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The Calendar Column

- **Join us at SNA's 6th Annual Conference, Sat. Aug. 7th and Sun. Aug. 8th, at Echo Lake Berkeley Camp.**
- **UC-Davis is offering a one-day seminar on "California Watersheds: Protecting Water Quality and Aquatic Habitat" on Monday, Mar. 29th, at the Sacramento Hilton. For info or to register, call 800-752-0881.**

WATERSHEDS ARE WHERE IT'S AT

With all the action taking place in Sierra watersheds these days, the Alliance's long-time advocacy of watersheds as the key to protection and restoration in the Sierra is bearing fruit.

The Alliance began promoting watershed work in 1996, starting with that year's annual conference, titled "Strategies for Living in the Watershed." Following the conference, the Alliance collaborated with a somewhat unlikely partner, the Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCRC), on Watershed Restoration Principles and Principles of Watershed Community Involvement, to provide a framework for appropriate action and decision-making in Sierra watersheds.

Sierra Watershed Efforts

SNA member groups, such as the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) and others, are putting these principles to work in watershed efforts throughout the Sierra.

SYRCL is involved in a newly formed stakeholder group, the Yuba Watershed Council, which has received almost \$1.3 million through CalFed and Proposition 204 for watershed planning, implementation and restoration projects in the Yuba and Bear River watersheds. The group's composition reflects the Alliance's recommendations for community-based watershed councils, including representatives from local environmental and neighborhood groups, the local water district, city and county officials, major landowners like PG&E, state and federal land managing agencies, and others.

SYRCL is also working with the California Hydropower Reform Coalition, Planning & Conservation League and CalFed on a multi-stakeholder issues identification process to determine the feasibility of possibly removing or otherwise breaching Engle-bright Dam on the South Yuba to allow chinook salmon and steelhead access to historic spawning and rearing habitat in the upper Yuba watershed.

The studies advocated under this proposal would assess the degree and suitability of upstream habitat, identify water temperature and flow regimes needed to sustain salmon and steelhead in the upper reaches, and research sediment and possible mercury contamination issues related to decommissioning

or retrofitting the dam.

The American River watershed boasts similar levels of activity. A multi-basin study of the American River's North, Middle and South Forks is being launched by an impressive group of stakeholders, including the Forest Service and the Placer County Water Agency, to develop protocols for effective watershed management.

The American River Watershed Group, a CRMP group of agencies and other interested parties, also applied for and received over \$1 million from Prop. 204 for fuels management and other watershed-based projects. To help these growing watershed-based efforts, the Alliance is again working with the RCRC to draft a California Watershed Management Act to secure funding for stakeholder-based watershed restoration in the Sierra. With current budget constraints, the act may be quite modest this year; but it will set the stage for the future.

And the concept of reoperation of hydropower dams, first advanced last year in the water bond, has now spread to the entire West! Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt was so taken with the idea when we presented it to him last Fall, that his agency is talking up re-op as a solution for the West's water problems.

CHANGING THE 1872 MINING LAW

In the last issue of Sierra News, we introduced new member group Mono County Mining Committee (MCMC).

What we didn't mention at the time, however, was that MCMC has done the impossible - the group helped pass a unanimous resolution by the Mono County Supervisors calling for changes to the 1872 Mining Law!

Recognizing that a.) the 1872 Mining Law's original purpose was to encourage hardrock mining

at a time when the nation was interested in promoting settlement of the West; b.) that its continued enforcement is leading to the loss of millions of dollars due to the lack of royalties paid by mine operators and the virtual give-away of federal lands through the patenting process; and c.) that the direct and indirect social costs of mining often exceed any economic benefit gained through mining operations, the Mono County Supervisors and the Mammoth Lakes Town Council voted unanimously to support specific revisions to the outdated law.

Copies of the resolutions with the recommended revisions were forwarded to California Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, then-Governor Pete Wilson, State Senator Tim Leslie, Congressman John Doolittle, Assemblyman Rico Oller, Congressman George Miller, the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

As if recommending changes to the seemingly inviolate 1872 Mining Law weren't enough, what really makes this effort noteworthy is the common agreement and support from both the environmental community and members of the local People for the USA chapter (formerly known as People for the West).

