of the North American Wetlands Conservation Council. Contact: US Fish & Wildlife Service, 703-358-1711.

Transportation Enhancement Activities Program: Funding through "ISTEA" program for conservation projects related to transportation, such as acquisition of easements, construction of bicycle trails, etc. Eligible projects must relate to a transportation facility and be above and beyond normal transportation projects or mitigation. The law is expected to be re-authorized by Congress in late spring, with the next round of applications expected in California in late fall 1998 or early 1999. Contact: Caltrans TEA Office, 1120 N Street, Sacramento, 95814, 916-654-5275 or your local regional transportation planning agency.

Wetlands Reserve Program: Funding for acquisition of conservation easements on agricultural lands. Both permanent and 30-year easements can be purchased under the WRP, with priority given to projects that maximize wildlife values. Contact: Natural Resource Conservation Service, 916-757-8200.

The Green Money Fact Sheet, published by the Trust for Public Land, provides a sampling of public funding programs available for land conservation projects. For more information, contact Jennifer Greene in TPL's Western Region office at 415-495-5660.

If It's Green, Is It Clean?

Maureen Rose, California Hydropower Reform Coalition

With the advent of energy deregulation in California comes the freedom to choose a new electrical utility company, plus the responsibility to wisely choose where your power comes from.

Since hydropower looms as a potentially popular energy source (and certainly a popular marketing device), it is critical that people start doing their homework before making choices which could actually encourage the use of more environmentally damaging hydropower throughout the state.

The old adage "buyer beware" has never been more appropriate nor more complicated!

Recent surveys indicate that, given the choice, Californians would like to choose environmentally friendly (so-called "alternative" and "renewable") energy sources. Little wonder, then, that companies such as Southern California Edison, Green Mountain Power and others have launched massive advertising campaigns to lull unsuspecting consumers into purchasing not so earth-friendly energy.

The use of terms such as renewable, clean, alternative, all suggest power generation that does not harm the environment. Unfortunately, in marketing this "green power," many electricity providers misleadingly tout hydropower as clean and green. While obviously not as environmentally risky as coal- or nuclear-powered energy, hydropower generation can be an environmentally damaging energy source - a fact the utility industry isn't eager to advertise.

Hydropower production involves the construction of large dams and reservoirs. Such facilities have devastated many hundreds of miles of California rivers. Absent are the flow variations that trigger natural growth and reproduction cycles of aquatic species. According to the State Lands Commission, more than 95% of the historic salmon and steelhead spawning habitat in California's Central Valley has been eliminated by the construction of dams on rivers.

While producing power from our rivers might seem clean, since there are no smokestacks or radioactive wastes, such production dramatically alters water temperature, impedes geomorphic processes, disturbs natural nutrient distribution, and finally - and simply - kills fish.

Unfortunately, it will be difficult to choose a new utility that does not sell some energy generated from hydropower dams. Once energy is generated, it all goes into the California Power Exchange for distribution by different utility companies, making it difficult to identify the source later. The trick will be to educate yourself on the relative merits - and potential flaws - of power options available to you. Every utility is required by the Federal Trade Commission to include qualifications and disclosures in their green marketing claims. Companies that choose not to disclose the true source of their energy should be ignored.

For more information, contact Maureen Rose at Friends of the River; 916-442-3155 ext. 223, or via e-mail at PALIGN@LEFT>BECOME INFORMED! Questions to ask of potential power providers:

- 1) What sources, by percentage, make up your "Green" or "alternative" energy program?
- 2) Which hydropower projects in particular produce your Hydropower output?

You have a choice - and you CAN make a difference!

Keeping Open Space Open

Cristi Bozora

Cattlemen's association magazines, conservation newsletters, law review articles, national newspapers - they're all publishing information about the effects of protecting property under conservation easements.

This heightened interest is partially the result of a public realization that traditional means of land preservation, such as government acquisition, is not the only way to protect open space.

Much of California's remaining open space is in private hands - made up largely of privately-owned working ranches and rangelands in the Sierra foothills. Some of these ranches, encompassing thousands of acres of grassy meadows and oak woodlands, are owned and managed by fourth- or fifth-generation ranching families who see themselves as stewards of the land and want to pass it, untouched, to their children.

At the same time, conservationists hope these areas can remain open and undeveloped because they function as wildlife habitat and offer the kind of scenic vistas associated with rural living.

But as population pressures increase and more development creeps into the foothills, both the economic stability of the ranching industry and the sustainability of these natural ecosystems are impacted, making it much more difficult to keep these open spaces open.

In working to establish collaborative relationships between the parties, the Alliance has uncovered substantial common ground on the issue of halting the loss of open space in the state. Not surprisingly, both the ranching community and the conservationists want the same thing: to keep open spaces open. Now the question is, how do we do it?

Conservation easements are one way to bring together the goals of sustainable ranching and protection of open space. A conservation easement is a voluntary agreement between a landowner and a local government body or qualified non-profit that preserves the natural resource values of the land by limiting or eliminating development on it.

While the landowner still owns the property, the easement-holder separately holds the development rights, which it agrees never to exercise. The property continues to be used for

cattle grazing, as before, but the historical uses, and the natural resources that make the property valuable for conservation, are preserved forever.

