

Tehipite Topics

December 2019 – Vol. 65, No. 1

www.sierraclub.org/tehipite

Sierra Club Supports Federal Recognition of Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation

by Gary Lasky, Tehipite Chapter Legal Chair

The Tehipite Chapter Executive Committee voted last month to support the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation's (SSMN) effort to gain federal acknowledgment from the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI). Federal recognition of Native tribes is important for tribal autonomy, and would enable the SSMN to receive federal support, including direct funding and benefits such as the Indian Health Service. Only federally-recognized tribes have full authority, under the U.S. Constitution, of negotiating as sovereign nations with the U.S. government. The SSMN has been applying for federal acknowledgment *since 1982*.

Our Sierra Club has a direct historical connection with the actions taken by the federal government to banish Yosemite Valley's traditional Native inhabitants. In recognition of this connection, our national Sierra Club today, under the leadership of Michael Brune, has authorized our Tehipite Chapter to send a letter to the Office of Federal Acknowledgment from the Chapter *on behalf of the national Sierra Club* in support of federal recognition of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation. This action is consistent with the Sierra Club's recognition of the importance of environmental justice as a concern of the Club and our members, for it is only through alliances such as these that the Club will be able to achieve its goals of protecting the environment from the aggressive actions of American industry and its government collaborators.

Despite a seven-year review by the DOI's Office of Federal Acknowledgment (OFA), completed in 2017, in which a majority of the staff recommended federal recognition for the SSMN, the Trump administration's

The Tehipite Chapter is now seeking volunteers for our teams to interview candidates for the March 2020 elections. No experience is required! We will be interviewing on the weekends *right after New Years for Congress, State Assembly, county supervisor, and city council.*

Contact Gary
at tehipite.chapter@sierraclub.org
or 559-790-3495.

OFA made a preliminary determination in May 2019 to recommend against federal recognition of the tribe. The OFA's stated reason was that the SSMN's 600-plus tribal members were scattered across California and did not meet often enough to demonstrate their continuing presence as a qualifying tribe, and suggested further research by the tribal leadership.

The reason for the Sierra Club's involvement in this effort is that the Southern Sierra Miwuk are one of seven tribes whose members were the original inhabitants of Yosemite National Park and, in particular, Yosemite Valley. In 1906, following a famous three-day camping trip by Sierra Club founder John Muir and President Theodore Roosevelt, Yosemite Valley was reacquired by the federal government and Yosemite National Park was expanded to include it. Soon after, a Native village at the base of Yosemite Falls was burned down by the National Park rangers, and by 1910, only one of five villages in the Valley remained standing. Natives remained in the Park to serve the tourist trade. The last remaining Native residents of the Valley were removed in 1969, and their housing structures burned in a fire department exercise (!).

In 2018, after extensive negotiations, the National Park Service authorized the Southern Sierra Miwuk to construct a traditional roundhouse in Yosemite Valley, nearby the Camp 4 campground, utilizing historically

– CONTINUED ON PAGE 10 –

see also:

Range of Light National Monument — A Proposal

on page 6



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet



Bear in mind the consequences.

The Yellowstone grizzly bear is an irreplaceable part of America's natural heritage, a symbol of the independence that defines the American character and an icon of all that is wild and free. The Bush administration set forth a proposal that would remove federal protection for the Yellowstone grizzly bear. Help Sierra Club protect our forest friends; they prefer the woods than being on display.

Get grizzly and JOIN Sierra Club.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Phone (____) _____

Email _____

Join today and receive a FREE Sierra Club Rucksack



Check enclosed. Please make payable to Sierra Club.
Please charge my: Visa Mastercard AMEX

Cardholder Name _____

Card Number _____

Exp. Date ____/____/____

Signature _____

Membership Categories	Individual	Joint
Special Offer	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	
Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> \$39	<input type="checkbox"/> \$49
Supporting	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100
Contributing	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150	<input type="checkbox"/> \$175
Life	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1250
Senior	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35
Student/Limited Income	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35

Contributions, gifts and dues to Sierra Club are not tax deductible; they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to Sierra magazine and \$1 for your Chapter newsletters.



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Upcoming 2020 Tehipite Chapter Meetings

Tehipite Chapter Conservation & Executive Committee Meetings

Second Wednesday of each month ~ members welcome

January 8, February 12, March 11, April 8, May 6, June 10, July 8, August 12, September 9,
and October 7, November 11, and December 9

The Conservation Committee meets at 7 PM. The Executive Committee meets at 8 PM.

