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P.E.S.T.E.R. Starts An E-Mail Network - Says its Easy!

Elizabeth Tenney, Coordinator



In the rapidly developing Eastern Sierra we've found a very productive way to participate in the decision-making process. And better by far than battling it out in the weekly Letters to the Editor column. Public participation is, of course, more effective when it happens before decisions are made, but with meeting notices buried in the back of our weekly newspaper—if even there—it's definitely hard for the public to be informed in time.

We found a solution. In 1998, I started the Eastern Sierra Agenda Network (ESAN) and began

e-mailing weekly ESAN alerts to inform locals of upcoming public comment opportunities on issues of concern.

Starting an information network was surprisingly simple. In August 1998, I sent via US mail letters of inquiry to 200 people, some of whom I knew and others whose names I gleaned from a petition opposing unsightly signs in the HWY 395 Scenic Corridor. The letter briefly outlined the quickening pace of development and its potential to destroy the very thing visitors come to enjoy in the Eastern Sierra. The concept of an Eastern Sierra Agenda Network was explained. Nineteen people signed on in response.

I then called all the secretaries and public affairs officers responsible for sending out public notice of meeting agendas and "notice of public comment" in Mono County, the Town of Mammoth Lakes and government agencies with jurisdiction in the Eastern Sierra. I asked them to add P.E.S.T.E.R.'s ESAN to their media notification distribution lists, explaining what I was trying to do.

Initially, agendas were faxed to me. I would mark agenda items that could impact P.E.S.T.E.R.'s mission: "preserving the spectacular natural beauty of the Eastern Sierra and the HWY 395 Scenic Corridor" and type up in chronological order a brief alert of the next week's meetings where issues of concern were to be discussed. That was e-mailed on Friday afternoons. Now agendas are e-mailed to me making the task much simpler with only cutting and pasting involved.

With word of mouth our distribution list grew rapidly. The ESAN Network now includes nearly 400 people. Even government agencies, local officials and management at Mammoth Mountain Ski Area have asked to be included because they find the ESAN alert a reliable and readily accessible source of information.

Increasing the scope of the distribution list has increased dialogue between often adversarial parties, spotlighting ESAN as the east side's "Agenda Central". The central clearinghouse is at

And I added the "From the Inbox" feature in the weekly alerts as an opportunity to distribute meeting feedback and comments on issues. This feature became so popular one Network member started the Eastern Sierra Discussion Forum <http://www.ESForum.net> to expand the dialogue.

Our original mission, "preserving the spectacular natural beauty of the Eastern Sierra" has increased in scope as well. P.E.S.T.E.R. is now tracking 62 separate issues under seven categories: à Development's Impact à Mining in the Eastern Sierra à Planning for Future Generations à Preserving the HWY 395 Scenic Corridor à Preserving Scenic Viewsheds à Quality of Life à Working with Government Agencies

Wonderful offers of help and expertise have come to us through this network. One member recently devised a standard alert format for us using Acrobat.pdf (members can download "Acrobat Reader" free from the Web). This format enables the reader to use hyperlinks to move quickly through the information. It also provides a Table of Contents for the week's issues

organized under our seven categories of concern. The alerts have become even more valuable, as the pace of development increases.

Public participation has increased exponentially, from comment letters to attendance and speaking out on the ongoing threats to the exceptional quality of life that is the essence of the Eastern Sierra. And the letters to the Editors have improved, as well! "Sending you the news you can use in time to make a difference" is our motto. It sure is working in the Eastern Sierra.

For more information: PESTER, PO Box 3511, Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546; email: <http://www.pestor.org>

Celebrate: Eight Years!

Yosemite Institute August 10-12 This year's celebration theme is Conflict and Collaboration: Two Paths to Success.

Our brochure is in the mail with the registration form, camping information, hikes, events, panels and food!

We held the cost this year at \$90 for the entire celebration, but are limited in numbers, so do register early.

President's Letter

Bill Center

My first campaign with Laurel Ames was over twenty years ago in El Dorado County. We faced a destructive sales tax increase that was designed primarily to fund the "improvement" of Highway 50 by four-laning it into Tahoe. In a true and magnificently unusual alliance the environmental community partnered with car dealers and the Taxpayers Association and buried the proposal at the polls.

