



Friends of Hope Valley Newsletter

Winter, 2005

Volume 20, Issue 1

For the preservation
of the scenic,
recreational, and
historic use of Hope
Valley and Alpine
County's eastern
Sierra slope.

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Rotenone Use Denied

Jim Donald

On August 30, 2005 a federal judge in Sacramento issued an injunction against the use of rotenone in Silver King Creek, a creek in the Carson Iceberg Wilderness. This came after he issued a temporary restraining order a week earlier to halt this project on the eve it was to begin. California Department of Fish and Game had been planning to use rotenone to kill more aggressive species so that the endangered Paiute Cutthroat Trout could be established on 11 miles of this creek and it's upper tributaries.

"The Friends" supported this lawsuit and was present for the ruling. Plaintiffs contended that the use of this poison was flawed in concept, based on poor science and would not work. The probability that the benthic macro-invertebrates would never fully recover and the chance that a rare or endemic species might be eliminated was the crux of plaintiffs' contentions. Arguments also presented noted that the use of rotenone in a wilderness sullied the concepts by which these areas were created and negated users expectations of a pristine, unspoiled area.

The judge said, "You have what is a stark finality, an execution in a very special place in our treasured mountains." He added that "irreparable harm" would be done and "unimpaired reference" would be lost. He continued, "Life would end for a period of time."

He was critical of the Environmental Assessment done by the Forest Service. He stated that poor methodology and insufficient data did not show what was present in the stream, nor did it consider that rare or endemics might be present. He praised plaintiffs' experts noting that they were of "singular expertise" regarding the study of benthos, while CDFG and FS studies were missing data and were done by people who were not as well versed in this special niche of science.

It is now up to CDFG to do a full Environmental Impact Statement or drop the project altogether. An EIS could take two years to complete, and the results would go before the same judge who might reject it again. As we go to press, CDFG has decided to drop the project, citing funding issues. However, they have been known to reverse course in the past and could appeal to a higher court, an unlikely scenario, but one that requires vigilance on our part.

This is a good ruling in light of so many attacks on the environment by the current administration. There is enough emphasis and force in the judge's words that it may carry over to future poisoning projects. While The Friends support species reintroduction, we do not support the use of poisons to do it. As the judge noted "the Paiute Cutthroat Trout appears to be surviving, at least for now, in parts of the same watershed and in other watersheds."

Hope Valley Work Day

Debbie Waldear

June 4th was the date of our Hope Valley workday. Projects included willow planting along the Carson River, trash pick-up at legal and illegal campsites, and fence mending. This year much of the old barbwire that is lying around the valley was collected and hauled off to the Minden dump. A great deal of work was accomplished during the mere four-hour workday. After completing their tasks the volunteers enjoyed lunch on the river while listening to the annual Friends of Hope Valley general membership meeting.

An additional day was used to complete projects at fishing piers for the disabled near Picket's Junction. A hardy group of locals removed silt from the platforms and built up the sides of the piers with rock and dirt. Spring high waters damaged much damage to this area.

Thank you to all that helped. Plan to join in the fun next year about the same time.

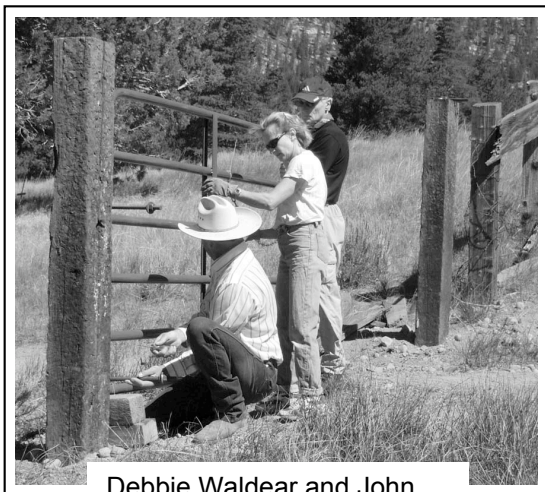
Collaboration

Debbie Waldear

Collaboration is the name of the game when it comes to taking care of Sierra Nevada's natural resources. The Park Cattle Company Ranch and the Friends of Hope Valley teamed up to protect meadowlands in Hope Valley.

In the past this acreage - now managed by the Forest Service and the California Fish and Game Department - was ranch land. Owned by several Carson Valley ranching families, the meadows were used for grazing, requiring the installation and maintenance of fences and gates. There were few undeveloped roads and little devastating impact from off-road vehicles. The meadows were sacred lands under the ranchers' stewardship.

Much of the fencing is dilapidated; new dirt roads have appeared, created by individuals who drive across the meadows. Damage done to this ecological system by this illegal usage requires years to reverse, if ever. "The Friends" and the Park Cattle Company joined forces and installed new gates in a critical area of the valley. The gates, purchased by "the Friends" and erected by a Park Cattle Company rancher, will permit access to the company's holding pens for its employees, and create parking for individuals who are in Hope Valley to experience its splendor - on foot.



Debbie Waldear and John Barr help rancher with gates

Leviathan Mine Tour

Jim Donald

Leviathan mine is an EPA superfund site located on the east slope of the Sierra in Alpine County. It was a sulfur mine that was worked during the 1950's to provide sulfur for the extraction of copper in Yerington NV, some 75 miles southeast. The site is 250 acres in total area, while the open pit is some 50 acres including the defining ridgelines. It discharges acid mine drainage (AMD), not only from the pit but from the overburden which was pushed into a tributary creek as large scale mining operations began. This AMD can total up to 12 million gallons per year depending on winter precipitation.

