

January 2001

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New Member Group - Amador Land Trust

The local land trusts in the Sierra are a critical part of the permanent protection of Sierra resources. The Amador Land Trust's mission is to protect and preserve "local agricultural, historic and scenic sites and natural habitats for the benefit of generations to come." The focus on ag and historic sites is important in this Mother Lode area of century-old mines, farms, ranches, and vineyards. The land trust covers Amador and Calaveras County and some portions of El Dorado County, with a focus on the small foothill towns of Volcano and Sheep Ranch.

Amador Land Trust has 2247 acres under management, with a number of innovative easements, including those allowing direct farm sales and another a few new homesites. Protection of a spectacular wildflower display and river access are included in other ALT lands.

And the newest information from the Trust is that it is entering an expansion mode and has recently advertised for a part-time employee to build their organizational capacity.

The Sierra is fortunate to have groups such as the Amador Land Trust working in such an important sphere.

CONTACT INFO: Amador Land Trust, 711 Court St. Jackson, CA 95642; 209.223.1225; 209.223.1360 Fax; E-Mail: BR>

Pools, Schools and Wetland Rules: Siting the New U.C.

Phil Chang

Public debates about where to locate the 10th University of California (U.C.) campus revolve around managing growth and controlling sprawl, providing educational opportunity and protecting sensitive habitats, and sustaining both communities and ecosystems in the southern Sierra foothills and San Joaquin Valley. Currently, U.C. proposes to locate the new campus and the campus community within, or at the margin of, the largest, richest, densest and best-preserved vernal pool complex in California, located northeast of the City of Merced, and outside the current urban growth boundary.

The eastern Merced County vernal pool complex is known for spectacular spring wildflower displays and rare landforms known as mima mounds. The 90,000 acre complex provides refuge for migratory waterfowl and habitat for 27 special status species, including 7 federally listed endangered species and several endemic species. Species of concern in the area include Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp, Succulent Owl's Clover, Dwarf Dwingia, and San Joaquin Kit Foxes.

Only 10% of California's original vernal pools remain intact and this unusual and fragile wetland habitat type is found in few other places in the world.

Few people question the State goal of providing quality higher education opportunities to the rapidly expanding population of young Californians in the under-served San Joaquin Valley and southern Sierra Nevada. (The population of the Valley is projected to grow by 60% in the next 20 years). The disagreement centers on which of the 14 potential sites offers the best mix of benefits and costs and whether an eastern Merced County site would threaten the precious 90,000 acre vernal pool complex there.

Proponents of the current U.C. plan argue that the campus and community can be developed sensitively, as a model development project, in the western margin of the vernal pool complex. They also argue that the proposed package for this campus location may offer the best long-term protection to the pools. The Davis administration has offered \$30 million to acquire conservation easements on as many as 60,000 acres of the eastern Merced County complex. In addition, the new campus will showcase a new Sierra Nevada Research Institute (SNRI) emphasizing research and education to protect and restore the environment with a special focus on development pressures in the Central Valley and Sierra.

Opponents of the university plan argue that U.C. and the State should be using this opportunity to control sprawl and reinvigorate existing communities by directing new development into already developed areas such as depressed urban centers or closed military bases. They fear that a campus and new town in or near the vernal pool complex will damage and fragment sensitive wetland habitats, disrupt hydrologic and ecological processes, introduce alien species, subject the entire area to increased development pressures and generally threaten the viability of the pools. Conservation biologists within the University itself have emphasized that efforts to construct around or reconstruct vernal pools usually fail, resulting in permanent loss.

Up until mid-December 2000 U.C. was pursuing a plan for a 2,000 acre campus and an 8,300

acre University Community within the western portion of the vernal pool complex. Scientists estimate that there are between 7,000 and 9,000 vernal pools within this 10,300 acre planning area which is located 8 miles northeast of downtown Merced. Though U.C. stated that 5,000 acres of the 8,300 acre new town would be put into a reserve and remain undeveloped, critics argued that the 5000 acres would be fragmented and hydrologically and ecologically impacted by the town. Since the site is outside the current growth boundary for the City of Merced road, highway, power, water, sewage, and communications infrastructure would have to be built to serve the new town of 30,000, causing additional impacts to undisturbed lands between Merced and the campus. In addition, the magnet of a new university town and new infrastructure would increase development pressure in the area.

