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New Program Improving Sierra Waters Health



Sierra waters supply 65% of California's and almost all of Northwestern Nevada's developed water supply – and many perceive these waters as sparkling, pure streams and lakes. But the fact of the matter is that every major watershed of the Sierra is impaired. Many are polluted with sediment, mercury, and e-coli. Others are having a hard time supporting the native fish communities. [Please see our report *Troubled Waters of the Sierra* on our web] That is why the Alliance is so excited about our Watershed program this year. We have launched two wonderful new elements to our program to partner with local watershed groups monitoring and restoring their rivers, streams and lakes.

Training Volunteers to Monitor Water Quality

Thanks to a 319h federal grant, the Alliance is supporting six watershed groups to launch volunteer water quality monitoring programs. Volunteer monitors collect water quality data such

as temperature and oxygen levels, evaluate fish habitat, and make visual observations of stream health.

Training volunteers, as well as coordinators managing the volunteers, is critical for accurate data gathering. The Sierra Nevada Alliance teamed up with the experienced South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) and State Clean Water Team to provide training to all the selected watershed groups. Combining state expertise, regional leadership and local action is a powerful recipe for establishing long term successful monitoring efforts.

Local groups who are hosting trainings and setting up programs are: "Big Chico Creek Watershed Alliance on the Upper Sacramento Watershed "South Fork American River Watershed Group on the American Watershed "Upper Merced River Watershed Council on the Merced Watershed "Alpine Watershed Group on the Upper Carson, Upper Mokelumne and Upper Stanislaus watershed "Wolf Creek Community Alliance on the Yuba Watershed "Millerton Area Watershed Coalition on the San Joaquin Watershed

In addition to training, the Alliance, with SYRCL, purchased approximately \$15,000 in monitoring equipment for the above groups, plus the Friends of the South Fork Kings, Truckee River Watershed Council and Upper Mokelumne Watershed Council.

Restoring Local Streams and Rivers

The Sierra Nevada Alliance has also partnered with six groups to reduce non-point source pollution in Sierra watersheds and to demonstrate their pollution control success to their communities. The Alliance is providing \$84,000 in funding to the following groups to perform the following projects:

"Sierra Watershed Education Partnerships (SWEP) is working to capture storm water runoff on a school site in Tahoe City by filtering water through garden planters.

"American River Watershed Institute is comparing the effects on water quality of different vegetation treatments of burned and unburned forestlands.

"Friends of Deer Creek is reducing erosion of sediment to Squirrel Creek by removing non-native plants and replacing them with native plants. They are also investigating the source of algae growth in the creek.

"Millerton Area Watershed Coalition is using natural vegetation on streambanks to reduce erosion and sedimentation on San Joaquin watershed.

"Big Chico Creek Watershed Alliance is redesigning and regrading an existing gravel road to reduce the erosion of sediment to Big Chico Creek.

"Truckee River Watershed Council is conducting two restoration projects. They are stabilizing a trail on Martis Creek and restoring a meadow on Davies Creek.

Sierra Conservancy Close to Passing



The Sierra Nevada is over 20% of California's land mass, supplies 65% of the state's water, and receives less than 1% of state funding for conservation outside of the Tahoe region. This set of facts is helping compel legislators from all over the state of California to support the establishment of a Sierra Conservancy.

For years there has been an effort by a number of allies and the Alliance to establish a state agency that would provide state funding support for Sierra conservation projects. Many areas of California have these non-regulatory agencies, including the Santa Monica Mountains, San Diego River and even Baldwin Hills (an area in Los Angeles.) Whenever there is a water bond or conservation bond on the ballot it is often state conservancies which are designated to disseminate the bond funding. Without a Sierra Conservancy, California has lacked an effective mechanism to strategically invest in Sierra conservation projects.

Thankfully, The Sierra Fund stepped in this year to be a critical link in the capitol leading a coalition effort to aggressively advocate for a Sierra Conservancy. Assembly Member Laird authored AB 2600. This legislation has now passed the Assembly and is being considered in the state Senate. Governor Schwarzenegger's administration has shown support for the concept of a Sierra Conservancy and is negotiating on the final language of the bill.

The Alliance has worked with the Sierra Fund, Mono Lake Committee, Planning and Conservation League and Sierra Business Council to move legislation this year. The Alliance has mobilized our network of Sierra conservation leaders throughout the region to endorse legislation, attend lobby days and advocate for a Conservancy.

Please write your State Senator, State Assembly Member or Governor Schwarzenegger to urge them to pass AB 2600 this session! The bill will be heard on the Senate and Assembly Floors in August and hopefully be passed to the Governor's desk in September.

