

# SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE SIERRA NEWS

VOLUME X, ISSUE 2

JUNE 2006



SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

## CALENDAR COLUMN

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### Sierra Nevada Alliance 13th Annual Conference

August 11-13, 2006

Three days of Sierra conservation workshops, outstanding speakers, field trips, updates from conservation efforts around the region, and fun

North Tahoe  
Conference Center,  
Kings Beach, CA

visit  
[www.sierranevada  
alliance.org](http://www.sierranevadaalliance.org)  
for more information

~\*~

### October Oak Symposium

California Oaks  
Foundation

October 9th - 12, 2006  
Double Tree Hotel,  
Sonoma Wine County

Visit:  
[www.californiaoaks.org](http://www.californiaoaks.org)

## New Alliance Water Report Garner Attention

### Better Data and Support for Stewardship Needed

40-50 million visitors come to the Sierra each year, in large part attracted to our stunning rivers, lakes, streams and creeks. However, few realize that these waters are not always pristine and greatly in need of further monitoring and protection. So the Sierra Nevada Alliance released a report entitled *State of Sierra Waters: A Sierra Nevada Watersheds Index* to evaluate the relative health of Sierra waters.

The first of its kind, the *State of Sierra Waters* report evaluates 24 major Sierra watersheds (or river systems which include lakes and streams) using 30 indicators of environmental health. The analysis was based on publicly available data from various state and federal agencies. Highlights include:

- 83% (20 of 24) of the major watersheds in the Sierra had stretches that were impacted for swimming sometime within the past five years, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency.

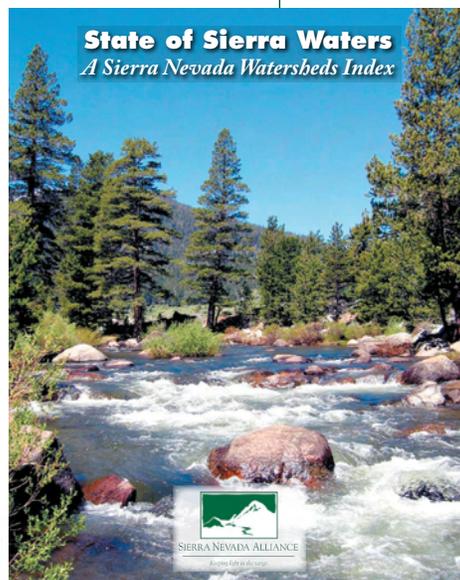
*Continued on page 6*

## Dams, Fish, Floods and Rafts Facing the Challenges of a Changing Climate

Dams serve a multitude of purposes in California, such as generating hydropower, providing peak flows for recreational river boaters, releasing cold water for salmon migrations, and stopping flood waters. This dance of serving many masters has always been challenging. The main plan to balance between the different needs is often worked out in a dam license agreement that the federal government establishes between themselves and the dam operator. This hydropower dam operation dance just got a lot more complicated with the news of unavoidable impacts coming from climate change.

What makes these dam relicensing processes particularly vulnerable to climate change is that the license conditions last for 30-50 years. So when deciding how much water goes for fish needs or power generation needs or flood control, they

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SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

*Keeping light in the range.*

## Executive Director's Letter

In April of 2004 the Sierra Nevada Alliance Board of Directors came together to create a Strategic Plan and in determining their vision of success they all got behind this idea articulated by Lynn Sadler: "Yesterday's Headline: Sierra in Peril. Today's Headline: Sierra a Model of Regional Success."

We've got a ways to go before our region is seen as a model of regional success, but we have come a long way from the days when no one knew our region had problems – or where it was! We are somewhere in the middle of these two headlines – and the key to getting to the 'success part' is continued attention. The Alliance and our conservation partners must keep Sierra issues and solutions front and center before the public and our elected leaders.

To this end, the Alliance released to the media our second report on the troubles facing Sierra waters. The good news is that reporters we spoke with knew the Alliance, had been tracking Sierra issues and we got widespread TV, radio and print coverage on our report. (more on page 1)

Likewise, Sierra Lobby Day participants met with many of the same California legislative aides and legislators from the past efforts. Few asked what was considered "in the Sierra" this time and broad support for increased conservation funding through a license plate and budget line items was the flavor of the day (see story on page 4).

