

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.



So much to discover and enjoy in the summer season



Photo of acorn woodpeckers by Peggy Sells

This newsletter could easily be filled with page after page of photos of colorful wildflowers, diverse wildlife, or some of the spectacular scenic vistas that reward those who explore the Northern Yosemite region this time of year.

Look for these and more as you enjoy discovering nature's treasures this summer.



Ring-necked snake



Snow plants



Washington Lily

New leaders at Yosemite Park face all the ongoing challenges along with shifting administration priorities for National Parks

A new superintendent and deputy superintendent have both recently arrived at Yosemite National Park to take on key leadership roles.

Ray McPadden is the new Acting Yosemite Park Superintendent. Ray was previously Superintendent at Mojave National Preserve and Castle Mountains National Monument. He has 15 years of experience with the Park Service, and he also brings a background of serving in an elite U.S. Army unit in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Danika Globokar has joined the Yosemite staff in the role of Acting Deputy Superintendent. She has a diverse career background and lots of enthusiasm for being at Yosemite. Prior to coming to Yosemite, she served as Chief of the Major Construction Division for the Park Service's Pacific West Region.



CSERC's director had a chance to talk with them at a "meet and greet" session. It was easy to see why they've become rising leaders in the Park Service. **In their roles, they'll face increased Administration pressure to boost the Park's economic outputs and maximize visitation. They'll also deal with shifts in policy direction.**

For example, on July 3rd, the President signed an executive order mandating higher national park fees for international visitors and revoked an Obama-era memorandum that promoted diversity of workforces at national parks and other federal lands.



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Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center
P.O. Box 396, Twain Harte, CA 95383***

Phone: **(209) 586-7440**
E-mail: **johnb@cserc.org**
Website: **www.cserc.org**

***CSERC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization
working 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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CSERC staff ramps up watchdog monitoring in Yosemite after day-use reservation system is limited to only two months



For years Yosemite Park has grown in popularity, which often results in high numbers of vehicles and long delays at entrance stations or periodic traffic jams in Yosemite Valley. Park officials have acknowledged that without day-use reservations in place, peak season visitation frequently exceeds the Park's capacity to provide sufficient shuttle service, or to ensure that vehicles are parked only in designated, appropriate places. Unlimited vehicles can also violate legal thresholds that spell out how many vehicles and "people at one time" can be in the eastern half of Yosemite Valley.

When the Administration allowed DOGE to slash Park Service staffing, it initially only made a minimal difference in the number of permanent employees at Yosemite Park. But as DOGE pressure was applied to long-time Park Service staff to take early retirement, more permanent employees opted to leave. Some were key staff who had years of experience hiring seasonals. Without them, nearly half of seasonal Park Service positions have reportedly still not been filled.

This year instead of the four or five month-long day-use reservation systems that were effective in recent years, daily reservations are only required during a two-month period (June 15th to August 15th).

Our Center's staff has spent numerous days in the Park to see if parking areas are overflowing or how long wait times are at entrance stations. We've found that from late morning into early afternoon, Yosemite Valley is often at capacity. Signs block entry to most Valley parking areas, and vehicles idle in full parking lots as drivers wait for someone to leave. On a recent Sunday, even with reservations required, every parking area in Yosemite Valley was full at noon time, and cars were parked along both sides of the main roads and sometimes illegally squeezed in-between trees at some pullouts.



Adding to the problem is the decision this year to allow visitors without reservations to enter at 2 p.m. when visitation is still very high. Our staff has seen waves of vehicles arriving at Yosemite Valley and other destinations a half hour after those without reservations are allowed in. When parking areas are full, those who are arriving simply add to the crowding.



Giant wood pellet project is revised to reduce controversy and to shift to supplying alternative fuels and oriented strand board

Over the past three years, the **Golden State Natural Resources (GSNR) biomass pilot project** went through planning that would allow two huge wood pellet facilities to operate – one in Tuolumne County and one in Lassen County. The proposed plan called for sending massive quantities of wood pellets by rail to the Port of Stockton, where giant cargo ships would transport the wood pellets to Europe and Asia.

Some opposition to the project was based on accurate concerns such as the project adding to air quality problems in the Stockton area, or the need for enormous amounts of energy for collecting the biomass and transporting the wood pellets, or the predicted extreme levels of GHG emissions.

Some strongly touted criticisms were misinformed – such as claims that it was a Drax Energy Company project, or that it would poison the air for Tuolumne County residents, or that it would result in more clearcuts in local forests. Those inaccurate claims resulted in many well-meaning citizens signing petitions against the project.