Pressured by federal agencies that warned of lengthy and complex permitting and by anti-sprawl and biodiversity activists threatening to litigate, U.C. announced a plan modification on December 20. The modified campus would be concentrated into a smaller area and the core of it would be sited on an existing 200 acre golf course at the western edge of the vernal pool complex. The Environmental Protection Agency, Army Corps of Engineers, and US Fish and Wildlife Service told U.C. that the original plan threatened protected wetlands and sensitive species and encouraged U.C. to perform more in-depth analysis of less environmentally damaging alternatives.

With a mandate from Governor Davis to open the campus by 2004, U.C. officials are scrambling to meet the concerns of regulators and environmentalists without delaying construction. The Merced Hills Golf Course contains only 7.5 acres of wetlands and could encompass a significant portion of the campus. But the golf course is still outside the current growth boundary of Merced and within the vernal pool area, inviting the criticism that the campus will still bring new sprawl to a sensitive area. Some wary local environmentalists fear that the golf course proposal is an attempt to establish a foothold for the overall project so that U.C. will not have to seriously consider the 14 other sites for the entire campus and community project, which are under analysis in a forthcoming Environmental Impact Report. Many of these sites including the Bellevue Ranch (Merced County), a downtown Fresno location, and Castle Air Force Base were deemed less environmentally damaging in a 1995 report.

Whether the new U.C. comes to eastern Merced County or not, the 90,000 acre vernal pool complex will face tremendous development pressures in coming years. If and how the new campus and community can come to this area is only part of the puzzle of long-term protection of a California treasure.

The Deal: The existing deal between U.C. and the Virginia Smith Family Trust, the owner of the original 10,300 acre planning area and the golf course, is also affecting decision-making about where to locate the new U.C. Under the original plan the Smith Trust would donate the 2,000 acres for the campus to U.C. in exchange for assistance with developing the 3,300 acre University Community. The Trust would donate a significant portion of the revenues from this development to scholarships for under-represented and low-income youth from the Merced community to attend the new U.C. The total revenue stream from the University Community development for the Trust and U.C. was projected to be \$467 million annually. The attractiveness of this deal weighed heavily in favor of the eastern Merced County site when

U.C. was originally considering alternatives in 1995. To keep the deal the University Community must be built on Smith Trust lands within the vernal pool complex.

For more information regarding the U.C. site please contact:

Karen Merritt U.C. Merced 510.987.9468 <http://www.ucmerced.edu>

OR

Carol Witham VernalPools.Org 530.753.5872 <http://www.vernalpools.org>

Thank You, Thank You

The Sacramento River Watershed Program gave the Alliance healthy financial support for our annual conference in September with the program Connecting The Dots - Growth, Watersheds, and Open Space that tied together watershed protection and land stewardship.

Restoration work on the Sacramento river and its surrounding lands is the key role that the SWRP plays. And a large part of the storm and snowmelt runoff from the Sierra connects to the Sacramento River soon after it leaves the Sierra foothills, linking our lands and rivers to theirs.

The SRWP mission statement is "working together to sustain, restore and enhance our watershed's resources while promoting our long-term social and economic vitality." The program focuses on restoration and water quality management strategies for issues including mercury, pesticides, drinking water, and toxicity with unknown causes.

Since two thirds of all Californians receive some of their drinking water from the Sacramento River, and two thirds of that water comes from the Sierra, we are inextricably and forever linked to the SWRP and its work.

