

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

The California Native Plant Society



Bristlecone Chapter

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FROM THE EDITOR

Next Newsletter Deadline: February 25, 2012
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.

January General Meeting

Wednesday, January 25, 2012, 7:00 pm at White Mountain Research Station, 3000 East Line St. in Bishop. Kathy LaShure, coordinator of the Creosote Ring subchapter, will present "A summer of rare plant treasure hunts" (or, How the LaShures spent the summer of 2011). She will share information on how CNPS determines the rarity of a plant and what the several categories of rarity mean. Then she will introduce you to the 15 rare plant species for which she and her husband Rich submitted 35 occurrence records in 2011. Some were casual discoveries, while others were located on planned Rare Plant Treasure Hunts. The spring finds were desert species, while all the summer finds were located on the Kern Plateau in the southern Sierra. Finally, you'll learn how their team, the Red Jeepsters, did in the state-wide Rare Plant Treasure Hunt competition.

January Board Meeting

Wednesday, January 18, 2012, 7:00 Location TBA (check website). Members are welcome.

EVENTS

2012 Field Trip Planning meeting

The annual field trip/planning/brainstorming meeting will take place January 25 at 6:00 pm, before the general meeting at 7:00 pm (see above). Please bring your ideas for interesting trips and be ready to sign up for dates. If you are interested in leading a Rare Plant Treasure Hunt (visit historic rare plant occurrences that haven't been re-visited for a while), contact Sue Weis (760-873-3485) for more information. If you don't want to lead a trip by yourself, but would consider being a co-leader with someone else, please come to the meeting and

you can probably find someone else who will lead the trip with you. Let's have more great field trips this year. Pizza and other refreshments will be available.

REPORTS

2009 CNPS Conservation Conference Proceedings

Strategies & Solutions, the 2009 CNPS Conservation Conference brought together hundreds of botanical experts, artists, amateurs, students, and policy-makers. The Conference Proceedings, just printed in November 2011, includes 51 papers on topics ranging from rare plant introduction, regional conservation planning, habitat restoration, and mapping the vegetation of California. The proceedings cost \$65, and the complete table of contents may be viewed online at http://www.cnps.org/cnps/conservation/conference/2009/files/cnps_2009_proceedings-toc.pdf. Bristlecone Chapter member Sally Manning has an article in the book:

Managing groundwater pumping to conserve native alkali meadow in Owens Valley, California, p.131.

FEATURES

Dead Alkali Meadow Turns Deadly

(A sad reflection by Sally Manning, plant ecologist, Inyo County Water Department 1985-2008)

Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "A nation that destroys its soil destroys itself." I have long said, "A healthy ecosystem hangs onto its soil." Here in Owens Valley, water diversions and groundwater pumping by Los Angeles Dept. of Water and Power destroys ecosystems, people's livelihoods, and people.

Returning on Nov. 19 from a vacation, I heard that winds resulted in the closure of Highway 395 between Big Pine and Independence on Friday Nov. 18, 2011. I immediately guessed the wind was kicking up dust from the former alkali meadow known as the Blackrock 94 parcel. This meadow parcel has been discussed frequently in this newsletter and elsewhere, because the meadow was a casualty of ongoing, excessive pumping at the

Blackrock Fish Hatchery and other pumping in the wellfield in which it's located. The nail in this parcel's coffin was a 2007 wildfire. The remnant vegetation burned, and in the overpumped part of the parcel native vegetation has yet to recover. The pumps have continued pumping, and in the current runoff year, LADWP and Inyo County agreed to even more pumping from this area. Years after it burned, parts of the parcel still look like a desolate moonscape with an occasional tumbleweed (*Salsola tragus*). I wondered if the highway closure caused my former coworkers to be stuck at work in Independence, where the Inyo County Board of Supervisors moved the entire Water Department in 2008. There would be some irony if that had been the case, since my former coworkers, along with Inyo County leadership, were in part responsible for the death of the meadow.

A few days later, I read the Inyo Register account of the Nov. 18 dust storm and highway closure. The paper talked about serious auto accidents, with injuries and vehicle damage. I checked some weather data and noted winds out of the west through that area up to 75 miles per hour and a large spike in PM-10 during that afternoon. Wind from the west no doubt started the sand from the alluvial fan rolling which then kicked up the silty meadow soil, lofting the PM-10 and other stuff into the air, similar to what happens at Owens dry lake and what used to happen south of Independence where the so-called Shepherd Creek alfalfa field is now located.