In response to over 5,500 comments on the project's 1,300-page DEIR, GSNR evaluated three options. Option 1 would continue the original controversial plan. Option 2 would scale down the project and shift to converting waste wood into wood chips for domestic markets, rather than shipping wood pellets overseas. Option 3 was to pause development of the project and focus on supporting existing biomass efforts.

CSERC was grateful to learn that the GSNR Board voted to adopt Option 2. The new plan is to collect waste wood “forest residuals” left after logging projects and to collect “lumber mill residuals.” **Those residuals would be made into wood chips to supply a variety of new alternative fuel programs – ranging from making green methanol to sustainable aviation fuel to the production of hydrogen as a fuel for trucks.** Using biomass to create alternative fuels could make good use of waste wood that is now just burned in the forest.



The new GSNR plan will also evaluate the feasibility of producing **oriented strand board**, which utilizes small diameter roundwood to create an engineered wood panel building material that is in demand across the West.

The new project proposes to create a wood innovation campus in Tuolumne County to look for even more biomass uses. A revised DEIR will look at the new aspects of the project and then allow opportunities for additional public input.

Restoration workday projects get meaningful work done, and offer opportunities to meet other CSERC volunteers



At the June volunteer workday shown above at Ackerson Meadow in Yosemite National Park, CSERC volunteers joined Park staff in planting 1,000 wetland plants as part of on-going efforts for the giant meadow restoration project. As it turned out, the timing was also right for the volunteers to help unload an additional 7,000 wetland plants from a delivery truck!

Volunteers also joined CSERC staff in a number of workdays that were needed to construct or repair important fences at Wet Meadow Springs, Fiddlers Green, and other sites where livestock need to be excluded to protect meadow habitat. Last month our staff also worked with volunteers to remove invasive weeds at a high elevation meadow area within the Donnell Fire landscape. More workday projects are planned.

There is still time for YOU to sign up get notified about upcoming volunteer workday opportunities this summer. Call our volunteer coordinator Chelsea at (209) 586-7440 or email her at chelsea@cserc.org to let her know you're interested.



Unprecedented changes at the U.S. Forest Service shrink staffing and unravel decades of agency policies

It would be hard to overstate how dramatic the changes have been for the U.S. Forest Service under the new Administration in Washington, DC. First there was the firing of 3,400 Forest Service employees by DOGE. A court later directed that those fired employees should be re-hired, but media coverage described that the terminated employees were not actually allowed to physically return to work or access computers – only to be on the payroll temporarily.

Pressure for remaining Forest Service employees to take “early retirement” motivated some to take the offer, resulting in many key staff resigning. National media coverage then reported that the Secretary of Agriculture planned to significantly reduce the Forest Service’s administrative employees at national offices in Washington, DC and at ten regional offices across the country.



CSERC staff learned that in a single week, a large percentage of the Forest Service natural resource employees who worked at the Regional Office in Vallejo were let go or re-assigned to open positions on individual national forests. Funding freezes interfered with contracts, and many programs were paused.

All the staff reductions are on top of a decision by the Forest Service last fall to not hire seasonal employees this year except in firefighting positions. That action was reportedly taken because the budget allocated to the Forest Service by Congress last year was hundreds of millions of dollars short of funding needed for existing staff and operating functions. Without seasonal employees, the agency admits that restrooms may be cleaned less often, trash may accumulate, and less field season work may get done.

In response, CSERC has attempted to support the local Stanislaus Forest by doing extra efforts on top of our normal work. With limited wildlife staff left on the Forest, CSERC has stepped up to do more wildlife surveys for key species. We’ve increased our work to put up meadow fences that are the responsibility of the USFS, but which won’t get put up or maintained due to the agency’s limited capacity.



All the agency downsizing is not as alarming as the Roadless Rule being targeted and media reports that the agency may be planning to weaken or eliminate key national environmental policies -- such as diameter limits that currently protect large trees or agency requirements for limited operating periods during logging projects to protect endangered species. **As the agency shifts to maximizing timber production as the top priority, keeping longtime environmental policies is essential** (as described in the article about the MAC Project on the following page).

Rescinding the Roadless Rule would open 58.5 million acres of wild areas to logging and roads. It's essential to show opposition.

The 2001 Roadless Rule was a significant conservation victory for environmentalists, fishermen, hunters, wildlife enthusiasts, backpackers, and those who simply cherish wild places. [The Roadless Policy set aside wild, roadless areas on national forests and on Bureau of Land Management lands to be protected from road building and from commercial timber management.](#)



In total, 58.5 million acres of undeveloped wild lands outside of Congressionally designated Wilderness areas were mapped and identified for preservation.

