

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

The California Native Plant Society



Bristlecone Chapter

**Volume 33 No. 3
May-June**

May General Meeting

Wednesday, May 30, 2012, 7:00 pm at White Mountain Research Station, 3000 East Line St. in Bishop.

Dr. Yonne Wood, president of the Bristlecone Chapter will give a talk entitled “Loss of Coastal Sage Scrub from western Riverside County.” Her talk will examine the conversion of a unique California plant community to one dominated by invasive grasses. She will show how combined pressures from air pollutants and fire dynamics lead to soil loss across hillsides supporting this community. Lessons learned may be applicable throughout California, including Owens Valley.

May Board Meeting

Wednesday, May 23, 2012, 7:00 pm at the ESICE office, 512 N. 2nd St., Bishop. Members are welcome.

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Greetings! As the new President of our local chapter, I would like to introduce myself to the members of the Bristlecone CNPS. Many of you have only occasionally met me -- or perhaps not met me at all.

I have a great interest in the natural world, even to the point of completing a PhD in arid land geomorphology and pedology. Or in non-‘ology’ terms, I study processes that shape our lands, focusing on those that formed – and are recorded in – our natural soils. Prior to my graduate study, I completed a BA in Biology – more specifically, Microbiology and Virology. And in between my two degrees, I spent time employed by the University of California Statewide Air Pollution Research Center. Here, I researched the atmospheric chemistry of smog production in California and its impacts on our plant communities.

Now, I am a soil scientist who focuses on the landscape dynamics of arid and semi-arid ecosystems. In drylands, natural soils are of extreme importance and I am dedicated to their protection -- through exploration, study, and enjoyment and appreciation of their native plants. I have studied landscape systems and dynamics in the Eastern Mojave Desert National Preserve. Also, I studied the decline of some Southern California native plant communities -- including feedback dynamics between them and on-going changes to their soils and subsurface water dynamics.

Just as important to my natural worldview, I am a descendant from an early 1900s California-born woman who moved from the 'westside' to the 'eastside' to join her sister and teach school in the Owens Valley. Settling first in Laws, Mabel Kumle taught in several of the one-room schoolhouses found throughout the Owens Valley. I have a deep love for this 'place' -- passed to me by my family and strengthened by much 'on-foot' exploration. I was born here and have spent many summers exploring its deserts and mountains with members of my family.

Now, it is with joy that I anticipate learning from all of you about botanical responses to 'wildness' in this unique and exquisitely beautiful place. As I look forward to the next year, I plan to share my knowledge and view of this natural world. In return, I want to learn as much as possible from you who have explored many places that I have not even heard of yet, and seen them with your own view honed by years of knowledge and observation.

Please feel free to contact me ... I am listed in the directory on the back page. I look forward to getting to know you all -- to join you in exploration on 'the eastside' and to help preserve the native richness of the plant communities found here.

Yvonne Wood

FROM THE EDITOR

Next Newsletter Deadline: June 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.

Newsletter editor sought – if interested, please contact the email address above.

EVENTS

May 12, Saturday– *Sawmill Road, Greenhorn Mountains*. Leader: Jane McEwen. This is a Creosote Ring Sub-Chapter event. The highlights of this trip in the Greenhorn Mountains include driving through several plant communities, from Grey Pines and Oaks up into Pines, Firs and Cedars, exploring a mountain meadow, and driving down Sawmill Road with spectacular views of Lake Isabella.

We will leave Inyokern Post Office parking area at 9:00 am; Drive along the South side of Lake Isabella on Hwy 178; and meet others from the Kern River Valley at 10:30 a.m. at Tillie Creek Campground (Elevation 5000) on Tuttle Road, off

Highway 155, just south of Wofford Heights (57 miles from Inyokern). From there we will drive along Hwy 155 up into the Greenhorn Mountains; Travel south on Forest Route 25S15/Rancheria Road, past Shirley Meadows Ski Area, traveling south along the ridge, through a beautiful forest of cedar trees to Evans Flat Meadows (Elevation 6040; 16 miles from Tillie Campground); and then double back and head down Sawmill Road back to Highway 155 on the west side of Lake Isabella. The drive down Sawmill Road requires high clearance vehicles. A plant list for the area along Rancheria Road is available on the CNPS Kern County Chapter, website:

<http://www.kerncnps.org/PlantLists/rancheria.html>.
Contact person: Jane McEwan at mcewanmj@gmail.com or 760-264-6206 (cell).

