

THE FOOTHILL ADVOCATE

December 2013

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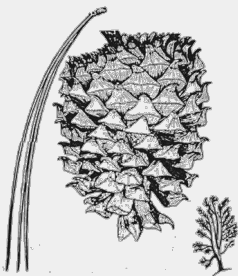


Highlights

Trail Builders!



Why are Grey Pines in Decline?



OUTside in Mariposa



Financial Report



Upcoming Events

Building Relationships One Trail at a Time

In the fall of 2009, Sierra Foothill Conservancy was approached by Fresno State's Richter Center and asked to join forces in an effort to engage students in unique opportunities to serve their local community. SFC has worked alongside many college students over the years through internships, field studies and volunteer opportunities, but this proposal was a bit different.

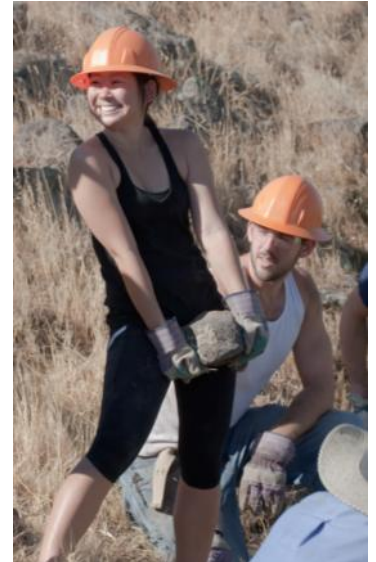
The Jan and Bud Richter Center for Community Engagement and Service-Learning operates with the knowledge that students realize unique personal, professional and academic benefits when involved in service to others. Their desire was to partner with SFC in creating one-day service events centered on student involvement in land stewardship while learning about the natural and cultural resources present in their own backyards.

For the past five academic years SFC has worked alongside the Richter Center and provided projects for Fresno State volunteers. Because these service projects were centered on trail building, maintenance and enhancement, SFC courted High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew to enter as a third partner. HSVTC brings incredible knowledge of trail work and crew leadership. Their team was a perfect fit and has worked well alongside SFC's dedicated preserve maintenance crew.

This past October volunteers gathered for a day of work on the McKenzie Preserve. After a safety demonstration on lifting techniques and trail building tool usage, the volunteers began their ascent up the trail to the worksite near the top of the table. Team leaders from the High Sierra Trail Crew divided the workers into teams and described the task ahead of them. Some students headed down towards Smith Basin to perform trail maintenance, while the majority were to construct an access ramp up to the table top built completely from chunks of lava rock. The rock had broken off as a result of thousands of years of erosion and lay loosely around the immediate area. The construction, however, was not going to be a simple task. The ramp would require tons of



Building a rock access ramp for a Table Mountain trail



photos by Gary Woods

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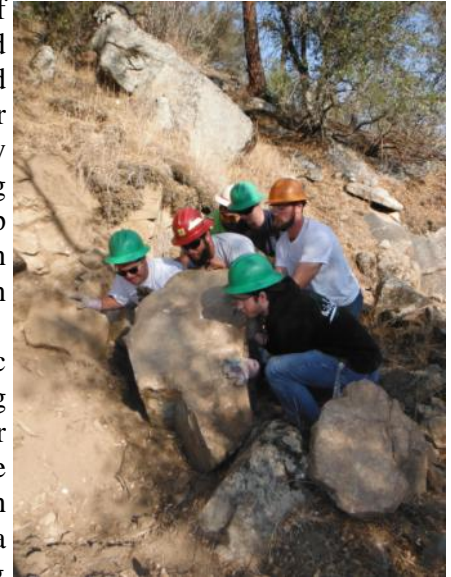
material to be moved by hand and meticulously placed along a cliff to make a stable, gently sloping trail which would eventually reach the top of the table.

Over a period of roughly three hours, a team of approximately 35 volunteers moved and stacked lava rock. Several young men from the Army ROTC program were moving many large chunks while others formed a long line handing smaller material from person to person. By the end, the crew had built up the entire 40 foot section climbing the 10 foot incline to the top.

