



The Sequoia

Notes from our Groveland Hiking Group

By Bob Asquith

The late spring rains and snow brought a plethora of wildflowers and water to Yosemite National Park's high country this year. We explored places such as Elizabeth Lake, Gaylor Lakes, Fantail Lake, Bennettville, Mount Watkins, Tuolumne Falls Polly Dome Lakes, Cherry Lake, Lake Eleanor, the Merced Grove of Giant Sequoias and the Rockefeller Grove of old Sugar Pines.

One of our goals this summer was to follow portions of two early roads in Yosemite - the old Tioga Rd and the old Big Oak Flat Rd. We now have traced the path of the Old Big Oak Flat Rd from Rush Creek to the foot of El Capitan.

Along the way, we time travelled back to springtime with increasing elevation. The higher we climbed the later spring was. On our hike to Bennettville at 10,500 feet, it was still springtime in the middle of August.

A special highlight this summer was at Gaylor Lakes where we met up with Beth Pratt, the Regional Executive Director of the National Wildlife Federation and a pika whisperer. She helped us locate the little critters that are very cute and quite endangered by climate change. She also described her efforts to save California mountain lions and other species.

Several hikes brought us alongside the mighty Tuolumne River.

We embarked on two particularly ambitious hikes. One hike led us to Bennettville, an historic mining town near Tioga Pass and Fantail Lake, and the other to Mount Watkins where you could almost reach out and touch Half Dome. ■



On the Mighty Tuolumne



Mt. Lyell



Hike to Gaylor Lakes



Looking at Half Dome from Mt. Watkins

INSIDE
**YACK & SNACK W/FELLOW
 SIERRA CLUB MEMBERS 11/21**
 USFS AIMS TO WEAKEN
 ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES
 & LIMIT PUBLIC INPUT
 2020 SIERRA CLUB CALENDARS

**JOIN OUR
 GROVELAND HIKING
 GROUP FOR A HIKE
 ANY THURSDAY >>>>**

Email Bob Asquith, Outings Leader:
bobasquith@gmail.com

Look for photos from recent outings
 on our "Hiking the 120" Facebook page



Beth Pratt joins us at Gaylor Lakes

USFS Aims to Weaken Environmental Policies and Limit Public Input

“THOSE WHO PROFIT FROM CONSUMING RESOURCES ON PUBLIC LANDS CONSISTENTLY OPPOSE DELAYS AND, REGARDLESS OF MERIT, OFTEN CONTEST FINDINGS THAT COME FROM ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWS.”

Under the current administration, the Forest Service proposes to weaken National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements and to allow many potentially harmful actions on national forest lands without the safeguards of scientific study and without public input concerning the actions.

An Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking was released in January 2018 that introduced these proposed changes to NEPA and sought public input. As reported in the Federal Register of Proposed Rules published in June, 2019, the Forest Service received 34,674 comments in response to the Notice, of which “33,000” came from “two form letter campaigns, which urged the Forest Service to reject any proposal to weaken the Agency’s NEPA process” and “600 comments (came) from a third form letter campaign in favor of the Agency’s...goals as stated in the ANPR.” Descriptions of the 1,229 “unique” comments received make it impossible to gauge public opinion regarding the newly proposed rules. Nevertheless, the Forest Service appears to be moving forward with new policies that will significantly undermine the original goals of NEPA.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS

The newly proposed NEPA rules will increase the use of Categorical Exclusions, which are “categories of actions that normally will not result in individual or cumulative significant impacts on the quality of the human environment and, therefore, do not require analysis or documentation in either an EA or EIS (40 CFR 1508.4).” In plain English, this would open the door to the approval of projects without first studying potential impacts. Examples of resource threats posed by such new categorical exclusions include:

- **Up to 4,200 acres of forest could be logged without normal studies or public input;**
- **Up to 5 miles of new road could be constructed with little public notice;**
- **Illegally created off-road-vehicle routes could be approved as official routes;**
- **Major mining exploration activities could be approved without regular studies.**

In addition to giving a “categorical exemption” to such potentially significant projects, the new revised policies would shortcut normal public comment opportunities. In many cases groups like the Sierra Club and concerned members of the public would never even learn about proposed projects until after they were approved, or possibly, already fully completed.

Along with these not-yet-approved proposed changes to Forest Service policies and plans, the Administration has already made changes to undermine the Endangered Species Act. The new policy changes allow for economics to override scientific reasons to protect species that are on the brink of extinction. The new changes would also restrict government wildlife agencies from considering the effects of climate change on at-risk species. Both changes, similar to the NEPA rollback proposals, are political gifts to industries that often destroy habitat, clear-cut forests, contaminate streams and rivers, and pollute air quality. Unfortunately, at this time there is no public comment period when citizens can oppose these changes. ■



For years the mining industry, timber industry, and other user groups have complained that federal agency projects take too long to plan and implement. Planning does take time. Before bulldozers clear a hillside or an open pit mine is approved or significant amounts of water are diverted from a river, studies are needed to predict the effects on water, wildlife, plants, and air quality. Those who profit from consuming resources on public lands consistently oppose delays and, regardless of merit, often contest the findings that come from environmental reviews.

