

# SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

# SIERRA NEWS

VOLUME XVII, ISSUE 1

JULY 2013



SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

## CALENDAR

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### Steve Robinson Memorial

July 20, 2013  
Westwood, CA

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### Sustainability in Business Webinar

August 14, 2013  
South Lake Tahoe, CA

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### Sierra Nevada Alliance 20th Anniversary & Conference

September 13-15, 2013  
South Lake Tahoe, CA

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### Sierra Nevada Alliance 20th Anniversary Celebration Cruise

September 14, 2013  
South Lake Tahoe, CA

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For more information on these and other upcoming Alliance events, visit [www.sierranevadaalliance.org](http://www.sierranevadaalliance.org) or call 530.542.4546

## Planning for Climate Change to Protect the Sierra Nevada

“SB 375 and Sustainable Community Strategies are changing the way California plans.”

—Bob Johnston, former Alliance Board Member, Emeritus Professor of Environmental Planning, U.C. Davis

Across the Sierra, the State, and the Nation, we are slowly coming to grips with the necessity of planning for climate change. The Alliance’s Regional Climate Change Program weaves climate change into all our planning and advocacy efforts, whether that be long-term water supply planning on the Sierra’s eastern side, the latest forest plan for the Lake Tahoe region, or planning for the next twenty years of development in Plumas County. A recent grant from the Kresge Foundation has allowed the Alliance and some regional partners to greatly increase our efforts to help implement SB 375, a major component of California’s nation-leading laws on reducing the impacts of climate change on our communities and natural resources.

SB 375 requires metropolitan areas of California to create Sustainable Community Strategies (SCSs)—designed to tighten the link between land use and

Continued on page 8

## Sierra Friendly Landscaping Project Flowing Strong

The Alliance is proud to announce that our model Sierra Friendly Landscaping Project, in coordination with the Truckee River Watershed Council, has had homeowners implement 157 changes on their properties to protect their local watershed! The average house lot in Truckee contributes roughly 1.2 tons of sediment runoff annually, so this accomplishment equates to 81.32 tons of sediment prevented from entering local streams!

The Sierra Nevada Alliance’s Sustainable Sierra Communities Program works hard to restore and protect the Truckee River Watershed through helping design and implement a Truckee River Friendly Landscaping program (TRFL). The TRFL program focuses on watershed restoration and protection by identifying and addressing non-point source pollutants that threaten the health and clarity of rivers, streams, and lakes within the Truckee Watershed. The program is in its third year of implementing sustainable landscaping practices that reduce erosion and polluted runoff. The Alliance plans to export lessons learned from this program to communities throughout the region to protect Sierra watersheds.

Continued on page 5



The city of 30,000 people proposed for the biologically-rich Yokohl Valley in Tulare County spells bad news for greenhouse gas emissions.

Photo courtesy of Laurie Schwallier.

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## Executive Director's Letter

Dear Friends,

This year the Alliance is celebrating our 20th Anniversary!! I encourage all of our donors, member groups, supporters, friends, SNAP Alumni and members, and partners to join us for the 20th Annual Conference and celebration. A committee of board members and staff has been planning the event, and it will be our best conference ever.

Bill McKibben, author and global activist, will be our keynote. Informative, inspirational and urgent – McKibben is a hero of mine. Climate Change is transforming our lives, and everything I have worked for in the last 35 years is under threat from potentially catastrophic changes. McKibben gives me hope that maybe we can actually motivate a



sea change to protect all that we love, and pass on to future generations the treasures of the Sierra Nevada.

We then have the ultimate environmental educator and naturalist John (Jack) Muir Laws coming on Saturday. Jack's Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada is in every backpack in the Sierra, I think – where else can you look up mushrooms, birds, and scat?? But even better than the guidebook is Jack himself. He personifies the spirit of the Sierra. He is full

of life, passion for the environment, humor and a drive to motivate everyone to get as excited about experiencing the outdoors as he does. You can't miss him.