In that case and many since I have learned that Laurel is a master at creating alliances. Her unrelenting focus and energy over the past eight years has made the Alliance into a recognized Sierra presence. The Alliance's power and effectiveness rises directly from its foundation: a granite-solid base of member organizations. Laurel's real gift to the Alliance is the knitting of activists, community organizations and environmental interest groups of all sizes into a functional organizational Eco-system focused on watershed restoration. The Alliance and the Sierra have greatly benefited from Laurel's unique, empathetic and intimate knowledge of the physical, biological and human landscape of this magnificent mountain range.

It is with regret and more than a little trepidation that we accept Laurel's resignation as Executive Director. But we know it is also a time to celebrate and look ahead. We are delighted that a process is unfolding that can only strengthen the Alliance, a process of transition and building and reaching for even greater accomplishments. Aided by a generous grant from the Packard Foundation we are focussed on increasing our organizational effectiveness and finding

the best possible new Executive Director.

It will be a challenging and exciting six months. But what six months over the last decade hasn't been? And look where we have come!

Laurel, on behalf of the Board, the member organizations, Alliance supporters, and all the people who value the Sierra today, and tomorrow, thank you! And above all thank you for continuing your commitment to the Alliance and to the Sierra.

And enjoy your ski pass!

YOU Nominate New Board Members

Member Groups are urged to nominate new Alliance board members for election at the August 11 annual meeting at 7 pm. Send your favorite candidate name and contact information to the Alliance office asap, Attn: Nominating Committee. Member Groups will also receive a packet of info regarding the three different ways that Member Groups can nominate 60% of the board.

Executive Director's Letter

Laurel W. Ames

Dear Alliance Aficionados,

Eight years, and I've got the eight year itch...travel calls! The Alliance is in such good shape and our programs are so strong, that I think it is the right time for me to transition out, and the board to bring in new energy and expand the Alliance's work in the Sierra.

It's been a most interesting eight years, no doubt about it! From the early start-up days, to the usual (and unusual) power struggles, from poverty to a full staff, from the kitchen table to a real (but small) office, the Alliance has seen, heard, lived and influenced some exciting times in the Sierra, beginning at the height of the militia movement to embarking on the most coherent organizing strategy for Sierra resources – restoring Sierra watersheds.

I've been a leader, survivor, manager and policy wonk, worked long hours, driven to meetings in Sacramento through raging blizzards and horrendous heat waves, prepared budgets, work plans, grant applications and reports, and been on call throughout to board members, member groups, politicians and funders. I've written for the newsletter, put on our conference, held meetings at my house, and traveled the Sierra from the Kern River to Lassen, up and down every state highway and a lot of county roads. I've hiked in many counties, climbed peaks and wandered in wildflowers on the east and west sides, skied quietly in pristine areas, and exulted in the joy of new Sierra vistas.

I've had the privilege of working with many wonderful and supportive Board members and general Alliance believers who care deeply about the Sierra, and especially the member groups, who are the heart and soul of the Alliance. And I want to call out two people who have made a difference in my life at the Alliance. First and most important is Patty Brissenden who is a true

founder of the Sierra Nevada Alliance, with continuous service in the cause of the Alliance from the initial organizing committee of the Sierra Now conference in 1991, to serving as chair of the organizing committee for the Alliance in 1992-93, to serving on the Board from its formation until last summer. Patty has the strength to take on the difficult, to stand for principle, and to keep the bigger picture in mind no matter what the issue. She can be counted on and she works. The Alliance would not be the organization it is today without the work and support of Patty Brissenden.

The second person who has helped to assure that the Alliance is what it is now is Kerri Timmer, who worked on important parts of the basic Alliance, designing and writing much of the first years of our regular newsletter, developing our first fundraising plan, organizing and managing regional meetings of member groups, and writing and producing the Alliance's signature publication, The Watershed Council Toolkit. Kerri set the bar high for us, and the Alliance benefited immensely from her work. It is important to me to publicly thank Patty and Kerri for their support, work and love.

