



# Tehipite Topics

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## Fulton Mall Targeted by City Hall Should we just give up on pedestrian malls and accept that Fresno is a car culture?

by Robert Turner

On September 5, 2013, the day the City of Fresno found out they would be getting sixteen million dollars from the U.S. Department of Transportation to wreck our Fulton Mall and turn it into a street for cars, I heard Mayor Ashley Swearengin give an impassioned speech calling for all Fresnoans to rally behind this one simple project. It will be the first domino in a series that will lead to the renaissance of downtown, she said. Bring cars back to Fulton Street and hope will be restored, businesses will return, developers will invest, one domino after another until the city is back on its feet. All because people in cars will be able to drive and park right in front of the stores and restaurants on the street.

It was a brilliant piece of political theater. I began to feel unpatriotic not jumping on the bandwagon, wanting instead to save this unique piece of Fresno's artistic and cultural heritage. Ever since I became involved in the politics of Fresno city planning, I have resented the notion that if I believe in downtown Fresno, then I should also be supporting the reintroduction of cars into the Fulton Corridor.

As former Fresno County Planning Director Hal Tokmakian makes clear in his article on page 10, the pedestrian mall did not kill downtown, and bringing cars back into this precious space will not set things right. I have to agree with Hal, except for the fact that with so many people now believing that cars will make the difference, it might actually work, but only as a self-fulfilling prophecy! The irony is that if Fresno does succeed in turning Fulton back into a street, along the most valuable real estate in the city, then thirty or forty years down the way, the city will want to turn it back into a pedestrian mall, and then there will probably be a movement to re-create the lost design of Garrett Eckbo while they hunt around to gather up all of the original sculptures. Rumor has it that people are already lining up, so to speak, to bid on the sculptural art works should there be no room for them in the new plan.

For a city that has made such progress in moving toward sustainability and wise planning, it saddens me to hear the mayor state that Fresno is a "car culture" and so we must acquiesce in accepting that residents (at least those with lots of money to spend) will not come downtown to shop unless they can drive right to the front of a store. Well, I don't accept it.

There is no shortage of good ideas for making something unique on the Mall that will draw visitors from all over to come downtown. It can become an arts and entertainment district, or a center for international culture and food. There could be a museum of Hispanic culture or of San Joaquin Valley history. It can become an agricultural technology hub, tied in with Fresno's nascent computer tech community. A college could be situated on the Mall, along with multi-use high rises. Starting on page six I describe my own vision for the Mall as the ideal location to build one of the first vertically integrated publicly accessible complete high-rise urban environments in the country, a structure that can also include everything that has been suggested above. But let us never forget that our Mall is also an urban park for so many seniors who live close by, an oasis of greenery and calm in our busy downtown.



*see also:*

The Fulton Green Project

The Rim Fire's Harsh Lesson

Art and Wilderness

on page 6

on page 12

on page 14



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet



### Bear in mind the consequences.

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## Merced Group Conservation & Executive Committee Meetings

The first Wednesday of each month at 7:00 PM — Rod Webster's home, 345 E. 20th St., Merced

Conservation meeting is first and can last 30-40 minutes.

Anyone with an interest in local, state, or national conservation issues is welcome to attend.

## Merced Group Monthly Meetings/Programs

**WE'RE BACK! MONTHLY GENERAL MEETINGS ALREADY RESUMED SEPTEMBER 19<sup>TH</sup> ... AND  
CONTINUE OCTOBER 17<sup>TH</sup> AND NOVEMBER 21<sup>ST</sup>.**

Meetings are on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month. The public as well as members are cordially invited.

Same time and place as last year: 7:00 PM in the Fireside Room at Merced United Methodist Church.

It is located at 899 Yosemite Parkway (also known as Hwy 140 to Yosemite).

Park in the lot off of Cypress Ave. and use the entrance there.

### WHAT'S ON TAP?

We try to schedule a variety of events during the course of the year.

**ISSUES:** Some programs are topical and informational, meant to inform and stimulate discussion. Some are local and regional concerns close to home. Others have a wider scope encompassing the state, nation, or the entire planet. Penciled in for this year are:

- \* fracking — a method of gas extraction using chemicals, water, and sand injected into the earth;
- \* the Delta Tunnel — a proposed plan to reroute water around the Sacramento Delta;
- \* current research coming out of the UC Merced field station in the Sierras (Sierra Nevada Research Institute);
- \* trash and recycling issues and how they are being dealt with locally.

**INSPIRATION:** Other programs have a focus that has more of an entertainment and inspirational value. Speakers share their favorite destinations and adventures in the great outdoors. These could be local day trips, a weekend outing, or an excursion to the other side of the planet. In the plan:

- \* "Winter Mountaineering in the Sierras" (already shown in September by local member Larry Harris);
- \* a featured speaker for our December banquet (some great options are in the works);
- \* "The Central Valley — a Birder's Paradise";
- \* "Vietnam."

### HOW CAN YOU KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING AND WHEN?

Though we have mapped out the entire year ahead, details cannot always be worked out months in advance. Changes occur.

So since you no longer get a monthly *Topics* you can stay informed by:

1. Adding your email address to Rod's list if you are not among the 75 or so already on it. He sends out notifications, reminders, and occasional pertinent information. Be assured that this will be used discreetly. Usually info about the speaker and the presentation is sent out a couple of weeks ahead, as well as a brief reminder the week of the event. If this works for you send your email address to [rwebster@elite.net](mailto:rwebster@elite.net);
2. Keeping an eye out for short items in the local newspapers around mid-month;
3. Phoning Rod at (209) 723-4747.

# *Tehipite Chapter Meetings*

## **Tehipite Chapter Conservation & Executive Committee Meetings**

**Second Wednesday of each month ~ Open to the Public**

October 9, November 13, December 11, January 8, February 12, March 12, April 9, May 14, June 11

The Conservation Committee meets at 7 PM. The Executive Committee meets at 8 PM.