To tell the truth – I'm probably most looking forward to dancing with everyone to celebrate our 20th anniversary on the Dinner Cruise. I have danced with Pam Flick, Terry & Carol Manning, Martha and Laurie Davis and Betsy Reifsnider before. I look forward to dancing with good friends again, and expressing that joy of living life in the Sierra. I can't think of a better way to celebrate our accomplishments than being together with people who love the Sierra. Dancing optional.

And what about all those accomplishments from the last 20 years? Too many for one letter, of course. So look forward to our next *Sierra News!* Better yet come to the conference and we'll have it chronicled in the halls and woven through the program. Note that the conference is not just celebrating the past — it's celebrating what we can still do together to save the Sierra. Really, you can't miss this year's event.

Sign up now.

Cheers,

Executive Director  
Sierra Nevada Alliance

## SIERRANEWS

PERIODIC NEWSLETTER OF THE  
SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

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**Lynn Baumgartner**

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Sustainable Sierra Communities

Program Assistants  
**Taylor Fargo and Nikki Thompson**

Bookkeeper  
**Cami Chavez**

Administrative Assistant  
**Carissa Gospodinoff**

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**Scott Kruse**  
**Mehmet McMillan**  
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## Helping Sierra Disadvantaged Communities Secure Clean, Reliable Water

The Sierra Nevada Alliance has been working with the Inyo-Mono Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) team for over a year to determine how to most effectively address the needs of disadvantaged communities in the Sierra for reliable and clean water. The Sierra has some of the highest proportions of disadvantaged communities (DACs) in California. Unfortunately, Sierra communities are often underfunded and thus underserved as the result of State formulas based on per capita statistics. The

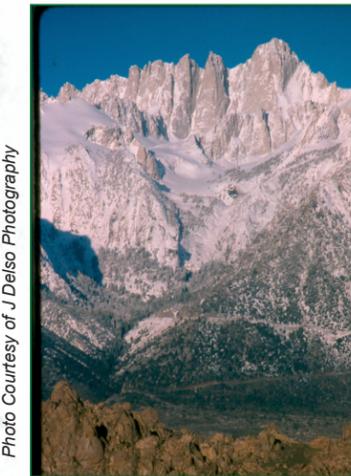


Photo Courtesy of J Deiso Photography

Water from Mono and Inyo counties heads mostly to Los Angeles.

rural nature of most Sierra communities often results in higher per capita costs to maintain basic services, and thus does not mesh with those State formulas. The Inyo-Mono region epitomizes the challenge of rural disadvantaged communities needing more resources per capita to secure clean and dependable water, and the Alliance's current role is to explore planning and outreach tools that best make those resources available. The Inyo-Mono IRWM planning region makes up about 11% of California's land area and provides 40-60% of the annual water consumed by the City of Los Angeles. The region has many small, remote communities, with the largest population center, at 27,000, in Ridgecrest. The majority of communities are designated as disadvantaged (including all of Inyo County). As a result, we believe examples of good projects in Inyo-Mono will help other Sierra communities as well.

A good example of how an IRWM can help disadvantaged communities with water problems can be found in the Coleville school system, in northern Mono County. Coleville schools have uranium levels in their water exceeding the State drinking water standard and insufficient water storage capacity for both the school and local emergency fire protection needs. The Inyo Mono IRWM team involved the Coleville community while drafting its first IRWM Plan, and as a result was able to apply and secure State implementation money to improve their water system. Breaking ground in June of 2012 and completed in early 2013, the Coleville project included an ion exchange to remove the uranium along with three storage tanks to provide the campus with a minimum of four days of potable water. Storage water resulting from the project will also be available for fire protection via two new fire hydrants. Communicating the success of such multi-purpose projects is part of the Alliance's current work, to encourage other, similar communities to bring forth their issues and work collaboratively to address them.

