The Sierra Club • Tehipite Chapter

Tehipite Topics

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The Tip of the Iceberg?

A Commentary on the Lower Yosemite Falls Project

by an anonymous employee of Yosemite National Park

The construction that occurred to develop the "new and improved" Lower Yosemite Falls area has generated a great deal of controversy. In my opinion, the Falls area is grossly overbuilt. The restroom is large enough to serve a herd of elephants and giraffes, the shuttle bus stop looks like it belongs on a mini-ranchette in Montana, the bridges along the east side trail are solid enough to drive a car across, and there is far and away too much pavement in formerly unpaved areas.

I am happy that the parking lot has been removed. But because there is no limit to the number of cars entering Yosemite Valley, those that would have been in the Falls parking lot simply end up parked all over the Valley—on road shoulders, in forests, and on meadow edges. I was okay with the concept of a new restroom, but not on the scale that was built. I shuddered and grew weepy as I watched the 60-inch diameter ponderosa pine cut down to make way for the new restroom. I believe the NPS should have made the west side trail fully accessible and left the east side alone.

I have three key issues with the Lower Falls project.

- The natural setting was diminished. I think the project is just too urban-looking, a trend that does not bode well for the future of the Valley.
- Serious flaws existed in the planning process that preceded the project.
- The project negatively affected the ecological web that embraces Yosemite Falls and the meanders of Yosemite Creek.

In violation of the intent of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), the project's Environmental Assessment (EA) presented no alternatives for the east side trail. The EA did not identify short-term project impacts. The actual impacts included site closures, noise, visual intrusion, vegetation removal, soil disturbance, water quality degradation, and wildlife disturbance. A deer fell into a large excavation. The footbridges were to be "rehabilitated;" the bridges were replaced with grossly over-engineered structures of steel I-beams, with concrete footings up to 15 feet by 15 feet by 10 feet deep. The project was to benefit hydrology and water quality; the project dumped tons of concrete into the stream channel for bridge and boardwalk footings. More than 70 trees were removed, including the one over 60 inches wide, which was destroyed for the new restroom.

Unfortunately, what's done is done. The NPS is unlikely to re-do the project. I suppose we will have to wait for the spirits of the Valley to remove all of our human intrusions with a really large flood.

In spite of my sadness over the project, however, in the spirit of "taking the high road" with respect to the Lower Falls Project, I want to propose that the Yosemite Fund take the project to the next level. The Fund should not stop after "restoring" the human built component of the Lower Falls area. Let's see the Fund move forward and restore the more important parts of

*See **Yosemite**, page 5*

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October General Meeting

October 19th at 7:00 P.M.
University of California Center
550 E. Shaw Ave., Fresno
(across from Fashion Fair)

"National Parks of Thailand"

presented by Rodney Olsen

Rodney Olsen will present a slide show and talk on his recent trip to Thailand in December and January 2004-2005. His photos will take us on a journey through three national parks of Thailand, with the a focus on flora and fauna. Rodney Olsen is an instructor of biology and ecology at Fresno City College and has recently shared his experiences in the Brazilian Amazon with members of the Tehipite Chapter. Don't miss out on this night of charismatic forests and animals of Thailand.

Upcoming Chapter General Meeting Presentations

November 16th
Helen Gigliotti: Gwaii Haanas (see back page)

December 14th
Kevin Hall: Very Important Updates on Fresno's Air Quality and Measure C

Dinner Date With The Speaker

Meet at the Imperial Gardens Restaurant at 5:15 for our monthly no-host "Dinner Date with the Speaker," an opportunity to interact with fellow Sierrans.

