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Butte, Glenn, Lassen, Plumas & Tehama Counties

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Yahi Fall 2015 Outings and Events

Coordinated by Alan Mendoza

www.sierraclub.org/mother-lode/yahi/outings

Protecting Our Groundwater

By Grace Marvin, Yahi Group Conservation Chair

We need to respond to what is happening to our groundwater. A project has been proposed by Glenn-Colusa Water District (GCID) to build and operate five more (powerful) production wells above our shared aquifer. The stated purpose of these powerful wells is to supplement water supplies in dry years. However, even GCID's *Draft Environmental Impact Report* (DEIR) recognizes how the project could lead to the potential depletion of water resources, meaning that wells throughout the area may become increasingly incapable of supporting existing land uses -- such as farming. The GCID declares that their proposal is to monitor such impacts, but Butte County officials believe that such monitoring will not offset the negative effects on Butte County residents as wells get ever drier.

Moreover, land subsidence (or the sinking of land when areas below become too dry) could affect not only many residents' wells; subsidence can also create landscape changes, such as erosion of levees. Again, the Supervisors doubt that monitoring for such changes will help.

Finally, the Butte County Board Supervisors is concerned that future attempts by GCID to transfer the newly mined water to areas outside of our region would only add to the harms described above.

As your Yahi Group Conservation Chair, I shared these and other concerns with the Mother Lode Chapter at our quarterly meeting in Sacramento on August 2. They voted unanimously to allow me to address our local concerns publicly *and* as a Sierra Club representative. It is important that I represent the Club's policies, correctly. Thus, I will add that the Club supports *conjunctive use, i.e., permitting groundwater to be pumped during dry years and allowing the groundwater to recharge during wet years*. But we do not see conjunctive use as appropriate here, since no one has the requisite scientific data and analyses that would allow for true conjunctive management of our water resources.

Moreover, we all know that wet years look increasingly rare. May we all protect water within our regions (a la Governor Brown's new groundwater legislation), use it wisely, and not allow financial interests to undermine our farmlands and other public interests.

Yahi Club News

Yahi Group of the Sierra Club Fall Program Meetings

By Suzette Welch

Sierra Club Yahi Group is going to have two meetings during fall 2015 to inform the public about local environmental issues

On Sept. 17, 2015 Jim Brobeck from AquaAlliance will give a presentation about groundwater substitution and transfer/sales of water from the Sacramento Valley. Of special concern are 5 proposed wells to be added to the 5 existing wells in the Glenn/Colusa Irrigation District. If added the total of 10 wells will be able to pump more water from the deep end of the Tuscan Aquifer than the City of Chico uses in a year with California Water Service Company. There will be time for a question and answer session after Jim's presentation.

Our November 5, 2015 meeting will feature current information about issues affecting our urban forest. Charles Withuhn from Chico Tree Advocates program will talk about what they are accomplishing and how people in the community can get involved.

These programs will take place at Chico Branch Library 1108 Sherman on the corner of East First Ave. and Sherman in Chico. A social hour with refreshments will start at 6:30pm with the program following at 7pm. The talk is free and open to the public. Non Sierra Club members are welcome. For more information contact Suzette Welch 342-9214 or booksontape@rocketmail.com.



Save the date: The Yahi Christmas potluck will be on Friday, December 18, 2015, at Valley Oaks Village, 1950 Wild Oak Lane, Chico, Ca.

Web Update: The River Watcher

A new section called THE RIVER WATCHER has been added to the Yahi web site. It is a section dedicated to the writings of naturalist Rex Burris. Rex has been writing for the Yahi newsletter for many years, and it is time to give him his own forum on our website.

Rex is a naturalist, an artist, and a photographer. "The immediate "River Watcher" is a spin-off of my fondness for rivers in general, and especially for Grand River, near where I grew up in Missouri. It has spun off also from a lifetime of taking notes, journal-keeping, the pursuit of art, being a professional naturalist, and writing for several publications. I wrote "Oakland, Naturally," for about 15 years, and wrote a weekly column, "Signs of the Season," for a San Ramon Valley newspaper about 10 years, illustrating it with drawings and photographs. " — Rex

Hiking Butte County

Hiking Butte County is a wonderful field guide to hikes in and around Butte County. You can purchase it for \$11.95 at Trailside Adventures in Paradise and in Chico at Mountain Sports and Lyons Books. Or you can order one directly from Alan for \$10 plus shipping. Contact Alan Mendoza, 891-8789 or ajmendoza@prodigy.net.