For more information on the bill and how to contact your legislator or the Governor, visit

Executive Director's Letter

As we put this newsletter to press, the Alliance staff are madly working on the last details for our Annual Sierra Nevada Alliance Conference. This is my favorite time of year at the Alliance. Our phones ring off the hook and on the line are the most amazing people. New leaders forming new groups (like Save Round Valley Alliance working to stop sprawl in Rovana), scientists who are joining our panels, long-time leaders of the Sierra – it's a cacophony of energy whizzing into our office. These lines of energy connect the Alliance to a myriad of efforts saving the Sierra's special places.

But what's got me even more revved up these days is the Alliance's new strategic plan commitment to adding up this energy for regional progress. [See strategic plan article page 5]. The Alliance is more committed than ever to mobilizing our member groups and allies to be a strong, powerful voice on critical region-wide efforts. Whether it is establishing a Sierra Conservancy, engaging in statewide water policies, or tackling exploding growth in the Sierra – the Alliance will unite efforts for effective change.

While our first ten years of existence built an impressive network throughout the Sierra and supported critical individual efforts to save special places, our next ten years of existence will focus on mobilizing and uniting this network for regionwide success.

Cheers,

Joan Clayburgh, Executive Director

Alliance forms Sierra Environmental Water Caucus



When the Sierra Nevada Alliance released the report "Troubled Waters of the Sierra", scientists were just beginning to speak out about the impacts of climate change to the Sierra. Since our successful release of the report to the media (with over 34 stories appearing in newspapers across

the country) there has been an avalanche of news media covering yet further scientific reports on the Sierra's shrinking snow pack. The Alliance's launch of the Sierra Water and Climate Change campaign could not have come at a better time.

Joan Clayburgh recently attended the first California Climate Change Conference in June. Scientist after scientist repeated the same startling facts. 50% of the snow pack will be gone in the Sierra by 2100. The Northern Sierra will likely not have any snow by the next century. The snow is already melting sooner due to climate change. California and Nevada's existing water supply system, supplying water to the Bay Area, Los Angeles, Central Valley, Reno and Carson Valley and the majority of Californians, will not work adequately under this new paradigm of mother nature. How California and Nevada use water and how we supply water is going to have to change. The question is – will the health of the Sierra's natural resources be protected in the new water plan?

That is why it is so exciting that the Alliance's launch of a Sierra Environmental Water Caucus has been so successful. This last year, the Alliance hosted a series of meetings that have drawn Sierra experts and leaders from throughout the range to form a Sierra Environmental Water Caucus. Whether the northern, eastern, southern or central Sierra – the Caucus has attracted the best and brightest players to come together. 77 leaders have signed on as participants in the Caucus.

The Sierra Environmental Water Caucus' mission is to protect the health and clean water of the Sierra Nevada's rivers, lakes, streams, and ecosystems in California and Nevada.

The purpose of the Sierra Environmental Water Caucus is to provide a forum for:

“taking collective action to protect Sierra Waters in regional, statewide or national forums, and

“sharing information amongst different water protection efforts in the Sierra Nevada. This is a forum for conservation leaders to act regionally.

The first event the Caucus organized was a Sierra Research Assessment Workshop on July 13. This workshop discovered what current research is related to Sierra waters and resources and which research institutions could fill needed gaps to inform smart policy. Sam Traina, Director of the new Sierra Nevada Research Institute of UC Merced; John Tracy, Director of the Desert Research Institute; and many more leading academic researchers addressed the Caucus.

It bodes well that in the first six months the Caucus united, identified information needed to inform better policies and determined where best to engage to protect Sierra waters. The Alliance will continue to facilitate and convene this new powerful entity as part of our efforts to protect Sierra Waters.

Alliance Welcomes New Watersheds Program Coordinator



Megan Suarez joined the Alliance staff in January of 2004 as the Sierra Watersheds Program Coordinator. Megan will oversee the watershed program, which protects and restores Sierra Watersheds by promoting and supporting watershed groups.

The Sierra Regional Watershed Program provides networking, distributes information, offers financial support, hosts trainings, consults with watershed groups, educates communities and advocates for the region.

Megan Suarez has a master's of Social Science in Environment and Community from Humboldt State University. She has a strong background in watershed issues. Her graduate work created a curriculum for a watershed based environmental education program for Humboldt County. She participated in a watershed assessment of the Upper Truckee, has taught watershed issues, and is familiar with various Tahoe restoration projects. Prior to joining the Alliance she was a Naturalist and Information Specialist for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit at Taylor Creek.

How Shall the Sierra Grow?