**University of California Center, 550 E. Shaw Avenue, Fresno (between First and Fresno Streets)**

## **Tehipite Chapter General Meetings**

**Monthly meetings are on the third Wednesday of each month from 7 to 9 PM  
except in July, August, and November**

***MEETINGS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC***

**University of California Center, 550 E. Shaw Avenue, Fresno (between First and Fresno Street)**

### **Wednesday, October 16, 7:00 PM**

**Dr. Bob Merrill, Emeritus Professor of Geology at CSU Fresno, speaks on  
Antarctica and the Southern Ocean: Geology, Plate Tectonics, Climate Change, and Wildlife**

Dr. Bob Merrill spent December 2012 in and around Antarctica with nearly a hundred other geologists and Antarctic experts from around the world. His talk will examine the plate tectonic history of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, including the formation of the Scotia Sea and the creation of the island of South Georgia. We will also look at the influence of Antarctica on climate around the world and how anthropogenic climate change is impacting the continent's ice and therefore global sea level. We will briefly examine the animals and plants of the region, and look at the history of whaling in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. "I promise to keep the temperature tolerable, and avoid storms," he assures us. Come hear about the field trip of a lifetime.



### **Wednesday, December 18, 7:00 PM**

**Magical Tibet: Across the Roof of the World  
A Digital Slide Show By Helen Gigliotti**



Join Helen as we explore mystical Tibet, The Roof of the World. In the capital city, Lhasa, we visit the magnificent Potala Palace, former headquarters of the Dalai Lama. We mingle with pilgrims in the Jokhang, Tibet's most sacred temple, and encircle the ancient Barkhor Bazaar. Crossing the soaring Tibetan Plateau, we visit remote hamlets and striking fortress-monasteries, where flickering yak-butter lamps illuminate ancient Buddhist frescoes. At the foot of Mt. Everest, we ascend to its 17,000 ft. base camp. Then across the spine of the Himalayas for a spectacular descent from the high Tibetan Plateau to the lush kingdom of Nepal and its capital city, Kathmandu. Don't miss this journey!

# Merced Group News — Upcoming Events

**October 17<sup>th</sup>** — Tentatively on tap for October is a visit from the Audubon Club. Since we are on the migratory flyway with many numbers and species of birds wintering over at our local Wildlife Refuges, there is lots to learn about 'local' birds.

In November the focus will be on “Fracking” — a practice whereby chemicals are mixed with water and sand and injected into underground wells under high pressure. This slurry carves out channels in the rocky layers, mixes with the oil there, and is then returned to the surface for extraction. Though the process has been going on for decades it is now rising to the public consciousness because it is becoming far more extensive and little is known about its potential risks and impacts.

For example, companies are not required to reveal where they are fracking (it could be right under your house) nor what chemicals are being used (many of them suspected of being quite toxic). The industry claims that groundwater is not effected, but since the injection mix is not revealed, the impacts on water supplies are hard to know. Another concern is the inadvertent escape of methane gas during the process, a potent form of air pollution. There are many questions and concerns that need to be addressed. Some folks have called for an outright ban on fracking, while others have requested a moratorium until more details are revealed and studies are completed.

We hope to help our community understand the issues and be in a position to evaluate the discussion as it evolves. Our Valley sits on the Monterey Shale formation, the prime area where fracking in California is being developed. Some of the concerns include:

- Can we support this water hungry industry?
- Will our groundwater be safe from chemical contamination?
- What kinds of industry oversight will there be — in Merced County, in California, nationwide?

Two events this month will help bring more information around this topic to light:

**November 7<sup>th</sup>** — The Merced Sierra Club will co-sponsor an event with EMRCD (East Merced Resource Conservation District). The film “Gasland – Part 2” will be shown in the Sam Pipes room, on the ground floor of Merced City Hall. Doors will open at 6:30, the movie will start at 7:00 PM.

*In this explosive follow-up to his Oscar-nominated film **GASLAND**, filmmaker Josh Fox uses his trademark dark humor to take a deeper, broader look at the dangers of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, the controversial method of extracting natural gas and oil, now occurring on a global level (in 32 countries worldwide).*

***GASLAND – PART II**, which premiered at the 2013 Tribeca Film Festival, shows how the stakes have been raised on all sides in one of the most important environmental issues facing our nation today. The film argues that the gas industry’s portrayal of natural gas as a clean and safe alternative to oil is a myth and that fracked wells inevitably leak over time, contaminating water and air, hurting families, and endangering the earth’s climate with the potent greenhouse gas methane. In addition the film looks at how the powerful oil and gas industries are, in Fox’s words, “contaminating our democracy”.*



**November 21<sup>st</sup>** — Our November program will be a follow-up session to the film “Gasland – Part 2”, being shown on November 7th. We will have a panel of experts to present up-to-date, detailed information on “Fracking”. They will share some of what is known and underscore what is not known about its dangers and impacts. The second part of the evening will be a discussion of what can be done in our local community to address the issue.

**December** — Early in December we will have our annual awards banquet and featured speaker. Everyone seems happy (and well fed!) with the pot luck dinner format, so we’ll stick with that. We will have it on the first or second Saturday. Location and special speaker are TBA. See options 1, 2, and 3 on page 3 of this issue for how to be updated on the specifics as they get nailed down.



# The Fulton Green Project: Introducing a Broader Vision for the Future of Fresno

by Robert Turner

The future of Fresno's historic Fulton Mall hangs in the balance. Whether it remains as a car-free corridor, a welcoming place to pedestrians, strollers, and bicycles, or is returned to its former habit as drivable street with curbs and parking meters, will soon be

decided by the City Council. It is hoped that they will choose to take guidance from the will of the citizens of this city, most of whom, I have come to believe, value urban parks and pedestrian ways, and treasure the artwork that adorns and is the Fulton Mall.

The voices arrayed against the Mall and in favor of cars are well-organized and currently hold the reins of power. On the other hand, they share a lack of vision of what downtown Fresno is capable of becoming. By opening up our imaginations to embrace bold new ideas, we can see the enormous potential held by the most valuable locations in the center of the city, especially those alongside the Mall. Connect with this vision and you too will have a confident optimism in the future of Fresno to become an economic and technological powerhouse of the state.

