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### Board Briefs

SNA Board member Jane Baxter and her organization, Range Watch, were recently featured in the California Flyfisher magazine.

SNA Board member Rick Breeze-Martin has been appointed to the Tuolumne County Planning Commission. Congratulations to Rick!

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### Conference Corner

Well, it's that time of year again - time to mark your calendars and begin planning for Sierra Nevada Alliance's fourth annual conference.

This year's gathering will be held on Friday and Saturday, July 18th and 19th. We're contemplating a change of venue - perhaps taking a turn on the west side of the Sierra. Please call Laurel Ames if you have any thoughts or strong feelings about this, either way.

The SNA annual conference brings together activists from grassroots, regional and national organizations, along with scientists, politicians, and land managers, to discuss new ideas and

ways of doing things in the Sierra.

Last year saw some 90 participants exploring our evolving relationship as residents in and keepers of our Sierra watersheds. This year promises to be just as exciting. Stay tuned for more information on theme, location, and presenters in the next issue of Sierra News.

If you're interested in tracking down information resources referred to by last year's presenters, here's who to contact:

Overall Conference Summary, SNA. To order call Laurel Ames at 916-542-4546 or download a copy from the SNA website: [www.outdoingit.com/~sna](http://www.outdoingit.com/~sna).

Individual Session videotapes, RangeWatch. To order call SNA board member Jane Baxter at 805-536-8668.

EPA Watershed Grants. For more information, call Maria Rea, EPA, at 415-744-2005.

Lost Landscapes and Failed Economies, Thomas Michael Power. To order write: Island Press, Box 7, Dept. 2AU, Covelo, CA 95428 or call 1-800-828-1302.

Public Interest Press Guide, Conservation Circuit Riders. To order write CCR, 1212 Broadway, Suite 808, Oakland, CA 94612 or call 510-763-0211.

Public Journalism and Public Life, Why Telling the News Is Not Enough, Buzz Merritt. To order write: Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, NJ.

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### Getting Acquainted: South Yuba River Citizens League

The South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) has been a member of the Alliance since 1994. The group, located in Nevada City, is dedicated to preserving and protecting the Yuba River ecosystem.

Until recently, that effort has consisted primarily of attempts to secure national Wild & Scenic river designation for parts of the Yuba. Now, however, SYRCL is also becoming more active in the larger watershed.

SYRCL Executive Director Robert Lonsdorf is launching a volunteer stewardship program to assist public and private agencies in actual land management projects in the watershed.

In addition, SYRCL is gearing up for a campaign to oppose the unnecessary Marysville-Parks Bar Dam being touted by state representative Bernie Richter to solve lower Yuba flooding

concerns.

As if that's not enough, SYRCL recently moved to new office quarters, which it plans to turn into an environmental resource center for group meetings, public education forums and other events.

SYRCL can be reached at PO Box 841, Nevada City, CA 95959. Phone: 916-265-5961.

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President's Letter

*Andrea Lawrence*

Greetings - and welcome to the Alliance's first official newsletter!

Perhaps because I'm a local politician (in my other life) I would hope that this newsletter might come to be viewed as "the State of the Sierra Nevada"!

We bring this first issue to you with a keen sense of excitement and a positive sense of what we've accomplished in our first three years of establishing the Sierra Nevada Alliance (SNA) as a community-based, place-based organization working on behalf of the Sierra, our communities, our environment, and our economies.

We have successfully begun efforts at community-building, have successfully been a constant voice for local involvement in the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project, and are working with local county Supervisors on establishing watershed principles for the long-term values of the resource and our communities.

Much credit for our being recognized as a presence and active voice in the Sierra has to go to our Executive Director, Laurel Ames, who is tireless in her effort and commitment on our behalf, and to our Board of Directors, who are the repository of the knowledge and expertise regarding Sierra issues important to our communities and our landscapes and who collectively bring their wisdom to our policy-making.

From a long history of fragmented decision-making within the Sierra Nevada and a too-often divisive community rhetoric, we must work toward a more cohesive vision of this remarkable and much-loved range. That, I believe, is our common ground.

It is well begun! And to all of you who have become Friends of SNA, our great and warm thanks.

"There is much comfort in high hills, and a great easing of the heart."

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### Principles of Watershed Community Involvement

Watershed strategic, annual, and project planning must be open, public, and involve communities in the watershed;

Community involvement must include a comprehensive and inclusive community public education component;

Watershed restoration and stewardship\* should reflect a strong component of sustainable local economics and/or revitalization of local communities implementing projects;

Advisory and/or oversight committees must include members residing in the watershed;

Watershed groups/JPAs administering restoration projects must deposit restoration funds in institutions that actively invest in local communities and economic revitalization within the Council's jurisdiction;

Watershed groups must adopt restoration strategies, and plans of action, that enhance and create local job and contracting opportunities;

Watershed policy, restoration and stewardship\* plans and projects must be consistent with principles and standards established by this act.