Program Information and Calendar

SRWP Resource Center Call Toll Free: (888) 815-3330; email: [srwp@ oberon.lab.csuchico.edu](mailto:srwp@oberon.lab.csuchico.edu) or visit the website at <http://www.sacriver.org>

Watershed Assistance Grants Spread Thin

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the River Network provided \$395,000 in Watershed Assistance Grants in 2000 to support the growth and sustainability of community-based watershed partnerships across the U.S. Funds were only sufficient to fund 16 out of 400 applicant groups, with just one award in California on the Middle Fork Eel River. But funding opportunities for watershed organizing, capacity building and coordination are increasing steadily. For example, \$2 million of Watershed Coordinator grants will be distributed through RCDs this year in California.

Saving El Dorado County

The most litigious county in the Sierra is El Dorado, hands down, with numerous initiatives and lawsuits as solutions to bad land use decisions. Starting with mining controls enacted in the 80s through an initiative, to the famous traffic measure in 1997 that requires developers to pay for the road improvements needed to service their new developments, and including a series of environmental lawsuits that turned over the county's 1996 General Plan and several developments, El Dorado County has not slid willingly into a mirror image of highly-developed Placer County.

In fact, El Dorado County citizens have moved consistently, through the ballot box and the courts, to slow growth and to focus on the pieces of growth that are most visible - - ever-increasing traffic congestion and a finite water supply. Measure Y, the traffic payment measure, was approved by more than 60% of the voters. But the development interests fight back at every turn, and the price of eternal vigilance is very high. A large number of meetings have occupied everyone's time, as the issues surrounding how the fair share of the traffic costs should be determined is hammered out. What seemed simple has been made exceedingly complex.

Now El Dorado is going to try something entirely new for the Sierra – a county-led consensus process on the general plan issues, to work out the contentious pieces of the general plan between all the players in hopes of crafting a general plan that will reach a significant level of common ground regarding the growth of El Dorado County.

Does this sound very difficult? It is, but with the help of an international consultant, interviews with more than 60 people ranging from the victorious slow-growthers to the ready-to-roll developers, and including representation from everyone else, the county expects to produce the critical mass of agreements needed to start off on a new general plan.

While residents, developers, enviros and officials are a little skeptical, there is a sense that this may be the only way that El Dorado County will ever develop a new general plan. Fortunately for the environment the El Dorado environmental community is very clear about their values, their objectives and their commitment to the county's quality of life - - we expect that the environment will be very well represented in the consensus process. Alliance member groups in the county have a large body of knowledge about the county's resources, not only to do with water and traffic congestion, but with habitat, soils, endangered species, forests, rivers and

economics.

In the past we have referred you to the lawsuits and initiatives in El Dorado County for inspired ideas about how to protect the resources in your area. But the Alliance has always counseled working in a consensus process for long-term solutions. Now we will learn if a consensus process can work in this polarized county, where initiatives and lawsuits have been so successful, but the pressure never stops.

Three Who Make a Difference

The Alliance has been especially honored to have three outstanding people who have contributed to the Alliance in ways that have helped us immeasurably. Although we have thanked them with letters and phone calls, our eighth year is surely the time to say thank you in a much more public way, so that our member groups and our members learn about these special people who care about the Sierra and provide invaluable help to those of us working to assure the long-term protection of Sierra and community resources.

Mary Hanson is from Swall Meadows, a place uphill from Bishop and downhill from Mammoth, on the edge of the spectacular eastern Sierra escarpment. Mary has been a volunteer for many groups in the Mammoth area, as a board member, or treasurer, or trainer, and including volunteering in the hospital ER. This is a woman with great staying power - - she has been the treasurer of the Mammoth Friends of the Library since 1977!

What Mary does for us is our taxes - - and that is the greatest service for a start-up non-profit that anyone can imagine. Mary was an auditor for the IRS for 9 years, but moved to the mountains in 1976 to take up personal taxes and a lot of volunteering. She worked with us to set up our books, and has faithfully filed seven years of our tax returns, with never an error. Mary has been doing tax returns both professionally and as a volunteer for non-profits in Mono County since she moved to the mountains, including for Friends of the Library, the Mammoth Hospital Auxiliary, the Mammoth Lakes Jazz Jubilee, the Mono County Historical Society and the Mono County Arts Council.