First of all, let us get straight that returning cars to Fulton is not the economic driver needed to revitalize the Mall and downtown. What Fulton Mall needs to be successful is a destination that takes advantage of its unique pedestrian character — a destination that will synergistically provide the impetus that lets the pedestrian corridor finally live up to its full potential. My proposal is to keep the Mall free of cars, while building alongside it a fabulous multi-level, multiuse megastructure that will be that needed destination. What I call the "Fulton Green" Project will bring people to the Mall not just from throughout the city, but from across the state, while also putting Fresno on the national map as a leader in modern urban planning. I will return to that idea later in this essay, but first we must examine the argument that our Fulton Mall is a failure that has driven our downtown, like other downtowns with pedestrian malls across the country, to decay.

Critics are correct in stating that many, if not most, of the pedestrian malls in the United States have failed to create the lively and economically viable environments that were promised when they were first built. Because of this, our mayor and many downtown business leaders believe cars will restore the economic prospects of the former main street of our city. However, if cars are the solution, then why are the streets on either side of the Mall, where cars now are allowed to drive and park, not more vital than the Mall is today? Some of these streets, like Broadway to the northwest and Fulton Street southeast of Chukchansi Park, are virtually dead, with boarded-up abandoned buildings, despite the presence of drivers and parking on these blocks.

That cars can cure the depression of downtown is a false hope. People flock to Fashion Fair and River Park, not because they can drive down the center of the malls to check out the shops. No, they bring their cars in close to the edge and park for free, then walk in and enjoy the walkable centers, ambling by storefronts that open only to the inside of the complex. Rather than wiping out the valuable architectural resource that is the Fulton Mall, a better step in the right direction would be to turn all of downtown's multistory parking garages into free parking lots in order to balance out the competition between the downtown and the suburban shopping malls. Remove all of the parking meters on the city's streets and restrict parking by time instead — one hour, two hours, or four hours. Right now, people can leave their car in a spot all day if they return to put more coins in the meter, not particularly helpful to the businesses close by.

But focusing on parking and access by cars is missing the point altogether. The push to turn the Mall into a street is retrogressive and counter to the trends evident in many successful cities across the country, but especially in Europe, where residents have long valued their walkable centers. As Fresno moves toward encouraging infill development, and the transformation of corridors along bus rapid transit routes into high-density walkable communities, it just seems counterproductive to spend millions on a project that is meant to encourage more people to drive into the center of the city.

One can cite numerous examples in this country of successful malls that are an asset to their city. Several are associated with nearby college campuses, such as Ithaca Commons near Cornell University, Ped Mall in downtown Iowa City, State Street in Madison, Wisconsin, Church Street Marketplace in Burlington, Vermont, and Pearl Street in Boulder, Colorado. Charlottesville, Virginia's Main Street Mall is anchored at one end by the Pavilion, an outdoor amphitheater that holds 3,500 people for concerts and city events. That mall has an active nightlife that draws thousands of college students in the evening.

As described by landscape architect Andy Meessmann, "The space may become a giant open air bar, with food vendors and live music that filters out of venues. After a night of indulgence and entertainment, the streets are swept and the space is once again bustling with daytime normalcy." He goes on to say, "For countless towns, the pedestrian mall has been converted back to automobile use and labeled a planning and design blunder. However, their success in the American college town is unmatched. In virtually every college town, somewhere at the edge of campus and downtown, there is a transition away from the school environment that often goes unnoticed. The best college towns can create, capture, and enhance this experience in the form of a pedestrian mall." Other successful pedestrian malls in the U.S. include Miami Beach's Lincoln



**EVEN NEW YORK CITY'S TIMES SQUARE  
HAS BECOME A CAR-FREE ZONE**

pedestrian mall can never be a successful destination if the area is blighted to begin with.

The Fulton Mall never fully succeeded because the downtown was already dying when it was built. The construction of McDonald's on Blackstone near Shields and of Manchester Center signaled the shift of commerce away from downtown toward the new neighborhoods in the north of the city. Today Fresno's Fulton Mall has Chukchansi Park nearby, but that space is alive only during the occasional games and rare concerts. The area currently lacks a popular destination that is active at all hours on every day. Adding cars to the Fulton Mall will just make it another typical street in a still blighted downtown. Adding a unique and magnetic development will make the Mall something truly exceptional.

When I first walked the Fulton Mall a little over a year-and-a-half ago, I was immediately struck by the beauty of the historic buildings still left standing along the way, skyscrapers erected between 1914 and 1925, a time when beaux arts reigned supreme in American architecture and buildings were elaborately decorated on their front-facing walls with ornate glazed architectural terra cotta. Peering through the windows, it was apparent that a couple of these beautiful old buildings had reached a sad, nearly condemnable condition; yet, still, I had hope, as I studied them that early spring day, that the city will be able to keep them intact until economic conditions improve enough to allow for their restoration and re-occupation. (I was pleased when I read a month later that the historic 1914 Helm Building was purchased by Sevak & Serko Khatchadourian, developers from Beverly Hills who also own the Pacific Southwest Building across the Mall. But I also was saddened that, like Mayor Swearingin, they too support the restoration of vehicular traffic to the Fulton corridor.)

Looking at the sides of each building where the structure faces away from the main streetscape, one sees only a plain painted brick wall with windows, as if the builders expected someday another equally tall structure would be erected directly alongside their building, a new structure with its own decorated façade to form a flush continuity of style along the north-facing street wall. This never happened (or buildings were built and later torn down). These historic skyscrapers, too beautiful to demolish today, expressed to me not just a nostalgic look at a bygone time of different, in some ways more extravagant, aesthetic standards, but also the melancholy of lost promise and an uncompleted optimism and grandeur.

Then the thought naturally came, why not complete that promise and fulfill that vision of a tall wall of connected buildings along Fulton Street, but not as a completed line of ersatz beaux arts façades (which we can never afford today, in any case), but with an equally tall modernistic structure to fill in the gaps. Attach the structure to each brick side wall of the three historic buildings, then build up to that height and you have a single two-block-long architectural front on the southwest side of the most important stretch of the old main street, Fulton between Fresno and Tulare. That structure will be centered on Mariposa Street, bisected by the central axis that runs through the Courthouse and City Hall. This two-block-long megacomplex, connecting the old Bank of Italy Building on the Tulare Street corner to the Mattei Building (Guarantee Savings) on Fresno Street, and wrapping itself around the Helm Building in the middle, will not be just another skyscraping office building, hotel, or condominium complex. It will not be so simple as to serve only a single use. Nor will it

– CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 –

Road Mall, Boston's Faneuil Hall Marketplace, Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade, San Diego's Horton Plaza, the Fremont Street Experience in Las Vegas, the River Walk in San Antonio, and Oklahoma City's East California Avenue, alongside the Bricktown Canal. Then there are the hybrid transit malls like Denver's 16<sup>th</sup> Street, Minneapolis' Nicollet Mall, and Memphis' Main Street transit corridors. In our own neighbor city Clovis, farmers markets, antique fairs, and sporting events like bike races and the annual pole vaulting competition turn Old Town's Pollasky Street and several of the side streets into a highly successful pedestrian-only venue on a frequent basis throughout the year.