Revisions recommended in the resolution include:

- 1.) assure that mine operators pay reasonable royalties to the federal government, similar to what is paid by those who extract coal, oil and gas from federal lands, to be shared with state and local governments to alleviate the social and environmental costs of mining;
- 2.) prohibit the patenting process whereby mine operators acquire title to federal lands;
- 3.) provide siting discretion to federal land management agencies so that they may prohibit mining in areas where competing values for other land uses outweigh the economic values of hardrock mining;
- 4.) assure that state and local governments are able to implement reasonable environmental rules and regulations on mining projects on federal lands in order to assure minimal environmental damage during mining operations and maximal reclamation of mined areas after mining ceases.

For more info on the Mono County Resolution, contact Nancy Wells, Clerk to the Board, at 760-932-5215.

To find out more about the Mono County Mining Committee, contact Bill McNeill at 760-934-4141.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S LETTER

As I think of Frank Olrich and his contributions to protecting those places we love, I realize just how much he taught us over the years. The Alliance didn't catch on to watersheds until planning began for the 1996 conference; yet, Frank was already heavily involved, as he spearheaded so much of the work of the Auburn-area group Protect American River Canyons (PARC).

Frank showed us how many different ways there are to protect watersheds - from education projects, river clean-ups and festivals to leaning on officials, appealing to new allies and always steadfastly pursuing strong protection measures.

The Alliance awarded three Futures Fund grants to PARC, all aimed at watershed protection, and all quite different. Frank was a very creative and positive man who put his heart into his efforts to protect the American River.

One of the efforts that Frank advised on and supported from the beginning was our work with RCRC to develop a stakeholder-based concept for managing watershed protection. And while it hasn't quite caught on in the American watershed, management in the Yuba watershed has come together around a group composition that reflects those ideas for a truly community-based watershed council.

The Alliance Board and staff give their heartfelt thanks to Frank and promise that our watershed efforts will never cease.

Onward...

SNA Welcomes Heidi Hill Drum

In February the Alliance welcomed new staff member Heidi Hill Drum, our new Director of Program Development! Heidi will be managing all aspects of the Alliance's fundraising efforts, communications and media. She will also work on elements of the Alliance's policy programs.

Heidi graduated from Florida State University in 1991 with a degree in International Relations and began working for the Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) in Massachusetts. During her summers, she ran canvasses for PIRG in both Massachusetts and Missouri, and after two years transferred to CALPIRG in Santa Barbara to take a position as the PIRG's hiring director.

In 1996 Heidi moved to South Lake Tahoe, thinking she'd be here for one season. She taught skiing and snowboarding at Sierra-at-Tahoe until she was tapped to be press secretary for Katie Hirning's Congressional campaign in California's 4th District. When the campaign ended in November 1997, Heidi returned to Sierra-at-Tahoe, this time as manager of human resources. Heidi remained involved in the environmental community by volunteering at the League to Save Lake Tahoe and keeping her eyes open for other opportunities to work with conservation organizations.

The Alliance Board and staff are very happy to have Heidi join us! You can reach her at:

The Foothill Conservancy, partnering with the Alliance, held an exploratory meeting in West Point with local interest groups and Calaveras County Supervisor Paul Stein to look at an economic renewal process for this isolated former mill town.

Participant Judy Spadoni said, "the timing is right. There is enough momentum to go forward."

FRANK OLRICH - OPTIMISM BEYOND BELIEF

- Kerri Timmer, Sierra News editor

Frank Olrich and I recently reminisced about how difficult it has been for environmental activists in the Sierra foothills - and how exciting it is to see movement toward more responsible environmental decision-making in our respective communities.

As we wondered where this new trend might take us, Frank laughingly shared with me his outlook regarding community activism: OPTIMISM BEYOND BELIEF.

Although he admitted to borrowing the phrase from another, it was so "Frank." Optimism beyond belief. I can think of no better way to characterize him and the impact he had on his community.

Frank was killed Sunday, February 14th, while cross-country skiing with his wife, Michael.

From his work with watershed organizations like Protect American River Canyons (PARC) and the American River Watershed Group, to his leadership of community-building efforts like the 20/20 Vision for Greater Auburn and the Placer Legacy open space project - Frank was always giving; always looking for ways to help others; and always working to protect and enhance the places he loved.

