

THE
JEFFREY PINE JOURNAL

Newsletter of Friends of the Inyo

WINTER 2008/09

VOLUME VI, ISSUE II



Mt. Whitney basks in a snowy winter sunrise.

photo: Vern Clevenger

Desert
Blooms

Death Valley Flowers

Stewardship
Diaries

Four Days in the Forest

Preservation, exploration and stewardship for the public lands of the Eastern Sierra

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Newsletter of Friends of the Inyo



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Friends of the Inyo is a local non-profit conservation organization dedicated to preserving the ecological, cultural and recreational values of the Eastern Sierra's public lands.



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The Cover Photo



"Mt. Whitney Pink Glow"
from Vern Clevenger's
recently published
Sierra Sojourns

Inyo is a Paiute word meaning "dwelling place of the Great Spirit." For us, this dwelling place extends from the bottom of Death Valley to the top of Mount Whitney, from Owens Lake to Topaz Lake, from the crest of the Sierra Nevada to the roof of the Great Basin atop the White Mountains.

The *Jeffrey Pine Journal*, named after the Eastern's Sierra's most aromatic conifer, is distributed free to all members of Friends of the Inyo and wherever great spirits tend to dwell.

President's Message

by Frank Stewart

About 20 years ago a friend named Joe Fontaine (former president of the national Sierra Club) told me a story. In Washington D.C., he was spotted on Capitol Hill by a familiar congressman. The congressman pulled him aside saying "Joe, I'm glad I ran into you, we need to talk. I've been inundated with letters on that issue you've been working on" (probably some public lands campaign or other). Joe did some behind-the-scenes inquiries, and discovered that over the past few months the congressman had received seven letters.

Fast forward to 2008. Thanks to folks like you, over the last eight years our congressman and our senators have received *thousands* of letters asking for wilderness legislation for the wild places on the Eastside. Imagine how powerful a force that has been on their motivation! Your voices finally caused a 400,000-plus acre bill to be introduced last spring by Rep. Howard "Buck" McKeon and Sen. Barbara Boxer, with the bill progressing all the way to congressional subcommittee hearings and markups in the fall. This was truly an astounding accomplishment in such a short time. Now, by the time you read this, the bill either will have passed in this session, or will be on the list for next year. Either way, I want you to recognize the significance of our accomplishments over the course of this past summer. Thank you for your work; I know it hasn't been easy.

Early in September, four Eastern Sierra business owners headed back east to lobby our congressman and senators to get the bill passed in this session of Congress. The group included Brian Brown, a date grower from Tecopa; Chris Lizza, the owner of Mono Market in Lee Vining; Stacy Corless, the editor of *Eastside* magazine from Mammoth; and myself, a building contractor from Bishop. Some of you may remember that I had the privilege of doing this a couple of years ago, with a different group of business owners. This time something was very different: we were riding the wave of momentum that you created with your letters, testimony and actions. Instead of meeting out in the halls with congressional staff, we got to meet with our representatives personally, in their offices.

While meeting with Rep. McKeon, I noticed something interesting on his desk. Now, you can imagine that only the most important documents are going to find their way onto the desk of a U.S. Congressman—otherwise his "in" pile would be three feet tall! Guess what was on the top of McKeon's "in" pile: copies of *The Inyo Register*, the *Mammoth Times*, and what appeared to be other local papers from the southern part of his district. If your congressman wants to know what the people in his district think, he's going straight to the papers. I want you to remember that. The next time we ask you to get a letter into the paper, remember that the letter that you send to your local papers will find its way right onto the top of the pile on your congressman's desk. If our bill doesn't pass in this session, you can bet we'll be asking you to warm up those pens!

Frank Stewart, shown here with the Eastside team in D.C. (seated far left), is a founding board member of Friends of the Inyo.

This issue of the Jeffrey Pine Journal is dedicated to the life and legacy of Mary Vocelka, one of the world's gentlest souls who touched many, many lives in the Eastern Sierra and across the Sierra Nevada.



Get Out!

Glass Creek Meadow Ski Tour

by Darren Malloy

Most people will want to start their winter excursion to Glass Creek Meadow from the Obsidian Dome parking lot, on the west side of 395 just north of Deadman Summit. The parking lot is plowed throughout the winter, and the area is off-limits to snowmobiles, making it an ideal place to get yourself on skis or snowshoes for your adventure. From the parking area, groomed trails will lead you west toward the small nearby peak known as “Chicken Wing.” From the parking area, groomed trails lead west toward the small nearby peak known as “Chicken Wing.” A left at the first fork goes past Obsidian Dome; before the groomed trail bends north up the hill, head cross country through gorgeous Jeffrey Pine trees toward Glass Creek.

Adventurous souls might want to try an alternate start, just to the south at Deadman Road. This area is used by snowmobiles, but after skiing less than a half-mile toward Obsidian Dome you will pass into an area that is reserved for human-powered recreation.