A major goal of the Alliance's DAC work with Inyo-Mono is to share lessons learned with other, similarly situated regions throughout the Sierra Nevada. The Alliance is well-known across the Sierra for sharing and exporting ideas amongst communities. The Alliance has been scheduling and facilitating meetings between Sierra IRWM regions in order to share experiences and knowledge. We are in the process of planning a Sierra-wide IRWM conference this June, working with the Sierra Water Work Group and the State Bar of California and including a full-day focus on disadvantaged communities and Native American tribal issues. Finally, later this year we will help coordinate a State-wide water event focused on serving disadvantaged communities. Of the early lessons learned through our extensive work with the Inyo-Mono IRWM team, and specifically on DAC outreach and engagement, the importance of engaging a broad group of individuals and organizations early and often rises to the top.



Photo Courtesy of Marion Gee.

Along the Sierra's majestic East Side lie many remote, rural communities without adequate drinking water.

## Four New Board Members Bring Diverse Talents to the Alliance!

### Bob Barrett



Bob is a mediator, facilitator, and consultant, working primarily on environmental and other multi-party cases. He splits his time between the San Francisco Bay Area, where his firm, Collaborative Decisions, is located, and Incline Village, Nevada. He has degrees from Stanford and the University of California School of Law at Berkeley (Boalt Hall). Before beginning his practice, he was the program officer at the William and Flora Hewlett

Foundation responsible for its grants in the environmental and conflict resolution areas.

Bob started his connection to the Alliance by attending the Annual Conference for the last few years. He looks forward to bringing his experience as a mediator to conservation issues facing the Alliance and our Member Groups.

### John Knott



John was born and raised in Northern California and currently lives in Loomis with his wife. From a young age, he went camping and backpacking with his family throughout the Sierra, with his favorite backpacking spots in the backcountry of Yosemite.

John spent 32 years as a park ranger in the California State Park System, finishing his career as Superintendent of the Sierra. It was during this time

as a ranger that John started attending the Alliance's annual conferences and saw the key role the Alliance played in building the capacity of smaller groups across the range.

John welcomes the opportunity to be involved in the upcoming strategic planning process the Alliance is undertaking. He believes that his Chico State majors in psychology and sociology served him well during his years as a park ranger. We expect those same skills will make him a valuable asset to the Alliance as well.

### Scott Kruse



Scott is a Biophysical Geographer, and has been an Alliance supporter since our founding in the early 1990's, having served a previous term on the Board.

He is currently working on the Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE) project, a hands-on, school-based international environmental science and education program in 5,000 kindergarten through 12th grade schools in more than 70

countries, with 30 schools in the Sierra.

Scott served on the Futures Fund Committee prior to becoming a Board member. Scott lives in Fresno with his wife Deborah.

### Mehmet McMillan



Mehmet was born in Sinop, Turkey, his mother is Turk and father American. He grew up in Louisiana and now lives in the southern Sierra Nevada in the Giant Sequoia National Monument of California. Educated at Louisiana State University, Mehmet earned a B.S. in Zoology in 1989. In January 2001, McMillan launched WildPlaces a 501(c) 3 non-profit.

With the WildPlaces' team, McMillan coordinates, designs and implements

education through restoration projects combined with youth experiential outdoor programs.

In 1999, he co-founded and co-directs the Burma Humanitarian Mission, a non-profit organization that brings medicine and medical training to the peoples of eastern Burma in the midst of one of the most oppressive and brutal regimes. McMillan volunteers with Sequoia Mountain Rescue, a high angle rescue organization serving outdoor enthusiasts living in and visiting Tulare County.

## Homeowners Protect the Truckee continued from page 1

Examples of the 157 changes homeowners made to protect their favorite local river are: replacing bare soil with mulches or native plants, redesigning their driveways to capture runoff, installing drip lines under porches and eaves to capture runoff, and installing retaining walls. The River Friendly program provides free on-site consultation to homeowners on possible improvements, including



Homeowners' volunteer efforts make a BIG difference.

providing them a workbook with instructions on how to make the improvements. Last year the program offered rebates to offset some of the costs of installing the changes and held a competition, giving out five \$5,000 to \$10,000 awards to exemplary projects. This year, a rebate of up to \$1,000 exists for homeowners who implement the recommended changes.

