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### **Board Briefs**

Alliance Board member Linda Blum recently served on a panel with Michael Jackson (QLG), Louis Blumberg (The Wilderness Society) and Jack Ward Thomas (former US Forest Service Director) at the University of Montana School of Law's Public Land & Resources Law Review conference on collaborative processes.

Rick Breeze-Martin, SNA Board member, has completed his work on the Proposition 204 funding committee, which, rather than distributing the full \$14 million just because they could, took the unprecedented step of only awarding \$8+ million to projects that truly met the funding criteria.

### **El Dorado Activists Send A Wake-Up Call**

"Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people," cautions Margaret Mead. Developers in El Dorado County would be wise to take heed.

The Sierra Nevada boasts many committed people working to protect their quality of life. But we want to especially recognize the folks in El Dorado County who have successfully stopped bad development and crafted a way to deal with traffic congestion through citizen action.

Cinnabar

When a developer proposed building 563 homes in an area zoned for only 120, an SNA member

group - Foothill Conservancy - and other project neighbors started taking notice. Then, when it came out that the area was so zoned because of unreliable water, poor soil for septic, and potential fire danger, people became even more concerned.

When the developer decided to cut costs by planning for only one existing loop road in and out of the project - and the County approved the project anyway - that was the last straw.

Neighbors of the Cinnabar project, including Foothill Conservancy, decided it was time to appeal to a higher authority.

We're not talking about a pre-existing, organized bunch of "no-growthers" here; these were just regular folks - from young families to conservative retirees - sticking up for their right to a safe, well-planned neighborhood.

One such neighbor, attorney Randy Barrow, helped present the case. Although the neighbors lost in trial court, the appellate court judge saw the merit of their concerns and reversed the original ruling. The developer will now be required to reconfigure the project to meet stricter standards regarding density, traffic circulation, and other details, leading to a more intelligently planned development for the County.

"It's gratifying for me to see people's faith in the system restored," says Randy Barrow. "These folks saw the County doing things in total disregard for their own rules. And they took a big risk by getting involved in something like this," he says. "But at least now the County will be required to 'do it right'."

#### Carson Creek

Another group of local citizens, El Dorado County Taxpayers for Quality Growth, took on City Hall when they protested the County's approval of a massive 2,400-unit subdivision near Folsom, called Carson Creek. At 710 acres, this was by far the biggest project to be approved in west El Dorado County in this decade.

The group pointed out that several important project elements went against the County General Plan requirements. In addition, the developer's environmental impact report failed to assess the full range of project alternatives and did not adequately address public comments on the project.

Visiting judge John J. Golden agreed with these concerns and found in the group's favor.

#### Traffic Control Initiative

In yet another example of local government insensitivity to constituents' desires, residents of El Dorado County are being forced to take the issue of traffic congestion to the polls. The point of the "Control Traffic Congestion Initiative" is to add language to the County General Plan calling for adequate traffic impact fees to help mitigate traffic problems caused by new development.

"This initiative adds policies that firmly support and clearly implement the General Plan's traffic planning goals and objectives," says El Dorado County Supervisor Sam Bradley. Bradley, one of

the authors of the initiative, represents an area where much of the county's future growth is expected to occur.

"The initiative guarantees that we will have safe and adequate roads as the county develops, and that development does not get ahead of the county's ability to make... or pay for road improvements to accommodate new growth," says proponent Kathi Lishman, a Placerville City Councilwoman.

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### **Evaluating Impacts of Land Use Decisions on Biodiversity in El Dorado County**

Thanks to special funding from the Alliance, SNA member group the Institute for Ecological Health (IEH) will begin a study of biodiversity in the foothills of El Dorado County.

This project is part of a larger effort to design computer and visual models that can help evaluate impacts of land use decisions on biodiversity in Sierra counties.

IEH's project fills a gap left by the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) report by studying important biological areas within remaining large parcels of private land. SNEP focused primarily on public lands.

Based on data from questionnaires developed by IEH's John Hopkins and project partners, including CNPS, UC Davis, CDF and DFG, maps will be made depicting habitat, plant, and wildlife communities on these properties.

A main focus of the project is to look at habitat connectivity, which is so important for wildlife survival.

For more information on this project, contact John Hopkins at 409 Jardin Place, Davis, CA 95616. Phone/fax 530-756-6455. Email:

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### **Executive Director's Letter**

*Laurel Ames*

When a particularly egregious development decision comes down, and land use issues seem the most intractable problem in the Sierra, it is time to check our perceptions and see what's

happening.

