

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

The California Native Plant Society



Bristlecone Chapter

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November-December 2011

FROM THE EDITOR

Next Newsletter Deadline: December 27, 2011

Send articles to: newsletter@bristleconecnps.org

If you still receive this newsletter via US Mail, please send your email address to the editor (email address above) so you can receive the electronic version. Please help the Bristlecone chapter save money, energy, and trees

This issue marks completion of two full years Jan Bowers has written her "Birch Creek Journal." In the future she will only submit entries as occasional pieces, rather than as a regular feature. Her essays have contributed greatly to this newsletter and we are indebted to her for her work.

November General Meeting

On Wednesday, November 30, 7:00 pm, at the White Mountain Research Station, 3000 East Line St., Bishop, Sherry Taylor and Leslie Dawson of the Valentine Eastern Sierra Reserve will share with us the work they have been doing over the last several years as part of the Valentine Reserve's Outdoor Science Education Program. They will speak about the UC Natural Reserve System as well as the local project that has brought sciences and native plant education to school children in Mono and Inyo Counties. The public is invited to attend.

November Board Meeting

Wednesday, November 16, 2011, 7:00 pm at the ESICE office, 512 N. 2nd St., Bishop. Members are welcome.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Chapter Elections Nov. 30

The Bristlecone Chapter's Nominating Committee is pleased to present the following slate of candidates for its 2012 Executive Board:

President: Yvonne Wood
Vice President: Holly Alpert
Treasurer: Rosanne Higley
Secretary: Rosemary Jarrett

After opening the floor to any other nominations, the election will take place at the November 30 general meeting. Positions will begin in January. Please thank these candidates for their commitment!

Sally Manning

REPORTS

Native Plant Sale

The Native Plant sale on September 10th was a great success. People started showing up around 7:30 am to cruise through the plant tables to see what was available. At 9 o'clock when I yelled, "Go!" people started loading their plants into boxes and queuing up to pay the cashier.

By 11:00 am the frenzy had calmed down and it was pretty much over. But in those short two hours, 84 people had bought almost 700 plants. After the sale several more people who couldn't make the event have contacted me to purchase plants that have now found homes in gardens.

Once the sale was over all extra plants were potted into larger containers so they can be overwintered and available at next year's sale. This year we donated plants to the DeDecker Garden in Independence, to replace ones that had died, the Master Gardener's Native Demonstration garden at the Community Garden in Bishop, and to Camp Bernasconi for the 6th grade camp.

This plant sale couldn't happen without the huge cadre of volunteers that show up to sow seeds into flats in March, repot the seedlings into pots in May, and help out at the plant sale in September. A total of 36 volunteers gave 83 hours of their time this year helping with the growing of plants for the sale: A big thank you goes out to all of them for all the work they do.

It is always fun to see all the enthusiasm people have for growing natives in their gardens. The proceeds from all the plants sales (Mammoth and Bishop) go toward DeDecker grants

Katie Quinlan

Who Belongs to the Bristlecone Chapter?

To find out, I did some back of envelope counts. The Bristlecone Chapter of CNPS unofficially had 193 members as of September 2011. By "members," I refer to households, not necessarily individuals. The number of current members stays steady, with inflow equaling outflow over the long term.

A bit less than half of our members (81) live in Owens Valley, with 61 in Bishop. Four are in

Death Valley and one in Deep Springs. Thirty members live in Mono County, including Swall Meadows, Benton, and Coleville, and 25 reside in the Ridgecrest area and surroundings.

We count 16 out-of-state members, ranging from Florida to Alaska. Our 36 non Inyo-Mono California members are almost evenly split between northern and southern California.

Thus, one-quarter of the Bristlecone Chapter members have out-of-area addresses. I've met some of these members, and they typically express a deep attachment to the eastern Sierra. Perhaps they are not here to read the local papers and keep a daily watch on the region's environment, but they join and maintain their membership as a show of support for conservation of the eastern Sierra landscapes and flora. I invite these members to submit an article to our newsletter.