6640 N. Blackstone, east side, just south of Herndon.

Merced Group

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Merced Group

Conservation and Executive Committee Meeting

Thursday, October 13th at 7:00 P.M at Rod Webster's home, 345 E. 20th St., Merced

General Meeting

Thursday, October 20th at 7:30 P.M.
Sierra Presbyterian Church, 3603 M St.
(M St. and Yosemite Ave., across from Merced College)

"The True Cost of Food—Why to Buy Locally"

A short video entitled "The True Cost of Food" will be shown, documenting the often ignored environmental and societal cost of modern mega-scale food production, including the transportation impacts of getting it to your local market. To draw from just a few of the many thought-provoking points made, given that an average meal travels 2000 miles from farm to table, the pollution from such transport is a major cost of current eating trends. Agricultural practices in the U.S. also commonly rely heavily on the use of toxic pesticides—about 3 pounds per person per year. In fact, this puts agriculture in the position of being the largest source of water pollution in the country! Three quarters of our land is used for grazing or growing food for animals, not people. And the list of costs goes on.

Following the video, local organic farmers will be on hand to offer alternatives which advance sustainable farming practices and support local family farms. Tom and Denesse Willey of Willey Farms will be among the growers represented. They have been Certified Organic Farmers since 1987. Their website TDWilleyFarms.com offers some clues to what they might share with the group. It states that 20 families are supported full time on their 75 acres of production. This is possible because every dollar made goes to the support the farm and its workers, contrasted with as little as 20 cents on the dollar for supermarket items.

The Willeys also assert that "the paramount tools of quality production are caring people's eyes and hands."

At the presentation, information will be provided about several sources marketing fresh produce from local family farm operations.

Annual Banquet

Mark your calendars for the Merced Group's Annual Banquet, the evening of Thursday, December 1st at the Branding Iron Restaurant in Merced.

The featured speaker will be Tony Rowell who will share stunning imagery by his father, Galen Rowell, followed by slides of his own travels. These will include photos from trips to the Arctic Circle, hiking the John Muir Trail, and his latest adventure to China and Tibet. Tony's images have been published in calendars, books, and magazines such as *Backpacker* and *Outdoor Photographer*. He is the Vice President of Mountain Light Photography, a member of the Sierra Club, and serves on the advisory board for the Rowell award and the Rowell fund for Tibet. Tony recently moved to Bishop, CA to be closer to the photo opportunities of the majestic Eastern Sierra. Fine art prints and calendars will be available for purchase. Some of Tony's work can be viewed at www.tonyrowell.com. Details to purchase tickets to this event will be in the November *Topics.*

Outings

See the Tehipite Chapter's listings. Phone Rod Webster at (209) 723-4747 if you would like to coordinate carpooling with others from our area.

Logging Project Halted in Sequoia National Monument!

by Carla Cloer, Chair, Sequoia Task Force

The Sierra Club and other environmental organizations were granted a preliminary injunction stopping logging on 2000 acres within the Giant Sequoia National Monument. Attorney Pat Gallagher, director of Environmental Law for the Sierra Club, led the rescue of the Monument, where logging was allowed to proceed five years after the Monument was created. This timber sale, the Saddle so-called Fuels Reduction Project, was all about removing big trees, not about fire control, and would have taken more than 5 million board feet of big timber between 12 and 30 inches in diameter. While many large pine and fir were logged prior to the issuance of the August temporary restraining order, most of the area was spared! The project directly bordered, but did not enter, five groves of majestic sequoias.

The Giant Sequoia National Monument was created in April of 2000. The Proclamation stopped bulldozing, logging and exploitation of Monument lands. It called for restoration from a century of logging. However, the Proclamation allowed a few timber sales that had been approved prior to the creation of the Monument to be completed as a short term transition for the timber industry.

The original Saddle Project contract termination date was March, 2004. That meant logging should have been completed by November of 2003 because of seasonal closure of the forest for winter. But quietly in the backroom of the Forest Service, the contract deadline was changed, giving the industry until 2005. Then the deadline was changed yet again, and extended until June of 2006.

Why did this happen? The Forest Service implied that the industry was busy removing hazard trees, but during the court hearing it became clear that the real reason for the delay was that the Forest Service was letting the timber industry wait to log until the price of wood went up. Clearly, if this had *really* been a project to protect either the forest or communities, no such delays would have been allowed. This project is far from communities and on ridgelines where fire often lays down or goes out!

