

Report of 2010 FWOC Conference

“Partnerships for the West: Protecting Public Lands in an Era of Climate Change”

The Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs 2010 Conference, co-hosted by the California Alpine Club and the Contra Costa Hills Club, was held October 1-3 at the Alpine Club’s Lodge on the slopes of Mt. Tamalpais in Mill Valley, California. Early conference arrivals enjoyed an afternoon field trip through the old growth redwood forest protected in nearby Muir Woods National Monument, established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906.

Dr. Tony Barnosky, Professor of Integrative Biology at the University of California, Berkeley, kicked off the conference Friday evening with a sobering presentation on the dramatic changes in wildlife species distribution that have occurred throughout the world due to global warming. Professor Barnosky (who is also Curator of Fossil Mammals at the Museum of Paleontology and Research Paleoecologist at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology) has conducted extensive studies of small mammal fossils during the Pleistocene era. His studies have highlighted changes in the distribution of these mammals due to climate changes that have occurred during this period prior to mankind’s emergence as Earth’s dominant species.

Barnosky provided several examples not only of long-ago changes in species distribution, but also of more recent and more discernable changes in distribution due to climate change. For example, the distribution of the pika, a small mammal well known to mountain hikers, is under stress due to the increasing temperatures in high altitude mountains in the West. The pika is being forced to higher elevations to survive, and where there are no higher elevations where it can escape to, it has become extinct. By the mid-1990s it had already become extinct on 5 of the 25 mountains in Nevada where it had existed a century before. Numerous other examples of relatively recent changes in species distribution, including those from Yosemite, Yellowstone, the Rocky Mountains, and the grasslands of Africa are described in Barnosky’s recently-published and highly readable book, *Heatstroke: Nature in the Age of Global Warming* (Island Press [2009], 229 pp).

On Saturday morning Bruce Hamilton, Deputy Director of the Sierra Club, gave an excellent presentation of the Sierra Club’s Resilient Habitats Campaign. This campaign focuses on forward-looking land use planning, through public ownership or partnerships with private land owners, that will facilitate protection of lands necessary for the movement of species to habitats where they hopefully will be more likely to survive current and impending climate change. An example cited is the need to protect the wildlife corridor, now in private ownership, between Yellowstone National Park and the Forest Service’s Wind River Range so that Grizzly bears in Yellowstone can move to the higher elevations in the Wind River Range that are more likely to retain cooler temperatures essential to the Grizzlies’ survival.

Saturday morning’s program also included presentations by conservation activists about ongoing efforts to protect wilderness lands in California and Nevada, and to protect forest habitat in Giant Sequoia National Monument within California’s Sequoia National Forest.

Christy Davis, Executive Director of the California Wilderness Coalition, who previously worked in the Sierra Club’s San Francisco Office, outlined the recent accomplishments and

ambitious goals of the Coalition, including support for the California Desert Protection Act of 2010 (S 2821, introduced by Senator Dianne Feinstein). This bill would create two new national monuments (a Sand to Snow National Monument to link Joshua Tree National Monument to San Bernardino National Forest, and a Mojave Trails National Monument in the Mojave Desert), several new wilderness areas, and five designated off-highway vehicle recreation areas. It would also expedite permitting of renewable energy projects in the desert while protecting environmentally sensitive lands from energy development. (See www.californiadesert.org for information about this legislation.) Although this bill has significant support from the environmental community, some groups, including the Sierra Club, have given it only qualified support because of the inclusion of legislatively created OHV recreation areas on federal lands, a designation never before authorized by Congress.

Shaaron Netherton, Executive Director of the Friends of Nevada Wilderness, who has been working very effectively in that position for the last decade, described the extensive and successful efforts by that organization to partner with a wide variety of government agencies and non-profits to establish and protect wild areas throughout Nevada. She reminded us of the many upcoming outings, work parties, and other events that the Friends will be sponsoring over the course of the next year, and encouraged our participation. (See www.nevadawilderness.org for details.)

Joe Fontaine, long-time Sierra Club activist and past FWOOC president, gave an update on the continuing, but unfortunately necessary, campaign to protect forest habitat within the boundaries of the Giant Sequoia National Monument in the southern Sierra Nevada. Ever since this monument was established by President Clinton near the end of his term, the Forest Supervisor of Sequoia National Forest, within which the monument is located, has resisted the explicit directives of the presidential proclamation establishing the monument. Instead the supervisor has proposed significant amounts of logging within its boundaries under the guise of protecting public safety, i.e., reducing the fire hazard to nearby communities by cutting trees up to 20 inches in diameter.

A federal judge declared the initial Environmental Impact Statement prepared for the Monument's Management Plan to be grossly inadequate and instructed the Forest Service to do it over again, yet the latest EIS repeats many of the erroneous claims of the original one by attempting continued justification of a substantially high level of logging. Conservation activists are asking concerned citizens to support instead the "Citizens Park Alternative", which would permit prescribed burning rather than logging as a fire management technique, and would still allow dispersed camping and continued group-use permits at designated locations. (Details of this plan are described at www.sierraclub.org - enter "Giant Sequoia National Monument" in search window.) Evidently citizen action is the only recourse in getting the Forest Service to follow Presidential proclamations, and further litigation may be necessary to achieve that objective.

Club delegates voted to adopt twelve resolutions submitted by member clubs and cooperating environmental organizations at the annual business meeting held Sunday morning. These resolutions can be viewed at the Federation's website by clicking on the "2010 Resolutions" link. [Note to webmaster: please provide link to resolutions.] Officers elected at the meeting were: Joan Zuber, President; David Czamanske, Vice President; Jack Walker, Treasurer (thru December 2010); Raelene Gold, Past President. The position of Secretary is vacant until a volunteer steps forward to fill this position. The convention concluded with a pleasant hike through Mt

Tamalpais State Park led by Contra Costa Hills Club President Ron Van Dette.

Although attendance at this year's conference was lower than at more recent conferences, perhaps because of the location and lateness of the season, an enthusiastic group of delegates and members engaged in spirited discussion and enjoyed the gracious hospitality and excellent cuisine served up by the host California Alpine Club. Thanks to Joe Fontaine for arranging an informative and stimulating program, to Beryl Vonderheid for arranging the two outings, and to Mae Harms for arranging conference logistics and ensuring a welcoming and comfortable setting for our meeting and dining.

Next year's conference will be held at the Mazamas Lodge on the slopes of Mt Hood in Oregon. Ideas for the conference are welcome and should be forwarded to Joan Zuber at zuberj@juno.com.