



## Bristlecone Chapter

*Dedicated to the Preservation of California Native Flora*

# The California Native Plant Society

Bristlecone Chapter Newsletter

**Volume 44, No. 6**

**November–December 2023**

**SAVE THE DATE! Dec. 6<sup>th</sup>**  
**Annual Holiday Potluck and Presentation**  
**Wednesday, December 6<sup>th</sup>**  
**White Mountain Research Center,**  
**3000 E. Line St., Bishop**

Please join us at our annual joint holiday potluck with Eastern Sierra Audubon Society. Bring a dish to share with everyone. We'll begin in the dining room at 6:00 pm for our potluck feast, then move into one of the classrooms at 7:00 pm for a presentation by Blake Engelhardt, Botanist with the US Forest Service. She will be sharing "Flora and fauna highlights from a year on the Inyo National Forest".

RSVP—because seating is limited—to [secretary@bristleconecnps.org](mailto:secretary@bristleconecnps.org) to save your seat!



## November Conservation Updates

### Public process for proposed drilling at Conglomerate Mesa moves forward

On August 16, 2023 the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced the start of a 60-day scoping period for a proposed drilling project on Conglomerate Mesa, an important plant area in Inyo County that is home to rare and culturally important plant species. The scoping period was an opportunity for the public to identify issues, suggest alternatives, or provide additional information for the agency to consider in the forthcoming Environmental Impact

Statement (EIS). The CNPS Bristlecone Chapter collaborated with numerous organizations including the CNPS state office, Friends of the Inyo, and Sierra Club Range of Light Group to ask the BLM to consider a comprehensive set of concerns, including impacts to rare plant species. We also asked the agency to analyze a “lower impact” alternative that prohibited road building and limited ground disturbance near rare plant habitat.

You may be wondering why there have been so many calls to action and opportunities to comment on mining activity at Conglomerate Mesa. Unfortunately, as long as this area is unprotected, there's a good chance that the rare plants and their habitats will be vulnerable to mining activity. Fortunately, with each proposal, there is an opportunity for the public to weigh in and highlight the need to protect native plants. Below is a timeline that summarizes the most recent mining activity focused on sediment-hosted gold deposits in this area.

1996–1998: BHP completes exploratory drilling at Conglomerate Mesa.

1998–2018: Several companies acquire mining claims, but no additional drilling is completed.

2019: K2 Gold (subsidiary “Mojave Precious Metals”) acquires mining claims and operating plan from the former operator, Silver Standard.

2020: K2 Gold completes Phase I of exploratory drilling at roadless area in Conglomerate Mesa by using a helicopter to carry in equipment.

2021: K2 Gold proposes to build roads to conduct drilling in a much larger area at Conglomerate Mesa. BLM opens scoping, the first phase of public comment, for an Environmental Assessment. K2 Gold acquires additional claims near Cerro Gordo.

2022: Due to Tribal concerns and sensitive biological resources, BLM requires a more comprehensive EIS which initiates a separate scoping process.

2023: Scoping is completed for the more comprehensive EIS.

TBD: A second opportunity for public comment will occur when BLM releases a draft EIS which will include a full analysis of the impacts of the proposed drilling as well as the impacts of alternative courses of action.

### **Inyo rock daisy to be listed under the CA Endangered Species Act**



Inyo rock daisy at Conglomerate Mesa. Photo: Duncan Bell.

On October 11, the California Fish and Game Commission voted unanimously to list the Inyo rock daisy (*Perityle inyoensis* or *Laphamia inyoensis*) as threatened under the state Endangered Species Act. This action came in response to a petition submitted by CNPS, Center for Biological Diversity, and Maria Jesus, who surveyed the species while completing a plant checklist of Conglomerate Mesa. Over half of all Inyo rock daisy occurrences are on Conglomerate Mesa, including the site of proposed gold drilling. Now that the daisy is state-listed, any potential impacts resulting from proposed mining or other projects will require consultation with California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

### **Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act**



A western Joshua tree and mining claim at Conglomerate Mesa. Photo: Maria Jesus.

On July 4, 2023, California passed the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act. Although the western Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*) is widespread, scientists predict the species will be nearly extirpated from California in the coming decades due to climate change and other factors, such as development and invasive species. The act provides important protections for the western Joshua tree including the implementation of a conservation plan, regular status updates to determine if protection remains warranted, and the establishment of a conservation fund. Furthermore, the act prohibits the importation, export, take, possession, purchase, or any sale of any western Joshua tree in California without prior permission from California Department of Fish and Wildlife. There is a separate permit process for people who need to trim or remove a hazardous Joshua tree on their property. You can read more about the permitting process and sign up for alerts at <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Environmental-Review/WJT>.