While the industry waited for higher wood prices, evidence came to light that the Pacific fisher, a reclusive member of the weasel family, had such reduced numbers and such damaged habitat that it was eligible for listing under the Endangered Species Act. The Pacific fisher is a species specifically mentioned for protection in the Proclamation that created the Monument, yet the Forest Service did not stop logging of fisher habitat to re-evaluate how more logging might further impact this troubled species. The Pacific fisher is making its last stand here in the southern Sierra; projects such as the Saddle could mean the loss of this valiant little creature forever.

There are several other timber sales, "left over" from before the Monument's creation, that would have similar impacts on the fisher, and on other species that rely on the Monument's remaining intact forests. The Sierra Club is deliberating about their next course of action.

We are outraged that the Forest Service did not take seriously its responsibility to protect this wondrous forest. The Sierra Club has another lawsuit pending, which challenges the Forest Service's Sequoia Monument Management Plan, because it perpetuates logging instead of restoration from logging. The Forest Service cannot be allowed to continue to manage this National Monument, with its emerald meadows, sparkling streams and over half the earth's groves of giant sequoia! In contrast to the Forest Service, for a century Sequoia National Park has successfully managed its third of the Sierran sequoia ecosystem without relying on logging. The Park has earned the public's trust to nurture the lands in its custody. The Park System already

Saved from logging! Cold Springs Peak, inside Saddle Sale unit 161.

*See **Monument**, page 7*

***Yosemite**, from page 1*

the Lower Falls area—the ecological components. "Phase II of the Lower Falls Project" could begin by restoring native vegetation. Every year the Lower Falls area supports more and more bull thistle, cocklebur, velvet grass, cheatgrass, ripgut grass, and other highly invasive introduced plant species. These plants are changing, and in some places have completely changed, the understory, or ground level, vegetation of the Lower Falls area. This, in turn, changes wildlife food sources, soil nutrients, soil water balances, and soil microorganisms.

Additionally, the forest of incense cedar and ponderosa pine is far denser than it would have been if the natural cycle of fire had not been interrupted in the Valley. Selectively thinning these forests would increase forest health in a variety of ways. The NPS is supposed to be doing restoration of this nature in Yosemite Valley, but funding levels have been inadequate. The Yosemite Fund's Phase II could set a precedent, and could serve as a pilot project for future ecological restoration in Yosemite Valley. By contributing to the ecological well-being of the Valley, the Fund could leave an even more lasting legacy to the park and to future generations.

The Fund and the NPS have invested over $13 million to improve the human components of the Lower Falls area. How much can they now provide to protect and restore the ecological integrity of this sacred land?

This article was written by an employee of Yosemite National Park. Fearing retribution, the author has asked to remain anonymous.

An Alternative Argument in Opposition to New Sierran Dams

by Dr. David Cehrs, hydrologist

As environmentalists, we typically oppose new Sierran dam proposals by using environmental issues, points, and arguments. This is only natural for us. These environmental arguments are valid, sincere and defensible. But I would propose another argument against new dams that I think will elicit a positive response, upon reflection, from some who now favor dam construction, specifically the agricultural community and the construction industry. My argument is as follows: I oppose new dam building in the Sierra because we, in the San Joaquin Valley, will not get the water. The water will go to either the Los Angeles/San Diego or the Bay Area metropolitan areas. Why will this occur? For two reasons: they can pay more for the water than we can and they have the vote to influence water legislation allowing them to acquire the water.

New federally financed dams will require non-subsidized payments for the water. This engenders a bidding process for the water. Agricultural water users can pay up to $300 per acre foot, maybe in extreme cases $500 per acre foot; currently most ag water costs in the $30 to $150 per acre foot range. Central San Joaquin municipal/industrial water users pay up to $1300 per acre foot for their water with the majority paying between $55 and $420 per acre foot. For the major metro areas, desalination projects, which are their current "new" source of water, seem to be stabilizing near $900 per acre foot and LA is currently paying up to $1300 per acre foot for water conservation. But the major metropolitan areas' demand for new water is such that they can and will pay three to five times these values for water. The San Joaquin Valley cannot compete with the metro areas on water costs.

