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## Yahi Winter 2013/2014 Outings and Events

*Coordinated by Alan Mendoza*

<http://www.motherlode.sierraclub.org/yahi/outing.htm>

## Butte County's Most Valuable Resource

*by Dave Garcia, Yahi Group Political Chair*

Water is the very foundation of life and a finite resource that must be vehemently protected. Our lakes, rivers, and wetlands are the life source of our county's natural and scenic beauty, bringing in millions of tourism dollars to the county's economy. These surface waters feed, nourish, and replenish our Tuscan Aquifer, making them both vital components of Butte County's precious water supply. Maybe this is why Butte County chose the motto "Land of Natural Wealth and Beauty."

The bright full moon reminds us each month what life would be without water: barren, desolate, and lifeless. Everything we do, eat, grow, make, and especially the energy we use daily depends on water. Butte County's



number one industry, agriculture, would be non-existent without water. This is an industry with an estimated gross value of \$721 million in 2012. The county's agriculture industry is vitally dependent on water with 97.66 percent of its farmland being irrigated harvested cropland.

Roughly 70 percent of our planet is covered with salt water, which takes tremendous amounts of energy and money to desalinate for domestic use. Ninety-nine percent of all liquid fresh water is ground water, which is an enormous source that needs paramount protection. Ground water is crucial in watering our crops and supplying our domestic water needs, but requires vigilant protection from over drafting and contamination. Over 60 percent of Butte County residents depend on ground water as their main source of domestic water.

Lake Oroville is the backbone of the California State Water Project, supplying trillions of gallons of supplemental water to 25 million people and 750,000 acres of farmland in the Central Valley and southern California. This water is Butte County's most valuable resource, providing supplemental water to millions, with ground water being the main source of water to meet resident's domestic needs, helping agriculture be our #1 industry, and providing natural and scenic beauty for our tourism industry.

Our most valuable resource, water provides our county with immense benefits that we must cautiously protect to prevent over drafting and contamination from jeopardizing this vital resource.

### **CONTAMINATION**

The extreme energy extraction process of fracking (hydraulic fracturing) injects millions of gallons of fresh water, sand, and toxic carcinogenic chemicals into the ground and pressurizes it to fracture geologic formations, thereby releasing gas and oil. Usually about 50 percent of this toxic carcinogenic fracking fluid mixture remains in the well.

Current studies show well failure rates for new wells in the Marcellus Shale at around 7 percent. The Deepwater Horizon Maconda Well is an example of a new well failing and spilling billions of gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. More disheartening is another industry study indicating the failure rate for wells over 30 years old at 50 percent.

Failed wells are leaking wells that contaminate surrounding sources of water with the toxic carcinogenic fluids left in the well. Ninety-nine percent of all the liquid fresh water on earth is ground water, our largest source of liquid freshwater. Aquifer contamination from fracking has occurred in Dimock, PA; Pavillion, WY; and in Canada by Crew Energy Company.

Water contamination also occurs from frack waste water. In 2008 ProPublica investigated and then identified more than 1,000 cases of water contamination near drilling sites. The Colorado State Regulator reported that oil and gas have contaminated ground water in 17 percent of the 2,078 spills that occurred over the past five years.

In California, Kern County farmer Fred Starrh won an \$8.5 million lawsuit against Aera Energy for polluting his aquifer with 4 million gallons of frack waste water, which in turn killed his almond orchards.

### **TOXICITY OF FRACK FLUID**

Benzene is a chemical used in fracking. Benzene causes blood cancers, specifically leukemia. The EPA has an enforceable regulation for public water systems for benzene called the maximum contaminant level (MCL) which is 5 parts per billion (PPB). A single frack well could contain enough benzene to contaminate more than 100 billion gallons of drinking water to unsafe levels, according to drilling company disclosures in New York State. This amount is more than ten times as much water used by the state of New York in a single day (NYDEC DSGEIS 2009).

