

**DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF THE CALIFORNIA
NATIVE FLORA**

The California Native Plant Society



Bristlecone Chapter

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November General Meeting

The November General Meeting of the Bristlecone Chapter will be our Annual Holiday Potluck and Slideshow held on Wednesday, Nov. 17, at White Mountain Research Station, 3000 E. Line St. in Bishop. Please bring a dish and/or drinks to share, as well as your own place setting. Also, bring up to 15 of your favorite photos from 2010, and share your stories with the group. We'll have a digital projector and a Mac laptop, and if you need other equipment, such as a slide projector, please contact Stephen Ingram. See you at 6:00 pm for dinner set-up, followed shortly by dinner, and 7:30 pm for slideshow!

November Board Meeting

Tuesday, November 8, 2010. Tentatively planned for 7:00 PM at the ESICE office, 512 N. 2nd St., Bishop. Members are welcome.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

I'm stepping down after my third term as Chapter President. My thanks to all of those who served as officers, board members, field trip leaders, plant-sale volunteers, highway cleaners, newsletter editors and contributors, and program presenters over the past three years. The purpose of our chapter, as written by Mary DeDecker when she crafted the by-laws 27 years ago, is simply "the preservation and conservation of the native flora of California." My approach to fulfilling that purpose has been to strengthen the ties between the Bristlecone Chapter and other conservation organizations in the Eastern Sierra Nevada. To this end I've participated regularly in the Eastern Sierra Environmental Roundtable, the informal solar park coalition, the Owens Lakebed Planning Committee, and the Bodie Hills Conservation Partnership. These activities have been very time-consuming but also very rewarding. I hope to continue this partnership work in some capacity other than as the chapter president.

While the chapter membership numbers have stayed steady, I'm concerned that the level of participation and volunteerism has declined markedly over the past couple of years. For any relatively small, volunteer, non-profit organization to remain viable, members must be willing to serve on the board, and board members must be willing to serve as officers. At this point in time we are losing active members faster than they are being replaced, and that is not sustainable. There are many good reasons for this, of course. People move away, develop other interests, or get burned out. It happens. The poor economy may have much to do with this as

well, as environmental and conservation groups often experience a decrease in membership, funding, and participation during economic downturns.

But here is where it gets ugly. Recessions also tend to spawn various types of anti-environmental movements. Remember James Watt and the sagebrush rebellion? The latest attempt to privatize public lands seems to be coming from the Tea Party. According to a September 7, 2010, article in the Los Angeles Times, Joe Miller, the Tea Party candidate for senate in Alaska, “says Alaska can generate plenty of its own money if it takes control of the state’s 178 million acres of federal lands—theoretically including such gems as Denali National Park and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—for mining, timber, oil and gas development.”

It’s never a good time for apathy, particularly now. On the other hand, maybe a Sarah Palin is exactly what the broader conservation community needs to wake it up.

Steve McLaughlin

FROM THE EDITOR

Next Newsletter Deadline: December 28, 2010

Send articles to: newsletter@bristleconecnps.org

REPORTS

Important –New president needed!

The Nominations Committee reports that it has nominated Holly Alpert to be vice-president, Rosanne Higley to be treasurer, and Rosemary Jarrett to be secretary. Unfortunately, the committee was unable to find anyone to agree to be nominated to serve as president. If you would consider serving as president, please contact Stephen Ingram at ingram@bishopwireless.net

If not you, then who?

If not now, when?

FEATURES

Birch Creek Journal

Statistically, every night past October 15 is slightly more likely than the night before to bring frost, and by the time we get to November 2, the probability of frost is ninety percent. Yet here it is October 16 with no freezing predicted for the next six nights. I was late to get the news, however, and acting under an earlier prediction, I went into culinary overdrive yesterday, picking small cucumbers and making pickles, filling my basket with paste tomatoes and making sauce, grating zucchini and making zucchini bread. I gathered up all the Italian frying peppers that had any hint of red or orange and made peperonata to freeze for mid-winter meals. I turned overripe tomatoes on the counter into gazpacho. I picked the few remaining bush beans and considered gathering up all the basil

as well until I remembered that I still had pesto in the freezer from last year. At some point, I heard the latest forecast with its reprieve for local gardeners, but by then I was committed to cook, and the end of this long day in the kitchen found me standing at the stove and frying three pounds of sliced eggplant for eggplant parmesan.

Meanwhile, the world outside the garden fence seemed less inclined to panic; perhaps it had better information than I did. Our big black cottonwood has flourished a single spray of yellow leaves for a month now but otherwise remains resolutely green. Willows, too, seem to deny their inevitable fate: what, me worry? Birches have advanced a little farther into autumn. That wall of green along the creek is now speckled with yellow, and if you walk the creek-side path, pushing aside the long and leafy withes of willow, you will come upon a lone birch that glows like a torch. I almost expect its leaves to shine in the dark, like cat’s eyes.

