

# The CSERC Newsletter

*Like a stone tossed into still water, knowledge about environmental issues can ripple outward far beyond its beginning point, and perhaps return in a wave of concern, active involvement, and greater awareness of nature in the mountains and foothills around us.*



## CSERC'S "WILD WONDERS" PHOTO CONTEST IS OPEN!

Share your love for the beauty of our local region by entering CSERC's photo contest!

There are two categories in the "Wild Wonders" Photo Contest:

- **Best Native Wildlife Photo**
- **Best Natural Landscape Photo**

If bragging rights weren't enough, **CSERC is also offering cash prizes!** For **both** categories, the following cash prizes will be awarded:

**First Place: \$150**

**Second Place: \$75**

**Third Place: \$50**



Photos must be of landscapes in the Northern Yosemite region or of wildlife native to our region.

To enter, e-mail up to 10 of your photos as a JPEG at the highest possible resolution to Chelsea at [chelsea@cserc.org](mailto:chelsea@cserc.org) along with your contact information. The deadline for entries is **April 30th**.

Before you submit photos, visit [cserc.org](http://cserc.org) to review the photo contest rules. GOOD LUCK!!



# Lay-offs and funding freezes affect the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the National Park Service

Across our vast region, federal land policies can make a huge difference for water, wildlife, forests, and recreation. Having experienced, knowledgeable agency staff matters when it comes to managing resources. **So it was troubling news when the new Administration in Washington, DC fired 3,400 Forest Service staff, 800 BLM workers, and 1,000 Park Service employees.**

While the lay-off of the 3,400 USFS employees only affected 10% of that agency's work force, the firing of those permanent employees added cumulatively to a previous agency directive that eliminated the hiring of all seasonal employees this year except for firefighters.

Taken together and combined with the roughly 30% of USFS staff positions that were vacant at the start of the cutbacks, **the reduced Forest Service staff would likely struggle to provide basic services this summer for campgrounds, public safety, and the management of millions of acres of forest lands.**



A court decision suddenly reversed the firings, reinstating all the terminated USFS employees. But the court action only appeared to require that the fired employees be rehired for 45 days. That left open the potential for them to simply be fired again at some point.

The uncertainty caused by the downsizing of agencies has led many long-time federal employees to accept the DOGE offer to retire now and be paid until fall. As background context for all the employee cutbacks, the Administration has stated that more downsizing of agencies can be expected.

Separate from the lay-offs, as this newsletter goes to print, **Yosemite Park's long-awaited Visitor Access Plan is on hold. There has been no word as to whether Yosemite will implement a day-use reservation system this year or will instead allow unlimited numbers of vehicles and visitors.**

In past years when no reservations were required, traffic jams and crowding were rampant. Now with less staff to manage visitors, **the busy season without day-use reservations could be the most congested in the Park's long history.**

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Is a publication of the  
Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center  
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***CSERC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that works to protect the water, wildlife, and wild places of the Northern Yosemite region. CSERC relies entirely on grants and donations from people like you to do that critical mission.***

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# New policy makes timber production the priority on federal lands



In the midst of the Administration taking strong actions on a wide range of national and international matters, on March 3<sup>rd</sup> President Trump signed an Executive Order that mandates the expansion of timber production from federal forest lands. Blaming onerous environmental policies for the supposedly insufficient levels of logging, the new Order provides policy direction to undermine those policies and streamline approval of logging projects.

**The Order asserts that “...heavy-handed Federal policies have prevented full utilization...” of timber resources, and that “...these onerous policies have forced our Nation to rely upon imported lumber.”**

Consistent with the new Administration’s emphatic promise to “Drill, baby, drill!” for oil and gas on federal lands, the new timber production mandate aims to greatly boost timber production on Forest Service and BLM lands. It sets deadlines for agency actions and requires the agencies to set new firm timber targets.

The Order requires the USFS and BLM to apply new strategies to speed up the analysis of likely impacts of proposed logging projects on listed species. It directs the agencies to use the Endangered Species Committee to review projects that may threaten vulnerable species. The Committee (often called “the God Squad”) can authorize projects to go forward, even if they may wipe out a depleted, threatened species.