—Maria Jesus

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## **Water Year 2023 in the Eastern Sierra**

The winter and summer of 2023 were an extraordinary water year for the Eastern Sierra. This year of abundant water follows five drier-than-normal years when drought was on everyone's minds. Below is a review of water conditions and issues in Inyo and Mono Counties.

## Inyo County

Groundwater levels rebounded in all well fields except Symmes-Shepherd. Symmes Creek, before it empties in to the Los Angeles Aqueduct, has experienced severe down-cutting in recent years; this may account for the lack of improvement in groundwater levels. The Big Pine well field, which consistently provides the largest share of water pumped by Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), rose significantly after years below the benchmark established for the area.

This fall, springs along the valley floor from south to north are showing signs of some flow, fostering hope that a reduction in pumping might partially restore dry springs. Here is a summary of the status of each spring.

**Reinhackle Spring** is flowing strongly. This spring has been affected by the Los Angeles Aqueduct as the water chemistry has changed over time to resemble water chemistry in the aqueduct. LADWP proposed drilling a new well to replace an existing well, which would tap a deep aquifer. Inyo County Water Department (ICWD) has concerns about this new well related to the geology of the area.

I wasn't able to visit **Little Black Rock Spring** this year. Like Reinhackle Springs, the water chemistry of ponds supplied by the Division Creek ditch has changed to resemble water in the ditch. Vegetation is lush and mature.

As of October, a pond has formed in the basin below dry **Hines Spring**. Since this pond is above where water allocated under mitigation measures (Pump 355 and water diverted from the Aberdeen Ditch) comes in, it seems this spring is also flowing. Vegetation below the spring has made a remarkable recovery from allocated water, although there is an



The pond below Hinds Springs Vent (November 3, 2023). Photo: Edie Trimmer.

increasing presence of non-native salt cedar (*Tamarix chinensis*) and pepperweed (*Lepidium* spp.).

**Big Seeley Spring** has substantial flow and increased vegetation (including salt cedar and pepperweed) along the draw as it flows toward the Owens River. Below **Little Seeley Spring**, wild rose (*Rosa woodsii*) is coming back among dead brambles so there may be some spring flow. The one-acre pond which is usually supplied by Well 349 flows out into the Owens River despite the fact the well has not been pumped from this year. The well usually pumps approximately 10,000 acre-feet per year through the pond and into the river.



Edie Trimmer's dog enjoying the outflow from the pond at Seeley Springs. Water flows despite no pumping at nearby well 349. November 1 2023. Photo: Edie Trimmer.

**Fish Springs** provides water for the Fish Springs Hatchery with the outflow going to Tinemaha Reservoir and then the Los Angeles Aqueduct. There has been discussion for several years if the hatchery needs the approximately 20,000 acre-feet pumped most years. As a result, LADWP has agreed to modify the pumps to modestly reduce pumping. However, it does not plan on modifying the pumps until 2026. This year pumping has been much less than typical due to high run-off but still accounts for over a third of pumped water in the Owens Valley. As a result, a five-acre pond known to the Big Pine Paiute Tribe re-appeared through October indicating that groundwater levels in the area can recover quickly with reduced pumping. The Big Pine Paiute Tribe is interested in meeting with Inyo County Supervisor

Jen Roeser, California Division of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), ICWD, LADWP and others to look for solutions for effluent from the hatchery and to create wetland habitat. This was part of a field trip in June 2022 with all the potential partners, but no further discussions have taken place. The Fish Springs Hatchery and surrounding area are not on tribal reservation land but are important areas to the tribe. Reduced pumping along with return of natural ponds would benefit the entire Big Pine area.



August 2, 2023. Water unseen for years between the natural springs and the north end of the concrete runways at Fish Springs Hatchery. Photo: Elaine Chow.

### **Mitigation Projects and Weed Control**

The proliferation of invasive species has been overwhelming this year as a result of the abundance of water. Agricultural Commissioner Nate Reed has discussed reviving the Eastern Sierra Weed Management Project to address invasive species such as Russian thistle (*Salsola* spp.), bassia (*Bassia hyssopifolia*), pepperweed and salt cedar. There is some basic funding from a grant and from Inyo County, but this would be an inter-agency effort, so more resources might be available. Special attention should be directed to weed removal at renewed springs and failed mitigation sites such as Five Bridges.