Three weeks later another group of volunteers made their way to Fine Gold Creek Preserve to finish the trail that had been started last year. The November weather proved perfect for the hard work that lay ahead. Several groups focused on finishing the last part of a loop trail that would end up near the creek. The others focused on enhancing the existing trail that had been scratched in last fall.

Volunteers also constructed a scenic overlook so hikers may view the rushing waters of Fine Gold creek as it runs over massive exposed granite rocks before entering Millerton Lake. A side trail with several switchbacks leading down to a viewing platform was made incorporating many large rocks used as footings. The platform also required many rocks to be stacked up and placed by hand for stabilization. The slope of the hillside challenged the crew as the project required quite a bit of material to be moved. Eventually fill dirt was added and leveled off for a nice viewing and picture taking area. Considering the amount of rainfall that can be seen in wet years on the preserve, thought was given to control runoff and prevent erosion of the trail.

Since 2009 approximately 600 Fresno State volunteers, primarily students, have attended events on either the McKenzie Table Mountain Preserve or the Fine Gold Creek Preserve. They have constructed switchbacks and rock steps, restored areas burdened by weather, and built approximately six miles of trail. Through these events these volunteers have provided more than 2,200 hours of service to SFC. In a gesture of thanks, SFC and the High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew host a BarBQ for the volunteers at the end of each event. Students express their appreciation for the opportunity to serve, and are especially excited when they are invited to eat their fill at the end of the day (those who aren't too tired to get up for seconds!). Intangible benefits they have expressed include a sense of pride and accomplishment in a job well done and an opportunity to create and maintain trail systems that provide greater access to the preserve lands while minimizing the impact on the protected wildlife corridors.



Fine Gold rock stars! Photo—Tesia Vang



Fine Gold work crew Photo by Tesia

Billy Freeman, Rosanna Ruiz & René Delpont

SFC Staff Update

SFC has been fortunate to hire several new staff this year! Here's a quick update on the people you may run into on the Preserves, at our office, or in your email.

SFC hired **Rae Dennison** this summer as our office manager. Rae previously taught in the Sierra Unified School District, but now works in the office SFC shares with Sierra Unified. She is managing files, working with Jeannette and Margaret, and keeping our systems organized. We are so grateful to have Rae on board!

Sahara Saude-Bigelow was hired this fall as SFC's **Development Director and Partnership Coordinator**. Sahara had previously interned with SFC, and after working for California Rangeland Trust in Sacramento, she is now back home in the Sierra Foothills.

Tesia Vang is SFC's new Education Coordinator. She interned for SFC last spring while completing her degree in Recreation Administration at Fresno State.

Mary Snyder, our new **AmeriCorps member**, hails from Michigan. She spent last summer working at Lassen National Park, and is now working in SFC's Mariposa office. She is an important part of the Mariposa team—working with volunteers and organizing our hikes and classes program.

Lastly, **Kristen Boysen**, our previous AmeriCorps member, has been hired on full time at Sierra Foothill as the **Conservation Project Manager**. Working directly with Bridget, our Conservation Director, Kristen helps with land project development, landowner outreach, and grant management.

Kristen Boysen

Volunteer Opportunity—Events Ambassador

Do you like to spend time outdoors on some of the most beautiful foothill lands while interacting with some great outdoor loving people? SFC is looking for members to help hold our preserves open during the 2013-14 season. We need help directing the efficient parking of vehicles, greeting people at the sign-in/information table, explaining the trails and answering general questions. These volunteer positions will be working alongside SFC board members to help the visitors to our preserves have an enjoyable experience. Training will be provided.

Volunteer dates are as follows:

McKenzie Preserve: Sat - Jan 11th, Sat - Feb 8th, Sat - Mar 8, Sat - Apr 12th, Sun - Apr 13th

Fine Gold Creek: Sat - Mar 22nd

Black Mountain: Sat - May 10th (Mother's Day Weekend)

Sign up as an **Events Ambassador** by visiting sierrafoothill.org and clicking on the Explore tab. Choose the SFC Events Calendar and go to the date you are interested in. You can also contact the main SFC office at 559-855-3473.