The TRFL program has been reaching out to Truckee homeowners within three target communities; Squaw/Alpine/Northstar, Tahoe Donner, and Truckee River Corridor. Sixty-eight Site Evaluations were conducted by former Alliance AmeriCorps members Kelly Miller and Tony Passantino. Their hard work, combined with dedicated homeowners, enabled the Alliance to meet and exceed its goal of 100 changes, installing 115 by the end of 2012. On top of this accomplishment, the Watershed Council's Conservation Assistants successfully implemented 42 additional changes, bringing to 157 the total number implemented to date in the Truckee River Watershed.

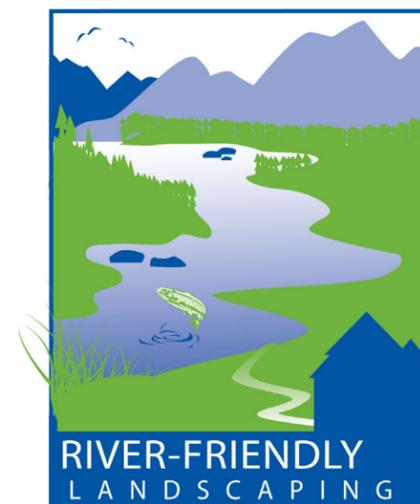
In addition to reducing sediment runoff into the Truckee River, the River Friendly program promotes fire-defensible space, wildlife habitats, and the removal of invasive species. Various types of outreach have been conducted over the program's three year lifespan to inform, inspire and support homeowners making landscaping changes. Alliance AmeriCorps members' outreach efforts included attending local community events, holding workshops at public venues, and tabling at Truckee Thursdays, in addition to handing out over 1700 Sierra Nevada Yard & Garden Guides (an Alliance publication).

One inspiring story comes from Steve Ramos, a Truckee resident and one of last year's contest winners. After a career practicing law, Steve is now a professional mediator and has been a long-time friend of, and volunteer for, the Watershed Council.

He also serves on the Truckee Planning Commission, which often deals with projects that affect the River, Donner Lake and their tributaries. Steve's property, like many others in the community, was an ideal candidate for the Truckee River Friendly Landscaping program. "My property is across the street and uphill from Alder Creek; a tributary to the Truckee River. The lot was left mainly bare after construction, had been largely re-vegetated, but still had bare areas, and the original runoff control measures had deteriorated." The Watershed Council sent a Conservation Assistant out to conduct a free site evaluation. The Conservation Assistant then wrote up and delivered a treatment workbook to Steve, who began working on implementing the recommended measures "The process was easy. I can see what the protective measures are doing and how they're working." "It was gratifying to learn that even though I do not live directly on the Truckee River, I can make a difference."

The program continues through 2013.

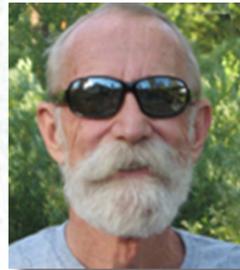
If you are interested, check out the Sierra Yard and Garden Guide at [http://www.truckeeriverwc.org/images/documents/SNYG\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.truckeeriverwc.org/images/documents/SNYG_Guide.pdf), which is an excellent resource for "Do It Yourself," sustainable landscaping. The Truckee River Friendly Landscaping program began its fourth season this spring, offering free consultations and personalized workbooks for interested homeowners. For more information, please contact Andy Otto at the Watershed Council at [aotto@truckeeriverwc.org](mailto:aotto@truckeeriverwc.org) or visit [TRWC.org](http://TRWC.org)



Rock, plants, and even paving can reduce polluted runoff.

## Remembering Sierra Hero Steve Robinson

By Joan Clayburgh  
Sierra Nevada Alliance Executive Director



Steve Robinson

Steve Robinson was my kind of hero—a man who humbly took on what the world dealt him, and then made it better. Steve led numerous efforts to protect and restore his special corner of the Sierra Nevada – the Mountain Meadows region of Lassen County. A retired carpenter from San Diego, Steve seemed not a likely hero, but with his firecracker wife Judy, they made their home in Westwood, and then set out to make change.

