

Sierra Conservationist

NEWSLETTER OF THE PLACER GROUP SIERRA CLUB

October-December, 2015

Limits on West Placer sprawl within reach

by Terry Davis

The 15-year saga of the Placer County Conservation Plan

(widely known as the "PCCP") is in its final lap. The county is poised to protect most of what remains of the agricultural lands, stream systems and vernal pool grasslands that once dominated vast expanses of the western part of the county, but has steadily succumbed to urban development.

We mounted our first serious challenge to sprawl in western Placer County in 1990, when we filed a lawsuit opposing the Roseville Hospital's expansion into a vernal pool area. Over the next 20 years the Sierra Club, Sierra Foothills Audubon Society and Defenders of Wildlife (in varying combinations) would initiate three more lawsuits under the California Environmental Quality Act, and one lawsuit based on the federal Endangered Species Act. The West Roseville Specific Plan, Placer Vineyards and Regional University were all met with litigation.

Why is the county, Lincoln and Roseville now willing to limit future development in western Placer County? The answer is simple, it's the vernal pools. This rare habitat is the Achilles heel of developers, and westward growth has repeatedly collided with two federal agencies—the US Army Corps of Engineers, which must ensure "no net loss" of wetlands, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which must protect plants and animals on the Endangered Species List. The last 25 years are replete with protracted struggles in which agency permits were delayed for years and lawsuits were filed by environmental groups.

Eventually, all interests realized that the only way out of this costly stalemate would be a Habitat Conservation Plan—thus the PCCP was born.

Why do environmental groups support the PCCP? First, a portion of West Placer would be established as a Reserve Acquisition Area, designated for conservation and off limits to urban growth. It would be a de facto Urban Growth Boundary, considered the "gold standard" in limiting sprawl. Secondly, the PCCP's regional approach to conservation would contrast markedly from the usual requirements imposed on developers by the federal agencies. To compensate for the destruction of vernal pools, developers were allowed to establish small onsite or offsite vernal pool preserves, without surrounding grasslands ("uplands"). But vernal pools biologically depend not only on the "wetter acres," but on the surrounding uplands, which contribute to plant pollination and the necessary hydrologic conditions. As these small preserves are surrounded by development, the biological processes that maintain the rare and diverse species inhabiting vernal pools deteriorate. In contrast, the PCCP would take developer money and use it to buy land in the Reserve Acquisition Area, building a system of large interconnected vernal pool preserves with ample uplands. Absent of the threat of future development, agriculture could also continue to thrive in this portion of the county.

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As of now the PCCP is still on track to be a win-win—a means of removing the road blocks to growth within a defined footprint, and in return ensuring sustainable vernal pool habitat and preserving a big piece of the agricultural heritage of our county. Through its final stages of adoption we will continue to monitor the plan and provide input. For more information about this issue email terry.davis@sierraclub.org.



From the Chair

By Marilyn Jasper

As a member of the Sierra Club since the 1960's, and chair of the Placer Group for 16 years, it's time for a "changen' of the guard." I plan to "retire" as chair but will continue to volunteer on wildlife and legislative issues.

Please consider helping the Sierra Club with its noble environmental efforts. You can be as "active" as you wish, for long or short commitments—help out a few hours a year (such as volunteering at an event where we have a booth) or attend one or more of our Member/ExCom meetings to learn the ropes and see how it all unfolds. Volunteers are the foundation of this great organization's work, and you are being called to become one!

Pressing Issue. The saga of Placer County's revised Winery Ordinance (WO) continues. Please see separate "ALERT" in this issue and speak out; contact your supervisor and tell him/her that you support the Sierra Club's positions on the revised Winery Ordinance (bos@placer.ca.gov).

Stay informed. In your own community—county, city, special district (fire, water, school, etc.)—you, as a resident and/or a taxpayer, play an important role in governmental activities. Ask to be notified of all agendas, start by attending a few meetings, and stay on top of decisions that will affect your lives.

Thanks to all of you who have volunteered and/or donated to keep the Placer Group alive, well, and kicking by supporting our work. Don't forget to vote for Placer Group's ExCom. Ballots are included in this issue.

MEMBERSHIP

The *Sierra Conservationist* comes with your Sierra Club membership. Donations from anyone to help defray newsletter costs are always appreciated. Write "newsletter" on your check.