Last chance to purchase Grass Fed and Finished Beef this season!

Steaks and Roasts Package available, 25lbs of our best steaks and roasts for \$175

Support Sierra Foothill Conservancy's Mission by Ordering Today!

For More Information Visit Sierra Lands Beef Website at www.sierralandsbeef.com

Sierra Foothill Conservancy Annual Financial Report

July 1, 2012—June 30, 2013

This Statement of Financial Activities and accompanying charts represent the Conservancy's 2012-2013 fiscal year as stated in our financial statement audited by Price Paige & Company CPAs. During 2012-2013 \$1,021,100 was donated by Ted Martin to purchase the 280 acre Martin Preserve near Table Mountain, along with \$280,507 for long term stewardship of the property. We also completed 2 conservation easements with a total value of \$2,050,000. One protects 1390 acres in the upper San Joaquin River corridor. The other is 2011 acres of Blue Oak woodland and adjoins the Miller Preserve on Black Mountain. Sierra Lands Beef continues to grow and sold \$75,399 worth of grass fed beef during the year.

June 30, 2013 Balance Sheet

ASSETS:

Cash & Cash Equivalents	455,589
Investments	2,288,604
Grants & Other Receivable	7,233
Prepaid Expenses and Other Assets	14,156
Inventories	18,940
Property and Equipment, net	660,514
Conserved Land	<u>7,304,344</u>
Total Assets	10,749,380

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS:

Liabilities:

Accounts Payable	9,129
Accrued Expenses	46,000
Deferred Revenue	100,250
Line-of-Credit	<u>242,000</u>
Total Liabilities	397,379

Net Assets:

Unrestricted:

Undesignated	934,971
Board Designated	<u>486,601</u>
Total Unrestricted	1,421,572

