

SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

SIERRA NEWS

VOLUME XIII, ISSUE 1

FEBRUARY 2009



SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

CALENDAR

Sierra Nevada Alliance Wildflower Walk

March 29, 2009
Coloma

Early reports are that we'll time the blooms perfectly again this year, so grab your camera, sunscreen and hiking boots and join Alliance staff and board members for this spectacular afternoon of wildflower viewing!

~ * ~

16th Annual Sierra Nevada Alliance Conference

September 18-20, 2009
Lake Tahoe

Mark your calendars and Save-The-Date for one of the best conservation conferences in the Sierra!

~ * ~

Birding in Tahoe

May 23, 2009
Lake Tahoe

Check out our feathered friends!

~ * ~

For more information on these and other events, visit www.sierranevadaalliance.org or call 530.542.4546

State Freeze on Grant Contracts Cuts Sierra Funding

Like every non-profit these days, the Alliance board and staff are closely watching how the downturn in the economy may reduce our income. Ironically, we recently noted that our watershed program, working to protect and restore the Sierra's major water systems, was secure with 3 grant contracts with the state of California. Then on December 19th the Alliance was notified to stop work on these three state watershed contracts, and that reimbursements of about \$130,000 for past work performed were also being frozen.

These contracts funded by proposition bonds supported three major Alliance Watershed projects. One project established four programs across the Sierra to train homeowners how to landscape around their homes and businesses to create fire defensible space using native plants, reducing erosion and water use. Another project trained volunteers to create volunteer water quality monitoring programs to provide quality data to gauge the health of our local rivers, lakes and

Continued on page 7

Community Forums Unite Water and Land Use Planners

Efficient land use patterns and compact community form are among the most effective means of sustaining water supplies, yet good land use planning is rarely employed as a water management strategy. As part of an effort to illuminate the water benefits of smart land use planning in the Sierra, the Alliance sponsored six water and land use forums in six different watersheds across the region during the fall of 2008.

The forums, sponsored by the Alliance, were held in Butte, Tuolumne, Calaveras, Tulare, and Fresno counties, as well as in the City of Truckee. Each forum was organized by local organizations within their watershed with involvement from many local Public Utility Districts (PUD). Attendees included PUD and Planning Department personnel, in addition to county supervisors, city council representatives, conservation organizations and the general public.

Continued on page 5



Photo by: Do Lee

Shaping Smart Land Use Protects Sierra Waters

IN THIS ISSUE

- 2**
- Executive Director's Letter
- 3**
- Ski Area Scorecard
- 4**
- Serving the Sierra (SNAP)
- 5**
- Thank You for Your Support
- 6**
- Shaping Climate Policy
- Staffing Changes
- 7**
- Farewell to Stan Weidert
- 8**
- Save the Dates



SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

Keeping light in the range.

Executive Director's Letter

Dear Friends,

What a challenging time. The economy is poor, but with the national election many have hope for the future. The same is playing out here at the Alliance on our own micro-scale.

This December, the Alliance was hit by the state freezing work and payment on contracts, causing us to lay off four wonderfully talented staff to address the budget shortfall. In a small non-profit like the Alliance, it's like losing family in many ways. Sadly the cuts didn't stop there. The remaining team of dedicated staff volunteered to take 10-30% pay cuts to help the organization weather this fiscal crisis. On our slim non-profit salaries, this means a lot. Staff cancelled honeymoon plans, cut some of their few amenities, stopped contributing to savings or even started drawing on their reserves.

And it is that spirit of giving and sacrifice that gives me hope for the future. It wasn't just staff that came to the Alliance's aid – but our board, member groups and individual donors. Folks gave us loans, special donations, and encouragement.

The organization is weathering this horrible turn of events thanks to the many, many people who make up the Alliance. Thank you so much for all your support and dedication to this range.