University of California Center, 550 E. Shaw Avenue, Fresno (between First and Fresno Streets)

Tehipite Chapter General Meetings

Third Wednesday of each month from 7 to 9 PM, except for July and August this year

OUR GENERAL MEETINGS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, AND PARKING IS FREE.

University of California Center, 550 E. Shaw Avenue, Fresno (between First and Fresno Street)



Wednesday, January 15, 7:00 PM — “Preserving Fire Lookouts in the Sierra Nevada,” with Kathy Allison of the Buck Rock Foundation

Join Kathy Allison of the Buck Rock Foundation and learn about the history of fire lookouts in California, what working a lookout station entails, and the work of Buck Rock Foundation in staffing three lookouts in Sierra National Forest and Kings Canyon National Park.



Wednesday, February 19, 7:00 PM — “Aquatic Habitat Restoration in our National Parks,” with Danny Boiano, Biologist for Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

Danny Boiano, SEKI biologist, will tell us about the Aquatic Habitat Restoration Project in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, an effort to return the ecology of mountain lakes and streams to the time before the high country lakes were stocked with non-native trout.

Saturday, March 28, 5:00 PM, at The Big Red Church, 2131 N. Van Ness Boulevard, Fresno — Our Annual Potluck Banquet, featuring best-selling author Mark Arax

Come hear acclaimed Central Valley journalist and historian Mark Arax, author of 2019’s *The Dreamt Land: Chasing Water and Dust Across California*. This is the social event of the year for the Fresno contingent of the Tehipite Chapter, a great time to meet other Sierra Club members. Bring your friends too. More information on page 12.



Wednesday, April 15, 7:00 PM — “Archaeology of the Sierra Nevada,” with Jeff Irwin, Manager of the Sierra National Forest Heritage Program

Join archeologist Jeff Irwin as he presents an overview of the prehistory of the Sierra National Forest, covering a timeframe from the Ice Age to the Gold Rush. He'll highlight patterns in indigenous culture as represented by archaeological evidence and describe some of the more common and important artifact types and site features found in the Forest.



Wednesday, May 20, 7:00 PM — to be announced

Wednesday, June 17, 7:00 PM — to be announced

Merced Group News

2019 Kirihara Scholarships Awarded to University of California Merced Students

In 2011 a scholarship was established in honor of two of the founding members of the Merced Group, Jake and Fran Kirihara. The Kiriharas were supporters, and when needed founding members, of many groups dedicated to the environment, peace, and justice. They were activists who not only spoke out but took action to defend and provide for the under-represented and disadvantaged. Each year the Merced Group awards scholarships to two U.C. Merced students who show seeds of these same passions and sense of commitment. At the Merced Group's April meeting, the recipients were Gabriela Diaz and Oscar Elias.

Gabriela is a first generation college attendee, in her 4th year at the University of California, majoring in psychology. Her academic interests are varied and have included sociology, political science, public health, cultural anthropology, economics, and entrepreneurial courses. She also finds time to be an Orientation Leader for new students on campus and is a participant in the Yosemite Leadership Program. Gabriela says that the national park's Y.L.P. has been particularly influential in expanding her environmental awareness and helping her become socially engaged. Next semester she will study abroad at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. After graduation she plans to join the Peace Corps to feed her passion to help address social issues like homelessness, food & water security, education, mental health, and economic inequality.

Oscar had his love of nature fostered in high school where he attended the Nature Bridge campus in Yosemite during the summer. On attending U.C. Merced early, the labs in his ecology classes pointed him toward environmental research. Later those interests were folded into a public health major which has led to a focus on environmental health issues like water quality, air quality, and access to fresh and healthy foods. This summer Oscar is interning in Yosemite, teaching middle school students about ecology, hydrology, fire science, and enviro stewardship. This coming school year he will continue his lab research and try to land an internship in environmental health.



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA MERCED STUDENTS GABRIELA DIAZ AND OSCAR ELIAS ARE HONORED LAST SPRING WITH MERCED GROUP'S ANNUAL KIRIHARA SCHOLARSHIPS

Congratulations to both Gabriela and Oscar and of course best wishes in their future pursuits.

