

TOIYABE TRAILS



April | May | June 2015

Environmental News of Nevada and Eastern Sierra from the Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club

From the Chair

Does this issue of the Trails look different? Here's why. Our regular newsletter editor, Lynne Foster, lost her home in the Swall Meadows Fire of early February near Bishop, CA. She and her husband Lyle escaped unharmed but the house was destroyed. This issue has been assembled by the chair, with no apologies for quality which is nowhere near what Lynne would produce. We are not sure of future issues, but only wish that Lynne pays full attention to getting their lives back into order, as best can be done in such a setback. So, you will notice the absence of certain features in this substitute newsletter. Masthead information has been dropped — it is available at individual group websites and at the chapter website. Similarly, the outings have been omitted, with those being available on the local group websites or otherwise, with links supplied here. We have simply concentrated on getting out important news items from the groups and on important conservation articles from our active issue chairs and leaders. Feedback welcome. David von Seggern, vonsegr@sbcglobal.net

Check out the new chapter website
<http://www.sierraclub.org/toiyabe>



Snow barely covers highest peaks around the calm Lake Tahoe

Mega-drought, Court Victory, and NV Water Politics (Rose Strickland)

Water issues have boiled over this winter. Record-breaking warm temperatures and scarce snowfall this winter have morphed into predictions by scientists from NASA, Columbia University and Cornell University of the worst drought in 1,000 years for the American West by the century's end, according to National Geographic: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/02/150212-megadrought-southwest-water-climate-environment/> Back in the Great Basin, a report by the Utah Geological Survey found that Snake Valley groundwater development is unsustainable: <http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2015/feb/15/study-groundwater-pumping-snake-valley-unsustainable/>

Existing pumping is already lowering groundwater tables in Snake Valley which straddles the Nevada/Utah state line and proposed additional pumping by the Southern Nevada Water Authority will exacerbate existing water scarcity. And in Northern Nevada, an official with the Humboldt River Basin Water Authority, where farmers received little or no agricultural water deliveries in 2014, is concerned that a drought response management plan is not being developed by the State of Nevada.

A joyful event occurred in the long-standing campaign to stop the water grab by the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) in four dry, remote valleys in eastern Nevada. Abby Johnson, Great Basin Water Network director, believes the February 6, 2015 ruling by the Nevada Supreme Court should be the final death knell of the ill-conceived and unsustainable water project. The Supreme Court rejected an appeal by SNWA and the Nevada State Engineer of a district court ruling vacating state approval of 83,000 acre feet/year of groundwater (continued on p. 5)

Quarterly Meeting of the Toiyabe Chapter Executive Committee (ExCom)

Saturday, April 11, 2015, 9 AM

Winnemucca, Nevada

All members are welcome to attend the ExCom meetings, and an open comment period is always on the morning agenda.

For details, contact the chair, David von Seggern (vonsegr@sbcglobal.net or 775-303-8461)

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----------|
| From the Chair | 1 |
| Megadrought | 1 |
| Rally in Carson City | 2 |
| Peaks Section News | 2 |
| Mojave Monitor | 3 |
| (Southern Nevada Group) | |
| Great Basin Gatherings | 3 |
| (Great Basin Group) | |
| Range of Light Reflections | 4 |
| (Range of Light Group) | |
| Conservation: | |
| Wovoka Wilderness | 5 |
| Big Year Ahead for Inyo National Forest | 6 |
| Sage Grouse and Pinyon Juniper Projects | 6 |
| Alien Invasion | 7 |
| Carson City RMP | 7 |
| Other News of the Chapter: | |
| January ExCom Report | 8 |
| ICO Hikes Railroad Tunnels | 8 |

Join the Sierra Club at

<http://www.sierraclub.org>

Sierra Club Joins Rally for Public Lands in Carson City (David von Seggern)

March 2, 2015, 1 PM. Signs with “Keep Public Lands Public”, “Hands Off Our Lands”, “Don’t Jump Our Claim”, and many other slogans dotted the sidewalk in front of the state legislature building in Carson City. Nearly 100 people joined the rally aimed at the Senate hearing on SJR1, a resolution to urge the federal government to turn over public lands to the state. Sierra Club and partners from recreation and conservation organizations attended the rally. Later in the afternoon, Toiyabe Chapter Chair, David von Seggern, testified against SJR1, along with numerous others opposed to this land-grab resolution. The marathon hearing did not end until after 7 PM, and legislators certainly got a fill of public opinion on this proposed resolution, overwhelmingly against.