**Perhaps most significant, the new Order requires the federal agencies “...to suspend, revise, or rescind all existing regulations, orders, guidance documents, policies, settlements, consent orders and other agency actions that impose an undue burden on timber production.”**

Basically, any existing regulation to protect natural resources or scenic values could potentially be weakened or eliminated to speed up projects and raise timber production.

There is no way yet to accurately predict how widely federal agencies may work to undo environmental regulations that have been developed over many decades to reduce harm from logging for water, wildlife, and wild places on public forest lands.



## Randy Moore is out; Tom Schultz is in as new Forest Service Chief

In recent years, CSERC had a friend serving as Chief of the Forest Service in Washington, DC. Randy Moore had worked his way up through the agency and had served as the Regional Forester here in California before being elevated to Chief. His management style was thoughtful, friendly to all interests, and strongly supportive of all the agency's employees who served under him.

CSERC staff interacted with Randy in countless meetings over many years, and we had opportunities to show him resource issues of concern during visits to national forests of the Region. We knew that he would always at least consider the environmental perspective even as he often made decisions that maintained the status quo. His 45 years of experience with the Forest Service truly gave him a clear understanding of complex forest issues; and he led efforts to support diversity and respect within the agency.



Photo: Frances Chung - Politico

With the new Administration taking over, Chief Moore noted in a public statement that he had learned about the mass firing of USFS employees along with the rest of the public. On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, he announced his retirement, leaving with a message of encouragement and praise for Forest Service staff and for the agency's long-established multiple-use mission.

In sharp contrast to having a highly experienced USFS leader rise to the position of Chief over the agency, the Trump Administration chose to appoint a representative of timber interests to that position.



Tom Schultz is now the new Chief for the Forest Service. His background includes working for the Idaho Forest Group and working for state agencies in Montana and Idaho. He has extensive experience in forestry and the wood products industry.

As he noted in his initial statement to USFS employees upon his selection, he is the first Chief of the agency who did not come from, or previously work within, the agency. That is a profound shift – to now have the head of the Forest Service be someone who has no experience or familiarity with the agency's policies, multiple use objectives, or relationships with diverse public stakeholders.

CSERC is hopeful that Chief Schultz will strive to build broad consensus support for fuel reduction, recreation, resource protection, and other key values – along with wood production outputs.



# FOR REWARDING FUN, SIGN UP TO BE A CSERC VOLUNTEER

CSERC is gearing up for an even busier restoration workday season this year, and we need your help! Our staff is currently planning a number of volunteer project workdays, and we hope to see you at one (or more) of them!

Projects may include installing and repairing exclosure fencing around vulnerable meadows and riparian areas in order to protect these sensitive habitats from livestock impacts. Other projects may be invasive weed removal, litter-cleanup, trail maintenance work, and much more.

While the volunteer workdays do involve some “work,” they are also fun, educational, and a great way to meet like-minded CSERC members. At a time when divisions among people seem to be increasing, volunteer workdays bring unity, laughter, and rewarding activities.

**Sign up to be a 2025 CSERC Volunteer by emailing Chelsea at: [chelsea@cserc.org](mailto:chelsea@cserc.org)**

Once you sign up to be a volunteer, we'll make sure you receive timely information about upcoming restoration workdays so you can determine if a specific workday project is a good fit for you. If it is, simply let us know that you would like to participate.

**Please also spread the word to anyone you know who may also want to be a workday volunteer.** We would love to grow our volunteer roster so that we can increase our volunteer project efforts.