According to Bob Field, president of Santa Ynez Rancho Estates Mutual Water Company in California, "only one gallon of 1 percent frack solution could contaminate up to 1 million gallons of ground water." This is a 1 to 1 million gallon ratio for contaminating our largest source of liquid fresh water, a truly terrifying statistic for everyone who relies on ground water for domestic use.

The U.S. Senate identified 29 chemicals used in fracking that are toxic and or carcinogenic. In America some 1,500 people die of cancer everyday. Cancer is the second leading cause of death, according to the American Cancer Society. Why are we allowing



carcinogenic chemicals to be injected into the ground with a 50 percent chance of leaking and contaminating our largest source of fresh water in the future?

There are currently about 26 active gas wells and one waste injection well in Butte County. However, nearly 300 wells have been drilled. Our concern is that when the price of natural gas rises to \$14.32, like in 2001, making drilling lucrative again, drilling companies will be reworking (fracking) these old wells and jeopardizing our ground water through contamination.

### **CURRENT REGULATIONS**

Currently, fracking is not regulated in California. SB4, a weak regulatory fracking bill, just passed but will not go into effect until 2015. The oil and gas industry helped craft the bill by adding amendments to it before it was voted on. The oil industry is the most powerful corporate lobby in California, spending \$45.4 million in the state since 2009, according to the American Lung Association.

The oil and gas industry is extremely secretive with its activities in California. For example, back in 2011, when Senator Pavley asked the Division of Gas and Geothermal Resources (the agency responsible for regulating the oil and gas industry) about fracking in the state, DOGGR stated they did not know how many, when, or what chemicals were being used because “the state has no reporting requirements.” The California Coastal Commission, which regulates offshore drilling, learned in August 2013 that at least 12 offshore wells have been fracked. The commission has launched an investigation to determine how much fracking is occurring and what power these commissioners have to control it. The latest data now has offshore fracking having increased 203 times in the last 20 years!

When a senior planner from Butte County was contacted about wells, he advised “there are no existing natural gas or oil wells currently in the county.” When I showed him reports of 10 existing wells, he then provided me with information on additional wells and advised, “Contact DOGGR. This is the agency that oversees these activities.”

With a 1 to 1 million contamination ratio, Butte County Supervisors need to implement county regulator ordinances to protect our most valuable resource. We cannot afford to jeopardize our industries, our residents, our environment, and our economy to a state regulatory agency that has no knowledge when issuing drilling permits of how many, when, or what chemicals are being used when a well is fracked. Water is truly Butte County’s most valuable resource and it must be vehemently protected!

Join Butte Citizens Action Network in educating our residents about our precious water. Join us in encouraging the Butte County Board of Supervisors to investigate and implement a moratorium on fracking. Please join us in placing a 2014 ballot initiative for a moratorium on fracking in Butte County. We must protect our most valuable resource. To sign our petition or to volunteer, contact us at (888) 358-5556 or go to our Facebook page: Butte Citizen Action Network.



# Yahi Club News

## Yahi Group Holiday Potluck December 13

By Suzette Welch



A holiday potluck will be held on Friday, December 13, 2013, at Valley Oaks Village, 1950 Wild Oak Lane, Chico. The party starts at 6:00 p.m. Make new friends and catch up with old acquaintances.

We are privileged to have as an after dinner treat a talk by Barney Hope about his walk on the Pacific Crest Trail. Barney traveled the trail from Mexico to Canada in 2013.

There is limited parking so please carpool. Bring your own beer and wine, and \$5 to cover our expenses. After dinner there will be an entertaining program. If you plan to attend, please contact Suzette Welch (booksontape@rocketmail.com or 342-9214) stating number of people in your party and what you plan to bring .

## Yahi Group Winter 2014 Program Meetings

By Suzette Welch, Program Chair

This winter and spring we have planned four program meetings. These meetings will be held at the Chico Branch Library on the corner of East First Avenue and Sherman. The meetings will start at 7 p.m. with refreshments served. Non Sierra Club members are always welcome.