Steve fished, hunted, cut firewood and bonded with his piece of the Sierra daily. This bond inspired him to take on preservation, and when he couldn't find someone else to lead the effort, he led it himself.

Steve founded Mountain Meadows Conservancy, where he became Executive Director and recruited others to join him in defining and protecting the qualities that made their region special. Plain-spoken and deeply sincere, he educated himself on the archaic rules and regulations of county land use planning, state preservation laws and the local political landscape.

When Steve determined that he didn't have the expertise, he would recruit experts. Steve knew intrinsically that you often recruit neither with words nor pages of policy analysis, but by getting people to experience your special place or program.

Steve would convince conservation group directors, environmental leaders, attorneys, and agency heads to come hundreds of miles and take a drive in his ancient truck on the dirt roads around Westwood. He would have you walk the land, pointing out Sandhill cranes, showing where the waterfowl would descend each spring, and sharing the long-term Maidu Indian connection to this place. He would also drive you by clear cuts, pointing out where new developments were proposed, and show the 'fancy' developers office in the middle of an aging mill town. If you got lucky, you got some time in Westwood's one room historic museum with Judy – hearing stories of the company town that was Westwood and seeing memory books created by local teachers.

By the time anyone was done with the tour, they were hooked. You had seen an unheralded treasure that you had to help. Part of it was the landscape. Mountain Meadows has a rich rural history, remains off the beaten path, with critical biological diversity. You wanted to protect the place, but you just as much wanted to work with heartfelt, humorous, and smart Steve & Judy.

To date, Steve prevented Dyer Mountain from being carved up with a ski area, golf courses, and thousands of housing units. He

stopped a cement plant on culturally important lands. He secured conservation plans, easements and investments needed to protect prime hunting, ranching, and wildlife areas. It wasn't just his team of experts or diligent watch-dogging and attention to detail. Part of Steve's success was that others often underestimated him. Steve was an amiable carpenter and looked more likely to chop wood or go camping than devise strategies with the best environmental attorneys and experts around.

Steve stands out even more for me in his eagerness to support other activists around the Sierra going through similar personal journeys. He joined the Sierra Nevada Alliance board of directors and served six years before term limits required he step down from his seat and onto our Advisory Board. Steve never missed an Alliance Annual Conference. His was a perpetual voice of support for other land trusts and conservation groups in the region.

Since becoming Alliance Executive Director, my favorite Sierra Nevada Alliance Board meeting occurred when

Steve and Judy hosted our staff and board in Westwood. They found friends to house us all in RVs and trailers and guest bedrooms (Westwood is too small for a hotel). Judy helped us all gain a few pounds with homemade treats. We spent two hours poking around in the volunteer-run historic museum.

We got to go bird watching with a local biologist, mead tasting with the Lunders, and dining at the local café.

A few hearty souls proceeded to the local bar after dinner with Judy to end the night. It was

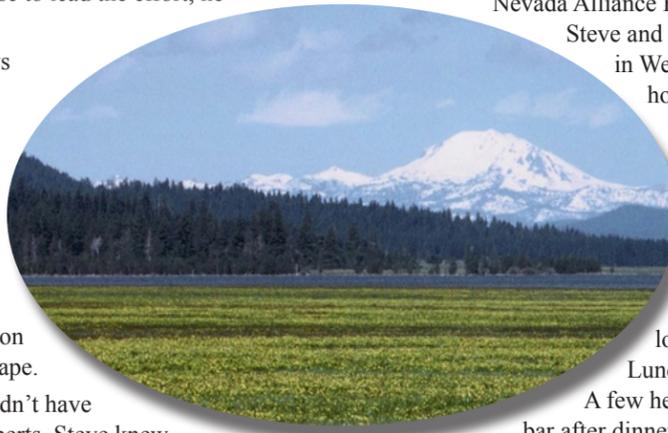
Sierra living at its best. Two days, one meeting, and thanks to the Robinsons, a true appreciation for Westwood and Mountain Meadows.