The key to the success of every outdoor pedestrian mall is that they have destination points that draw people to the area throughout the day and into the night. For the college town it is the campus nearby. For others it is an arena or theater complex, an ice skating rink, a riverfront, or a promenade along a canal. Nearby shops and restaurants open in the daytime, while night clubs and bistros draw people in at night. By itself a



**THIS REVOLUTIONARY EXAMPLE OF IMAGINATIVE VERTICAL HIGH-DENSITY HOUSING, BUILT FOR THE 1967 INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION, IS AN ARCHITECTURAL LANDMARK IN MONTREAL. HABITAT 67 WAS DESIGNED BY ISRAELI-CANADIAN ARCHITECT MOSHE SAFDIE AS HIS MASTER'S THESIS, EMPHASIZING DENSITY, GREENERY, AND INDIVIDUAL PRIVACY.**

be dense inside and limited in its access to just those who live, work, or have business there. No, what shall be built in this space is something worthy of the enormous potential of the location, an open multi-use public space serving as a platform for shops, apartments, offices, restaurants, and entertainment establishments, all arranged in a airy three-dimensional shopping, work, and living complex, like a shopping center with businesses and apartments in the mix, upended into the third dimension to produce what I like to call a “vertical streetscape,” and crowned with a public city park on top, a veritable island in the sky where anyone can go to admire the view and children can fly kites in the windy aerie.

A structure like this calls to mind Paolo Soleri’s arcologies or Richard Register’s ecological urban neighborhoods — automobile-free, three-dimensional urban fabrics that increase the density of land use while at the same time expanding the architectural space to make the downtown urban scene more spacious and airy due to the elimination of streets, curbs, parking, and everything else associated with cars. A large amount of city may be contained on a very small acreage, but by utilizing the vertical space wisely, there is a sense of openness and space rather than the heaviness and density of a typical office building. And — very important for the success of such a complex — like with any shopping center mall, ordinary citizens are free to come and go without the security checkpoints ubiquitous in most of today’s skyscrapers.

A vertical car-free streetscape, which I envision for this two-block stretch of Fulton between Fresno and Tulare will become the heart of downtown Fresno, occupying the central crossing place of the city’s two main axes. Such an interconnected and integrated complex will be a destination worthy of the extraordinary potential of this prime location, which is the most economically promising real estate in the city, being just a block away from the future high-speed rail station, also situated on the Mariposa Street axis. Not only will this megastructure provide a working, shopping, and living environment for people who want to live a car-free lifestyle in the heart of downtown, but it will also draw users from across the city to its shops, restaurants, and night clubs. They will come at all hours of the day and night, so long as there is an adequate mix of purposes for the commercial space.

Because people live in the structure, there will be all of the services necessary for neighborhood life, such as a grocery store, bank or credit union, laundry, barber, health club, perhaps a branch of the county library, and other such prosaic establishments. But with people coming from the entire metropolitan area, and even beyond, this is also be the best place

to locate a unique shop or business that relies on customers and clients drawn from an area wider than just a neighborhood or city district. This vertical streetscape will have a diversity of commerce unequalled by any other shopping center in the city, or even the whole Valley.

Beyond that, visitors will come not just for the stores, services, and entertainment, but to experience the space itself. The sky park alone, with its unparalleled views, is a unique draw. But the structure can also be designed to bring in visitors who want to see revolutionary architecture, with large interior plazas along the lines of the interior space of the Hyatt Regency in San Francisco, and promenades at multiple levels, festooned with hanging indoor plants. As urban design Fulton Green will have no equal in this country, setting a new standard for big cities to emulate. Such a structure will put Fresno’s downtown on the national map.

It will also put the *there* there in downtown Fresno. Now people will have a reason to go to the Mall. The pedestrian axes of Fulton and Mariposa will be full of



**ONCE A STREET, NOW A MALL — THE TREND IN URBAN PLANNING IS TOWARD MORE OF THESE, NOT LESS.**



**THERE IS NOTHING PARTICULARLY FANCY ABOUT THIS JAPANESE VERTICAL MALL, BUT NOTICE ALL THE BICYCLES PARKED ON THE GROUND FLOOR. OTHER COUNTRIES ARE NOT SO RELIANT ON CARS.**



life, people, and activity throughout the day. The car-free environment of the Mall will complement and enhance the same car-free character of the Fulton Green megastructure. People will reside in this space, as well as on nearby streets like Broadway, where new complexes similar to downtown's recently built Granville townhouses, will allow residents to enjoy life without having to own a car. For those who require more than trains to transport them around the state, one of the parking lots beside the megastructure can be set up to house a car rental business providing for residents who otherwise have no need to own a car, and for visitors to Fresno who arrive by high-speed rail.

Keeping with Soleri and Register's tradition of ecological architecture, the megastructure will utilize the latest in green building and maintenance technology, something made easier when designing a large complex in an integrated manner. This is why I call the project "Fulton Green."