There is legislation on the books that surface water cannot be diverted away from the basin of origin. But legislation can be changed or rescinded by a new vote. The LA/San Diego and Bay Area metro areas not only have the popular vote majority but the legislative vote majority to introduce and change the current legislation. The metro areas also have the money to influence the vote on these issues. Again, the San Joaquin Valley cannot compete.

The last time surface water was exported from the area our local water table dropped. This occurred in the late 1940s, when the Central Valley Project went on line. As Millerton Lake was filling and San Joaquin River water diversions began via the Madera and Friant-Kern Canals no San Joaquin River water was flowing down its natural channel. This natural San Joaquin flow is a major source of groundwater recharge to the area. The water table beneath the Fresno Irrigation District dropped 15 feet in two years (1947-1949) and has never recovered to pre-dam levels. Expect this to happen again with new export of surface water from the area.

So what to do? The best way to maximize our local water volume for all users is to use the current dams as peaking facilities and store the water in the underground. How does this work? Instead of using the dams as the storage facility, you use them to catch the high volume, warm, winter storms and spring runoff and meter the water out continuously to groundwater recharge facilities scattered throughout the San Joaquin Valley. An analogous example to this use of dams is having an alternating current (AC) input to a rectifier and getting a continuous direct current (DC) output. The storage space in the subsurface for this surface water is practically infinite when compared to any limited, new dam storage and can be built for one third to one quarter the cost of a dam per acre foot of water stored. Also, the recharge can be targeted to influence areas of overdraft. But best of all, it keeps the water in our local area for our local use and the water does not go over the hill to slake the thirst of California's major metro areas.

Currently, all of our central valley U.S. Representatives (Cardozza, Radanovich, Costa, and Nunes) are lobbying for new Sierran dams. I believe they could do more for their constituents, both from a water and employment perspective, if they could garner federal dollars for construction of recharge facilities. The recharged water would remain local and local contractors have the resources and ability to construct recharge facilities but not dams.

The core of my argument is that if we in the San Joaquin Valley want to keep the water, a new dam would be the worst way, as the water would leave the area for the benefit of others far away. My proposal would keep the water local, for agricultural and municipal use; it would provide local construction jobs, a point which Congressional representative should like; and it would save the Sierran environment that we are trying to preserve.

Outings Schedule

October 1st - Saturday

We will hike cross country from Kaiser Pass to Idaho Lake, approximately two strenuous miles each way.
Gerald Vinnard (559) 431-5780

Trip Ratings

Distance	Elevation Gain
1) up to 6 miles	A) under 1,000 feet
2) 6 to 10 miles	B) 1,000 to 2,000 feet
3) 10 to 15 miles	C) 2,000 to 3,000 feet
4) 15 to 20 miles	D) 3,000 to 4,000 feet
5) over 20 miles	E) over 4,000 feet

Our Tehipite Chapter Outings Chair is Richard Sloan (559) 696-2971 RiverRich1509@aol.com. Please contact him with any questions concerning our outings program. Contact the trip leader directly if you are interested in one of the listed trips.

Tehipite Chapter outings are free and open to the public. All leaders are unpaid volunteers assuming responsibility for a good trip, and your cooperation is mandatory. Please review additional trip and participant requirements at www.tehipite.sierraclub.org/outings.

Would you like to be an Outings Leader? Do you have a favorite hike you would like to share with fellow outdoor lovers? Being an Outings Leader can be very rewarding. Basic qualifications include a desire to lead outings, basic first aid or the ability to devote a day to getting qualified in first aid, and reading the Sierra Club Outings Leader Handbook. The Tehipite Chapter would like to offer outings to people of all abilities and ages. if you are interested, e-mail or phone Richard Sloan at RiverRich1509@aol.com or (559) 696-2971. Richard will organize a dinner for interested members. Current Outings Leaders please contact Richard with your proposed hikes.