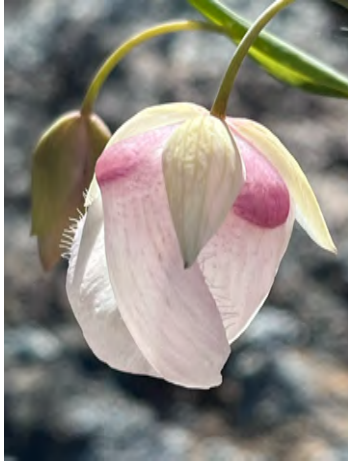
**Thank you!**



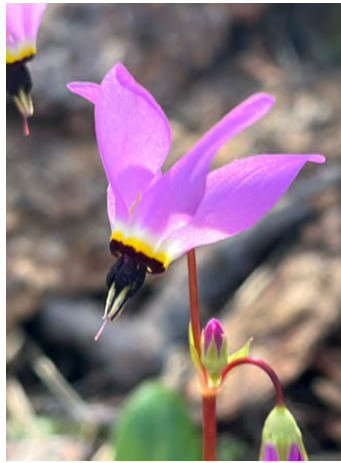


## Wildflowers are in bloom, so go out and enjoy the displays!

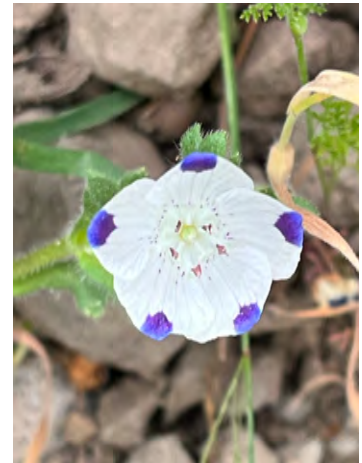
Spring has arrived, and so have the wildflowers! It's like being on a treasure hunt when you search for new wildflowers to add to those already discovered. Here are some of the species you may find in the local region.



Fairy Lantern



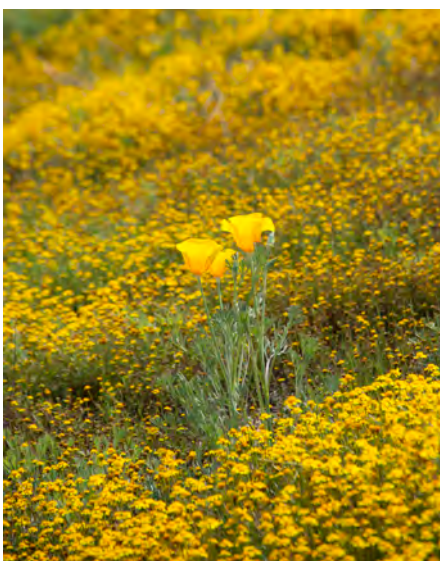
Shooting Star



Five Spot

Every year our CSERC staff marvels as the wildflower blooms slowly unfold – from the low elevation locations (like the Red Hills Special Management Area and Table Mountain) on up to mid and higher elevations as spring transitions into summer and summer into fall.

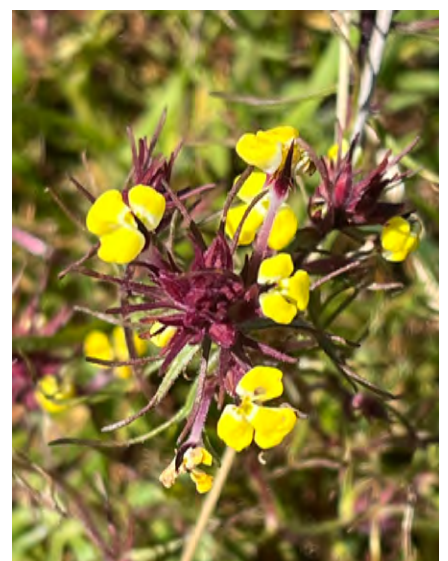
We encourage you to get out to explore and to enjoy the colorful displays of our region's wildflowers. These photos show just a few examples of the visual delights you are likely to discover. Not only will you often find hot spots of colorful diversity, but at times it can be surprising to find different hues of the same species of wildflowers that vary depending upon the location and site conditions. Wildflower areas can even be prime areas to take colorful landscape photos for a certain organization's photo contest.



California Poppies  
surrounded by Goldfields



Indian Paintbrush



Butter and Eggs



## A few suggested day hikes to enjoy the dazzling wildflowers



In the Northern Yosemite region, you can chase the wildflowers as they ascend the west slope of the range and be dazzled by not only their colors, but also by their intricate shapes.