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### Quips and Quotes & News Notes

SNA has received a two-year grant from The William & Flora Hewlett Foundation for community-building. Way to go Alliance!

USFS Chief Mike Dombeck on Public Involvement:

"Debate and information are the essence of democracy. The people we serve, all of the people, are now more fully engaged in defining how to move from point A to point B. Our task is not to dictate the course or the outcome. Rather, we need to be the facilitators, the educators and communicators who help people search for solutions."

(excerpted from remarks on his first day as USFS Chief 1/6/97)

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt on forest health:

"Babbitt criticized those who 'insist the best way to save our forest is to repeal environmental laws,' adding the practice would 'raze the forest in order to save it.'"

Sacramento Bee, February 12, 1997, p. A1

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### SNA On the Move

The Alliance has come of age. After three years and three months, SNA has moved from Executive Director Laurel Ames' dining room table to a "real" office.

The new digs are located at 2489 Lake Tahoe Boulevard (aka Highway 50), Suite 6, in South Lake Tahoe. Stop by for a visit!

The mailing address (PO Box 9072, So. Lake Tahoe, CA 96158), phone number (916-542-4546), fax number (916-542-4570), web address ([www.outdoingit.com/~sna](http://www.outdoingit.com/~sna)), and President's address all stay the same.

Now that her dining room is back in commission, are there multiple gourmet dinner parties in Laurel's future??

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### Sierra Watershed Restoration - A Dream Coming True

*Laurel Ames*

Everybody lives in a watershed; and some of us even live in the floodplain of our home watershed, as we discovered when the waters rose dramatically to meet us in January.

Watershed is the wonderful word describing the landscape of a particular river system component - be it creek, stream, or rushing river - viewed from ridgetop to ridgetop.

A watershed encompasses the landforms, vegetation, habitat, biological systems, and communities (including human!) that lie within its boundaries. The Sierra has 24 significant watersheds, each with its own network of subwatersheds draining into it.

The Alliance featured watershed issues at last summer's conference titled, "Strategies for Living in the Watershed." We left that conference convinced that with the seed money provided by the sure passage of Proposition 204, watershed restoration could be moved front and center on our agenda.

Luckily for us, our political prognosticators were right! Prop. 204 did pass. And thanks to our credibility as an organization that lives in the Sierra and has the interests of both the resources and the communities of the Sierra at heart, we have been able to play a significant role in the newly emerging watershed restoration campaign.

We have built a constructive and positive dialogue with the Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCRC) to define and describe appropriate watershed restoration principles, as well as principles for community involvement in restoration programs (see sidebar below and on page 5).

The principles provide a framework for appropriate decision-making for potential watershed restoration programs and projects throughout the Sierra.

#### Show Me The Money

With the passage of Prop. 204, there is \$15 million allocated for restoration in Delta tributaries, to be administered by the State Water Resources Control Board. The bill focuses on reducing watershed contaminants and improving fisheries and forest health.

The Alliance has argued for a \$300,000 cap on individual projects (except pilot projects), as well as a comprehensive and well-funded monitoring component for all projects. We are convinced that adequate baseline data is critical and must be available for large-scale projects.

The Alliance is also working with the RCRC team of John Mills and Michael Jackson to develop a Watershed Restoration Act to take to Congress to secure additional funding. We have worked effectively together to assure that such a proposal makes sense to us all, even at the most basic level - that of language - so that we understand each other and the words we use.

The Alliance voice is also being heard in the CalFed process, another arena in which funds are likely to be made available for Sierra watersheds.

Unfortunately some Bay/ Delta folks are a bit slow to grasp the need for healthy watersheds above the many foothill dams. But it's beginning to sink in that these upper watersheds nurture some of the fish species targeted for protection by the Bay/Delta process.

#### Watershed Councils

The Alliance is strongly promoting the idea of using watershed councils to oversee development of watershed restoration plans and projects.

Watershed groups are a key strategy in the Alliance's efforts not only to secure money, but also to assure that projects will be the kind of thoughtfully considered, well-planned efforts that the Sierra needs. Such groups or councils are common throughout the United States, and have been a

very successful vehicle for getting projects on the ground.