Great Basin Peaks Section

Great Basin Peak Section News

(Sharon Marie Wilcox)

What is the best thing to do on Super Bowl Sunday? Go hiking, of course! GBPS members decided to hike a snow-free Tahoe OGUL list peak, Desert Creek Peak (8958'). Instead of TV screen views, we relaxed in fresh air with 360-degree mountain views from Desert Creek Peak and Black Mountain. Our view included Bald Mountain that we hiked last autumn when it was in the proposed Wovoka Wilderness. Great news is that it is now the newly designated Wovoka Wilderness. It was joined by the designation of the Pine Forest Wilderness, giving Nevada two new beautiful designated wilderness areas.

Larry Dwyer scheduled a hike to Petersen Mountain on the GBPS list. He also has trips to two other Washoe County Peaks, Pah-Rum and Rawe Peaks. Check the Friends of Nevada Wilderness website for details.

Our Toiyabe Chapter webmaster, Dennis Ghiglieri is diligently working on redoing our webpage for a new host system. Plans are to make the GBPS outings easier to locate and include a blog for member interactions. Thanks Dennis for your many years of work on the chapter website.

We now have a page on Facebook (Great Basin Peaks Section). Check us out and please add pictures or reports from your trips.

Join the GBPS! For details on membership, recognition categories, peak list, and trip reports check out Great Basin Peaks Section at: <http://www.sierraclub.org/toiyabe/great-basin-peak-outings>

Outing Report: Quartzite Mountain 7133'

Oct. 2014

(Sharon Marie Wilcox)

We left Reno attempting to stay a day ahead of predicted storms. Our route down the Eastern Sierra, through Death Valley and towards the Las Vegas Range was storm-free. Blue-sky hikes on Tungsten Peak and Pleasant Point were enjoyed before heading to Desert National Wildlife Refuge.

The new DNWR visitor center was a surprise, so we stopped to tour the interesting displays. Unfortunately, the weather report indicated that the storm would catch us that evening. We cut our visitor center tour short planning to set-up camp before it rained.

Our drive on Mormon Well Road became a very rough, rocky, washboard as we turned onto Gass Peak Road. We camped at the trailhead where Quail Spring Road is gated. Hoping tomorrow's predicted storm might pass overnight; we celebrated Halloween with costumes, treats, and a feeding frenzy.

After listening to howling wind all night and waking to rain with heavy low gray clouds, we were uncertain about the hike to Quartzite Mountain. Our start was delayed until 8:00 AM when the rain turned to a drizzle. We decided to leave and hiked up the road that varies from wash to road as it winds up the canyon. Passing Quail Spring guzzler we were always on the lookout for Bighorn Sheep.

A variety of interesting Mojave Desert plants and changing plant communities distracted our weather thoughts as we gained elevation. Two of my favorites were the pink feathery Apache Plume and uniquely shaped Joshua Trees.

At about 6400', we left the road and headed up to the ridgeline. Rain had ceased and lifting clouds revealed patches of sky. A large burn area left charcoaled skeletal remains of trees to navigate near the ridge. Along the ridge, we scrambled over rocky areas to get both summit areas.

Protected by rocks on the summit knob, we found shelter from the chilly wind to relish the view, eat lunch and take photos. Since dark clouds were building again and cold wind increasing we didn't linger as long as we'd like. Even though the storm caught us, we still delighted in another memorable day enjoying a Great Basin Peak plus Mojave Desert Vegetation.

Great Basin Peaks Section Hikers on Super Bowl Sunday



Mojave Monitor

Southern Nevada Group

Message from the Chair (Taj Ainlay)

SNG Monthly Meetings. Have you visited our new office yet? It is located just off Sahara Avenue in The Plazas Office Park, behind the Bank of Nevada Regional Headquarters, at 2330 Paseo del Prado, Building C, Suite 109, Las Vegas, NV 89102-4336.

We now have two full-time Sierra Club staff members working out of the Las Vegas office. Elspeth DiMarzio continues to work for energy efficiency and heads up our Beyond Coal campaign, while Christian Gerlach recently joined us to promote public lands on behalf of the Our Wild America program.

Open to all members, the monthly meetings of our Executive Committee are held at the Sierra Club Office on the second Wednesday of each month. We meet from 6pm to 8:30pm. There is plenty of free parking around the building. Please join us on April 15, May 20 or June 17. We currently have several openings on our leadership team. If you have an interest in local politics, event planning, membership activities or conservation efforts, contact SNG Chair Taj Ainlay for details, tajainlay@aol.com.

General meetings and mixers are also held at the Sierra Club office unless otherwise noted on the accompanying calendar of events. Please join in our activities on April 25 (GreenFest) and May 6 (New Members Orientation). We are always happy to have volunteers assist in tabling and event organization.

