



# Tehipite Topics

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## Is Madera County Growing Too Fast?

by Bruce Gray

Land development comes at a cost to all area residents — whether the cost is in the form of taxes, the loss of open space, traffic congestion, or air pollution. If planned properly, positive impacts should outweigh the negative so that development will sustain the community and improve people's living standards (i.e., incomes, consumption, levels of food) and quality of life (i.e., higher education, medical care, and elderly services).

We all need to get involved by looking at the big picture. We must hold our cities, counties, and developers accountable. Planning is essential and cannot be ignored. Traffic and utility infrastructure, along with protection for resources such as air and water, must be in place before a project breaks ground. Madera County has a track record of deferring mitigations until after a development project has progressed too far, and then the County falls back upon others to sort it out, often deferring the costs to the residents.



**SHOULD MADERA COUNTY'S VINEYARDS AND ALMOND GROVES GIVE WAY TO BEDROOMS FOR FRESNO?**

If Madera County's new homes create a bedroom community for Fresno, all existing roadways and services will quickly become inadequate, forcing Fresno to remedy the situation, a cost which Fresno County residents will ultimately pay.

In Madera County, there are ten major developments currently on the books for the southeastern portion of the County. Four of these developments have been approved by the Madera County Board of Supervisors for a total of 15,693 dwelling units plus planned commercial. These will be built once it's been determined to be economically viable. The projects now ready are; Tesoro Viejo, North Shore at Millerton Lake, Gateway Village, and Gunner Ranch West. Another six projects with a potential of 40,623 houses plus planned commercial are in process. The approved and proposed developments are shown on the map on pages 6 & 7.

These developments have not been without their problems. Gateway Village started out in 2006 and then ran into issues with traffic and water. After losing at the Appeals Court to the Madera Oversight Coalition (a local nonprofit citizens' organization), there was a negotiated settlement which allowed the developers to obtain approval for their project. The property and approvals were later sold, and the new project owners are now resubmitting plans for the Gateway Village development to the County.

– CONTINUED INSIDE ON PAGE 8 –

*see also:*

Map of Southeastern Madera County Development Proposals  
Sequoia/Kings Canyon Wilderness Plan Update  
Canoeing in the Noatak Wilderness

on pages 6 & 7  
on page 9  
on page 10



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet



## Bear in mind the consequences.

The Yellowstone grizzly bear is an irreplaceable part of America's natural heritage, a symbol of the independence that defines the American character and an icon of all that is wild and free. The Bush administration set forth a proposal that would remove federal protection for the Yellowstone grizzly bear. Help Sierra Club protect our forest friends; they prefer the woods than being on display.

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## Merced Group Conservation & Executive Committee Meetings

The first Wednesday of each month at 7:00 PM — Rod Webster's home, 345 E. 20th St., Merced

Conservation meeting is first and can last 30-40 minutes.

Anyone with an interest in local, state, or national conservation issues is welcome to attend.

## Merced Group General Meetings

Monthly meetings are on the third Thursday at 7:00 PM, except in May when we have a Saturday picnic and in December when we have our annual banquet, also on a Saturday.

*The public is cordially invited to all of our meetings.*

Meetings are at Merced United Methodist Church, 899 Yosemite Parkway (also known as Hwy 140 to Yosemite). Park in the lot off of Cypress Avenue and use the entrance there.

NOTE: Sometimes it is hard to confirm speakers and programs months in advance (e.g., This coming June). If I (Rod Webster, publicity) have your email I can contact you when things are set. This is also helpful should there be any last minute changes. Occasionally (maybe once or twice a month at the most) I might also send you info on a pertinent community or Valley enviro event. If you would like to be added to our email list, send it to me at <[rwebster@elite.net](mailto:rwebster@elite.net)>.

## Merced Group May Picnic

Saturday, the 18th, 11:00–2:00.

Pot Luck Luncheon

12230 Livingston Cressy Road in Livingston

We'll lunch along the Merced River on Cindy Lashbrook's organic blueberry and cherry farm. They also grow walnuts, lavender, oat hay and some mini-plantings of persimmons, pomegranates, pecans and citrus. Riverdance Farms is the location of the well-known Pick 'n' Gather / Merced River Fair event held annually the first weekend after Memorial day (this year June 1 and 2). <[www.riverdancefarms.com](http://www.riverdancefarms.com)>

Bring food to share — it is literally pot "luck" since we don't assign dishes. Surprises are always fun and we never seem to go hungry. Water and iced tea provided; if you'd like something else it's BYOB (bring your own beverage). Also bring your own table service. We usually take a stroll along the river and there is also talk of some rafting this year (courtesy of the John Magneson Rafting Company!).