**Tuesday, January 14, 2014:** Neil Wiegman will talk about his and his wife Nancy's experiences while walking the Camino de Santiago de Compostela both in Spain and France. The Wiegmans have done a number of walks in both countries and have many beautiful photos that they took along the way. Neil has given talks about the Camino to many groups in Chico.

**Wednesday, February 19, 2014:** Chris Nelson will update us on the current practice of clearcutting of our forests and what individuals can do to help stop the practice in California. Trish Puterbaugh, Yahi Group's action contact for forest issues, will also be available at the meeting with comments and background information.

**Thursday, March 13, 2014:** Dave Nopel will show photographs and talk about exploring the natural world based on "a lifetime of rambling in California." David along with Marti Leicester wrote *The Humboldt Wagon Road*, which includes many historical photographs. David acquired his interest in history and historical photographs from his father John Nopel. You can currently see John Nopel's historical photographs at the Chico Museum, 141 Salem Street, in Chico.

**May 2014, date to be announced:** We will be showing *Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for Our Time*, a film about the life and accomplishments of Aldo Leopold, one of the most important conservationists of the twentieth century.

## Yahi Group 2014 ExCom Elections

All Yahi members will receive an abbreviated version of our winter newsletter through the US Postal Service because it is time to vote for people to represent them on the Executive Committee (ExCom) of the local Yahi chapter. This year we have two candidates who are seeking re-election to the Yahi Board: Sharon Fritsch and David McKinney.

Please take a few minutes to participate in this important process. Your ballot has been inserted into the printed version of your newsletter. Read the Candidates' Statements, and show your support by folding, taping and mailing your ballot by December 31, 2013.

# Area Conservation News

By Grace Marvin, Yahi Group Conservation Chair & BEC Advocacy Chair

*Brief Reports from Fall 2013 meetings: Sierra Club California (SCC), California Nevada Regional Conservation Committee (CNRCC), and Sierra Nevada Alliance (SNA)*

The CNRCC delegates (including yours truly) passed four resolutions which had earlier been distributed to the Cal-Activist (Web) list. In summary, we opposed the Sites reservoir and the raising of Shasta Dam. We also approved providing more guidance for California General Plans regarding greenhouse reductions, and we approved a resolution requiring licenses for OHV (off road) vehicles.

We also heard an amazing number of important environmental topics addressed at the joint CNRCC and SCC conference in October 2013, including conservation reports from several chapters of the club. The September Sierra Nevada Alliance conference also covered much ground. I will summarize only a small portion from both conferences, first giving a bit more attention to forest issues, as they loomed large!

Forests are key to adapting to climate disruption, so we need to do a much better job of making forests, meadows, and headwaters more resilient. Forests have become much denser since fire suppression efforts began decades ago; now more trees block the sun, meaning that closed canopies get half the normal snowfall on the ground, *i.e.*, less water for streams and rivers.

## Forests and Fires

Fires have increased eight-fold as compared to 100 or 150 years ago, and the average fire is now twelve times larger. We need to reduce tree plantations, plant more prescribed fires, and greatly reduce certain fire fuels, *i.e.*, "ladder fuels" and *not* the large trees. Then, huge fires would become less likely. The Rim (Yosemite) fire this past summer cost \$100 million and should show us that we need to invest in Sierra Nevada forests and California's water supply.

Sierra Nevada environmentalists need to also concern themselves with the source of waters further north, *e.g.*, Butte County and beyond. (The Yahi Group needs more outspoken activists to call attention to our precious resources, especially water, that we need to protect from tunnels, dams, and related transfer demands.)

## California's energy needs & conservation

We can meet our needs with greater solar, wind, and energy efficiencies. We do not need the two nuclear plants in California. (*Sungevity* installs the solar panels for interested members of the Sierra Club, by the way. To get you on board, our Yahi Group would need to sign up to help with getting out the word.)

## Latest climate science findings

If we maintain our current energy practices, the earth will have 900 to 1,100 CO<sub>2</sub> parts per million by the turn of the century and will be 2.5 to 6 degrees warmer in the West. Trends include less snow-pack, earlier stream-flows from snow pack, more tree mortalities, more animals moving north, earlier “green-up” dates, and enhanced wildfires.