California's population is doubling and the Sierra is the third fastest growing region of the state. Population growth is especially severe in the foothill areas. Open space in the foothills is largely privately owned and provides easy access for development. This population explosion and sprawl could destroy wildlife habitat, block wildlife corridors, impair watershed health and ruin the rural quality of life Sierrans love.

The bulk of Sierra growth is taking place in the unincorporated areas where county governments have the primary responsibility for regulating land use and guiding human settlement patterns. As a result, the county general plan has taken on added significance, not only as the primary planning tool for individual counties, but also as arbiter of the collective growth of the region. The next few years present an opportunity to influence planning.

It is vital that local Sierra conservation representatives be actively involved in these efforts, informed to shape these plans, and have the most cutting-edge tools and resources to engage and ensure smart plans.

The Sierra Nevada Alliance recently received a grant from the Resources Legacy Fund Foundation to identify, support and recruit conservation working groups to shape Sierra counties' general plans. The Alliance will work with leading smart growth experts to train and support general plan conservation leaders, and raise further funds to support these local efforts.

If you are interested in partnering with the Sierra Nevada Alliance to shape growth in counties of the Sierra, contact Sierra Nevada Alliance Executive Director, Joan Clayburgh.

Sierra Nevada Alliance Has New Strategic Plan

The Sierra Nevada Alliance Board of Directors was joined by Advisory Board Members and staff this late spring to develop the organizations strategic plan from now through 2010.

As Lynn Sadler, Director of the Mountain Lion Foundation and Alliance Board member said about our ultimate goal, " We want the headline for the Sierra to go from being "Sierra in Peril" to "Sierra a Model for Regional Success."

To achieve this vision, the Alliance in the next years is determined to achieve the following four goals.

The first goal is to be an authority on environmental threats facing the Sierra. One project will be issuing semi-annually a report on the major threats, current status, and progress for major

resources of the Sierra such as water, air quality, and wildlife habitat.

The second goal is to be a leader making significant on-the-ground improvements on 3-7 major issues regarding the protection and restoration of the Sierra Nevada. The first issues the Alliance will tackle are Climate Change and Sierra Water, Watershed Restoration, County General Plans, and Air Quality.

The third goal is to double public conservation funding to the Sierra. The Alliance will work with partners to increase state, federal and private foundation funding for Sierra conservation.

The fourth goal is to grow to have at least 100 Sierra conservation groups in the Alliance and to provide useful services and information so we are important allies to our network. The Alliance will forever remain committed to strengthening the work of our member groups.

We are confident that this strategic framework will ensure we effectively move towards the mission of protecting and restoring the Sierra Nevada for future generations while promoting sustainable communities.

Thanks goes to the Resources Legacy Fund Foundation for their support of the Strategic Plan and Will Murray of Conservation Impact for guiding us through the process!

Parties for the Sierra!



All over the Sierra this last year, Sierra Nevada Alliance members have been cooking up fun times and raising funds to support the Alliance.

In Tahoe, Heidi and John Drum held a Sierra Wine Tasting to support the Alliance. Terry and Carol Manning battled against all power point gremlins and showed a Sierra Nevada Alliance slide show in Springville. Joan and Barry Boothe opened up their amazing wine cellar and held a rave shin dig in San Francisco. John and Patty Brissenden crowded their friends into one of their charming Sorensen's Resort chalets in Hope Valley to quiz folks on Sierra facts. Ray Griffiths with Bill and Robin Center hiked their friends through the wildflowers of the South Fork American River Canyon. Food, fun and Sierra factoids were shared by all. Hearty thanks goes out to all these generous hosts for introducing their friends to the Alliance and supporting our

efforts!

If you would like to "Party for the Sierra", contact our office for our easy to follow step by step guide for organizing a House Party. The Alliance staff are happy to provide back up support on invitations, entertainment and more. So, want to help save the Sierra? Throw a party!

"Love Your Rivers, Lakes and Streams" Presentations



Did you know that when asked, most members of the public think that a watershed is the shack where you store your cases of bottled water? Of the 24 major watersheds of the Sierra, only about 20 watersheds have organized efforts to assess, protect and restore part of the watershed. Not only does every major watershed need stewards – but all parts of these vast watersheds deserve protection.

The Sierra Nevada Alliance is working to get the word out on how individuals can "Love their rivers, lakes and streams" and what watershed protection and restoration efforts are about. The Alliance has prepared brochures, a display and a public presentation to encourage individuals to join existing efforts and start watershed groups where none exist. Alliance presentations and materials include the What, Who and Why of Watershed Management.

The Alliance has a long history of working with local leadership to start up watershed groups and help them plan, obtain funding, and implement projects. If you have a fair, event or meeting where you think a presentation would be helpful, please contact our office.