A full calendar of our outdoor activities can be found online at www.sierraclub.org/toiyabe/southern-nevada. You can also visit us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/sierraclub.sng, and please "like" our page.

SNG Calendar

APRIL 22 (Tuesday) - **Celebrate EARTH DAY!!** The entire month of April revolves around this day to honor our natural environment. You can find a whole host of local activities collected on our special Earth Day website. See all of the details at www.earthdaylv.com.

APRIL 25 (Saturday) - **Come to GREENFest!** In the heart of Summerlin, the sixth annual GREENFest will honor Earth Day and celebrate local businesses, non-profits and government entities that champion sustainability and the environment here in Southern Nevada. Sponsorship is provided by the GREEN Alliance and Republic Services in cooperation with Downtown Summerlin & Summerlin developed by Howard Hughes Corporation. There will be more than 150 booths, educational exhibits, and festivities for the whole family. Look for the Sierra Club and ICO booths among the "Green Allies & Non-profits" between 10am and 5pm. For more information visit www.thinkenergystar.com/greenfest/ or contact tajainlay@aol.com.

MAY 6 (Wednesday) - **New Member Orientation.** Our first orientation of the year is open not only to new and prospective members but also to current members with an interest in learning more about the Sierra Club, the Toiyabe Chapter and the Southern Nevada Group. We will be meeting for one hour, starting from 6:30pm at the Sierra Club Office. Light refreshments will be served. Info: tajainlay@aol.com.

JUNE 2 (Tuesday) - **Municipal Election Day.** If you live in Las Vegas, Henderson, Boulder City or North Las Vegas, here's your opportunity to vote for Mayor and City Council candidates who support the environment. Polls will be open from 7am till 7pm at

designated locations throughout Clark County. Don't miss this opportunity to be a part of the solution. Details can be found at www.clarkcountynv.gov/depts/election/Pages/Dates.aspx.

Great Basin Gatherings

Great Basin Group

Message from the Chair (Katy Christensen)

Monthly Membership Meetings. The Great Basin Group ExCom encourages all members and friends to attend our monthly programs, held the **2nd Thursday of each month** at Bartley Ranch, Western Heritage Center in Reno, and geared to meet the interests of all our nature-loving and adventuresome northern Nevada friends. Members with email addresses get a monthly reminder of these meetings; others can check the MeetUp calendar at "Sierra Club Hiking-Reno".

We also welcome members to our ExCom meetings held once a month on the first Mondays, especially if you have an issue to bring to the attention of the full ExCom. Contact the group chair, Katy Christensen, for time and place (mablenv@hotmail.com).

On March 12, 2015, Roleigh Martin, GB Group treasurer, offered a lively presentation on the John Muir Trail. He will lead his eighth JMT hike in July 2015.

On April 9, a Gear Swap will be offered instead of a program. Look at our MeetUp calendar at "Sierra Club Hiking-Reno" for special Earth Day events in April as well!

On May 14, acclaimed author and professor, Laird Blackwell, will offer a not-to-be-missed presentation on wildflowers. He was a professor for 31 years at Sierra Nevada College where he was honored five times by the students with their Teacher of the Year award. He has led wildflower field classes in the Sierra for over 30 years and has written, with his own photos, eight wildflower field guides, including ones for Tahoe, the Eastern Sierra, the Great Basin, Mount Rainier, and the state of California. He enjoys the botanical academic approach — identification, taxonomy, and ecology — but also loves to approach flowers as fellow creatures with fascinating stories to tell.

During June, July, and August, our group does not have a monthly general membership meeting.

Goodbye to our current Programs Chair and invitation to others to take this position. A most special thank you goes to Caron Tayloe, who has served as Program Chair during the past 2 years but cannot continue due to a new job. Due to her commitment and energy, program content improved and attendance grew. We wish her much good fortune in her new job. This means the Great Basin Group is looking for a new Programs Chair. The monthly program has always been one of the strengths of the Great Basin Group. You would follow in the footsteps of many past Chairs who have given us entertaining and informative monthly programs over the years. Contact the group chair, Katy Christensen, if you are interested. (mablenv@hotmail.com).

Outings. The Great Basin Outings schedule can be accessed at our group's website <http://toiyabe.sierraclub.org/gbgroup/outings> or at the MeetUp site <http://www.meetup.com/Sierra-Club-Hiking-Reno/events/calendar/>

Range of Light Reflections

Range of Light Group

Message from the Chair (Richard Hihn, rhihn@skidmore.edu)

At the last ExCom meeting, held on Wednesday, January 21, Malcolm Clark stepped down as ROLG chair and I was voted to be the new chair. I wish to thank Malcolm for his many years of faithful service, and for taking on so many tasks. Though we still do not have a Conservation Chair, Malcolm has generously agreed to perform the conservation work he has done in the past.