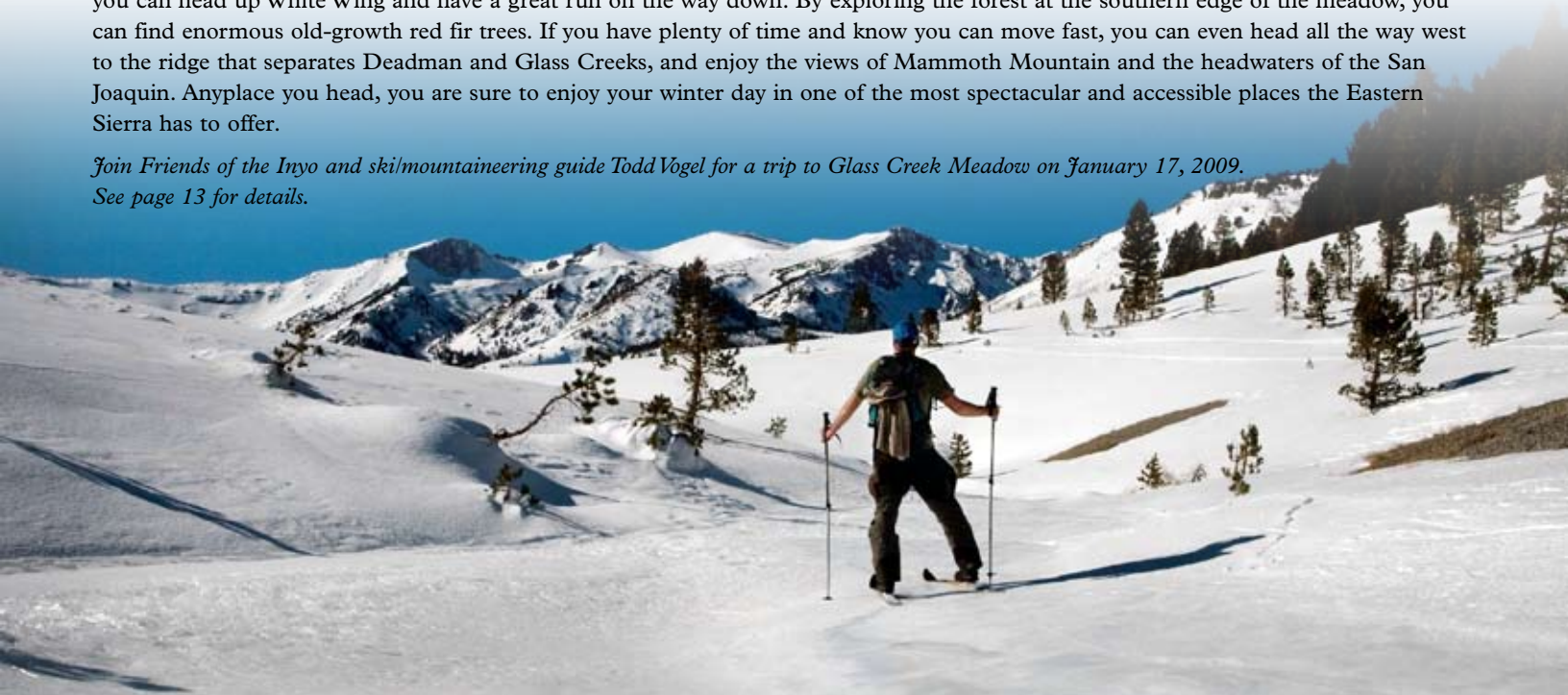
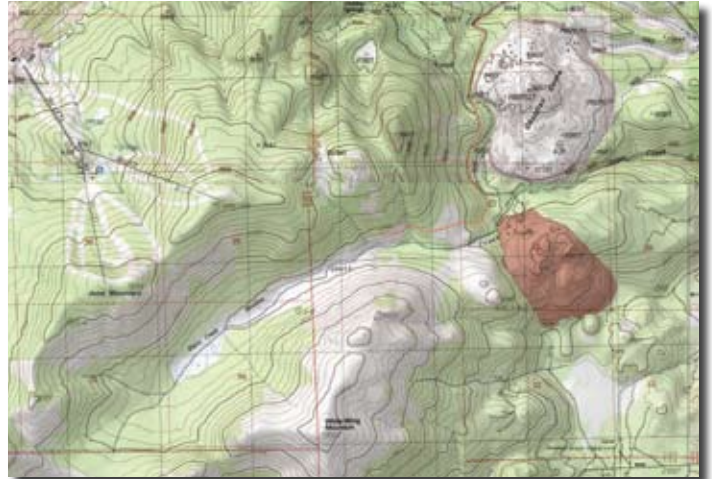
Follow the small valley along the southern edge of the Obsidian Dome toward Glass Creek – this area offers some open areas at gentle angles, so if the snow is good you can try to fit in a few turns along the way.

In either case, you will have to make your way up one relatively steep slope in order to reach Glass Creek Meadow. This is a good place to practice kick-turns and using your edges on skis, or if the slope seems too steep, you can always take off your skis and boot-pack up until the terrain gets easier. Keep in mind that you will need to negotiate this same slope on your way back out.

By moving west, parallel to Glass Creek, you will eventually reach the meadow, with great views to White Wing peak on the south edge of the meadow, the backside of June Mountain Ski Area on the north, and the San Joaquin Ridge to the west. From here you can choose how to spend your day of quiet, snowy solitude. If you are confident in your turns and your judgment of avalanche conditions, you can head up White Wing and have a great run on the way down. By exploring the forest at the southern edge of the meadow, you can find enormous old-growth red fir trees. If you have plenty of time and know you can move fast, you can even head all the way west to the ridge that separates Deadman and Glass Creeks, and enjoy the views of Mammoth Mountain and the headwaters of the San Joaquin. Anyplace you head, you are sure to enjoy your winter day in one of the most spectacular and accessible places the Eastern Sierra has to offer.

Join Friends of the Inyo and ski/mountaineering guide Todd Vogel for a trip to Glass Creek Meadow on January 17, 2009.

See page 13 for details.



Approaching Glass Creek Meadow below the San Joaquin Ridge, Owens River.

photo: Todd Vogel

The Eastern Sierra

Getting Out and Giving Back

A Stewardship Update

Aspen Restoration Fence, Bodie Hills

WHO: Friends of the Inyo's first ever professional Stewardship Crew: Ian, Jake, Ryan and Nick.

WHAT: Working with Anne Halford, botanist with the Bishop Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management, through a grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, the "Stew" Crew constructed the Bishop Office's first ever natural materials, split rail fence from downed aspen.

WHERE: An isolated aspen and spring complex at 8700' in the Bodie Hills.