On top of that she is the 2001 newsletter editor for the Sacramento Valley Area Council of Hospital Volunteers, the Board Member representing Mono County on the Mountain-Valley Library System Advisory panel, and teaches volunteers in the AARP/IRS Tax Counseling for the Elderly Program in Bishop.

Does reading all that this woman does make you tired? Well, Mary is tired, because she has been fighting cancer since 1990, with regular bouts of chemo and radiation, but she just keeps going! We think Mary Hanson is the volunteer of the decade, if not two! She makes our life easier, for which we say a big thank you to a very resilient woman.

Mark Russel

Mark Russell, was noted before in our newsletter, to thank him for spearheading the Amador Web Works' team production of our killer website www.sierranevadaalliance.org. The website has been a boon to the Alliance, providing a place to highlight the member groups, highlight our issues, and display our publications. And Mark not only created the website, he helps us with advice on support and maintenance issues. We are very pleased that his website is really user-friendly for us, so that we can add and subtract information right here from the office. What a great donation!

Mark lives in Pine Grove with his writer wife Grace, and two boys, and volunteers with the local schools and theatre. Mark still has his Memphis drawl, but has been a Californian since 1980 and a resident of Pine Grove in the Sierra since 1986. A telecommuter for 10 years, Mark made the break when he helped start the Amador Web Works. The Web Works is a wonderful new venture designed to service small businesses. We can certainly attest to the quality of their work!

Claudia Laub

Claudia Laub is a celebrated graphics designer with a boutique shop in Beverly Hills but her heart in the eastside of the Sierra, who designed our wonderful mountain and stream logo. Claudia apparently is psychic, capturing our watershed spirit before we knew we would focus so much of our energy on watersheds. In a high-tech world, Claudia defies the trends and operates in a world of the craftsman, providing the rich impressions of letterpress printing, a craft that is renowned for its depth and desirable texture. Fed one page at a time through an antique press, and each inspected carefully for errors, Claudia's product captures the aesthetic of a past era. Needless to say, she is in great demand!

It seems almost heresy that Claudia's elegant logo for us is now mostly captured on recycled paper run through the copy machine by the hundreds. But the original piece of stationery and business card is treasured in the Alliance office, as our own original of Claudia's art.

We are proud of our logo, and proud of the way it captures the heart and the spirit of the Alliance. We have nothing but praise for Claudia Laub and the logo she created for us, and have never thanked her enough. We hope that this tribute in our newsletter will let her know how much we appreciate her work. You can contact Claudia at 7404 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036; phone 323.931.1710 or e-mail: <http://www.claudialaub.com>

President's Letter

Bill Center

This month marks the start of a new year, decade, century and millennium.

For the Sierra such increments are but grains and pebbles in its geologic time stream.

But for us human inhabitants the last decade in the Sierra has brought wonderfully palpable changes, and as changes always do, new opportunities and threats.

As we came into the nineties the Sierra was viewed and managed from the top down as a collection of national forests and parks, from the bottom up as a myriad of independent private land holders and disconnected counties, and from the outside by massive exporters of water, timber and electricity. State government had so little presence that the Resources Agency was widely condemned in the region for even convening a discussion called the Sierra Summit.

The economics of the region were dominated by extractive industries and quality of life was a seldom, if ever, heard phrase. And there were more democrats than republicans.

Today the Sierra is widely viewed as a varied, diverse and inextricably inter-connected region. Resource management is increasingly watershed based, science driven, and more sensitive to what is left behind than to what is taken away. Intensive study and education has illuminated the need for massive habitat protection and restoration for the basic preservation of species.

Local politics and economics are more concerned with quality of life than resource extraction while state and federal agencies and many private landowners understand the need to protect our vast watersheds, integrated habitats and working landscapes.

And the Sierra Nevada Alliance has gone from being little more than a dream to a vital and strategically positioned organization. The next decade will need all the energy we have, and much more, to ensure that the progress of the last decade continues, while we confront head-on the challenges of unprecedented growth in population and recreational use.

I look forward to this new decade and have much hope for the new millennium because the passion, values and energy of all of us has already made a difference, and they are but grains and pebbles in the stream of activism yet to come.

