

October 2000

Inside This Issue...

- [Alliance Welcomes New Watershed Coordinator](#)
 - [Clearcutting and Water Quality](#)
 - [Executive Director's Letter](#)
 - [Local Watershed Groups Deep-Sixed](#)
 - [Member Groups Change the East Side of the Sierra](#)
 - [State Agency Looks at a State Conservancy for the Sierra](#)
 - [Members of the Sierra Working Group](#)
 - [Taxes/Bonds to Raise \\$ for Open Space](#)
 - [Envisioning a Protected and Connected Sierra Nevada Bioregion](#)
 - [New Member Groups](#)
 - [RCDs Get Budget Boost for Watershed Work](#)
-

Alliance Welcomes New Watershed Coordinator



Phil Chang comes to the Alliance through the Sustainable Communities Leadership Program (SCLP), a project of the Irvine and Packard Foundations. When his SCLP fellowship concludes in November, he will sign on as a full time staff member of the Alliance.

Phil grew up in New York State and received his bachelor's degree in Cultural Anthropology from Columbia University. He has worked as an environmental educator, ecological restoration technician, and program manager for an outdoor service and education organization. Phil is completing his Masters Degree in Environmental Science, Policy and Management at UC Berkeley.

Currently he is working with three new watershed initiatives in the Sierra, the Cherokee Watershed Group in Butte County, the Upper Mokelumne Watershed Council, and an emerging effort to address bank erosion and stream health in the town of Markleeville. Phil is excited to offer organizational, technical and grant-writing assistance to these and other new groups and encourages Alliance members to steer people who are trying to start local watershed groups his way.

Clearcutting and Water Quality

Phil Chang



The management of forests has profound consequences for the quality, quantity and timing of water flows in streams below. The vast forest lands which dominate the Sierra landscape are also the watersheds which feed Sierra streams. If these forests are in good condition they will yield high quality water, retain plenty of water in Sierra watersheds well into the summer or fall, and moderate floods during storms and spring runoff. Poor forest management lowers water quality and increases the severity of winter and spring floods, leaving less water in the mountains in the hot, dry months. Forest management activities can also incrementally increase or decrease the overall annual water yield of Sierra watersheds.

The rivers of the Sierra Nevada supply most of the water used by California's cities, agriculture, industry and hydroelectric facilities and the annual value of Sierra water to the state economy is \$2 billion. Thus the management of Sierra forests directly impacts most Californians. Millions of city dwellers in coastal and Central Valley urban centers depend on Sierra watersheds for clean drinking water. The quality of Sierra runoff is generally considered excellent, but water quality can be quickly and dramatically impacted by forest operations. Sierra Pacific Industries' announcement that it will clearcut 70% of its 1.5 million acre holdings over the next 50-100 years has many people wondering whether California's drinking water is safe.

Will further clearcuts and timber plantations adversely affect water quality? It depends. Though experimental research on the hydrologic impacts of timber operations is thin, we know that the potential for clearcutting and tree plantations to impact water quality is large. The impact that a particular harvest and reforestation operation has on water quality will depend on:

- The placement and extent of roads built and used to access the site
- The distance of harvests and plantations from the stream
- The slope of the site
- The degree and extent of soil disturbance and compaction caused by heavy machinery and by moving logs and slash materials
- The amount of slash and standing shrubs and trees left behind to protect the site
- The time until vegetation reoccupies the cutover land
- The density and overall extent of disturbances within a given watershed (cumulative effects)
- The use of herbicides and other chemicals in reforestation practices

Watch for Timber Harvest Plans (THPs) that propose clearcutting in a forest near you. THPs must be prepared for any proposed harvest on private forest land in California. Part of the review

process for THPs is a public comment period in which citizens can raise concerns about the impacts a specific harvest project might cause.

Clearcutting is a logging practice in which a large percentage of cover is removed and then a new stand of trees, all of the same age and size, regrows on the site. In California the typical plan for a clearcut site is as follows:

-all vegetation in the clearcut area is removed -the area is bulldozed and or burned during site preparation -herbicides, often mixed with thousands of gallons of diesel fuel, are sprayed to kill off naturally occurring brush and trees -one or two species of conifer seedling are planted -the resulting overcrowded young stand is "precommercially thinned" (many small trees are removed and either left on the forest floor or turned into wood chips and burned) 15-30 years following the initial logging -the area is clearcut again, generally between 35-60 years of age, and the process begins again.

To get on a list to receive notices of intent for all timber harvest plans in your area, call your local Department of Forestry (CDF & FP) office.