WHY: With new sprouts trampled or eaten by cattle, and water and temperature stress worsened by climate change, aspen groves are a unique and threatened component of the Eastern Sierra's ecological tapestry. Born on a site visit a few years ago to assess the condition of this aspen grove and spring complex, the construction of this split rail cattle fence has been years in the making. It was the brains and brawn of our first ever paid Stew Crew that not only constructed by hand over 1000 feet of fence, but figured out how to create all the materials on site except the nails.



Mammoth Basin Collaborative Stewardship Project, Mammoth Basin

WHO: Mammoth Basin Community Stewards, Drew, Vireo, Brian and Lauren, along with dozens of volunteers.

WHAT: With the support of a Ski Area Conservation Fund Grant from the National Forest Foundation and Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, Friends of the Inyo Community Stewards conducted trail maintenance, led wildflower, geology and mine interpretive hikes, organized volunteer clean ups and planted hundreds of trees in the popular Mammoth Lakes Basin.

WHERE: From Barney Lake at 10,200' to Twin Lakes at 8500' in the Mammoth Lakes Basin.

WHY: The Mammoth Lakes Basin receives nearly half a million visitors each year, but until this season has lacked a constant management presence. In partnership with Mammoth Lakes Trail and Public Access, the Town of Mammoth Lakes, California Trout, and the Inyo National Forest, our Community Stewards provided a needed interpretive and stewardship presence in the hugely popular and beautiful subalpine basin.



Stewardship Corps

Mono Basin Collaborative Stewardship Project

WHO: Mono Basin Resource Steward Justin Hite and dozens and dozens of volunteers.

WHAT: Through a generous two-year grant from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Friends of the Inyo partnered with the Mono Lake Committee, Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association and the Inyo National Forest to employ a roving Resource Steward to conduct recreational monitoring, lead interpretive hikes, coordinate on the ground restoration and recreational enhancement projects and organize community stewardship days throughout the Mono Basin. From bird walks to constructing parking lots to restoring off-road vehicle damage, Justin and friends did it all this summer.

WHERE: From 13,000' to 6300' in the Mono Basin.

WHY: From the shore of Mono Lake to the Jeffrey Pine forest to the alpine headwaters of Lee Vining Creek at the base of Mt. Conness, the Mono Basin's beauty attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. With more visitors arriving while federal capacity to manage and meet them diminishes, the Resource Steward position fills a critical gap in ensuring the long-term health of the Mono Basin.



Big Pine Creek Trail Maintenance, John Muir Wilderness

WHO: Volunteers with the Eastern Sierra Stewardship Corps joined with the Stewardship Crew.

WHAT: Funded through a grant from the National Forest Foundation's Wilderness Stewardship Challenge, the Stewardship Corps connected individual volunteers and organizations with meaningful, needed work in the Wilderness areas of the Inyo National Forest. For this project, volunteers conducted trail maintenance to restore meadows and enhance water quality.

WHERE: From 10,000' to 13,500' in the North Fork of Big Pine Canyon.

WHY: A well-maintained trail not only provides a safe and enjoyable recreational experience, but also works to maintain the health of the land. Poor trails damage meadows, fragment wildlife habitat and degrade water quality. In addition to work, participants scaled the 13,525' Cloudripper peak.



Special Thanks

National Forest Foundation's
Wilderness Stewardship Challenge Grant
and Mammoth Mountain's Ski Area
Conservation Fund

Rancher Stephen Fulstone
for the extra nails for the Bodie Fence
Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association
National Fish & Wildlife Foundation
Patagonia

American Hiking Society's Volunteer Vacations
Sierra Nevada Conservancy
All our volunteers and supporters who
actually make our work possible.

US Forest Service
Bureau of Land Management
National Park Service

State Lands
Other
Highways

0 10 20 Miles



Wilderness Stewardship

Todd's Whirlwind (and Flash Flood) Summer

by Todd Vogel



Norma Ryan of Simi Valley participated in the Mt. Whitney trail project with Todd last July. Even the flash flood at Whitney Portal couldn't dampen her enthusiasm! Here's what she said:

"I did two days of trail work on the Main Trail with Friends of the Inyo. Hard work and very rewarding to be able to give something back to the mountain I love."

CREATE A LEGACY OF STEWARDSHIP

Your bequest helps Friends of the Inyo forge new paths for stewardship of the public lands of the Eastern Sierra. Planning now could help reduce taxes on your estate. Many gift options are available. Please contact Darren Malloy for more information:

Darren Malloy
Friends of the Inyo Gift Planning
699 W. Line St.
Bishop, CA 3546
760-873-6500

It's been a busy summer—one that, in order to recall what I did this season, I'd have to start with the previous one. Summer? Where did spring go? Like a tree shedding its leaves, this time of year I just want to stand still for a while, rest and regroup. Having just finished my thirty-ninth overnight work trip of the year, I'm still cleaning up from trips that happened weeks ago!

Here are the stats: from June through September I helped lead 11 multi-day backcountry trips for FOI, 50-plus days in the backcountry, and with over 100 individual participants on board, nearly 500 "participant-days" in our Wilderness stewardship and exploration program. Include my work with my own outdoor education work through my business, Outdoor Link, and it's 80 days in the backcountry with 160 individuals. Phew.

Fortunately, I long ago became a master of pre-packing—that is, not only packing for the current trip, but the next one, and the one after that. My personal clothing is easy because when I get home from a trip I wash them and, without time for drying, toss them right into the next trip's pile. Food shop for 15 people for a week? That's a two-hour stop on the way out of town. Done that way we might wind up with two jars of olive oil and no dish soap but no

one will go hungry... Considerations: are we carrying all our stuff on this trip or do we have stock support? Spring (cool nights; more perishable food is ok), or summer (forget the salad)? Bear proof or mouse proof?

