



The Sierra Club • Tehipite Chapter

Tehipite Topics

October 2020 – Vol. 66, No. 1

www.sierraclub.org/tehipite

Brynne Kennedy for Congress in the 4th District

by Bill Fjellbo

The Sierra Club has endorsed Democratic candidate Brynne Kennedy in the 4th Congressional District. Brynnes' opponent in this race is Republican incumbent Tom McClintock. This district includes part of Fresno and Madera Counties, all of Mariposa and continues to the Lake Tahoe and Sacramento areas.

Unlike Congressman McClintock Brynne believes



that climate change is here and that it is causing longer wildfire seasons, more severe floods, droughts, hurricanes and more. Brynne states that climate change is a global

challenge, but that also means that there will be global markets for new technologies in forest management, bio-fuels, carbon capture, renewable energy, and many other fields. She is a strong believer in investing in a clean energy economy. McClintock's denial that the problem even exists will cede this economic opportunity to other nations. Brynne believes that we should end subsidies to yesterday's energy technology, and she supports tax breaks and targeted incentives that can create good sustainable clean energy jobs. Brynne advocates updating our water infrastructure by using more modern and cost-effective storage methods such as restoring wetlands, water conservation and replenishing underground aquifers, not just dams and tunnels.

Brynne believes that we need to take back our democracy from the special interests. She has rejected all corporate PAC contributions and will fight for a constitutional amendment to get big money out of politics.

For these and many other reasons the Sierra Club has endorsed Brynne. We strongly urge all members in

the 4th District to vote for her. We also urge all members of the Tehipite Chapter no matter where they reside to donate and/or volunteer for her campaign. There is a role for everyone to play in this most vital election of our time.

Election Time Is Upon Us and We're Endorsing TJ Cox!

by Sharon Hoffmann

Elections will be held on November 3, 2020. TJ's first term in Congress has been impressive and much in line with the things we look for in a representative. Help us win the upcoming CD21 election and send him back to accomplish more.

TJ Cox is fighting climate change, cosponsoring the 100% Clean Economy Act, which would get our country to carbon neutral by 2050 and he's demanding that the United States rejoin the Paris Climate Accord. TJ Cox is also fighting for our environment and public lands, helping pass the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) — a landmark piece of legislation for our public lands — and getting it signed into law. The GAOA will make sure the Land and Water Conservation Fund can continue to protect our national treasures, and our local treasures around the corner. It also addresses the decades-long maintenance backlog in our National Parks. For more information, you may go to his sites here:

<https://tjcoxfordcongress.com> or
<https://cox.house.gov/year-in-review-2019>.

We are gearing up to Get Out the Vote (GOTV) for TJ and hope you will find the time to assist us. We will be contacting our membership in the near future and hope you will be able to assist us win this election for the many environmental reasons we are facing. Please join us when we call. To get on the list now, please email Sharon at: tehipite.chapter@sierraclub.org, thanks!



EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT THE PLANET



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet



Bear in mind the consequences.

The Yellowstone grizzly bear is an irreplaceable part of America's natural heritage, a symbol of the independence that defines the American character and an icon of all that is wild and free. The Bush administration set forth a proposal that would remove federal protection for the Yellowstone grizzly bear. Help Sierra Club protect our forest friends; they prefer the woods than being on display.

Get grizzly and JOIN Sierra Club.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Phone (____) _____

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**Join today and receive
a FREE Sierra Club
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Cardholder Name _____

Card Number _____

Exp. Date ____/____/____

Signature _____

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**SIERRA
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Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club

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Call for Candidates

2020 Tehipite Chapter Executive Committee Election

The world's most democratic environmental organization needs you!

Yes, Tehipite Chapter members, you can run for Executive Committee and have a say in decision making in the Sierra Club as an elected Club leader. The ExCom is the administrative body of the Tehipite Chapter. We need people who can organize committees and inspire participation from our members. The Chapter always needs volunteers to handle the tasks common to all organizations.

If you have some time and would like to help this great organization, please volunteer to run for a seat on the ExCom. Each winning candidate is elected for a two-year term.

The Executive Committee typically meets monthly for 2½ hours beginning at 7:00 pm on the 2nd Wednesday of the month in the UC Merced Center, across from the Fashion Fair Mall in Fresno. Lately we have been meeting via Zoom.

You may volunteer yourself for consideration or suggest another member to the Nominating Committee. Suggestions for nominations will be accepted until 5:00 pm Wednesday, October 14. Any submissions mailed must be received by that deadline.

Members may also run by petition. Any Chapter member proposed in writing by at least fifteen Chapter members prior to the deadline for submission of petitions, and who gives consent, shall also be included on the ballot. Petitions must be submitted to the Chapter Secretary (e-mail to sailboard@prodigy.net) by 5:00 pm Friday, October 30.

