

SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

SIERRA NEWS

VOLUME XV, ISSUE 2

NOVEMBER 2011



SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

CALENDAR

~*~

Sierra Nevada Alliance Holiday Party

December 6th, 2011
American Legion Hall
South Lake Tahoe, CA

~*~

South Yuba River Citizens League 10th Annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival

January 13 -15, 2012
Nevada City, CA

~*~

Planning and Conservaton League Environmental Legislative Symposium

January 28, 2012
Sacramento, CA

~*~

19th Annual Sierra Nevada Alliance Conference

September 21 & 22, 2012
Embassy Suites
South Lake Tahoe, CA

~*~

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

Tea Party and Property Rights Politics in the Sierra: Tactics and Counter-tactics

Tea Party politics was a popular topic at the 18th Annual Sierra Nevada Alliance Conference. A well-attended workshop featuring three panelists with unique experience dealing with Tea Party political and property-rights strategies in the Sierra received high marks from conference participants.

The Tea Party was initially formed in the Sierra's own Nevada County by Mark Meckler in 2009. There are now over 2,800 chapters nationwide – a testament to the Tea Party's power of organizing. They have a 40-year plan to control local, state and federal government and have strong financial support from the Koch Brothers, a pair of neo-conservative Texas billionaires, as explained in this *New York Times* editorial: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/29/opinion/29rich.html>.

While the Sierra Nevada Alliance is non-partisan, we are concerned with many Tea Party positions that counter our efforts to protect and restore Sierra lands, water, wildlife and rural communities, often

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Sierra Nevada Alliance Conference Highlights Sustainability in Action!

On August 19 & 20, 2011, over 170 community activists, foundation leaders, agency directors, concerned citizens, AmeriCorps members, and resource conservation experts gathered in South Lake Tahoe for the 18th Annual Sierra Nevada Alliance Conference. The two-day event provided attendees with a variety of sustainability solutions, success stories and action plans for the future.

First was the location itself – **Embassy Suites, South Lake Tahoe** – a facility recognized for being in the forefront of innovative, sustainable green business practices. The property composts their waste, reusing it to grow their indoor plants; uses ozone to wash all their laundry instead of water; and deploys heat and motion sensors to turn off heating and lighting throughout the hotel when rooms are not in use.

David Hansen, Director of Engineering – the driving force behind the implementation of these practices – offered conference attendees a

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Photo Courtesy of Richard Knapp

The beauty of Sierra waters offers special treasures for every season.

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SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

Keeping light in the range.

Executive Director's Letter

The New Economy. The Same Dedication.

Dear Friends,

If the Alliance let the roller coaster of the economy determine the extent of our work for the Sierra, I would be writing this fall to tell you we've had to drastically reduce the scope of our efforts. Non-profit philanthropic newsletters constantly report the trends of giving going down and gifts being smaller, and our own donations mirror this in some way.

But the great news is the Board and staff of the Alliance don't let economic trends determine our work plan or affect the level of our dedication. Instead, we look always to what the region needs and what we know we can do for the Sierra.

The Sierra Nevada can't afford to put conservation on hold until the economy recovers. Lake Tahoe's clarity doesn't follow economic trends. Development plans for gateway communities to the Sequoia National Forest are being decided this year. Sandhill Cranes will continue to stop by mountain meadows this next year, unaware of development plans for their favorite stopping places. The degraded streams, wetlands and hills of the Sierra will continue to bleed sediment into their once-clear waters unless someone leads on-the-ground efforts to reverse it this year. The Sierra snowpack level for our grandchildren graduating high school in 2050 or 2060 will be determined by the amount of greenhouse gases we emit this year.

So rather than reduce our scope, we are getting even more innovative.

We are working to recruit more people to join the effort to Save the Sierra and asking our existing supporters to increase their support.

Our Empower El Dorado project is uniting agencies and individuals together to save money, do more with less, while becoming better stewards of the environment. Our SNAP program is fighting to save AmeriCorps and gearing up to deploy 27 members a year for three more years – knowing that AmeriCorps does more for the Sierra with fewer resources than any other conservation program in the region. Our Regional Climate Change Program is expanding the network of trained strategists to fight for smart resource plans – because we need effective local leaders now more than ever before.

The Alliance is expanding our outreach, being more innovative, precisely because the Sierra can't wait for the economy to recover. The Sierra needs action today.