Certainly some of those trips were easier than others but they were all good trips. Too many memories to detail here but a few stand out: during the Oak Creek flash flood event of July 12th—the one that destroyed or damaged 15 homes near Independence—I was camped with a group in Whitney Portal. We received nearly three inches of rain in a forty minute period and had our own flash flood. We didn't know until after the fact that our camp was missed by a road-closing debris flow by less than two hundred feet. Two months and many trips later and at the opposite end of the Sierra, I was with a group of incoming freshman from Stanford University. Many were on their first camping trip, their first lesson on public land stewardship, and when we climbed Crater Mountain in the Mono Craters chain, their first mountain climb.

So it's been another good and busy summer of stewardship in the Wilderness of the Eastern Sierra, and, like I imagine the mountains do, I look forward to a rest that comes with the winter snow.

Join Todd on a backcountry adventure next summer! Help with trail maintenance and see the Sierra's splendor. Visit www.friendsoftheinyo.org and sign up for the monthly e-newsletter to get all the details.



Stanford students in the Mono Basin.



Todd Vogel: Guide, chef and trail crew supervisor.

Stewardship Diaries

Four Days in the Jeffrey Pines

by Maria Dzul

When Friends of the Inyo's Executive Director, Paul McFarland, asked me to conduct bird and vegetation surveys in the Jeffrey pine forest, I saw it as a great opportunity to explore one of the dominant ecosystems in the Eastern Sierra. Having researched the Jeffrey pine forest and its fire regime, I knew that, historically, the Jeffrey pine forest experienced frequent, low-intensity fires and that years of fire suppression had drastically changed the forest. I was curious to go out and see, with my own eyes, its current state and how it had responded to recent high-intensity fire.

The study involved visiting four treatment areas: 1. "old growth" (put in quotes because it had been designated in 1993 and did not really resemble an old growth forest), 2. proposed action (areas proposed for fuel reduction treatments that were similar in appearance to "old growth"), 3. younger burn (the June Fire that burned in 2007), and 4. older burn (the Crater Fire which burned in 2001). The data collected from the monitoring would hopefully help pilot future work by Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO), as well as measure the effects of fuel reduction treatments on bird and vegetation diversity.

Day 1 – Old Growth Forest

6:12 am "My binoculars are proving useless due to the dense canopy. While the forest resounds with the songs of western woodpeckers, mountain chickadees, and white-breasted nuthatches, there are very few birds that I am able to see."

3:53 pm "I feel as though I am a warrior fighting in the name of Science. Armed with a measuring tape and a meter stick, I have to battle my way through thickets of young pine trees. I have learned that closed shoes and long pants are crucial if I am to make it through the forest alive."

Day 2 – Proposed Action

5:49 am "I'm still sleepy from waking up

at 5 am to a tent covered in frost. Green tail towhees are abundant in the sagebrush scrub that surrounds the Jeffrey pine trees. Clad in thick layers of down and polyester, I feel akin to these plump birds as I waddle from site to site."

Day 3- June Lake Burn

11:22 am "Never have I seen so many woodpeckers. Makes me wonder...how can something repeatedly bash itself against a dead tree to find food? The grey, ashy soils have produced a carpet of fluffy, pink Phacelia and purple lupines. Interspersed amidst this fru-fru-ness there are monstrous, charred-black tree trunks. The effect is surreal, a visual exhibition of birth and death."

Day 4 - Crater Fire

2:36 pm - "I was surprised when this morning when I awoke to a whole new community of birds – most notably violet-green swallows, mourning doves, and vesper sparrows. Hairy woodpeckers are abundant here as well. The vegetation survey of this site is an obstacle course that tests my physical ability; I must repeatedly climb over stacks of dead logs and trudge through carpets of itchy grasses to collect the data."



In the Jeffrey Pine Forest.



Recognizing the strong connection between the health of our public lands and the health of our local economy, the following businesses have stepped up and become founding members of the newly formed Eastern Sierra Stewardship Corps Business Support Program. When shopping around the Sierra, support those who support caring for your public lands.

Muscles

Stewart Construction, Inc.

Pick Axe

Mammoth Condo Rentals

Loppers

Focused Fitness
Timothy Sanford Law
Patricia Schwartzkopf, Coldwell Banker
Mammoth Real Estate
Vermilion Valley Resort
Hardy and Place, Attorneys at Law
Robin Roberts, Marriage and Family Therapist

Shovel

The Green Thread
Yosemite Half Dome View Vacation Rentals
Derrick Vocolka, Maker in Wood
Vern Clevenger Gallery
Steven White Woodworking
Flowmotion Pilates
Hanz On Massage and Yoga
Eastside Magazine

To learn more about how your business can help support active stewardship of our public lands, contact Darren at darren@friendsoftheinyo.org.

photo: Maria Dzul

Wildflowers

Searching for Winter Color

Photos and text by Paul McFarland

WINTER. For much of the Eastern Sierra, winter brings a distinct absence of color. Jeffrey Pines bear snow on their bows, Sierran peaks sport white winter cloaks and ice fog blankets our valleys.

Tired of pulling on snow boots to simply head outside, many Eastern Sierra residents heed the wisdom of the birds and light out for warmer haunts. I am always amazed that when pulling into Furnace Creek or Texas Springs campgrounds, my wife and I invariably run into other Eastern Sierra refugees. It seems that many who call the Eastern Sierra their physical or spiritual home head east to wander the alluvial fans and twisting canyons of Death Valley National Park.

Few of nature's gifts break winter's icy grip like a lone Desert Fivespot or field of Desert Gold. The follow is a brief collection of some of the more common flowers to be found early season in Death Valley.

This winter, ditch the skis for a weekend, and get some pollen on your nose.