On a field trip in October, ICWD asked the Inyo County Water Commission to consider modification

to three mitigation sites. One proposal is to stop supplying water to McNally Ponds at the north end of the county and allocating some of that water to expanding Farmer's Pond into lower basins designated as Pond 2-4.

All four ponds in the Farmer's Pond area had water through the summer and fall and are surrounded by cottonwoods and willows. But an important question is where water would come from in average or low water years. The area is part of the Bishop Cone; there is a possibility that LADWP would be allowed to drill a new well within the Bishop Cone.

McNally Ponds, in contrast, has little quality habitat around the pond and is subject to evaporation. Water was to be supplied from Lower McNally Canal during September through January but instead comes from pumped water. This northern area of the county is not well understood with regard to groundwater flows.

Another mitigation project which has not worked as envisioned is Freeman Creek. For the past several years, water-flows in the creek have dropped just above the gaging station for unknown reasons. As a result, this mitigation project has received only a portion of the water reported by LADWP. Vegetation that had begun to flourish is dying and the meadow area at the end of Freeman Creek does not receive any water. ICWD proposes shifting the water allocated to this mitigation site to another existing or new site.

### **Mono County**

Tri-Valley Groundwater Management District (TVGMD) is the agency to create a sustainability plan for Benton, Hammil and Chalfant Valley groundwater. A Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) was formed in November 2022. Previously, TVGMD was part of the Owens Valley Groundwater Sustainability Agency (OVGA) but chose to withdraw to allow local control of groundwater management. However, the Owens Valley Groundwater Sustainability Plan (OVGSP) has data and recommendations for Tri-Valley that can be used by TVGMD.

Also in November 2022, TVGMD lost a board member, reducing the seven-member board to six. The board was not able to agree on an appointee to the board because of disagreement about whether the new member would represent agricultural or domestic users and how environmental resources

would be protected, in particular the decline in flow at the North East Spring at Fish Slough. Groundwater levels have been declining throughout the Tri-Valley district for many years, most significantly in Hammil Valley and more moderately at the North East Spring. However, the negative impacts to the spring and to the springs below it are much more immediate. The flow from the North East Spring was only a trickle in November, even after a very wet year.



Water trickled out of the weir at Fish Slough (November 3, 2023). Photo: Edie Trimmer.

Because no board member was chosen within six months, the vacant position will be filled by special election this November 7. The two candidates running for election to the board are Don Moss, a farmer and manager of hydro-electric projects, and Curtis Milliron, a retired CDFW biologist who has worked on groundwater projects in his career. The campaign has caused divisions and acrimony in the communities of Tri-Valley.

The differences in board members' concerns are stark with those representing agricultural interests resisting the construction of a groundwater model. Such a model would define groundwater resources, including a water budget for the Tri-Valley area. It would also clarify if or how groundwater pumping in Tri-Valley affects Fish Slough.

Funding from CDFW and California Department of Water Resources (DWR) has been obtained for two monitoring wells on Bureau of Land Management land. These wells will add more data than are currently gathered from existing wells at private homes and county landfill operations in order to prepare a groundwater model. Also, the DWR is conducting Aerial Electromagnetic Surveys in

November to determine where there are suitable areas for groundwater recharge in the Tri-Valley.

At the close of the October board meeting, Board Chair Carol Ann Mitchell announced she was stepping down as board chair, although she will continue to be on the board. In remarks to the Board and the audience, she described the accusations and innuendo against her, other Board Members, and members of the Advisory Board both in public meetings and in interactions with some residents in personal encounters. These encounters were an unfamiliar experience for her as a long-time resident of Chalfant and in her opinion reflect the political divisions throughout the United States.

I would like to express my admiration for Carol Ann Mitchell, for Betsy McDonald as co-chair of the Advisory Board and for other folks who have patiently and openly addressed the issues of sustainability of groundwater resources in Tri-Valley and Fish Slough. Carol Ann and others worked to create a Tri-Valley GSA apart from OVGA when residents demanded local control, found solutions for monitoring when farmers refused to allow their wells to be monitored, and respected and welcomed all viewpoints at contentious meetings. She and others have been true leaders in Tri-Valley and, despite resistance and unfair criticism, have moved TVGMD much closer to understanding its groundwater resources.