What I will miss most is talking to Steve. Directing the Sierra Nevada Alliance always is a rollercoaster of ups and downs, and Steve provided a calm voice of support and motivation. We would laugh at our challenges together, his calm determination seeping through the phone to keep me going. Steve's connection and commitment to the Sierra Nevada was a rock upon which I and many others leaned.

It is gratifying to know that Steve's legacy will live on. His family is connected to the meadows, rivers and mountains for the rest of their lives. Mountain Meadows Conservancy has already found an interim Executive Director and will continue to fight to stop poorly planned development and save working landscapes. The Alliance will continue to support local activism saving Sierra special places, knowing the difference that one leader like Steve can make.

Heroes like Steve Robinson are rare – but when they do come into our lives and lands, they leave legacies of inspiration for us to spend our time creating a better world.

To contribute to Steve's legacy, please donate to Mountain Meadows Conservancy. Send your check to P.O. Box 40 Westwood, CA 96137.



## Alliance Staff Comings and Goings

### Kay Ogden Accepts Exciting New Position

We are both sad to announce that Kay Ogden has stepped down as Associate Director and excited to share that she has assumed the Executive Directorship of the Eastern Sierra Land Trust. Kay has been a talented and indispensable director at the Sierra Nevada Alliance for over seven years. We will always be grateful for her leadership in building our Development Program, expanding the Alliance network, transforming our communication outreach, and building our Sustainable Sierra Communities Program. Always a model of sustainability personally (such as team captain for our victorious



Kay Ogden

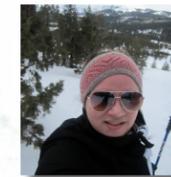
Bike to Work Week championship for 3 years) Kay helped us walk our talk. Alliance staff, donors, partners, members and allies will miss her day-to-day presence leading our Alliance.

Thankfully, Kay has not gone far. She will continue to be a vital part of the Alliance network and active participant within the greater movement. "It's with mixed feelings that I take this next adventure in my life," said Kay Ogden. "And it's a wonderful feeling to be returning to my beloved Eastern Sierra, and I look forward to working with new and old friends."

For Alliance business that Kay was your point person, try Joan or Lynn. And to reach Kay at her new office in Bishop with ESLT, email [kay@eslt.org](mailto:kay@eslt.org) or phone (760) 873-4554.

### New Alliance Office and Staff

If you visit the Alliance's new office (which we encourage—2311 Lake Tahoe Blvd), you'll first encounter the smile of Carissa Gospodinoff, Alliance Administrative Associate.



Carissa Gospodinoff

Carissa is responsible for coordinating administration, our fiscal sponsor program, and support for Board of Directors' meetings. Carissa has previously volunteered and worked on a temporary basis for the Alliance. Taylor Fargo and Nikki Thompson are our new AmeriCorps members and Sustainable Sierra Communities Program Assistants.

Taylor began in January and Nikki in April and both will be with us through September. They will coordinate the Truckee River



Taylor Fargo



Nikki Thompson

Friendly Landscaping Program as well as producing a webinar series on sustainability, compiling a Sustainability Inventory of Sierra organizations, and producing the Alliance's *Spokes* newsletter. Taylor had previously been an intern in the Regional Climate Change Program, while Nikki comes to us shortly after finishing college at Cornell. Our appreciation

to Kelly Miller (AmeriCorps), Tony Passantino (AmeriCorps), and Evan Muchmore (VISTA), who completed their terms of service.

Cami Chavez became the Alliance's new bookkeeper in April, joining us on a part-time basis. Thanks to Karen Hodges for her years of support with our financials.



Cami Chavez

## Many ways to support the Sierra Nevada Alliance!

### Secure, Quick and Convenient Online Giving

Make an online gift at [www.sierranevadaalliance.givezooks.com](http://www.sierranevadaalliance.givezooks.com).

### Gift Memberships: Give the Gift of the Sierra - Protected & Restored

Visit [www.sierranevadaalliance.givezooks.com](http://www.sierranevadaalliance.givezooks.com) for more information.