Desert Gold

Geraea caescens

SUNFLOWER FAMILY

THIS LANKY MEMBER OF THE SUNFLOWER FAMILY ENRICHES ALL WHO WALK AMONG THEM (UNLESS YOU HAPPEN TO BE A HAPLESS POLLINATOR – SEE NOTE OF CAUTION). FIELDS OF DESERT GOLD, PRESUMABLY FED BY EXTRA WATER FLOWING OFF THE IMPERVIOUS ROAD PAVEMENT, ARE COMMON ON ALLUVIAL FANS ALONG THE MAIN ROAD THROUGH DEATH VALLEY FROM THE KIT FOX HILLS SOUTH TO ASHFORD MILLS.



Mojave Desert Star

Monoptilon bellioides

SUNFLOWER FAMILY

WHILE SOME MAY THINK THE NAME *BELLIODES* STEMS FROM THE FACT THAT MOJAVE DESERT STAR IS A TRUE 'BELLY-FLOWER' – ONE THAT YOU HAVE TO GET DOWN ON YOUR BELLY TO TRULY APPRECIATE—THE ROOT OF THE SPECIES NAME FOR THIS DIMINUTIVE DESERT SURPRISE ACTUALLY STEMS FROM THE LATIN WORD FOR 'PRETTY' – *BELLIS*. THESE DAISY-LIKE FLOWERS, OFTEN NO LARGER THAN A QUARTER, ARE HELD JUST OFF THE GROUND ON PROSTRATE, REDDISH STEMS.



Gravel Ghost

Atrichoseris platyphylla

SUNFLOWER FAMILY

HELD HIGH ON LEAFLESS, BUT STOUT, GRAY-GREEN STEMS, EACH WHITE 'FLOWER' OF GRAVEL GHOST, LIKE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE SUNFLOWER FAMILY, IS ACTUALLY COMPOSED OF DOZENS OF STRAP-LIKE FLOWERS GATHERED TOGETHER TO CREATE ONE 'COMPOSITE FLOWER'. EASILY OVERLOOKED, THE ALMOST FLESHY LEAVES, OF GRAVEL GHOST SEEM PURPOSELY PRESSED AGAINST THE GRAVELLY DESERT SOILS.



Desert Fivespot

Eremalche rotundifolia

MALLOW FAMILY

WHAT CAN YOU SAY? DESERT FIVESPOT IS SIMPLY A PINK BOWL OF PURPLE SPOTTED BEAUTY. ONCE YOU LEARN THE ALLURE OF THIS DESERT SIREN, YOU MAY FIND YOURSELF MEANDERING FOR HOURS OVER ROLLING DESERT HILLS AND WASHES IN SEARCH OF THIS SPINY-LEAVED MALLOW. FIVESPOT'S GENUS NAME, *EREMALCHE*, IS GREEK FOR 'LONELY MALLOW'. TAKE TIME TO SIT WITH FIVESPOT; YOU'LL BOTH BENEFIT FROM EACH OTHER'S COMPANY.



Golden Evening Primrose

Cammissonia breyipes

EVENING PRIMROSE FAMILY

GOLDEN EVENING PRIMROSE IS JUST ONE OF MANY YELLOW EVENING PRIMROSES TO GRACE DESERT CANYONS AND WASHES. DISTINGUISHED BY ITS TOOTHED, SPOTTED LEAVES AND FOUR WAXY, PURE YELLOW PETALS, GOLDEN EVENING PRIMROSE WILL ANOINT YOUR FACE WITH BRIGHT, YELLOW POLLEN IF YOU COME IN TOO CLOSE. THE STEMS, FLOWER BASES AND ELONGATE SEED PODS ARE, LIKE SO MANY DESERT PLANTS, COVERED IN FINE WHITE HAIRS.

of Death Valley



Death Valley Mohavea

Mohavea breviflora

FIGWORT FAMILY

NEXT TIME YOU'RE HUFFING AND PUFFING UP A SIERRA TRAIL, KEEP AND EYE OUT FOR THIS TUFTED PURPLE-FLOWERED MINT. A DEEP SNIFF WILL TAKE YOUR MIND OFF YOUR HEAVING LUNGS AND GET YOU MOVING AGAIN. LIKE ALL MINTS, PENNYROYAL HAS SQUARE STEMS AND OPPOSITE (GROWING DIRECTLY ACROSS FROM ONE ANOTHER IN PAIRS OF TWO) LEAVES.



Phacelia

Phacelia spp.

WATERLEAF FAMILY

DEATH VALLEY IS HOME TO A NUMBER OF PHACELIAS SPORTING FIVE RICH PURPLE PETALS AND EXERTED (EXTENDING OUT FROM THE FLOWER) STAMENS. THE FLOWERS OF PHACELIA ARE HELD ON CHARACTERISTIC CURLING STALKS RESEMBLING THE CURLED NECK OF A VIOLIN OR TAIL OF A SCORPION. OFTEN SCATTERED AMONG DESERT GOLD, OR EVEN GROWING IN EXTENSIVE STANDS OF THEIR OWN, THE LEAVES AND STEMS SOME PHACELIAS ARE COVERED WITH SMALL HAIRS WHICH MAY CAUSE PAINFUL SKIN IRRITATION IN SOME FLOWER WATCHERS.



Purple Mat

Nama demissum

WATERLEAF FAMILY

TRUE TO ITS NAME, PURPLE MAT SPREADS OUT FLAT ON THE DESERT FLOOR AS A GREEN-LEAVED, REDDISH-STEMMED PLANT RUG. THE FIVE-PETALED, DEEP MAGENTA TUBULAR FLOWERS, EACH SMALLER THAN A DIME, ARE SURPRISINGLY STRIKING FOR THEIR DIMINUTIVE SIZE. .



Sand Verbena

Abronia villosa

FOUR O'CLOCK FAMILY

IT SEEMS THAT THE GROUND-HUGGING SAND VERBENA ACTIVELY COMPENSATES UP FOR ITS LOW STATURE BY WAVING BRIGHT PINK POM-POMS IN THE DESERT BREEZE. EVEN WITHOUT ITS ROUND HEADS OF FLOWERS, SAND VERBENA IS EASILY IDENTIFIED BY ITS PROSTRATE REDDISH STEMS AND THICK GREEN LEAVES. BOTH THE LEAVES AND STEMS BEAR STICKY HAIRS THAT OFTEN CATCH WIND-BLOWN SAND.