Please submit names to Sierra Club, P.O. Box 5396, Fresno CA 93755-5396, or e-mail names to one of our Nominating Committee members listed below. Only those who consent to run will be on the ballot.

Election Schedule:

October 5 Notice of elections mailed /
Start of nominations

October 14, 5pm Deadline to submit names
to Nominating Committee for consideration

October 14 Nominating Committee reports
nominees to Executive Committee

October 30, 5pm Deadline to submit petitions
to Chapter Secretary — Petitioners may go to
<http://www.sierraclub.org/tehipite/chapter-policy-documents> to review the by-laws
regarding election procedures

November 13 Deadline for candidate
statements to be submitted to Election Committee

November 30 List of eligible voters produced

December 7 Ballots mailed out / Start of voting

January 8, 5pm Close of voting

January 8-10 Ballots counted by Election
Committee, time & location to be announced

January 11 Candidates contacted with results

January 13 ExCom certifies election and
welcomes new members to the ExCom

For nominations or election information contact a member of the Nominating Committee:

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Merced Group Conservation & Executive Committee Meetings

We are currently meeting via Zoom, usually at 7:30 on the first Wednesday of each month. Be aware that there are sometimes 'adjustments'. The Conservation meeting is first and generally lasts 30-40 minutes. Anyone with an interest in local, state, or national conservation issues is welcome to attend. It is immediately followed by the Ex-comm portion where official business is conducted. All Sierra Club members are invited to join us for both meetings. Please contact Rod Webster if you are interested in attending so he can confirm the date and time and forward you the log-in info.

Merced Group Monthly General Meetings

... already resumed in September after our normal summer break. They are conducted using Zoom and are held on the third Thursday of the month, except in November and December (see details below). All Sierra Club members and the public as well are cordially invited to join us. Program topics and speakers vary — some educate on environmental issues, and others are more entertaining and hopefully inspire folks to get out and enjoy our natural treasures. The *Topics*, the Tehipite Chapter website, and local newspapers often have details on our monthly general meetings, but to make sure info is accurate and up-to-date, email Rod at <rwebster@elite.net> and get on the email list for notifications and occasional updates on important issues of local concern.

Merced Group's Annual Award event in December

Our November and December monthly programs will be combined into a single event in early December. As in the past, we will have a featured speaker and present our local environmentalist award — BUT as you might guess, we sadly will not be able to host a potluck dinner. Instead, succumbing to the times, we will ZOOM that event. When finalized, the details of date, time, and program will be shared. Again, if you are on Rod's email list that is the best way to insure you are in the loop.

Tehipite Chapter Monthly General Meetings on Hiatus — But New Volunteers Can Change That —

Tehipite Chapter general meetings, usually held monthly at the UC Merced Center in Fresno, are on hold until COVID-19 is brought under control in the Valley. However, if the Chapter in Fresno follows the excellent lead of the Merced Group, who are arranging Zoom meetings each month, and making recordings of the events available online afterward, we too can revitalize our tradition of informative, educational, and entertaining live presentations, drawing from the deep list of speakers we had invited to fill out our 2020-21 schedule. People like Bill Leonard, Chair of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation; Pat Ferguson, from California Fish and Wildlife, on the restoration of salmon in the San Joaquin River; Jeff Irwin, manager of the Sierra National Forest Heritage Program, on the archaeology of the Sierra Nevada; and Doug Broten, educational docent for Sierra Foothill Conservancy, on the Central Valley before humans, and after, when Native Americans were managing its natural resources.

Are you at ease working with Web applications and willing to do the mechanics of arranging, running, and recording an online group meeting with several dozen members in virtual attendance? Would you like to meet more of the Tehipite Chapter by taking on the task of publicizing our events to the membership? With your help we can revitalize this important Chapter activity. Email me at robertsturner52@gmail.com, if you can take on this task. We'll meet online with other members of the Programs and Publicity Committees and get the process rolling toward our first online live general meeting presentation.

Merced Group News

Russ Vara Honored by Merced Group

This year's award for environmental stewardship went to Russ Vara for his many years of volunteer work at the Merced Zoo. These days many zoo animals are rescues, taken for rehabilitation of injuries or adopted from private parties who realize that many wild animals are not suited to be pets. Some of those animals can eventually be reintroduced into the wild but others are unable to survive on their own. All of which is to say that a zoo these days is often a refuge for animals that would otherwise not survive on their own in the wild. In addition the zoo is an urban classroom that educates the public in the stewardship and protection of our natural places and the animals that live there.