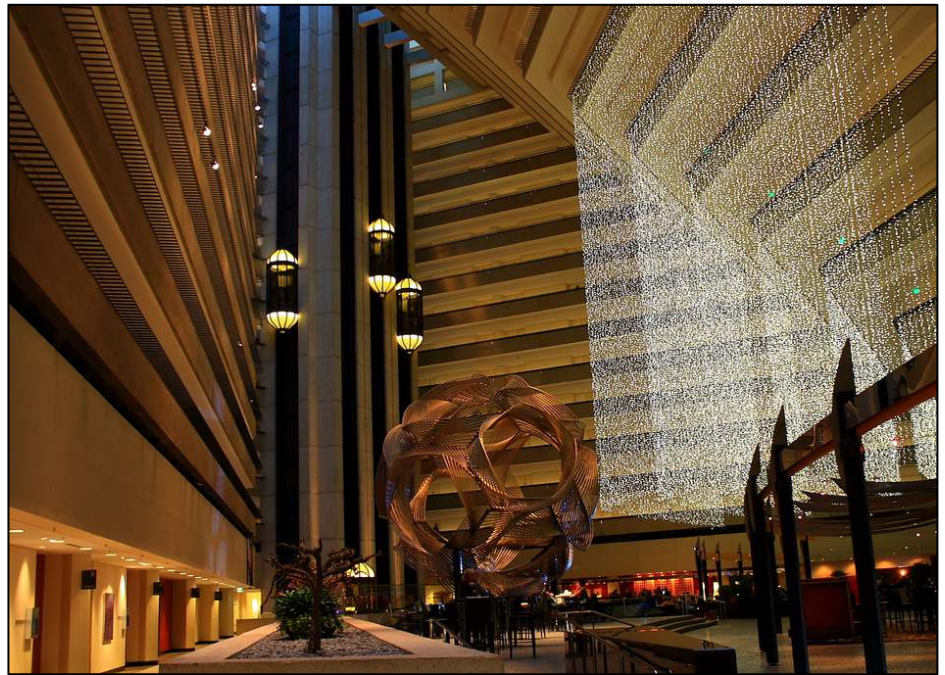
It is my hope that people will be inspired and thrilled by this vision for Fresno to want to contribute by elaborating on the ideas here presented. Let's build some momentum for an ecological megastructure joining, preserving, and enhancing the three beautiful buildings on the south side of Fulton Mall, while saving the historic Mall itself from the blight of cars. Time is short. The ultimate fate of our Fulton Mall may well be determined by City Hall before March of 2014.

As I am neither an architect nor an urban planner by profession, nor much of an artist either, my part in this effort at crowdsourcing will be to facilitate an architectural competition to create a more fleshed-out face for the Fulton Green Project. In this city and up and down the state are new students and skilled professionals in the fields of green architecture, environmentally friendly landscaping, and sustainable urban design, as well as many talented and capable artists, who can

work out aspects of this idea in greater detail and render realistic imagery that will move so many more people than can be done with just the written word. Sometime in early 2015 I will begin to gather the resources and sponsors to hold such a competition.

A year-and-a-half ago I arrived in Fresno for the first time. Being without a car of my own, I quickly found the Fulton Mall. That first walk down the Mall inspired this vision. I saw the seeds of grandeur and the enormous potential of this place. And the more I learned about what makes Fresno special — one of the largest cities in California, agricultural center, gateway for tourists, future hub on the high-speed rail system, growing tech community, and a dedicated population that loves and believes in its city — the more this vision seemed not just reasonable, but inevitable. Fresno will indeed have a lively and vital downtown, filled with residents who live and work and play within walking distances. These downtown residents will treasure their pedestrian mall park. Certainly Fulton Green would work if it opened up onto a street, but such a complex begs to have a pedestrian plaza as its main entrance. The synergy that will develop from the combination of the Green and a restored and still car-free urban mall can be enough by itself to launch a new era of growth in Fresno's downtown. Whoever builds such a complex will both kick-start and be in a position to capitalize on the inevitable downtown renaissance that is the destiny of our city.

It is because of the extraordinary potential of this two-block stretch between Fresno and Tulare that I want to keep the layout of the Fulton Mall as it is today, to preserve this option for the future, when a developer will come along who has the vision and guts to do something amazing and help make Fresno the great city it can be.



**IN DESIGNING LARGE INTERIOR PUBLIC PLAZAS THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS. THIS IS THE FAMOUS HYATT REGENCY HOTEL IN SAN FRANCISCO, OPENED IN 1973.**



**ANY LARGE INTERIOR PUBLIC SPACE WILL BE ADORNED WITH ART, ENHANCING THE TRANSITION FROM INSIDE TO THE ART OUTSIDE ON THE MALL.**

# Fulton Mall as a Scapegoat for Past City Planning Policy Failures Let's Set the Record Straight

by Harold Tokmakian, AICP

After WW II most cities in the United States felt an urgent need for increased housing in response to population growth and to make up for the halt in construction during the war years. The thrust of Fresno's expansion was to the northwest where large parcels were available and awaited the subdivider's plow. Manchester Center was attracting retail businesses and other services northward to the Shields and Blackstone area, while Fresno State College (later to be CSU Fresno) was establishing a new campus at Shaw and Cedar Avenues. As other retail businesses such as I. Magnin were moving to the north end of downtown, remaining long-established Fulton Street retailers (known as the 100 Percenters) exerted pressure on the City Council to do something about the situation. In 1958 Victor Gruen was invited to Fresno to study the problem and recommend solutions.

Gruen devised a plan for central Fresno based on a city planning policy of centralization. The plan consisted of three major components intended to bring about revitalization of the Central Area of Fresno: Fulton Mall as the center of a superblock for retail shops, professional offices, and entertainment; a loop of freeways around the central area that would also include a Civic Center and Convention Center; and high-density housing within the freeway loop created by a private and government partnership. The objective was to create a Central Area that would be the heart of the four-county region as well as of our city. Only after a long delay was the freeway loop completed. The housing component was never achieved.

Gruen engaged Garrett Eckbo, a world-renowned landscape architect, to design the pedestrian mall. Fulton Mall gained worldwide recognition as a unique masterwork merging art with landscape architecture. It gave Fresno an identity and a "sense of place."

After Fulton Mall was opened in 1964, I participated in a meeting of the top business and government leaders in the mezzanine conference room of the Fresno Hilton Hotel. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss downtown and the Mall with Gruen's chief of staff, Edgardo Contini. One of the questions put to Contini was when we would know that the Mall and other downtown changes had been a success. "Twenty-five years will be necessary before we have the answer," was his reply. We all continued to drink our coffee and think. At that time the Fresno General Plan, adopted in 1964, was based upon the policies of the Gruen Plan. The plan emphasized centralization and focused on downtown revitalization.

