

SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

SIERRA NEWS

VOLUME XIV, ISSUE 2

DECEMBER 2010



SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

CALENDAR

~*~

Wild & Scenic Film Festival

January 14-16, 2011

Nevada City
www.

wildandscenicfilmfestival.org

~*~

PCL Annual Environmental Legislative Symposium

California 2020: A Vision
for the Next Decade

January 29, 2011

Sacramento
www.pcl.org/projects/
2011symposium

~*~

Wild & Scenic Film Festival

March 2011

South Lake Tahoe

~*~

Earth Day Happy Hour

April 21, 2011

South Lake Tahoe

~*~

Fly Fishing in Hope Valley

June 3-5, 2011

Sorensen's Resort

~*~

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

Tulare County Citizens for Responsible Growth

This issue of the newsletter highlights member group Tulare County Citizens for Responsible Growth (TCCRG). TCCRG was formed in 2006 when a diverse group of local citizens joined together to express concern about the direction of growth in Tulare County. One of the most beautiful areas of the state, Tulare County is the gateway to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks and the home to vast open spaces, critical wildlife habitats, historic communities, archeological sites and prime agricultural land. The organization's mission is to ensure that future growth in the county protects the county's unique scenic beauty, local economy and diverse communities.

The beauty of Tulare County is compromised by a host of serious environmental problems that could be further exacerbated by poor planning. Tulare County is currently undergoing a general plan update. In April 2008, more than 70 individuals,

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Extensive Land Use & Water Project a Success

With help from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009, the Sierra Nevada Alliance recently completed an extensive three-year project to assess the impacts of common land uses on Sierra watersheds and coordinate new projects to help protect and restore Sierra watersheds. The Alliance completed a staggering number of projects designed to reach new audiences – from gardening groups to resource managers.

First, the Alliance funded and trained seven water quality monitoring groups to assess the impacts of land uses on water quality. With support from the Alliance, the groups created successful programs that have educated the community and collected scientifically-reliable data accepted by the State Water Board. Some groups found alarming water quality problems in their Sierra rivers, including: high nutrient, sediment and E. Coli levels; water temperatures unsuitable for native

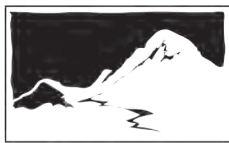
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The Alliance partners with Tulare County citizens to save important oak woodlands.

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SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

Keeping light in the range.

Executive Director's Letter

Dear Friend,

It's snowing and my favorite time of year in the Sierra. I've had a love affair with snow since my Mom, Dad and Grandma taught me how to build my first snowman. The silence and peace of being outside while it's snowing is so reflective and joyous.

And so as we end 2010 I'm happy to share our reflections of Alliance accomplishments and projects this second half of the year. Our SNAP program is ending its 5th year of existence and once again seeing not only on the ground restoration and education completed but young people enthusiastically embracing careers to protect the environment. Our Regional Climate Change program held our first Sierra Nevada Community Organizing Academy – training our partnering groups in state of the art advocacy to defend and protect their special places in the Sierra. Our Sustainable Sierra Communities Program just wrapped up a three year project that transformed hundreds of yards in the Sierra to be beautiful while protecting our rivers and lakes, being friendly to wildlife and better protecting homes from fire. And we just saw papers around the country share our Ski Area Citizens Coalition ratings of ski area environmental performance, keeping our favorite resorts accountable to the health of the mountains that host them.

It's great ending the year knowing the Sierra Nevada Alliance made a difference on-the-ground and region-wide. It's even better knowing that we are positioned in 2011 to create more change with our network to protect what we love. I'm so grateful to experience daily the strong commitment from our donors, staff, board, member groups and friends to Save the Sierra. May you all share in this same peace and gratitude in or out of the Sierra snow this holiday season.

Happy Holidays!!

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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Inaugural Sierra Nevada Community Organizer Academy a Success



Community Organizer Training inspires Sierra leaders

Winning complex environmental battles in the Sierra requires a well thought out framework for success, utilization of a sophisticated organizing strategy, and follow through by an entire team. This past September, twenty-two grassroots activists and seven staff members gathered in Midpines, California to learn the skills needed to win Sierra environmental campaigns.

The Sierra Nevada Alliance raised funding for, and organized, the first in what we hope will become an annual occurrence, the Sierra Nevada Community Organizer Academy. Thanks to funding from an anonymous foundation, the Alliance provided scholarships for Member Groups to attend, and recruited nationally-recognized trainers from the Midwest Academy.