Easiest route there is heading north on Santa Fe Drive out of Merced. At the small town of Cressey turn left onto Cressey Way, and then almost immediately turn right onto Sultana Drive / Livingston Cressey Rd., then go about two miles more. It's on the right.

## Merced Group June Program

Thursday, the 20th, 7:00 PM

To Be Announced.

I will email folks on "the list," keep an eye out in local newspapers, or phone Rod at (209) 723-4747.

# *Tehipite Chapter Meetings*

## **Tehipite Chapter Conservation & Executive Committee Meetings**

**Second Wednesday of each month, except July and August ~ Open to the Public**

May 8, June 12, September 11, October 9, November 13, December 11, January 8, February 12, March 12, April 9

The Conservation Committee meets at 7 PM. The Executive Committee meets at 8 PM.

**University of California Center, 550 E. Shaw Avenue, Fresno (between First and Fresno Streets)**

## **Tehipite Chapter General Meetings**

**Monthly meetings are on the third Wednesday of each month from 7 to 9 PM  
except in July and August**

***MEETINGS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC***

**University of California Center, 550 E. Shaw Avenue, Fresno (between First and Fresno Street)**

## **Tehipite Chapter May General Meeting**

**Wednesday, May 15, 7:00 PM**

**Joanna Clines, Forest Botanist, Sierra National Forest**

### **DIVERSITY OF PLANT LIFE IN THE SIERRA NATIONAL FOREST FROM THE FOOTHILLS TO THE SIERRAN CREST**

Joanna will give a slide presentation showing a sampling of the ecologically fascinating plant life of the Sierra National Forest, a 1.3 million acre area between the Kings and Merced Rivers. The Forest is especially diverse as it spans over 12,000 feet in elevation — from around 900 feet at Pine Flat Lake to nearly 14,000 feet at Mount Humphreys along the Sierra Crest. From hot, dry, low-elevation foothills to the windswept, glacier-clad alpine zone, and with a variety of geology, soils, slope aspects, and moisture regimes, growing conditions for plants vary hugely. An amazing wild garden exists just outside Fresno. Focusing on colorful wildflowers and on places where one can see them in the Forest, Joanna will also reveal some tidbits about less obvious but equally intriguing members of the plant world such as ferns, mosses, lichens, and a few fungi. The impact of invasive, non-native weeds and what is being done to protect our native flora and fauna from these invaders will also be discussed.





## Tehipite Chapter June General Meeting

Wednesday, June 19, 7:00 P.M.

### Film Program: “Mother...Caring for 7 Billion”

Our program is a multi-award-winning 60-minute film that tells the hopeful story of two families as they make decisions to improve the world for their children.

“Mother...,” the film, breaks a 40-year taboo by bringing to light an issue that silently fuels our most pressing environmental, humanitarian, and social crises — population growth. In 2011 the world population reached 7 billion, a startling seven-fold increase since the first billion occurred 200 years ago.