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Sierra Club

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Contributions or gifts to the Sierra Club are not tax deductible as charitable contributions. Annual dues include subscription to *Sierra* (\$7.50) and chapter publications (\$1.00) and other member-only benefits.



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www.sierraclub.org/mother-lode/placer

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Public Relations/Newsletter: We invite your letters, comments and input. Our deadline is 15 days prior to publication, the first day of each quarter during the year. Our newsletter can also be accessed on our website.

The Sierra Conservationist is published quarterly: January, April, July online and printed in October by Placer Group Sierra Club, a nonprofit organization.

ON THE COVER: Vernal pools
Photo: Cat Raymond



SIERRA CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

NID's new dam on the Bear River a pie-in-the-sky?

by Terry Davis

The Nevada Irrigation District is making the rounds promoting its proposal to put still another dam on the Bear River called Centennial Reservoir (formerly called Parker Dam). Located between Lake Combie and Rollins Lake, the dam is supposed to provide NID with 110,000 acre feet of storage and hydroelectric energy. The reservoir would inundate 6 miles of river, displace 36 families from their homes, and drown the popular Bear River Campground and the Dog Bar recreation area. NID now must do an Environmental Impact Report, which will take about 2 years. The water agency has already sunk 2 million dollars in the project and will spend the next 1-2 years doing the Environmental Impact Report. But whether the dam will ever be built is uncertain.

At the top of NID's challenges is its water rights application before the State Water Resources Control Board. The State Water Board has already granted rights to more water than the state has available. The Bear River is also classified as a "Fully Appropriated Stream System," meaning no additional water is available for diversion or storage during the summer and fall months. Every bit of new water that NID tries to acquire rights to is certain to be challenged by those depending on Bear River water staying in the system. That system extends from the crest of the Sierra to Rollins Lake, to Lake Combie to Camp Far West Reservoir, to the Sacramento River and on to the Delta. Everywhere, powerful interests strive to hold on to every last drop of water.

For the State Water Board, the Centennial application also comes at an inconvenient time, to say the least. California is in the midst of a multi-year drought and faces a long-term loss of water storage, as the snowpack shrinks due to climate change. A consultant who has taken an initial look at the Bear River system with this new dam on it concludes that NID would be able to fill their 250 million dollar reservoir just once every 7 years. Is this dam mere foolishness, or is it a boondoggle?

Casey Mills appointed to SCPG Executive Committee

We are delighted to announce that Casey Mills has stepped up to serve on the Sierra Club Placer Group Executive Committee. Because the term he is filling expires at the end of the year, he is running for the seat in the current ExCom election. Casey lives in Meadow Vista with his young family and teaches high school English. He has years of experience working with environmental and CEQA issues. We are honored to have him on board. Welcome Casey!

Wildlife in the news

The vast majority of citizens support wildlife protection from wanton killing by humans, including predators from apex species at the top of the chain to the most vulnerable at the bottom. Public agencies are finally recognizing the role predators play in maintaining healthy ecosystem balances and diversity. Regulatory agencies are also taking steps to correct negative impacts created by previous uninformed decision making, some of which was influenced by self-serving special interests.

BOBCATS are "baited" to draw them just outside parks and refuges (where they cannot legally be trapped), and are killed by the tens of thousands—solely for their beautiful pelts, which are reportedly sold primarily in China and Russia. After five hours of testimony and more than 100 speakers, at its August meeting, on a 3-2 vote, the California Fish and Game Commission (FGC) banned commercial bobcat trapping in California. To watch or hear one speakers' eloquent presentation, go to [http://www.cal-span.org/media.php?folder\[\]=CFG](http://www.cal-span.org/media.php?folder[]=CFG), scroll down to August 5, 2015, click on "Linked agenda," and go to 1:35:35 on the timeline scale.



COYOTES are not considered "game" animals and are not protected. Killing contests with prizes are illegal, but a potential loophole may allow the killing "contests" to continue if no "prizes" are awarded. Mass coyote killing drives in remote areas, with the goal to bring in as many carcasses as possible, result in a huge disruption of wildlife balances. In October, the CA FGC is expected to rule on killing contests. For more information and addresses to support a ban on killing contests go to: http://projectcoyote.org/action/choose2BAN_MarcosMessage.html



On many fronts, the biggest news this year was the discovery of a pack of **WOLVES** living in California! In anticipation of wolves dispersing to California, we (CA DFW's "Wolf Stakeholder Group") spent almost three years hammering out a "wolf management plan" after the arrival of OR 7 (who now lives in OR with his seven-member "Rogue" pack).



