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Board Briefs

Stan Weidert, who has served as Alliance board President this past year, has traded roles with board Vice-President, Bill Center, following an election in April.

Read Bill's 'President's Letter'.

Thank you Stan, for your leadership!

Bottom-Up Economic Renewal in West Point

The small foothill town of West Point in Calaveras County is in a new mode these days, thanks to the stalwart members of the Mokelumne Alliance who came together at a time when the town and the residents were not seeing much hope for new beginnings. But in a fascinating process of sorting out their values, perceptions and issues, the community began to see their town and surroundings in a new light.

The lumber mill had closed, the downtown was not looking prosperous, West Point is off the beaten path for gold country tourists, and the people were not getting along. In short, the prospect of pulling themselves up by their bootstraps seemed a far-out goal. But, with the guidance of the Rocky Mountain Institute's "Economic Renewal" model (and the Institute's guru on small town economics, Michael Kinsley) key leaders in the West Point community came together to probe their concerns and tackle their future.

The RMI process develops the ability to work in a collaborative manner, develop a new sense of place and community, and develop the tools that lead to a clear understanding of the kind of development that fits in that community and will be successful.

And it all worked! The community leaders worked hard to get to a final recommendation to the community- and those recommendations were surprising to some because the group did not select the usual whiz-bang economic renewal projects that tend to fail in the Sierra, but weighed in with a series of community-building exercises to restore community capacity to work and plan together.

From those recommendations, the morale, interests and energy of the community increased, and suddenly new projects appeared- including a grocery store, a watershed restoration group, a learning center, and an electronic community job network. The local newspaper was revived and the community entered the year 2000 in a new state of mind. One member of the working group, Judy Spadoni, noted that the renewal training "has given the community a certain confidence and optimism that had been missing for too long."

The Sierra Nevada Alliance, working with member group the Foothill Conservancy, helped sponsor the project, through the W. Alton Jones Foundation. Calaveras County contributed a large share of the costs of a community attitude and demographic study that provided the community with new understandings and accurate data about their town. And the members of the Mokelumne Alliance for Community Renewal provided the blood, sweat and tears that it takes to learn and use a collaborative process to get to new beginnings.

To contact the Foothill Conservancy: PO Box 1255, Pine Grove, CA 95665;
www.outdoingit.com/fhc

Markleeville Creek Day
Kelley Moore, AmeriCorps Service Learning Coordinator

Enthusiasm has been the key to starting a citizen-based restoration project on Markleeville Creek in Alpine County, California. Areas of the creek were severely scoured in the 1997 floods and

present day erosion from these areas is contributing to a decline in water quality and fish habitat. The goal of this restoration project is to empower citizens with knowledge of watershed restoration so that they can make educated environmental decisions about a creek restoration and learn how to do restoration projects.

It was important to tailor the project to the community. Through speaking with various members of the community, it was determined that residents the of Markleeville-area wanted to have more town-wide family days.. The next step was to contact a few key leaders in the town and get their advice on how to proceed. By seeking their input, people had more buy-in to the project and were excited to help. For example, the Chamber of Commerce was able to recommend community groups that were interested, as well as places to seek donations.

As soon as people saw that I was genuinely interested in making the project a success, they joined in the effort. The businesses were extremely supportive with donations and advice. Every aspect of this project has been donated, from plants and use of tools, to refreshments, and most importantly, to the labor that the citizens are volunteering to restore their own creek. The Alliance expects that the experience gained in this event will provide a guide to other Sierra towns to get similar watershed restoration projects underway.

News from our Member Groups

Closing the Dam Diversion Tunnel

PARC (Protect American River Canyon) moved a giant step closer to its goal of the Amercian River Confluence Parkway when Attorney General Bill Lockyer put his office's clout behind PARC's efforts to close a tunnel built as part of the Auburn Dam project. The 30 foot high tunnel, blasted through over a thousand feet of solid rock in the 60s, was integral to construction of Auburn Dam, and dewatered the river below its entry point.

The Department of Interior has sent Mr.Lockyer a letter agreeing with him that since the dam had never been built, the tunnel should be closed. And if the tunnel is closed, the Bureau of Reclamation has agreed to implement a river channel restoration project in conjunction with the Placer County Water Agency. PARC has shown us all how to think strategically and act when the time is right. Congratulations to PARC!

Don't Block My Trail

Friends of the Trails got the Third District Court of Appeals to agree with them that 240' of historic old trail along an irrigation ditch in Nevada County had been used by the public long before 1972 and the public had created a public right of way across private property.

It had never occurred to the residents of Nevada County that the trails were anything but public, until a property owner put up two locked gates to keep the hikers, dog walkers and other such unsavory characters off the trails that had been used for more than 100 years.