October 2nd - Sunday

Coyote Lake via Brewer, Tocher, and Beryl Lakes. We will visit four High Sierra lakes, three of them seldom visited, on a ten mile round trip that ascends less than a thousand feet. The hike will be partly cross country and may follow a jeep trail briefly. Coyote is one of the prettiest lakes that can be reached on a day hike. A friendly German Shepherd will accompany us on this hike. Limited to eight people.
John Cameron (559) 896-6919

October 8th - Saturday

Day Hike—Moderate (3C)
Ostrander Lake. A beautiful lake and a stone ski hut just south of Glacier Point Road in Yosemite.
Walt Taguchi (559) 435-2818

October 14th-16th (Friday-Monday)

Car Camp and Day Hike (3D)
Leave Friday evening and meet at Ballarat and camp out. In the morning hike 6 miles to Panamint city ghost town located in a juniper/pinion pine forest. we have seen bighorn sheep three times in a row on this hike! Saturday night we will have steaks at Panamint Springs (if it hasn't sold yet.) Sunday we will explore either the lookout ghost town or go to the hot springs in the Saline Valley (and waterfalls in Beveridge Canyon) depending on what the group wants to do. Five dollar deposit required (refunded if you go on the trip) for this trip to handle mailing, maps, detailed itinerary, etc. High clearance vehicles required; 4wd not required. Possible extension trip in north part of Saline Valley for those interested. "You will learn about the environmental geography and history of the area." Please sign up early for this one.
Richard Sloan
1509 E. Fallbrook Ave.
Fresno, CA 93720
(559) 696-2971

October 22nd - Saturday

Day Hike (3C)
Mount Nelson is in the Courtright area above Lake Nelson. Some cross country.
Walt Taguchi (559) 435-2818

October 29th - Saturday

Day Hike (2B)
Cliff Lake is in the Courtright area.
Carolyn Ordway (559) 449-7780

November 5th - Saturday

Day Hike (2A)
Pincushion Ridge. Hike to a mesa above Millerton Lake.
Don Redmond (559) 268-1537

***Monument**, from page 7*

manages about 80 National Monuments. We must turn over management of the Giant Sequoia National Monument to Sequoia National Park so that true restoration and protection can begin!

We will keep you posted on our next step. We urge you to protest the implementation of any Monument project that removes trees over 12 inches in diameter, except in hazardous situations. Write letters to your Congressional representatives and to the Supervisor of Sequoia National Forest, 1500 West Grand Avenue, Porterville CA 93257.

We are very grateful to Pat Gallagher of the Sierra Club's Environmental Law program. We urge that members and Chapters let the Sierra Club Board of Directors know how pleased we are with his work and how vital legal action is when all other options fail. ❧

Please visit the Sierra Club website at www.sierraclub.org/ca/sequoia *for the latest updates on the Sequoia National Monument.*

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Inside *Tehipite Topics*

Did you know that *Tehipite Topics* is available online, approximately one week before you receive it in the mail? *In color!* See www.tehipite.sierraclub.org.

November *Tehipite Topics* deadline Oct. 15th.

Coming to the General Meeting in November

"Gwaii Haanas"

presented by Helen Gigliotti

November 16th, 2005 at 7:00 P.M.

University of California Center, 550 E. Shaw Ave., Fresno

Helen Gigliotti is a retired Professor of Biochemistry and administrator at Fresno State and an avid international traveler and photographer. Recent trips to Mongolia, Antarctica, Borneo, India, and Madagascar have resulted in slideshows and photographic exhibits in the local community.

Join Helen as we board the schooner *Copper Sky* for a sailing adventure amongst the northwest Canadian Queen Charlotte Islands. Although these islands are a land of great natural beauty, boasting some of the world's biggest trees, Canada's largest population of bald eagles, and a rich tapestry of intertidal and sea life, our focus will be the islands of Gwaii Haanas, home to the native Haida people and their richly artistic culture for more than 10,000 years. We will visit, by sea, the major "ghost villages" of the Haida, including the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Ninstints, where the world's finest collection of totem poles still stands majestically decaying. Walking the paths of these villages is said by many to be a profound spiritual experience.