The Alliance touched base with member groups and discovered that although sprawl is spanning the foothills, local activists are beginning to throw a monkey wrench into the works. Action-oriented member groups are taking on the tough assignments required to protect their communities and landscapes for the present and for the future.

Success stories are mounting, developers are realizing they have to follow the rules, and some local governments are getting a wake-up call about decision-making and the law. The use of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) to challenge bad planning has spread as more people become fed-up with decisions that allowed new development in arsenic- and asbestos-contaminated areas, or approvals to rezone exclusively agricultural areas to heavy industry, or approved helicopter-spraying of herbicides or expansive use of off-road vehicles in rural residential areas.

The growing power of grassroots groups in the Sierra is demonstrated in these pages, as we learn how various combinations of collaboration, lawsuits, demonstrations, education and lots of hard work can result in successes.

The Alliance is excited about all these efforts and has helped various groups with Futures Fund grants and advice. We are working with a planner and a lawyer to design a comprehensive support program that we hope to have funded by this time next year.

The Alliance salutes our member groups and their hard-won and heartening successes.

Onward!

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### **Kudos to the SNA Webmaster**

Thanks to Mark Russell, our talented Webmaster, SNA's website is chock full of interesting and timely information, including member group info, action alerts, job openings, publications for order or downloading, and links to other useful sites such as homepages for: the California Environmental Resources (CERES) project, SNEP, High Country News, National Park Service, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and more.

Mark, now a partner in Amador WebWorks in Pine Grove, was a software designer and programmer for Silicon Valley high-tech companies for 17 years before he relocated to the Sierra foothills.

Mark and Amador WebWorks can be reached at 209-223-4554 or <http://www.amadorwebworks.com>.

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## Strategies for Governing Ourselves and Our Landscapes

The theme of this year's SNA Annual Conference comes from last year's keynote speaker, Daniel Kemmis, who reminds us of the need to take responsibility at the local level for our communities and their resources.

This message is becoming increasingly important, as we continue hearing rumors of smaller budgets for - or even the merging of or elimination of - federal public land management agencies like the Forest Service, BLM, Bureau of Reclamation, etc.

But if we are to "take back our landscape," so to speak, we will need access to the full range of tools for achieving our land management goals.

To help us with this, we will spend Friday talking with SNA member groups and others who have "nuts and bolts" suggestions for developing local leadership, establishing working agreements with local groups/agencies, setting up effective communication networks, fighting bad land use planning decisions, and more.

Then on Saturday, we'll hear from keynote speaker Charles Wilkinson, a law professor at the University of Colorado and author of *Crossing the Next Meridian: Land, Water, and the Future of the West*, who will help us start framing how to respond to different possible governance scenarios in the Sierra.

Wilkinson is one of the nation's leading scholars and lecturers on issues relating to natural resource law and policy in the American West.

Those of you who were with us for the first conference huddled at the edge of the mud-ringed Horseshoe Lake will surely agree - we've come a long way in four years.

To give ourselves another view of the Sierra - this time from the west side - we're holding the Conference at Echo Lake Berkeley Camp, a mountain retreat in the High Sierra. Berkeley Camp, located just off Highway 50 south of Lake Tahoe, overlooks the lake at about 7,500 feet elevation. It offers a recreational lodge, heated swimming pool, and other outdoor recreation facilities. And it's only one mile from Echo Lakes and trailheads leading into Desolation Wilderness.

Accommodations include tent cabins with beds and hot showers, bathrooms and even a laundry. All main buildings and six of the tent cabins are accessible by wheelchair. Space is strictly limited to 75 people, so please register early! Registration materials will be coming out next month.

Mark your calendars now, and prepare to join friends and fellow activists for two days of

regenerative thinking and doing in the unbeatable surroundings of the Lake Tahoe area.

Dear Friends,

The annual conference is one of the activities we at SNA look forward to the most. The opportunity for camaraderie, sharing our good energy, our hopes, stories of our efforts and successes... it's most important that we track and speak of these together.

On Friday, July 17th - our "nuts and bolts" day - we'll catch up on what's been going on with member groups and offer further insights for reinforcing skills and tools we can use to continue our work as voices for our community-of-place.