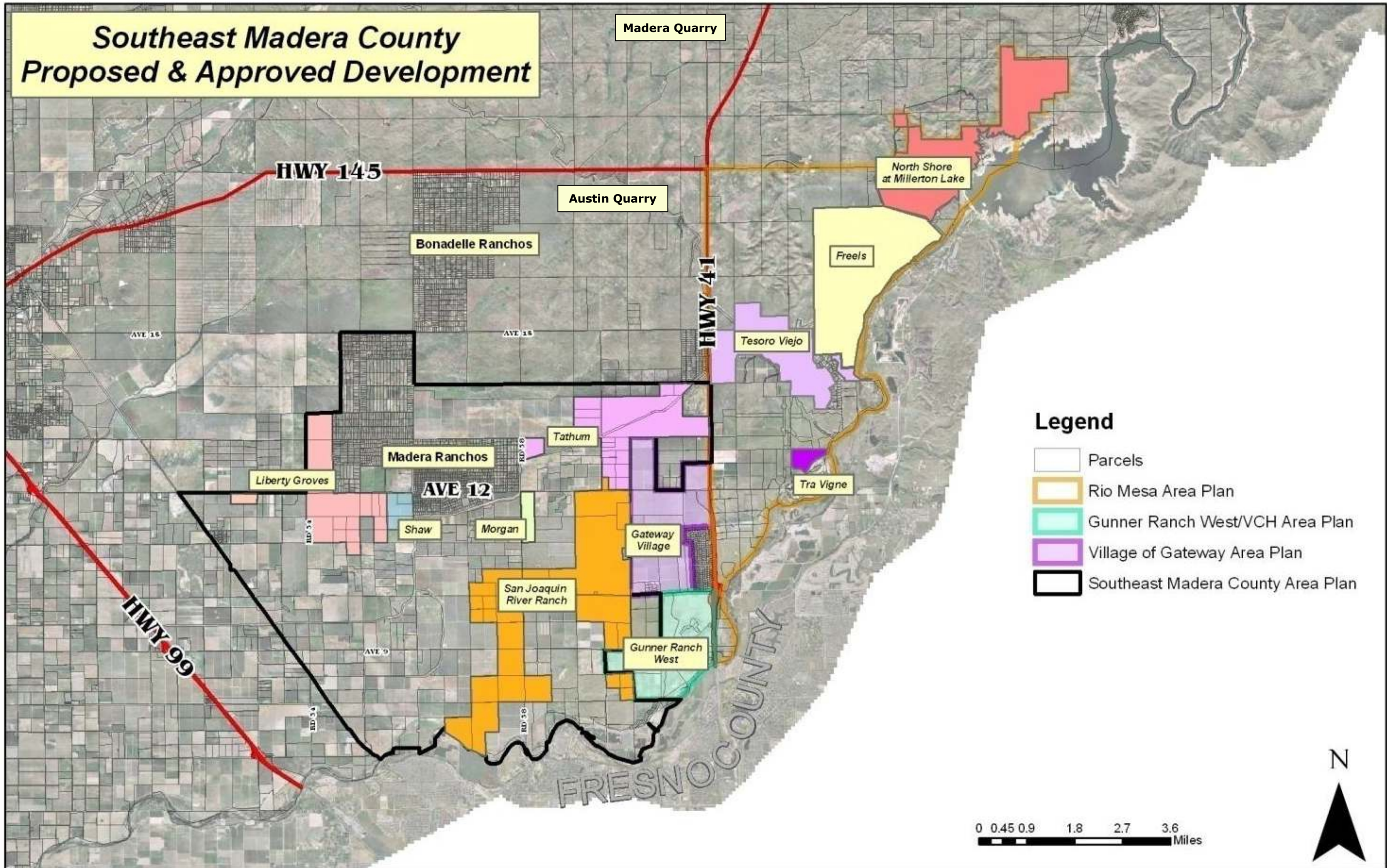
Today, nearly 1 billion people still suffer from chronic hunger even though the Green Revolution that has fed billions will soon come to an end due to the diminishing availability of its main ingredients — oil and water. Compounded with our ravenous appetite for natural resources, population growth is putting an unprecedented burden on the life system we all depend on, as we refuse to face the fact that more people equals more problems.

This film illustrates both the overconsumption and the inequity side of the population issue by following Beth, a mother and a child-rights activist as she comes to discover, along with the audience, the thorny complexities of the population issue. Beth, who comes from a large American family of 12 and has adopted an African-born daughter, travels to Ethiopia where she meets Zinet, the oldest daughter of a desperately poor family of 12. Zinet has found the courage to break free from thousand-year-old-cultural barriers, and their encounter will change Beth forever.

Overpopulation is merely a symptom of an even larger problem — a “domination system” that for most of human history has glorified the domination of man over nature, man over child, and man over woman. To break this pattern, the film demonstrates that we must change our conquering mindset into a nurturing one. And the first step is to raise the status of women worldwide. For more information about the film, go to <[motherthefilm.com](http://motherthefilm.com)>.



# Southeast Madera County Proposed & Approved Development



## Madera County Smart Growth – Yes or No?

– CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1 –



The North Shore Millerton Lake project was also held up by the Madera Oversight Coalition due to traffic and water issues. The lawsuit was settled out of court through mitigation requiring a second look at these two concerns prior to Phase II of construction.