We understand that getting federal money in today's tight times will be difficult. But we are convinced that when the environmental community in the Sierra and the local governments can work together to write a strong watershed restoration bill, our potential for success is increased exponentially.

## WATERSHED RESTORATION PRINCIPLES

Restoration must be consistent with watershed level assessment, analysis and evaluation; restoration includes protection of existing healthy conditions;

Restoration should ensure the preservation of existing healthy conditions by removing known threats and protecting from future threats;

Restoration must include eliminating continuing causes of watershed degradation;

Restoration should be staged, moving outward and downward, generally from the top of the watershed, from core healthy or restored areas; exceptions are limited to work designed to link core healthy areas;

Restoration projects should be prioritized within each watershed for effectiveness on the basis of maximum ecological benefit and on the benefits to sustainable local community economics and/or revitalization;

Restoration and stewardship\* decisions should be based on explicit objectives and benchmarks from an approved Watershed Restoration Strategic Plan;

Restoration that alters environments should give highest priority to project results that use natural processes;

Progress of restoration must be effectively monitored, using explicit objectives and benchmarks, in order to evaluate ongoing restoration and stewardship\* effort;

Restoration plans and/or projects must not sacrifice one ecosystem for another;

Restoration must be accomplished consistent with existing, applicable environmental laws.

## The Future of the Sierra Foothills

(condensed and reprinted with permission from Linkages, Institute for Ecological Health, Issue No. 3, Fall 1996)

The future of the Sierra Nevada's western foothills is a critical California issue. People are

moving to the foothills in large numbers.

The state projects a tripling in population between 1990 and 2040, much higher than the projected statewide growth rate.

"How can we avoid a development process that will destroy the very features that make a region a desirable place to live?" asks Berkeley Professor Tim Duane in his paper in the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) report. There are no simple answers.

Surveys show that most Americans would rather live in small towns or rural areas than in cities. A 1992 survey in El Dorado County, for example, found that 75% of the respondents moved to the county for the rural environment; 72% cited open space, 65% air quality, and 62% scenic views, as key factors.

Most of the people who moved to the foothills between 1970 and 1990 weren't looking for life in compact livable communities. They were in search of their own small, 5- or 10-acre, piece of open space with privacy from neighbors, where they could have a chicken or two, maybe a goat for the children, or the garden they always wanted.

These newcomers settled in the unincorporated areas of the rural counties, outside existing communities and beyond the service boundaries of water and sewer infrastructure.

"The rapid population growth being experienced in some rural areas has the potential to transform radically the physical and social environments of those regions, including significant fragmentation of habitat and likely loss of native biodiversity" writes Tim Duane.

The high rate of growth is driven by development of large metropolitan areas like Sacramento and Fresno in the Central Valley, and the growing desire of Californians to exchange urban homes and neighborhoods for a rural lifestyle. The Sierra population doubled between 1970 and 1990, with 40% of this growth occurring in the foothill counties east of the greater Sacramento area.

Future Central Valley urban development will lead to the inevitable rapid growth of the adjacent foothills, particularly where there is easy highway access.

#### Social Impacts of Projected Development:

One of the first negative impacts of growth residents notice is traffic congestion on collector roads and state highways. Rapidly growing rural counties fall far behind in meeting the transportation needs of rapid, dispersed growth.

Environmental analysis of the Placer County General Plan, for example, shows a future with 20 mile traffic jams on I-80 during rush hours. El Dorado County calculates it will take \$800 million to \$1 billion to upgrade road infrastructure over the next 20 years. Fiscal problems at all government levels, and voter unwillingness to approve additional expenditures, make this funding unlikely.

In many rural Sierra counties, most homes depend on wells and septic tanks. Future development of substandard parcels, created under earlier planning laws, will likely result in failed septic systems and contaminated ground water. Wellwater supplies are uncertain for all this potential development. Most ground water outside riparian zones is trapped in pockets in fractured rock formations rather than in the underground aquifers common to the flatlands.

Wildfire poses a serious threat and a potentially huge insurance expense to a dispersed rural population. "In most low elevation oak-woodland and conifer forest types of the Sierra Nevada, presettlement fires were frequent, collectively covered large areas, burned for months at a time, and although primarily low to moderate in intensity, exhibited complex patterns of severity" states the SNEP report. Fire control costs millions, protection of scattered structures is extremely difficult and consumes resources that could be used to limit the spread of a wildfire.

Prescribed fire reduces fuel loads and improves ecosystem health by mimicking a more natural fire regime of frequent low intensity burns. But the use of prescribed burns is severely limited by the presence of scattered housing. A strong case can be made for public policy that limits publicly financed fire protection of structures to already developed areas and future higher density development.