The CDFW announced in early August that a new gray wolf was spotted in Siskiyou County via a trail camera. Subsequently, unexpectedly, a trail camera caught two black gray wolves and five pups, which meant that California has its first official pack—now named the "Shasta Pack"—since wolves were extirpated in 1924. Wolves are protected under both federal and state laws as endangered species, but vigilance is needed to keep them safe.



Placer Calendar

November 4 & December 2, 2015

Placer Group Member/ExCom meetings

7:00 p.m. Denny's at I-80 Foresthill exit. Let us know if you want to have the agendas emailed to you. Contact Marilyn for more info: marilyn.jasper@mlc.sierraclub.org or (916) 652-7005.

October 28, 2015

Hike (1A) Monroe Ridge and Monument Trail (Senior Section)

We will hike a loop up to the Marshall Monument in Coloma and then back down to the American River and the 1848 gold discovery site. Plan on spending some time enjoying lunch near the river. You may want to explore the museum and shops on your own after the hike. Bring \$ or pass for state parking fee, as well as lunch, water, and essentials. Meet at Burger King in Auburn at 9:30am or in front of Gold Discovery State Park Museum in Coloma at 10 am. No dogs. Rain cancels. Leader: Sheila Toner (530) 886-0673.

November 11, 2015

Canyon Keepers Hike: PG&E Trail

This approx 4 mile one way hike, down the canyon, offers many unique views of both past and current quarrying operations along the Middle Fork American River. There are also several nice views up the Middle Fork American River. Bring lunch, water and essentials. Meet at the Quarry Parking Lot, (State parking fee or pass required.) on the left off Hwy 49 just past the Hwy 49 bridge below Auburn at 9:30am. We will shuttle from there to the upper trailhead starting point. No dogs. Rain cancels. Leader: Sheila Toner (530) 886-0673.

November 25, 2015

Hike (1A) Greenwood Creek (Senior Section)

Pretty, approx 4 mile fairly level loop hike along the South Fork American River. We'll spend some time alongside and overlooking the South Fork. Plan on a long lunch break by the river. This short hike has it all, views, sandy beach, rocky beach, forested trails, open meadow, sun, & shade. Hike will begin at Greenwood Creek parking area off Highway 49. Bring lunch, water and essentials. No dogs. Rain cancels. Meet at 9:30 am at Burger King on Lincoln Way in Auburn at Foresthill Exit off I-80 in Auburn or at trailhead at 10:00 am. Leader: Sheila Toner (530) 886-0673.

Visit these websites for additional organized environmentally related events:

Sierra Club Mother Lode Chapter "Outings": www.mlc.sierraclub.org/outings

Sierra Senior Hikes: <http://groups.dcn.org/sierraseniors>

Placer Land Trust: www.placerlandtrust.org

PARC (Protect American River Canyon): <http://www.parc-auburn.org>

Placer Group Executive Committee (ExCom) 2015 Election Notice

Once again it's time to elect three ExCom members for the Sierra Club's Placer Group. These are elected officers who attend monthly Member/ExCom meetings and vote on important issues. All members are invited and welcome to attend the monthly member meetings, but only the six elected officers (two-year terms) can vote on motions. Please show your support by voting and submitting your ballot before December 1, 2015. Candidates are listed in alphabetical order.

Tom Beattie stepped up to fill a vacancy on the ExCom and has been a great addition to the Placer Group Sierra Club. As an Auburn native, he's well aware of the region's environmental issues.

Marilyn Jasper believes "watchdogs" are a necessity in all areas of government, but especially when it comes to diverse environmental topics. She is resigning as chair of the Placer Group's ExCom (16 years is long enough!) but plans to continue working in Placer Group's conservation areas, participate in public meetings, and encourage others to do the same.

Casey Mills is a former environmental planner who worked for ten years managing CEQA compliance efforts, developing neighborhood plans, and working as a Planning Commission analyst. He is currently a high school teacher and writer in Placer County. He published California Northern Magazine and lives in Meadow Vista with his wife and two children.

