

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.



For early spring wildflowers, visit one of our local river canyons

Spring comes early in the river canyons of our region. Rivers can be challenging to access, but the reward can be spectacular spring-time vistas and early wildflowers. The Merced, Tuolumne, Stanislaus, and Mokelumne Rivers all have portions of their canyons with prime wildflower views.

The Merced River flows out of Yosemite National Park and winds down through a deep canyon. Much of this stretch runs along Highway 140. Many drivers – intent on reaching Yosemite – don't stop to admire the abundant wildflowers. But the route offers many viewing opportunities to enjoy the river and the flowers. One of these is the Hite Cove Trail along the South Fork of the Merced.

On the Tuolumne River, the Wards Ferry Bridge spans the river between Sonora and Groveland. Normally access is provided by the steep, narrow, and winding Wards Ferry Road. But when the road is closed (as it currently is), it makes an excellent hiking and biking trail, providing breathtaking views of the river canyon and its abundant wildflowers.

Accessing the Stanislaus River, the Camp Nine Road is steep and bumpy. From Parrotts Ferry Road near Vallecito, the road winds down to the river. Across the footbridge at the road's end, you can access Clark Flat where wildflowers are plentiful, and a sandy beach provides river access.



The Mokelumne River canyon is accessible via Electra Road, upstream of the Highway 49 bridge. Three miles of wildflowers line the road following the river to Vaught's Beach. Middle Bar Road provides access to the river downstream of the Highway 49 bridge. For another three miles off Highway 49, this road takes you through blue oak woodlands and wildflower-laden grasslands to the Middle Bar Bridge.

Latest update on the highly important Yosemite Park visitor access plan

For years CSERC has pressed the Park Service to manage the number of visitors and vehicles entering Yosemite Park to reduce traffic jams, crowding, and congestion. Park resources can be stressed or damaged whenever too many vehicles and visitors crowd into popular places such as Yosemite Valley or other popular areas.

At times Park officials have agreed that there needs to be strong and effective limits. The only sure way to achieve that goal is for the Park to put in place a day-use reservation system during the busiest half of the year that allows Park officials to set whatever number of vehicles and visitors is judged to be low enough to avoid traffic jams and to adequately protect precious Park resources.

Outside the Park, new lodging development continues to get built to take advantage of profits from Yosemite tourism. Visitor-serving businesses know that any limits on vehicles or visitors might mean less profit. As a result, many regional businesses and county supervisors have opposed any plan that includes day-use reservations.

Over a year ago, Park officials launched a “two-year” Visitor Access Management planning process to create a long-term plan to address the crowding and congestion. But with so much lobbying by businesses and politicians, Yosemite officials acknowledge that there is pressure to keep the status quo with no reservations or limits.

A final decision on the Visitor Access Management Plan is supposed to be made near the end of the year. At the moment there is no public comment period open for input, but at least one opportunity will be available prior to any final decision. That decision could reflect the passion of John Muir to keep Yosemite an iconic natural cathedral, or it could reflect the desire by many business interests to have the Park managed for profits. **CSERC urges members to support a long-term plan with clear limits that will help protect Yosemite as a legacy for future generations.**



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

Phone: (209) 586-7440

E-mail: stan@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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A tragic fatal attack by a mountain lion reminds of the risks that exist within the forest ecosystem and elsewhere in the state



Photo courtesy Peggy Sells

On March 23rd, two adult brothers were reportedly searching for shed deer antlers in the forest near Georgetown about 30 miles west of Lake Tahoe. The men were unexpectedly attacked by a mountain lion.

One brother was badly injured, but he managed to call for help. Responding deputies found that his brother had been killed by the lion. Soon afterwards, the lion was tracked down by State wildlife officials and killed.