The challenges and rewards of my work with the Alliance make for great stories, some of which you have heard over time, some of which are best forgotten, and all of which make up an interesting tapestry of achievements, struggles, small losses and great successes, and a wonderful set of memories. I particularly appreciate the current Board of Directors and their understanding, the support of officers Stan Weidert and Bill Center, and the knowledge that I'm leaving the Alliance in good hands. As I wind down my work, know that in my heart I will always be with the Sierra Nevada Alliance and its extremely important progressive, positive, forward-looking programs to protect and restore the Sierra and its communities.

I'll keep an eye out for you on Sierra trails, peaks, and meadows....let's celebrate the end of the first era and the beginning of a new era for the Alliance!

Job Notice

The Sierra Los Tulares Land Trust is looking for a full-time Executive Director. You can find a copy of the job description on their Web page at <http://www.slslt.org>. Send a cover letter and resume to "Executive Director Search, Sierra Los Tulares Land Trust, 711 N. Court St., Suite D, Visalia, CA 93291.

ALLIANCE BOARD BRIEFS

The Board has regretfully accepted the resignation of Shawn Garvey, who also left the South Yuba River Citizens League to become CEO of Wolaver's Organic Beer. We will miss Shawn's media savvy and energy and wish him well in his new venture.

Grassroots Groups Go!

Protect American River Canyons (PARC) is a member of the American River Watershed Institute which is offering the Sierra Ecology Adventure Camp for high school and CSUChico credits to study ecological field research methods and environmental restoration in the American River watershed. CalFed helped fund the program. For more information: 215 Del Monte Way, Auburn, CA 95603; 530.885.8878; email: P ALIGN=LEFT> **Eastern Sierra Audubon Society** board member Debby Parker found a very rare yellow-billed cuckoo, which is a California Species of Special Concern. The bird migrates from South America, stops in riverside forests, and for the first time, in Debby's back yard. Debby notes that our watershed restoration work helps these birds. For more information: PO Box 624, Bishop, CA 93514; 760.872.4447; email: P ALIGN=LEFT> **High Sierra Hikers Association** won twice in a month! 1) a judge's decision that the Forest Service was illegally issuing commercial packers permits in the Ansel Adams and John Muir Wilderness areas. The judge found that the FS failed to assess the environmental damage, failed to document the damage, and failed to examine the cumulative environmental impacts of commercial packing operations. HSHA was joined by Wilderness Watch and Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics. 2) a decision from the Forest Service to halt grazing for ten years in the Golden Trout Wilderness, headwaters of the Kern River, a significant source of drinking water for Los Angeles and home of California's state fish. HSHA joined California Trout and NRDC in the appeal. For more information: PO Box 8920, S Lake Tahoe, CA 96158; email: P ALIGN=LEFT> **SYRCL** has a new 12-page newsletter, Sierra Citizens, published quarterly on quality paper in tab size. Billed as "the voice of the wild Sierra", SYRCL is soliciting stories from the member groups of the Alliance. For more information: PO Box 841, Nevada City, CA 95959; 530.265.5961; email: BR>

Welcome New Member Groups

Butte Environmental Council has dedicated the past twenty-five years to protecting the exceptional quality of life in the 1,670 square miles of Butte County. The 800-member organization "made recycling a way of life" in the area, and sold its successful recycling service in the late 80s to work on education and advocacy of timber, mining, watershed and other environmental issues. BEC is recognized as having made a difference in a county that ranges from rice farms to forest. For more information: 116 W 2nd St #3, Chico, CA 95928; 530.891.6424; email:

Friends of Kirkwood Association formed to address the increasing development pressures on the Kirkwood Valley area. The Friends' goal is for the resort to succeed, but with an appropriate amount of development in the valley, preserving the special environment and community that is Kirkwood. The Friends have been gaining strength and support as the residents and visitors to Kirkwood become aware and concerned about the potential for over-development in the narrow alpine valley. The Friends have been successful in night-lighting issues, eliminating plans to build a golf course on the ski slopes, protecting old-growth trees, and have delayed proposed development projects. For more information: PO Box 202 Kirkwood, CA 95646; 707.526.7949; email: reidbe@ pacbell.net

