

SIERRA-FOOTHILL



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SIERRA FOOTHILL CONSERVANCY MISSION

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.

SFC ANNOUNCES BIG ROCK SOUTHERN SIERRA MIWUK REMATRIATION PROJECT

MARIPOSA, CALIFORNIA - Sierra Foothill Conservancy (SFC) is thrilled to announce its latest project - the 96-acre Big Rock rematriation project which returns this land to the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation (SSMN) for the first time in 175 years! By partnering with SSMN to permanently protect the significant cultural and natural resources of the Big Rock property, this project returns first stewards traditional land management to the land to further protect and enhance its unique habitat and ecological features.

"The Southern Sierra Miwuk have survived the trauma of displacement brought on during the Gold Rush, the Mariposa Indian War, and even the Muir Conservation Era. Despite these tragedies, our indigenous families have maintained ties to our natural landscape, waters, and plant and animal relatives through cultural and spiritual traditions that teach us to honor that sacred relationship. Our ancestors and elders have forged the path that we are walking today, our partners, like Sierra Foothill Conservancy, help to light that path, and we are enabled to turn dreams into reality. The acquisition of the Big Rock property returns this land to indigenous stewardship for the first time in 175 years- helping restore that ancient and sacred reciprocity



SAVING NATURAL LANDS
NOW AND FOREVER

between people and landscape and reconnecting lost generations to future ones.” -Tara Fouch Moore, Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, Director of Landscape Stewardship & Council Secretary

The property lies within the ancestral and contemporary homelands of the SSMN and includes the historic Miwuk village of Eyeyaku. Composed of rolling topography at 2,600 ft elevation, the property features oak woodland, mixed evergreen/lower foothill pine ecotones and water resources including seasonal wetland meadows and pools, a year-round pond, and significant portions of Pegleg Creek and its seasonal tributaries. Collectively these natural resource features provide ideal habitat supporting a diverse variety of common species as well as rare, threatened, and endangered species including Western pond turtle, Great Gray Owl, and multiple rare plants such as Mariposa Lupine. The project is named after a prominent granitic formation in the landscape which houses a significant archeological site including dozens of bedrock mortars and cupules, utilized for processing acorn, medicinal plants, and other foods from the abundant native food-sources tended and gathered onsite including an abundance of well-established Black oaks which hold significant cultural value for SSMN.

This unique project represents a collaborative effort in which SFC facilitated the purchase of the Big Rock property from the Regelson Family in fee-title to the SSMN utilizing competitive grant funds awarded through the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) Acquisition Funding Program. The project represents a poignant combination of habitat conservation, cultural preservation and ecological stewardship - offering a unique opportunity to protect ancestral lands and biodiversity while supporting SSMN’s desire to carry on their traditional lifeways.

"Sierra Foothill Conservancy is honored to work in partnership with the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation to return first stewards to the land with the Big Rock Project. Rematriation of this land is part of our ongoing collaboration which focuses on restoring the ethics and values of indigenous people and indigenous stewardship to the land. The principles of reciprocity are values that we seek to cultivate in our own organization and the conservation community at large." -Bridget Fithian, Sierra Foothill Conservancy, Executive Director

The Regelson Family owned and enjoyed the property since the 1950s mostly for light recreational purposes, and desired to honor their parents’ wishes to conserve the family property while simultaneously promoting tribal land ownership. This unique transaction allowed SFC to fulfill the partnering landowner’s vision, while simultaneously fulfilling SSMN’s long held vision of regaining ownership of culturally significant lands. The Big Rock Project also assists with Sate of California, WCB and 30x30 goals for land and water conservation.

Under SSMN ownership, the land will be actively managed by engaging traditional and contemporary indigenous stewardship practices. Through implementation and teaching of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), ceremonial activities, and tending, gathering and caretaking for the abundant plants and wildlife present on the property, the Tribe will continue their work in healing reciprocal relations between people and landscape. A special focus will be placed on the return of cultural fire and wildfire hazard reduction as part of SFC and SSMN’s ongoing commitment to restore fire-based ecosystems as demonstrated through their Sierra Nevada Conservancy Regional Fire and Forest Capacity Building Program (RFFCP) funded

work. The property will also be utilized by the tribe to implement training for their forest-based workforce development programming.