In the Stanislaus Forest, inventoried roadless areas include Bell Meadow and its scenic aspen groves, the core canyon of the Tuolumne River, and the rugged Bald Peak roadless area north of the Sonora Pass. At left, the Eagle roadless area abuts the Emigrant Wilderness and stretches across thousands of acres of scenic ridges, lush meadows, and stands of unlogged forests.

There are other local roadless areas – each has its own unique reason for still being wild and pristine. All are poised to lose Roadless Rule protection. [Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins announced last month that the Administration is rescinding the Roadless Rule with the intent to allow roads and logging.](#)

This is a huge blow to all who have worked so many years to keep the remaining roadless wildlands protected from roads, logging, and oil and gas drilling. **The claim that roads are needed to allow fuel reduction treatments in those areas is bogus. Roads actually increase the rate of wildfires, plus the Roadless Rule already allowed for prescribed fire and fuel reduction treatments in roadless areas.**

Even if you doubt that your Congressional representative cares about the environment, it is important to ensure that he or she knows that many members of the public oppose the elimination of protection for wild, roadless areas. Unlike some complex issues, the gutting of the Roadless Rule is straightforward. Preserving wild, roadless areas on Forest Service and BLM lands benefits wildlife, protects rare and sensitive plants, provides outstanding wildland recreation, and costs very little in agency oversight in comparison to high levels of recreational visitors. [5calls.org](#) is a free and easy way you can contact legislators.

It makes no sense to build more expensive roads on federal lands when just on USFS lands alone, there are already 371,000,000 miles of existing roads – enough to reach to the moon and halfway back. The government cannot even come close to maintaining all its existing roads on USFS and BLM lands, so building even more for money-losing logging projects in remote areas is a boondoggle worth opposing.

After years of collaboration and planning, the giant MAC Project is finally poised to be released for public comments

The MAC Project is still not fully defined for exactly how many acres will have “forest treatments.” But the project area of 250,000 acres (400 square miles) has been the focus of three years of studies, collaborative discussions, and computer modeling. **THE MAC PROJECT IS THE SINGLE LARGEST FOREST PROJECT EVER PLANNED FOR THE REGION.**

The forest treatments being analyzed include the mastication of dense, nearly impenetrable brush fields by heavy equipment to open up access for people and wildlife and to reduce the woody fuel levels. As proposed, high-tech logging equipment and bulldozers will create many miles of fuel breaks (see photo below) to provide safer locations for fire crews to work to suppress wildfires. Areas with dense forest stands would be selectively logged to remove many small and medium size trees to reduce the risk of high severity wildfires and to also reduce tree mortality during periods of drought.



CSERC and a diversity of other forest stakeholders who participate in the **Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)** have spent years in detailed discussions that have led to collaborative agreements about how to design the huge project. The goal is a precedent-setting proposal that will benefit the local economy while sufficiently protecting water, wildlife, recreation, and wild areas.

One key ACCG member – the Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority (UMRWA) – has invested major funding for planning to move the project to this stage. **After reaching consensus agreement on key issues, ACCG currently supports the proposed forest treatment plan and the emphasis on protecting critical infrastructure and communities from the threat of extreme wildfires.**



At the point of celebrating this giant project being ready to be released for public feedback, it is somewhat uncertain whether the Forest Service will fully stick with ACCG’s consensus agreements that form the basis for the project. At the national level, anti-conservation mandates could undercut the hard-fought consensus.

One compelling reason for the Forest Service at the national level to stick with the stakeholder group’s proposed plan is that if the MAC Project gets approved as now crafted, then ACCG (and UMRWA) will be at the forefront in pushing to get millions of dollars in grants to begin to implement the needed treatments.

Surveys for rare, at-risk species are one of CSERC's priorities



This photo of a well-camouflaged Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog (SNYLF) was taken recently by CSERC staff while doing meadow assessments at a high elevation meadow. Our meadow and riparian area surveys early in the field season provide a baseline of vegetative conditions for the grasses, bushes, and riparian plants that provide critical habitat along streams and ponds - not just for the SNYLF, but also for the Yosemite Toad (YT). The toad was listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as “threatened” in the same year (2014) that the frog was listed as “endangered.”