The Bristlecone Chapter also sends its newsletter, free of charge, to non-member agencies and institutions throughout the eastern Sierra, including public libraries, state and federal agencies, and county government officials. Our goal, consistent with that of CNPS, is to inform the decision makers about the irreplaceable resources they are charged with protecting.

Sally Manning

FEATURES

Birch Creek Journal

We've had an exciting couple of months along Birch Creek, at times more exciting than we'd like. In September, the John Fire on Crater Mountain came within 1.3 miles of our house. A highway patrolman drove through the neighborhood with a loudspeaker, and now, to the list of phrases I never want to hear (the landing gear is stuck; here's a breath mint; hello, this is the IRS), I can add, "The fire is headed this way." Then opening day of quail season brought gunshots alarmingly close to home. At times it sounded like a popcorn popper out there. And finally I tumbled down the embankment below our house as I tried to thread a hose underneath the deck. I made no noise as I went but simply flip-flopped backwards, making altogether three complete revolutions before I came to a stop, slightly bruised but

basically fine and newly awake to the realization that I am definitely too old for gymnastics.

For several weeks now, old fields in our neighborhood have been vibrantly yellow as my favorite rabbitbrush, *Ericameria nauseosa* var. *hololeuca*, reached for, achieved, and passed its peak of bloom. Believe it or not, we lived in the neighborhood for a full year before I realized that these old fields were indeed old farm fields. It would not have been news to anyone who had lived in the Owens Valley for any length of time, I'm certain, but it was quite a revelation to me. Not until I strolled across the flats west of Griffiths Road, looking for animal tracks, did I tumble to the fact that the plant community is early successional—mostly rabbitbrush and fourwing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*) amidst plenty of bare ground, quite different from the unplowed desert scrub just to the west, where a variety of low shrubs grow close enough together that progress on foot is necessarily zigzag.

These days I can tell you who owned every parcel in our neighborhood and when they bought and sold it, but back then I was so full of the delight and glory of living here myself that I had hardly begun to wonder about the people who lived here before me. Eventually I learned that the parcel west of Griffiths Road was farmed by Jim Hill, Sr., one of eight Paiutes in our township who successfully navigated the Land Office bureaucracy and obtained land titles from the federal government. On his homestead, Jim Hill grew berries, apples, and alfalfa as crops and no doubt had a large and thriving vegetable garden, too. You can still see trunks and branches of long-dead apple trees on the ground. Jim Hill's water came from Tinemaha Creek, running through soil so soft that his ditches are deeper than I am tall. Little else remains of his farm. I've crisscrossed his parcel several times without finding house ruins. I did find shards of window glass, an enamelware wash basin, a burner from a gas stove, and the broken reservoir of an oil lamp, all of which suggest a more formal structure than a wikiup, perhaps a clapboard house on a rock foundation.

The City of Los Angeles probably tore the house down. Robert Sauder, in *The Lost Frontier*, reminds us that after the city bought most of the land in the Owens Valley, "Dying orchards, empty schoolhouses, and abandoned farmhouses became common landscape features. Los Angeles. . .

removed most traces of abandoned rural life as quickly as possible; houses and barns were bulldozed or burned and trees and orchards were either cut down or uprooted in order to hide from passing motorists the despoliation that it had wrought." (They not only took our water, they took our history, too.) Jim Hill sold to the City of Los Angeles in 1924, 170 acres for \$6,000, and since then his farm has gone back to nature, or at least is heading that way. Big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) has colonized some of the empty ground between the shorter-lived rabbitbrush and saltbush, and, unless succession is interrupted, Jim Hill's old fields will one day be a solid stand of sagebrush.

In *Western Times and Water Wars*, John Walton shows matched photographs of the Red Mountain Fruit Ranch in 1920 and 1990. The ranch house was situated along Tinemaha Creek just a mile south of our place. The 1920 photo shows "a prosperous farm with several hundred acres of orchards." The 1990 photo, in contrast, displays "miles of devastation." Well, yes and no. The orchards are certainly gone, as is the ranch house and its outbuildings, but succession is underway here, too. In places the old fields do indeed look pretty bad, as overgrazed land often does, but even in the worst places there is a sparse vegetative cover of rabbitbrush, and some former fields are in much better shape, with sagebrush so dense and tall that making your way through them is a puzzle. Everywhere you walk you see signs of wildlife: quail, deer, coyote, jackrabbit, bobcat, antelope ground squirrel, fox. Although these fields may be ugly to our eyes, ecologically they are far from a total loss and might even support greater faunal diversity now than when they were an orchard.