As I know you all understand, our goal of Saving the Sierra is not the place to downsize efforts or contributions or time. The Sierra is our heart and center, where we can rejuvenate and recover together, both today and 20,000 days from now.

Cheers,

Joan Clayburgh
Executive Director

PERIODIC NEWSLETTER OF THE
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Alliance AmeriCorps Members & Conservation Assistants Implement Truckee River-Friendly Landscaping

A typical summer morning often found Reyna Yagi and Kelly Miller, Sierra Nevada AmeriCorps Partnership members serving at the Sierra Nevada Alliance, off to an early start to get to Truckee for a homeowner consultation at 8:30 a.m. Reyna and Kelly helped reach out to nearly 1,000 homeowners and did 20 home consultations this year as part of the Sierra Nevada Alliance and Truckee River Watershed Council's collaborative program to help Truckee-area homeowners understand how actions they take on their property can adversely affect the health of the Truckee River watershed.

The program is coordinated by the Alliance's Sustainable Sierra Communities Program and assists homeowners in voluntarily reducing or preventing soil erosion from their property. Through a \$500,000 Clean Water Act grant awarded by the California State Water Resources Control Board, Conservation Assistants — like Reyna and Kelly — are able to provide homeowners with free site evaluations, site plans, and a workbook detailing what areas of the property need attention and what actions they can take to become a River-Friendly property. Once the homeowner implements the recommendations, they qualify for a rebate from the Truckee River Watershed Council to cover labor and materials costs.

“Driving to Truckee for work isn't a bad commute,” Kelly chimes in. The road curves and bends through tall pine forests, opens to vistas of Lake Tahoe and finally reaches Tahoe City where the road begins to run parallel to the Truckee River itself. Making the drive reinforces the importance of the work they're doing serving as AmeriCorps members in the Sierra.

One homeowner stated to Reyna, “I really want to help the watershed as much as I can. I want to do whatever it takes because I love this place.” Reyna explains that many homeowners express

this same sentiment, and want to know what they can do to help. Over 100 Truckee homeowners have signed up for the program so far. “It's wonderful to know that so many homeowners want to be proactive in repairing the watershed,” Reyna adds. “They aren't sure what to do or how and that's where we come in!”

After walking a property with the homeowner, Reyna and Kelly look for problems on properties such as water dripping from the roof and eroding away at bare soil below the roof line, if slopes in the yard are stable or washing away into the watershed, and if driveway water runoff flows into nearby storm drains that carry pollutants to local streams and lakes. Then back at the Alliance office, Reyna and Kelly take all these issues and draw up the site plans, create a “Treatment Workbook” which they give the resident. The Conservation Assistants then do follow-up to make sure the homeowner understands the suggestions in the workbook and make themselves available for any questions regarding implementing the solutions on their property.

For Reyna and Kelly, this summer has been a great hands-on experience that will help advance their conservation careers. “It's amazing to know that we are contributing to the health of Sierra rivers and streams and enabling homeowners to easily help the Sierra, too,” says Kelly. The Sierra Nevada Alliance plans that this on-the-ground project of Truckee River Friendly Landscaping will not only make it easy for residents to help the Truckee River, but that the program will be an innovative model for other Sierra communities to steward all Sierra rivers and streams.

If you live in the Truckee area and wish to have a free consultation on your property, give Reyna and Kelly a call at (530) 542-4546 or sign up online by visiting the Truckee River Watershed Council's website at www.truckeeriverwc.org.



River-Friendly Landscaping assures our sparkling Sierra rivers will continue running clear and clean.

Alliance 2nd Sierra Meadow Forum Informs and Inspires

The potential for Sierra meadows to provide critical habitat, improve water quality, increase late summer flows and adapt to climate change was the subject of the two-day Sierra Meadow Forum, June 15-16, 2011. With critical support from the **National Fish and Wildlife Foundation**, and sponsor **California Trout**, the event sparked hearty discussions that will help chart the future of our iconic Sierra meadows.

Day One found 60 participants tramping through several different meadows near Portola, California where Feather River Coordinated Resource Management, in partnership with local landowners and the U.S. Forest Service, are implementing several interesting projects. Field trip leader Jim Wilcox highlighted projects in different phases of completion and the successes and failures of each project, which gave participants a realistic understanding of on-the-ground restoration techniques.