Temporarily Restricted 1,488,517

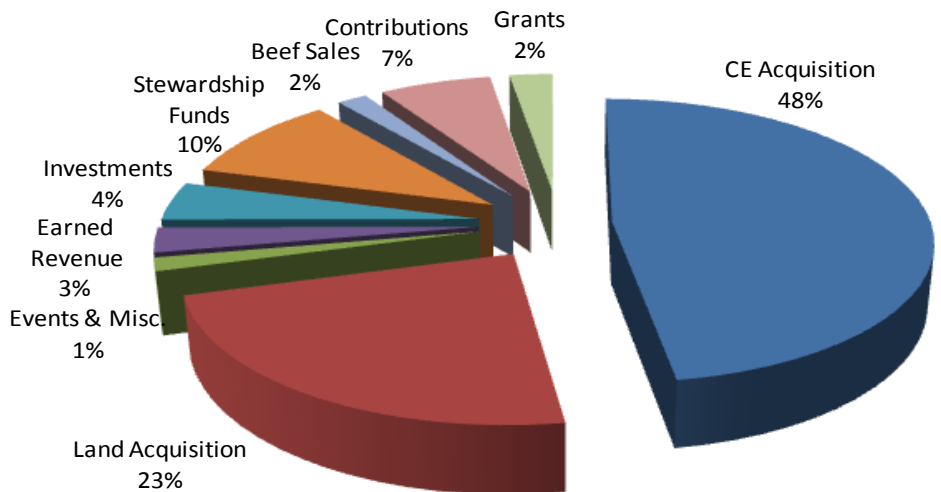
Permanently Restricted 7,441,912

Total Net Assets **10,352,001**

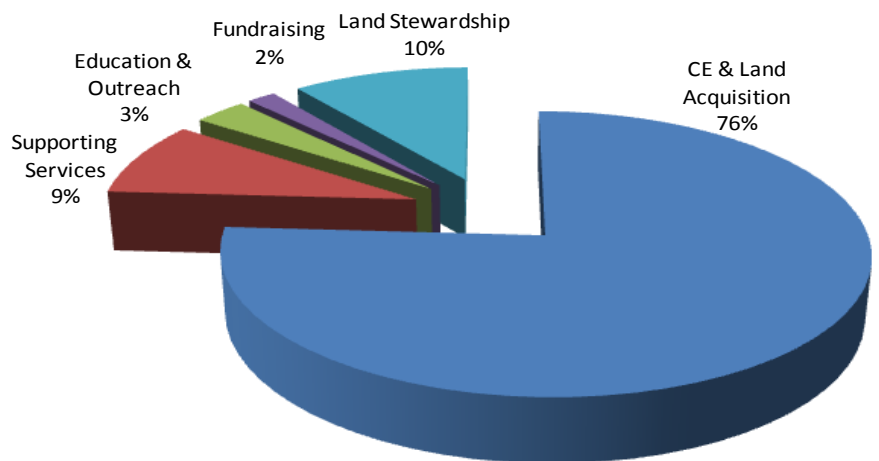
Total Liabilities

& Net Assets **10,749,380**

Income:



Expenses:

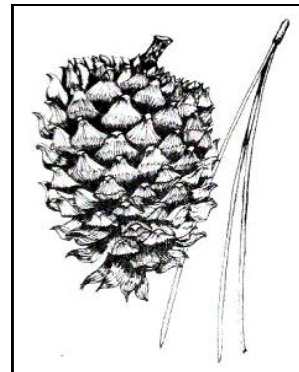


Make a Year-end Gift to Sierra Foothill Conservancy!

The holidays are a perfect time to give thanks to the land that provides a home for native plants and wildlife, a source of clean water resources, land for family farms and ranches, and a place of recreation and refuge. Please consider a gift to the land through Sierra Foothill Conservancy today!

Why are the Grey Pines in Decline and Why does it Matter?

Gray pine (*Pinus sabiniana*, known locally as foothill, bull and digger pine) is a common associate of the oak-pine woodlands that encircle the Central Valley of California. In the Sierra Nevada, this California endemic can be found from the lower foothills to around 4,000 feet on sites that receive between 15-25 inches of precipitation annually. Within the last several years, many residents and frequenters of Sierra Nevada foothill woodlands have noticed a significant decline of gray pines with symptoms ranging from partial limb dieback to death of entire trees. Whereas tree mortality is common in any forested system, such large scale and sudden mortality draws one's attention, including that of US Forest Service forest pathologists. According to a Forest Service bulletin discussing the recent decline, no single causative agent has been found that explains the pattern of mortality seen in this species. Several insect species such as pine engravers and woodborers have been found infecting both live and dead wood, but no species alone have been identified as the primary factor of mortality. Further, gray pines are susceptible to dwarf mistletoe, which once a tree is infected, will spread rapidly through the canopy and to adjacent trees utilizing a propulsive method of seed dispersal where the sticky seed explodes out of the fruit landing on nearby branches. Being a parasite, dwarf mistletoe drains energy from infected trees leaving them weakened and susceptible to pathogens and damaging insects. Such parasitism appears to be one of the most debilitating agents to gray pines according to pathologists. To further complicate the matter, it is well understood that extreme weather such as drought and high temperatures can predispose a tree to pathogens and infestations by decreasing the ability of the plant to photosynthesize and make defensive compounds such as pitch or resin. It is logical to predict that below average rainfall in years past, coupled with decreased soil water availability is an important part of this complex equation.



In addition to the causative factors of gray pine mortality, ecologists are interested in the possible impacts to the foothill woodland community if gray pines continue to decline. Many species such as gray squirrels and White-breasted Nuthatches utilize gray pine nuts as an important part of their food supply. Hawks, eagles and owls commonly nest in the high canopy of gray pines alongside many other avian species. Acorn Woodpeckers predominantly utilize the bark of living gray pines as a granary in which to store acorns that serve as their primary food source during the winter. Family groups of over a dozen individuals will work collectively to stock, maintain and defend their granary trees. Acorn storage sites, more so than the availability of acorns, has been shown to be the key habitat factor influencing Acorn Woodpecker distribution. Acorn Woodpeckers are the primary excavators of nest cavities in California oak woodlands and are responsible for constructing most of the cavity nest sites in these communities. In addition to being occupied by breeding woodpeckers, the excavated cavities are also used by secondary cavity nesting birds such as Western Bluebirds, Violet-green and Tree Swallows, wrens, Ash-throated Flycatchers, Oak Titmouse and some mammal species. These species require tree cavities to breed, yet since they lack the anatomical equipment to excavate them, are dependent on the woodpecker's excavations. As gray pines continue to decline, Acorn Woodpecker populations may be negatively impacted due to limitations on the ability to store an important winter food source. If Acorn Woodpeckers significantly decline or are lost from the community, one would predict a subsequent decline in secondary cavity nesting species as nest cavities are not replaced over time.