## Fracking

While Sierra Club California will work on a new and better statewide fracking resolution (than the highly disappointing SB4), the club will be heading up group calls to local entities working on local fracking bans or moratoriums, *e.g.*, the Yahi Group was on the first call in October.

## Wilderness

2015 is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Wilderness Act, and the Sierra Club is planning a year of activities surrounding it. We need to let the national club volunteer, Vicky Hoover, know about what efforts we can make in wilderness areas near where each of us live. *Focus especially on getting youth involved so they will learn to explore protest and enjoy the wilderness.* (I could convey your message to Vicky Hoover.)

## Rivers

As Sierra Club members, we need to work to protect the Endangered Species Act and the Wild and Scenic Rivers protection designation for many of our rivers. In particular, the Merced River needs major public defenses right now to combat certain politicians' efforts. Moreover, often we are told that major river-related construction projects will have beneficial environmental effects. We must look at their findings skeptically and then review truly scientific analyses. For example, the raising of Shasta Dam would have little if any benefit for fish, according to Steve Evans (once with the Butte Environmental Council and now at Friends of the River).

## Farming

We need to encourage farmers and politicians to plant water-tolerant crops, *e.g.*, not the permanent orchards that Westland farmers planted, thus “justifying” their greater need for water from up north.

## Lake Tahoe

Temperature changes have meant less deep-water mixing, such that the lake will be anoxic by 2075 as phosphorus is released. In the meantime, the Sierra Club is engaged in a lawsuit to protect the lake from excessive development projects.

## John Muir (Jack) Laws, field guide biologist extraordinaire

Jack Laws spoke to the Sierra Nevada Alliance conference and led a wonderful field trip (right outside the conference center). The trip involved only a very brief walk and our breaking into small groups, but the message was very powerful. His emphasis was not on identifying biological specimens but on developing our feelings about nature.

Awe, exploration, and spirituality are the keys. Instead, too many of us seek only to identify a specimen with its scientific name, and then we feel like we know what it is: end of exploration. Instead, we should develop our curiosity, stay authentic, and ask questions. After noting what seems interesting to us in its natural milieu, ask: Of what does this observation remind me? Then start speculating about it, *e.g.*, I wonder how, whether, when, etc.

This approach to nature can lead us to make poems, and to live our lives in such a way that makes poems possible and our lives richer. Examples he gave were written (and published) by Mary Oliver, while Jack tasked us to come up with our own poems during this field guide.

**A sad note:** Bob Anderson was a wonderful member of my small group of four poets-to-be on this trip. He committed himself fully to our assignments, after our chatting about his upcoming 70<sup>th</sup> birthday trip to Tanzania with his Sierra Club activist wife, Grace Anderson. He died in a rollover accident on this trip. We not only lost a wonderful human being but a great environmentalist with many huge accomplishments. And he was on the way to becoming a sweet poet of nature.

## Finally, a message to you

Please consider becoming active around one of these issues. I would be happy to help you get started.



## Hiking Butte County

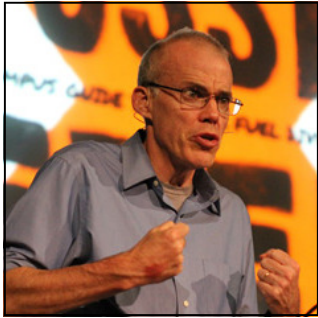
*Hiking Butte County* is a wonderful field guide to hikes in and around Butte County. It was assembled by the outings leaders in the Yahi Group under the direction of Alan Mendoza. In it you will find descriptions directions, distances and difficulty information for 35 hikes. This is the only book of its type for this area.

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](mailto:ajmendoza@prodigy.net).