Ironically, just as I was working to get loans, ask for help, and alert the media – I was also doing a mid-year update on our progress for the fiscal year. There was much to celebrate as we start 2009. Our SNAP program exceeded all their 2008 watershed restoration, ecological monitoring and environmental education goals. The AmeriCorps members and site supervisors couldn't say enough wonderful things about how the program helped them. Our Sustainable Sierra Land Use Program completed over 6 successful community forums with partners showing how land use can better protect our rivers, lakes and streams. There is much more, but I'll save them for our annual report.

So, while we still have much to do to resurrect our Watershed Program, there is also success to celebrate. I have hope for the Alliance and the Sierra because there are so many of us working together, we succeed when we try, and this region inspires us to do all we can to protect and restore its lands, water, wildlife and communities.

Cheers,

PERIODIC NEWSLETTER OF THE
SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

P.O. Box 7989, S Lake Tahoe, CA 96158

T 530.542.4546 F 530.542.4570

email: info@sierranevadaalliance.org
www.sierranevadaalliance.org

STAFF

Executive Director

Joan Clayburgh

Associate Director

Mary Bennington

Development Director

Kay Ogden

Office Manager

Kathy Haberman

Watersheds Program Director

Megan Suarez-Brand

Land Use Associate

Patricia Hickson

SNAP Program Director

Do Lee

AmeriCorps Program Regional Coordinator

Morgan Fessler

Water & Climate Program Associate

Marion Gee

BOARD OFFICERS

President

Jan Chatten-Brown

Chatten-Brown & Carstens

Vice President

Betsy Reifsnider

Secretary

Steve Robinson,

Mountain Meadows Conservancy

Treasurer

Lynn Sadler, SC Wildlands

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jenny Cooper

Tracy Grubbs

Addie Jacobson

Robert Johnston

Terry McLaughlin

Roger Pratt

Pete Pumphrey

Christine Rozance



Printed on recycled paper.

Ski Area Scorecard 2008/09 Shows Improvement in Environmental Ratings at Resorts Across the West

The Ski Area Citizens Coalition, including Colorado Wild and the Sierra Nevada Alliance, collaborated to release the 2008/09 Ski Area Environmental Scorecard in mid-November 2008. It was the eighth consecutive year the Ski Area Citizen's Coalition has published the Scorecard, the only independent review of ski resorts giving skiers and snowboarders a way to assess the environmental performance of their favorite ski areas.

The 2008 Scorecard showed an overall expansion of energy efficiency retrofits at ski resorts across the west, a trend that contributed to improvement in environmental grades for many resorts. This trend held true in California where 12 of the 19 ski resorts evaluated improved their scores over the 2007 Scorecard, due in large part to expanded efforts to reduce energy consumption and to install green energy technology. Energy retrofit projects that helped boost grades included new efficient snow-making equipment, increased use of biodiesel, and purchasing energy from renewable resources.

The Scorecard received excellent media coverage with 80 media outlets carrying the story nationwide and 20 in California/Northern Nevada, including Sacramento Bee, San Francisco Chronicle and Reno-Gazette Journal.



Photo by: Dan Moses

Jonelle Bright Skiing in Tahoe

Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley continued to rank as the highest scoring ski resorts in California, though they are now flanked closely by Homewood Ski Resort where improvements in erosion control helped boost the resort's grade from a C to an A. Only one California resort got a D, Northstar-at-Tahoe, and no resorts in California flunked this year.

Despite ski resort improvements on the global climate change front, expansions and real estate development continue to be major threats to mountain environments.

Of the 83 resorts analyzed by the Ski Area Citizens Coalition, 24 had scores that stayed the same or declined. Of these, 15 are planning or have recently undertaken sizable terrain expansions or real estate development into sensitive areas.

Resorts are scored on a comprehensive suite of criteria such as protection of old growth forests, alpine wildlife and water resources, along with proactive steps such as carpool programs, recycling and using green energy..

To view the full scorecard with each resort's score and details on their environmental management practices, visit: www.skiareacitizens.com.

Skiers and snowboarders can also send emails to resorts through the website, thanking resorts for their environmental stewardship or encouraging them to improve their environmental policies and management.