For decades the SNYLF and the YT have been facing multiple threats – ranging from climate change (and less wetland habitat) to intensive livestock grazing in high-elevation meadows. Where the growing season is short, cattle often diminish or overgraze the tall grasses that provide critical shelter for amphibians.

Then there is the chytrid fungus, an introduced deadly fungal disease that affects amphibians worldwide. Under previous administrations, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other federal agencies worked together to help populations of mountain yellow-legged frogs fight the deadly skin fungus. In recent years, when field tests discovered outbreaks of the fungus in remote, high elevation lakes where frog populations were previously fungus free, a rapid-response team hurried to the location to apply an anti-fungal drug treatment protocol before the lake’s frog population plummeted or disappeared completely.



Captured frogs were placed in plastic bins with diluted medicine and water for 10 minutes of treatment daily for eight days to boost their immune system to resist the pathogen. Follow-up monitoring showed that frog populations at lakes with treatments had high survival rates of frogs. The teams doing the studies described the work as making the critical difference between persistence and extinction of local frog populations.

Both lower photos taken by Issac Chellman, CA DFW

It is uncertain whether sufficient funding and staffing is available this year to do these kinds of intensive amphibian recovery efforts (especially for federal agencies that have suffered significant staff reductions and funding cuts). CSERC staff rarely encounters SNYLFs while doing meadow surveys, and YT are also only occasionally seen at high elevations. If you see either, take photos and share them with our staff.



The hard-to-find mountain lady's slipper looks as if might fit the foot of a tiny fairy in a magical forest setting

Mountain lady's slipper (*Cypripedium montanum*) is a rare and special find in the Stanislaus Forest and Yosemite Park. As the name suggests, mountain lady's slipper is characteristic of mid-elevation to subalpine mountain landscapes ranging from British Columbia and Alaska south to the Sierra Nevada.

A member of the Orchid Family, moccasin flower (as it is also known), displays the typical structure of the flowers of this family such as bilateral symmetry, three petals, three sepals, and a "column" composed of the fused stamens and style. One petal (lip or labellum) is often large and colorful and serves as a landing pad for pollinators. The unique structure of orchid flowers is highly adapted for pollination by specific insects or other animals. Often orchids are pollinated by just one species of animal, highlighting the importance of preserving all biodiversity.



The mountain lady's slipper is primarily pollinated by bees that are attracted to the flower's fragrant scent and are tricked into entering the pouch-like labellum, where they are temporarily trapped. As they try to escape, they brush against the reproductive parts of the flower, picking up and depositing pollen.



Mountain lady's slipper is very rare locally and can be extremely difficult to find unless you know where to look. It typically occurs primarily in moist areas but can also be found on dry slopes in mixed-evergreen and conifer forest. One surprising account from 1944 reports it at the Twain Harte Post Office. It blooms March through August.

If you are fortunate enough to discover patches of the plants in bloom while hiking through the forest, you can easily understand why it received its compelling name. Please do not publicize any locations of this rare plant, and obviously, be careful to avoid any impacts.

CSERC receives no federal or state funding – we depend on donations from *you*, our members, to defend nature in our region



CSERC staff setting up a wildlife survey camera station in a crest zone location.

We are often asked if CSERC has been affected by the cuts in federal grants led by DOGE. The answer is ‘no’. We neither apply for nor receive any federal grants. Likewise, we don’t receive any state grants.

In our work to protect water, wildlife, and wild places in the Northern Yosemite region, CSERC maintains full independence from government funding.

Our work is supported by tax-deductible contributions – **many set up as recurring donations at our website** – and private foundation grants. Please visit www.cserc.org and click on “Donate” to learn more. **Your support truly matters. Thank you!**

Donating stock can reduce or eliminate capital gains taxes

CSERC recently signed up with a new service that streamlines the complex process of donating stock to charitable organizations like ours. Stock Donator provides support for both sides of the transaction, is free to donors, and charges only a 1.9% fee to non-profit recipients. To learn more, visit **StockDonator.com** or contact our Center’s program director, Stan Dodson, at stan@cserc.org or (209) 586-7440.



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It's fawning season again, so please look, but don't touch



Last week our staff saw a doe that was so pregnant, she looked as if she was ready to burst. It's that time of year when delicate tiny fawns begin to show up in sites from the foothills up into the forest. A doe can give birth to two to three fawns, which will be left frozen in place until she periodically returns to nurse them.

Often fawns will show no fear of humans, but it's essential to give them space and minimize disturbing them when they are so vulnerable. People often feel the urge to "rescue" a fawn that appears abandoned, but for the fawn's sake, please don't interfere. Look but don't touch.

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