Executive Director's Letter

The 7th Annual Conference reached a new level for the Alliance, with an intellectual challenge to connect the concepts of water, forests and open space. And we did it! Great panels and panelists brought the pieces together so that we could see the links. From stream restoration to land acquisition, the pieces of the puzzle that is the Sierra slid together. And sitting out on the deck in the afternoon and listening to the member group representatives present their wonderful array of the stories of their successes reminded us that we are clearly forging ahead at protecting and changing the Sierra.

The Alliance moves into our eighth year with great confidence for the future for the Range of Light.

Onward...

Local Watershed Groups Deep-Sixed

AB 2117 defeated by bureaucrats

In the end, the administration killed local watershed work groups in favor of an agency-dominated set of pilot projects. After a lot of hard work by watershed activists to promote legislation that set up a statewide watershed program and encouraged local watershed groups to start working on their own watersheds, the administration demanded that the bill be dumped in favor of three pilot projects. The fact that the bill had successfully won committee after committee in the legislature had no weight against the power of the administrative veto. At the last moment, with only five days before adjournment, the bill that we knew and had worked on for so long, was stripped and replaced by the pilot project language.

The bill, which encouraged the creation of citizen-based watershed groups had been supported by an astoundingly wide coalition of interest groups, ranging from the giant Metropolitan Water District of Los Angeles to the Regional Council of Rural Counties, from the start-up Cherokee Watershed Group in Butte County, to the well-established Mono Lake Committee. The Resources Agency has not yet explained its last-minute opposition, after working on the bill throughout the months-long legislative session.

Alliance Executive Director Laurel Ames noted that this action flies in the face of the successful experiences across the country of citizen-based watershed groups and that it is a sad day when "bureaucracy defeats democracy." The Alliance will continue to work to bring democracy to watersheds she said, quoting Bruce Babbitt, the Secretary of the Interior, who stated that "The watershed movement is one of the most refreshing, encouraging trends on the entire American landscape."

Ames feels confident that the State of California cannot lag behind the rest of the country for too many more years. "The legislature was very supportive of watershed groups, recognizing the strength, commitment and longevity that comes from locally-based environmental restoration - - we can tap into that understanding again and convince the administration that democracy is best for our local watersheds!"

In the meantime, the water bond that the voters approved last March, provides assessment and planning money to watershed groups and encourages collaborative processes. While the Administration appears to heavily favor agency-based groups, this available restoration money is open to any collaborative group.

Member Groups Change the East Side of the Sierra

Friends of Hope Valley Meiss Country Deserves Wilderness Protection

The glorious meadows and snow-covered peaks of the high Meiss country were named as a roadless area in the 1970s, according to Debbi Waldear, Chair of the Friends of Hope Valley. Now Friends is working to increase the protection for the area through a wilderness designation.

Friends have been successful in protecting more than 25,000 acres in Alpine County over the past 14 years. The prize, of course, is Hope Valley, with its adjoining Faith and Charity Valleys. Once slated to be drowned by a Bureau of Reclamation dam, surrounded by condos, and topped with a ski resort, the beautiful Hope Valley is one of the most accessible high meadows in the Sierra, with two state highways skirting its edges.

Meiss Meadows, on the other hand, is a medium hike from Highway 88 off Carson Pass. In the summer it has one of the better wildflower displays and in the winter is a playground for cross-county skiers. The Pacific Crest Trail traverses the area. Waldear notes that although Meiss has roadless protection, that did not prevent the Forest Service from favoring a new high voltage electric transmission line across the area in the late 1980s. "Permanent protection of this spectacular area can only be guaranteed by a wilderness designation," said Waldear.

Friends, an all-volunteer organization is working with the League to Save Lake Tahoe to promote action on the Meiss area, which is also the headwaters of the Upper Truckee River, Tahoe's largest inflow. Four other Alpine County wilderness area designations are also sought by Friends. Contact: 530-694-1701; POBox 431,Markleeville,CA 96120

P.E.S.T.E.R. Seedling Awards

The Sierra's first and only "agenda network", created by PESTER (Preserving the Eastern Sierra Tradition of Environmental Responsibility) serves more than 400 interested citizens in Mono County, providing not only agendas, but a lot of on-target commentary. It's hard to imagine a more effective way to build a well-informed constituency for good environmental protection and good planning.