The Midwest Academy is a leading national training institution that teaches a strategic, results-oriented approach to social action and organization building. Topics covered in trainings include: choosing issues, developing a strategic approach to address those issues, building coalitions, growing an organization, and hosting a community meeting with an elected official.

As trainer and renowned advocate Jackie Kendall stated early in the training, "Being right is not enough. You must have power." The training provided participants with a new framework for engaging constituents on their issues, identifying and building their power, and developing winning strategies to influence key decision makers.

Throughout the weekend, participants shared their issues, challenges and experiences, discussing strategies and tactics they had used in the past with varying levels of success. Academy participant Bob Dean of Ebbetts Pass Forest Watch noted, "It was great to hear others' perspectives, not only on their issues, but on my own as well."

The training was well-received by participants, who left the training inspired to apply their newly-learned skills to campaigns for protecting clean water, preserving free-flowing rivers, remediating abandoned mines, stopping clear-cutting, and building livable communities to preserve Sierra values and wildlands.



Sierra Community Organizers discuss strategies



HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU AND YOURS!

**THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT
AND EFFORTS PROTECTING
THE STUNNING SIERRA!**

New Staff Members

Joann Eisenbrandt, Operations Manager

Joann joined the Alliance staff as Operations Manager in September. Joann, originally from Southern California, has lived in the Tahoe Basin and the Southern Sierra for the last three decades. She brings with her a love of challenges and an eclectic background including print media writing and graphic design, medical and nonprofit office administration and teaching. Joann is excited to be able to put her love of the Sierra and her varied experience together to assist the Alliance in its vital role of “Keeping Light in the Range.”

Lynn Baumgartner, Development Program Associate



Lynn grew up enjoying the outdoors in eastern Washington. An early interest in environmental issues led to a BA in environmental geology from Western Washington University, and an AmeriCorps VISTA position at ReUse Works in rainy Bellingham, Washington. She moved to California and earned a Master’s Degree in

Environmental Science & Management from the Bren School at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Among other things, she’s worked on projects involving food access issues, environmental health and safety issues in the nanotech industry, and garbage & recycling studies. She is excited to use her background in development, outreach, and environmental issues as the Development Program Associate at the Alliance. When she’s not working, Lynn is likely swimming, mountain biking, or coordinating inter-state book club meetings.

Christa Cassidy, VISTA Member & Sustainable Sierra Communities Program Assistant



Christa grew up in Park City, UT and graduated from the University of Utah in 2009 with B.S. degrees in Urban Planning and Environmental Studies. She is the AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer and Program Assistant for the Sustainable Sierra Communities Program at the Sierra Nevada

Alliance. Her service will focus on education, outreach and implementation of water and energy conservation strategies among residents of the Sierra. Before joining AmeriCorps, Christa interned at her local land trust as well as a community-building organization called The Center for the Living City. In her free time she loves to travel, ski, climb, cook and crochet.

Matt Griffis, Program Associate, Wyss Fellow



Growing up in the Bay Area, Matt spent his youth hiking, backpacking, and fishing in the Sierra and throughout Northern California. These experiences solidified in him a love for the outdoors and an ethic to work for the conservation of these landscapes and the resources they provide. With experience

in conservation, natural resource management, and outdoor recreation, Matt has previously worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and East Bay Regional Park District. He holds a B.S. in Environmental Sciences from UC Berkeley and an M.S. in Environmental Policy and Planning from the University of Michigan.

Land Use & Water Project: continued from page 1

salmon populations; acidic pH; and low dissolved oxygen levels. In addition, some groups used monitoring as an outreach tool. Big Chico Creek Community Alliance recruited and trained hundreds of volunteers and even coordinated with local teachers to use monitoring as a service learning experience for students.

To help address land use impacts on water quality, the Sierra Nevada Alliance completed several projects. First, the Alliance published a first of its kind one-stop-shopping guide to Sierra-friendly landscaping, called the *Sierra Nevada Yard & Garden*. Then, the organization funded four groups to complete Yard & Garden demonstration sites that integrated issues such as healthy soils, native plants, defensible space, water conservation and living with wildlife. In addition, the Alliance realized that Sierra watersheds could be better protected through more

coordinated water and land use planning. To accomplish this goal, the Alliance hosted Annual Land Use Summits and coordinated local water and land use planning forums in six target communities. The local forums were eye-opening and effective. For example, at one forum in Tuolumne County, water resource managers and land use planners were meeting for the first time! Also, during the meeting, they began to realize that their current water infrastructure could not support a planned sprawl development in the county. To further this and other coordinated efforts in Sierra counties, the Alliance and Local Government Commission authored *Planning for Water-Wise Development in the Sierra: A Water and Land Use Policy Guide*. The guide contains strategies and case studies and it has been well-received and used by planners and community groups alike across the Sierra.