Tesoro Viejo is another development that lost to the Madera Oversight Coalition at the Appeals Court on traffic and water issues. They recently submitted a Revised EIR, which is now being challenged on traffic, water, air, and cumulative impacts by the Madera Oversight Coalition, Caltrans, the Coalition for Clean Air, and the City of Fresno.

The Gunner Ranch West project was approved by the Madera County Planning Commission and the proposal will be heard at the Board of Supervisors in the near future. Currently it looks as though they have seen the handwriting on the wall and have addressed the issues that others did not or would not address.

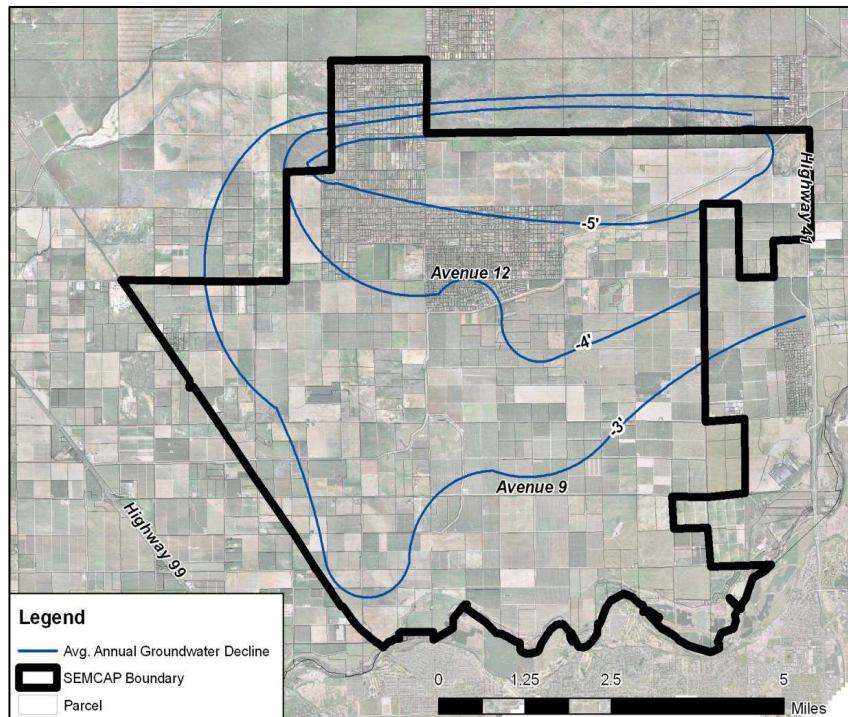
The primary drawbacks to developing in the southeastern portion of Madera County include:

- A historical lack of water in the southeastern portion of Madera County. The continual reliance on groundwater for residential and commercial developments, as well as agriculture, has led to a severe average annual groundwater decline ranging from three to five feet per year. Currently there is a 22,000 acre feet per year overdraft. Gateway Village is the only project that will be importing its water under contract. See the map with groundwater contours, below.
- The County is currently underfunded and not able to financially support construction of the transportation corridors required to move the increased amount of traffic resulting from the



**CENTRAL VALLEY AGRICULTURAL LAND — SOME OF THE BEST IN THE NATION — IS A PRECIOUS AND IRREPLACEABLE RESOURCE.**

56,000+ proposed residential units and the accompanying commercial development. In 1997 Senate Bill 45 mandated that the State Transportation Improvement Program funding be inverted so Caltrans would receive 25% of the available funds, with the remaining 75% going to the counties. State Highway routes 41 and 145 are not considered interregional and thus are not supported by Caltrans funding.



**GROUNDWATER LEVELS ARE DECLINING AN AVERAGE OF FROM TWO TO OVER FIVE FEET A YEAR IN MADERA COUNTY LAND BETWEEN HIGHWAYS 41 AND 99.**

In summary, Madera County is growing at an unprecedented rate without adequate transportation and other infrastructure, and without a sustainable water supply. This has triggered multiple lawsuits resulting in additional mitigations for the contested projects, as well as deferred actions. As to whether the development of commuter communities will occur as “smart growth” is up to each of us. Please support the Madera Oversight Coalition, the Coalition for Clean Air, and area decision-makers with your financial and political support.