Scorecard data is obtained from an annual survey, public records, the resorts themselves and information on ski area development projects. Resorts are also asked to fill out surveys regarding their on-mountain environmental programs. All source documents can be viewed on the website: www.skiareacitizens.com

2008/2009 Ski Area Environmental Scorecard grades for Northern California Ski Resorts

Resort	Score	Grade	Resort	Score	Grade
Squaw Valley	78.3	A	Kirkwood Mountain Resort	65.3	B
Alpine Meadows	77.4	A	Bear Mountain Resort	65.2	B
Homewood Mountain Resort	73.9	A	Snow Summit	64.4	C
Boreal Mountain	70.4	A	Sierra Summit	63.5	C
Sierra at Tahoe	69.6	B	Snow Valley	63	C
Mountain High	69.5	B	Dodge Ridge	60.4	C
Mammoth Mountain	69.1	B	Bear Valley Mountain Resort	55.2	C
Sugar Bowl	68.5	B	Heavenly	51.3	C
Mount Rose – Ski Tahoe	67.7	B	Northstar-at-Tahoe	48.9	D
Mount Shasta	66.5	B			

SNAP: Fertile Ground for Sprouting Environmental Leaders

The Sierra Nevada AmeriCorps Partnership (SNAP) celebrated the amazing successes of the 2008 year of service by 27 AmeriCorps Members throughout the Sierra Nevada in December. With the goals of restoring and protecting important Sierra habitats, SNAP Members serving at 19 separate community organizations and resource agencies collectively:

- led restoration projects on a total of 2181 acres
- monitored 362 sites
- educated 19,919 citizens
- recruited 3038 volunteers

Seven of these capable Members were offered positions with their organizations upon completion of service.

With the momentum building from two successful years, SNAP was all set to begin the third year when the State budget freeze

resulted in five SNAP partnering organizations withdrawing from hosting a Member. Thanks to SNAP Director Do Lee and Regional Coordinator Morgan Fessler, new site partners and members were recruited to fill these positions. New 2009 partners

include the Feather River Coordinated Resource Management, the California Tahoe Conservancy, the Sierra Institute for Community and Environment, the USFS-Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, Sierra Foothill Conservancy, Shasta Land Trust, and the El Dorado Irrigation District.

Photo by: Do Lee



2009 SNAP Members at Yosemite

welcomed 23 new and 4 returning AmeriCorps Members for the 2009 SNAP program orientation early this year near Yosemite National Park. Below, excerpts from a letter written by a 2-year SNAP Member at Yosemite National Park highlight the personal impacts of the SNAP experience.

My AmeriCorps Story

by Brittany Woiderski

SNAP is a gem among thousands of exceptional volunteer programs in the US; two distinguishing characteristics immediately come to mind that set SNAP apart from other programs: location and mission. The Sierra Nevada, or as John Muir called it, the Range of Light, spans 400 miles from north to south, celebrates rich biodiversity, and offers some of the most fantastic scenic vistas in the world. SNAP members are located all over the Sierra in an effort to spread the concept of volunteerism throughout the entire geographic region. SNAP offers diverse service sites to members and retains a link between community non-profit groups and natural resource agencies—a partnership that could easily dissipate without the support of SNAP members. These members offer a unique set of skills, exude independence, and are committed to their cause, but as a group of AmeriCorps members, represent the next generation of politicians, land managers, and influential

writers and symbolize the beginning of a shift in American thinking, where volunteerism and land conservation had commonly taken a backseat. Subsequently, the SNAP mission to serve in community-based organizations by conducting local habitat restoration, performing ecological monitoring, educating the public, and recruiting civilian volunteers to do the same, is achieved with unmatched dedication by those who represent the heart and the future of the Sierra.

Prior to applying to the SNAP program, I knew relatively little about the Sierra—I had never even been there; however, one of the participating SNAP sites caught my attention immediately: Yosemite National Park. I had studied Yosemite from a distance for nearly two years while I held a teaching assistantship for a course called “The Geology of National Parks and Monuments” in which the instructor dedicated a significant chunk of each semester to Yosemite, his favorite place. In time, I

developed a similar sentiment for the park, but never imagined that I would play an important part in its conservation or that it would shape and mold me into the person that I am today. Shortly after discovering the SNAP program, which at the time was gearing up for the launch of its pilot year, I submitted an application, participated in seven interviews, accepted a position, and in a miraculous leap of faith, moved 3000 miles to California.