This year I noticed that autumn leaves of black cottonwood, some of them, look like watersheds seen from the air: green veins on yellow blades mimic rivers with their innumerable tributary creeks and rivulets. Rivers in many cultures are metaphors for the journey of life, and here we have not only a metaphor within a metaphor but the real thing as well, because this leaf has been on its journey of life since April, a journey now coming to an end. So much beauty in autumn yet always with a hint of sadness that the year is drawing to a close. Often at this season I remember a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins that begins, “Margaret are you grieving/Over Goldengrove unleaving,” one of the few poems I once tried to learn by heart. Margaret cries over falling leaves, the poet says, because this will be her fate, too: “It is Margaret you mourn for.”

“Spring and Fall” is one of the most poignant poems in English, and I love it dearly; nevertheless, I cannot help thinking that maybe what Margaret really needed at that point was not a poem but a brisk dose of science. Nothing like immersion in plant physiology to counteract our natural bent toward autumn melancholy.

We all learned about the unleaving process in school, or should have, but if you’re like me, you have to refresh your memory every autumn. Leaves can contain several kinds of pigments, primarily chlorophylls, which are green; xanthophylls, which are yellow; carotenoids, which are orange; and tannins, which are brown. In autumn, if temperature, moisture, and sunlight are favorable, leaves of certain species manufacture anthocyanins, which are red. Chlorophyll is of the course the pigment that absorbs the sunlight that provides the energy for the greatest miracle on our planet, the conversion of carbon dioxide and water into oxygen and carbohydrates. Chlorophyll is not a stable molecule; it decomposes in bright sunlight and must be constantly synthesized anew. Plant physiologists have estimated that worldwide 1000 million tons of chlorophyll are synthesized and degraded every year. Not only are there a lot of individual leaves out there, but every leaf continually renews its supply of chlorophyll as long as it remains green.

But, as Margaret discovered to her regret, nothing remains green forever. When nights lengthen in autumn, a layer of corky tissue gradually forms where leaf stalk meets twig, and water and nutrients can no longer flow into the leaf. Once its nutrient supply is disrupted, the leaf cannot continue to synthesize chlorophyll. As chlorophyll production declines, the green color of the leaf fades and other pigments are revealed, such as the yellow of xanthophylls in birch and cottonwood, and, at high elevations, the red of anthocyanins in red-osier dogwood and fireweed.

As green pigment fades, the role of the leaf changes from manufacturing carbohydrates to recovering nutrients, especially nitrogen. Chlorophyll itself cannot be exported from the leaf; it is a large and not especially mobile molecule. But the nitrogen that is attached to chlorophyll by chemical bonds *can* be exported, or at least some of it can. If nitrogen is to be moved from the leaf into longer-lived parts of the plant, the chlorophyll

molecule must be broken down. As chlorophyll is split into smaller molecules with the assistance of enzymes, the leaf becomes vulnerable to light damage—no big deal in a leaf that is doomed to drop anyway, you might think, but before it drops the leaf has a job to do, and the recovery of nitrogen within the leaf is carefully organized and controlled to minimize light damage until the job is done.

In the final stage of breakdown, small colorless molecules called NCCs are made in vacuoles, which are storage bubbles within leaf cells. NCCs are effective antioxidants, but you need not feast on yellow cottonwood leaves to get their disease-fighting benefits. It turns out that pretty much the same process of chlorophyll breakdown occurs in ripening fruits, and NCCs therefore become concentrated in the red or yellow skins of apples and pears. Speaking as a grandmother, I’m pleased to inform you that *your* grandmother was right after all: an apple a day does indeed help keep the doctor away. And if *that’s* not a cheering thought in autumn, I don’t know what is.

Jan Bowers

CONSERVATION

Inyo County Water Commission resurrected?

Last spring I wrote about a bizarre meeting of the Inyo County Water Commission (WC) in which the only agenda item was a proposal that the WC recommend to the Inyo County Board of Supervisors (BOS) that it (the WC) be disbanded. After hearing public comment the WC voted, instead, to recommend that the WC NOT be disbanded, and that an energetic campaign be conducted to solicit volunteers to be water commissioners.

The Inyo County Water Department (ICWD), which had previously recommended that the WC be disbanded, delayed passing on the WC’s recommendations to the BOS for 2 ½ months. When the WC’s recommendation was finally placed on the BOS’s agenda, ICWD re-submitted its own recommendation that the WC be disbanded, and the Inyo County Planning Department submitted its own recommendation for WC disbanding as well. Given that one member of the BOS has publicly stated that he has to do what his staff says, I felt certain the demise of the WC was at hand.

To my surprise, however, the BOS voted to follow the WC's recommendation instead of those of its staff. As a result, the vacancies on the WC were well publicized, and, as of the closing date for applying, 8 people had applied. I applied (for the fourth time) as did at least two other Bristlecone Chapter members.