Day Two gathered restoration practitioners, conservationists, and federal, state and local government agency representatives at the PlumpJack Squaw Valley Inn for presentations and discussions on the state of Sierra meadow science, restoration techniques, and outreach strategies. Some of the key speakers included Ann Mills, Deputy Under-Secretary of the USDA; former California Natural Resources Secretary Mike Chrisman; and Sierra Nevada Conservancy Executive Officer Jim Branham. The Alliance is excited to continue working with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to support their critical efforts to enhance and protect Sierra meadows.

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Conference Highlights...from page 1



California Natural Resources Secretary John Laird was the opening Keynote Speaker

“Green Building Tour,” explaining the hotel’s efforts in detail, while noting the economic savings they provided the company. One participant wrote on their conference evaluation form about the Tour, “This was incredibly inspiring! It really gave me hope for the future.”

California Natural Resources Secretary John Laird opened the conference Friday morning. Secretary Laird has long been a hero for the Sierra Nevada, co-authoring the bill and leading the charge in the legislature that established the Sierra

Nevada Conservancy. Secretary Laird explained how politics in Sacramento could help the Sierra, and later answered questions on clear-cutting and other important issues in the region.

A Plenary on **Communities in Action** spotlighted sustainability actions throughout the Sierra: **APPLE** of Nevada City’s **WHAT; Envirolution’s** creative ways of engaging youth as in Truckee High School’s Trashion Fashion Show; and **Sierra Business Council’s** geo-tourism efforts at work for the Sierra. A last-minute panel filling in for Saturday’s keynote speaker got rave reviews: special thanks to **Autumn Bernstein, Director of ClimatePlan, Steve Wilensky, Calaveras County Supervisor, Nick Santos, Executive Director, Environmental Consumer** and **Elizabeth Martin, Chief Executive Officer, The Sierra Fund** for sharing their inspirational Sierra stories on such short notice.

Participants gave Conference workshops high marks, including **Mounting an Effective Campaign in the New Tea Party Climate**. The Tea Party has been organizing in many Sierra Nevada counties, getting anti-environmental candidates elected to county offices and providing a voice for reduced government at public gatherings. Attendees found the workshop motivational, with one of them writing, “This was extremely important to me. I’ve been going to the Board of Supervisors meetings a lot. Now I know how to identify the Tea Party rhetoric and deal with them, very informative.”

An important part of the annual gathering is the presentation of awards to outstanding Sierra leaders. **The Dean Malley Sun Tzu Award** was presented to **WildPlaces** for being an organization that developed a winning strategy and exemplified that winning without fighting is best. WildPlaces has pioneered a number of youth and diversity outreach programs that connect local and urban youth with their wild places in the Southern Sierra.

The Tissiack Award was presented to **Peter Van Zant** for being an impressive and inspirational leader, widely admired by other Sierra conservationists. Peter earned the award through his decades-long service to the Sierra Nevada. His accomplishments include: founding the Rural Community Action Network (Rural-Can), serving as Chair of the Board of the South Yuba River Citizens League, serving as a twice-elected member of the Nevada County Board of Supervisors, and currently helping save the Sierra through his work with Sierra Watch.

The Mt. Whitney Award was presented to **Jan Chatten-Brown** for her exceptional commitment, energy, creativity, and vision in leading the Sierra Nevada Alliance. Jan served on the Board of Directors of the Sierra Nevada Alliance for six years, two of those as President. During her tenure, she championed legal assistance for Member Groups; actively served on program and organizational committees; was a leading contributor to the organization and long-time Annual Conference sponsor; and consistently provided valuable strategic advice.

Conference participants were given a rousing sendoff on Saturday afternoon, with an authentic Aztec dance by Chico Garza that celebrated the wonderful diversity of the Sierra Nevada.

This year’s Conference would not have been possible without the generous support of our sponsors. Special thanks to our title sponsors, the **Sierra Nevada Conservancy** and the **Rose Foundation For Communities & The Environment**. For a full list of all our generous supporters, see page 6. Thanks also to **Crowdbrite**, for their new collaborative design application that provided a platform for the best thinkers and doers in the Sierra to share sustainability projects throughout the event. In addition, **the staff and interns of the Sierra Nevada Alliance** should be recognized for their outstanding work in organizing and hosting the conference. Thanks also to the members of our **Board of Directors** for their help and support.

As in past years, for many participants, the best part on the Conference was networking and meeting others who share the same goals and struggles, and celebrating each other’s successes. As one attendee summed it up, “The people and their enthusiasm, dedication, attitude and concern for people and our world are inspiring.”