Some of our staff's favorite locations to begin the wildflower search each spring are New Melones, Glory Hole Recreation Area, Knight's Ferry Recreation Area, Table Mountain, Peoria Mountain, Red Hills Recreation Management Area, Wards Ferry Road (past the road closure - walking down to the Tuolumne River and back up), and the Westside Trail near Tuolumne. Please note that the first three locations do require paid parking.

It's a good idea to plan your hike, to have a map of the area, bring plenty of water, consider sun protection, wear appropriate clothing and shoes, and – of course, bring your camera!





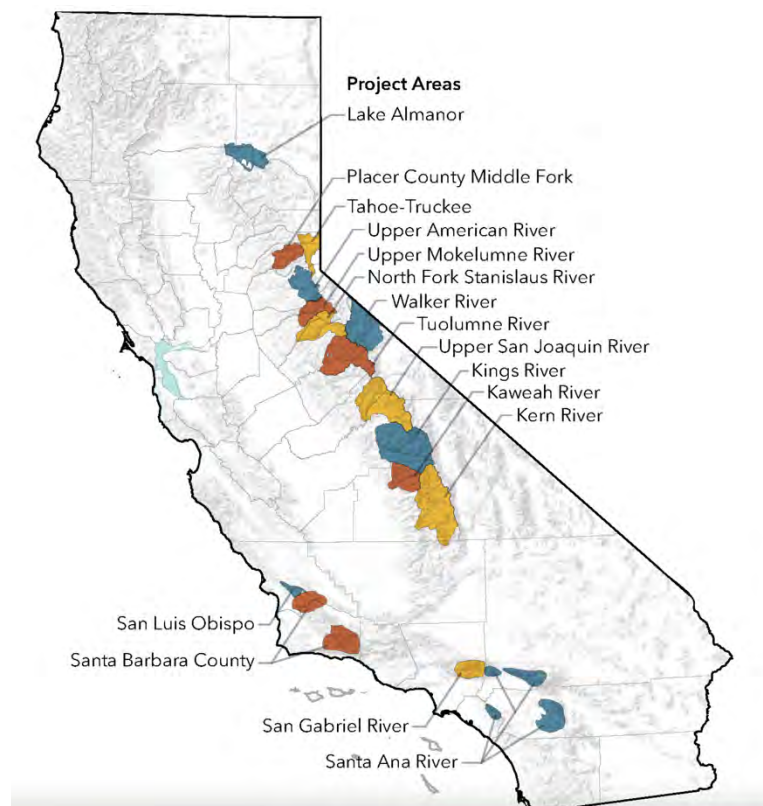
# Cloud-seeding is widely applied across the Sierra Nevada region despite little evidence that it definitively enhances precipitation



In case you aren't familiar with "cloud-seeding" or weather modification, the concept is simple. **During storms, water agencies use airplanes or a high-elevation ground station to disperse an active seeding agent (such as silver iodide) into moisture-laden clouds. The aim is for ice crystals to form and for water to condense into extra precipitation that will then fall within targeted watersheds.** If cloud-seeding works, extra run-off means additional hydroelectric power generation and additional water supplies for agriculture and other water uses.

Despite many studies that have been done over the years by water agencies and consultants (who often have economic motivations to claim cloud-seeding works), **there is no solid evidence that cloud-seeding consistently works or that it's cost-effective.** Results are always uncertain due to the variability of weather, with no clear way to prove that extra water is actually generated by the seeding.

Modeling generally predicts that cloud-seeding should provide some degree of extra rain or snow (often estimated to be somewhere between 4% to 15% increased precipitation for the storm event). Because they believe that the cost of cloud-seeding results in enough water to produce a substantial profit, water agencies spend large amounts of money to cloud-seed, even in years when rainfall levels are high.