Current ExCom membership:

Chair: Richard Hihn

Vice Chair (conservation focus): Malcolm Clark

Secretary: Lesley Bruns

Treasurer: Mary Ann Dunigan

ExCom members: Joanne Hihn, Fran Hunt, Mike Shore

Other ROLG Chairs:

Newsletter: Shalle Genevieve

Publicity: Rosemary Jarrett

Webmaster: Jo Bacon

Group ExCom meetings. Our next meeting will be held on April 22, at the home of Dick and Joanne Hihn. All are welcome but please confirm date, place and time. Please submit action items to the chair (Richard Hihn) in time for consideration prior to meeting by ExCom members. On items requiring a vote, please include text of proposed resolution (subject to revision by ExCom). Normally ExCom acts on proposals between meetings only when a deadline precludes waiting to the next ExCom meeting. Submissions or more info: Contact Richard Hihn, 760-709-5050 or rhihn@skidmore.edu.

Range of Light Outings at

<http://sierraclub.org/toiyabe/range-light>

You're Invited:

Range of Light Group Monthly Meetings

Everyone welcome!

For all potlucks, please bring a dish for 6-8 people and your own non-disposable table setting. For those months with potluck and program, you are welcome to skip potluck and come only to the program.

April 21 (Tuesday)

6:15 pm, social and potluck

Crowley Lake Community Center

7:00 pm Program:

Researcher, David Lee, will present "Rock Art of the Eastern Sierra: Local Examples of a Global Expression"

May 19 (Tuesday)

6:15 pm, social and Potluck

Crowley Lake Community Center

7:00 pm Program:

Patrick Hayes, General Manager of the Mammoth Community Water District, will give a current report on "Measuring Water".

June 16 (Tuesday)

6:30 pm, social and announcements

White Mountain Research Center, 3000 E. Line St., Bishop

7:00 pm, Program:

Fran Hunt, conservation advocate, and Eastern Sierra Organizer for the Sierra Club, will discuss the Inyo National Forest Draft EIS and Draft Forest Plan.

Past Monthly ROLG Meetings. Our annual December Holiday Potluck was again held at the home of John Walter. We thank John for graciously opening his home for this event. In January, our monthly meeting (held at Mammoth Lakes Library) was devoted to a roundtable discussion on various topics surrounding the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP). The consensus was that this was a profitable discussion, and many hope for more such roundtables in the future.

Blue Diamond Ski Routes. The ROLG has been working on refurbishing and establishing blue diamond ski routes in the area for some time. Areas included are the knolls, Inyo Craters, the "connector" route between the knolls and Inyo Craters, and two loops in Obsidian Dome. Most of these routes can be found on the map recently published by the Forest Service, and available at the Visitor Center in Mammoth Lakes. The project is largely complete, but there is still some work to be done. Many thanks to Mary K Prentice and Mary and Mike Shore for their leadership.

Highway Cleanup. The ROLG will again be doing our annual Highway Cleanup project on our assigned stretch of US-395 between the Crestview Rest Area and the end of the Mammoth Scenic Loop Road. Cleanups are held in May, July, and September on Wednesday mornings after our third Tuesday eve monthly meeting: May 20, July 22, and September 16. Very satisfying work, and you never know what you might find! Meet at the Crestview Rest Area, five miles north on I-395, at 8am. We provide required equipment: vests, hard hats, trash bags, grabbers, and gloves. Refreshments served afterwards, along with good conversation. **Contact:** DickHihn (760-709-5050, rhihn@skidmore.edu) or Mike Shore (805-217-5563, marymikesshore@gmail.com).

Conservation Issues (Malcolm Clark)

The Range of Light Group is following or participating in a number of important conservation issues. Follow these at

<http://sierraclub.org/toiyabe/range-light/conservation>

Owens Lake dust control re-watering (Malcolm Clark)



Conservation Corner

Conservation News from Across the Chapter

A Day in the Wovoka Wilderness (Larry Dwyer)

(Note to reader: this article was composed before Wovoka Wilderness, 49,000 acres in Lyon County, Nevada, was created by Congress and signed into law by President Obama on December 12, 2014. That legislation also brought us the Pine Forest Wilderness, 23,000 acres in Humboldt County, Nevada. Congratulations to Larry and many other Sierra Club members who worked for these wilderness areas.)