When I expressed amazement at his level of community activity, Frank responded by saying it was the Alliance that allowed him, and other activists, to do the work they did. "The Alliance is the one

that laid
the groundwork for all the good things that are happening in our watersheds and our
communities," he
said. "If it weren't for the Alliance's energy, their educational workshops and conferences, the
networking and other support, we [activists] wouldn't have the opportunities we have today."

In an interview shortly before his death, Frank told the Auburn Journal that he returned to
Auburn
because it always held a strong place in his heart. "It's a special place and if we don't take care of
it,
we're going to lose what makes it special," he said. "And we still have a chance." Well, Frank
made
the most of his chance and has done his good work. Thanks to his incredible gifts of positive
thinking
and "optimism beyond belief," we can now carry on in his stead.

As a reminder of how Frank touched our lives, the Alliance has established the Frank Olrich
Annual
Community-Building Award. This award - based on Daniel Kemmis' ideas regarding the need to
nurture civic virtues like trust, honesty, justice, tolerance, cooperation, hope and remembrance -
will
be given out at the SNA conference each year in Frank's memory to groups or individuals
embarking
on the process of building community.

EL DORADO COUNTY GENERAL PLAN VICTORY

The hard-working land use activists in El Dorado County finally have something to cheer about!
Their
efforts to get the County's poorly conceived General Plan invalidated have worked. In a ruling
handed
down on February 5, Sacramento County Superior Court Judge Cecily Bond upheld a challenge
brought by environmental and community organizations, including the League to Save Sierra
Lakes,
neighboring Alpine County, and El Dorado Taxpayers for Quality Growth. Judge Bond ruled
that the
El Dorado General Plan violated two dozen separate elements of the California Environmental
Quality
Act (CEQA). As a result, the County must set aside the general plan until it adequately addresses

the negative impacts on water resources, wildlife habitat, agricultural lands, water pollution, and traffic congestion. (See May 1998 Sierra News story, "El Dorado Activists Send a Wake-Up Call," for more information.)

"The Board of Supervisors repeatedly ignored our warnings that they were breaking the law in adopting this plan," noted Sierra Club member Alice Howard. "We hope that the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors, with two newly elected members, will accept the Court's ruling and reject unsustainable growth that destroys the very rural values that the citizens of El Dorado County cherish."

PACKARD FUNDS FEASIBILITY STUDY

Your Local Attorney and You

Alliance member groups have told us in our annual surveys that they would like access to legal help. We have followed that up with a project to identify local attorneys who are interested in working with grassroots groups. We have recently hired a project assistant and intend to complete the study by December.

Through this study we hope to determine the best way to create a regional network of attorneys in the Sierra who are interested in providing legal support to grassroots conservation organizations. Creating a regional network of local attorneys emphasizes the importance of community-building at every level by connecting local attorneys to local groups.

We recognize that a successful legal strategy is one that is integrated with a political strategy that works and with effective education and outreach. As Bill Center, Alliance Board member and former El Dorado County supervisor said, "There is no silver bullet. The places where you really win are at the ballot box and in the court of public opinion, not through legal action. Lawsuits just buy you time to develop the other two."

A legal support program will simply be another tool conservation organizations can use to protect the Sierra's natural resources.

We'd like you, and all the grassroots activists you know, to participate by completing surveys and joining us at regional meetings to discuss your requirements and ideas for a legal support program. The survey will be in your mailboxes sometime in the next six weeks, and the regional meetings will begin in late spring (depending on the weather!).

We have tentatively scheduled six regional meetings, throughout the Sierra, but will plan for more if needed.

We'll also be meeting with attorneys across the Sierra to gauge their interest in and experience with environmental and land use issues. We hope to develop, as part of a legal support program, a mentoring program for attorneys who want to participate but who aren't experienced in this area. A lot of us who come out of law school want to practice public interest law, but financial constraints make it impossible to do so. If you know an attorney you think should be included in this part of the study, please send us his or her name. We want participation in the study to be as widespread as possible!

One caution - - we do not expect that local attorneys will necessarily provide pro bono services.