This tragic loss of life reflects the reality that across the Sierra Nevada region, nature can often pose unforeseen, deadly risks. Slipping into a surging stream or river during the spring or early summer can be fatal. Lightning poses a low risk statistically despite thousands of strikes each year in the region, but fatal strikes do occur. Bee stings—for those with allergic sensitivity—can kill recreating visitors, and rattlesnake strikes very rarely, but occasionally, do result in fatal incidents. Falls are a special risk in places like Yosemite.

HOW RARE ARE FATAL LION ATTACKS?

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife website shows that in the past 38 years there have been 21 reported mountain lion attacks on humans in the state. Given that tens of millions of people in California are out in the midst of lion habitat each year (or live in areas where lions are present), the number of lion attacks makes it clear that the overall risk from mountain lions is extremely low.

It is even more rare for an attack to be fatal. In 1994 a woman jogger was killed by a lion near Auburn. In that same year a woman was killed by a lion in Cuyamaca State Park near San Diego. In 2004 a lion fatally attacked a man in Orange County and wounded a woman with him. And now the fourth known fatality has occurred from this latest mountain lion attack near Georgetown. That totals 4 fatal lion attacks in 38 years.

While the risk is extremely low, all those out in natural areas should be prepared to respond to a lion encounter or other unexpected threats. Experts advise to raise your arms, yell, clap hands, maintain eye contact, and stay close to any other person to intimidate a lion that shows menacing behavior. It's wise to not have children run ahead on forest trails or to wander from adults in secluded natural settings. Being prudent can at least reduce the threat of a risky wildlife encounter. Be prepared and aware of the forces of nature.

CSERC steps away from one stakeholder group, even as we intensify our efforts with the ACCG collaborative group

As a founding member of the **Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions (YSS)** forest stakeholder group, CSERC is grateful for many years of collaborating with timber interests, Tuolumne County, recreation and business interests, and other stakeholders. From the beginning, we've served on the YSS Leadership Team; and we've consistently been able to praise the County and local timber industry representatives for truly being excellent partners in efforts to gain significant funding for projects to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk.

Yet a month ago, **after extensive internal discussion, our staff chose to leave YSS.** That decision was based upon a number of reasons, but one key factor was our frustration that the Stanislaus Forest staff has frequently not been in alignment with what CSERC believes are essential conservation needs. From not adequately managing livestock that affects meadows and riparian areas; to what we believe are mis-marked hazard tree logging projects; to the agency shifting large landscape planning to more controversial proposals – the Forest Service has often taken actions that CSERC cannot support. By being such a visible member of YSS, CSERC was frequently being described in the media or by agency statements as one of the conservation groups supposedly endorsing local Forest Service actions. Unfortunately, that has often not been the case.

We expressed to regional Forest Service officials that our withdrawal from YSS was also due to agency decisions rarely showing that public comments actually matter. **“Thank you for your comments. Your comments are important to us!”** ...is often a theme promoted by Forest officials. But few major, meaningful changes result from public input. Despite that, CSERC continues to submit detailed requests for changes in the **SERAL 2.0 Project**, which currently proposes to log 40” diameter trees and which also proposes a delayed decision that could approve the spraying of herbicides over thousands of acres of public forest land.



Although CSERC has left YSS, **our staff has intensified our efforts to work with a separate stakeholder group** that covers the northern portion of the Stanislaus Forest and the southern portion of the Eldorado Forest. Stakeholders in that **Amador Calaveras Consensus Group** (at left) are collaborating to create the largest forest treatment project ever planned for our region.

Called the **Phase 2 Project**, it could include a vast area of 250,000 acres. CSERC staff is partnering with others in ACCG to try to design an ecologically positive project with minimal controversy, a goal to reduce wildfire risk, and a boost in local jobs and economic benefits.

Dogwood flowers are sure to impress again this spring!

Don't miss your chance to witness the serene beauty of the flowering dogwood

Known as Pacific, Mountain, or even Pacific Mountain Dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*), the California native is endemic to the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada and pockets along the Pacific coast.