As important, lest we become complacent, is to look at what challenges may lie ahead. For those of us in the Sierra, this means considering the possibility that there may be no more Forest Service in the future.

A growing number of us have thought about and been asking ourselves: "Will there be a Forest Service in 3 to 5 years? If so, what will it look like? If not, what are the alternatives? And what role do we, as community-based activists, want to have in influencing an outcome?"

Saturday's conference panels are meant to stimulate our thinking and generate thoughtful discussions about an issue that could be one of the most challenging we will face in the Sierra Nevada and the West in the coming years.

We all look forward to seeing you at Echo Lake in July - and being infused with the energy of another beautiful Sierra setting, and each other.

Cheers!

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### **Update on People for Healthy Forests**

*Linda Conklin, PFHF Chair*

More than 100 demonstrators from around the state converged on the town of Sonora to voice their opposition to the use of herbicides on the Stanislaus National Forest. Speeches by local activists, Native Americans and leaders from throughout the state were featured.

The rally was coordinated by People for Healthy Forests, a non-profit grassroots group of

foothill-area volunteers opposed to the use of chemicals in our national forests.

Over three quarters of a million acres of our national forests in the Sierra Nevada have been treated with herbicides in the last seven years. The USFS is applying or has plans to apply herbicides on more than 100 square miles in the Stanislaus National Forest, home to the Wild & Scenic Merced River, the Clavey River and the Stanislaus River watersheds.

The Forest Service has performed some limited amount of chemical monitoring to test some streams and wells within the affected watersheds. But little or no biological monitoring is being done to evaluate impacts on water quality, fish and wildlife.

Thanks, in part, to a Futures Fund grant from the Alliance, PFHF started the Sierra Watershed Health Assessment Project last year. This is a biological, chemical and toxicological water monitoring program designed to assess the impacts of herbicide use on Sierra watersheds. The resulting data, being gathered in conjunction with the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board and the US Forest Service, will be used to initiate changes in the water quality and vegetation management practices of the Stanislaus and other National Forests in the Sierra.

CONTACT: Linda Conklin, PFHF, PO Box 3252, Sonora, CA 95370; 209-532-2956

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### **Getting Acquainted: Truckee River Habitat Restoration Group**

Usually special events are sponsored by existing organizations. But in this case, a new organization was spawned by a special event!

Say hello to newest SNA member group, the Truckee River Habitat Restoration Group. The Truckee River Habitat Group formed a year and a half ago to continue the work started by the first Truckee River Day.

Unlike many so-called river days, this one involved much more than pulling old tires out of the river channel or picking up trash along the shore. More than 400 people showed up the first year to help with serious revegetation and habitat enhancement projects.

The second year, the Truckee River Day attracted 800 people, all eager to help with additional projects designed to improve habitat and control sedimentation in the river.

As the event's organizers identified the need for more widespread watershed habitat restoration and enhancement, it became clear they needed a more formal structure to qualify for certain funding programs.

The group recently received its 501c3 tax-exempt status from the IRS. Already it has launched into an impressive series of activities, including planning for the next Truckee River Day, as well as working with the Adopt-a-Watershed program in the local schools, integrating Americorps

volunteers into that program, identifying additional projects in the watershed that have yet to be funded, and starting to look at issues such as river health and recreational carrying capacity.

Quite a workload for an all-volunteer organization that's so new it doesn't have a logo yet. And how did the Truckee River Habitat Restoration Group find out about the Alliance? Through the newsletter, of course!

WELCOME!!

To find out more about the Truckee River Habitat Restoration Group and its work in the Truckee River watershed, contact: Kathleen Eagan, president, at 530-587-2730 or Sarah Trebilcock, at 530-587-6421.

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### **Futures Fund Awards for March 1998**

Mariposans for Environmentally Responsible Growth (MERG)

MERG will hire a land use planner to represent the group before the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors regarding the proposed rezoning of 18 exclusive agricultural and other sites to commercial and heavy industrial use. MERG's goal is to influence the Board of Supervisors to reject the proposed rezoning (as it should) under CEQA or, as a last resort, to provide a basis for a legal challenge.

Protect American River Canyons (PARC)

PARC will explore potential legal action, based on recreational safety issues, that would force closure of a diversion tunnel on the North Fork American River and return water to the original channel below Auburn to provide for safe river recreation.

California Wilderness Coalition (CWC)

CWC will send two staff members to training on the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This training will provide the experience to map a system of potential wildlife reserves throughout the state of California.