During the following decade the City Council undermined the policy of centralization by approving projects that promoted decentralization. I will cite two major examples. 1. The construction of Fashion Fair was authorized with the condition that the developer would build a major retail store downtown on Mariposa. After Fashion Fair was completed, the Council allowed the developer to renege on his promise. 2. An effort by the Redevelopment Agency, directed by Alan Kingston, to centralize regional medical facilities in the vicinity of Community Hospital had failed. St. Agnes Hospital, after refusing to participate in the medical center, launched its program to rebuild at Herndon Avenue and Millbrook. At first rejected by the City Council, the project became successful through the lobbying efforts of the institution's attorney and nearby land speculators. The City Council manipulated its zoning regulations to allow higher buildings in the area. This action was to change the direction of the political and physical environment of Northwest Fresno forever.

This ad hoc policy of decentralization was ratified in the 1974 Fresno General Plan. In the 1984 and 1994 updates of the General Plan, city officials continued to pursue a developer-and-land-speculator-driven policy of decentralization that produced Fresno's present urban sprawl. This policy led to the virtual abandonment of downtown as a major retail center.

Continuing suburban decentralization has led to construction of the River Park and Villagio shopping centers at the north end of the Blackstone corridor. More recently this same pattern is continuing in another direction, to the southeast, with the River-Park-scale Fancher Creek project.

Even as the City's proposed 2035 General Plan makes some effort to curtail decentralization, it is accompanied by a specious narrative focusing on the Fulton Mall as the prime cause of downtown decline rather than placing the blame where it belongs, on a succession of bad planning decisions and official neglect. Those failures cannot be undone by destroying the mall in the wrong-headed belief that downtown Fresno might become a four-county regional retail center. Long ago that ship sailed, and sank.

**Fulton Mall is the scapegoat for decades of failures by Fresno government.**

HAROLD TOKMAKIAN, PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING AT CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO, IS A FORMER FRESNO COUNTY PLANNING DIRECTOR, FRESNO CITY PLANNING COMMISSIONER, AND FRESNO COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSIONER.

# Public Sentiment Largely Rejects Traffic on the Fulton Mall

by Ray McKnight

Three years ago the Fulton Corridor Specific Plan process (FCSP) was set in motion. Its announced goal was to revitalize downtown Fresno, and deciding what to do about the Fulton mall was stated as key to reaching that goal. The Pasadena firm Moule and Polyzoïdes was chosen to conduct the FCSP process. At the beginning of the process Stefanos Polyzoïdes, one of the principal partners of the firm, invited Harold Tokmakian, Linda Zachritz, and me to meet with him. Evidently we were invited because we wrote the Downtown Fresno Coalition's application to list the Fulton Mall in the National Register of Historic Places.

It became very obvious from our conversation with him and with a rather confrontational member of his staff who joined the conversation for a while that the FCSP process was aimed inexorably at putting traffic on the Mall. A citizens committee was appointed to propose a draft Fresno corridor Specific Plan to be presented to the City Council and to choose three options for what to do about Fulton Mall. The committee concluded its work in November 2011. Two of its chosen options are variations on restoring traffic to the Mall. The third option is to restore and maintain the Fulton Mall in accordance with its original design. The City Council will presumably make a decision after the Environmental Impact Report, now being prepared, is completed.

In the meantime, a concerted propaganda campaign from City Hall is attempting to give the impression that the public has spoken, and that turning the Fulton Mall into Fulton Street is what the people want. A look at the facts suggests a different conclusion. Whenever there has been a truly open forum for expressions of public opinion on the matter, support for preserving the Fulton Mall as a pedestrian-only space has been strong.

The first clear manifestation of this public support came in reaction to the plan submitted by ELS Architecture and Urban Design to the City Council in 2002 to return two-way vehicular traffic to the Mall. At a meeting of Fresno's City Council sitting as the Redevelopment Agency board on May 21, 2002, the Council chamber was filled with citizens who overwhelmingly showed opposition to the plan. My notes from that meeting indicate that there were eight citizens speaking in favor of traffic on the Mall and thirty-five speaking in opposition to traffic on the Mall. A letter supporting traffic on the Mall was presented, signed by eleven Mall merchants. This was countered by a petition signed by ninety-nine merchants opposing traffic on the Mall. Before that meeting a statement of opposition to putting traffic on the Mall, signed by

several dozen citizens, was printed in *The Fresno Bee*. The Council voted to accept the plan as a report but chose not to act on it otherwise. In other words, the plan was shelved.

In March 2006 the City Council voted to have city staff conduct a Fulton Mall Study in response to a request by a Council Member who was one of the most vocal proponents for vehicular traffic on the Mall. A Fulton Mall Working Group was appointed and a series of meetings was scheduled to allow public expressions of what should be done about the Mall. The public was also invited to submit written suggestions by email and regular mail. At least one member of the Downtown Fresno Coalition was present to observe what transpired at each of the public meetings. At every one of these meetings nearly every comment that had anything to do with the issue of returning vehicular traffic to the Mall was against doing so. The team of facilitators who conducted the public meetings submitted in their report a list of seven "general themes that emerged during the community meetings." Number one on the list was "No traffic on the Mall." I personally examined all written comments submitted by the public for the Fulton Mall Study by email and regular mail. Approximately eighty per cent of the comments that in any way dealt with the issue opposed putting traffic on the Mall. The Fulton Mall Study, not able to counter public support for preserving the Mall, was quietly shelved.

More evidence of the considerable support for keeping traffic off the Mall continues to emerge, as found in the creation of the "Save the Fulton Mall!!!" Facebook page. The page now has in excess of a thousand followers, and the page administrators report that with few exceptions these followers support preserving the Mall.

At one of the early public meetings during the FCSP process, Charles Birnbaum, Founder and President of the Cultural Landscape Foundation, headquartered in Washington, D.C., spoke about the Mall as an historical resource and described aspects of its design by the renowned twentieth-century landscape architect, Garrett Eckbo. An enthusiastic round of applause greeted Mr. Birnbaum's statement that the Fulton Mall deserved listing as a National Historic Landmark, a designation more exclusive than listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

New attempts will soon be made to destroy our historic Mall. There is no doubt that there is widespread support for preserving the Mall, but we need to continue to have it heard.