—Edie Trimmer

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## Greenhouse update Nov. 2023

Fall has slowly been coming to the Owens Valley and I have been enjoying the fall colors in the mountains and collecting seeds from the plants that are ready.

My garden has shifted to the fall blooming plants, California fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*), goldenrod (*Solidago* sp.), Wrights buckwheat (*Eriogonum wrightii*) and a few blooming poppies. The bees are all over them and it reminds me of how important it is for us to plant varieties that bloom at different times of the year. While I am standing with the bees buzzing around my legs, I am collecting from the plant next to it that has gone to seed.

At the propagation center it is the time to weed and do repairs. With the abundant water year there has

been a lot more weeds so I have spent a couple of days just pulling bassia and Russian thistle. One of the growing tables had broken at the beginning of the season and I finally was able to build a new one as well.

Slowly my plant-growing season is coming to an end and I am looking forward to a couple of months where I don't have to do much before the next growing season starts up again in January.

—Katie Quinlan

## Welcome New Members

We'd like to give a warm welcome to Gavin in Park City and Xtine in Sacramento for joining our chapter.

Up-Coming Events
<b>Chapter Events</b>
<p><b>Thursday, November 16, 6:00 pm</b>  <b>Board Meeting (online)</b>            All members are welcome to join. Contact our Secretary, Kathleen Nelson, at <a href="mailto:secretary@bristleconecnps.org">secretary@bristleconecnps.org</a> for the Zoom link.</p>
<p><b>Saturday, November 18, 9:00 am</b>  <b>CNPS Bristlecone Chapter Plot, Bishop Community Demonstration Garden in Bishop City Park, 688 N. Main St.</b>            Join Sue Weis on the third Saturday of each month, starting at 9:00 am, to work in our plot of native plants. Workdays will be canceled if raining. If you plan to help out, do contact Sue beforehand. <a href="mailto:sue.weis98@gmail.com">sue.weis98@gmail.com</a></p>
<p><b>Wednesday, December 6, 6:00 pm</b>  <b>CNPS/ESA Annual Holiday Potluck</b>  <b>White Mountain Research Center, 3000 E. Line St., Bishop</b>            See pg. 1 for more details.</p>
<b>Other Events</b>

## Up-Coming Events

**Monday, February 12, 2024, 7:00 pm–8:30 pm**  
**California Water Culture; an overview of how California's unique waterways have been transformed, how it happened, and what it means**  
**North San Joaquin Valley Chapter WEBINAR with Tina Donnelly**

This talk will overview the ties between California's culture and how it revolves around water & its plants and how the relationship has evolved over the past couple hundred years. Can California balance the needs of the citizens, the landscape, and the economy? This question may not be answered in this talk but insights and realistic perspectives will be given and discussed that may help open a productive dialogue.

Tina has lived in California's Central Valley most of her life and has been in the Natural Resources Management field for over ten years

Please register for this meeting at <https://cnps-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYrdeurpjotG9zydgLL0HRvz56vC2Yes7qx>

**Please send any submissions to us by December 15, 2023 for the next issue.**

### Bristlecone Chapter Directory

President: **OPEN**  
 Vice President: **OPEN**  
 Secretary: Kathleen Nelson  
[secretary@bristleconecnps.org](mailto:secretary@bristleconecnps.org)  
 Treasurer: Sue Weis [treasurer@bristleconecnps.org](mailto:treasurer@bristleconecnps.org)  
 Chapter Council Delegate: Stephen Ingram  
[stephen@ingramphoto.com](mailto:stephen@ingramphoto.com)  
 Conservation/Partnerships: **OPEN**  
 Education: **OPEN**  
 Programs: **OPEN**  
 DeDecker Grants: Kathleen Nelson  
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 Field Trips: **OPEN**  
 Bishop Plant Sales: Katie Quinlan  
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 Website: **OPEN**  
 T-shirt Sales: Katie Quinlan [plant\\_sale@bristleconecnps.org](mailto:plant_sale@bristleconecnps.org)  
 DeDecker Gardener: Kelly Bahr [kbahr@cnps.org](mailto:kbahr@cnps.org)

## Mary DeDecker Botanical Grant

The Bristlecone Chapter of the California Native Plant Society is pleased to request applications for the Mary DeDecker Botanical Grant. This small-grants program is named in memory of a local botanist renowned for her many contributions to the botany and history of the Eastern Sierra Nevada and northern Mojave Desert.