The result is that the gates must come down, and the Nevada Irrigation District and others are liable for the Friends of the Trails legal expenses, amounting to more than \$60,000. The Friends of the Trails was represented by Allan Haley and John Bilheimer. Bilheimer pointed out that, "This is a beautiful county and these ditch trails are an incredible asset for this community".

To Contact Protect American River Canyons; POBox 9312, Auburn, California 95924;
<http://www.jps.net/parc/>

To Contact Friends of the Trails; PoBox 845, Cedar Ridge, California 95924

Sierra Land Trust Council Formed!
Laurel Ames, Executive Director

Sierra land trusts formed a strong coalition to speak with one voice for Sierra land issues at a two-day meeting in late April in Nevada City. The first day was launched with opening remarks from Ed Hastey, former State Director of the Bureau of Land Management and currently working as a consultant to the Resources Law Group, which manages the Packard Foundation's Conserve California Landscapes Initiative. Ed encouraged the group to organize and noted the recognized need for on-the-ground management of acquired lands. As Dave Sutton said, "no one is going to monitor conservation easements better than local land trusts!"

The group of local, regional and national land trusts worked quickly and surely through the two days to agree to form the Sierra Land Trust Council now!

A steering committee was named on the spot. The group agreed on the importance of developing a conservation strategy for the Sierra that would paint a picture of Sierra land conservation needs and describe the long-term range of approaches to conserving land that is important to communities, landscapes and habitats.

The Sierra Land Trust Council's mission statement is "To support local land conservation efforts in the Sierra Nevada Region."

With new park bond money and Governor Davis' proposed \$75 million additional from the revised state budget, this is a critical time for the Sierra land trusts to flex their muscles to assure that the Sierra gets its fair share of state land acquisition and protection money.

The Alliance will provide management services to the council, the steering committee and the four task forces as this new organization builds its program.

The Tuolumne County Land Trust and its partners have just completed the first phase of a plan to protect several hundred acres of sensitive land near Highway 108-120. The land is part of the

Red Hills, inhabited by an estimated 16 species listed as threatened or special status.

A \$350,000 grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation was crucial to the success of the transaction.

7th Annual Conference

Saturday and Sunday, September 9 & 10.

The Alliance's much anticipated 7th annual conference, *Shaping the Sierra: The Member Groups and the Alliance in a New Era of Conservation*, will be held at Foresthill, California.

The face of conservation is changing in the Sierra. While legislative action and litigation have been the backbone of conservation efforts, local land use decisions and local conservation efforts are becoming increasingly important arenas of conservation work. The efforts of the Alliance's member groups are at the cutting edge of this movement in conservation.

This new arena of natural resource management requires new strategies, skills, and partnerships. In this conference, the successes of member groups will be highlighted, conservation issues that are 'slipping through the cracks' will be identified, and new tools for local conservation efforts will be examined. The conference will explore a question central to the mission of the Alliance: How can we foster local ownership of conservation efforts and simultaneously achieve regional consistency?

So mark your calendars and plan to attend; registration materials will be available soon!

Friends of the River and Dam Removal Opportunities in California

In light of its current effort to remove some dams in California, perhaps it is ironic that Friends of the River (F.O.R.) actually got its start by first losing a battle to stop a dam from being completed.

Founded in 1973, during an ultimately losing struggle to save Calaveras County's Stanislaus River from New Melones Dam, the Sacramento-based group has gone from trying to save one particular river to now working on protection and restoration of rivers, streams and watersheds

around the entire state.

Its latest campaign, however, is definitely unique, because it goes beyond stopping new dams from destroying rivers. Now, Friends of the River wants to see some dams removed and rivers restored, including several within the Sierra Nevada. Although the state's vast system of dams and canals has clearly benefitted people by providing water, power, flood control and recreation, dams have also played a key role in the extinction and decline of many fish and aquatic species. Every salmon and steelhead run in the Central Valley, for example, is either extinct, endangered, or in decline; all of this largely due to habitat destruction and degradation caused by the construction of dams. As a way to tackle the fact that some of these structures have outlived their usefulness and now are simply causing environmental damage, F.O.R. is supporting legislation that would conduct a statewide inventory of potential dam removal projects in the state. Identifying abandoned, obsolete or poorly functioning dams is a key to eventually restoring fish habitat and migration, improving river ecosystems, and enhancing public safety.

This measure in the state legislature - SB 1540 (Sher) - is certainly not about removing all dams or even most dams in California. It is about having an inventory and good information to decide which structures might be removed. The bill follows on the heels of a 20-page publication F.O.R. released last year entitled "Rivers Reborn," which provided a brief history of dam removal in the state. Among the Sierra Nevada waterways identified in "Rivers Reborn" as having potential dam removal opportunities were the Calaveras, Cosumnes, Merced, Mokelumne, Stanislaus, Truckee, and Tuolumne rivers.