It was a gorgeous early November day when nine of us headed up toward Bald Mountain in the Wovoka proposed Wilderness Area. Barely a hint of a breeze wafted over us as we sat on top looking out at other peaks in every direction. To the north, Slide Mountain's distinctive scars were seen in the distance. Directly to the east was Mount Grant with the East Walker River right below. Further south we could see Nevada's highest point on Boundary Peak and we could pick out several other peaks in the White Mountains. Over to the southwest was Bridgeport Reservoir with the magnificent Sawtooth Ridge and Matterhorn Peak just beyond. To the west, right in front of us were the Sweetwater Mountains where we gazed at Middle Sister and Mt. Patterson, two peaks on the Great Basin Peaks List.

After a leisurely snack we headed down to some rock outcroppings overlooking a dry lake bed in the valley 1500 feet below. This may be one of the areas where Wovoka, the Native American spiritual leader, and his followers performed the GhostDance. Or, perhaps it is where he had his vision during the solar eclipse on Jan 1, 1889, that entailed the resurrection of Paiute dead and the removal of whites and their works from North America. We also discussed the pending legislation that would turn this area into a designated Wilderness Area in the near future.

Hiking in the Wovoka Wilderness (Larry Dwyer)



Mega-drought (continued from p. 1)

be exported to Las Vegas A district court judge had remanded the ruling back to the State Engineer after finding that, if the Engineer had enough information to approve SNWA's applications, he must have had enough information to specify monitoring and mitigation for pumping impacts. The Judge

then ordered the Engineer to recalculate and probably reduce how much SNWA could safely pump from the 4 valleys to avoid draining the basins and causing conflicts with other water rights holders there and elsewhere. "If the Nevada State Engineer lacks information to set concrete triggers for monitoring and preventing or mitigating harmful impacts, then SNWA's applications must be denied," argued Johnson.

Great Basin Water Network (GBWN) attorney, Simeon Herskovits, said that SNWA has had 25 years to provide basic information that its project would comply with the most basic requirements of Nevada's water law and its failure only goes to show this poorly conceived proposal is not scientifically defensible or legally permissible.

Given continuing court defeats, increasing water shortages due to the extended drought and climate change, and no state drought planning, the State Engineer proposed significant changes to Nevada Water Law to extend his authority over over-appropriated basins in Nevada to require and enforce water management plans in SB 65 (<https://legiscan.com/NV/bill/SB65/2015>) and SB 81 (<https://legiscan.com/NV/bill/SB81/2015>).

The State Engineer has held two workshops on the two bills attended by the major water buffaloes in the state — water authorities, water developers, water consultants, water attorneys — along with a few GBWN representatives (the public) to reach a consensus on bill provisions. The focus of the workshops have been in developing a process and "tools" for the State Engineer to remedy over-appropriations in Diamond Valley and in Pahrump Valley, without much consideration of the ramifications of the changes on the many other over-appropriated basins in the state.

The State Engineer proposed to define Perennial Yield, but SNWA objected. The original proposed definition in effect said Perennial Yield was whatever the State Engineer said it was, science notwithstanding. The second definition proposed a more scientific approach, but allowed the State Engineer to exceed these hydrological limits, which would thus yet again lead to over-appropriation of water basins. The legislative proposals would also extend the State Engineer's authority over domestic wells, including reducing amounts of well water that can be used, zeroing out any use of well water, and requiring domestic well owners to hook up to nearby municipal water systems which may be impacting domestic well production. These changes could cost tens of thousands of dollars, effectively a taking of well water from owners who cannot afford the exorbitant connection costs or effectively destroy property value and the livability of homes dependent on well water. Discussions continue on these proposed legislative changes, but a formal hearing in the Nevada Senate has not yet been scheduled by March 1, 2015. The legislative session will terminate by the end of May.

Can we convince the State Engineer that it is better to make conservative and sustainable water rulings rather than resorting to a complicated and draconian process to undo water imbalances after they occur?

Big Year Ahead for Inyo National Forest (Fran Hunt)

With critical decision points and the scheduled release of key environmental documents and the Draft Inyo Forest Plan, 2015 will be a critical year for the future of the Inyo National Forest. In the next two months, for example, the Sierra Club and other wilderness advocates are hoping the Forest Service will make public which special Inyo National Forest wildlands it is considering recommending to Congress for wilderness protection.

Numerous other important dates and critical “public involvement milestones” have already been scheduled and appear on the U.S. Forest Service’s planning [website \(http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/r5/landmanagement/planning\)](http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/r5/landmanagement/planning). However, elected officials in both Inyo and Mono Counties in California have written the Forest Service urging it to delay the release of the Draft Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement to more fully allow public input to influence the development of these key documents. The Sierra Club and our regional and national allies have also repeatedly expressed concerns that the Agency’s planning timeline is too aggressive to allow for the development of strong, scientifically based plans that are shaped by robust public participation.