IBM Computer Recycling

IBM is expanding its programs for consumers and businesses to recycle unneeded computer hardware in the United States.

You can recycle any manufacturer's PCs, including system units, monitors, printers and optional attachments for \$29.99 which includes shipping. IBM will either recycle the equipment or refurbish it and arrange for its donation to charities typically lacking funding for computer equipment. If the computer meets the criteria for donation, the donor will receive a receipt for potential deduction on their annual federal tax return up to the amount allowed by law.

You may purchase the PC Recycling Service by calling 1-888-SHOP-IBM (746-7426). Additional information is available on the IBM website at <http://www.ibm.com/environment>.

Welcome New Board Members

Alliance member groups elected two new Board members at the annual membership meeting held during the annual conference in September.

Cal French holds BA and MA degrees in English from Stanford and San Jose State Universities and worked for 38 years as a high school English teacher. He has an extensive environmental track record with the Sierra Club where he held a range of positions including: San Geronio Chapter Chair, Southern California-Southern Nevada Regional Vice President, Outings Liaison to SC Council, Treasurer to California Nevada Region and a leader of Sierra Club Outings. Cal has been visiting the Sierra for the past 55 years and has hiked over every east to west trail from Yosemite to Tehachapi.

Ray Griffiths has been applying his academic training as a biologist and ecologist to land and resource problems in El Dorado County for over 20 years. He has provided a key environmental voice to debates about the County General Plan over the past decade, ultimately working to have the 1996 Plan set aside. As a Board member of the Georgetown Divide RCD, member of the Center for Sierra Nevada Conservation, and affiliate of many other organizations Ray works to promote good land use policy and sustainable resource use in the Sierra.

The Alliance Board elected **Carole Combs** at a November Board meeting. Carole fills the southern Sierra seat. She is the President and Executive Director of the Sierra Los Tulares Land Trust and co-founder of both the Kaweah-Tule Watershed Management Group and the Southern-Sierra Foothill/ San Joaquin Valley Land Trust Coalition. She worked for the Nature Conservancy for 17 years in Washington D.C., where her last position was Director of Donor Support. Carole has played key founding and directing roles at Earth Island Institute, Initiative for Social Action and Renewal in Eurasia (ISAR) and the Center for Russian Nature

Conservation.

We thank our outgoing Board members who have completed their terms: Joan Boothe was a founding member of the Alliance and served for 6 years as the Secretary and Treasurer; Martha Davis and Jim Thorne joined the Alliance Board in its second year. Martha is now assisting with the formation of the Advisory Committee which she has agreed to chair.

12 Steps to California's Watershed Recovery

Does California's nascent watershed movement need help? You bet! Especially since there is now more than \$300 million available in water bond and other money for restoration, planning and agency watershed coordinators - - but there is no statewide coordination!

California finds itself in the unenviable position of now throwing money at watersheds and coordinating later, if at all. And the watershed legislation to create a statewide management plan was killed by the administration because there was no money, they said. Fortunately, the Watershed Management Council series of forums, attended by 100s of people concerned about the need for a rational statewide process, recognized that the state needs help and recommended twelve steps that rely on a mix of people that includes the state, but doesn't rely on the state agencies, to put together the pieces of a statewide program. However, it does ask the Governor to endorse watershed management, on the assumption that will help his agencies get their act together.

It's amazing how much good work citizens can do to prod the state agencies to step up to the new era of resource protection through watershed restoration!

- 1. Form a statewide coalition/network of local watershed groups.** Create a statewide umbrella organization or coalition of local watershed groups for the purposes of communication, constituency building, informational sharing, and improving their capacity for organizational effectiveness.
- 2. Seek endorsement by Governor Davis for the State's commitment to the watershed approach.** An Executive Order to address the statewide value of the watershed approach would be one means.
- 3. Support collaborative watershed groups that are community-based.** a. Obtain State commitment for assistance with the start-up and continuation of collaborative watershed groups; b. Advocate funding for the operation and capacity-building of such groups; c. Advance the levels of state and federal technical support for such groups.
- 4. Obtain Legislative endorsement of the State's commitments.** Through one or more bills, seek necessary authority and funding to carry out the state's role in its watershed management

commitments, including #3 above.