Local Forest Supervisor Proposes Giagantic “Forest Treatments” Plan

A FEW MONTHS BACK, Stanislaus Forest Supervisor Jason Kuiken publicly proposed a truly massive “large landscape” plan to allow 750,000-acres worth of forest treatments across the Stanislaus Forest over 15 years. Not only is this the largest plan to ever be proposed for logging and other kinds of project actions in the local forest, it was proposed as a “condition-based” plan that would result in approval of projects without first doing field studies. This reflects the federal agency’s national strategy to fast-track projects with little environmental review (See story on previous page).

This giant condition-based plan was especially controversial because it would mean that the public would have no opportunity to appeal any logging project for 15 years once the overall plan got approved. Litigation was almost certain.

The Sierra Club representative participating in the local YSS forest stakeholder group shared strong concern about such a massive, unlimited plan. Other conservation groups and even local industry representatives also shared their concerns that the plan could end up in a lengthy legal gridlock with little real work getting done. All parties, including the Sierra Club representatives, agreed that there is a need for more forest treatments that might include prescribed burning, science-based thinning logging, mastication

of dense brush fields, and other fuel reduction activities in order to make the Stanislaus Forest more resilient to high severity wildfires, drought, and insect mortality. But the consensus of the stakeholder group was that this massive 15-year plan is not the solution.

As a result of the opposition that was raised, the YSS forest stakeholder group brought forward the concept of considering a 5-year plan that could allow all interests to be clearer on exactly what is intended and how any changes in project planning would be done. No final proposal is yet fully defined, but there is consensus that there are broad areas of overlapping agreement where local forest stakeholders can support consensus-based forest treatments. ■

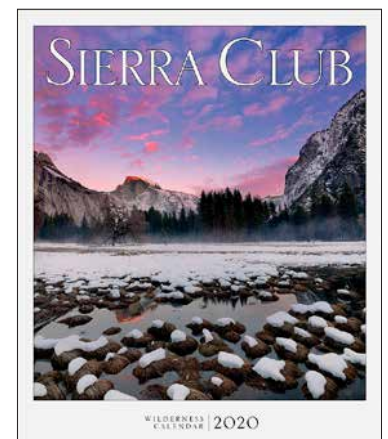
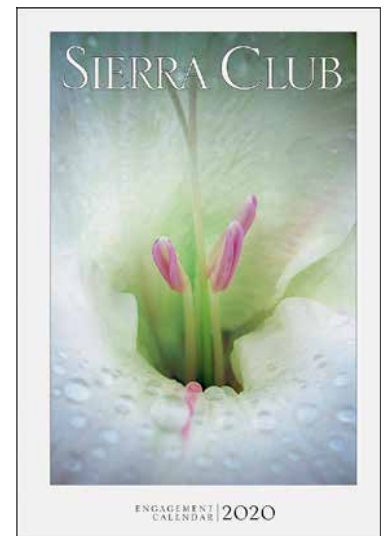
2020 Sierra Club Calendars Available Now!

Looking for a unique holiday present that beautifully expresses your values? Sierra Club Wilderness Calendars are the perfect gift.

2020 Calendars will be for sale at our Sierra-Tuolumne Group “Yack & Snack” gathering, 7pm on Thursday, Nov. 21st at the TUD office in Sonora. (more on this event on back page of this newsletter).

Bob Asquith will have calendars for sale on the Thursday hikes in Groveland. Calendars can also be ordered by calling Jennie Moiso at 533-9417.

Wall calendars are \$15 and the Engagement (desk) calendars are \$16. Proceeds go directly to benefit local conservation work by our Sierra Tuolumne Group. ■





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**SIERRA
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Tuolumne Group Executive Committee meets monthly at the Tuolumne Utility District boardroom, 18885 Nugget Rd. in East Sonora. For information on attending our next meeting, contact Trudy Craig at the email listed below.

Chair Trudy Craig, broadinski48@yahoo.com

Membership Elaine Hagen, elainehagen@att.net

Treasurer Kevin Rice, kjrice@ucdavis.edu

Outings Keith, Beth Martin, keithwmartin@sbcglobal.net

Chapter Delegate Kevin Rice, kjrice@ucdavis.edu

Webmaster Jim Bearden, jbearden@ieee.org

News Editor Todd Stolp, ststolp@sts-studios.com

Newsletter Design Joe David, jd@daviddesign.com

Secretary & Programs, Open Positions

We welcome your input and feedback.

NOTES & UPDATES

YACK & SNACK WITH FELLOW SIERRA CLUB MEMBERS 7PM THURSDAY NOVEMBER 21 IN SONORA

Come meet with our Executive Committee in a casual gathering at the Tuolumne Utilities District conference room (18885 Nugget Blvd. Sonora) at 7pm on Thursday, November 21st. Connect with other local members. Choose from tasty snacks and enjoy a 20-minute slide show by John Buckley, who will highlight current forest issues of local importance. **2020 Sierra Club Calendars will be for sale at this event. Opportunities for questions and discussions will abound!**

GET INVOLVED

Want to get more involved with your local Sierra Club group? Interested in joining our Executive Committee? Have a great idea for a local Sierra Club presentation? There are many ways to volunteer for whatever time you are able to give. Email Membership Chair, Elaine Hagen at elainehagen@att.net.

WOULD YOU RATHER RECEIVE NEWSLETTER VIA EMAIL?

If you would like to receive our newsletter via email either instead of, or in addition to our printed edition, email your request to mail@sierratuolumne.org.

The Sequoia Newsletter is designed to provide local Sierra Club members with a trusted source of information on people, events, and issues impacting our environment. Members can also find additional information on our updated web page: www.sierratuolumne.org.