Jan Chatten-Brown accepting the Mt. Whitney Award from Sierra Nevada Alliance Board Member Lynn Sadler

Thank You to our 18th Annual Conference Sponsors!

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Foresthill Residents for
Responsible Growth
Friends of Jesse Morrow Mountain
Friends of the Inyo
Friends of the West Shore
High Sierra Rural Alliance
Local Water Stays Local
Mariposans for the Environment and
Responsible Government (MERG)
Moonlight Valley Alliance
Mountain Area Preservation Foundation
Mountain Meadows Conservancy
North Fork American River Alliance
Placer Land Trust
Planning & Conservation League
Plumas Tomorrow
Rural Quality Foundation
Save Van Norden Meadow

Sequoia Forestkeeper
Sierra Buttes/Lakes Basin Coalition
Sierra Club Maidu Group
Sierra Club Mother Lode Chapter
Sierra Club Placer Group
Sierra Club Sierra Nevada Group
Sierra Cycling Foundation
Sierra Foothills Audubon Society
Sierra Streams Institute
Sierra Watch
Sustainable Tahoe
Tahoe Baikal Institute (TBI)
Yosemite Area Audubon Society
Sierra Club Range of Light
Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter
Sierra Club Yahi Chapter
SRVA Advocates for Smart Growth

New Board Members Bring Diverse Experience to Alliance

Help us welcome three new members to the Alliance Board of Directors. Voted into office by our Member Groups at the Annual Meeting in August, each will serve three-year terms. They bring with them special skills and dedication to protecting the Sierra. We look forward to the important role they'll play in helping the Alliance achieve its goal of "Keeping Light in the Range."

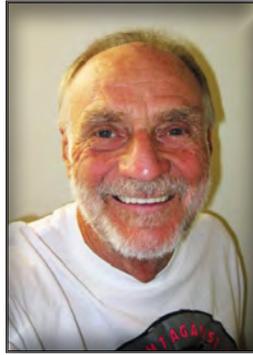
Richard Taylor



Richard Taylor spent his teens hiking up and down the Sierra and is now a partner with Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger LLP, in San Francisco. He has extensive experience advising community groups and agencies on complex planning and land-use matters, including drafting initiatives that address local concerns.

Richard was part of the negotiating team that brokered the landmark settlement agreements protecting the Martis Valley between Tahoe and Truckee, and recently advised a coalition of conservation groups in negotiating an agreement to preserve 240,000 acres of the historic Tejon Ranch in the Southern Sierra. In 2009, he was recognized as a "California Lawyer Attorney of the Year".

Sam Mudie



Sam Mudie, BSME, is the President and a founding member of the Sierra Cycling Foundation (SCF), a bicycling advocacy group whose mission is to promote safe bicycling opportunities for fitness, recreation, rehabilitation and transportation within the Eastern Sierra. Sam grew up in rural eastern Pennsylvania, and received his undergraduate degree from Rutgers University and MBA from the University of Pittsburgh.

Sam got his first taste of the Sierra Nevada in 1965, while working for IBM in San Jose and skiing at Squaw Valley. He later owned and operated three Swensen's Ice Cream franchises in Los Angeles. Currently, Sam splits his time between Los Angeles and Hilton Creek, near Crowley Lake.

John Friedrich



John Friedrich of South Lake Tahoe has a rich career guiding important environmental non-profit programs and projects, including the Yosemite Association, the Yosemite Conservancy, the League to Save Lake Tahoe, and as a former Campaign Consultant for the Sierra Nevada Alliance. While living in Washington, D.C., John founded Community Harvest, an organization that connected local family farmers with low-income communities and operated an urban organic farm.

John has a true passion for community and sustainability, and has managed numerous political and issue campaigns including stopping bad development and promoting smart land use.



New Board Member Sam Mudie has a passion for the Eastern Sierra, including Mono Lake.

Sierra Nevada AmeriCorps Partnership in Jeopardy

Over the past year, the Corporation for National and Community Service, the umbrella organization for AmeriCorps, has been on the chopping block. Starting with the federal budget debates for the 2011 fiscal year, American policymakers have proposed zeroing out funding for the Corporation for National and Community Service, effectively eliminating AmeriCorps. In the months since, these initial drastic funding proposals have not only continued but increased.