This study is undertaken thanks to the generosity of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, which is also funding a similar study in the Central Coast region. If you have questions or comments about this study, call Cristi Bozora in the SNA office.

INTRODUCING NEW BOARD MEMBER STAN WEIDERT

The Alliance has always drawn exceptionally talented and knowledgeable people to its Board of Directors. New Board member Stan Weidert is no exception.

Stan is co-owner and operator of Carl & Stan Weidert Biological, a business that collects plant pollen for use by doctors in identifying patient allergies.

Stan is also a mushroom expert. He and Carl lead mushroom walks in and around their hometown of Shingletown in Shasta County, where Stan also provides weather commentary for the local paper, the Ridge Rider News. Although well-known locally for his pollen business, Stan has had quite a career at the state and national levels as a Sierra Club "bureaucrat."

He first became a Club member in 1969 when his parents gave him a membership following a hike he completed along the John Muir Trail.

A few years later he moved with his family to the property in Shingletown. While building a home on the property, Stan got involved in the Shasta Group, a sub-unit of the Sierra Club's Mother Lode Chapter.

When the Sierra Club leadership discovered his expertise in biology, they asked him to work beyond the local group level. Stan worked his way up to California conservation chair, one of the two top positions in the state organization.

He has since stepped back from the organization because of differences of opinion regarding the Club's "zero-cut" policy on national forests. Stan believes that some selective harvest is needed to return the forest to its pre-1850 condition.

But he continues serving the Sierra through his work with the Alliance and other groups. We are very

lucky to have Stan and others of his caliber.

NEW BOOK!

Tim Duane's new book, *Shaping the Sierra: Nature, Culture & Conflict in the Changing West*, will be out in a couple of months. Watch for it on the Alliance web page.

RIVER NETWORK WATERSHED ASSISTANCE GRANT

Good news for fledgling watershed groups in the Sierra - River Network, of Portland, Oregon, is offering Watershed Assistance Grants for groups working to build community-based partnerships to conserve or restore watersheds.

The program is especially focused on projects that increase a partnership's ability to identify and resolve watershed problems and issues well beyond the life of the grant.

Two types of grants will be awarded: Project Grants (\$4,000 - \$30,000) and Mini-grants (under \$4,000). The deadline for the single round of Project Grants will have passed by the time this article is published. However, the Mini-grant program has two rounds, the second of which has a submission deadline of June 15, 1999, with awards announced in mid- to late-July.

Mini-grants are available for targeted, short-term technical assistance projects, such as holding a strategic planning retreat, providing organizational development consulting, hosting a meeting of diverse watershed interests, enabling under-funded citizen groups to participate in partnership efforts, or hiring a professional facilitator to guide the partnership through issue identification and prioritization.

To get more information on how to apply for a Mini-grant, contact Kathy Luscher at River Network,
PO Box 8787, Portland, OR 97207, phone:

503-241-3506 x16, email: or check River Network's homepage on the Internet: <http://www.rivernetwork.org>.

River Network works to protect America's rivers by building effective partnerships to strengthen community-based conservation of our rivers and watersheds. The Watershed Program provides technical assistance, information and seed funding to help local river conservation groups flourish.

1999 SNA ANNUAL CONFERENCE: NEW DATES -- SAME LOCATION

This year's SNA Annual Conference will be held once again at City of Berkeley's Echo Lake Camp overlooking the Tahoe Basin.

Based on scheduling conflicts, we've moved the conference from a Fri./Sat. in July to a Sat./Sun. in August.

So, write this down right now, before you forget - this year's conference dates are: **SATURDAY AUG. 7th** and **SUNDAY AUG. 8th, 1999**.

We will welcome Tim Duane as our keynote speaker on land use and growth in the Sierra.

Overnight camping will be available Friday, Aug. 6th, and Saturday, Aug. 7th. Meals will include breakfast, lunch and dinner on Saturday and breakfast and lunch on Sunday.

Registration brochures should be in the mail in May.