Sydney Smith, a much beloved English pastor of the nineteenth century, used to urge depressed parishioners to take short views of life—never further than luncheon or tea. It's good advice for worrywarts but perhaps not as useful if you tend to see miles of devastation instead of recovering wildlife habitat. Succession in arid lands is a leisurely process, requiring many decades amounting to a hundred years or longer. In our general neighborhood, for example, old sawmill sites abandoned in the mid-1870s are now so overgrown with sagebrush, bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), and other shrubs that only the presence of rock walls and millraces gives them away—but the process took 135 years.

Although long views provide the best perspective on vegetation change, short views may be all we have left at this point. Steve reconnoitered along McMurry Meadows road after the John Fire and saw scorched and blackened earth. Shrubs had burned to the ground, leaving precious little behind but ash and the occasional stem. Dried-out annual grasses, especially red brome (*Bromus madritensis* subsp. *rubens*) and cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) helped the fire spread, and these invasive exotics will be among the first species to return. Once the shrubs come back, red brome and cheatgrass will help them burn again. Succession is a powerful process, able to heal the devastation wrought by a city water department, but to succeed it must work without interruption, a requirement that cannot be met when grass-fueled fires are frequent, as they are likely to be from here on out.

Jan Bowers

CONSERVATION

2012 CNPS Conservation Conference

The January 2012 CNPS Conservation Conference offers something for every plant lover. The venue is a resort in San Diego. The conference offers opportunities to hear distinguished speakers, attend workshops, field trips, and social events, view posters and nature photography, read nature poetry, and even join a sing-along. CNPS members received a brochure in the mail two months ago. Two members of the Bristlecone Chapter, Vice President Holly Alpert, and Conservation Chair Daniel Pritchett, are tentatively planning to speak at the Transmontane session, which includes discussions of plant issues from our region and deserts to the south. Other topics include vegetation, restoration, rare plants, CEQA and laws that protect plants, and traditional use of native plants. The conference website is: <http://www.cnps.org/cnps/conservation/conference/2012/>

“Mitigation” at Owens Lake

Despite a record amount of snowmelt runoff, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) proposed to pump 91,000 acre feet

(af) of water this year, the highest volume in decades. For comparison, the USGS estimates long term average pumping should not exceed 70,000 af/yr. Inyo County challenged DWP’s pumping plan, but the reduction Inyo sought was trivial, and DWP refused even that trivial reduction (see Blackrock correction and update below). Now that the year is half over, DWP is well on its way to reach the pumping inflated amount.

It's easy to see why DWP refuses to reduce its pumping. It is spreading water on the dry Owens Lakebed for dust abatement measures. Huge amounts of water are being pumped from Laws, the Aberdeen area, the Blackrock area, Independence and Manzanar, and especially Big Pine, in order for DWP to implement its lakebed dust mitigation requirements without diminishing flows down the aqueduct.

In spite of this, Inyo County is proceeding with a plan to actually allow several un-used wells to be brought into production to supply water to the Lake, without insisting that already-excessive pumping in existing wells be reduced. In most ideas of justice, the perpetrator is required to compensate the victim. In Owens Valley, the roles are reversed. Owens Valley, the victim of the dust problem created by DWP, is compensating DWP for the water DWP uses to mitigate dust by allowing ever more pumping.

Blackrock correction

In the last issue I described Inyo County’s attempt to challenge DWP’s 2011 pumping program under the Dispute Resolution process of the Inyo-LA Long Term Water Agreement (LTWA) and DWP’s delaying tactics. In describing the Technical Group meeting of July 15, 2011 I wrote that Inyo County Water Department staff gave a presentation about the conditions at parcel Blackrock 94, after which DWP noted that Inyo County attorneys were in the audience and refused to discuss Inyo’s challenge to the pumping program. I erred in placing Inyo County’s presentation at the July 15 Technical Group meeting. Inyo’s presentation actually occurred at the continuation of this meeting. The continuation occurred August 1, 2011. At the Technical Group meeting of July 15, 2011 nothing happened at all, because as soon as the agenda item pertaining to Inyo’s challenge to the pumping program was

reached, DWP noted the presence of Inyo attorneys in the audience and used this as a pretext to refuse to discuss the agenda item and seek to continue the meeting.