CA Water Plan – Map of Precipitation Enhancement watersheds

Many years ago, when initial proposals to cloud-seed in the Central Sierra region were open for public comment, **CSERC raised concern over the repeated introduction of silver iodide into mountain watersheds. We pointed out that silver can be toxic to fish eggs and amphibians, and we noted that silver in the snowpack almost certainly washes downslope to concentrate in high elevation lakes and ponds.**

Cloud-seeding interests countered that the amount of silver introduced into mountain ecosystems is generally low, and that there was no evidence of silver bioaccumulating at toxic levels. Few studies, however, have actually measured silver concentrations in seeded versus untreated watersheds. Cloud-seeding proponents also argue that with climate change causing so many droughts, society's need for water justifies risks from elevated silver concentrations in scattered sites in remote mountain areas.



## Discovering a mighty canyon live oak with truly massive limbs



By Dr. Tom Hofstra, staff ecologist

Our staff sees many big, old trees. We often look for the largest, oldest trees when placing cameras for our wildlife surveys; and we are a key source of knowledge about old growth trees during Forest and Park planning. We appreciate exceptional trees, but we have high standards for being impressed.

This winter I was traveling along Italian Bar Road above the South Fork Stanislaus River canyon. I had traveled this route many times before, but it was different this time. Recent forest thinning work had opened up the view from the road, revealing the falls along Deer Creek and many large old oaks – black oak, interior live oak, and canyon live oak. The forest thinning made the forest healthier, more resistant to wildfire, and more aesthetically pleasing.

**Something caught my eye.** I realized that it had been a huge tree. **Indeed, it was a truly gargantuan oak – perhaps the largest canyon live oak I’ve ever seen.**

I was stunned by the enormity of the tree and by the fact it had been concealed in these woods for so long - finally revealed by a thinning project. Upon returning to the office, I shared about the tree with the rest of the staff. Days later, some of them went to photograph the tree, which they affectionately named “Gus.”

Proving the age of the tree would require counting its growth rings, the oldest of which are surely decayed and long gone from the center of the tree. What is certain is that this huge oak has endured for centuries despite wind events, wildfires, and droughts.

For scale, in the photo above, note that John is standing just to the side of the trunk. To see this tree, go out Italian Bar Road and look along the west side a short distance south of the 4N16 turn-off. Be careful to do no harm. Whether or not you go to view this big tree, we encourage you to be on the lookout for other exceptional trees and to share their location with our CSERC staff.





# Wolves continue to expand their range across California

Just over a decade ago, no one would have expected that gray wolves would solidly establish a population in California a century after being eradicated by wolf foes. Then a male wolf (designated LAS02M by biologists) from Oregon slipped into the state and eventually joined with other wolves to form the Lassen pack. He sired multiple litters before disappearing in 2019. The pack has continued with other wolves.

Years later, a male wolf labeled OR93 also entered California from Oregon. Radio-collared, he was tracked by researchers as he wandered south through the Sierra Nevada to the Fresno area, then west to Monterey County, and finally back to Kern County. There he was killed by a vehicle after traveling nearly 1,000 miles across the State.

**What began as a handful of wolves in far northern California has gradually become a full-fledged population of widely scattered wolves in the state.** Monitoring surveys by California Fish and Wildlife, combined with helicopter captures and radio-collaring, reveal that there are currently at least seven established wolf packs plus individual wolves that are not clearly connected to any pack. Almost all sightings are north of the Lake Tahoe region. **But south of our area, the Yowlumni pack in Tulare County has been seen multiple times by biologists and the public. That pack raised six pups in 2023 and seven pups last year.**



Photo - Paxaby

The return of wolves is a storyline that is positive for those who see wolves as iconic symbols of wild nature. But for ranchers, the spread of wolves across areas containing livestock has resulted in frequent depredation as certain wolf packs have become accustomed to killing calves, and even adult cattle.

To reduce financial impacts for ranchers when wolves kill livestock, the State provides fair-market compensation for losses caused by wolves. The state also pays for non-lethal deterrents to reduce wolf presence near livestock. In February, California Fish and Wildlife crews used aircraft to capture 12 wolves, test them for disease, and use genetic analysis to establish their blood lines and their relatedness to various packs. All 12 wolves are now radio collared, allowing them to be tracked so that ranchers can be alerted if wolves are nearby.