Russ Vara stepped away this June from what has often been an almost full-time commitment as a volunteer to the Merced Zoological Society. He retired after 20 years of dedication serving in a multitude of capacities to support the zoo and its efforts. Over the years Russ has served in every position on the Zoo Board: president, VP, secretary, and treasurer. He's often the one who negotiates with the City on staffing and funding issues. He

composed the monthly board meeting agendas and coordinated publication of the zoo's newsletter. But there is more. Russ was also the hands-on, go-to guy who did the ordering and inventory for the gift shop as well as helping to staff it. He oversaw the zoo's special events like its Halloween "Zoo-Boo," Xmas lights at the zoo, and the Mother's Day butterfly release. Maintenance projects both big and small fell under his purview — either to overseeing the task, or often to doing the job himself. He was the one who got the phone call from the police of an evening when they responded to 'goings on' at the zoo. You get the idea. Russ is that volunteer that every organization needs — the one who knows where things are and how to get things done. And when he finally stepped away this June after 20 years of service, a team of volunteers was likely needed to fill the void.

Thank you Russ for all you've done during your 'second career.' Enjoy retirement — you've earned it. And to wife Carolyn — thanks for loaning the Merced Zoological Society your husband, you can finally have him back.



RUSS VARA WAS HONORED BY THE MERCED GROUP FOR HIS TWENTY YEARS OF VOLUNTEER SERVICE AT THE MERCED ZOO, ON THE BOARD AND IN NUMEROUS OTHER CAPACITIES HELPING TO ORGANIZE THE ZOO'S PROGRAMS AND SPECIAL EVENTS. HE IS SHOWN HERE AT THE MERCED GROUP'S ANNUAL DINNER LAST DECEMBER WITH MERCED GROUP CHAIR ROD WEBSTER.

Saving Monarch Butterflies One Seed Ball at a Time

by Rod Webster

The Merced Group of the Sierra Club had a table at the Fall 2019 Art Hop in downtown Merced. We were in Bob Hart Square near other kid-oriented art activities but also invited as many adults as possible, explaining that our focal project for this year was the planting of milkweed seeds to help the monarch butterflies. It was fun to see the children rolling clay mixed with humus into balls while we explained what the purpose was to onlooking adults. We had posters showing the life cycle of the monarch and their migration routes. The participants left with a bag explaining what to do with their seed balls. Most people had heard that the monarch was in trouble and were glad they could help. It was a fun, educational, and ecologically helpful time for all.



Reyn Akiona, the Environmental Project director for Bowles Farms, got us started by providing the seeds and some expert advice. Last October we staffed an activity table at the Merced downtown Art Hop where folks were instructed how to make clay balls that contained milkweed and wildflower seeds. A handout on the monarch life cycle and seed ball planting instructions was given out to accompany the balls that were taken home. As you might suspect families with kids were our most enthusiastic participants. The main focus of this outreach was not really to create a viable food source for migrating monarchs, but to increase public awareness of their plight and promote support for more widespread action.

For the next phase of community involvement we got the cooperation of Andy Codd, who heads the horticultural program at Merced College. He and his students propagated 2000 starter plants for us. 400 of those were later repotted into larger containers and earmarked to be handed out gratis at the College's annual spring plant sale. Unfortunately, there was reduced attendance this year due to coronavirus constrictions, so only about half of them were handed out.

The 200 leftovers were added to the 1600 seedlings destined for the planting project scheduled at the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge north of Los Banos. Biologist Fumika Takahashi, of the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge, agreed to oversee the milkweed planting at the Refuge. She also made arrangements for the plants to be watered regularly over the summer — a critical step in the planning. Unfortunately, 'the plan' didn't work out, with the shutdown response to the coronavirus pandemic coming just a week before our anticipated work project.

The Merced Group scrambled to find an alternate plan for our seedlings which were starting to outgrow their containers. Over the next couple of weeks our leadership team worked on several fronts to find folks interested in creating a plot, large or small, of milkweed plants on their properties. Among those taking several hundred plants were the Northern San Joaquin Chapter of the California Native Plant Society, a local preschool teacher who raises monarchs as a classroom activity, the Merced Garden Club, leaders in the Mariposa Butterfly Festival, and an almond grower who has surrounded her property with native plants. Other local folks took some for small plantings in their personal gardens. In any case we found homes for all of our 'orphaned' milkweed plants.

Though the large planting did not work out this past year, all is in place for another attempt this year. Plus, the way it worked out, we made connections with organizations and private parties who may want to grow some milkweed on their properties again. So we may actually be able expand our efforts. Looking forward, Merced College found it to be a positive experience and has expressed an interest in continuing their involvement. The Wildlife Refuge staff has plans to continue its efforts at establishing milkweed stands on their site. We are thankful to all those who helped in the project's initial year. Hopefully public awareness of the monarch butterfly's precarious situation will continue to grow. All seems to be in place for a second round of efforts when conditions permit.