By my calculations, I would have a 24% chance of getting appointed to one of the four vacancies if the selection process were random. The selection process, of course, is anything but random, so I give myself a 0% chance. Still, the new WC should be quite different from the old one and it will be interesting to see what happens. I wish the new WC luck, as its responsibilities are enormous and its authority very limited.

Daniel Pritchett

Big Pine Paiute Tribe tries to enforce the Brown Act and the LTWA

I wrote in a recent issue about the Inyo County Water Department's proposal to exempt a well from the LTWA's On/Off protocol to supply water to a mitigation project in Big Pine. I objected on behalf of the Bristlecone Chapter, as did a staff member of the Big Pine Paiute Tribe. The Technical Group ignored our objections and placed its recommendation for a modification of the mitigation project description, which presupposes a well exemption, on the agenda of the Standing Committee for final approval.

Before the Standing Committee met, however, the Inyo County Board of Supervisors (BOS) met and "gave direction" to Inyo's Standing Committee members regarding this proposal. A representative of the Big Pine Tribe attended the BOS meeting and presented a petition with 164 signatures of Big Pine residents and workers opposing the proposal. I also wrote a letter to the BOS repeating the Bristlecone Chapter's objections. The BOS ignored my letter entirely, and dismissed the Big Pine petition on the grounds that people will sign anything, and that because only one person had attended their BOS meeting, there was not real opposition to the exemption.

The Big Pine Tribe took these comments to heart, and about 30 tribal members and supporters attended the subsequent Standing Committee Meeting. Some of the tribal members carried large signs, which infuriated Inyo Supervisors: it was the

most excitement I'd ever seen at a Standing Committee meeting! No one spoke in the public comment period in favor of the exemption and numerous speakers (including the author) spoke against it. By the Inyo Supervisors' own criteria, this should have made an impression. It didn't, however, because BOS had already "given direction" to its Standing Committee members how to vote. In other words, the outcome had already been determined, in violation of the Brown Act. With no serious discussion or deliberation, the Standing Committee voted to approve the revised project description and initiate review under CEQA.

The apparent Brown Act violation wasn't the only problem with this Standing Committee meeting -- there was the issue of the absence of a quorum. According to the LTWA, LA's Standing Committee representatives are comprised of "at least one (1) member of the Los Angeles City Council, the Administrative Officer of the City of Los Angeles, two (2) members of the Board of Water and Power Commissioners, and three (3) staff members." At this meeting, however, neither the LA Administrative Officer, nor LA City Council members nor LA Water Commissioners were in sight. LA was represented by DWP staff and an attorney. The fact that Inyo Standing Committee members agreed to hold the meeting at all tells you everything you need to know about the submissiveness of current Inyo leadership.

Now for the real surprise -- instead of giving up (or whining in a newsletter article) the Big Pine Tribe wrote a formal letter of complaint to Inyo and LA regarding the Brown Act violation and the lack of the quorum. My cynicism precludes optimism about the resolution of the complaint, in spite of the complaint's obvious justification. There's a reason, after all, why DWP has that building full of attorneys we always hear about! And the Inyo BOS will undoubtedly argue that its "direction" given to Standing Committee members was advisory, not binding -- in other words, the BOS will argue that it merely violated the intent, as opposed to the letter, of the Brown Act.

Regardless of the eventual outcome, the Big Pine Tribe should be commended for insisting that the LTWA and Brown Act actually mean what they say, a radical idea if there ever was one. May the Tribe's actions be an inspiration to others!

Daniel Pritchett

by an interest in the plants of California. It is open to all. The society, working through its local chapters, seeks to increase the understanding of California's native flora and to preserve this rich resource for future generations. Varied interests are represented. To join, please see back of newsletter.

MEMBERSHIP

The Bristlecone Chapter heartily welcomes the following new members:

- Les & Jill Allert – Markleeville
- Pete Anderson - Bishop
- Cathy Cannon - Bishop
- Jane Cipra - Death Valley
- Lily Douglas - Bishop
- Susan Hughes - Mammoth
- Judith Talbot - Ridgecrest
- Sauna Turner - Pasadena

To RENEW: please contact Sally Manning or **RENEW ONLINE:**

Using a credit card, go to www.cnps.org
And click on the JOIN button

Membership Application

The California Native Plant Society is an organization of lay persons and professionals united

Aspen-glyph art
Head
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<u>Membership Category</u>	
___ Student, Limited Income	\$25.00
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___ Supporting	\$75.00
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___ Benefactor	\$600.00
___ Mariposa Lily	\$1,500.00

Please make membership checks payable to and send to:
CNPS – Membership Coordinator
2707 K. Street, Suite 1
Sacramento, CA 95816

Gift Contribution: Where most needed _____
Conservation _____

Bristlecone Chapter Directory

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Publicity – Denise Waterbury (760) 873-7639
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Plant Sale Committee –
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Book Sales - Sue Weis (760) 873-3485
Posters – Stephen Ingram (760) 387-2913
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