# The Rim Fire's Harsh Lesson

By Chip Ashley

As you probably already know, the Rim Fire started on August 17 in the Stanislaus National Forest, west of Yosemite National Park. To date (September 26) it has a footprint of 257,134 acres (402 square miles), not all of which was burned. It is still burning, but is 84% contained. The current burn is mostly “good” fire, doing what fires are expected to do in southwestern dry mixed conifer forests, clearing the dead fuels and thinning small trees and shrubs, and returning nutrients to the soil.

According to recent news reports, Rim is the third largest wildfire in California history. Severity of burn to vegetation is about 38% high severity, 27% moderate, 24% low, and 11% unchanged.

“Severity” refers to the results of the fire, how much of the vegetation (plants, shrubs, trees) is killed and how much organic matter is consumed. “Fire severity” is often confused with “fire intensity,” which is concerned with the amount of energy being released as the fire burns. “Fire intensity” is generally a function of fuel load, ambient temperature, and relative humidity. Simply put, if you have a heavy fuel load of 40-50 tons per acre (as had many areas burned by the Rim Fire, not having seen fire in over 100 years) as well as hot dry weather and dry vegetation, look out! Supply flame and you’re going to get a high intensity fire that will leave large areas of high severity vegetation burn.

In addition to vegetation burn severity, researchers also measure soil burn severity. The BAER (Burned Area Emergency Response) team that evaluated Rim as it died down also reported on soil burn. Rim has 7% high severity soil burn, 37% moderate severity, and 56% low severity or unburned. Some early news and blog reports unfortunately confused soil burn and vegetation burn. Indeed, if the soil burn numbers were actually veg burn numbers, most fire experts would call Rim an ecologically beneficial fire in this forest type. Some seized on this confusion to argue that In spite of heavy fuel loading, Rim was not a “catastrophic” or “uncharacteristic” fire. Not!

Soil burn and veg burn are different; and in fact, both sets of numbers are way out of the norm. So while “catastrophic,” with its emotional connotations, may not be a useful term for fire in a scientific context to describe Rim, “uncharacteristic” is more appropriate since this fire is outside the natural range of variation for levels of severity in pine dominated mixed conifer dry forests. “Natural range of variation” just means that for this ecosystem, a fire that behaves like Rim would fall way out on the thin tail of the bell curve describing proportions of fire severity in this ecosystem.

As for the high severity soil burn of Rim, 7% of the surface (28 square miles) does not absorb water. Water just beads up. If mitigation does not come before heavy rains (which can come at any time now), runoff will carry much of this vulnerable soil away to cause serious erosion and silt up streams and reservoirs. As for high severity veg burn, most of the researchers I work with on the Dinkey Collaborative say that a healthy forest of the type affected by Rim — a type that sees fire every 3-10 years or so — should see 5%-15% high severity vegetation burn, maybe 20%-30% moderate severity, and 55%-75% low severity or unburned.

High severity veg burn means the canopy



THE RIM FIRE BURNS IN TUOLUMNE RIVER CANYON BELOW YOSEMITE. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY NATIONAL FOREST SERVICE, STANISLAUS NF



**WISE FOREST MANAGEMENT, WHICH INCLUDES ALLOWING FIRE TO PLAY ITS NATURAL ROLE IN MAINTAINING A BALANCED ECOSYSTEM, WILL SAVE THE PUBLIC MILLIONS OF DOLLARS NOW SPENT ON FIGHTING CATASTROPHIC FIRES, AND IN THE END WILL PUT FEWER FIREFIGHTERS IN HARM'S WAY.**

trees are killed and needles consumed, surface litter of all sizes and soil organic layer are largely consumed, and white ash and charred organic matter go down into the soil several centimeters. Simply put, most of the trees and all of the shrubs and grass are killed, and most of the organic matter is oxidized. Rim killed just about all the vegetation on over 150 square miles of the Stanislaus National Forest.

Moderate veg severity means half or more of the canopy survives, most of the small stuff is killed, and the top of the duff is burned. Low severity causes leaf loss to plants from radiated heat, light canopy trees retain green needles but have stems scorched; surface litter, mosses, and herbs are charred or consumed; soil organic layer is largely intact with charring limited to a few millimeters deep.

The forest affected by Rim is part of a fire-adapted ecosystem. Indeed, fire is the main driver of this ecosystem. The problem is that, because of fire suppression, this ecosystem — which needs fire on every square foot as often as every 3-10 years — has not seen fire on much of its landscape in over 100 years. Within a natural fire regime, this forest would seldom build up fuel loads of more than 4-5 tons per acre, and frequently returning fire would remain mostly in the low-to-moderate severity range. But much of the mixed conifer forest in the Sierra now has fuel loads of 40-50 tons per acre, which is the substrate for high intensity fire with high severity results.

Some high severity fire is beneficial. A forest needs fire to take out some old growth now and then here and there, in areas which may have missed a few fire cycles and have heavier fuel loads, to open up patches a few acres to several tens of acres for shrubs and grasses to grow and provide cover and forage for the many fauna that live in the forest. Edges or transitional zones between old-growth and shrubby, grassy patches opened up by high severity burns provide opportunities for these fauna. Mixed severity burns with a small component of high severity create more of this patchy heterogeneous structure than fires with large high severity components, which burn out whole landscapes devoid of patchiness, edge, and heterogeneity.

The question now is how to solve the problem created by many decades of fire suppression in Sierra and other forests. The U.S. Forest Service has learned some painful lessons about fire and ecosystems and is now implementing plans to restore fire to this ecosystem — no simple task. One can't simply light a match to the tinder box. Nor is it a matter of logging off the big trees "to protect the forest" (as some economic interests, thinly camouflaging greed in "forest health" language, now propose); indeed, one part of the problem is a deficit of large ponderosa and Jeffrey pine, which are fire-resistant to moderate and low intensity fire. My experience working with the Dinkey Landscape Restoration Project this past year convinces me we are on the right track with the new adaptive management policy of fuels treatments (mechanical treatments and prescribed fire) followed by monitoring and adjustment. The forest service is working with the scientific community and has made huge strides in understanding how natural fire operates in forests. But it is now a race against time hobbled by lack of funds — the result of political factions attempting to starve the Forest Service with the aim of proving that the new planning scheme can't succeed.