PLACER GROUP SIERRA CLUB EXCOM BALLOT

PLEASE RETURN BALLOT BY DECEMBER 1, 2015

- 1) Vote for up to three candidates. Joint memberships use both columns.
- 2) To validate your ballot, include your return address on the envelope
- 3) Write "Ballot" on envelope and mail it to P.O. Box 7167, Auburn, CA 95604.

CANDIDATE	VOTE 1	VOTE 2
Tom Beattie	_____	_____
Marilyn Jasper	_____	_____
Casey Mills	_____	_____

ALERT: Your input needed!

Please contact your Placer County Supervisor immediately and ask him/her to support the Sierra Club's positions and suggestions regarding the revised Placer County's Winery Ordinance (WO). The Placer Group Sierra Club has worked for almost seven years on the combined WO and Event Center Zoning Text Amendment, which is where the current WO proposed revisions originated. We are not opposed to winery operations--tasting rooms are not the problem. A primary reason for the WO revisions should be to correct vague language that allows for arbitrary code interpretations. This in turn leads to noncompliance and little-to-no code enforcement. The Grand Jury Report (2013) concurred in its scathing report on the lack of enforcement of the WO.

Two primary concerns are environmental impacts and the loss of Residential/Agricultural and Farm zone operations due to defacto conversions to commercial activities, especially when they are not allowed or warranted. We insist that Res/Ag and Farm zone operations must be protected, and zoning codes must be enforceable in order to prevent these lands from incompatible defacto conversions. The proposed revised WO's vague language guarantees un-enforceable codes.

The proposed revisions include language to allow "unlimited" events and attendees, especially with the addition of a new "non-event" event category. If adopted, the proposed WO will codify unacceptable environmental impacts (noise, traffic, air quality, and others) at rural community and neighbors' expense. Also, whatever activities wineries are allowed to conduct in the Res/Ag and Farm zones, it's understood that breweries, cider houses, and possibly distilleries will most likely be granted the same entitlements in the future.

Anyone may obtain a Temporary Outdoor Event (TOE) permit and hold six days of commercial events per year. Wineries are also allowed to have tasting rooms because they are the "functional equivalent" of roadside farm stands where farmers may sell their produce or value-added products. But unlimited commercial events do not belong in Res/Ag and Farm zones. Help us keep ResAg and Farm zone activities limited to ag operations rather than morphing into commercial operations. Contact the Board of Supervisors: bos@placer.ca.gov and urge them to accept the Sierra Club's positions.

To read more about the WO, click on "Zoning Text Amendment—Winery Ordinance Update at: <http://www.placer.ca.gov/departments/communitydevelopment/envcoordsvcs/negdec>
For more information or copies of our submitted comments, please contact Marilyn at marilyn.jasper@mlc.sierraclub.org

We wish to thank these Placer Group Sponsors







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**Buy, or help sell,
 breathtaking 2016 Calendars**

The stunningly beautiful Sierra Club 2016 Wilderness (wall) and Engagement (weekly-desk) calendars have arrived with magnificent images of nature for homes, offices, or for the perfect gift. Wilderness calendars have 12 large (11.25" x 12.75") color photographs above with monthly large date blocks below. Engagement calendars (6.5" x 9") have spectacular photographs opposite each weekly page.



Calendar sales are the primary fundraising source for our Placer Group. Proceeds help pay for our activities—materials, tabling/booth rents, environmental campaigns, legal expenses, etc.) that benefit Placer County’s region. Calendars can be purchased by completing the order form below or call (916) 652-7005 or email marilyn.jasper@mlc.sierraclub.org. You can also purchase from our booth at upcoming farmers’ markets, festivals and events.

Help us reach our goal to completely sell out before the end of the year. We’ve ordered fewer calendars this year, so the insider tip is to buy early!

CALENDAR ORDER FORM

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 Address _____
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 Telephone and/or Email _____

	QUANTITY	X	PRICE	+	*SHIPPING	=	TOTAL
Wilderness Calendars	_____	x	\$15	+	\$5 ea	=	_____
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*No shipping charges if you pick up, or FREE delivery in Placer Group area for orders of 10 or more. Sales tax is included in the price.

Please make check payable to Sierra Club Placer Group and mail to P.O. Box 7167, Auburn, CA 95604. For more information or questions contact Marilyn Jasper at marilyn.jasper@mlc.sierraclub.org.

Thank you. Your support is greatly appreciated.