#### Air Pollution Transported to the Foothills:

The Central Valley is the primary source of the foothills' major ozone and particulate air pollution problems. "The dramatic decline of peak ozone levels seen (in recent years) in places such as the Los Angeles Basin is not seen in the Central Valley," state Professor Thomas Cahill and coworkers in the SNEP Report. Summer ozone is transported from the Valley into the Sierra. "The resultant daytime ozone levels between 2,000 and 6,000 feet are essentially as severe as those on the valley floor." While Valley ozone levels drop rapidly at night, they stay high in the Sierra. Significant ozone damage to human and biological health will continue until the proposed new federal standard of 8 parts per million is met for the Central Valley floor and the Sierra foothills.

#### Conclusions:

Standard large-lot zoning both fragments the landscape and creates social and biological problems. One alternative is clustered development, with building grouped in one area of a large land parcel, permanently protecting the rest in open space. To be biologically effective, clustering should result in large open space areas, carefully selected to preserve critical habitat and wildlife corridors connected over a large landscape.

The fear that open spaces will be built out later can be addressed if communities require that development rights of the open space be deeded in perpetuity in exchange for development rights elsewhere.

In the communities of Sutter Creek and Mariposa, vivid pictorial demonstrations of the effects of build out caused local residents to oppose new development projects. But political efforts to slow subdivisions are difficult in foothill counties. In 1996, El Dorado voters narrowly defeated an initiative requiring new developments to have a long-term water supply and to be denied a permit if they would result in severe traffic congestion. The initiative lost after a long period of

intense publicity and debate over growth impacts of the revised General Plan.

#### Achieving Workable Solutions:

The Sierra foothills need effective solutions to these long-term growth problems. These solutions must effectively maintain the rural quality of life, conserve areas vital to biodiversity protection and ecosystem health, and ensure the future of economically viable ranchland. Only solutions that come from the region, and are supported by foothill residents, will succeed.

### PROTECTING QUALITY OF LIFE AND NATURE IN THE FOOTHILLS

Help protect quality of life and nature in the foothills by:

Protecting small town character and values in existing communities. This requires avoidance of urban/suburban sprawl and maintenance or restoration of economically and socially strong town centers.

Designing any new higher-density areas as true villages or towns that have economic and social centers with shops, civic buildings, and other amenities. Avoid communities that are a mosaic of housing subdivisions and malls.

Restricting low-density development to carefully selected areas, using cluster development where acceptable. Maintain large tracts of undeveloped land, using private landowner incentives to make ranch & wood lands economically viable.

Actively reducing build out on existing substandard parcels, using techniques such as transfer of development rights.

Contact: Institute for Ecological Health, 409 Jardin Pl., Davis, CA 95616; 916-756-6455; email: P ALIGN=LEFT>

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#### Web Notes

Moving right ahead into the 21st century... not only does SNA now have its own office in So. Lake Tahoe, but we also have a new web page, many thanks to Mark Russell.

You can get the latest scoop on what the Alliance and its members are up to by visiting us at: <http://www.outdoingit.com/~sna>.

Once there you will find our mission statement, action alerts and other information from SNA and its member organizations, a copy of the conference summary document from last year's conference, as well as a slew of news items about projects, campaigns and other issues of interest

to those who love the Sierra.

Visit us soon, and let us know what you think!

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### Win-Win Solutions

(excerpted from a letter to SYRCL members from SYRCL President Charlie Brock)

"I firmly believe that our democratic system works best when those with differing viewpoints come together and listen to one another. If we are able to listen well, and honestly consider all of the options available, creative solutions to vexing problems can be achieved.

In point of fact, including the South Yuba River in the Wild & Scenic rivers system is the only way to permanently protect the river from further dams.

I believe Wild & Scenic designation also holds solutions for other challenges. Critics of Wild & Scenic say that private property rights would be trampled if a bill were passed. Yet even the most ardent "home-rule" proponents would have to agree that without Wild & Scenic, the government holds a much heavier hammer over our heads, as it can at any time license construction of a dam, regardless of local opinion.

In addition, with Wild & Scenic the Forest Service is required to work with the public and local agencies to prepare a management plan for the river. This same plan could be used to address existing problems such as waste disposal, trespass, and ways of transporting water out of the high Sierra to meet our community's future water needs.

A free-flowing South Yuba addresses many community needs, from economic diversity to open space preservation. And it does so in a way that positively benefits all the citizens of the County. Therefore, I strongly advocate a decision-making process that brings our community together, ultimately achieving win-win solutions for all of our needs."

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