The creamy, greenish-white flowers will be blooming soon giving the appearance of large snowflakes resting ever so gracefully on the tree branches. The flower "petals" are actually modified leaves called bracts. The bracts encircle the true flowers. The flowers mature into dark red-orange drupes (seeded berries) that grosbeaks, cedar waxwings, woodpeckers, band-tailed pigeons, and small mammals love to feast on in the fall.



Dogwoods need partial shade and are usually found growing under the canopies of taller mixed conifer trees. Even the anatomy of its own leaves helps to create needed shade for the dogwood branches – a feature called "self-shading."

Typical habitat includes moist, but well-drained soils on slopes generally below 5,000 feet elevation. [Some great places to see flowering dogwoods are in Calaveras Big Trees State Park, along the Merced River's banks in Yosemite, and on the Arnold Rim Trail near Avery.](#)

FUN FACTS:

The name "dogwood" is said to have derived from one of the historical names of the tree "dagwood" in the 15th century when the wood was used to make daggers and arrows. As the story goes the "a" evolved into a "o" and the name "dogwood" came into being.

The Latin name (*Cornus nuttallii*) was given in honor of Thomas Nuttall, a 19th century English scientist who studied throughout the U.S. and has his name given to numerous animal and plant species such as the Nuttall's woodpecker.



Do CSERC's efforts to protect nature in our region matter to you?



Sometimes victories versus defeats for the environment can be stark and dramatic. Other times the gains from protecting rare wildlife or woodland habitat may be less obvious.

CSERC needs more members for a solid base of funding support.
You can help by doing two key things.

First, if you have not donated in the past year (or don't remember contributing), please donate. Donations of any amount add up to make a difference.

Second, do you have a relative, friend, or co-worker who may love Yosemite, flowing rivers, precious wildlife, old growth trees, or scenic vistas? Can you give them this newsletter, and encourage them to consider joining?

Or could you email our website link www.cserc.org to someone along with a recommendation to check us out?



We are launching this rare CSERC membership campaign request because we truly need more donating members. Please help us so that we can continue to make a clear and meaningful difference for our vast region.

CSERC camera stations detect the rare and elusive fisher in the Stanislaus National Forest



After decades of partnering with agency biologists to survey for rare furbearers in the Stanislaus Forest, our staff was extremely excited in February to discover that we had photos of two different fishers at our camera stations! While we've detected martens and the extremely rare Sierra Nevada red fox previously, these were our first proven detections of a fisher in the national forest. But that was just the beginning of our success. During a recent break between winter storms – allowing our staff access to the remote cameras again – we discovered fisher detections at six out of seven cameras that we'd set up in the Forest.

WHY DOES IT MATTER? The fisher is a federally listed endangered species in our region. By law, when a fisher has been proven to be present in a project area, Forest officials must protect their habitat. They are most often found in mature and old growth forest areas that contain a mix of conifers and hardwoods. Throughout their range, fishers often use tree cavities for denning; and they select denning and resting sites in forests that have large trees with high canopy cover, big snags, and large down logs.



CSERC shares detailed input for key state and national wildlife policies

CSERC recently provided detailed comments on two proposals related to how the Federal Government and the State of California are authorized to manage wildlife (especially predators) on public and private lands.

Wildlife Damage Management in California

The first proposal was an environmental policy document that supported the continued use of taxpayer funds to kill “nuisance” wildlife for the benefit of private, commercial agricultural enterprises. This proposal would renew and expand the role of the California Department of Food and Agriculture in providing technical and operational assistance for lethal methods of “wildlife management” including aerial shooting, leg-hold traps, snares, and poison bait to kill native wildlife perceived as a threat to agricultural interests.