May 20, Sunday - *Highway clean-up*. Leader: Scott Hetzler. Meet at the intersection of Highway 395 and Pine Creek Rd., west of 395, at 9:00 am. We will try to be done by 1:00 pm. For more information contact Scott at (760) 873-8392.

June 2, Saturday – *Alkali Meadow, Black Rock*. Leader: Daniel Pritchett. As recently as the mid 1980's the area south/southwest of Blackrock Springs was alkali meadow, a rare plant community in California. Continuous pumping for the Blackrock hatchery with the assistance of the 2007 Inyo Complex Fire is now converting part of the area into a dustbowl. Come see what an Inyo County Water Department-certified pumping impact looks like, as well as an example of very successful groundwater-dependent meadow

management. We will explore an area from the Fort Independence reservation north to 8-mile Ranch/Blackrock hatchery area. Sense of humor and capacity for outrage required. 4x4 not necessary but high clearance never hurts. Meet at Fort Independence travel plaza/casino parking lot at 8:45 am. Bring water, snacks, hat, and sunscreen. Trip will end by noon. For more information contact: Daniel at 760-873-8943.

June 17, Sunday – Rodeo Flat & Lower Fish Creek Meadow on the Kern Plateau. Leaser: Kathy LaShure. This is a Creosote Ring Sub-Chapter event. Although, in this so-far dry year, it is unlikely that there will be a repeat of last summer's glorious carpets of wildflowers in these locations, we still might see some rare plants such as *Fritillaria pinetorum*, *Phacelia oregones*, or *Viola pinetorum* ssp. *grisea* that were documented from these locations in 2011. Other rare plants we'll also be looking for are *Erigeron multiceps*, 2 species of *Astragalus* and *Cordylanthus eremicus* ssp. *kernensis*.

We will meet at the Inyokern Post Office at 8:00 am to carpool. Be prepared for sun, wind, hot and cold. Bring food and drink, and have your fuel tanks full. Those coming from points north can meet the group at 8:30 am at the 9-Mile Canyon Rd turnoff from Hwy 395. For more information contact: Kathy LaShure; 760-377-4541 or desert_encelia@verizon.net.

June 23, Saturday: Oak Creek, Leader: Jerry Zatorski. This will be an exploration of the lower Oak Creek area. Oak Creek hosts two native tree oak species found in the Eastern Sierra, and one is only found in this drainage. The 2007 fire and 2008 flood has greatly changed the landscape in many places, and after a few years of recovery we'll see what's there now, what survived the major disturbances, and maybe get an idea of what may be there in the future. From the trail head we will also hike up the canyon to see what may be happening further up in elevation. The hiking portion is moderate to slightly difficult and it could be warm at the lower elevations, bring plenty of water, lunch, field guide, hand lens, sunscreen and hat. We should be done by late afternoon. We will meet at 8:00 am at the intersection of Fish Hatchery Rd. and US 395, 2.3 miles north of Independence and 0.5 mile south of the Fort Independence gas

station. For more information contact Jerry Zatorski at (760) 3987-2920 or jerryzat@gmail.com.

CONSERVATION

DWP declares war on the Eastern Sierra

We are saturated with wars. Lyndon Johnson initiated the "War on poverty" and Richard Nixon followed suit with the "War on drugs" which continues to this day. George W. Bush began the endless "War on terror" while the Republican Party recently began the "War on women." With all these wars, is it any wonder that DWP's latest war on the Eastern Sierra has yet to be publicized? One could argue that DWP has actually been at war with the Eastern Sierra for over a century, but DWP's aggressive behavior has recently increased so dramatically I think a new "war on the Eastern Sierra" has clearly begun.