These small signs of recognition among these opinion leaders is certainly a mark of progress. At the same time, as our *State of Sierra Waters* report points out there is much to do in monitoring problems, investing in solutions and implementing projects that restore water quality, protect wildlife habitat, and ensure our region thrives. Even the most recent bond proposals still only give the Sierra minimal support and not a decent share of state resources. We have a long way to go still.

So I look forward to partnering with our board, donors, member groups and other allies to earn those future headlines – "Sierra a Model of Regional Success."

Sincerely,

Joan Clayburgh  
Executive Director

### PERIODIC NEWSLETTER OF THE SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

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Sierra Nevada Alliance's mission is to protect and restore the natural environment of the Sierra Nevada for future generations while ensuring healthy and sustainable communities. We do this by strengthening the work of people and organizations committed to the environmental integrity of the Sierra.



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# Sierra Foothills of Tulare County Facing “New Town” Madness



We all have heard of the plight of the California condor – down to a population of less than fifty birds, often bred in captivity to restock the population, and constantly making the news as a member gets shot or accidentally poisoned. Now one of the few places in the Sierra Nevada that is home to the condor is facing another challenge to their survival. At Alliance headquarters, we call it Tulare County “New Town” Madness.

The county is home to some of the Southern Sierra’s greatest foothills. Blue oak woodlands, Kaweah, Tule and Kern Rivers, ranchlands, open space and the rare Sycamore alluvial woodlands all call this county home. And as noted, the California condor, among many other rare and endangered plants and animals, makes its home here.

Tulare County has just issued a notice of preparation – announcing that it will release this summer a draft general plan and draft environmental impact report. Earlier this month, at notice of preparation hearings residents reminded county officials of the concerns they expressed at numerous General Plan update workshops in the past several years about how they would like their county to grow.

But sleuthing by residents about what the general plan is likely to include has uncovered a new proposal never before seen in California, let alone the Sierra – a “New Town Policy.” This policy proposes to allow the Tulare County Board of Supervisors to establish new communities anywhere in the county, anytime with very little public oversight. It would allow a proposal, for example, to pave over the 36,000 acre Yokohl Ranch with a new community outside existing infrastructure, destroying a noted priority conservation area. The “New Town” policy is seen by many long time planning experts to be an extremely dangerous precedent.

The great news is that the Sierra Nevada

Alliance has been asked by our supporters and member groups to facilitate a number of planning sessions for conservation leaders to determine how to wake up their residents to this ugly vision for their area and win better plans for their future. Alliance Land Use Coordinator Autumn Bernstein has helped convene groups to review their goals, develop a mission and plot out how to hold their supervisors accountable to community interests.

From these meetings a new group has been born: Tulare County Citizens for Responsible Growth. Members of the coalition include Center for Race Poverty and the Environment, Sierra Club Mineral King Group, Wildplaces and other concerned residents, farmers and ranchers from Springville, Exeter, Three Rivers, Visalia and other communities throughout the county.

This new partnership has a vision of preserving the rural character of Tulare County by focusing on infill, revitalizing existing communities, and prioritizing the protection of farms and ranchlands. It proposes to map critical resources, concentrate development, and ensure democratic participation in growth decisions.

The Sierra Nevada Alliance is looking forward to continuing to provide campaign consulting and planning advice to this new network. Stay tuned as the campaign continues.

*The proposed New Town Policy sets a dangerous precedent and opens the door to developers to build anywhere – including 36,000 acre Yokohl Ranch and historic Central Valley farming towns such as Earlimart.*

*Yokohl Ranch is adjacent to a wildlife refuge with known habitat for the California condor, and lies in a priority conservation area identified by The Nature Conservancy and local conservation groups as having valuable blue oak woodlands, rare plant and animal species, and Sycamore alluvial woodlands (2000 acres left in entire state.)*



*The 36,000 Yokohl Ranch in the Sierra portion of Tulare County is habitat for California condors and the proposed site of a new town.*

## Democracy in Action

One of Executive Director Joan Clayburgh's favorite days is Sierra Lobby Day.