# Sierra Club Holds Meeting with SEKI Wilderness Coordinator

by Robert Turner

On April 5<sup>th</sup> of this year, Joe Fontaine, Richard Garcia, and Brian Newton of the Kern Kaweah Chapter and I met at Three Rivers on the Kaweah, then set out to visit the Park Headquarters of Sequoia/Kings Canyon National Parks (SEKI) for a meeting with Gregg Fauth, the Wilderness Coordinator of SEKI. The two parks are managed together from the same office in Ash Meadows, a few miles inside the boundary above Three Rivers. Greg is in charge of the new Wilderness Stewardship Plan, which will soon be undergoing environmental impact review.

Also meeting with us via long-distance hookup were Vicky Hoover, Chair of the California/Nevada Wilderness Committee, Sarah Matsumoto of Our Wild America, which Joe also represents, and Alan Carlton of the Yosemite Committee of the CNRCC. Present with us at Park Headquarters was Sylvia Haultain, SEKI Plant Ecologist. The new Sequoia/Kings Canyon Superintendent, Woody Smeck, had not yet arrived to take on his new duties.

## THE WILDERNESS PLANNING PROCESS

2012 saw planning begin its public face with the scoping process, where the Park Service presented preliminary draft alternatives through a series of meetings and postings on the Park's website <[www.parkplanning.nps.gov/sekiwild](http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov/sekiwild)>. Public input on the scoping alternatives ended November 19, and all of the public comments from the meetings and online submissions have been collected and are available for viewing on the SEKI website.

Once the comments are analyzed, the Park will refine the draft alternatives and prepare a draft wilderness stewardship plan (WSP) and environmental impact statement (EIS), which will be put up for a 90-day public review. This should occur around January 2014. The rest of the year will see the analysis of public comments, preparation of the final WSP/EIS, and its release toward the end of the year. The plans stated purpose is to establish a framework for management of wilderness in the parks in order to preserve wilderness character and provide opportunities for access and use in accordance with the Wilderness Act and other laws and policies, two goals that are often at odds with each other.

## HORSES IN THE WILDERNESS

The SEKI Wilderness Plan is of high priority to the National Park Service, perhaps the highest priority, due to the lawsuit filed by the High Sierra Hikers Association. That suit resulted in a court decision ordering the NPS to do a needs assessment determining the extent necessary for the Park to allow commercial stock services within the wilderness boundaries. The deadline for the Park Service is June 5, 2015. Fauth stated that they would be conducting a "use capacity analysis," essentially predicting what the carrying capacities of the various parts of the wilderness area are, and then decide whether they want to make adjustments to the social and biophysical standards already set. There are impacts by stock use on both the natural environment and on the experience of other wilderness users, and sometimes, Fauth commented, the social impacts are more sensitive than the biophysical.

96.6% of SEKI is wilderness. Within those boundaries there are maintained trails, constructed bridges over major streams, directional signs at trail junctions, a few hard-sided ranger cabins, and some major campgrounds with bear-proof food storage lockers. The lockers present a dilemma, in that they congregate campers into a smaller area with greater impact. On the other hand, removing them disperses use. Long-term studies show that this results in an increase in the number of new campsites across the wilderness. Currently, bear canisters are required for use by all backpackers, so the storage lockers should be unnecessary.

## THE CONTROVERSY OF WILDERNESS ZONING

Vicky Hoover took on the Park Service's application of wilderness management zones, arguing that making these designations part of the plan gives the public the impression that for some parts of the wilderness there are different standards on what is an acceptable level of degradation due to greater use. Fauth stated that no part of the wilderness is to be treated with lesser regard than any other according to the legal standards of the Act. But Vicky insisted this is a slippery slope that ought to be avoided.

I argued against either increasing or decreasing quotas on wilderness use. Regulating the number of users is essential to minimizing the impact of sensitive areas. Some lakes and meadows are necessarily off-limits to camping to allow for their recovery from past uncontrolled use. On the other hand, I prefer to control user impact not with additional use restrictions, but rather with education of wilderness visitors during the permitting process regarding the fragility of certain high-use, impacted areas on a given party's itinerary.

As a club, we discourage the creeping increase in use restrictions, since part of the enjoyment of wilderness lies in the sense of freedom that one encounters in leaving behind the trappings and constraints of civilization. Already in some national parks, backpackers must state on their permits exactly where they will be camping on every night of their wilderness excursions, which doesn't leave much room for improvisation.