Bristlecone Chapter

Our goal is to promote research and projects that increase understanding and appreciation of native plants and ecosystems in the Bristlecone Chapter area.

Anyone may apply, but we are especially interested in helping graduate and undergraduate college students as well as elementary, middle, and high school pupils and their teachers. The only requirement is that the project include studies within the Bristlecone Chapter area – generally defined as Inyo and Mono Counties, but including adjacent biogeographic areas of the northern Mojave Desert, Sierra Nevada, or western Great Basin. Subjects appropriate for funding cover a wide range, from basic taxonomic or ecological research to native plant gardens. The committee evaluates applications based on the extent to which the proposed project is specific to our regional flora, fills information gaps, and contributes to public awareness of native flora. We seek well-organized proposals that demonstrate a clear objective and a pathway to achieve success.

The program will award grants of up to \$1,000 each. Proposals exceeding \$1,000 may still be considered, contingent on chapter funding and project justification; in such cases, applicants are advised to develop their project acknowledging that only \$1,000 or less may be available, and line-item the budget accordingly.

### Criteria and Procedures

Submit written proposals to the Mary DeDecker Grant Committee. Each should contain 1) title, 2) objectives, 3) methods, 4) expected final product, 5) relevance to chapter area (at least part of the project should be conducted in Inyo or Mono Counties), 6) proposed budget, 7) permitting plans for collection and research from relevant land managers, and 8) applicant's resume. Student proposals must include a letter of support from their adviser or teacher. Electronic files may be in Word or pdf format, and should be named using the format: LastNameFirstName\_2024application (or \_2024letter). Proposals should not exceed three pages in length, excluding resume. The deadline for complete proposal packages is **January 19, 2024**. All applicants will be notified of the committee's decision by **early March, 2024**.

A progress report explaining how Bristlecone Chapter funds were used is due at the end of the calendar year. Applicants are encouraged to give a talk about their project at a chapter evening meeting and/or to write a brief explanation of their work for the Bristlecone Chapter newsletter.

### Send proposals or requests for information to:

[grants@bristleconecnps.org](mailto:grants@bristleconecnps.org) (electronic submissions are preferred but not required)

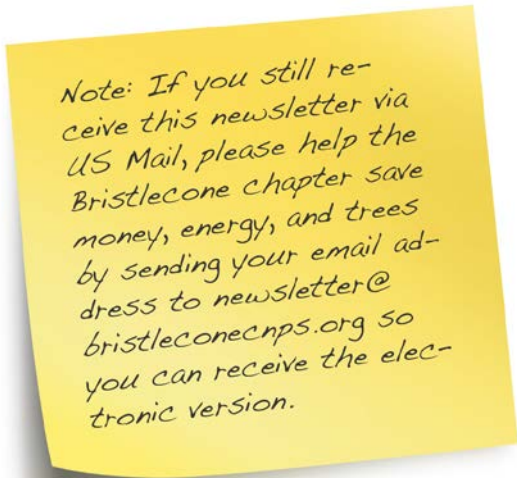
OR:

Kathleen Nelson  
Mary DeDecker Grant Committee Chair  
P. O. Box 364  
Bishop, CA 93514

*You can find more information about the Bristlecone Chapter Grants Program, including this Request for Proposals, at <http://bristleconecnps.org/dedecker/grant/>*

**The California Native Plant Society**

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



## Membership

The California Native Plant Society is an organization of laypersons 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.

**To join or renew online:** Go to [www.cnps.org](http://www.cnps.org) and click JOIN/RENEW (at the top-right or select it after clicking the menu button at the top left of the webpage) or mail the form below:

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Zip Code:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_  
I wish to be affiliated with the Bristlecone Chapter: \_\_\_\_\_  
Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership Type:** \_\_\_ New Member  
                                  \_\_\_ Renewal

**Mail To / Make Payable To:**  
California Native Plant Society, Attn: Membership  
2707 K Street, Suite 1  
Sacramento, CA 95816

**Membership Category**

__ Student / Fixed Income	\$25
__ Individual	\$50
__ Plant Lover	\$120
__ Supporter	\$500
__ Patron	\$1,000
__ Benefactor	\$2,500
__ Steward	\$5,000
__ Guardian	\$10,000
__ Additional Contribution	_____

**Gift Contribution:** \_\_\_\_\_ Wherever needed   
Specific Area: \_\_\_\_\_

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