Two years and over 3000 volunteer hours later, my time with the SNAP program is coming to a close. Before joining AmeriCorps, I hadn’t a clue about what I was getting into, but it has proven to be the best decision of my life thus far. SNAP has provided me with a solid foundation for living in this crazy world: a place to plant roots and grow, a small group of fellow AmeriCorps members who have the capacity to love and provide for each other, and the self-respect and courage needed to carry on afterwards.

Community Forums: continued from page 1

Overall the forums proved to be a successful method for bringing together citizens and officials to discuss water management and land use planning in their various localities. In some areas it was the first time local planners and water experts had ever come together on this topic.

Although the theme of each forum focused on the relationship between land use and water, several key topics of concern were also discussed. These hot topics included how water can be addressed as part of new General Plan documents, concerns regarding sustainability of groundwater supplies, costs of infrastructure, and water contamination problems associated with leaking and aging water and wastewater pipes and septic systems.

Planning for Water-Wise Development in the Sierra, A Water and Land Use Policy Guide co-authored by the Local Government Commission and Sierra Nevada Alliance, released in August 2008 was provided to all participants. The guide, like the forums, focuses on the importance of community planning to watershed protection and sustainable water management, and presents a variety of planning strategies that promote development

patterns and practices better aligned with water protection goals. Guides were also distributed to planning directors and planning commissioners in each of the Sierra's 20 counties.

One key concept presented in both the guide and at the forums is the relationship between impervious surfaces and watershed health. Studies from a variety of institutions and agencies including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have found that on a per capita basis increasing density shrinks the development footprint, minimizing land disturbance and impervious cover in the watershed. As a result, more land is left undeveloped. Conversely, lower-density patterns of development result in a greater loss of sensitive environmental lands, including wetlands, flood plains, critical habitat, aquifer recharge areas, stream corridors, and steep slopes due to a higher instance of land disturbance and impervious surface.

Free copies of *Planning for Water Wise Development in the Sierra* are available. For a hard copy: info@sierranevadaalliance.org, or call: 530-542-4546. To download a PDF version visit our website: www.sierranevadaalliance.org/programs/program.shtml?type=pgm03

Thank You for Supporting the Alliance & the Sierra!

The Sierra Nevada Alliance relies on the support of our members, especially during challenging times. There are many ways you can show your support - personal gifts, "Tell A Friend", Host a House Party, or join the Green Giver Club. This new way of supporting the Alliance lets you sign up for monthly donations on your schedule. For more information on how you can help the Alliance, call or email Kay! kay@sierranevadaalliance.org

Name (please print) _____

Mailing address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Enclosed is my check payable to the Sierra Nevada Alliance

Please bill my Visa/MasterCard: Card # _____ Exp. _____

Signature _____ Total Amount \$ _____

Please charge my credit card this amount \$ _____ monthly.

DONOR CLUBS

Mt. Whitney	\$2,500+
Yosemite	\$1,000
Lake Tahoe	\$500
Mono Lake	\$250
Half Dome	\$100
Family	\$50
Sustaining	\$35

NEW! Green Giver
Commit to a monthly contribution!

The Sierra Nevada Alliance is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Donations are tax deductible. No goods or services were provided in connection with this gift.



Sierra Nevada Alliance Shapes State and Local Policy on Climate Change

Type “Sierra Climate Change Toolkit” into Google’s search engine and prepare to be amazed. It appears on the website of member groups and others working in the Sierra, like the Upper San Joaquin River Stewardship Council and the California Audubon Society. Academic sites like those of the Pacific Southwest Research Station and the Mountain Forum similarly include the Toolkit as a resource. California’s Climate Change portal, the state’s official site for global climate change information, also features a copy. Even an official UN report by the Secretary General on Sustainable Mountain Development describes the Alliance, our important work on climate change and our useful resource, the *Sierra Climate Change Toolkit*.