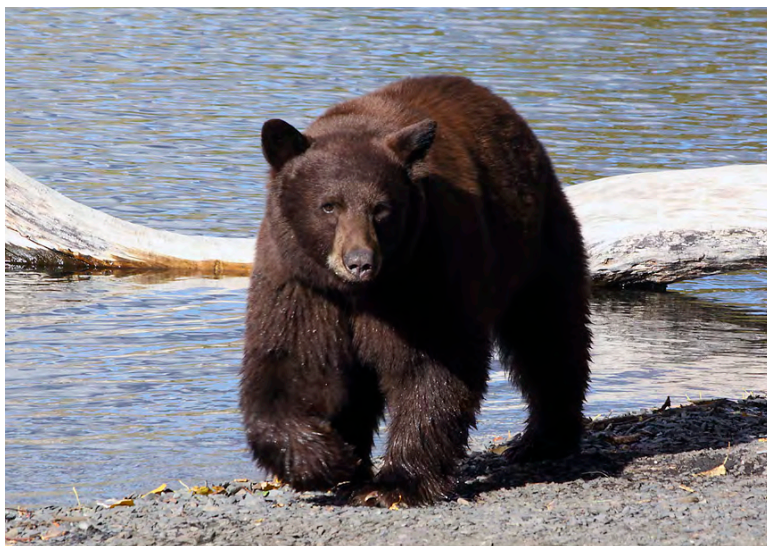


The agency’s preferred plan would also continue the Federal Government’s role in “wildlife damage management” in California. CSERC urged that lethal methods only be used for airport safety, endangered species protection, human health and safety, and invasive species control. We also advocated strongly for a prohibition of indiscriminate lethal methods such as leg-hold traps, snares, and poisons.

Predator Control on Wildlife Refuges

The other major wildlife related issue was a chance for input on policy and rule changes for the US Wildlife Refuge System, which oversees the management of wildlife refuges across the country. Among other things, the proposed changes would codify the System’s use of lethal methods to manage predators and other native species to benefit private commercial agricultural enterprises on or near Wildlife Refuges.

CSERC again advocated against the use of lethal management, except in the case of human health and safety, essential protection for endangered species, and invasive species control. CSERC also urged that a full Environmental Impact Statement should be required to consider the potential environmental effects of refuge management activities such as the translocation of wildlife species, the introduction of genetically engineered organisms, the use of pesticides and herbicides, and the effects of for-profit mining, agriculture, and recreational sport hunting.



2024 “Celebrate Winter” photo contest winners amaze our judges

Our photo contest aimed to raise appreciation for our local wildlife and natural landscapes in wintertime. A total of 125 photos were entered in the contest by nearly 20 photographers! The diversity and quality of the photos was, as always, impressive. Here are the winners along with an assortment of other top 10 photos. We hope you find the photos as inspiring as we do!



Left: First Place for Kingfisher in rain by Erik Long

Above: Second Place for Coyote in fresh snow by Kyle Strand

Below: Third Place for Half Dome in winter mist by Paul Rajewski





As spring turns into summer and the temperature rises, you may want to keep these photos handy to help remind yourself of cooler times!

- Above left: Momma bear and cub by Kyle Strand
- Above right: Stellar's jay by Cindy Murphy
- Right: Snow cornice by Tyler Childress
- Below left: Anna's hummingbird by Dave Douglass
- Below right: Bobcat with snow by Erik Long



Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center (CSERC)
P.O. Box 396
Twain Harte, CA 95383
(209) 586-7440 e-mail: info@cserc.org

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit #113
Sonora, CA 95370

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Rare wildlife, winter photo winners, forest updates, abundant wildflowers, and more!

Spring is sweeping across the foothills; and our cover article describes some of the prime places where you can see colorful displays of wildflowers.

Inside this newsletter you'll find photos of elusive wildlife that was detected at our remote cameras. We share information about forest issues and Yosemite Park planning, as well as articles on predator control, flowering dogwoods, and threats to be aware of when you and friends or family are enjoying nature in the region.

Along with the timely updates and the beautiful photos, we also explain how you can help CSERC.

Thanks for your partnership and support.