5. Coordinate Agency watershed work officially through formal agreements. Develop and obtain MOUs for Watershed Management that clearly states their commitments to cooperative watershed management in California: a. Among departments within the Resources Agency; b. Among the State's cabinet-level agencies; c. Between the State and the Federal resource agencies; d. Between the State and Local governments and e. Between the State and watershed groups.

6. Prepare State watershed handbooks and guidelines. Develop State manuals to provide consistency and clear expectations to watershed groups, managers, and restoration practitioners about recommended methods for: watershed assessments, water quality and habitat monitoring, data reporting, and watershed plans.

7. Share state-of-the-art watershed restoration methods & effectiveness. a. Hold an annual statewide watershed restoration conference, with a published proceedings to record the products of the event, as well as regional events; b. Expand use of field tours throughout the State's basins; c. Develop website sharing of restoration information; and d. Develop a central listserv for announcements.

8. Create pathways for education, communication and outreach about watersheds. Develop a coordinated approach for improving awareness and understanding of watersheds and for improving involvement in watershed activities. Pursue the proposed Watershed Signing Program.

9. Establish State Scientific Peer Review Team(s) for Watershed Management. Ensure that credible science in watershed management is recognized by the State and included within state agency processes through an integrated review and advice by independent team(s) of scientists using an interdisciplinary approach.

10. Promote effective watershed monitoring and project evaluation programs. Focus on the Big Picture of what is needed for local watershed monitoring and project evaluation and what is needed to help local groups.

11. Develop an effective funding delivery system for grant recipients. Address the ongoing need for a user-friendly grant process for recipients of state and federal restoration grants that also meets accountability standards of the grantors.

12. Identify a package of new incentives that need to be developed, and existing disincentives that need to be removed, in order to improve watershed management. Develop a list of conservation incentives in California – what is and isn't working - as well as new ideas and solutions for better individual, business, and governmental involvement watershed management.

Featuring Land Trusts

The Alliance produced our first on-line publication, The Sierra Nevada Land Trust Handbook: Sharing how Land Trusts in the Sierra Nevada are Gaining Ground that is a user-friendly introduction to ways to protect land and to learn about the thirteen local Sierra land trusts, as well as others working with the new Sierra Land Trust Council.

The Handbook describes the local land trusts, and the regional, and national land conservation organizations working together in the Sierra to protect scenic views, river corridors, habitat, working ranches, trails, historic and cultural sites and recreation opportunities. The handbook also summarizes supporting organizations work such as the Alliance and the Sierra Business Council. The on-line publication has links to all those with websites, and lists other groups working in the west that provide leadership and support to Sierra land trust interests.

And if you don't know much about the tools that land trusts use, those are briefly described along with information about where to get even more information! From The American Farmland Trust to the Sonoran Institute we include sources in the Related Links section. We even include a glossary, from "actuarial tables" to "unified credit trust," to satisfy the very serious reader.

The handbook also includes the maps prepared by GreenInfo for the Trust for Public Land and the Sierra Land Trust Council that include roads, road and population densities, and where the Sierra land trusts operate.

The best message of the handbook is that, as the title says, the Sierra land trusts are gaining ground! A few acres here, a thousand acres there, and it all adds up to serious protection of places that are very important to those who live and love the Sierra.

On another subject, for those of us stuck in the paper age, the act of promoting on-line publishing in a paper newsletter seems to imply a serious disconnect in our minds between paper and electronics. And it is! But there we are, caught between those who want all communications by e-mail and those who want the assurance of paper in hand in this era of transition, so we note that you up-to-date types can download the whole document now, while the committed paper readers can order a paper copy from the Alliance. We will advertise the info and cost in our next newsletter.

And a big thank you to Marc Landgraf, author, producer and publisher for a wonderful document and for our entry into on-line publishing, and to President Bill Center whose enthusiasm made it happen.