## AGAINST WILDERNESS USE FEES

We were all against having to pay an extra fee to use the wilderness. Already, any backpacker coming in through the park has already paid at the entry station. Anything more than an advance reservation fee is being taxed twice. Furthermore, our wildernesses are the common heritage of all Americans, rich or poor. We ought not to be placing more barriers to their use by all Americans.

Once the WSP is recorded and published, the Park Service will embark on another project, writing the Resource Stewardship Strategy (RSS). This study, which is related to actions that do not require environmental impact review, will look at SEKI's natural resources, analyzing threats to the natural conditions of the parks, such as from climate change. It will be a higher-level strategic document for managing the wilderness across several management boundaries, laying out the groundwork for implementing strategies by the Park Service to preserve our park wilderness.





# 2014: WILDERNESS 50

CELEBRATING THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WILDERNESS ACT

## Canoeing in the Noatak Wilderness

by Heather Anderson

Having never canoed before, or seen northwest Alaska, the Noatak was a perfect choice. Switching my Sierra trip to July, I was ready for August canoeing. Most of our last remaining pristine wilderness is in Alaska. The minute Coyote Air's Beaver bush plane set its extra-large tires on the gravel bar drop-off point, near the headwaters of the Noatak River, I jumped out, in wilderness, silence, and untouched beauty, just a few hours from even a suggestion of civilization, road, or building.

That civilization from which we departed was Coldfoot, so called because it marked the spot where miners, attracted to Alaska's gold mine fields during the 1870s to 90s, had traveled, gotten cold feet, and turned back. Today it consists of a truck stop (from pipeline and road building days), a modern Visitor Center, and Dirk's family-run air transportation service.

The low-flying bush plane we used to and from our back-country trips is a major connector, revealing a kaleidoscope of color from commercial airport to wilderness camp. There is a price, however, for the uninitiated camper — nights sleeping on the ground, no daily shower, no fresh fruit and vegetables but only camp food. It's a small amount to pay, however, for the experience of a river slipping silently by, mountain ranges fading gently into the distance, the arctic sun dipping only slightly below the horizon at evening, and a lone wolf call.



CANOERING NEAR THE HEADWATERS OF THE NOATAK RIVER IN NORTHWESTERN ALASKA. THE NOATAK IS THE LARGEST PROTECTED WATERSHED BASIN IN THE US.

As well as days paddling the river, there were mornings rambling up ridges, through waist-high willows and knee-high forests, on or between tussocks, over blueberry, salmonberry, brilliant red bearberry, and across a carpet of mosses, lichen, and tiny late-blooming flowers. For a time we walked along a small tributary stopping to examine evidence of who had been there before us — footprints twice our size, belying the bear as owner of them, the curved prints of caribou, the delicate petal-like paw prints of a wolf or lynx. A flaming yellow forest of willow, taller than the tundra, provided the background.

On the return flight I felt more familiar with the three-dimensional topography below, so I watched the winding river decrease as it neared the pass, and another increase as it flowed down the other side, the braids looping rakishly as they eroded and widened the valley in their descent. Often the river was gray from silt washed off the gray mountain. At times it was milky-turquoise from glacier melt. Once I saw one yellow stream, with silt from some ancient colorful formation, flow into the turquoise of another, turning it into a yellow-green river. The rivers and their surrounding blanket of vegetation melded together weaving an indescribable multi-colored landscape.

It is not impossible to save some of these places for future lovers of the wild who cannot speak for themselves — the wildlife who make this land their home and our descendants yet to be born. "2014: Wilderness 50" marks a national anniversary celebration — fifty years since the 1964 signing of the Wilderness Act by President Lyndon Johnson. Wilderness organizations will seek to make the concept and benefits of wilderness better known to the American public. Help is needed. Join us. Call Heather Anderson, (559) 681-6305.



HEATHER ON THE NOATAK IN THE FOURTH LARGEST WILDERNESS IN THE UNITED STATES — THE LARGEST AREA WITH AN INDIGENOUS NAME.