To Contact Friends of the River (F.O.R); 915 20th St., Sacramento, CA 95814; ph. 916-442-3155; fax 916-442-3396. Rivers Reborn is available for download at the F.O.R. website at <http://www.friendsoftheriver.org>

Members Make Year-End Appeal a Success

A big Thank-You to all of our members who contributed during our Year-end Appeal!

Julian Adams, Todd Anderson, Oscar Balaguer, John and Suzanne Barr, Daniel Ben-Horn, Phillip Berry & Michele Perrault, Bruce Bevacqua, Linda Blum & Harry Reeves, Peter Brussard, Harriet Burgess, Sally Cancelmo, Colleen Carr, Jim & Jamie Casey, Michael Cohen, William Conlon, Margaret Turano Conradsen, Margy Cottriel, Karen Cox, Gary Danielson, Bryant & Judith Danner, Richard Davis, Tim Duane, Theresa May Duggan, Neil Elliott, Jane Freeman, Marianne Gaddy, Jim Gallas, Urla Garland, Scott Gherini, Wayne Gianotti, Susan Gilliland, Richard & Maria Grant, Judy Guinn, Jeanene Hafen, Priscilla & John Hanford, Steven & Leslie Hartman, Cole Hawkins, Ken & Janet Hayes, Heidi Hopkins, Susan Hopkins, Bob Johnston, Scott Jorgenson, Elyce Judith, Robert Kelly, Eugene Kilgore, Ellen King, Richard & Frieda Klein, Harold Klieforth, Jeanne Lear, Hollis Lenderking, Norman & Virginia Livermore, Jane

Loebel, Edith Lufkin, Jim MacIntyre & Delaine Fragnoli, Herb & Marcia Magnuson, Donald & Patricia Malberg, Robert Meyers, Marilyn Missimer, Kathryn Mitchell, Edda Morrison, Jack Nelson, Mildred Nelson, Henry & Jenny Newburgh, William Newsom, Al Onnen, Carolyn Owen, John Pamperin, James Parsons, William Patterson, Mary Anne Payne, Sarah Pender, Marlee Powell, Carol Ray, John Ricker, Michael Rosenthal, Larry Ruth, Donna Schumacher, Thomas Scruggs, Ruth Sellers, Tom Shellhammer, Thomas & Loretta Shepherd, Benjamin Sher, Patricia Silver, Peter Sinclair, Kenneth Smith, Michael & Judith Spadoni, Peter and Polly St. Geme, William Steele, Dwight & Alberta Steele, Hank Stoutz, Douglas Swager, George Swain, George & Peg Tanner, Andrew Thompson, The Thornton Family, Don Tornberg, Stephen & Judy Walker, Keith White, Leora Benioff, Lance Williams, George & Marilyn Winard.

President's Letter

Hi. My name is Bill Center. I live just upstream from the edge of the Coloma Pluton, a little bubble of granite which causes the South Fork of the American River to slow and the sky to open, where the world changed forever 152 years ago with the discovery of a few small nuggets of gold.

I live in the Sierra Nevada, a gorgeous massive geologic region which contains dozens of political jurisdictions, about twenty major watersheds, about ten major ecological zones and close to one hundred dedicated, focused, knowledgable and very effective environmental groups. Most are members of the Sierra Nevada Alliance. And I have the good fortune to be the new President of the Alliance.

The Alliance is engaged in wonderfully new and exciting work. It is coordinating a coalition of Sierra Conservancies & Land Trusts. It is helping with legislation which could enable truly productive watershed associations to become the rule throughout the Sierra, rather than the exception. It has a growing, dynamic website. It has new staff, board members, and member organizations.

We have huge challenges ahead of us. Growth. FERC relicensings. PG&E divestiture. Fuels management. Water Quality. And there are great opportunities. Hundreds of thousands of people every year are educated in the Sierra and return to their urban homes having been touched by the Sierra magic. We can work to give them an even greater appreciation and awareness of how their lives and ours connect with the habitat which we live in. Even more people visit to ski and boat and hike and contemplate. We can provide them greater opportunities to see and feel the Sierra in ways that will ensure its perpetual availability for sustaining life in all forms.

As an Alliance we can do this work, we can ensure that the political jurisdictions and watersheds and ecological zones and environmental groups are vibrant and functioning and working together

up and down this great granitic batholith that we call home.

The Sierra Nevada deserves no less.

Watershed Report
Laurel Ames, Executive Director

Alliance efforts over the past four years are paying off, with a new piece of legislation moving through the Assembly right now. AB 2117 by Howard Wayne of San Diego establishes the statewide watershed management program that is needed to bring consistency, funds, and technical support to local watershed restoration efforts.