The toolkit features seven principles for incorporating climate change into resource planning and management, principles that are finding traction in the

most interesting places. These principles now form part of the recommendations of the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture’s White Paper on “Wetland Restoration and Projected Impacts from Climate Change,” an organization that has few common issues with the Sierra other than climate change. More importantly, the Alliance recommended the state adopt these principles as part of California’s Climate Adaptation Strategy – and they did! These principles will affect adaptation planning and funding throughout the state.

Local managers and policy makers are also taking notice of the Alliance’s approach to adaptation. **The Alliance was recently invited by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to serve on the agency’s Climate Change Technical Advisory Group.** The Alliance is the only non-governmental organization on this Group. We will bring a unique perspective to develop climate change

policy within the State Water Plan and DWR operations.

Other local Sierra efforts are underway to incorporate emission reduction and adaptation into local planning. The Alliance recently convened a Sierra Climate Change Vision Committee comprised of conservation leaders throughout the Sierra to discuss and develop recommendations to address climate change. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy invited the Alliance to submit these recommendations as well as our own suggestions to help them craft the workplan for their newly launched Sierra Climate Change Initiative. The Alliance remains an important leader, networker and resource on climate change in the Sierra and will continue to track and influence planning efforts and export models of climate adaptation throughout the Range of Light.

Staffing Changes

Marion Gee, who served as an AmeriCorps member in 2008 with the Alliance, was hired in January as the new Water & Climate Change Program Associate. Marion hails from the tame suburbs of Orange County. Although a So Cal resident for most of her life, she traversed much of the Sierra from an early age, hiking, fly-fishing and skiing with her family. In 2004, she graduated with a BA in history from the University of California Irvine. She went on to study environmental history and policy at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.



She then journeyed to Santiago, Chile where she volunteered in a children’s shelter for the non-

profit organization, VEGlobal before serving in the SNAP Program in 2008. As a staff member, she hopes that in this small way she will give back to the mountains that have been the site of countless hours of study, recreation and familial contentment.

Robert Collier joins the Sierra Nevada Alliance’s Water and Climate Change campaign as an AmeriCorps member for 2009. Rob spent his childhood in Catonsville, Maryland, a suburb of Baltimore. He received his liberal arts degree from Middlebury College in Vermont. While studying history and competing in varsity swimming, Rob made the most of the



Vermont outdoors, biking, skiing, and hiking whenever the opportunity presented itself. After graduating from Middlebury in 2007, Rob moved to Washington, D.C. to gain some professional experience as a paralegal for a year and a half. As a newcomer to California and the Sierra, Rob is excited to pursue his passion for the outdoors both professionally and recreationally.

Sad Goodbyes: As a result of the California Budget Crisis and the freeze on a significant portion of the Alliance’s budget for FY08/09, we were forced to lay off four members of our much loved and talented staff. At the end of December the Alliance laid off Sarah Green, Genevieve Jessop-Marsh, Dan Keenan and Max Norton. We wish them all well, hope they will remain connected to the Alliance and are happy to provide references for these talented and committed individuals. (aka Hire Them –They’re Great!!)

Farewell to Stan Weidert 1947- 2008

Stan Weidert passed away at home on Christmas Day with his brother Carl, and his beloved dog Inca by his side.

Stan was a leader of the Sierra Nevada Alliance for many years, serving actively on our Board of Directors, Advisory Board and Community Group Committee. Stan's passion for the Sierra, wilderness, and watershed restoration and protection helped build the Alliance to be a more effective organization. Beyond his vast knowledge of plants, ecosystems, weather and hydrology - Stan was a firm believer in grassroots organizing, and championed supporting and building the capacity of local groups.

Stan was an active leader in the Sierra Club, and helped the Alliance work with

chapters around the entire state. He was very active in his local RCD and a leader in his local Bear Creek Watershed Group.