In the past few months, DWP has:

- 1) Petitioned the State Water Board to discontinue limnological monitoring at Mono Lake. This monitoring is a condition of DWP's water export license and also part of a legal settlement reached over 10 years ago. For more information see <http://www.monolake.org/today/2012/04/25/monos-limnology-monitoring-requirements-challenged/>;
- 2) Filed two lawsuits and three administrative appeals to try to evade its requirements to mitigate dust at Owens Lake. For more information see <http://www.gbuapcd.org/Information/inthenews.htm>;
- 3) Filed two lawsuits and two California Public Record Act requests against the Mammoth Community Water District regarding its water plan and EIR due to proposed water diversions from Mammoth Creek. For more information see <http://www.mcwd.dst.ca.us/CityofLALawsuits.htm>;
- 4) Threatened to sue the California Dept. of Fish and Game if the Bishop Paiute Tribe introduces endangered Owens Valley pupfish to a specially designed pupfish refuge on the Bishop Paiute Shoshone reservation. For more information see the Inyo Register, May 3, 2012;
- 5) Asserted it is entitled to exempt certain wells from the On/Off provisions of the Inyo-LA Long Term Water Agreement, and initiated a formal dispute when Inyo County did not agree. For more information see "Another DWP Water Agreement dispute?" below;

6) Submitted an annual pumping plan under the Inyo-LA Long Term Water Agreement so vague and misleading it did not specify how much water DWP actually plans to pump. For more information see “DWP Releases 2012-2013 Draft Pumping Plan” below;

7) Demolished a historic structure in Independence at 4:00 am without first obtaining a demolition permit from Inyo County, notwithstanding offers by citizens of Independence to donate their services to restore the building. For more information see the Inyo Register May 3, 2012.

These aggressive acts are controlled by politics in Los Angeles and demonstrate how little control we residents of the Eastern Sierra have over the lands and resources of the Eastern Sierra. LA Mayor Villaraigosa, elected with strong support from the Los Angeles environmental community, is losing power. When first elected, Villaraigosa appointed several strong environmentalists to the LA Board of Water and Power Commissioners, and for several years thereafter DWP’s bad behavior was muted. The strong environmentalists have now departed from the scene and DWP is reverting to type.

These aggressions show the futility of making agreements with DWP. Most involve DWP attempting to get out of commitments it has already made, sometimes decades ago.

Daniel Pritchett

REPORTS

DWP Releases 2012-2013 Draft Pumping Plan

On April 20, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP) released its draft pumping plan, as required by the Inyo/LA Water Agreement. Despite very low mountain snowpack, DWP estimated runoff from the Owens River watershed at 65% of average this runoff year (the runoff year begins April 1).

The draft plan is not really a plan, instead the document provides a range of possible pumping amounts that could occur. The range in pumping presented for the entire Owens Valley is 61,900 to 88,000 acre-feet. However, close examination of the numbers (that is, adding them up with a calculator) reveals the range to be 61,900 to 93,000 acre-feet! It’s not clear if DWP added incorrectly or if they would juggle the pumping in each wellfield to not exceed a valley-wide total of

88,000 acre-feet. The USGS recommended an average of 70,000 acre-feet per year if environmental conditions were to remain close to the mid 1980s baseline for Owens Valley vegetation.

DWP was unclear as to what would influence the actual pumped amount. For example, for the Big Pine wellfield, the draft says, “The total planned pumping... is between approximately 20,500 acre-feet and 28,400 acre-feet during the 2012-13 runoff year, contingent on water needs and environmental conditions.” Not surprisingly, the terms “water needs and environmental conditions” are not defined in the draft plan. Also, per the Water Agreement, DWP reserves the right to further change the plan at any time during the runoff year.

What next? In the process governed by the Water Agreement, Inyo County Water Department (ICWD) has until April 30 to comment on the draft plan. DWP then has 10 days to respond to ICWD’s comments; then DWP will release a final plan. There was no indication at the April 23 Inyo County Water Commission meeting that ICWD’s comments would advocate environmental protection. Inyo and DWP have been bogged down for years on revising the Green Book, which would presumably replace the existing faulty on/off soil water balance method. Also, Inyo County “lost” in arbitration with regard to a procedural question about pumping plan comments, so ICWD seemed reluctant to assert environmental protection in challenging the draft plan. Groundwater levels remain well below mid 1980s baseline levels as of April 1, 2012, so any pumping in a dry year like the present will result in groundwater levels dropping further from the baseline numbers. In some parts of the valley, water levels have persisted below baseline for the entire period (~25 years).

The process is governed by the Water Agreement, so if the public objects to DWP’s final plan, the public would need to take concerns to Inyo County to demand less pumping.