While it appears that the Agency may be internally reconsidering its timeline, as of the time of this writing, no new schedule has been announced, so the official schedule remains as follows:

April: The Forest Service plans to release the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Draft Inyo Forest Plan with a 90 day public comment period.

April 16: The Agency holds its next public [Sierra Cascades Dialog \(http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r5/workingtogether/?cid=STELPRDB5349218\)](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r5/workingtogether/?cid=STELPRDB5349218) session.

May: The Inyo National Forest plans to hold a Public Workshop to discuss the DEIS and Draft Forest Plan.

July: The public comment period on DEIS and Draft Inyo Forest Plan will end 90 days after those documents are released for public comment.

Throughout the year, the Sierra Club will work diligently with our local and regional allies to advocate for critical fish and wildlife habitats, water and streams, and high quality recreation opportunities. We will continue to press for the protection of the Inyo’s special wild places, including, for example, the Glass Mountains, the only east-west trending mountain range in the Eastern Sierra. The area’s high elevation and location between the Sierra Nevada and White Mountains create a unique mix of Great Basin, Mojave, and Sierran habitats and vegetation. With diverse forests ranging from pinyon to limber and Jeffrey pine, as well as snowbank and riparian aspen groves, abundant meadows, and spring-fed creeks, these important mountains also contain valuable roadless areas and are an important migratory corridor and a potential refuge for species facing the impacts of climate change.

The Inyo Forest’s planning process offers a critical opportunity to provide increased protections for the Glass Mountains, which the Sierra Club’s Range of Light Group has identified as containing candidate areas for protection as designated Wilderness. Please note the dates listed above and stay tuned for changes! Sierra Club members and allies who would like to stay up-to-date about the Inyo Forest can sign up for a free monthly e-newsletter, the *Inyo Forest News*, by emailing/calling me at fran.hunt@sierraclub.org or 703 424 3143.

Dexter Canyon - Glass Mountains, Inyo N. F. (Fran Hunt)



Sage Grouse and Pinyon-Juniper Projects (Tina Nappe)

Tree carcasses and sooty sands mark the path of the Bison Fire. Started by lightning near Gardnerville, Nevada, in 2013, the fire rushed up the eastern slope of the Pine Nut Range, found a passageway through the mountains and raced down the other side burning 37 square miles to where we now stood. Some think the fire was a blessing as it burned through pinyon-juniper (P-J) stands. Nevada has an estimated nine million acres of P-J trees. And the acreage is expanding.

Sage Grouse require treeless sage brush country. The invasion of P-J into sagebrush impacts sage grouse survival. What are the priority sites for P-J tree removal? On a tour sponsored by the Bi-State Sage Grouse Working Group, we were shown how a P-J project site is selected.

For instance, as we looked up at the Pine Nut Mountain slope, we were told that reseeded efforts are targeting the Bison Fire burn at higher elevations, where precipitation and cooler temperatures can sustain young plants. Lower elevations have proved to be poor candidates for restoration efforts.

Next to the burned area was a Stage II P-J forest. The trees were spaced yards apart; sagebrush in between them was beginning to die off. Excellent habitat for mule deer, pinyon jay flocks, and pine-nut collecting we were told. Within a few years, expanding P-J will crowd out the shrubs, forbs and grasses. As the P-J forest continues to expand, the landscape becomes Stage III, where trees, so close together, are subject to disease and death as they compete with other. When the Stage III fires burn at lower elevations, trees die and cheat grass prevails.

The Bi-State Working Group, comprised of federal, state (California and Nevada), local, and tribal governments, ranchers and interested citizens has developed a plan and secured funding hoping to avoid sage grouse being listed as threatened. Removal of Stage I P-J is one component of their plan.

Our next stop was a recently treated Stage I, P-J site. At this site P-J trees were far apart; sagebrush, forbs and plants dominated the site. The trees had been cut with a chain saw and then masticated, i.e. chewed up and left on the ground.

Across the road, a reclamation site, now several years old, represented the future. P-J was already popping up through the low sage brush. A good volunteer project possibility. (continued on p. 7)

Sage Grouse and Pinyon... — continued from p. 6

I thought of the money and time that went into each project; looking around the valley, I noted the thick P-J woodlands that existed everywhere. How small this project was; how great the need. Clearly saving the approximately 5,000 sage grouse in the Bi-State area will be a challenge.