# Dinkey Creek Memorial Day Weekend Car Camp and Hiking Trip May 25-27, 2013

Join the Sierra Club California/Nevada Wilderness Committee, California Wilderness Coalition, and Friends of the River for a weekend of car camping and exploratory hikes on beautiful Dinkey Creek in the Sierra National Forest. Participants will have the opportunity to explore Dinkey Creek, a potential Wild & Scenic River, as well as potential nearby additions to the Dinkey Lakes Wilderness. Dinkey Creek is one of the longest free-flowing tributaries to the Kings River and offers outstanding scenery and recreational opportunities, including camping, hiking, expert-level whitewater kayaking, and rock climbing. The Forest Service is revising the Sierra National Forest Plan and this is your opportunity to get involved and gain first-hand experience with important wild places that should be protected in the plan.



DINKEY DOME AT SUNSET

We have reserved several sites at the Forest Service's Dinkey Creek Campground, and we will ask for modest contributions to help cover that cost. A central commissary will be offered for two dinners and three breakfasts for a cost of \$16. The trip is limited to 24 people, so please contact Vicky Hoover at [vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org](mailto:vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org) or [\(415\) 977-5527](tel:4159775527) to reserve your spot.



KAYAKING IN THE DINKEY GORGE BELOW THE DOME

Participants in the vicinity who'd like to join the outing may come up just for a day or for any part of the weekend that you can.

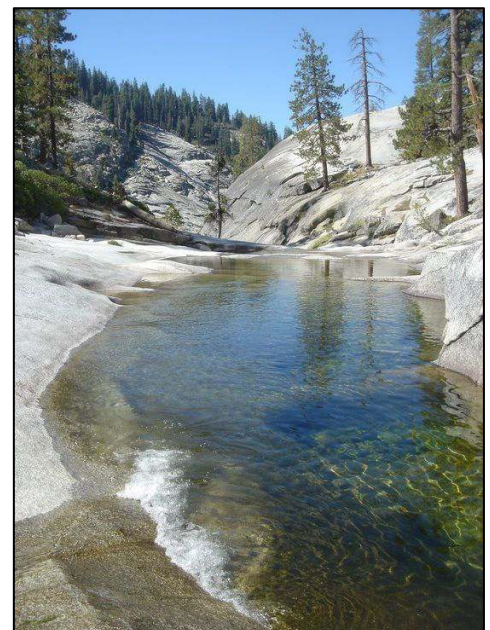
Dinkey Creek Campground is reached from Fresno or Clovis by taking Highway 168, turning off on the Dinkey Creek Road just before Shaver Lake, and continuing on that road for 12 miles. More detailed directions will be available for signed-up trip participants later.

**Dinkey Lakes Additions Wilderness Eligible Area**  
*Potential Wilderness Addition Background Information from California Wilderness Coalition re: Dinkey Lakes*

**Size:** ~28,763 acres

**Naturalness:** CWC staff and contractors confirmed that the area illustrated on the attached maps "...generally [appears] to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable." The area is free of all developments and disturbances listed above.

**Social and Ecological Values:** The area contains dozens of lakes and meadows situated in glacier-carved bowls. Between them flow cold, gushing streams surrounded by forests of hardwoods and old-growth conifers. The roadless area serves as a habitat connection between the John Muir and Kaiser Wilderness areas. Dinkey Creek is a v-shaped, deep whitewater stream with waterfalls, and is a major tributary of the North Fork Kings River. Dinkey Dome and Marble Point are both large, impressive edifices that rise above Dinkey Creek and its tributaries.



DINKEY CREEK



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*Tehipite Topics* is currently published four times per year. Full-color versions of this issue and the previous three issues of *Tehipite Topics* are available on the chapter website at [www.tehipitesierraclub.org](http://www.tehipitesierraclub.org). Articles and photographs from Sierra Club members are always welcome. Please send your personal contributions for the July-September 2013 issue by email to <[robertsturner52@gmail.com](mailto:robertsturner52@gmail.com)> before June 20.

**To celebrate Wilderness50 *Tehipite Topics*  
asks you to write for us on  
“My Most Memorable Wilderness Experience”**

Next year is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, a pivotal moment in the history of conservation in America. As part of the celebration of this groundbreaking piece of Congressional legislation, the Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club is launching a series of articles in *Tehipite Topics* on our members’ personal interactions with wilderness. How have you been affected by your experience within the wild lands preserved by this Act? Send your 100-to-200-word essay on “My Most Memorable Wilderness Experience” to the *Topics* editor at this address, <[robertsturner52@gmail.com](mailto:robertsturner52@gmail.com)>, and we will publish the winners in each issue through the anniversary year of 2014.