ATTENTION POLLENATORS!

When visiting vast fields of Desert Gold, do not be lulled into carelessness by the apparent bounty! Beware, a dangerous predator hides among the soft, yellow petals of this ubiquitous sunflower. With elongated front legs and color matching the petals of Desert Gold, Crab Spiders (family Thomisidae) are just waiting for unsuspecting pollinators. At press time, human noses have not yet been successfully attacked.

Pinedrops

Notes on issues affecting Eastern Sierra Public Lands

by Laura Chamberlin & Paul McFarland

Poised for more Wilderness?



photo: John Dittli

You know it when you see it, Owens River Headwaters Proposed Wilderness.

THE EASTSIDE WAS ABUZZ this summer with the prospect of the preservation of more of our public lands as Wilderness. After months of negotiation, Sen. Barbara Boxer and Rep. Howard P. "Buck" McKeon, introduced the Eastern Sierra and San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act into Congress this past spring. A true compromise, the bill would preserve over 430,000 acres of Wilderness and confer Wild & Scenic River status to over 50 miles of Eastern Sierra waterways, while removing protections for around 50,000 acres of Wilderness Study Areas.

Thanks to the hundreds of Wilderness supporters who spoke eloquently on behalf of the land, the Mono County Board of Supervisors and Mammoth Lakes Town Council voted unanimously to support the compromise package. Ignoring the better angels of participato-

ry democracy, the Inyo County Supervisors not only presided over one of the most outrageous and rude public hearings in Inyo County history, but repeatedly went out of their way to stir up anger through perpetuating falsehoods (You can't fight fire in Wilderness, these lands don't qualify for Wilderness, etc.).

The McKeon-Boxer bill will finally provide lasting protection for deserving places like the White Mountains, Owens River Headwaters and Granite Mountain. As of press time, we are keeping our fingers crossed and praying that this welcome legislation is voted upon before the clock runs out on the current congressional session.

Huge thanks to those who wrote letters, spoke at meetings and have pushed protection of these lands so far. Your work and efforts move these places closer to lasting preservation each day! We must also extend our heart-

felt gratitude to not only to Senator Boxer and Congressman McKeon, but also to their dedicated and thoughtful staff.

Judge Tosses out Inyo County Threat to Death Valley National Park

DUBBED THAT "kooky lawsuit about obscure roads in Death Valley" by the Eastern Sierra's Sierra Wave news team (ksrw.sierrawave.net), U.S. District Court Judge Anthony Ishii dismissed the vast majority of Inyo County's lawsuit against Death Valley National Park late this summer.

Citing the fact that the county knew the "roads" in question were included inside areas identified for Wilderness protection as early as 1978, Judge Ishii ruled the County had more than run out of time to claim three over-grown, largely non-existent tracks in the desert as county highways.

While we're pretty sure we heard Chuckwallas and Horned Lizards dancing in the washes as the county's claims were tossed out, not once, but twice this summer and again in the fall, we hold out hope that the dismissal of this lawsuit will encourage cooler heads to prevail in Inyo County's approach to preserving and enjoying its most precious asset, the wild desert lands of Death Valley National Park and its surrounding wilderness areas.

Huge thanks to the environment's legal eagles at Earth-

justice, especially Attorney Ted Zukoski, for successfully representing FOI and the rest of the coalition who intervened to defend America's largest continental National Park.

National Landscape Conservation System moves closer to permanence

A HEAPING HANDFUL OF BLM lands in the Eastern Sierra moved a bit closer to lasting protection this spring with the passage of the National Landscape Conservation System Act by the U.S. House of Representatives.

First established in 2000, the National Landscape Conservation System's (NLCS) mission is to conserve, protect and restore nationally significant landscapes managed by the Bureau of Land Management. A Congressional designation will impart the permanence necessary for the NLCS to fully realize its goal of preserving some of America's wildest public lands.

In addition to containing designated Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers, the NLCS provides dedicated funding and recognition to tracts of land known as Wilderness Study Areas - parcels of public land generally 5000 acres or greater containing outstanding wilderness characteristics (naturalness, solitude and unique ecological, geological or cultural attributes). Once identified, Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) are managed by the BLM to maintain and conserve their individual wild character.

Pinedrops...continued from page 10

photo: Justin Hite



An American Avocet reflects on the future Death Valley National Park.

Here on the western edge of the Great Basin, the Eastern Sierra is blessed with 19 WSAs totaling nearly 236,000 acres. As always, the numbers don't tell the story, but names can help. WSA status and the NLCS provide an important layer of preservation for many amazing places such as Granite Mountain, the Bodie Hills, Volcanic Tablelands, and Crater Mountain to name a few.

The next steps for the NLCS include passage of companion legislation in the Senate and reconciliation of any differences between the House and Senate Bill. Friends of the Inyo hopes the Senate version of the NLCS legislation contains the California Desert Conservation Area which was inadvertently left out of the House version. Huge thanks to the NLCS Congressional champions, including

California's own Representative Mary Bono Mack of Palm Springs.

To learn more about the Wilderness Study Areas hiding out around the Eastern Sierra visit friendsoftheinyo.org and click on *preservation*. To learn more about the National Landscape Conservation System visit conservationssystem.org.

Getting our feet wet

THE EASTERN SIERRA WATER WATCHERS have been here and there and everywhere across the Eastern Sierra this summer monitoring water quality and keeping an eye on our desert and mountain streams. With generous grants from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and CalFed program, the Water Watchers expanded their beat to sites on Mam-

moth Creek, Lone Pine Creek and deep into the Ansel Adams and John Muir Wilderness.