Pinyon pine encroachment into sage-grouse habitat (Tina Nappe)



Alien Invasion (Maurica Anderson)

Up and down the Eastern Sierra corridor an alien invasion is occurring. Native to Asia, common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) was first brought to America from Europe in the 1700s, when the leaves were used in medicinal tea and the crushed seeds to stun fish for capture. (A 2002 study of common mullein extracts revealed antibacterial and anti-tumor properties.) Today it can be found by the hundreds along roadsides and in campgrounds, popping up in cracks in concrete and asphalt, and it is beginning to appear in moist meadows far up the Eastern Sierra slope. It is especially invasive in newly burned areas, where the leaves at its base — which are large, six to twelve inches, densely woolly, and soft to the touch — prevent the re-emergence of native herbs and grasses. Though it has spread to all the lower 48 states, it is especially a problem here, for it loves alkaline soil and open, sunny areas. The ugly dead stalks stand for years unless removed.

Mullein is a biennial or annual herb that sprouts up to six feet tall in our area, topped with yellow flowers closely attached to its stalk. It usually spends the first year as a rosette close to the ground. A single plant may produce nearly a quarter of a million tiny seeds, which can last decades. It has no natural enemies here, and its mildly toxic leaves irritate the mucous membranes of grazing animals.

The best way to eradicate mullein is mechanical, either pulling or hoeing. Plants severed through the root crown below the lowest leaves do not re-sprout. If plants have begun to set seed, the flowering racemes should be cut off with shears just below the lowest seed pods and collected in a bag to prevent seeds from being released. A second or third weeding may be necessary. Herbicides are inefficient due to the plants hairiness, and burning is ineffective as it only creates new bare areas for seedlings to occupy.

Though mullein is pretty for a short time, don't turn your back. Me, I'm going to buy a good hoe.

Mullein plant (Maurica Anderson)



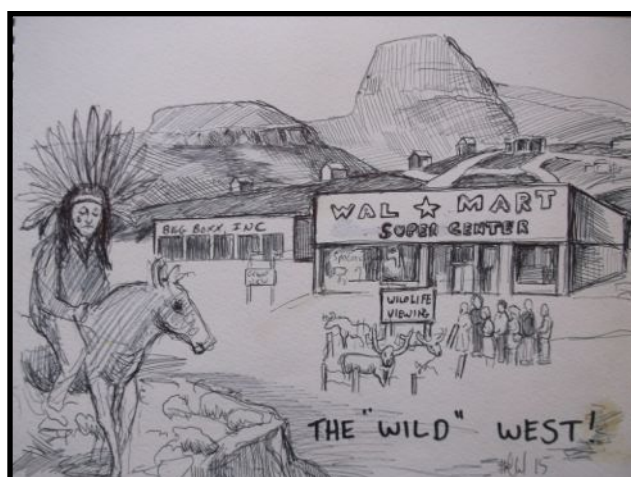
Carson City District, BLM, Resource Management Plan Revision (Tina Nappe)

The Carson City District released the draft of its revision to the Resource Management Plan in December 2014. This covers the urban areas of Reno, Sparks, Carson City, and Minden/Gardnerville. At nearly 2,000 pages, this document can even weigh down one's hard disk on the computer. The comment period ends April 27, 2015. This plan will be the guiding document for years, covering about 4.8 million acres of public land. The document is too large to even summarize here. We point out just a couple of typical actions that are proposed and that may be of interest to members in the Reno/Sparks area.

The draft plan proposes to continue Incandescent Rocks off Pyramid Highway as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) which provides some protection for the site. This is an area often scheduled for hikes by Great Basin Group outing leaders.

The draft plan proposes to drop all protection for the Petersen Mt. Range. Partially fenced to limit access, Petersen Mountain is important winter range for migrating deer. Many Sierra Club outings have been to this range and many members are familiar with it.

Interested in knowing more: contact David Von Seggern (vonsegr@sbcglobal.net) and go to Carson City District, Bureau of Land Management, and navigate to the RMP page.



From Nevada's wildest cartoonist and our own ExCom, Erik Holland

Other News from the Chapter

Highlights from the January 2015 Chapter ExCom Meeting (David von Seggern, Chair)

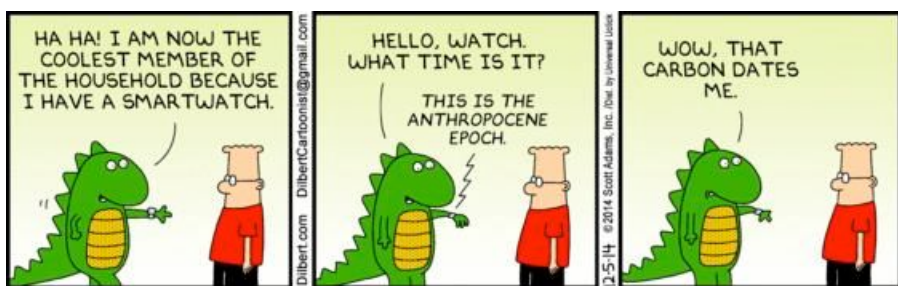
The January meeting is always a full one, and this year was no exception. The election results were that four ExCom members returned. The seat vacated by Christa Keyes was filled by Anne Macquarie of Carson City. Christa had been our Treasurer, but Jerry Yeazell of Reno has agreed to be our new treasurer, on appointment by the ExCom.