On August 23, 2005, two FOHV board members toured the site. Laura Lueders, Alpine County Watershed Coordinator, who did an excellent job putting together a group with representatives from local environmental organizations, government, watershed group, and Washoe Tribe whose land the AMD flows through, organized this informative tour. Leading the tour were Kevin Mayer and Vicki Rosen of the EPA's San Francisco office and several onsite project manager's representatives. Water percolating into the site picks up sulfur, which creates sulfuric acid that then, dissolves metallic elements in the ground. Iron, Arsenic, Nickel, Chromium, Copper, Aluminum and Zinc are found both as suspended solids and dissolved sulfate salts. This soup flowed into Leviathan Creek, which becomes Bryant Creek and then flows into the East Carson River. Now Leviathan Creek has been diverted through a concrete channel to prevent it from picking up contaminants, and 3 primary and several secondary ponds have been built along with an innovative treatment facility on Aspen Creek below the overburden.

Lime is added to the primary ponds, the pH is raised, and contaminants precipitate out. Metallic salts remain however, at reduced level (but still, at minimum, exceeding state standards by a factor of 10), and this process is repeated at the lower ponds. The water, now at normal pH for the area, is discharged into Leviathan Creek, and this once lifeless creek again supports trout and benthic macro-invertebrates. EPA hopes now to begin treatment year round. Previously, winter runoff had been held in the ponds and treated quickly during the short summers here at nearly 7000'.

You Can Help

This newsletter summarizes some of the issues we are addressing, but there are many more ahead. The larger our membership, the stronger our voice. Please help us by passing this newsletter on to a friend who might be interested in helping to protect and preserve the eastern slope of the Sierra and invite them to join us. Your membership renewal form is enclosed. An extra membership form has been added to the end of this newsletter. Imagine the impact of The Friends, supported by each one of us - and a friend.

At the Aspen Creek overburden site, a 2 stage bacterial process is being used to remove the AMD. Aerobic and anaerobic bacteria act in concert to eliminate the sulfur, thus neutralizing the pH. This innovative system was developed at the University of Nevada, Reno.

These are experimental processes. Water quality still does not meet federal or state standards. It does eliminate gross discharge, will improve environmental and human health, and buy time for the selection of a more effective remedy.

The URL for more information is <http://www.epa.gov/region09/wast/sfund> follow links for "Cleanup" to "Cleanup Sites in California".

Winter Recreation Plan

Jim Donald

As we reported in the last newsletter, snowmobile use continues to be out of control on the eastern slopes, especially in Hope Valley and Forestdale Creek. While local law enforcement and Forest Service have increased enforcement actions, lack of funding and staff prevent them from being able to control the problem.

FOHV and Snowlands Network have been collaborating on a number of proposals to structure motorized and non-motorized winter use of Hope Valley and eastern Alpine County. These proposals will balance the needs of the two groups and create a better experience for both.

Our proposals, which will go to the Forest Service this fall, will protect wilderness boundaries and the scenic hwy 88 corridor as well as prevent resource damage, and promote the aesthetic qualities sought by non-motorized users. Additionally, parking issues will be addressed, greater emphasis on enforcement will be required with mandated penalties for repeat violators, and historic uses of the valley will be emphasized. The plan contains 4 balanced options which will meet the needs of all.

Blue Lakes Road and Burnside Road will continue to be motorized and non-motorized, respectively. The west side of Hwy 88 will be closed to snowmobiles except for a well-marked access corridor from Armstrong Pass to Blue Lakes Road. Balancing this closure will be the opening of the north side of Monitor Pass, some 35 square miles, to motorized use. Additionally, parking at Blue Lakes Road would be expanded while motorized use parking at Forestdale would be reduced, permitted only during the shoulder seasons when there is insufficient snow at Blue Lakes Road for snowmobile use. During these shoulder seasons, usually November and April- snowmobiles would have to remain

on the road until south of the Forestdale Divide. Lastly, we propose improving the Deer Valley corridor to Hwy 4 which would give snowmobiles access Bear Valley from Blue Lakes and, indeed, all the way from Lake Tahoe given enough fuel. Balancing this would be the closure of two canyons near Forestdale Divide to snowmobiles.

The Forest Service has received monies from the Alpine County Resources Advisory Committee to begin working on a winter recreation plan. We ask that you help by submitting comments to Gary Schiff – District Ranger, Carson Ranger District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, 1536 S. Carson St., Carson City, NV 89703. Or send them to us via our website or to our PO box on the masthead and we'll make sure they get there. Hearings will be held locally - attend and make your voice heard. We'll post the dates and times.

Similar problems are occurring north of Lake Tahoe in the Mt Rose area and in the Hoover Wilderness near Sonora Pass. Some degree of resolution has been achieved near Mt Rose and in several areas of Montana and Idaho. We need to find that resolution here. Population increase in the Carson Valley is the driving force behind runaway motorized use in our area. Unless we rein it in now, this issue will only expand.

Visit <http://www.latimes.com/features/la-os-snowmobile8feb08.1.5164851.story> to view an article that examines the central issues.



No Snowmobiles - U.S. Forest Service



Friends of Hope Valley
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The Friends of Hope Valley want to thank you for your past support. We hope that you will continue your membership in this non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of historic, recreational, and scenic values of Hope Valley and Sierra Nevada's eastern slope in Alpine County. Be sure to read our newsletter as we have addressed many important issues this year. With your help we can continue to address the sensitive environmental concerns of the Sierra.



Friends of Hope Valley 2006

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