"I have walked the halls of the capitol for various efforts in the last twenty years and I usually feel like the halls are full of these seasoned, unknown deal makers. The place can be intimidating and you get the feeling from snatches of conversation that the business of the capitol is about mortgage brokers or chemical sales or timber harvest. But on Sierra Lobby Day my favorite thing is that it is impossible for me to walk down a hall or run down the staircase or catch an elevator or hit the cafeteria without seeing a fellow Sierra conservation leader smiling at me. It just feels like democracy should – friendly, passionate and for the public good."

May 23rd was the 4th Sierra Lobby Day, this year sponsored by The Sierra Fund and Sierra Nevada Alliance. Lobby Days over the years have seen up to a hundred Sierra lovers walking the halls, and this year had about 25 advocates from as far away as Lassen County and Kern County.

The main business of the day was getting the Sierra its fair share of conservation dollars. Assembly Member Tim Leslie and Assembly Member John Laird are authoring Assembly Bill 84 which would establish a Sierra Nevada Conservancy license plate. If AB 84 passes the legislature, these official license plates would be issued by the California Department of Motor Vehicles and available for all registered vehicles. Proceeds from the sales and re-

newal of the Sierra Nevada License Plates would directly fund the Sierra Nevada Conservancy's efforts. AB 84 passed the Assembly last year and is now awaiting a hearing in Senate Transportation.

In addition, Sierra lobbyists for a day advocated for the budget to include \$30 million for the Sierra Nevada Cascade Grant Program for Sierra conservation acquisitions, \$10 million for salmon and steelhead restoration, \$10 million for non-game fish and wildlife programs, \$5 million for wetlands and riparian habitat conservation and \$150 million for state park deferred maintenance.

Sierra conservation needs were just not understood or heard from until these lobby days got started by The Sierra Fund. The Alliance network has always provided the juice of citizen lobbyists to make these lobby days work.

"It truly has made a difference in the perception of the Sierra from legislators," said Izzy Martin, Executive Director and registered lobbyist for The Sierra Fund. "When I started lobbying for the Sierra it was the first time most of these legislators even considered where the Sierra was. Now it's pretty common knowledge that the region is the source of over 65% of California's drinking water and home to recreation enjoyed by all Californians. Having this troop of devout Sierra conservation leaders walk the halls each year has really helped put the region on the lawmakers radar screen."



### Reserve a Sierra Nevada License Plate

*While not available until the legislature passes Assembly Bill 84, your reservation helps show the demand for this new plate.*

*Once the bill is passed you will be contacted immediately with information on how to purchase your plate.*

*In the first year 7500 plates must be purchased for the program to continue.*

*For more on the cost and to reserve visit.*

*www.  
sierralicenseplate.org*

## Join Us for the Annual Conference August 11-13

"My favorite conference of the year is the Sierra Nevada Alliance annual conference," said Scott Kruse, Fresno resident and Science Teacher. "I love the workshops on conservation issues with terrific experts. I enjoy the speakers. Mostly I enjoy learning what everyone is doing to protect and restore the Sierra. It really is a highlight of the year."

Don't miss out on our 13th Annual Conference at the North Tahoe Conference Center in Kings Beach. Friday features the "Your Voices Shaping the Sierra" program by the Environmental Law Section of the California State Bar. Saturday and Sunday Key Note speakers include Heyday Book Publisher & Author Malcolm Margolin, Mariposa County Supervisor and John Muir Impersonator Lee Stetson, and visionary Steve Wilensky – farmer, ex-union organizer and Calaveras County Supervisor. Plus, Saving the Sierra team leaders Catherine Stifter and Jesikah Maria Ross will be leading a story telling workshop and bringing their audio recording booth to capture YOUR story about the Sierra – possibly for public radio broadcast.

Visit our website at [www.sierranevadaalliance.org](http://www.sierranevadaalliance.org) for the full program, to register online, and to locate accommodations.

# Welcome New Member Groups!

## Squaw Valley Gateway Community

Squaw Valley, CA (Fresno County)  
Email: [rosemary@squawvalleyherbgardens.com](mailto:rosemary@squawvalleyherbgardens.com)

This newest group is also one with the most recent victory. Squaw Valley Gateway Community works to protect Scenic "Hwy. 180" Corridor, encourage sustainable growth in their community while safeguarding their foothill beauty and resources, and promote family-owned farms, ranches and entrepreneurial businesses. In April they stopped the siting of a new cell tower that would have impacted the scenic gateway corridor in Squaw Valley.