At the Alliance, we will miss much more than Stan's incredible scientific and political know-how. Stan was one of those rare leaders who would call pro-actively to check in just to see how the organization was really doing. He attended all our conferences and board meetings and would brighten our gatherings with his quiet humor and good will. Stan could warm the room with his smile. Mostly we'll miss his surprise visits with Inca and his encouraging words and unwavering support for saving the Sierra.



Stan & Inca on World Water Monitoring Day, 2003

A Potluck Picnic at Brovan's Ranch on June 27th at 11:00 a.m. will celebrate Stan's life. Please call the Alliance for directions and information 530.542.4546.

State Freeze: continued from page 1

streams. The final project was in the initial stages of creating indicators with the state to assess the economic and community benefits of watershed efforts. All these efforts were non-regulatory projects aimed at protecting and improving the rivers, lakes and streams that not only provide a high quality of life for local Sierrans, but also fuel our tourist economies.

The sad news is that the stop work order did not just stop our projects, but it resulted in the loss of half the annual Alliance budget for the rest of the fiscal year. To address this massive shortfall, the Alliance laid off four talented staff, effectively halting the Sierra Watershed Program. The remaining 9 staff volunteered to take pay-cuts of 10-30% through June in order to hold the organization together.

The bad news goes beyond the Sierra Nevada Alliance. **A recent survey of 68 conservation groups** completed by the Alliance during the first week of January, demonstrated that the State's **stop work order affected 60% of surveyed conservation groups in the Sierra Nevada**, with 26% laying off workers to date. In addition, 64% of groups laid off contractors.

Groups reported that the majority of projects impacted include restoration and water quality monitoring of Sierra headwaters that supply quality drinking water to over 65% of California. Others included critical land acquisitions and creation of fire defensible space. For those groups impacted, the majority (55%) had over half their annual budget affected. To date, 7% of groups responding closed the doors of their organization completely.

Not only does this have an impact on the Sierra economy, wonderful talent may leave the Sierra forever. "The 23-year old

Feather River CRM had to lay off all 6 staff members effective January 2nd," reported Jim Wilcox, restoration specialist with the Feather River CRM. "This halts work on 9 watershed projects affecting 22 miles of stream channel and 1800 acres of floodplain restoration." These layoffs included Jim, a leading restoration specialist who has trained many in the Sierra restoration movement.

The Chairman of the Pooled Money Investment Board, Bill Lockyer, has indicated that reimbursements on state grant contracts for non-profits may not occur until the end of 2009 at the earliest with no indication when work may start up again.

In response to this crisis, the Alliance staff have kept the Sierra network abreast of the latest information at the state level. We also issued action alerts and alerted the media to the impacts in the region, gaining news coverage in various media including the Sacramento Bee and Los Angeles Times.

The silver lining in this dark time is that the Sierra Nevada Alliance still is standing strong and continuing our efforts to protect and restore the Sierra thanks to all our individual supporters and member groups. With this member support, federal AmeriCorps grant and foundation support, the Alliance's Sierra Water and Climate Change, Sustainable Sierra Land Use, and our AmeriCorps programs continue.