Yahi Conservation Report

By Grace Maria Marvin, Yahi Group Conservation Chair

Woe be gone, and so is the water. That is, there is no or very low water in many wells in the Yahi region. And our creeks and other water ways also are in dismal shape, with dry patches abounding.

It is for that reason many environmental activists, farmers, and local citizens have been questioning the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) put together by the Glenn Colusa Water District. They want to dig 5 more production wells, *i.e.*, to mine for more groundwater to “augment District surface water supplies.” At the same time, their EIR does not recognize subsidence and the sinking of our groundwater levels as significant environmental impacts.

A basic principle of wise conjunctive use includes the greater use of groundwater during dry periods followed up by recharging during wet times. Those wet times are not going to be occurring as long and as often in the coming years, according to all scientifically based predictions. Dr. Maurice Hall, at a UC-Davis CA Water Policy Seminar this year, pointed out that in the 1950's, the Sacramento River was gaining about 1 million acre feet of water per year from surrounding groundwater. But starting in the 1990's, the Sacramento was no longer a gaining river, and now it is a losing river. That is, the groundwater is no longer replenishing nearby rivers and streams, with surface water being drained into the ground instead. He also pointed out such groundwater pumping has resulted in the Consumnes River going dry every summer now.

We do not want to see the Sacramento River turn into a Consumnes, and so we don't want more groundwater pumping in our aquifer that results, not only in less groundwater but also in even less surface water available for us up here or for the rest of the state. Moreover, statewide policies including over allocation and out-of-region transfers, have further impacted the hydrological system as evidenced in our sinking groundwater levels and actual land subsidence,

Won't the increased groundwater pumping by GCID's project further endanger surface water flows as well as groundwater dependent ecology, on which agriculture, fish, trees, and we humans depend?

We believe that the lead agency in determining use of our groundwater should not be a water district but representatives of citizens, and in this case, the Boards of Supervisors of the 4 counties which depend on the same Tuscan Aquifer, *i.e.* that which is not being adequately recharged given all the situations identified above. What we need now is greater recognition of basic principles incorporated in the Governor's new groundwater mandate: to cooperate with other regional parties, to plan on regional self-sufficiency, and to become ever more transparent about how groundwater decisions are made and what specific consequences are entailed.

Thus several local activists contacted the Butte County Board of Supervisors (BOS) asking them to intervene in the GCID decisive-making. We hope that other Boards are being contacted as well. The BOS in Butte County voted 5-0 on 7/29/15 to send a letter to GCID, and we will keep our eyes open...

River Watcher:

Mysteries in Grand Canyon

By Rex Burress

The story of the “Egyptian Cave” alleged to be found in Grand Canyon during 1909 and reported in a Phoenix newspaper, has been revived by the TV program, “Mysteries in Our National Parks.”

It was stated that an explorer by the name of Kincaid was floating down the Colorado River through the park, and saw stains on the cliff-side. He climbed up to an apparently man made cave of colossal proportions inside and found a trove of artifacts with Egyptian characteristics. He sent some to the Smithsonian and they conducted an expedition there, and are said to have hauled away some 40 truckloads of material, something that the museum now denies.

Adding to the mysteriousness of that deep canyon sector was the verified crashing of two jetliners that collided at the nearby junction at the Little Colorado River and the main channel in 1956, killing all 128 passengers. Indian legend has it that a high energy source emanates from that confluence of the canyon. Presently, that region is in a 'forbidden zone' for hikers.

All of that is open to speculation and imagination, but without doubt, the Grand Canyon, and other National Parks, and even local Oroville parks, abound with astounding natural wonders and historical mysteries.

I wonder if the Grand Canyon mysteries were part of my friend Doug Bray's intrigue with the canyon? Doug had moved to Arizona for his health, and became obsessed to walk the trail down to the bottom of the canyon. In spite of physical ailments, he prepared to make the hike, sensing that time was slipping away and he wanted to do one big thing while he could. He had mountaineering experience, having trekked throughout the Sierra with his large negative camera, Sierra Club style.

I had met Doug in Oroville where he had moved from the metropolis seeking relief for a bad back. He was trying to recover strength by carrying a heavy backpack along the river at a time when I was writing “River Watcher,” and soon he was joining my public nature hikes, while he was featuring his camera art under the guise of “Healing River Photography.”