Think of private property rights as a "bundle of sticks," with each stick representing a different landowner right, such as use, sale, lease, or future development. By mutual agreement, different "sticks" can be held separately by different entities. For example, a rancher can still own the land, live on it, run cattle on it and continue other historic uses - but he or she can choose to give up the right to subdivide and/or develop the land in exchange for financial or other compensation.

By having given up the right of development, the land owner in essence devalues that property, at least in the eyes of the government, making it less expensive to maintain and less burdensome, in terms of estate taxes, to pass on to future heirs.

Some people argue that the public should not be responsible for protecting private land - that's the job of the land owner. But as Alliance Executive Director Laurel Ames said in the recent Stockton Record series on Sierra sprawl, "[I]t's to all our benefit for the private landowners to be able to keep their land for grazing. . . They can't just dig into their own pockets and start protecting land for everybody else."

Michael Beck of the Endangered Habitats League expressed similar feelings when he stated that rather than penalizing ranch owners for having held off development and maintained their land in a natural state for so long, the conservation community should help them continue to preserve their land.

The point is, if the community places value on open space rangeland for its habitat, scenic views, and other natural resource values, then the community should help pay for its preservation.

The Alliance is committed to this principle. And we will keep working with all ranchers and conservationists interested in finding ways to protect these last remaining open spaces.

Potential Tax Consequences of Conservation Easements -- tax benefits to landowners can include:

income tax deduction under the charitable contribution provision for a donation or bargain price sale;

reduction in property taxes because the property is assessed only for its agricultural value;

minimization of estate taxes due at the landowner's death because the overall value of the estate has been reduced.

By allowing private property to remain on the tax rolls, conservation easements help cash-strapped counties. While property taxes may be somewhat reduced to reflect the decrease in overall property value, they are not entirely eliminated because the land remains in private ownership.

Under another agricultural land conservation program, the Williamson Act, a subvention policy

replaces approximately 90% of the property tax revenue lost by the counties.

News Notes

Prop. 204 Application Statistics:

- * total of 33 proposals submitted
 - * total of \$22.8 million requested
 - * total of \$14.5 million available
 - * of that total, 12 are Sierra-specific proposals, for \$7.7 million
-

SNA Goes Global

Time to check out the new information on our Web site! Thanks to Mark Russell, we now offer direct links to member organizations and other resources in the Sierra, as well as conference information, our newsletters, and an interactive map showing interest groups working on environmental issues in the Sierra.

Our Web site address is: <http://www.sierranevadaalliance.org>, and our email address is

SNA Kicks Off Regional Meetings

More than 40 people representing 20 different organizations attended the first of the Alliance's planned regional outreach meetings - this one held in Nevada County.

After sharing information about current activities and completing a joint "visioning" exercise to identify common interests, goals, and concerns, participants discussed the possibility of establishing a Yuba River watershed council. SNA director Laurel Ames and president Andrea Lawrence presented the watershed council model developed by the Alliance and the Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCRC) for the group's consideration.

A smaller subcommittee of 10 committed individuals is pursuing the idea of a multi-stakeholder watershed council and will report findings and recommendations to the larger group later this year.

Yuba watershed resident and reknowned author/poet Gary Snyder offers the group his thinking in the form of an essay titled, "Coming into the Watershed," from A Place in Space, which reads:

Watershed consciousness and bioregionalism is not just environmentalism, not just a means toward resolution of social and economic problems, but a move toward resolving both nature and society with the practice of a profound citizenship in both the natural and the social worlds. If the ground can be our common ground, we can begin to talk to each other (human and nonhuman) once again.

Thanks to our Recent Donors

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President's Letter

Andrea Lawrence

As I write this, it is still January, the month named for the Roman god Janus, the deity of comings and goings, of beginnings and endings, one face looking forward and the other looking back. So perhaps it's a good time to look at where we've been and where we're going.

Looking back, I see the enthusiasm and high hopes we had as we put together the ideas that became the foundation for Alliance programs and vision. And now we are seeing our efforts evolve from the conceptual to the concrete in examples such as: our community-building in Tuolumne County, affectionately known as "Our Back Yard"; our regional meetings, the most recent one held in Nevada County with more planned for the coming months; and what many see as our main thrust right now, our efforts on behalf of watersheds.

We can be especially proud of our work with RCRC (Regional Council of Rural Counties), the body of Sierra-based county supervisors, on jointly establishing a set of watershed restoration principles and a community-based structure for watershed councils.

Looking forward, I see important changes in the discussion about our public lands, as well. For example, the BLM recently recommended release of 18 Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) in Inyo and Mono counties, a recommendation supported by People for the West.

However, rather than acting rashly, the Mammoth Lakes Town Council took testimony from both sides in a 3-hour public hearing on the matter. In the end, the Council voted unanimously to

have a group of local interests go out on the land to study the individual sites before making any recommendations.

We're beginning to see a range-wide shift in balance in discussions that affect our sense of place, our landscapes, and our long-term economy, thanks in part to the work of the Alliance and other groups, such as the Sierra Business Council.

We are starting to see signs of encouragement, as evidenced by this remark by Mammoth Lakes Town Council member, Byng Hunt: "Our community needs perpetual wilderness study areas in our surrounding public lands, and it needs environmental enthusiasts that will support honest and responsible long-lasting conservation and preservation of these amazing natural landscapes before they are diminished forever, and before we all become truly poorer for it." Amen, Byng! To the year ahead!