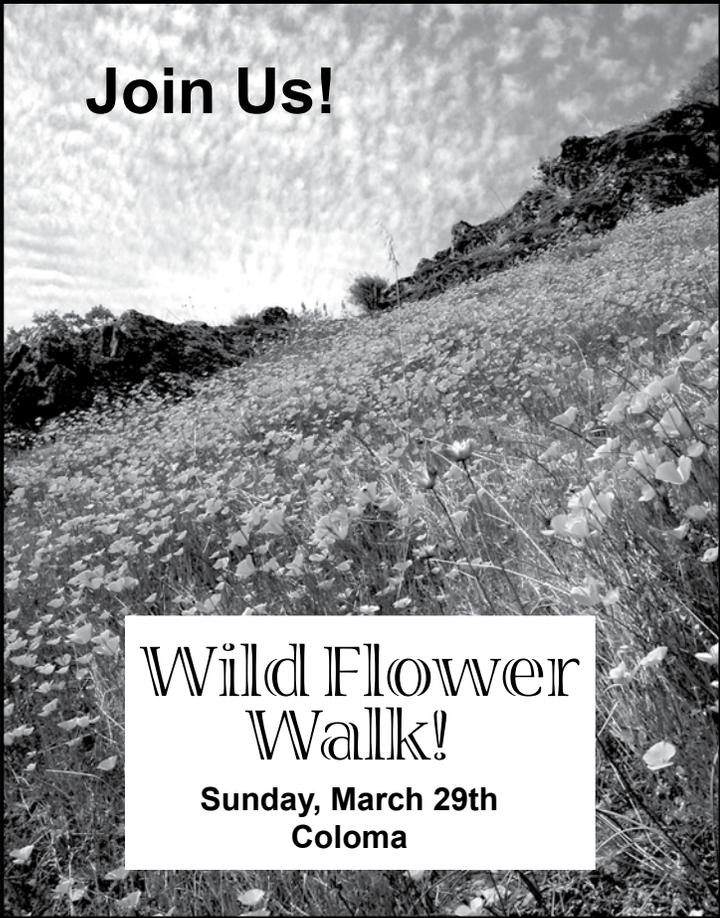
To help the Alliance weather this fiscal crisis, please renew your annual support this year and/or consider a special donation. For more information, please visit www.sierranevadaalliance.org or call 530.542.4546.

SIERRA NEWS

Sierra Nevada Alliance
2489 Lake Tahoe Blvd #5
P.O. Box 7989
S Lake Tahoe, CA 96158
T (530) 542-4546
F (530) 542-4570

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
Paid
Permit #68
Nevada City, CA

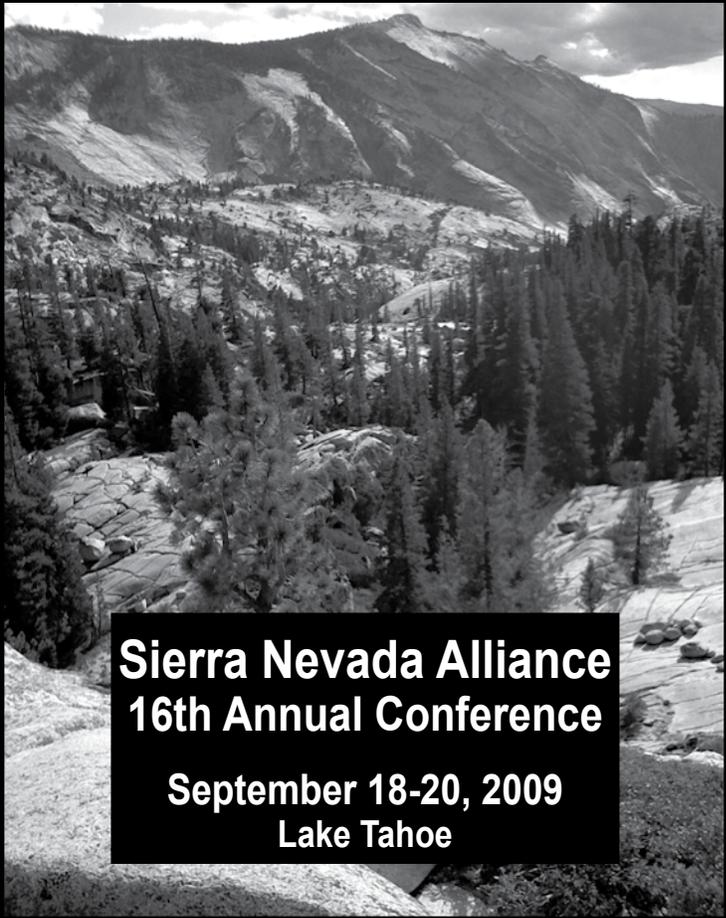
Visit www.sierranevadaalliance.org for more information about these and other events!



Join Us!

**Wild Flower
Walk!**

**Sunday, March 29th
Coloma**



**Sierra Nevada Alliance
16th Annual Conference**

**September 18-20, 2009
Lake Tahoe**