On June 10, 2015, Doug set off for the geological experience of a lifetime. The journey was wrought with mystery from the start. Episodes of time-blanks occurred on the drive up from Phoenix, but finally he was on his way down via a strenuous switchback trail, longer and more physically draining than he had ever imagined. Going down a trail can be rougher on the muscles than going up. At the bottom he found a trailside bench where he ate his sandwiches, but dusk was settling in quickly, and at that depth darkness comes very fast. He hadn't planned to stay overnight at the bottom, thinking what looked like a three-mile trail on the map would be a cinch.

Then in the climb out amid darkness, he discovered his flashlight was missing. He began stumbling around, injuring his leg on rocks, and then using what light was left in his cell-phone, until that too, was gone. Doug was alone in the dark with sheer walls dropping off into the abyss.

Then he saw a light in the area, and called out asking if he was on the trail. To his surprise, a very tall black woman, scantily clad, appeared, and offered him directions, but declining his request to walk with her, saying she had to get back to her people. But she gave Doug a headlight with new batteries, and then took a few steps and silently vanished, Doug said.

He found himself turned around and back at the bottom near the bench he had used before, and then he laid down and slept until 3A.M. With his new light, he was able to head back up once more, and this time he witnessed strange lights overhead. They would dart around rap-

idly, change color, hover, and then drift side by side like something from another world. Doug had a small digital camera, and he snapped dozens of pictures. The light-orbs seemed to hover over him, and stayed around almost until daylight started to emerge.

By this time, Doug was completely exhausted, and barely made it to the top, being helped by a couple men who appeared, encouraging him to take a couple steps and stop. He collapsed at the top, and was whisked by helicopter to a hospital in Flagstaff, where they readjusted his chemical balance and released him. He took a shuttle back to his car, but strange events lingered. His car hood came loose and reared up to block his view, nearly causing him to crash on the way home. Highway Patrol couldn't figure out what caused it.

Doug made it home, and excitedly showed me the pictures a couple weeks later as he was going through Oroville. Make what you will out of it, but being alone in the dark of Grand Canyon is conducive to seeing the unknown...and who knows for sure what drifts around in the chasms where life and death has occurred for ages.

I've never seen any supernatural scenes or flying saucers, but I've had eerie feelings at times when passing over certain places. I give little credence to the presence of ghostly manifestations, other than being scared witless in my childhood farmhouse that had creaky steps to the upstairs room, and the dismal stairs down to the basement dungeon, but nothing ever appeared. Those radio scare programs did it. "Innersantum and the Money's Paw."

No ghost solidified in the old abandoned VanHorn house that was considered haunted, but even though my friend Donald, Dad, and I, rigged scary scenarios to scare visitor Jackie, and even though I would creep into the interior 'magazine room' to ponder far away places with strange sounding names, nothing ever assailed me. The real ghosts were the skunks I trapped there under the ramshackled house.

I suppose I rather dramatized an experience in the Oakland Joaquin Miller Park canyon once. Years ago, I was resting under the redwoods where Cinderella Creek joined Palo Seco Creek, and even though there was dead calm in the swale, I seemed to sense a presence, and halfway to the top of a redwood, a branch was shaking, as if someone was violently waving it, but not even a breeze stirred.

I don't think that occurrence had any thing to do with mystic poet Joaquin Miller, even though he had once been there and renovated his land, and tapped a spring at the very spot I sat. But what about his graveyard on top of the ridge where his ashes were scattered and where nine people are buried in unmarked graves, including his mother? You could contrive a ghost if you were in that frame of mind. But nature is the great stabilizer and not prone to supernatural run-arounds.

John Muir had the opportunities to see spirits when he slept in the Bonaventure Cemetery at Savannah, Georgia for a week when he ran out of money on his thousand mile walk in 1867. But he said it was the best place to camp among stones and trees where superstition reigned and few people ventured.

I have stood on the rim of Grand Canyon and gasped at the splendid scene of spacious chasms and spectacular colors, but it never occurred to me to hike to the bottom, or ride a mule down, or even ride a boat through the gushing gorge. The challenge is more than I can comprehend. There is no doubt that there is indeed room there for exceptional adventures, unfinished stories, physical wonders, spiritual revelations, and plenty of mystery!