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17th Annual Conference Renews Spirit of the Sierra

The Sierra Nevada Alliance's 17th Annual Conference was filled with moving stories from keynote speakers, terrific workshops, and a full day of conservation law education for Member Groups. Held at Lake Tahoe Community College, August 27th & 28, 2010 in South Lake Tahoe, the two-day event left participants inspired, motivated and with a renewal of spirit to continue their critical on-the-ground conservation efforts.

Attorneys volunteering on the Alliance's Sierra Legal Services Committee organized a very successful first day of the conference, entitled "Using Legal Resources to Protect Sierra Resources." The day was sponsored by Alliance Board Member Jan Chatten-Brown's law firm of Chatten-Brown & Carstens, and included five workshops ranging in topics from endangered species law, CEQA, water transfer wars, general plans and climate change initiatives. Huge thanks to committee members Jan Chatten-Brown, Justine Augustine, Keith Wagner, Pete Pumphrey, Richard Taylor and Thomas Infusino.

Keynote speaker Craig Thompson, Chairman of the National Wildlife Federation, opened the second day of the conference with heartwarming stories of his youth in the rural west and how those experiences led him to his life as an "accidental environmentalist." For more than three decades, Craig has been a glacier researcher and an activist scientist on environmental problems. He is currently Professor of Earth Sciences and Engineering at Western Wyoming Community College and did research on Lake Tahoe at the beginning of his career. Craig shared lessons from environmental history providing hope and inspiration for today's challenges.

Saturday, sponsored by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, included the Alliance's Annual Meeting portion of the conference

where Member Groups reported challenges, battles and victories in the past year. The economy had not spared even one group, as everyone shared their stories of belt-tightening and cutbacks. Despite these challenges, the morning was also filled with stories of success such as the numerous volunteer plantings of Sugar Pines by the Sugar Pine Foundation and the stalling, by the Mountain Meadows Conservancy, of a badly planned new ski area and development in a pristine meadow and forest.

Also at the Annual Meeting Leah Wills was elected as the newest member of the Alliance's Board. Leah, a resident of Taylorsville, is a consultant to the Plumas Flood Control and Water Conservation District. Leah also serves on the Board of Directors for Water for California and the Environmental Justice Coalition for Water. Welcome!

Hard choices had to be made by attendees choosing from three fabulous workshops. The Reality Grantmaking workshop not only shared tips from foundation program officers on how to raise grant funds, but also awarded \$1,000 during the workshop for a winning grant proposal. This workshop was organized and the award money generously donated by The Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment. The Rose Foundation also provided scholarships to 14 activists who would not have been able to attend without this generous additional support.

The two other workshops were at full capacity – and one was outside in the chilly weather. The Master Variable: Instream Flow workshop was a hands-on workshop and an introduction to the Sierra Water Trust Project. The Social and Economic Indicators workshop focused on possible new tools to demonstrate watershed conservation success and benefits. Participants discussed challenges and took home information on how new

indicators for watersheds may be used to improve understanding of community and watershed health, to determine conservation priorities and to increase investment in Sierra watersheds.

Steve Robinson was awarded the Bedrock Award for his years of service on the Board of Directors of the Alliance. Just as the Sierra Nevada is a region united by one gigantic batholith (400 miles of igneous rock that has melted and intruded surrounding strata), Steve has been a bedrock of energy and commitment that supported individual and regional conservation efforts throughout the Range. Steve served two full three-year terms



Steve Robinson with wife Judy receiving his Bedrock Award from Alliance Board President Betsy Reifsnider.

Photo by Reyna Yagi

on the Board of Directors and Alliance By-Laws limit service to two consecutive terms. His sound judgment, calm, dedication and on-the-ground experience in the Northern Sierra will be missed on the Board.

The Alliance hopes that everyone who attended our 17th Annual Conference left with their commitment to pass on the beauty, inspiration and the rural wonder of the Sierra to future generations strengthened and fortified. Our collective contributions to the Sierra Nevada are needed today more than ever.

Stay tuned – we're hoping to announce a date for our 18th Annual Conference soon!