The needless accidents and awful dust are the direct result of poor management under the Inyo/LA Water Agreement. For many years, my former coworkers and I knew about the degraded conditions in the meadow. Internally, I strongly recommended that pumping in the wellfield be managed (reduced) to permit water table recovery to the meadow root zone, and I took serious issue with my former coworkers' decision to run additional groundwater wells near the parcel in the guise of a pump test in 2003 [Ed. See http://bristleconecnps.org/conservation/issues/water_agreement/case_studies/well_test.php. for a detailed history of this outrageous test]. I gave presentations and tours, wrote reports and articles for annual reports, and coauthored articles for the peer-reviewed scientific literature. To make a long story short, no steps were taken to save the meadow, and I no longer work for Inyo County.

And some of my former coworkers were recently overheard saying they had been stuck returning from Independence due to the highway closure!

Sally Manning

CONSERVATION

Good news from Blackrock

Having spent last year writing newsletter articles about excessive pumping at the Blackrock area, Inyo County's self-defeating challenge to DWP's 2011 pumping in the Blackrock area, and DWP's challenge to Inyo County's right to challenge its pumping program (yes, you read that correctly), I thought it would be appropriate to start the new year by writing... another article about Blackrock! This article, however, will document some very good news.

While Inyo and DWP were playing their legal/political games, the Owens Valley Committee had sued the California Department of Fish and Game over the adequacy of its 2010 EIR for its statewide fish hatchery and stocking program. In response to comments from the Bristlecone Chapter, DFG had proposed in its Draft EIR (in late 2009) to mitigate effects of excessive pumping for the Blackrock hatchery by reducing pumping to the volume of the former flow of Blackrock Spring. After DWP and Inyo County both objected, DFG removed this mitigation from its final EIR in early 2010.

The Owens Valley Committee then sued DFG over the adequacy of its final EIR, and in late 2011 won a big victory in the form of a settlement. The description of the settlement, below, was provided by the Owens Valley Committee.

“The settlement agreement provides for DFG to identify a groundwater pumping limit at Black Rock Hatchery no greater than 8,000 acre-feet per year, the approximate amount of the springs' original flow. Although that is a reduction from the current pumping average of 12,000 to 13,000 acre-feet per year, DFG deems the amount adequate to supply hatchery fish production. DFG has also agreed to support a modification of the current “exempt” status for the two Black Rock hatchery supply wells to limit the pumping exemption to 8,000 acre-feet per year.

Because DFG receives hatchery water from and leases the hatchery and associated wells and pumps from LADWP, these modifications will

be subject to LADWP's approval. The settlement agreement therefore provides for the DFG, by January 2012, to present a proposal to LADWP that addresses potential environmental benefits of reduced pumping and to modify the existing hatchery supply wells, at DFG's cost, to enable the limits on pumping. The proposal will also include a plan to maintain historic fish production levels in the Eastern Sierra to accommodate for any reduced fish production due to reduced groundwater pumping at Black Rock.

The settlement also provides for work at Fish Springs, allowing collaboration between the DFG and OVC to conduct an impact analysis in the Big Pine well field at the Fish Springs Hatchery.”

While it is a foregone conclusion that DWP will refuse to reduce pumping and will have to be sued, the interesting question is how Inyo County will respond. Inyo Supervisors have been rabid opponents of any reduction in hatchery pumping on the grounds that fish production would be reduced and (by implication) non-native fish are more important than native meadows. Now that DFG is committed to both pumping reduction and maintaining fish production, will Inyo Supervisors make a rational decision to support the pumping reduction? Or will they continue to oppose pumping reductions out of spite, because reductions are supported by much hated “environmental groups” such as CNPS?!

The answer should be known soon and will be reported in the next newsletter.

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 newsletter.

To RENEW: please contact Sally Manning or

RENEW ONLINE:

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

The California Native Plant Society

Bristlecone Chapter
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Membership Category

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Please make membership checks payable to and send to:

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2707 K. Street, Suite 1
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Gift Contribution: Where most needed _____
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