**So far at least OR93 and probably the breeding pair in the Tulare County pack were wolves that journeyed through the Northern Yosemite area on their travels.**

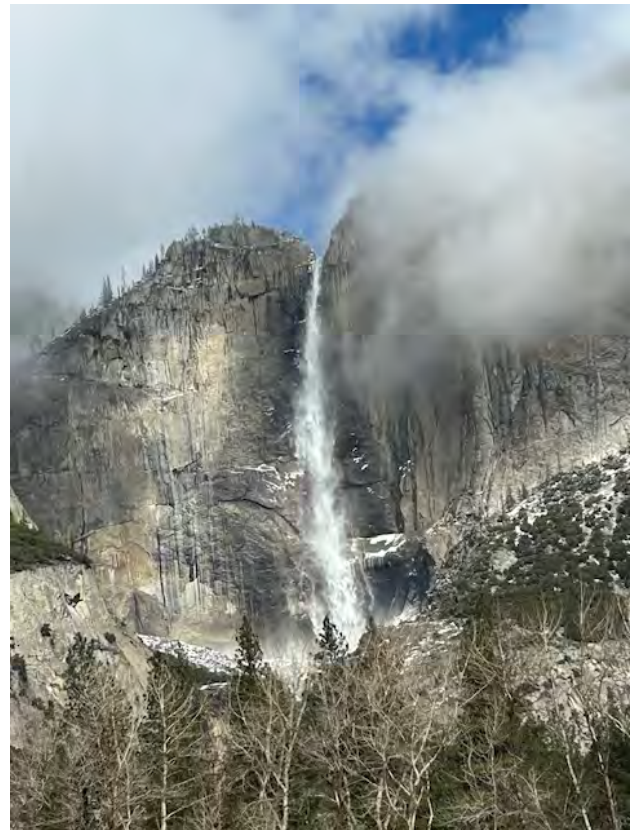
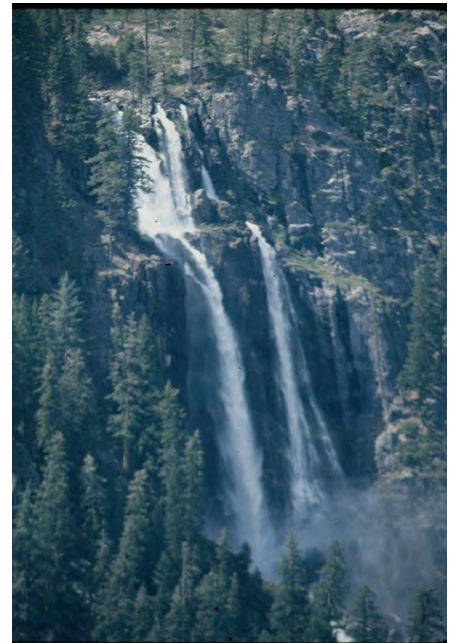
**IF LUCK IS WITH YOU, YOU MIGHT SEE A WOLF AT SOME POINT IN THE LOCAL REGION.**



Photo - CA Fish and Wildlife



## WATERFALL CHALLENGE: Can you match the waterfall to the names on the list?



**Which waterfalls do you recognize?**

**Which is Clark Fork, Sentinel, Bridalveil, Upper Yosemite, Niagara?**

Correct answers: Left to right, top down, in alphabetical order



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## Can you identify waterfalls of the local region?



It's a prime time of year to savor the beauty of cascading waterfalls. In Yosemite National Park, the local region has some of the world's best-known falls, but there are many other highly scenic local waterfalls that are also worth visiting.

Inside this newsletter, look for a **Waterfall Challenge** to see how well you can recognize a sampling of local waterfalls. And as our staff collectively agrees, PLEASE always be extremely careful around surging streams and rivers. Almost every year, slick, slippery rocks and rushing, ice-cold water result in tragic loss of life. Be waterwise and be safe.

### SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER

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