## Sierra Watershed Education Partnerships

Tahoma, CA  
[www.4swep.org](http://www.4swep.org)

SWEP promotes environmental stewardship in the Tahoe and Truckee region by connecting students to their community and local environment through comprehensive watershed education and service-learning. SWEP's primary role is to build collaborative community partnerships that promote the implementation of hands-on watershed education. They provide teacher trainings, community education and outreach, and collaborative efforts in service-learning that emphasize the three elements of place-based service learning: 1) place is the context, 2) service learning projects which focus on monitoring, restoration and public outreach, 3) reflection and evaluation.

## Foothills Water Network

Lotus, CA  
[www.foothillswaternetwork.org](http://www.foothillswaternetwork.org)

The Foothills Water Network provides a forum that increases the effectiveness of conservation organizations to achieve river and watershed restoration and protection benefits for the Yuba, Bear, and

American watersheds. This includes negotiations at the county, state, and federal levels, with an immediate focus on the upcoming FERC relicensing processes. To an extraordinary degree, the waters of the Yuba, Bear, and American watersheds are co-mingled from headwaters to mouth through tunnels and canals between basins. Accordingly, specific objectives of the Foothills Water Network include: 1) Facilitating a dialogue on cross-basin issues and strategies to enhance overall watershed balance; 2) Working towards a common "vision" for overall watershed health across the basins; 3) Analyzing the Yuba, Bear, and American (NF and MF) as the "problemshed" in order to explore constructive interbasin solutions; 4) Conducting public outreach to raise awareness of water supply issues and the unique opportunities in the three interlinked watersheds.

## Alpine Watershed Group

Markleeville, CA  
[www.alpinecountyca.com/alpine\\_watershed\\_group](http://www.alpinecountyca.com/alpine_watershed_group)

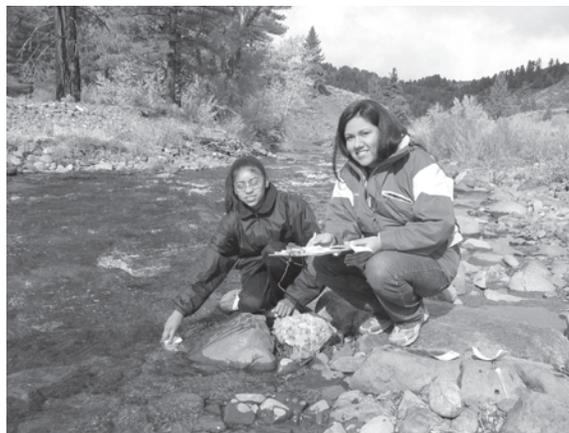
The Alpine Watershed Group works to preserve and enhance the natural system functions of Alpine County's watersheds for future generations. The group works by inspiring participation to collaborate, educate and proactively implement projects that benefit and

steward the county's watersheds. The group is comprised of individuals and representatives of local, state and federal agencies of a variety of interests. Currently, the Alpine Watershed Group has four program areas. The Alpine Creek Days Program provides citizens of all ages the opportunity to participate in restoration projects, fighting invasive weeds, monitoring water quality, learning about watershed function, and more. Through collaboration with local, state, and federal agencies the Alpine Watershed Group's Watershed Restoration Program seeks to implement streambank and upland restoration projects. The Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program gathers biological, chemical and physical data to assess the effectiveness of our watershed restoration program and detect poor landuse management throughout the County. The Group's newest program, the Temporary Construction BMPs Improvement, educates local contractors in proper erosion control measures during the construction of homes to protect water quality. The Alpine Watershed Group meets every second Tuesday of each month at Turtle Rock Park, Markleeville, CA at 6:00pm.