## Bill McKibben at the 2013 Sierra Nevada Alliance Conference

by Grace Maria Marvin, Conservation Chair



The keynote speaker at the September 2013 Sierra Nevada Alliance conference was Bill McKibben. One of the most prominent climate-change advocates, he founded 350.org and has helped lead a remarkable 15,000 climate-change rallies worldwide since 2009. (Several of us Yahi members attended 350.org rallies in San Francisco.)

Among his major points:

1. Climate change was a mere abstraction 25 years ago, but now the earth temperature is warmer and causing related huge problems, including: much larger and longer droughts, rain storms, and “epic flooding,” as warmer air pulls more water vapor. At the same time, in much of the Midwest, “trillions of acres of corn did not fertilize” because it has been too hot there. Moreover, atmospheric carbon is now up to 400 parts per million, that is, well past the 350 McKibben once said should be the maximum.

2. A mixed sign of hope is the state of Vermont, since it has been trying to become more resilient to “climate disruption,” the term increasingly used instead of global warming. For example, Vermont has many examples of small-scale farming, localized economies, and small-scale living. Nonetheless, Vermont can't prevent the newly dangerous rainstorms, which two years ago meant the loss of 500 miles of roads, as well as the loss of bridges and of many small organic farms.

3. It would have been rational to put a serious price (monetary) on carbon had we followed scientists' advice 25 years ago. Now, however, we really need to take on the fossil fuel industry full force. Yet, McKibben does not see that we in the U.S. should spend our efforts trying to convert those who do not believe in climate disruption, *i.e.*, climate-change deniers; 70 to 75 percent of Americans understand that climate change is real. Instead, *get far more of that majority engaged as activists.*

4. The Keystone Pipeline should be one of the primary targets of our activism. The preeminent scientist, James Hansen, has noted: If we burn all the oil in Alberta, the earth's CO<sub>2</sub> level would go up to 500 parts per million! A nearer target to us that McKibben mentioned is Chevron's refinery in Richmond, California, the site of 350.org protests. Furthermore, we can rid ourselves of investments that harm the planet. The “divestment” movement is growing rapidly, he said, and we should make sure our personal accounts, pension funds, and other institutions we patronize are not invested in the fossil fuel industry.

5. We should not leave it up to young people to do all the protesting. Consider that they are still pursuing education and employment. Retired seniors can more easily spend time protesting and even risk getting arrested for civil disobedience. (By the way, I have heard that civil disobedience is a topic that is being discussed on the national level of the Sierra Club.)

6. Driving less and putting in better light bulbs are not enough. We have such an excess of carbon that these measures won't make that much difference. Furthermore, it is too late to consider using “bridge fuels,” including fracked oil and gas. They not only add to our CO<sub>2</sub> levels. Consider that the dangerous chemicals used in fracking processes often leak into our aquifers. Instead, we should be concerned about the structure of the fossil fuel industry in our society and our dependence on it. Getting our social systems to invest in mass transit, *e.g.*, Europe's example of trains, would be a much better alternative. And consider modeling Bavaria (in southern Germany), which has more solar panels than all of the United States!

*For more information, see [www.billmckibben.com](http://www.billmckibben.com).*





# Conservation News

## Forging A National Coalition

by Kevin Killion

*This year 25 CSU Chico and Butte College students traveled Pittsburgh to develop a plan to return the power to the people.*



Left to right: Emili Abdel-Ghany, Courtnie Burns, Kevin Killion, Marli Diestel, Jesse Lyon, Courtney Cooper, Chauncey Quam, Emily Teauge Colin Pryor and Tommy Diestel.

Around the world people are waking up to the realities of climate change, social and economic injustices, and the need to organize to defend the livability of this planet. From October 18 to October 21, over 6,000 students and community leaders traveled to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to attend Powershift 2013, designed for us to demand and plan for social, economic, and environmental justice. We came from across the country to join together as one movement, to increase our networks by developing solidarity beyond our traditional activist silos. The event was hosted by Energy Action Coalition, a network of

over 50 organizations, among them the California Student Sustainability Coalition, Greenpeace, and the Sierra Student Coalition. Powershift is the premier opportunity to network with the movers and shakers from across the country and to build strategies and movements for the years ahead.