### Join the Evergreen Club with a Monthly Contribution!

\$10    \$15    \$25    \$50    \$100    Other \_\_\_\_\_

### One Time Gift

Sustaining: \$35    Family: \$50    Half Dome: \$100    Mono Lake: \$250    Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Leadership Gift

Lake Tahoe: \$500    Yosemite: \$1,000    Mt. Whitney: \$2,500    Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Please bill my Credit Card: Card# \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my check payable to the Sierra Nevada Alliance.

The Sierra Nevada Alliance is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law (no goods or services were received).

## Welcome New Alliance Member Groups!

### Tahoe Tallac Association



**Contact:** Ginger Nicolay-Davis  
**Email:** carolyn@valhallatahое.com  
**Phone:** 530.541.4975  
**Website:** www.valhallatahое.com

The Tahoe Tallac Association was formed in 1979 as a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization with the goal of assisting the Forest Service in restoring the three estates on the Tallac Historic Site and developing the site as a historic center while sponsoring as well as producing the Valhalla Arts & Music Festival held annually on the Heller Estate of the Tallac Historic Site.

### Friends of Squaw Valley



**Contact:** Ed Henneveld  
**Email:** friendsofSV@gmail.com  
**Website:** www.friendsofsv.org

Friends of Squaw Valley is an organization of concerned citizens formed in response to the Squaw Valley Olympic Village Specific Plan.

It is a forum whose mission is to advocate for environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and aesthetically compatible development in Squaw Valley while preserving its community character.

### Squaw Alpine Association



**Contact:** Fred Ilfred  
**Email:** info@squawalpineassoc.org  
**Website:** www.squawalpineassoc.org

The Squaw Alpine Association's mission is to preserve the integrity and spirit of our mountain communities. To pursue incorporation as a means to greater self determination.

### The Wilderness Society



**Contact:** Sally Miller  
**Email:** sally\_miller@tw.society.org  
**Phone:** 415.518.7679  
**Website:** www.wilderness.org

Our mission is to protect wilderness and inspire Americans to care for our wild places. The Wilderness Society has been the leading organization protecting our nation's shared public lands since 1935. Through our conservation and public engagement efforts, we work to preserve our nation's rich natural legacy for future generations.

### Million Green Communities

**Contact:** Scott Terrell  
**Email:** scott.terrell57@yahoo.com  
**Phone:** 530.386.5678

Million Green Communities helps communities save \$1,000,000 through strategic green initiatives.

## Sierra Climate Change: continued from page 1

transportation planning—with the primary goal of reducing vehicle miles traveled and thus greenhouse gas emissions. The Kresge grant is allowing the Alliance to focus on the SCSs currently being created in Fresno County, while also providing some resources for similar work in other Southern Sierra counties: Madera, Tulare, and Kern.



New towns are proposed for both sides of Millerton Lake.

The Alliance will bring several important concepts and concerns to the Fresno SCS efforts. Foremost, we will remind San Joaquin Valley leaders that their decisions have huge impacts for the Southern Sierra. The Alliance will forcefully point out that proposals for new towns in the Sierra foothills—such as the Friant/Millerton proposal in

Fresno County or Yokohl Ranch in Tulare County—are disasters from many points of view. If built, these New Towns mean increased vehicle miles traveled, loss of natural and working lands, increased fire risk, and inefficient use of water resources.

We also plan to bring to the table strong economic arguments for adopting climate smart plans. Recent years have shown that traditional suburban, residential developments have simply not provided as much in tax dollars as they cost in public services, and many end up tragic money losers for already strapped local

governments. The Alliance and our partners hope to show that planning for climate change (e.g. revitalizing downtowns and older neighborhoods) will have the direct effect of improving the long-term economic health of our cities.

Several major metropolitan areas—San Diego, LA, and Sacramento—have adopted SCSs, and to varying degrees they have committed their regions to grow in a more resource-efficient manner. The counties of the San Joaquin Valley and Southern Sierra are a different animal—typically more conservative and seemingly addicted to sprawl. Nonetheless, recent trends in the region provide hope for a breakthrough in these SCS processes. Truly unhealthy air quality has brought health advocates out in force, making the links between suburban sprawl, car usage, and asthma and other pollution related diseases. In addition, representatives of lower-income workers and populations are demanding attention to redevelopment of existing urban and rural communities, which have often seen their neighborhoods and services deteriorate as newer developments takes precedence.

