2020: Stewardship Year for Wilderness
National Wilderness Workshop Comes to California

Big event of the year for the Sierra Club’s California/Nevada wilderness committee and all other wilderness advocates in California will be the National Wilderness Workshop planned for Merced, California, October 13 to 17, 2020.

The conference being held in California this year offers our Committee a unique opportunity to engage, help organize, broaden local participation, and educate our own members on how important it is to protect our wild places ON THE GROUND, not just in legislative documents and on maps.

After an opening gathering at the University of California at Merced on the evening of Wednesday, October 14, the 15th and 16th will feature full days of plenary sessions and smaller concurrent workshops. Saturday is reserved for outings into the wild. Some workshop events and also outings will take place in Yosemite National Park.

The CA/NV Wilderness Committee is taking an active role in organizing local participation in the event and in preliminary planning -- continued page 2

Exciting News--some scholarship funds available for National Wilderness Workshop participation!

In 2020, the Sierra Club California/Nevada Wilderness Committee is leveraging a $4,750 grant from Sierra Club’s Grassroots Network to strengthen our team and elevate wildlands stewardship. Funds will be available to help both new and longtime wilderness activists attend the upcoming National Wilderness Workshop* in Merced, CA, near Yosemite National Park, this October 13-17, and to meet together in person before the conference. Costs for registration, travel, lodging and food will be eligible for reimbursement; a simple application and selection process is currently being developed. We particularly encourage local youth who are interested in wilderness stewardship to consider applying.

If you want to learn more about this opportunity—especially if you’d like to help make our CA/NV Wilderness Committee more powerful, inclusive, and effective—please contact Anne Henny, Committee Chair, at anneth16@sbcglobal.net.

Ideal applicants for scholarship funds will have a desire to stay in touch over time with the Sierra Club’s Wilderness Committee, and possibly serve on our leadership team. An ongoing concern for how to be actively engaged in wilderness stewardship and other related issues will be helpful in being accepted for funding.
two committee members, Joanne Clarke and Vicky Hoover, are on the planning team, participating in biweekly planning calls, led by Heather MacSlarrow, executive director of the Society for Wilderness Stewardship. The planning team conference calls began in February and will continue until October.

Joanne Clarke is currently working with the Sierra Club's Merced Group to bring them to the front lines of event efforts. In particular, she hopes to have them involved in offering homestays for visiting workshop attendees during the events at U.C. Merced.

The National Wilderness Workshop is an annual event cosponsored since 2010 by two organizations focused on stewardship of existing wilderness—the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance (NWSA) and the Society for Wilderness Stewardship (SWS). Watch for information at http://www.wildernessalliance.org/nwsa_annual_conferences. It is a gathering of representatives of wilderness stewardship organizations, federal land managers, wilderness researchers, and advocacy groups to learn and discuss current wilderness issues, network, and seek solutions to pressing wilderness problems. Sessions cover wilderness science, management issues, stewardship and volunteer steward engagement. Wilderness skills demonstrations and field trips are offered, as part of an immersive program of wilderness learning and networking with the wilderness stewardship community.

In recent years, these workshops—attended by 100 to 250 people each, have taken place in New Mexico, Arkansas, Montana, Colorado, and Oregon. This year, California is the chosen site for this event to showcase the need to take care of our wilderness areas—and a very appropriate choice, since California has far more wilderness areas than any other state (157 compared to 90 in Arizona and 70 in Nevada, the two with the next highest numbers of wilderness areas.) Of course none of our Lower 48 states can compete with Alaska's 48 vast areas in amount of wilderness—Alaska has nearly half of all our country's wilderness acreage.

Words of the Wild’s editor at-tended the November 2016 workshop in Missoula, Montana, and the October 2019 workshop last fall in Bend, Oregon. At both events, agency employees involved in wilderness stewardship seemed to make up about half the attendees, and the remaining half were staff and volunteers from nongovernmental environmental organizations, especially those that work physically within wilderness—building or clearing trails, taking youth groups into the wilds, etc. Both workshops opened with a Wednesday evening reception (food provided) followed by an initial plenary session, with Thursday and Friday dedicated to multiple concurrent workshop sessions, with lunch provided; and both evenings featured social gatherings in a local brew pub. (Drinks on your own.) Saturday is for getting out to some wilderness not far away—a variety of outtings are organized, from two-hour to full day events, some with additional cost: participants can get box lunches prepared. While the basic focus most emphatically was on taking care of designated wilderness, presenters from several states discussed their impending campaigns for more wilderness. But stewardship is the name of the game, which is a strong motivation for our wilderness committee to consider 2020 as a “stewardship” year. We invite Chapters to plan to offer stewardship outings. Stewardship topics at the workshop can range from trail building techniques, how to monitor for wilderness character, funding obstacles, training staff and volunteers, managing wild and scenic rivers within wilderness, improving data collection, increasing diversity in wilderness use, and much more—specific case studies may be featured.

Event sponsors

The Society for Wilderness Stewardship (SWS) is a professional association “made up of people who work in, recreate on, and care about wilderness”—agency or academic personnel whose profession is taking care of wilderness. Based in Grand Lake, Colorado, the organization seeks “to promote excellence in the professional practice of wilderness stewardship, science, and education to ensure the life-sustaining benefits of wilderness.”

The mission of the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance, started in 2010, is to develop a growing network of volunteer-based organizations to provide stewardship for America’s enduring resource of wilderness. Their vision is eventually to help establish and then support a wilderness stewardship organization dedicated to protecting and nurturing the area’s character and values for every wilderness area within the National Wilderness Preservation System. The organization is based in Bend, Oregon, home of executive director Randy Welsh.

Whatever your interests in and about wilderness may be—you will be sure to find plenty of items to interest you at the October 2020 National Wilderness Workshop at U.C. Merced, in Merced, California, and Yosemite National Park. In addition to education on specific topics—you’ll find it a great networking opportunity and—well, to put it simply, fun. And for many its timing will give us an inspirational sendoff for important election work later in October and early November.

FLASH—just in: good news for red fox!

After years of studies of the rare Sierra Nevada red fox, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed to list the fox as threatened or endangered. Conservation groups strongly support that proposal. Scientists estimate there may be as few as 15-50 surviving adults in the entire Sierra. The warming climate has greatly diminished the deep snowpack favored by the fox in its high elevation habitat. (from CSERC—Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center.)