The Mariposa County Resource Conservation District (RCD) started in 1954 with its goal to

preserve the natural beauty and resources of the county. The RCD is committed to its role as steward for conservation by providing leadership and working with all stakeholders to find solutions that conserve the basic natural resources of the county. The RCD provides technical assistance, education, and develops cooperative alliances with other agencies and community organizations. The Mariposa RCD received one of the watershed coordinator grants from the state and is launching a new stakeholder-based watershed group. For more information: PO Box 746 Mariposa, CA 95338; 209.966.3431; email: mcrd@yosemite.net

Sierra's independence is an obstacle to saving it

by Daniel Weintraub, published April 26, 2001 Reprinted with the permission of The Sacramento Bee

The Sierra Nevada is the longest continuous mountain range in the continental United States, covering nearly one-third of California, featuring breathtaking vistas and harboring valuable resources. But it suffers from a terrible inferiority complex.

The Sierra, it seems, is the only one of California's natural treasures that doesn't yet have its own state conservancy – a special agency that collects and distributes money to save land for future generations.

California's coastline has a conservancy looking out for its interests. The Santa Monica Mountains do, too. The San Joaquin River watershed is protected. Even the Los Angeles River, a once-proud stream that now runs through a concrete channel to the sea, has been afforded this special status. But except for Lake Tahoe and its immediate surroundings, the Sierra is on its own.

That shouldn't come as much of a surprise, considering the territory. The 20 Sierra counties, from Kern to Lassen, are filled with rugged individualists who simply want to be left alone. They are represented in Sacramento by conservative Republicans whose goal is to shrink the size of government, not expand it with new environmental agencies.

But a quiet movement is now underway to create a Sierra Nevada conservancy to preserve and protect the region's unique natural heritage, including the foothills that are increasingly shifting from open space to suburban sprawl.

Spurred by the Truckee-based Sierra Business Council, the coalition so far includes the Nature Conservancy, the Trust for Public Land, the Building Industry Association, the Ski Industry Association and the Regional Council of Rural Counties. They and others have been working for a year to find an elusive consensus that could bring more state money to the region without trampling local control or property rights.

One impetus for the move: the voters' approval last year of a \$2.1 billion bond issue for parks and other environmental projects. Sierra taxpayers will help repay that bond debt, whether they voted for it or not. But the region is getting almost none of the money. The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, by comparison, was allocated \$35 million directly by the measure.

In an ideal world, money would be distributed based on need alone, after rigorous scientific studies and dispassionate priority-setting. But politics is an art, not a science. The money goes to those who fight for it. For too long, the Sierra has had no one in its corner.

"The Sierra receive an incredibly low proportion of these kinds of moneys when they become available," said Placer County Supervisor Robert Weygandt. "Over time there will likely be other opportunities. A conservancy would be well positioned to take advantage of them."

Weygandt said a conservancy would start its work by helping Sierra counties better plan their futures, looking at what lands will be developed and which might need to be preserved. Placer County has already done that and just lacks the money to carry it off. Other counties are still in the starting blocks.

But the real power of a conservancy would be in corralling funds to buy land or to pay land owners to give up their right to develop their property. That's also where the controversy is.

Many Sierra landowners fear a new government agency that could condemn their land and force them to sell it at whatever value a court decides is fair. So a Sierra conservancy wouldn't have that power. It would deal only with willing sellers, and would lack any regulatory powers that might be used to turn unwilling sellers into willing ones.

Even when such transactions are among consenting adults, though, local governments in the region don't want a Sierra conservancy to be able to buy land in their counties without their approval. This is proving a more difficult problem to solve.

Conservancy planners have proposed a 21-member board of directors that has 10 locally elected members and 11 appointed by the state. Any transaction opposed by a local government could move forward only with a two-thirds vote of the conservancy board. But the skepticism remains.

Assemblyman Tim Leslie, a Tahoe City Republican who was prepared to carry the bill creating the conservancy, dropped the measure because the idea's supporters refused to give the locals a veto power. In a letter to the conservancy coalition, Leslie said he feared the agency, despite current assurances, would eventually run roughshod over local desires.

"History has shown that it is the nature of government and bureaucracy, if unfenced, to grow in size and active authority," Leslie said. "Without such a check – the conservancy could very well become something many would live to regret creating."