Elizabeth Tenney not only created and manages the network, turning out citizens to the numerous public meetings of local, state and federal governments, in her spare time she dreams up visible and productive awards, researches the sites, and writes press releases. The first annual Seedling Awards are in recognition of building designs that blend with and enhance their natural surroundings. Why seedlings? Because "great things grow from good ideas!" according to Elizabeth.

Advisory Board stalwart Phyllis Benham describes PESTER as "the glue that keeps this community together and the grease that keeps it moving."

Think of the power if agenda network pesters spread to every community in the Sierra! Contact: 760-924-8475; POBox 2428, Mammoth Lakes,CA 93546; e-mail:

Walker Lake Working Group Walker Lake Sues for Water

"We've been at this eight years and there is a ways to go," said Lou Thompson, Chairman of the Walker Lake Working Group, formed to save the desert lake in Nevada from dessication. The WLWG has filed suit in conjunction with the county to force the state to provide water to the lake. The state Supreme Court has issued an order to the state's water engineer to respond to the lawsuit.

In some ways similar to its cousin, Mono Lake, the water from the Sierra is allocated all along the Walker River and none is allocated to the lake. Consequently the lake has dropped 130 feet since 1990. And again, as it was for Mono Lake, the county and the WLWG are raising the Public Trust Doctrine, asserting that the state has the obligation to enforce the Public Trust in the existence and health of the lake.

Extinction and economic issues joined together to defend the lake. When the fishery was in danger of extinction, Mineral County, Nevada was threatened with the loss of 40% of its revenue from the tourist attraction of the unusual lake, unusual fish, and unusual birds. The Commissioners approved a successful initiative to provide funds for the lawsuit.

The Walker Lake Working Group will present an update on the lawsuit at its Walker Lake

Symposium in early October. And note that the Annual Walker Lake Loon Festival will be held next April. Contact: 775-945-8243; POBox 867, Hawthorne, NV 89415; e-mail: shirlou@famtree. Hawthorne.nv.us

State Agency Looks at a State Conservancy for the Sierra

The Resources Agency is taking a look at creating a state conservancy for the Sierra. There are 6 state conservancies in California, from the Coachella Valley to the Coastal Conservancy, and including the Tahoe Conservancy. State Conservancies have the advantage of access to large pots of money, attorneys, environmental specialists and high-powered advice from the Department of Finance. What they don't have is access to local decision-makers. Some Sierra counties, such as Alpine, concerned about the current amount of public land in their boundaries have adopted policies that prevent them from converting any more property to public ownership. But Placer County, concerned about the loss of open space, is currently promoting a new sales tax to make funds available for purchasing land. At our September conference, Placer County Supervisor Rex Bloomfield indicated that, if the Placer tax is approved, it will be spent in the valley portion of the County rather than in the Sierra in the first years. While some are concerned that a Sierra Conservancy would spend its money in the Sacramento or San Joaquin Valley portion of foothill counties, others are convinced that the Sierra Conservancy would only spend funds in the Sierra. One has only to learn that, in the recent successful Park Bond, the legislature determined that a portion of western Amador County, by Highway 99, was in the Sierra to understand that a Sierra Conservancy may not be only for the Sierra. In order to reveal the Resources Agency's plans and to find who will be the constituency for a new state conservancy, Mary Nichols, Secretary of Resources, is managing a work group that meets once a month to talk about her plan. While the workgroup meetings are short, it is expected that the group will endorse the Secretary's proposal and send it to the governor for his support before it heads to the legislature. The Alliance has asked that a local non-governmental presence be assured in the governance structure of the Conservancy, and noted that the Sierra is unique in that a very large array of Sierra environmental groups are networked together. Both the council of 16 local land trusts and the alliance of 70 environmental groups should have seats at the table of the new state conservancy.

Members of the Sierra Working Group

Laurel Ames, Sierra Nevada Alliance Linda Arcularius, Inyo County Supervisor Lucy Blake, Sierra Business Council David Breninger, Placer County Water Agency Corey Brown, Trust for Public Land Jim Gaither, The Nature Conservancy John Gamper, California Farm Bureau Greg Greenwood, FRAP – CDF&FP Dennis Machida, California Tahoe Conservancy Dan Macon, California Rangeland Trust Einar Maisch, Placer County Water Agency Michael Mantell, California Environmental Trust Elizabeth Martin, Nevada County Supervisor Robert Meacher, Plumas County Supervisor Cliff Moriyama, California Building Industry Association Mary Nichols, Secretary, Resources Agency Chuck Peck, Sierra Land Trust Council Dennis Pendleton, Watershed Management Council Bob Roberts, California Ski Association John Schrammel, State Association of RCDs Ron Slavin, Laborers International Dave Sutton, Trust for Public Land Todd Swickard, California Cattlemens Association Dan Tomascheski, Sierra Pacific Industries John Torrens, Manager, Government Relations, PG&E Robert Weygandt, Placer County