Special Thanks to our Conference Sponsors

Their generosity made our event possible!

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Thank You to all the generous organizations, businesses and individuals - especially Super Volunteers
Cindy Archer & Jeanne Andronovich - who donated time and items for our annual auction!

Green Practices Thrive at Ski Areas During Recession

Will Improved Economy Reverse Trend and See Increased Public Land Degradation?

Ski resorts in California and across the west improved environmental ratings for the fourth year in a row during the recession according to the 2010/2011 Ski Area Environmental Report Card, released each year by the Ski Area Citizens Coalition. The 82 ski resorts scattered throughout the West saw an average improvement of 2% in their overall scores, while California ski resorts saw an improvement of 1.8% over 2009 and 6.6% from 2008. Rating improvement trends resulted from resorts investing in water and energy efficiency projects, and for not proposing or implementing terrain expansions into sensitive lands.

“Ski areas are not developing as much new terrain in sensitive areas,” according to Colorado Wild Research Director Paul Joyce. “Is this due to an environmental commitment? Or when the economy turns will the treads on the bulldozers also turn?”

According to Ski Area Citizens Coalition assistant Norma Ryan, “Ski areas spent money on energy efficiency such as upgrading windows, employing solar power and improving public transportation. But this won’t compensate for taking out endangered species habitat or bulldozing a wetland. We hope their environmental efficiency mindset extends to their development strategy as the economy improves.”

“California resorts improved for the fourth year in a row,” said Richard McIntyre, Sierra Nevada Alliance Campaign Director. “But we’re concerned the environmental trend may be a matter of economic convenience rather than a long-term commitment to resource preservation. Californians well remember the days of bulldozing streams and serving eviction notices to wildlife to add a new ski-run, and trust they are a thing of the past.”

“Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows lead the California class,” said Stacy Hamburg, Sierra Nevada Alliance Program Assistant. “Heavenly and Snow Valley bring up the rear. For the Sierra with a lot to lose from climate change shrinking our snow pack, improving environmental stewardship is a good thing.”

The Ski Area Citizens Coalition is comprised of conservation groups around the west, including Colorado Wild and the Sierra Nevada Alliance. The Full Report Card for all 82 resorts and

#	Name	Grade	#	Name	Grade
1	(A) Squaw Valley USA	90.30%	10	(B) Dodge Ridge	68.30%
2	(A) Alpine Meadows	86.20%	11	(B) Mt. Shasta Board & Ski Park	68.30%
3	(A) Sugar Bowl	80.00%	12	(C) Bear Valley	67.30%
4	(A) Boreal Mountain	78.70%	13	(C) Snow Summit	67.20%
5	(B) Kirkwood Mountain	77.50%	14	(C) Northstar-at-Tahoe	66.50%
6	(B) Homewood Mountain	77.40%	15	(C) Sierra Summit	66.10%
7	(B) Sierra-at-Tahoe	73.70%	16	(C) Bear Mountain	65.20%
8	(B) Mammoth Mountain	73.30%	17	(C) Snow Valley	63.90%
9	(B) Mountain High	69.60%	18	(C) Heavenly	59.70%

more details can be found at www.skiareacitizens.com. The Ski Area Citizens Coalition (SACC) has been publishing the Ski Area Environmental Scorecard (now Report Card) for the past 10 years. The Report Card evaluates the environmental policies and practices of ski areas based on a system of 35 criteria.

The criteria to evaluate performance include

grading ski areas on their preservation of sensitive lands within the ski resort areas, their actions related to water conservation and quality, and commitment to green programs such as recycling and energy efficiency.

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

Scorecard data is obtained from an annual survey, public records from government agencies, and from the resorts themselves. Freedom of Information Act and Public Records Act requests are filed with appropriate land managers to identify ski area development projects and management plans each spring. Resorts are also asked to fill out surveys and regarding their on-mountain environmental programs. All source documents can be viewed on the website.

Responsible Growth: continued from page 1

organizations and agencies submitted comments critical of a deeply-flawed General Plan Update and Environmental Impact Report (GPU/DEIR). In May of this year, a second comment period was concluded. Throughout the general plan update process, TCCRG has advocated strongly for a Healthy Growth Alternative, which emphasizes town-centered growth, fosters livable communities and protects the abundant natural resources of Tulare County. The organization's priorities mirror values expressed by citizens of the county who participated in workshops held as part of the General Plan Update Process in 2008.