The Big Rock property is located within SFC's Chowchilla River Headwaters Focus Area which contains the headwaters of the Chowchilla River Watershed. By conserving the land, land use conversion will be prevented and restoration practices will be implemented, thus contributing to watershed health. This critical watershed is lined with forestland, working ranches, residential communities, public recreation areas and reservoirs that contain some of California's most important habitat. Conservation of the property through its purchase by SSMN will ensure that the land remains forever protected for wildlife and managed as a native gathering site for traditional uses. The project is also an important step forward in connecting key conserved lands and supporting the establishment of additional conservation efforts in this area.

SFC would like to thank our project partners, the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, the Regelson Family, the Wildlife Conservation Board, and all our supporters for their role in this historic accomplishment and for sharing in the vision to return this land to the care of its first stewards. The project returns ancestral homelands to the stewardship and full ownership of SSMN and is an excellent example of how land trusts, landowners, Tribes, and state agencies can partner together to realize shared visions to conserve the legacy of our natural heritage.

ABOUT

SFC's Vision: From the snow-capped Sierra to the Central Valley floor, expansive landscapes, important habitats, and clean water resources are conserved and managed to ensure continuing public benefits. SFC supports a thriving land-based economy while promoting a conservation ethic that spans generations. Sierra Foothill Conservancy serves eastern Fresno, Madera, Merced and Mariposa Counties in California's central Sierra Nevada. To learn more about SFC's work and how to get involved, including how to become a member or conserve your land, visit <https://sierrafoothill.org/>.





Above: Late spring bloom. Photo
Credit – Lauren Miller



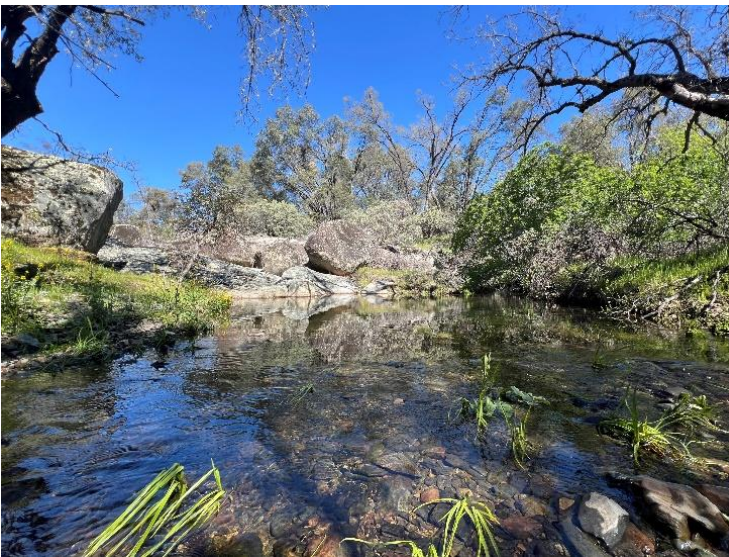
Above: Kevin Spach kneels at bedrock
mortar site



Above: Seasonal pool on Big Rock granite formation, Photo Credit - Mary Linn



Above: Sandra Chapman SSMN Chairwoman, Bridget Fithian SFC Executive Director, and Dr. Jennifer Norris WCB Executive Director



Above: PegLeg Creek in the height of spring
Photo: Lauren Miller



Above: Celebrating the WCB grant award to SSMN in Sacramento - Kevin Spach, Managing Director, Miwumati Family Healing Center, Irene Vasquez, Yosemite National Park Cultural Ecologist, their son George, Tara Fouch-Moore Tribal Secretary and Director of Landscape Stewardship, Bridget Fithian, SFC Executive Director, and Sandra Chapman Tribal Chairwoman



Left: Celestial Reysner WCB Grant Manager, Anthony Lerma, SSMN Stewardship Coordinator, and Bridget Fithian Executive Director of SFC in front of a unique property feature where Valley Oak, Ponderosa Pine and Live Oak intertwine and thrive.