Despite the diversity of issues presented, the event focused on the areas of intersection between these many movements. So long as the varied activist groups continue to work without the support of one another within larger coalitions, the systemic roots of all of our problems will grow ever deeper. The need to work together was especially apparent as the keynote speakers identified the Keystone XL pipeline as a fight that is necessary for all activist groups to rally around. Whether it is economic wealth gaps, social injustice, or environmental degradation, it appears that the fossil fuel industry is at the core of our problems. Though we address our specific and local problems in our own unique ways, it is essential that we work together across movements to end the destruction and profiting caused by fossil fuel industries.

The 2013 Powershift conference lasted four days. Twenty-five students traveled more than 12 hours from Butte County to Pittsburgh to attend. Starting on Friday with meetings, networking, and keynote speakers, including Josh Fox of Gasland, the place was alive with energy by the time we rolled in. Saturday began with anti-oppression and identity workshops,

focusing on how we can be allies to one another. And 200 one-hour workshops were spread over only six time blocks. The options available were an activist's dream, everything from permaculture, local resilience, and divesting from fossil fuels, to tools for combating racism within environmental organizations, radical and contemporary economics, and leadership models for a new generation. Each evening concluded with keynote speakers, including Bill McKibben, Crystle Layman, and Reverend Yearwood among many others.



Left to right: Melody Leppard, Kevin Killion, Emily Teauge and Colin Pryor.

The array of speakers' experiences spanned from the frontline communities to first nations people, from a fierce 16-year-old Nebraska high schooler, Helen Winston, to Tom Steyer (the "green billionaire"), all of them speaking about the need to work in solidarity with one another. Sunday fit a similar format as Saturday, but included a break-out section for each of the states to build their alliances and strategies for the years to come. On Monday we had a rally and marched down the streets of Pittsburgh. Many took direct action, whether that be a banner drop, the occupation of unapproved streets for the march, and ultimately the occupation of the courthouse where many risked arrest in order to have their voices heard.

Among the major sponsors of the event were the Sierra Club and the Sierra Student Coalition. Sierra Club executive director Michael Brune spoke both Saturday and Sunday nights. One of the most powerful things that was said by Brune was "Occupy the Sierra Club"! In his address to 6,000 student leaders, he explicitly asked that the younger generation join their local chapters and take control of the direction of the organization. He mentioned that there is a need for new energy and new ideas to be complimented with the wisdom from folks who have been in this fight for decades. On the travel home, one of our local student leaders, Melody Leppard, shared an airplane with Brune and was able to ask him some questions.

Though the event has ended, the work has only just begun. We in the local chapter of the California Student Sustainability Coalition will be doing our part to bridge divides, and infuse existing organizations and individuals with new energy, ideas, and passion. These four days felt like weeks of intensive training, an experience that will not be forgotten. In that time we forged relationships with leaders from across the country, people who want to dig in and make positive change locally and globally. Our passion and energy will not subside, but only grow stronger as we include more hearts and minds in this larger coalition. On behalf of the Butte College and CSU Chico chapters of the California Student Sustainability Coalition, we thank you for your contribution to our education, training, and empowerment. We hope to rededicate our service to the land and to our communities to create a world that is just and sustainable for all.

*The Yahi Group of the Sierra Club contributed \$200 to Butte County students attending Powershift 2013. Kevin Killion is a student leader within the California Student Sustainability Coalition, a state-wide organization uniting State, UC, and CCC campuses in local and statewide solidarity.*

*For more information, go to:*

*www.wearepowershift.org, where there are links to the keynote addresses on YouTube. Kevin Killion can be reached at [greenchico91@gmail.com](mailto:greenchico91@gmail.com).*



# YAH! Club Information

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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



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## 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.

Help protect our animal friends; because once they're gone, they're gone. Join Sierra Club now.

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 100% recycled papers available
- We use vegetable based inks
- Black & white and color copies

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