# 2014: WILDERNESS 50

CELEBRATING THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WILDERNESS ACT

## Art and Wilderness

Art and Wilderness have gone together since our nation's beginnings. Artists were among the first people to introduce the concept of wilderness to east coast Americans in the nineteenth century and to acquaint residents of the already densely settled urban East with the wild scenic wonders of America's West. Artists were also largely responsible for changing subsequent attitudes toward wilderness. Before the days of photography, they documented our landscapes and directed public opinion about these landscapes.

The land was largely a virgin wilderness, but early settlers viewed it as a dark, fearful place of savage beasts needing to be tamed. Pioneers, in the quest for civilization, were busy altering the landscape with farms and cabins, while artists were busy portraying it. As the land became more settled and cultivated, wilderness became more scarce, and conservation-minded individuals saw what was being lost, recognized the beauty of the land as painted by artists and printed by photographers, and spoke out about the importance of wild lands as a major part of our nation's heritage.

John James Audubon (1785-1851), in the early 1800s, foresaw the changes coming due to increased population, and hastened to paint the local wildlife and their habitat. His four-volume *The Birds of America* (1827-1839), with hand-colored, life-size engravings of almost 500 avian species, and his later encyclopedia of mammals, brought attention to the importance of protecting wildlife species. People also began to recognize the destruction by clear-cutting forests, burning prairies, and killing birds for millinery feathers.

Artists acted as surveyors and publicists to communicate the wonders, as well as the opportunities for development of the West, to an uninformed eastern audience. At the same time, they instilled viewers with a sense of reverence and the importance of preserving part of our nation's wilderness legacy.

Artists began to do more than document; they also captured the spirit of the western landscapes. Thomas Cole (1801-1848), a painter of the more romantic Hudson River School said, "Go first to nature." Many painters followed his advice. Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902) created romantic panoramas of the western land. Worthington Whittredge (1820-1910) traveled 2,000 miles across the western plains to study and sketch each day in the open under his white umbrella. Thomas Moran (1837-1926), on his padded saddle, explored Yellowstone with Hayden's geological expedition of 1871 and painted his "Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone" so convincingly that Congress was moved to set aside Yellowstone as the first national park in 1872.

Nineteenth-century artists went into the western wilderness to report about a landscape not yet known. They also reported about a landscape we risked losing, a landscape as important for the human spirit as for the human race. Despite an increasingly blighted environment, contemporary artists continue to paint it with as much sensitivity as their nineteenth century counterparts.

Early paintings reminded us of an America we are apt to forget: of seasons, unpolluted skies, clear cascading streams, and standing forests. They expressed the artist's trust that the natural landscape would continue as subject matter. They showed wilderness to be an essential part of America's heritage. Ultimately they inspired us to expand our awareness and concern for wilderness, and led us to legislate protection in perpetuity.



AS GUEST ARTIST ON THE HAYDEN GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF 1871, THOMAS MORAN SKETCHED MASTERFUL WATERCOLORS THAT COMPLEMENTED THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF WILLIAM HENRY JACKSON TO CONVEY TO A SKEPTICAL PUBLIC THE TRUTH AND BEAUTY BEHIND THE SEEMINGLY FANTASTIC TALES ABOUT STEAMING RIVERS, BOILING FOUNTAINS, BUBBLING MUD, AND PETRIFIED TREES ON THE YELLOWSTONE PLATEAU. ONE YEAR LATER YELLOWSTONE BECAME AMERICA'S FIRST NATIONAL PARK.



MOUNTAIN HOME RANGE – PHOTO BY RAY BLOXHAM – COURTESY OF THE SOUTHERN UTAH WILDERNESS ALLIANCE

## Veterans Day Car Camping Trip — Western Utah Exploration

Join the countdown to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wilderness Act with Sierra Club's Utah Wilderness Task Force and the Utah Chapter in a visit to western Utah's Mountain Home Range and San Francisco Peaks, now under consideration as new wilderness areas in a new BLM resource plan. But these two areas were not recognized by the BLM as having wilderness characteristics in the initial plan version. So we'll go there ourselves and hunt for wilderness characteristics to help them out.

Will we find some, as we experience the solitude of the desert, the darkest of night skies, and the beauty of pinyon-pine-covered desert peaks?

Please join us to assist in documenting wild values like scenic beauty, natural silence, and sweeping wide-open wild spaces with no human developments — and also, by the way, to have fun. Savor the splendid austerity and grandeur of the West Desert as you enjoy car camping with a central commissary in these remote and scenic Great Basin ranges over the Veterans Day weekend.

We can meet on Friday evening. Please contact Vicky Hoover at (415) 977-5527 or [vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org](mailto:vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org), or Jim Catlin at (801) 328-2550 or [jim@wildutahproject.org](mailto:jim@wildutahproject.org). Details and more arrangements will come after October 25.



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*Tehipite Topics* is currently published four times per year. Full-color versions of *Tehipite Topics* are available on the chapter website at [www.tehipitesierraclub.org](http://www.tehipitesierraclub.org). Articles and photographs from Sierra Club members are always welcome. Send contributions for the January–March 2014 issue by email to <[robertsturner52@gmail.com](mailto:robertsturner52@gmail.com)> before December 20.

## A call for submissions on: "My Yosemite Wilderness Experience"

January 1<sup>st</sup> begins our year-long celebration of wilderness, as we remember the momentous passage, by the 88<sup>th</sup> Congress, of Public Law 88-577, the Wilderness Act, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on September 3, 1964. It took Congress eight years of work, with over sixty drafts, to craft the bill that has resulted in the protection of nearly 110 million acres across the United States, an area bigger than the entire state of California. In language both succinct and poetic, the Act defines its subject:

*"A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."*

To open the year, *Tehipite Topics* will focus its first issue on Yosemite, with news on the current status of the Merced River Management Plan. But we also want to publish some reminiscences from our members about their own personal interaction with the Yosemite wilderness. We are soliciting essays of 100 to 200 words on your most memorable experience in the Yosemite wilderness. Please e-mail your essays to me, your *Tehipite Topics* editor, at this address, <[robertsturner52@gmail.com](mailto:robertsturner52@gmail.com)>, before December 20, so that we can include you in this special issue.