The difficulty in identifying a single causative agent responsible for gray pine decline, and the likelihood that several compounding factors are responsible, brings to light the complexity of local ecological systems. As potential impacts of gray pine decline are far reaching to members of these biological communities, we are reminded of the complex interconnectedness found in oak woodland ecosystems.

Rodney Olsen

OUTside Mariposa

On Saturday November 16, local Mariposa youth gathered at the Stockton Creek Preserve for a restoration event. The outing was part of the OUTside Mariposa program which is a collaborative effort between Ethos Youth Center, Sierra Foothill Conservancy, Balanced Rock and the PG&E Stewardship Council to engage youth in outdoor settings, promote stewardship, and experience wilderness and the outdoors. The most recent outing was the third in a series of six hikes which will take place on Sierra Foothill conservation easements and preserves between September 2013 and March 2014. Participants helped clean up and repair the trail and spent time outdoors enjoying the weather on one of Mariposa's only public hiking trails. The program also focuses on bringing their experiences to the public through social media and other online citizen science projects such as iNaturalist.

Mary Snyder

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The grasslands, foothills, and forests between Yosemite and Kings Canyon National Parks provide land for farms and ranches, a home for native plants and wildlife, and a source of clean water. The Sierra Foothill Conservancy honors our natural and cultural heritage by protecting these resources and ensuring that present and future generations will continue to experience and enjoy the land in this region.

Upcoming Events

Trail Work Days

January 4th—Fine Gold Preserve January 25th—McKenzie Preserve
February 1st—Black Mountain Preserve February 22nd—McKenzie Preserve March 1st—Fine Gold Preserve

McKenzie Member Days—January 11 and February 8th

Preserves will be Open 9am-4pm for hiking, picnicking and just enjoying the great outdoors!

Yoga Under the Oaks—Jan. 26, Feb. 23, March 30, April 27

Come stretch your stress away under a canopy of Oaks on the beautiful McKenzie Table Mountain Preserve. Certified Hatha Yoga instructor, Linda Marie, will guide you in a 90 minute all-level Hatha Yoga class integrating principles of breathing, body awareness, core strength and contemplation. The group will meet in the parking lot at 10 am to sign in. At 10:15 we will take a walk along the Discovery Trail to the picnic grounds for our Yoga practice. Please refrain from eating 2 hours before the start of class, bring your yoga mat, a small towel, and a bottle of water. Members free, \$10 for non-members.

Table Top Hike & Yoga—Feb. 2, March 2, April 6

Enjoy a great workout followed by an all-level Hatha Yoga class designed specifically for hikers! Certified Hatha Yoga Instructor Linda Marie will lead you to the top of McKenzie Table, a strenuous hike involving 6 miles and 1,000' gain. After enjoying the views, you will head back down the mountain in search of the perfect spot for your 60 minute post-hike Yoga Under the Oaks. Dress in layers. Bring plenty of water, snacks, sunscreen and a Yoga mat. The group will meet in the parking lot at 9 am. At 9:15 we will lock the gates and begin our adventure. Members free, \$10 for non-members.

Hikes

December 14th—McKenzie Table Top January 4th—McKenzie Smith Basin January 25th—Fine Gold
January 26th—McKenzie Table Top February 1st—McKenzie Smith Basin February 2nd—Black Mt. Summit
February 9th—McKenzie Loop Trail February 22nd—Fine Gold February 23rd—McKenzie Table Top

You will find detailed hike descriptions on our website at www.sierrafoothill.org