This intersection of traditional environmental concerns with health and equity issues may just carry the day. If we can work with regional partners to also drive home the economic benefits of planning for climate change, we stand a good chance of slowly shifting the growth patterns of the Valley and the Southern Sierra. The Alliance thanks the Kresge Foundation and our many donors for supporting this worthwhile effort.

## Member Group Spotlight: The Sierra Fund's Mining Campaign

The Golden State, the 49'ers—California's statehood was built on gold fever—and we still have a romantic notion of the Gold Rush days. The Sierra Fund, however, seeks to remind the Sierra that the legacy of gold fever is still with us in the form of thousands of abandoned mines—tunnels, pits, and ponds, often laden with toxics such as arsenic, lead, asbestos, and especially mercury.



The Sierra Fund's mission is to increase and organize investment in the Sierra Nevada's natural resources and communities. They do this by advocating for increased funding in the Sierra, by providing a vehicle for philanthropy, and by building strategic campaigns on vital topics, such as the mining campaign.

Sierra communities and tourists are more at risk from mining toxics than we realize. While many public and private landowners would rather the mines just stayed out of sight, out of mind, The Sierra Fund is looking at this legacy as not just a risk, but an opportunity. If they're right, those opportunities could proliferate across the Sierra, just as the mines once did.

This mercury didn't come from the Sierra. Most of it was mined in places like the New Almaden mines near San Jose, then brought to

conservation funds are unwittingly purchasing land that may come with a clean-up liability from a leaking old mine.

To confront this pan-Sierra concern, The Sierra Fund is participating in two pilot projects, both funded by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. The Humbug Creek Watershed Assessment project, at the well-known Malakoff Diggins near the Yuba River, is looking at possible alternative treatments to reclaim mining tunnels. If that were to prove safe and effective, Martin imagines that current and former gold miners—affected by increasing



Eroded hillsides at Malakoff Diggins in Nevada County.

Photo Courtesy of The Sierra Fund.



Hydraulic mining: washing the Sierra towards the sea.

Photo Courtesy of The Sierra Fund.

the Sierra to separate gold from ore. Mercury is quite good at that, but in the form of methylated mercury, it's also good at entering the food chain, and the potential harms are frightening—sensory impairment, nerve and brain damage, birth defects. According to The Sierra Fund's CEO, Izzy Martin, "It never goes away. It stays around for geologic time."

Thus we have Sierra fisherman unaware that many areas they fish are deemed by the State to be too toxic to eat from, though they are often not posted as such. Additionally, public and private

limitations on suction dredge mining—could find employment through abandoned mine reclamation.

In a second project, the Nevada Irrigation District is looking to remediate the toxic sediments that have slowly filled in the Combie Reservoir, using a contraption that Martin describes as "kinda like a cement mixer," invented by a Canadian mining duo. The (simplified) idea is to spin dredge spoils until the mercury separates out, leaving behind the mercury, perhaps some gold, and sand and gravel that could be used in construction or augmenting spawning gravels beneath dams. A non-trivial benefit here would be to increase the reservoir capacity. Martin imagines an ideal scenario where increasing the capacity of existing reservoirs replaces the current fights over building new ones.

### The AmeriCorps Connection

The Sierra Fund signed up as an AmeriCorps host site for the first time this year. Sierra Nevada AmeriCorps members Amber Taxiera and Philip Armstrong are working on elements of the Fund's mining campaign, including outreach to impacted communities and medical clinics as well as research on the pilot projects. Martin says she is "Bowled over by our AmeriCorps members" and will hopefully continue with other AmeriCorps participants in the future.

For more information about The Sierra Fund, visit [www.sierrafund.org](http://www.sierrafund.org). or for mining-related information go to [www.reclaimingthesierra.org](http://www.reclaimingthesierra.org).



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