It's hard to believe, with money so scarce, that a Sierra conservancy would force a land purchase on a county that for some reason didn't want the property preserved. But given the arrogance the state sometimes shows, it's also understandable why some people would fear its power. It would be a shame if the Sierra's admirable independent streak kept it from getting the help it deserves to protect one of the most majestic regions in the world.

New Watershed \$ for the Sierra - \$5.2 Million!

Hard work does pay off, to the tune of \$5.2 million. The Alliance's efforts to create watershed restoration funding have produced a substantial amount of dollars for an impressive array of Sierra watershed projects. The list below shows Prop 13 funds (from the state water bond) that have been awarded, and CALFED projects that have reached the preliminary final selection list.

The amounts shown for the CALFED list are the amounts that were applied for - - the final contracted amounts will not be known for some time.

Proposition 13 Watershed Funds to the Sierra

Mono Owens Watershed Management Plan - \$198,000

North Fork American River Sediment Management Plan - \$200,000

West Walker River Watershed Management Plan - \$198,000

Carson River Plan, Assessment and GIS - \$200,000

Cherokee Watershed Water Quality Investigation - \$195,171

Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Education and BMP Implementation - \$616,665

Lahontan Region Adopt-a-Watershed Education - \$287,000 Total \$1,894,836

CALFED Watershed Funds to the Sierra

Millerton Area Watershed Coalition (Sierra Foothill Conservancy)- \$102,154

Last Chance Assessment and Model Protocol (Plumas Dev. Corp)- \$582,000

North/Middle Forks American Watershed Management Plan (Placer RCD) - \$554,500

Calaveras River Watershed Management Plan Implementation (CCWD) - \$300,000

Lassen NF Watershed Stewardship in Antelope Creek (Lassen NF)- \$673,200

Deer Creek Watershed Conservancy Rangeland and Riparian Management Program (Deer Creek Watershed Conservancy)- \$212,000

South Yuba River Comprehensive Management Plan (Cal State Parks)- \$524,671

South Fork and Cosumnes River Basins WQ Assessment (American River Conservancy)- \$96,700

Cherokee Watershed Org Capacity and Citizen Monitoring Project (Cherokee CRMP) - \$93,815

Yuba River Conservancy Planning and Public Outreach Proposal (South Yuba River Citizens League and Yuba-Sutter Land Trust) - \$192,300

Total \$3,331,340

California Wild Heritage Campaign

Its time to permanently protect California's remaining publicly owned wilderness and wild rivers, and Bob Schneider is leading the California Wild Heritage Campaign. We know we are in good hands with Bob who is a man of many hats, best remembered as a long-ago founder of the California Wilderness Coalition and presently chair of the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board.

With more than 130 national, state, regional, and local conservation groups, businesses, faith groups, and youth groups, including the Alliance, this is a campaign that is destined to prevail! If you or your group has not signed on, hurry on down to the website <http://www.californiawild.org> and send Bob a message that you are on board.

For non-motorized recreation info check out:

Natural Trails and Waters Coalition PO Box 7516, Missoula, MT 59801; 406.543.9551;
<http://www.wildlandsepr.org>

Futures Fund

Thanks to the Robert & Lois C. Braddock Charitable Foundation for supporting this round of our mini-grant program!

Application info will be in the mail by June 30.

Alliance Welcomes A Watershed Fellow



Vicky Krikelas will be joining the Alliance's Watershed Support program staff this summer through the Sustainable Communities Leadership Program (SCLP). She is currently a second year masters degree student at the Donald Bren School of Environmental Science and Management at UC Santa Barbara, with a specialization in conservation planning. Prior to attending graduate school, she worked as a staff planner for an environmental consulting firm in

Oakland, and an environmental remediation intern for the National Park Service. As an undergraduate (B.S., Biology) at UCLA, she pursued her interests in restoration and conservation biology by leading volunteer beach clean ups and stream walks as part of a Water Watch/CALPIRG internship. Her diverse work experience includes leading children on nature hikes as an outdoor science school teacher and penning humorous bar reviews for an internet startup company in San Francisco. Currently, Vicky's interests include water resources planning, wetland mitigation, and assessing impacts of human development on natural resources. She recently co-founded an environmental journal at the Bren School.