Major funds were approved to support both an energy lobbyist and a public lands lobbyist for this legislative season in Nevada. The Toiyabe Chapter gets specific funds from national Sierra Club to support state lobbying. Our efforts, joined with those of partners, can make a difference.

A donation was made to the Las Vegas ICO (Inspiring Connections Outdoors). This program is part of a major effort by the Sierra Club to get kids outdoors and aware of our natural heritage. In Las Vegas, the program has been ably managed by Betty Gallifent, and please see the separate article on one of their outings in this issue.

We passed a resolution which urges Sierra Club members to make use of the phrase “Anthropocene Epoch” when talking about what geologic epoch we are in. The Anthropocene began about 1800, coinciding with the Industrial Age and rise of fossil-fuel energy. World geological societies are now looking to adopt this as an official geological epoch. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropocene> for information, and a web search on “anthropocene” will return many other sources.

The meeting was followed by an evening celebration over the shuttering of the Reid-Gardner coal plant near Las Vegas. The Sierra Club has been prominent in this closure.



ICO group pauses at railroad tunnel (Betty Gallifent)



ICO Hikes Railroad Tunnels to Hoover Dam (Betty Gallifent)

“I think I saw a bat!” “It’s cool in here.” “This isn’t too scary.” The observations of twelve West Prep middle school students reverberated off the inside walls of the 25 foot tall Railroad Tunnels as they passed through the first of five such tunnels on their way to Hoover Dam. This Valentine’s Day hike, sponsored and lead by Las Vegas ICO, brought students along the now historic four mile trail that was once a railway that shuttled supplies and equipment from Boulder City to Hoover Dam during the building of the dam in the 1930s. An added visual along the trail was the expansive waters of Lake Mead just to the north. For all but one student, this was their first visit to this area. Strolling along the wide and flat bed where the tracks and ties once lay offered little physical challenge, so these eager morning hikers had opportunity to take in the views and watch for wildlife. They observed the scrambling of a blue green lizard, speculated on how the volcanic rock was dug out for the tunnels, and smelled the rain-like scent of the creosote bush.

Along the way, students were queried about the origins of this man-made lake. How was the lake created? Where does the water come from? Where does it go? Students knew instinctively that the iconic “bathtub ring” now 100 plus feet deep, meant that the water level was once much higher. Discussions ensued about this dwindling water supply due to the prolonged drought and how that will impact Las Vegas water use in the future.

A National Park Service ranger and her interns stopped to share old photographs of the early builders of the railroad and dam. Students would find out that these jobs were dangerous and workers had to endure hot temperatures with no air conditioning. Pictures also showed families living in lean-tos, shacks, and tents along the river’s edge. This was a hard life.

Temperatures neared 80 degrees when these trekkers finally reached Hoover Dam. Spirits were refreshed and interests piqued when they were able to look down the 726 foot concrete wall that held back the waters of Lake Mead. The hydro-electric plant lay at the foot of the dam with its 17 generators, each producing electricity to 100,000 homes. From here the Colorado River continued its course southward. The students seemed to want to linger here just taking in the grandeur of the structure. Questions from them indicated they were thinking like engineers. “What keeps the water from overflowing the top of the dam?” one girl inquired. They were all enthralled by the fact that they could step over the half-way point of the dam and be in Arizona.

The last leg of this day’s journey brought the students up from the dam site to the stairs that ascend to the Mike O’Callaghan-Pat Tillman Memorial Bridge, completed in 2010, and extending 1,900 feet across Black Canyon just south of the dam. Too weary to take in more facts about bridge building, they opted for a simple walk across the bridge, with its prime view of the face of Hoover Dam, now cast in the afternoon sun. This day’s outing of contrasting views and experiences ended sweetly with Valentine heart treats for the ride home.

The Railroad Tunnels trip and seven more throughout this year are made possible by the contribution of \$2000 from the Toiyabe Chapter to Las Vegas ICO. The funding will pay for transportation and food costs. Las Vegas ICO leaders are most grateful for this level of support from the Toiyabe Chapter Executive Committee and its members.

For more information about Las Vegas ICO, check out our Facebook page at “Las Vegas ICO”. You may write us at: lasvegasico702@gmail.com