Taxes/Bonds to Raise \$ for Open Space

Three Sierra counties are going to the voters this November for money to purchase open space. If the three measures are all passed, there will be \$23.9 million new money largely for land protection adjacent to and in the Sierra! A one-quarter cent sales tax is proposed in Placer County, California and Douglas County, Nevada. Voters in Washoe County, Nevada will be asked to approve a \$38 million bond that includes \$13.9 million for open space and trails. Each of the measures specifically limits land purchases to those from willing sellers.

In Douglas County, at the base of the steep eastern Sierra, the commissioners debated retiring development rights vs. outright acquisition. Said a supporter, "Retiring the rights clearly represents the path of less government." The county (home of Minden and Gardnerville) was encouraged by a strong band of community activists to develop an open space plan and to put the tax on the ballot. In California's Placer County, the quarter-cent sales tax will generate \$8.5 million and be spent primarily in the valley portion of the county in the first years. However, experts note that eventually all the available property in the valley portion of Placer will have been purchased and, if the tax money is not diverted to other purposes, funds would then become available for Sierra properties. The tax is supported by a unanimous vote of the County Supervisors and a broad array of county leaders, farmers, citizens and activists.

The Washoe County proponents put together a comprehensive package covering libraries, parks, trails, recreational areas, and open space and the County Commissioners unanimously put it on the ballot. The bond measure has the support of the Reno and Sparks City Councils, the Chambers of Commerce and the Citizens Advisory Boards. Polling shows a 60% advantage for the measure.

Envisioning a Protected and Connected Sierra Nevada Bioregion

Chris Erichsen, CWC

A plan to rewild the Sierra Nevada bioregion has been drafted by the California Wilderness Coalition and is presently being reviewed by a team of experts. This first proposal for the Sierra identifies a network of core areas and habitat linkages for six native species: California spotted owl, wolverine, mule deer, Pacific fisher, marten, and gray wolf. Threatened oak habitats of the Sierra's west-slope were also mapped, and are part of the Wildlands network. The planning area for this project is the greater Sierra Nevada bioregion, which includes the Modoc Plateau, Cascade Ranges, and the Sierra Nevada to the Tehachapi mountains.

Wildlands planning is unique from other conservation planning in that it addresses what conservation biologists, from Aldo Leopold to Reed Noss and Michael Soule, refer to as the ecological wounds of the land. Ecological wounds are human-imposed injuries to the land such

as removal of habitat, fragmentation of habitat, and loss of species (directly through trapping, or indirectly by way of removal or fragmentation of habitat.) A Wildlands vision proposes a remedy to these ecological wounds in a conservation strategy termed rewilding.

Rewilding is a set of principles used to heal these wounds over the course of 50 to 100 years. An example from the Sierra plan is the proposal for restoring top predators to the Sierra by protecting large blocks of habitat and linking them together.

Promoting the Sierra Vision

The California Wilderness Coalition will continue to refine the science of the Sierra Wildlands vision and share our work with interested groups and agencies. We owe a great deal of gratitude to numerous individuals and organizations who have contributed untold hours of counsel and information to the Sierra planning process.

For more information on REWILDING or The Wildlands Project, visit <http://www.twp.org>

For more information on the Sierra Nevada Wildlands Project, contact Chris Erichsen, California Wildlands Project coordinator at 530-758-0308; or e-mail chris@calwild.org

New Member Groups

Seventy Member Groups and Counting! The diversity of these groups reflects the diversity of the Alliance. We welcome their inclusion in our broad and influential family.

American River Conservancy, protects wildlife habitat through acquisition, stewardship and education programs. ARC conducts stream monitoring, fisheries research, and watershed restoration planning for the South Fork American and the Cosumnes rivers. Their Nature Center within the Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park provides education programs to school groups and adults.

Cherokee Watershed Group is concerned about water quality, flooding, groundwater basin integrity, residential sprawl, new mines, and sedimentation associated with historic hydraulic mining. The group is organizing public watershed meetings and tours to educate and foster a collaborative process.

Maidu Group, Sierra Club works in El Dorado and Amador counties on every foothill issue from land use to watersheds, from open space and habitat protection to monitoring and enforcement of mining regulations, from hydro divestiture to timber activities and regulations.