Range Watch

Range Watch will attend the Annual Desert Conference in eastern Oregon. The conference is the largest annual gathering of range activists and provides an important opportunity to meet others engaged in range protection efforts. The project will help launch Range Watch in a new direction through training opportunities and the chance to recruit support for its new "Range Watch Allies" program.

People for Healthy Forests (PFHF)

PFHF will begin a Stream Ecology Education project. The group will hire an ecologist from the Department of Fish and Game to lead a series of eight watershed field trips to survey, map, and

document amphibian populations and the health of riparian vegetation, as well as to measure herbicide migration into riparian zones.

#### South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL)

The funds will allow the local non-profit organizations participating in the possible creation of a Yuba Watershed Council to get technical assistance for development of a Yuba River Restoration Inventory, detailing disturbances and proposing restoration projects to improve the health of the Yuba watershed.

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### **SNA Hosts 2nd Regional Meeting**

The Alliance held its second regional outreach meeting recently in the historic Gold Rush town of Coloma. Representatives from various land use, habitat protection, commercial outfitter and outreach/education organizations gathered to discuss issues affecting the three forks of the American River.

Presentations by Frank Olrich of Protect American River Canyons, Sue Britting of California Native Plant Society, Maureen Rose of California Hydropower Reform Coalition, and Tom Whitney of the Environmental Council of Sacramento brought the group up-to-speed on issues ranging from hydropower relicensing on the upper stretches, to collaborative dialogue efforts and land use challenges occurring in the middle elevation areas, to flood control and water supply agreements forming in the lower American watershed.

And, of course, it wouldn't have been a meeting about the American River without a healthy discussion of Auburn Dam.

The group also looked at the possibility of creating an American River Watershed Institute to conduct and promote research, education and collaborative problem-solving activities in the watershed.

Individuals agreed to keep in touch with each other in the interim but asked that the Alliance sponsor a follow-up meeting in six months or so to help keep the momentum going.

Our thanks to co-sponsors Protect American River Canyons (PARC) and California Mule Deer Association for their help, and to Alan Ehrgott and the American River Conservancy for providing a scenic and centrally located meeting space for the group.

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## **Watershed Restoration Assessment Criteria**

In response to growing statewide concern for the protection and restoration of California's upper watersheds, the Sierra Nevada Alliance contracted with Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Lab (SNARL) scientist Richard Kattelman to develop a set of criteria to assess certain components of watershed restoration proposals being submitted for funding under Proposition 204.

Proposition 204, passed by California voters in 1996, provides \$15 million for upstream watershed restoration work on tributary rivers to the Delta.

In order to receive funding under this program, projects must accomplish one or more specified goals, including: reducing contaminants, improving fisheries, increasing water yield and retention (including reducing forest understory, restoring upland meadows, etc.) and improving overall forest health (including reducing fire fuels build up).

The Alliance asked Dr. Kattelman to develop review criteria for the last two goals- increasing water yield and improving forest health - because these are more difficult to quantify than the others.

Dr. Kattelman came up with a series of criteria or questions to be used in judging the relative merit of proposed restoration projects.

Questions cover general concerns, such as whether the proposal has a clear statement of the problem and objectives, whether assumptions and justifying statements have scientific basis and support, whether the proposed restoration actions are physically/biologically feasible, and whether they are logistically feasible given the stated project budget.

In terms of forest health-related proposals, reviewers are asked to look at how the project proponents define "forest health," what indicators are used to evaluate forest health, whether treated areas will be able to retain the capacity to support native plants, what laws and regulatory procedures may affect the proposed treatment, what - if any - monitoring protocols are suggested, and how the relative success of the project will be measured and analyzed.

So-called water yield augmentation projects are subjected to similar questions, plus more specific criteria, including whether additional streamflow can be increased without harming other resources, what background data were used, whether the proposal differentiates between wet-year and dry-year yields, what changes in sedimentation may occur as a result of increased flow, what kind of monitoring and assessment methodology will be used, whether any of the augmented water yield would be diverted out of the stream, etc.

These criteria were sent out to state agency officials, peer-reviewers, and members of the environmental community for review and comment. They were used by the Delta Tributary Watershed Advisory Committee to help determine which Proposition 204 proposals to fund.

All reviewers agreed that the criteria will help define the issues of water yield and forest health in watershed restoration projects for the future.