## Meadow Vista Protection Inc

Meadow Vista, CA  
[www.meadowvistampv.org](http://www.meadowvistampv.org)

Meadow Vista Protection, Inc. (MVP) was organized in February 2005 and works to preserve and protect the health, environment and quality of life of our Meadow Vista area community, located in Nevada and Placer Counties. MVP is involved in many activities that benefit the health and safety of residents and protect the natural environment. Primary issue interests are the effects of asphalt production and diesel truck traffic on air quality, public health and safety, and the high risk of fire and spills from hazardous materials being transported through the area.



*Alpine Watershed Group's Markleeville Creek Day attracts residents and visitors to help monitor and restore the forks of the Carson River*

## Alliance Water Report: continued from page 1

- 79% (19 of 24) major watersheds in the Sierra have had stretches with impacts for fishing, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), the National Listing of Fish Advisories, and the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection (NDEP).
- 75% (18 of 24) major watersheds in the region had stretches that were listed as “impacted for drinking” according to the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Looking at all 30 indicators shows that all Sierra watersheds that have been impacted chemically, biologically, and/or physically in the past five years.

“The waters of our states, the tourist-dependent communities of the Sierra and our world-class fisheries deserve more support than we have witnessed to date,” said Megan Suarez-Brand, Sierra Nevada Alliance Watersheds Program Coordinator.

Over 60% of California’s and most of Northern Nevada’s water supply comes from the Sierra Nevada. Everyone from fish and wildlife in the Sierra, to farms in the Central Valley, to urban water consumers in California and Nevada rely on clean supplies of Sierra Nevada water. Sierra rivers, lakes and streams also supply prime fishing, swimming, boating and other recreation for residents and visitors alike.

The Sierra Nevada Alliance recommends that:

1. The Governor and the State Legislature should invest in providing better public data on where, why and for what period of time stretches of listed Sierra rivers were impaired. The Alliance could not find reasonably accessible details about these Clean Water Act violations.
2. California should also provide greater support to local watershed stewardship groups to both collect data and implement river and lake protection and restoration projects.
3. Residents and local businesses should reduce their use of toxic chemicals, such as pesticides and fertilizers, which make their way into Sierra rivers.
4. Residents and local businesses should use erosion control methods to keep as much soil on their property as possible. This will help maintain water clarity and healthy ecosystems.

The *State of Sierra Waters: A Sierra Nevada Watersheds Index* uses publicly available data from various state and federal agencies, including US Environmental Protection Agency, US Geological Survey, California State Water Quality Control Board, Nevada Division of Environmental Protection and others. Not every Sierra river, lake or stream has been evaluated thoroughly. So while a particular watershed may not be shown here to have a specific impairment, that does not suggest that an impairment may not actually exist.

### Report garnered widespread media

To release this report the Alliance staff, board members and allies held simultaneous press conferences in San Francisco, Sacramento, and Reno on March 22, 2006. The Alliance also issued news releases throughout the Sierra and nation. A total of fourteen television stations ran the story, seven radio stations did interviews, sixteen newspapers carried the story (including a front-page, above the fold article in the *Reno Gazette-Journal*), and numerous environmental organizations posted the AP story on their site and sent out announcements.

Partners from Tuolumne River Trust, Clean Water Action, Planning and Conservation League, Friends of the River, Truckee River Watershed Council, and Patagonia spoke out at the news conferences with their concerns and hopes for the future.



### Get Your Copy of the Report Today!

A full copy of the *State of Sierra Waters: A Sierra Nevada Watersheds Index* is available for free on our website at [www.sierranevadaalliance.org](http://www.sierranevadaalliance.org) or via mail for \$20.

Our website offers more information on our campaign and this issue.

“Gathering the data was a real challenge,” said Kerri Timmer of Community Action Partners who was the lead consultant writing the report for the Alliance. “The data is inconsistent from year to year, there are many areas that are never monitored, and different agencies classify and interpret the data differently. However, to be good stewards we need to create a benchmark with the best data available to prioritize resources and track progress or degradation. This is the best picture of the state of Sierra waters we could put together. We hope the state invests in better data collection and record keeping and works with the Alliance to track the health of these waters in the future.”

“I grew up fishing with my Mom and Dad on Sierra lakes all over the central Sierra and never thought twice about eating the fish or swimming in the water,” said Joan Clayburgh, Executive Director. “This report is critical in waking up our state leaders that those experiences are not to be taken for granted and that we must prioritize this region for water monitoring and protection. Future generations are counting on us.”