Pine Grove Civic Improvement Club's goal is to maintain and improve the quality of life in Pine Grove. They maintain the historic Town Hall, provide for a branch library, produce a Business Community Dinner, have established a beautification committee for Hwy 88, and work with the PGCSO to improve the local park.

Sierra Los Tulares Land Trust is a merger of the Four Creeks, Kaweah, and Tule Oaks Land

Trusts. Their mission is to protect the natural, scenic, agricultural and historic lands of the Southern Sierra and Tulare Valley through stewardship, restoration and education. They operate in Kings, Tulare and Kern counties.

Friends of Placer County Communities seeks to help ensure the long-term health, safety, and welfare of the county's citizens through maintaining sensible balance in Placer County's land-use policies in residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, recreational, historical, wildlife and wilderness areas.

Yuba Nation's primary goal is to expose the increased intensity of logging on private lands in the Sierra Nevada.

RCDs Get Budget Boost for Watershed Work

Watershed Coordinators are funded in the California State Budget for fiscal year 2001 at \$2.1 million to support watershed initiatives across the state. These funds will be awarded through a competitive application process to Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) exclusively. RCDs are local government districts intended to promote conservation on private landholdings and coordination among private and public landowners. As this budget decision by Governor Davis indicates, RCDs are viewed as the vehicle of choice for watershed work by this Administration. Yet the vast majority of Californians are unfamiliar with RCDs. This article describes how RCDs work and also explains some of the current shortcomings. Resource Conservation Districts provide for locally led conservation supported by employees and funds from the federal government. While local landowners establish and direct the Districts, the work of the Districts is carried out primarily by the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Under the direction of District Boards, NRCS agents visit with private landowners on their properties, suggesting conservation practices and linking landowners to grant monies to implement those practices.

Currently 80% of California is encompassed within more than 100 Resource Conservation Districts. The boundaries of most Districts correspond to those of a single County. RCDs work on erosion control, water quality, forest health, wetlands protection, wildlife habitat and a range of other conservation priorities. Each year RCD Boards work with the NRCS to channel tens of thousands of person hours of federal technical expertise and hundreds of thousands of dollars of federal grant assistance into California landscapes for projects, watershed planning, easements, and other practices.

In recent years some RCDs have also played an important role in fostering collaborative conservation initiatives, such as local watershed groups, in their areas. The Alliance has worked with RCDs, grassroots groups, and other agencies on some of these efforts. When RCDs try to initiate new collaboratives they frequently use the Coordinated Resource Management and Planning (CRMP) process. In recent years the State has increased its financial support to select RCDs through grant programs such as Proposition 204.

Locally led conservation is very near and dear to many of us at the Alliance. However, RCDs do not always live up to their innovative design. The key issue is that RCDs are structured to allow

local democratic self-determination but many people who live in Districts don't even know that they exist. Without active participation by a broad segment of the population of a given RCD, the agenda of that District can be quite narrow and dominated by a few people. Accountability is further reduced in many cases because Districts fail to hold elections, arguing they are too costly. In the worst cases, Districts can be found that are dominated by a few landowners who direct most of the available federal assistance into their own personal landholdings! Many examples of better RCDs can be cited in the Sierra. But the bad examples indicate the need for broader and more active public participation in RCDs throughout the region.

The new RCD Watershed Coordinator Grant program presents an excellent opportunity for concerned individuals and organizations throughout the Sierra to get involved in the Districts. If there is an RCD in your area then this may be the time to forge a new partnership. Potential duties a Coordinator can perform have been left wide open to accommodate diverse local needs. The key criteria is that the new coordinator position should demonstrably improve the condition of the watershed. RCDs must apply for coordinators by mid-December.

While the coordinators are expected to increase the quality of the RCD watershed programs, grassroots environmentalists should take greater notice of their local RCD. Attend a meeting or two to see where personnel and funds for conservation are being allocated. (The meetings should be open to the public and well publicized according to State law). Keep your eye on the Board appointment or election process. Even better, run for the Board or nominate a good local enviro!

For more information on the RCD Watershed Coordinator Grant program call Dennis O'Bryant at 916-332-5954.

To find out about RCDs in your area, call 916-447-7237 or on the internet at <http://ceres.ca.gov/carcd>

For more on NRCS programs: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>

Americorps intern Kelley Moore conducted an extensive survey of RCDs for the Alliance this spring. The report reviews what type of watershed restoration programs RCDs are involved in and how they go about working with interested parties.