In a partnership with the Inyo National Forest, the Water Watchers data gathering efforts are being used to assess watershed and meadow health in the Upper San Joaquin River just east of the Sierra Crest.

As volunteer site monitors return again and again to their adopted locations, the program is bearing real fruit. Already Water Watchers have discovered dirt bike tracks through a Lower Deadman Creek, small rock weirs (diversions), invasive species, and a man-made dam on Cottonwood Creek.

With eyes on the ground regularly identifying issues, we are able to inform the necessary management officials, as well as work to directly fix them ourselves. And we have done just that across the Eastside. From the Owens River Headwaters to the Whites, when we've identified a problem, we have mobilized volunteers and our staff to implement site-specific solutions.

The Water Watchers are one way to get out on the ground with your open eyes; look for more opportunities to adopt a site and be trained in monitoring techniques or contact Laura (Laura@friendsoftheinyo.org) at 760-873-6500 to get involved



photo: Laura Chamberlin

Mountain Yellow-legged Frog from Mono Creek.

On Board

Friends of the Inyo is pleased to announce the addition of two new board members. Welcome, Sydney and Mike!

Sydney Quinn

Big Pine

SYDNEY LANDED IN MAMMOTH three decades ago and has been an active part of the Eastern Sierra conservation community ever since. Under the guidance of Andrew Lawrence, Sydney got involved with land-use issues affecting the yet-to-be-incorporated town of Mammoth Lakes as a member of Friends of Mammoth and Save the Meadow. In 1985 Sydney was appointed to the Mono County planning commission, which was an invaluable experience in learning to negotiate the political river of the Eastern Sierra.

Sydney worked as a ski instructor at Mammoth Mountain for 18 years before earning an MA in psychology, becoming a licensed Marriage, Family and Child Therapist and working for Mono County Mental Health for 17 years. She also co-directed Mammoth's Labor Day Festival for 30 years and was a founding member of the Mono County Arts Council.

Four years ago, Sydney and her husband, Dennis Schumacher, built a straw bale house and moved Big Pine, where they live with five chickens, two cats, a dog and a large garden. Sydney stays active, following the "use whatever body parts are functioning at the time" philosophy: when not skiing or backpacking, she might be rafting the Grand Canyon or exploring the Whites and the Inyos.

Sydney is excited to be a member of FOI's board, and she and Dennis are looking forward to more volunteer opportunities.



Mike Prather

Lone Pine

MIKE HAS BEEN LIVING IN INYO COUNTY since 1972 when he and his wife Nancy moved to Death Valley to teach in a one room school. He stayed long enough to get "sand in his shoes" and has never left the desert. Mike has actively been working on land and water issues in the Owens Valley and Eastern Sierra since 1980 with the Owens Valley Committee (past president), Eastern Sierra Audubon (past president) and Sierra Club (past chapter chair). His issues have been wilderness, parks, wildlife, off-road vehicle use, grazing, mining and logging. The re-watering of 62 miles of the Lower Owens River and the massive wildlife return taking place at Owens Lake as a result of the Los Angeles Owens Lake Dust Control Project have been the center of Mike's conservation focus in recent years. The enhancement and protection of the Owens River and Owens Lake Important Bird Areas claim much of his attention, but he is also working with the local Alabama Hills Stewardship Group which is studying possible federal designation bringing greater protection and resources to the Alabama Hills near Lone Pine. Mike worked on the California Desert Protection Act for 10 years prior to its passage in 1994. Mike and Nancy live in Lone Pine and are retired (or 'real tired') from thirty years of teaching. They have two grown daughters – Robin and Phoebe. His entire family loves natural history and are avid birders.

Mike is a founding member of Friends of the Inyo, and his goals on the board of FOI are to first capture some of the energy of this terrific group, to be able to work more with Paul McFarland, to protect roadless lands in the Eastern Sierra, to help with stewardship projects, to bring awareness to the group and to the public of the enormous wildlife populations (largest in Inyo County) occurring at Owens Lake—shorebirds and waterfowl.



CALENDAR

December 5–6, 2008

WILD & SCENIC ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL

FOI is once again hosting two nights of the film fest, this time in Mammoth and Bishop. Join us Friday, December 5 at the Mammoth Lakes Arts Center for a wild evening of entertainment ranging from a global powder quest to grizzly bears. On Saturday, December 6, the party moves to the Mountain Light Gallery in Bishop where we'll explore the secret lives of aquatic insects and discover what's happening to American bees. Showtime both nights is 7pm; tickets are \$12 (or free with a new Friends of the Inyo membership purchase).

January 17, 2009

GLASS CREEK MEADOW INTERMEDIATE SKI TOUR

This has become another seasonal favorite and should be a great winter tour. Metal-edged skis equipped with skins and intermediate ski skills are essential because we hope to get up into the meadow and look for powder to ski! Meet at 8am at the Obsidian Dome road parking area just off Highway 395 and north of Deadman Summit. Bring a lunch, drinks and snacks for an eight-hour day. Please sign up in advance: call, email, or stop by our office.

Todd Vogel will be leading the trip and is a certified mountain guide and ski guide.

January 18, 2009

OBSIDIAN DOME AREA BEGINNER SKI AND SNOWSHOE EXPLORATION

Whether you're new to cross country skiing or are a pro on the snow, you'll enjoy this exploration of the Obsidian Dome area. Snowshoes or skis are suitable for this slide or high-step through the Jeffrey Pines east of the Owens River Headwaters. Meet at 9am at the Obsidian Dome road parking area just off Highway 395 north of Deadman Summit. Bring a sack lunch, drinks and snacks for an eight-hour day.