Merced Group Monarch Butterfly Restoration Project

by Stan Bunce

The western monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) is at risk of becoming extinct! “In the 1990s, hundreds of millions of monarchs made the epic flight each fall from the northern plains of the U.S. and Canada to sites in the oyamel fir forests in central Mexico, and more than millions of monarchs overwintered in forested groves on the California coast. Now, researchers and community scientists estimate that only a fraction of the population remains — a decline of approximately 80% has been seen in central Mexico and a decline of 99% has been seen in coastal California.”



It is not just insects that are at risk of extinction, but many plants and animals we might take for granted in our love for Mother Nature are threatened by rapid environmental changes. Habitat loss and degradation, pesticides, and climate change have negatively affected the migratory cycle of the monarch.

The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation has developed guidance on how to manage existing monarch habitat for the western monarch. They identify five key steps to recovering the Western Monarch population in the short term.



1. Protect and manage California overwintering sites.
2. Restore breeding and migratory habitat in California.
3. Protect monarchs and their habitat from pesticides.
4. Protect, manage, and restore summer breeding and fall migration monarch habitat outside of California.
5. Answer key research questions about how to best aid western monarch recovery.

Our Merced Group has taken up this challenge and is working with local resources and the public to extend the habitat essential for the monarch's survival. The monarch's life cycle begins with eggs laid on milkweed (and only milkweed) plants. After several days the larval stage caterpillars molt through five instars, or developmental

growth periods, of crawling and eating and molting. The chrysalis stage that follows lasts for several weeks, then finally to the adult stage for breeding and overwintering for the next generation. For our habitat efforts, we know the eggs are laid and larva feed ONLY on milkweed species. The adults however feed on the nectar of many flowering plants.

Our Group is working with Reyn Akiona, PhD, Environmental Program Director, Bowles Farming Co. in Los Banos; Andrew Codd, Professor of Landscape and Horticulture, Merced College; San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Biologist Fumika Takahashi; and Merced County Master Gardeners, UC ANR, Cooperative Extension, Merced County.

We are growing and will plant 1500 Narrowleaf milkweed plants, *Asclepias fascicularis*, on the Refuge this spring, as well as give 400 potted milkweed plants to the public with information on the plight of the Monarch and instructions on how to plant them. We hope to play a continuing role in habitat restoration for this endangered species.

P.S. We also have monarch/milkweed Sierra Club T-shirts for sale to raise awareness among the public.





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Tehipite Topics is published up to two or three times a year. This issue is the first issue of 2020. Downloadable color versions are available on the chapter website at www.sierraclub.org/tehipite/newsletters. Back issues are archived on the website beginning from April 2004. Articles and photographs from Sierra Club members are always welcome for our upcoming issues. Send your contributions for our next issue by email to robertsturner52@gmail.com before November 10, 2020.

What about Alaskan Wilderness?

by Heather Anderson

I gather that most of us have not been thinking much about Alaskan Wilderness lately. It is far away and not as interesting for most folks as the election, pandemic, fires, or maintaining a bit of what used to be our kind-of-wholesome life. Well, we need to think about it. One friend said, "I have too much on my list already." Another mentioned, "A bit of cool Alaskan weather would have been welcomed." Or, another, "Where exactly are the refuges?"

They are places I started to think seriously about when I first joined Fresno's Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter in 1984. I decided to have my art education class make a 3D learning layout of the Alaskan refuges on brown butcher paper laid over a large art table. Students could study the importance of wilderness while also learning about art in 3D. First of all, wildlife refuges are huge pieces of a protected environment that we need to save, if only as a record of beautiful and functional places. Alaska's ecology is entirely unique, and much of it is disappearing at a rapid rate due to our national neglect and adversity. Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is made up of icy glaciers and rivers, rugged, frozen peaks, and beautiful but mostly unprotected wildlife — polar bears, caribou, wolves and wolverines, eagles and migratory birds, whales, walruses and seals — several of which are already disappearing as species.

Change is coming at a rapid rate. Tongass National Forest, sometimes called America's Amazon, and a huge carbon sink, may soon face large machinery carving new roads into its old-growth heart. The administration has repealed the "Roadless Rule" that protects undesignated wilderness, and we must now rely on the federal courts to stanch the bleeding until we have a new president. Oil extraction, mining, logging should not be taking place beside our national parks, but this administration pushes leasing for the exploitation of resources at the expense of despoiling our environmental heritage. These lands should be protected, not destroyed by our government. Let's all keep posted on current environmental events, keep reading, and speak out to save Alaska's wild lands.

Go to <https://addup.sierraclub.org/campaigns/keep-alaskas-tongass-national-forest-roadless> to tell the U.S. Forest Service that logging and road building have no place in the undeveloped 9.3 million acres of Tongass National Forest.