River Watcher:

Don't Fence Me In

By Rex Burress



Hope of November

Photograph by Rex Burress

Sierra Club hikers thrive on adequate, unfenced trails where the free spirit can be unleashed, but throughout most of the country barriers indicating private ownership exist, unless you're in parks and public places. Thank you, John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, and many other park advocates who helped obtain open spaces for outdoor people.

Closer to home, the charming neighbors next door to me in Oroville have a lovely setter-type dog named Bailey. He barks at me when I'm in the

back yard, partly because I'm the noisy garbage can-man who rolls it out every week and he suspects my every move.

What keeps the dog and me apart is a chain-link fence. I can't imagine what might happen if that restraint wasn't there, so I'm glad the previous owner shared the cost of that fence years ago. As Robert Frost said, "Good fences make good neighbors."

Europeans have made their mark in America since the 1600's, mainly through boundaries of fences and walls surrounding buildings and livestock. We know fences not only define ownership, but are designed to keep things in or out. The 'wall principle' is exemplified in Frost's poem, "Mending Wall," which ponders the cobblestone wall between him and his neighbor as they work together in the spring replacing stones 'to sit things right.' "Before I built a wall I'd ask to know/What I was walling in or walling out,/And to whom I was like to give offense./ Something there is that doesn't love a wall...," Frost wrote. The same might apply to fences.

There is a Butte County sample of a rock wall south of Chico that rambles through the fields in a long stone line rather suggesting that the cattle stay on their side. The lava rocks strewn across the landscape were gathered and placed by Chinese laborers in the latter half of the 1800's.

When the Pilgrims arrived, the Indian tribes of the new world had not built fences, although they recognized territorial occupancy. As plots were parceled out to pioneers, the role of land-defining fences became apparent, even on the western plains, until now fences mark

properties wherever there is tillable soil or a home on nearly every acre of the country.

If you are of the John Muir, John James Audubon, or Mountain Man mentality, your free-style wandering is now a thing of the past. About the only free-way walking experience without confronting fences and “keep-out” signs is to take a tailored trail like the Pacific Crest Trail or the Appalachian Trail. Some would say that the Sierra and Mojave are fenceless, but somewhere along those routes you will run into obstacles of some kind. Taking a wagon train from St. Joseph to Sacramento is not a fenceless thoroughfare anymore. Travel is only possible on the roads or in the air.

Boundary methods to control livestock comes in many styles. Wire has been the most used type of fencing, and the perimeter fences on nearly all Missouri farms where I lived as a boy had woven fence, but inner areas, such as the cow lane through timothy and lespedeza fields to the bottom land was barbed wire. Cattle and horses could be controlled with an electric fence, too, with one strand of wire, and it was a kid's game to grab the wire between alternating currents to avoid shock.

Woven wire could be a trap for animals, but when brush became established, those fence lines became a haven for quail and rabbits when rust allowed escape-holes.

The barbed wire fence along the road over Table Mountain has provided the rancher with good cattle control, but during flower season getting to the flower fields on the other side was a challenge for flower seekers until gates were installed. Above all, “Please don't cut the fences!”

Bolt's Antique Tool museum and the Pioneer museum in Oroville both have collections of different styles of barbed wire illustrating the extreme effort to deter intrusion. The cry of the wild and free is “Don't fence me in,” yet civilization demands restrictive policies! Are you, like a cow, fenced in?

“There are three kinds of men. The one who learns by reading. The few who learn by observation.

The rest of them have to pee on the electric fence for themselves.”

--Will Rogers

“Don't ever take a fence down until you know why it was put up.”

--Robert Frost

YAH! Club Information

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Newsletter Information

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For advertising, contact Celeste Garcia, 533-2357, celesterdh@mynvw.com.

For changes in mailing address or email address, contact Sierra Club Member Services: membership.services@sierraclub.org, or (415) 977-5500.

For submissions, comments, or inquiries, contact Louise Casey, 872-9159, YAHInews@comcast.net. Please include name, phone number, and address with each submittal. Short, single-topic articles are preferred. Deadlines for proposed articles and letters to the editor: February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1.

Yahi News reserves the right to edit all submissions for reasons of space, clarity and potential libel. The opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Sierra Club or the Yahi Group.

The Last Word



Photo by Marie Scarrin

GOING, GOING... GONE?

Sea turtles date back nearly 90 million years and are among the Earth's oldest surviving species. All 6 species of sea turtles are protected under the Endangered Species Act. Sierra Club has mounted a major effort to defend and preserve threatened habitats before their inhabitants are gone forever.

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