The latest in a long line of attempts to reduce or eliminate the Corporation's funding has come with the recent debt ceiling agreement on August 2, 2011, that calls for 1.5 trillion dollars in cuts by November 23, 2011. While the Corporation for National and Community Service is not specifically mentioned in this wave of cuts, it is almost certain to incur deep and devastating cuts.

Please join the efforts of service advocates across the country who have voiced their support for AmeriCorps. Join us to ensure that programs like the Sierra Nevada Alliance's Sierra Nevada AmeriCorps Partnership (SNAP) can continue to complete desperately-needed watershed restoration and environmental education across the Sierra. To learn more or take action, visit <http://www.saveservice.org/>

Welcome New Member Group: Friends of Mariposa Creek

Friends of Mariposa Creek is dedicated to the protection, restoration and enhancement of Mariposa Creek as a community effort. Primary concerns include water quality monitoring, pollution source awareness, riparian habitat monitoring, mining prohibitions and stakeholder outreach.

Contact: Sarah Windsor
Email: swindsor@sti.net
Phone: (209) 966-2408



Photo Courtesy of Sarah Windsor

Mariposa Creek

Tea Party: continued from page 1

through their use of personal attacks and the ignoring of facts. An example is the messaging in this Tea Party video: <http://www.youtube.com/user/golddbcountrypatriots#p/c/8B02EE8657DCB628/5/7ZVPZbgoQ30>

The conference panel explored Tea Party-supporter activities in the Sierra, examined their tactics, and discussed methods to effectively counteract their anti-environmental messages. Panelists included Stevee Duber, who leads the High Sierra Rural Alliance (HSRA) in Sierra County in championing smart development to protect working landscapes. Both Stevee and HSRA have been the targets of Tea Party-initiated disinformation and personal attacks in the press, as in this excerpt from a Sierra County Prospect article: "This (HSRA) is an organization with an incredibly malicious agenda driven by an inherently unstable, misanthropic ideologue." HSRA has countered by drawing upon their vast planning knowledge and using the courts to enforce the law.

Another panelist, Steve Wilensky, is a pragmatic, conservation-minded Calaveras County Supervisor, who is often the target of Tea Party activists who see his collaborative, non-ideological approach to resource protection and economic development as a clear threat to their agenda. Wilensky has witnessed the rise of the Tea Party in

the foothills, and successfully fended off their attempts to weaken environmental regulation and the ability of the county to direct growth. Steve has developed the key tactic of identifying where job growth works with environmental values, through projects like Calaveras Grown and the Calaveras Healthy Impact Product Solutions (CHIPS), and has also been successful in promoting agricultural-based tourism for Calaveras County.

The third panelist, Steve Frisch, is President of the Sierra Business Council (SBC), an organization that trains regional leadership, protects natural resources, improves community planning and stimulates sustainable community development. SBC has been a target of Tea Party activists who term public-private partnerships, conservation easements, and working landscapes as "socialism."

Frisch suggested that community activists counter the Tea Party and their supporters by leading with economic arguments that create new jobs and expand the tax base of Sierra communities. Our thanks and appreciation go to Stevee Duber, Steve Wilensky and Steve Frisch for identifying and sharing tactics that help us to overcome rhetoric and personal attacks and create fact-based, winning campaigns to provide both jobs and environmental protection for the Sierra.

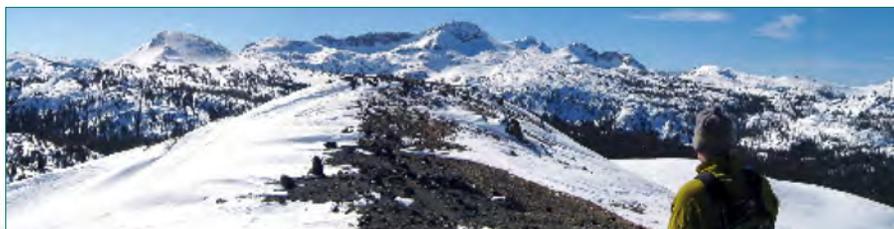


Photo Courtesy of Jim Delso

We all need to be champions of the Sierra to protect it for future generations.