The May 3 version of the bill does the following: 1) Defines a watershed plan as including an assessment, implementation and evaluation and funds them all; 2) Integrates restoration and water quality; 3) Provides a consensus-based advisory committee; 4) Awards grants on science-based criteria and by geographic region; 5) Funds plans and projects in sub-watersheds; and 6) Encourages stakeholder-based local watershed groups.

The bill still must pass the Assembly floor, and the entire gamut of Senate committees and the Senate floor, and then garner a signature from the Governor, so there is much work yet to be done before California really has an integrated restoration program. But there is hope!

The bill provides for joint management by the Resources Agency and the Cal-EPA, so that the program integrates the functions of diverse Resources Agency agencies and the expertise of the state's water quality program.

The program would be centralized at the state level, giving heartburn to some, although the bill is silent on regional management, leaving the potential for the state agencies to create regional councils to provide oversight at a less grand scale than the entire state. And there is great interest among watershed groups that the program, as it evolves, develops a regional look to it to provide technical support from a geographical perspective, so that mountain areas are compared to each other, rather than to the deserts or the coast, and vice-versa.

While there are still potential pitfalls for this legislation, the chance that California will actually have an official watershed program by the end of the year is looking better than ever.

Find AB2117 (Wayne) on the Internet at <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov>

Member group Friends of Hope Valley reports that the State of California Wildlife Conservation Board has approved a \$250,000 allocation for a cooperative project with the Department of Fish

and Game and Alpine County to install a barrier-free fishing and wildlife viewing access facility at the Hope Valley Wildlife Area.

The plan chosen for the site was closely monitored by the Friends of Hope Valley to assure that there would be no impact or obstruction of the valley's pristine beauty..

Groundbreaking should take place this year.

To contact Friends of Hope Valley; POBox 431, Markleeville, Ca 96120:

<http://www.greatbasin.net/~fohv>

Alliance Welcomes New Staff Members

The Sierra Nevada Alliance welcomes Caelan McGee as its new Program Director. Caelan will develop projects begun by Cristi Bozora, and looks forward to growing some of his own initiatives.

McGee was raised in Reno, Nevada, and returns to the Sierra region after receiving his education in Massachusetts and Colorado. Caelan has earned degrees in Biology and Geography, and will return to complete his Ph.D. in Planning once firmly established at the Alliance.

Among other things, Caelan is managing the Alliance's second major publication, the Open Space Protection Toolkit. Yet another exciting project on the radar for the Alliance involves connecting student interns with member groups for web-page design.

Caelan wants to make a special point of getting to know the member groups. "It will take some time to become properly acquainted with all of you, but I recognize how crucial it is to understand who you are and what you do. I look forward to meeting people who are passionate about how the Alliance can institute change, and to understanding how we can work together."

Another recent addition to the Alliance staff is Communication and Outreach Coordinator, R. Keith Rugg. Keith comes to the Sierra Nevada from Northwestern Montana. He holds a degree in political science from Grinnell College, and is currently working toward his MBA at the University of Nevada, Reno.

Keith is active in the field of wildlife habitat conservation, and has an extensive background in communications. He is producing the Alliance's Sierra News and will also be coordinating the Sierra Nevada Alliance's 7th annual conference, which will take place September 9 and 10 in Foresthill, California.

Member Group Survey Results

The results are in! The survey asked the question, "Which of the following would be of help to you in furthering your efforts at the local level?" The Alliance thanks our member groups for this valuable feedback. Responses for the 1999 survey is expressed as the percentage of respondents that identified each item as a valuable service.

Conference - 75%; Technical Support - 75%; Provide grant information - 75%; Regional Gatherings - 50%; Library of technical info - 45%; Land Use Summit - 40%; Attitude Survey of communities - 40%; Organized brainstorming - 25%; Watershed group grant program - 25%; Distribution of news clips/media - 20%; Technology/Internet training - 20%.

Alliance Distributes 'Sphere of Influence' Maps

Alliance member groups recently received a series of colorful and informative maps outlining the areas and issues in which member organizations work. The maps are a valuable resource for networking between groups and graphically displaying the physical areas in which member groups are making a difference in the Sierra.

One of several GIS maps produced for Sierra Nevada Alliance member groups

The series of maps outlines the regions in which member groups are addressing the issues of: Aquatic Habitat, Mining, Air and Transportation, Forest, Plant, Recreation, Grazing, Land Aquisition, Land Use, Water, and Wildlife.

These maps were produced with the assistance of the GreenInfo Network (a project of the Greenbelt Alliance) and the Packard Foundation.

To contact GreenInfo Network: 201 Mission St. 4th Fl, San Francisco, California 94105. Ph. 415-979-0343; <http://www.greeninfo.org>