Sally Manning

Another DWP Water Agreement dispute?

On April 10, 2012, DWP sent a letter to Inyo County asking for the Inyo-LA Technical Group to “resolve” the Enhancement/Mitigation project water supply imbalance.

Understanding what this is about requires going back over 20 years to pre-Water Agreement days (i.e. before 1991). Most Enhancement/Mitigation (E/M) projects called for some sort of “re-greening” of the valley such as: irrigated livestock pastures; alfalfa fields; woodlots; ballfields; and water spreading (called “ponds”!). For each project, DWP intended to pump water, either to supply the project directly or to replace surface water supplied to the project so aqueduct flows would not be diminished. In anticipation of this additional pumping, DWP constructed some new wells and labeled them “E/M.” Several of these E/M projects were implemented prior to the 1991 Water Agreement and EIR. However, the Water Agreement was based on the premise that pumping would not cause environmental degradation relative to “baseline” conditions in the mid 1980s. To make this premise a reality, both Inyo and DWP developed the Water Agreement’s On/Off protocol for controlling pumping. DWP knowingly agreed in the 1991 Water Agreement that E/M wells would be subject to the On/Off protocol.

DWP is now seeking exemption of E/M wells from the On/Off protocol. In the two decades of management under the Water Agreement, DWP has supplied existing E/M projects with water. It has also kept track of the amount of water pumped from E/M wells. By DWP’s reckoning, it has supplied more water to E/M projects than it has pumped from E/M wells, hence DWP asserts there is an “imbalance.”

The “imbalance” arose because many E/M wells have been in “Off” status (under the On/Off protocol) for years, or even decades. What DWP failed to mention in its complaint is that through its own management DWP controls when/if wells go into “Off” status. The “E/M” imbalance is not something beyond DWP’s control for which it might legitimately seek relief. The imbalance was created by and is an un-mistakable indicator of DWP’s excessive pumping.

Rather than accept responsibility for mis-managing its pumping, and thereby causing many E/M wells to go into “Off” status, DWP is simply trying to change the rules. In seeking exemption of E/M wells from the On/Off protocol, DWP is attempting to externalize the costs of its over-pumping to the Owens Valley environment. Under the status quo, without the exemptions, Owens

Valley environment is protected, because pumping can only be conducted where sufficient soil water exists to maintain wellfield ecosystems. With the proposed exemptions, the water supply to LA would be increased, and pumping of E/M wells would be conducted without regard to impacts to the Owens Valley environment. This is antithetical to the goal of the Water Agreement, which explicitly requires managers to “avoid” impacts while providing a “reliable” (as opposed to “maximum possible” or “optimal”) water supply. The fact that DWP expects its request to be taken seriously at all is one measure of the bad faith it so often exhibits in all things related to water exports. If DWP succeeds in getting these exemptions it will be a major weakening of the already far-too-weak Water Agreement.

In its letter of April 10, and in the discussion at the April 20 Technical Group meeting, DWP indicated it wants 180,000 acre feet of water as back payment, and it wants all wells labeled by DWP as “E/M” to be exempted by the Technical Group from the On/Off protocol. Inyo County did not accede to DWP’s request so the matter was placed on the agenda for the May 4 Standing Committee meeting in LA.

Sally Manning and Daniel Pritchett

MEMBERSHIP

The Bristlecone Chapter heartily welcomes the following new members:

Shaun Gonzales, Washington, D.C.
Dianne Rindt, Ridgecrest, CA

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

33(3)

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 Bristlecone Chapter
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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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 Rare Plant Committee: Kathleen Nelson (760) 873-2400
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 Plant Sale Committee – Katie Quinlan (760) 873-8023,
 Sherryl Taylor (924-8742), Denise Waterbury (873-4344)
 Book Sales - Sue Weis (760) 873-3485
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 Creosote Ring Sub-Chapter Coordinator – Kathy
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THE CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY (www.bristleconecnps.org) Bristlecone Chapter Newsletter comes out bimonthly. It is free to chapter members. To subscribe to this newsletter without joining CNPS, please send \$5.00 per year to CNPS, P.O. Box 364, Bishop, CA 93515-0364. ATTN: subscriptions. Send newsletter articles not memberships to newsletter editor Daniel Pritchett at newsletter@bristleconecnps.org.