Member Group Spotlight: High Sierra Rural Alliance

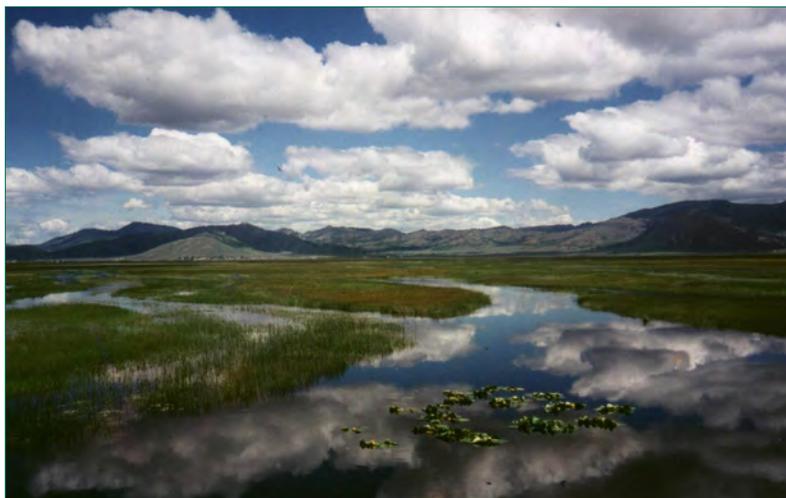


Since 2004, the High Sierra Rural Alliance has been protecting the public's interest in land use decisions in Sierra and Plumas Counties. Without a watchdog organization like HSRA, laws which are meant to protect the public's interest in our environment are often ignored. When important environmental values have been jeopardized, the nonprofit organization has held these Counties accountable to state law and their own local law governing land-

use decisions. The HSRA's actions have been instrumental in protecting thousands of acres of valuable agricultural, habitat, open space and timber lands from unwise development.

The organization has used its knowledge of land-use laws to ensure development is respectful of the public's interest. When proposed projects have not complied with the law, HSRA has appealed to the courts. HSRA has filed seven lawsuits in as many years, and prevailed each time. As a result:

- **The public's right to a ten-day notice of a Board of Supervisors hearing on a Planning Commission recommendation was protected in a published opinion of the Appeals Court. The Court clarified that the notice must be made after the Commission makes its recommendation so that the public will have at least ten days between the two hearings to review and comment on the Commission's recommendation.**
- **A subdivision which would have allowed the equivalent of a new community on the margins of the Sierra Valley, the largest high alpine valley on the continent, without environmental review was blocked.**
- **Construction of 44 condominiums in the floodplain of Bonta Creek was prevented.**
- **An amendment to the Timber Production Zone district in Sierra County which would have allowed more development on isolated, high fire risk, forested land was abandoned.**
- **Rezoning of over 7,000 acres of land from Timber Production Zone to a development-friendly zone without environmental review was stopped. Eventually, the same acres were placed in the first-ever conservation easement entered into by Sierra Pacific Industries.**



"Be Happy, Stay Rural!" - the motto of HSRA

- **Sierra County was compelled to update its Zoning Code to reflect General Plan policies intended to protect stream buffers.**
- **A subdivision plan, which would have allowed construction and septic systems on the unstable entrenchment bank of Spanish Creek, was revised to include a setback deemed safe by a soils engineer.**

Because the group has demonstrated an ability to mount a robust legal challenge, other victories have occurred without having to resort to the courts:

- **Plumas County abandoned its practice of approving more than four General Plan Amendments per year as limited by state law.**
- **Plumas County agreed to update its General Plan after HSRA repeatedly called into question the validity of its existing General Plan.**
- **Sierra County enacted an ordinance making the conditions of approval of a subdivision map enforceable after approval of the map.**
- **Sierra County revoked an "in-house" policy changing the stream setback distance without environmental analysis or public review.**
- **Environmental review and mitigation measures were required on a subdivision project instead of a negative declaration without any review.**
- **Through a Public Records Act request, HSRA exposed a Plumas County plan to suppress public scrutiny of its General Plan evaluation and its plan to "technically fix" the General Plan without public participation.**

Sierra Valley Photo Courtesy of Maureen Meikle

- **Development plans on the fast-track to approval without environmental review were abandoned in both counties when HSRA mobilized community awareness, and made clear that environmental concerns would not be overlooked. As a result, more land was protected through conservation easements or land trust purchases.**

The vigilance of HSRA has been instrumental in ensuring that Sierra and Plumas Counties comply with land use laws. The

compliance has resulted in the protection of thousands of acres of wildlands from haphazard and unwise development. More detailed information is available at: www.highsierrarural.org

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