Blackrock update

Since the last newsletter article, DWP has proposed a modification to its annual pumping program to meet Inyo's objections. It has proposed to simply shift pumping from the wellfields where Inyo had objections to other wellfields, so the total pumping is not affected. It remains to be seen what Inyo County will do.

Two Standing Committee meetings have also been held in which Inyo's pumping dispute was discussed. I attended the second one (October 17). DWP spent most of the meeting (several hours) attempting to change the wording of an action item already on the agenda. Although the discussion nominally concerned the wording of the agenda item, it was actually a power struggle. The agenda item pertained to DWP's attempts to impose a reading of the LTWA in which Inyo is not allowed to challenge annual pumping programs without DWP's approval. Under DWP's reading, the LTWA is good only for determining, *after the fact*, whether ecosystem deterioration is "measurable," "attributable" (to water management practices) and "significant" (under CEQA). Only *after* the Technical Group has made a determination of measurability, attributability, and significance could Inyo challenge a pumping program.

This is an obvious power grab, because, as one of the two members of the Technical Group, DWP would have to agree to the determinations of measurability, attributability, and significance. If DWP didn't agree to these determinations, Inyo would not be allowed to challenge a pumping program.

DWP's reading of the LTWA also renders the LTWA goal of "avoiding" impacts unenforceable, because, under DWP's reading, pumping could only be modified *after* significant impacts have been acknowledged by DWP to have occurred. Under DWP's reading, repeated references in the LTWA and associated EIR to the primacy of *avoiding* impacts would not be worth the paper they were printed on.

The Standing Committee meeting ended anticlimactically. After several caucuses, DWP agreed to vote on the item with only a few inconsequential wording changes. The vote was split, with Inyo opposed and DWP in favor. Nothing was resolved and the same disagreement will arise the next time Inyo challenges an annual a pumping plan.

The meeting was noteworthy for other reasons. First, the meeting showed how completely DWP controls the LA City Councilmen and Water Commissioners on the Standing Committee. That is to say, the meeting showed how completely DWP controls the people who are supposed to control DWP. It's hard to believe just a few years ago (five, I think) three members of the LA Board of Water and Power Commissioners came to Owens Valley, publicly proclaimed themselves "environmentalists" and made it clear that DWP's behavior would change.

Did DWP's behavior actually change? No. Membership of LA Board of Water and Power Commissioners changed.

Daniel Pritchett

MEMBERSHIP

Membership Application

The California Native Plant Society is an organization of lay persons and professionals united 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 the newsletter. The Bristlecone Chapter warmly welcomes the following new members:

Susanna Domancich, Mammoth Lakes
Raymond Fletcher, Reno, NV
Valerie Hart, Big Pine
Anne McCarthy, Bishop
Claudia Parish, Bishop
Brandon & Catie Sube, Bishop

To RENEW: please contact Sally Manning or **RENEW ONLINE**: with a credit card, go to www.cnps.org and click on the JOIN button.

The California Native Plant Society

Bristlecone Chapter
 P.O. Box 364
 Bishop, CA 93515-0364

Name: _____
 P.O. Box or Street: _____
 City: _____ State: _____
 Zip Code: _____ Phone: _____
 Email address: _____
 I wish to be affiliated with the Bristlecone Chapter: _____
 Other: _____

Membership Category

<input type="checkbox"/> Student, Limited Income	\$25.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$45.00
<input type="checkbox"/> International	\$45.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Family or Library	\$75.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Plant Lover	\$100.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Patron	\$300.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$600.00
<input type="checkbox"/> 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

Creosote Ring Sub-Chapter Coordinator - Kathy LaShure

Gift Contribution: Where most needed _____

Conservation _____

Bristlecone Chapter Directory

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