SIERRA NEVADA FOREST PROTECTION CAMPAIGN

As a member of the Sierra Nevada Forest Protection Campaign's Steering Committee, the Alliance wishes to express its support of the Campaign's three guiding principles regarding the importance of wild places:

Old Growth Forests: Protection of the Sierra's old-growth forests is long overdue. The ALSE (Areas of Late Successional Emphasis) strategy developed by the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) constitutes the most scientifically credible network of old-growth forest protection.

Aquatic Resources: An important component of a healthy aquatic system is an intact riparian area. Immediate action is necessary to avoid irreversible harm to aquatic resources. At a minimum, this will require a strategy that precludes logging and road construction within riparian areas.

Roadless Areas: Roads threaten wildlife and biodiversity by fragmenting and isolating animal populations and contributing to sediment loads in streams, among other impacts. For this reason, immediate protection of remaining roadless areas is necessary.

In addition, the Alliance supports the Forest Protection Campaign's SNEP-based conservation alternative to the US Forest Service's Conservation Framework. After the federal government spent \$7 million on the SNEP project, it only makes sense to give SNEP data the highest priority in setting public land management policy.

To Sign on or find out more about the Sierra Nevada Forest Protection Campaign write to SNFPC, 915 20th Street, Sacramento, CA 95814 or call

916-442-3155. You can also check out the SNFPC website at: <http://www.sierraforests.org>.

AND THE SURVEY SAYS...

In your last Sierra News you received a one-page survey asking three basic questions: 1.) what program areas should the Alliance focus on in the next 3 years; 2.) what services should the Alliance provide to its member groups; and 3.) what is your vision of the Alliance in 20 years.

Although delivery of the newsletter was delayed by the crush of bulk mail over the holiday season - resulting in fewer-than-expected responses by the due date - a phone follow-up helped generate an overall response rate of over 6%. That's about double what surveys of this type usually bring in.

Representation on region-wide issues and watershed restoration were the two big winners in the survey. Almost 60% of respondents listed representation on region-wide issues as the top priority in terms of services provided by SNA to member groups. Regional meetings/workshops (35%), grantwriting assistance (29%), watershed consultation (27.5%), and legal support (25.5%) rounded out the top choices.

Close to 73% of respondents felt that watershed restoration programs should be the top focus for the Alliance over the next three years. Open space preservation and land use protection tied for second (with 62.8% each), followed by wildlife protection (35%) and recreation land protection (21.6%).

The Alliance Board will use these results to develop its action plan for the next three years.

CONGRATS to Sharyn McDonald of Nevada City, winner of the survey's random drawing for free entry into this year's annual conference. Our thanks to everyone who took the time to help us by filling out and returning a survey form!

Our apologies to those of you who received your newsletter and survey form on or after the deadline. Bulk mail during the holiday season was slower than we expected! If you still have your survey and haven't sent it in, please do - we'd love to hear from you!

MEET NEWEST MEMBER GROUP: the Jumping Frog Research Institute

In the closing days of 1998, the Alliance happily accepted a membership application from the Jumping Frog Research Institute (JFRI) in Angels Camp.

JFRI is a new environmental organization focused on the conservation and reintroduction of native amphibian species Sierra-wide. Locally, that means bringing back the celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County (believed by many scientists to be the threatened California red-legged frog).

While still in the process of incorporating as a 501c3 organization, JFRI founder Bob Stack is already knee-deep in work, including a joint effort with People for Healthy Forests (PFHF) to ban the use of hexazinone on Forest Service land and an effort to involve local ranchers and other property owners in the process of developing a recovery plan for the California red-legged frog.

Bob has also received, on behalf of PFHF, a major grant from the W. Alton Jones Foundation to host a community forum with the Forest Service on the agency's herbicide use policy. The forum will be held at Columbia College this spring (call PFHF at 209-536-9389 for more information).

By capturing people's imagination with the fabled frog, Bob intends to introduce "watershed thinking" to county officials and residents in a positive and a non-threatening way.

To find out more about JFRI write to PO Box 921 Angels Camp, CA 95222 or call 510-769-6308.

You can also reach JFRI by email at

LA Dept of Water & Power (DWP) was caught intruding into the Owens Peak Wilderness Area, part of Death Valley National Park, with heavy machinery during recent maintenance activities. BLM-Ridgecrest is working with DWP to repair the damage.