## Climate Change: continued from page 1

decide this in a long-term agreement. With 25-40% of the Sierra Nevada's snowpack decreasing even under the best greenhouse gas emission reduction scenarios in the next 25-50 years, planning how to operate a dam really needs to address how climate change will affect hydrology.

For this reason, the California Hydropower Reform Coalition and Sierra Nevada Alliance sponsored a day long seminar in February which brought together, for the first time, those involved in regulating non-federal hydropower projects and those studying the impacts of climate change on California. The seminar was held at UC Davis and brought together leading scientists and stakeholders. The seminar was made possible thanks to the support of the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and Compton Foundation.

Dan Cayan from Scripps Institution of Oceanography started the day showing the scenarios where summer temperatures are projected to rise about 2-4 degrees Fahrenheit

under the lower emission scenario and how this maps out. Jeff Mount from UC Davis and Larry Brown from USGS spoke to impacts on aquatic resources. Michael Hanemann from UC Berkeley California Climate Change Center and Jay Lund from UC Davis spoke to some ideas of adapting hydropower for this new future.

At the event, the Sierra Nevada Alliance, distributed our *Sierra Climate Change Toolkit* and pushed our main platform of basic steps to address this new future:

- 1) Educate your team of planners on regional impacts of climate change.
- 2) Model and forecast a range of potential impacts from climate change on your watershed.
- 3) Base all plans on adaptive management.
- 4) Monitor and track changes in weather, hydrology, and ecosystems in your watershed.
- 5) Prioritize projects and plans that succeed under multiple scenarios.

“We can't let those planning how to protect fish and stop floods keep their heads in the sand about the fact that we are going to lose 25-40% of our Sierra snow pack in the next 25-50 years,” said Joan Clayburgh. “It is imperative that these hydropower relicensing efforts know the latest science – and even more imperative that those advocating for natural resource protection and recreation be equipped to be at the table planning for the future.”

“The California Hydropower Reform Coalition is determined to change the way dams are operated to better balance multiple needs,” said Laura Norlander, Director of CHRC. “Thanks to the Sierra Nevada Alliance we now realize how important it is to address climate change in the relicensing process. Their leadership on this issue has really gotten the ball rolling on this important issue.”

For more on CHRC visit: [www.calhrc.org](http://www.calhrc.org). For a copy of the Sierra Nevada Alliance Climate Change Toolkit visit [www.sierranevadaalliance.org](http://www.sierranevadaalliance.org).

## Films, Flowers, & Fun Spring Forth for Alliance

The Sierra Nevada Alliance has just chalked up a number of events to inspire communities to protect the environment while building our base of support.

This year the Alliance hosted the South Yuba River Citizens League's *Wild & Scenic Environmental Film Festival on Tour* on February 25 at the Lake Tahoe Community College in South Lake Tahoe. The Festival showed five award winning short films, including *Discover Hetch Hetchy*, a new film documenting the efforts to restore Yosemite Valley's sister valley. The event also featured



*Wild & Scenic Film Festival feature Flying over Everest followed hang gliders and eagles near Everest.*

a special appearance by world-class rock climber Ron Kauk who introduced his film, *Return to Balance - A Climber's Journey*. Special thanks go to Patagonia and Patagonia@Heavenly for their awesome sponsorship and support of the event!

April showers rescheduled our Wildflower Walk twice. The annual Walk, hosted by Alliance Board Member's Bill Center and Ray Griffiths, still came off with a display of great variety above

the South Fork American River! Ray took advantage of the delay to organize a new walk - adding on a Natural History Walk of Mameluke Hill Diggins. Lots of fun was had at both walks!!

And to make the last quarter even more fun for finding new friends for the Alliance, Board Member Jan Chattan-Brown and her husband Jack hosted a great house party at their home overlooking the Pacific, and Joan and Barry Boothe hosted another incredible wine tasting at their San Francisco home. The Sierra Nevada Alliance extends a hearty thanks for all this support!

So stay tuned for invitations to other events and fun. And if you have a walk, event or party you'd like to host and benefit the Alliance, please contact Kay Ogden, Development Director at 530.542.4546.