Despite having over two years to process and incorporate suggestions from its citizens, the county has failed to improve the document. In some cases, the 2010 revision further weakened the document's ability to prevent sprawl, address climate change and protect the natural resources of the county. Indeed, adoption of the Tulare County General Plan DEIR would lead to substantial losses of farmland, open space and exacerbate existing air and water quality issues.

The lack of forward progress on crucial issues led TCCRG to reach out to other interested stakeholders in Tulare County and create a coalition of 22 conservation, health, community, and faith-based organizations to review and respond to the General

Plan Update. Those organizations responded to release of the DEIR with a press release in May, and continue to work together as public hearings approach.

Many of these groups agree that Tulare County's proposed GPU/DEIR's emphasis on "New Towns," unlimited growth corridors and expanded urban boundaries encourages sprawl development and will fail to protect the natural beauty of Tulare County. Places such as Yokohl Valley (where a 10,000 unit development is being proposed) are at great risk of being decimated by the current plan. Loss of these open spaces is unacceptable and unnecessary, a point underlined in a stinging letter to the Tulare County Supervisors by the California Attorney General's office.

TCCRG recently implemented a creative voter education project to raise the profile of land use planning issues in the county. The group sent a questionnaire to each of the candidates running for the Tulare County District 4 seat in the November 2010 election. Questions centered on issues related to growth in Tulare County under the General Plan update, and what the future of Tulare County will look like under their leadership. They received the responses of Steve Worthley and Brian Rouch, and reprinted the questions and their unedited responses

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Member Group Spotlight: WildPlaces

WildPlaces is a community based non-profit organization that joined as a Sierra Nevada Alliance Member Group in 2001, and is located in Springville, California, in the foothills of the Southern Sierra Nevada. WildPlaces' mission is to preserve, support, and protect California's natural and rural places and the people of these landscapes through volunteer-driven habitat restoration, natural and cultural education, and career development.



WildPlaces leads students on the Freeman Creek Trail

2010 has been quite a busy year for the small organization. As the hills re-green and the sycamores turn yellow, WildPlaces looks back at all of the great projects the organization accomplished. A large part of the year being so great was having two Sierra Nevada AmeriCorps Partnership members: Anne Taormina, coordinating the "Immersed in the Wild" program, and Emily Creegan coordinating the Río Limpio program.

Summertime brings hundreds of people to the Tule River each day looking to escape the 100 degree heat of the San Joaquin Valley. Unfortunately, a small part of this group threatens the river for everyone by leaving broken glass, dirty diapers, graffiti and other garbage that creates a fire danger and sanitation problems. The WildPlaces' Río Limpio program, which means *clean river* in Spanish, is a watershed-wide community effort to keep the Tule River safe, clean and open for all to use. This year WildPlaces had 200 volunteers turn out for three volunteer cleanups to remove graffiti and nearly 3,200 pounds of garbage. Each year this program has been on the ground it has seen less garbage on the river and this was the best year yet!

In addition to removing garbage, the Río Limpio program has focused more each year on youth education. This year the program partnered with The Monache Technological Academy, whose students spent the year learning about the Tule River and creating bilingual videos and other outreach materials for the program.

"Immersed in the Wild" is an in depth youth education program. It provides single and multi-day outdoor programs for youth of diverse ages, backgrounds, and communities in land stewardship. Expert youth facilitators and activists guide youth in education sessions that cover backpacking, camp safety, team-building, botany, nature ethics, ecology, rock climbing, Giant Sequoia care, hiking, the indigenous cultures of California and Mexico, indigenous plant uses, dancing and music.

This year WildPlaces "Immersed in the Wild" took 18 students from local high schools backpacking in Sequoia National Forest in the Golden Trout Wilderness to perform a USFS survey on the white pines. The program also organized camps with a Mongolian Youth Group, The Dolores Huerta Foundation and Walt Whitman High School.

WildPlaces staff, volunteers and Board look forward to continuing these great programs and more in 2011.

For more information visit www.wildplaces.net



Volunteers on the Tule River for a Río Limpio event

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in an advertisement the week before the election, urging the citizens of Tulare County to consider the candidates' growth and development positions when making their choices. The race was the closest in recent history with less than a 2 point difference between the victor and loser. Clearly, in such a tight race, this information was important to voters.

TCCRG is committed to working with the Alliance and the diverse county coalition as the GPU/DEIR process continues in order to mobilize public support for a preferred Healthy Growth Alternative and to convince the Board of Supervisors to adopt the best plan.

For more information visit: www.tccrg.org



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