February, 2009

CHOCOLATE MOUNTAIN HIKE/SNOWSHOE

Conditions will determine our footwear (as well as the difficulty) for this wonderful hike up Chocolate Mountain in the Piper Mountains Wilderness, a yearly favorite hike of ours. It is a seven mile round trip with 1,500 feet of elevation gain and loss, most of which is on an old, closed road. A true island in a sea of desert, Chocolate looks out

over Deep Springs, Eureka and Fish Lake valleys. Meet at 8:30am at the Big Pine Campground at the junction of 168 and 395. Bring food and drink for the day, clothing for warm or cold, a pack to carry it all, and footwear appropriate to the conditions. Snowshoes maybe required and are not provided. We think we're getting a donation of some pairs of snowshoes so if you need them for this trip you should just contact us and see if they showed up. If it is snowy this will be a strenuous walk but it is an out-and-back so we can turn around anytime we want.

March 15, 2009

TABLELANDS EXPLORATION

The Tablelands are a wonderland to explore any time of the year. With fantastic volcanic land forms, hidden labyrinthine canyons, winter wildlife and archeological sites, there's a bit of something for everyone. If we luck out and it's stormy there may even be some of the amazing ethereal streams and waterfalls.

Bring clothing for any weather condition, food and water for the day. It's a moderate three-mile round trip but if it's interesting we'll spend most of the day out there. Other than enough snow to close the road, the trip is on for all weather conditions.

Meet at the FOI office at 8am or the intersection of the Chalk Bluff road and Five Bridges Road (just west of the gravel pits), by the BLM kiosk, at 8:30am.

April 5, 2009

CENTENNIAL CANYON PETROGLYPH TOUR

Centennial Canyon drains the north end of the Coso Range, just east of Lone Pine. The range is high and dry and is an interesting place to hike. Great views of the Sierra, Joshua Trees, and petroglyphs are some of the attractions. We are setting this up as a day hike but folks might want to come prepared to camp, spending parts of two or more days exploring the area, and perhaps nearby Malpais Wilderness. But for the Centennial Hike we'll meet in Bishop at 8am at the FOI office, Lone Pine at 9:30am at the interagency visitor center south of town by a mile, or at the intersection of 190 and 136, east of Keeler by a few miles, at 10am. Bring food, water, and clothing for the day. The hike is several miles each way and takes most of the day.

Visit www.friendsoftheinyo.org for more events.



Many Hands for Public Lands

As a member of the Peace Corps, I lived in a small village called Roubakawa in Niger, West Africa for two years. The Eastern Sierra is a world away from West Africa. But nearly every day I experience something here that mirrors an experience from there, proving that these two places are not a world away from one another, but just two places in the same world. Here is just one example.

The Hausa people in Niger have *gavyas*. When a family doesn't have enough time to plow their fields, plant their seeds or harvest their crops they hold a work party called a *gavya*. The invitation is kola nuts to adults and candy to the children. The goal is to get many hands in their fields and get a lot of work done in one day. All the women of the village prepare that day's meal together. Everyone that came to the *gavya* eats together, and the joy radiates from that home is heartwarming. I once came upon a *gavya* in a strange village. It was so festive I thought it was wedding and asked where the bride was.

Since returning to the United States, I often wonder if I am doing those people that hold *gavyas* justice. Am I doing good? I close my eyes and I picture their faces, their joys, and their sadness and I still wonder, what I am doing here? But then I open my eyes and I see a 12-year old smiling as he uses a shovel for the first time. I see a group of volunteers start their own water quality monitoring for the creek in their backyard. I see new willows growing along a stream that hasn't seen young willows in many years. And then I know that I am doing the right thing, that you all are doing the right thing, and we are all doing good.

Our public lands need *gavyas*. There are never enough hands. We need to pass kola nuts and candy and bring the people out. The land is as much a part of this community as your neighbor, and we must not abandon it in its time of need. We must help ensure that it produces the food that feeds our souls: horned lizards, the laughter of children at a lakeshore, blue-gray gnatcatchers, and peace, serenity, and wonder of wild places.

We will keep passing you the kola nut. Your responsibility is to keep answering. Not every time, but when you can. In Niger, villagers hold *gavyas* because the fields must be plowed, planted and harvested every year to feed families. Here in the Eastern Sierra, our public lands must be cared for year after year if they are going to continue to be the home for wildlife, the food for your soul and the future of our community. Come on a stewardship project, stand up and be heard in a meeting, adopt a site for regular monitoring, take a child for a walk. Do all that you can to make a difference. And do it this year, because next year we will need to do it again.

Last Words

Coming Soon! Quarterly news from Friends of the Inyo.

Pine Nuts: the spring and summer supplement to the Jeffrey Pine Journal. First Edition: March 2009

Jeffrey Pine Journal: Summer 2009. For story/photo submissions, ad opportunities and more, please contact Stacy Corless: stacy@friendsoftheinyo.org

Go to www.friendsoftheinyo.org to sign up for monthly email news and alerts!

patagonia presents the



DECEMBER 5-6, 2009

Hosted by Friends of the Inyo

MAMMOTH 7pm Friday, December 5 at the Mammoth Lakes Arts Center (549 Old Mammoth

BISHOP 7pm Saturday, December 6 at Mountain

Tickets \$12 available at Wilson's Eastside Sport and Access Business Center in Mammoth

Different film programs each night!

Information at www.friendsoftheinyo.org

Thanks & Acknowledgements

Justin, Vireo, Drew, Brian and Lauren: our amazing summer stewards

Steve White, for helping with our office renovation

Mammoth Brewing Company and Eastside Magazine for supporting our Rendezvous and Outdoors in Mammoth

Our Rendezvous musicians: Dan Connor, Denise Waterbury, Bob Harrington, Annie Cashner, Bruce Tulloch and Cathy Cannon

All members who attended our September Rendezvous

En Memoriam

Lynn Bauer and Joel Samuels, and Ryan and Erica Brady, in honor of Sarah and Darren Malloy's wedding (awwww....)

Barton and Debby Jones in honor of Pete and Stuart and in memory of their brother Philip

Stacy Corless in memory of Ned

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