Bill King Honored At Merced Group's Annual Awards Banquet

Retired Merced City planner Bill King was singled out for commendation by the Merced Group for both his contribution to sound city planning and his volunteer work in the Merced community. In his years as the city planner, King was a willing and responsive ear in encouraging public input on many Merced City planning efforts. Particular note was made of his role in the past decade, guiding development of the City's General Plan Update and its Climate Action Plan. Bill also made sure that the City's Bicycle Commission was able to be an impactful group in its advocacy. He helped them lobby to expand bike routes, provide secure bike racks, and ensure better safety for both commuters and recreational pedal-ers.

While working for the city and on into retirement, Bill volunteers for the Boys and Girls Club. His marquee project is "Kids From the Meadows" in which he designs outdoor experiences for children of a particularly disadvantaged area of town. Each week his after-school meetings use hands on activities right in the community to underscore the message that "nature" is all around us in everyday life. Bill also takes his charges on a culminating day trip to

– CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE –



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Merced Group Conservation & Executive Committee Meetings

The first Wednesday of each month at 7:00 PM — at Rod Webster’s home, 345 E. 20th St., Merced.

The Conservation meeting is first and can last 30-40 minutes.

Anyone with an interest in local, state, or national conservation issues is welcome to attend.

Merced Group’s Monthly General Meetings Resume

The third Thursday of each month at 7PM - Merced United Methodist Church

The Church is located at 899 Yosemite Parkway (also known as Hwy 140 to Yosemite).

Please park in the lot on Cypress Avenue and enter there to reach the Fireside room.

– CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE –

Yosemite to see some of our nearby jaw-dropping scenery.

In 2012 a near fatal car crash brought Bill to an intersection in his professional path. Bill traded the City Council chambers for high-mountain meadows, electing to share his passion for the outdoors and urban planning with others by connecting people to nature and nature with community.

Bill currently runs his own guide service, Yosemite Excursions, and also contracts with the Yosemite Conservancy to lead visitors on hikes throughout the park. In addition, he founded the South Fork Merced River Trailblazers which secured a grant and access to rebuild and repair a long neglected trail along the South Fork of the Merced River. One portion, from Hwy 140 to Hite’s Cove, is a well-known spring wildflower hike. Mudslides from winter rains make annual repairs a necessity. Less known is the portion of this historic trail that runs on further upstream to Wawona. This section has been deteriorating and little used for decades.

Bill takes volunteer crews up several weekends each month (yes, even in winter!) to repair damaged trail and to try and re-establish forgotten sections so they can be reopened for public use. Bill sees the trail work as yet another means to his goal — getting people (particularly young adults) out into nature. This creates experiences that help establish that personal relationship to place which fosters the environmental stewards of tomorrow.



MERCED GROUP CHAIR ROD WEBSTER PRESENTS THE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD TO HONOREE BILL KING

To let Bill King lead you to a greater appreciation of the great outdoors: volunteer to spend a day on his trail work project (www.facebook.com/groups/1488628871465907/), or check out his “Somewhere in Yosemite” blog (billking2.wix.com/somewhere-n-yosemite), or look on his "Walk with Nature" Facebook group (www.facebook.com/groups/353518828409626/) for monthly free hikes led by Bill. And, finally, in 2019 Bill will launch a new venture, Bill King Consulting: Community Planning and Design, which will focus on planning projects that connect people with nature, and nature with community.



Range of Light National Monument

by Deanna Lynn Wulff



The **Range of Light National Monument** is the most significant proposal to protect the Sierra Nevada in the past century. It would unite Yosemite with Kings Canyon and create an interconnected landscape stretching over 1.4 million acres in one of the most biodiverse places on earth — the Sierra Nevada. This forward-thinking proposal seeks to restore the forest for people and wildlife, to build and improve trails, to plant trees, and to provide an economic and environmental future for Californians and the golden state's spectacular and diverse wildlife.

John Muir's work to protect Yosemite and Sequoia as National Parks was a profound achievement for humanity. It sparked the formation of the Sierra Club and the environmental movement. Decades later, Sierra Club members and board members worked to protect Kings

Canyon and Mineral King. These parks, celebrated for their beauty, are now enjoyed by millions of Americans and visitors every year. This baton of noble work has been passed forward to us through time.

We seek to carry it forth and extend it by protecting the missing piece in the center. The proposed Range of Light National Monument will protect the area currently managed by the Sierra National Forest and a small portion managed by the Bureau of Land Management, the San Joaquin Gorge. As with all significant proposals, an enormous amount of work and support is required to achieve worthwhile and lasting results. We ask you to support this project and join the grassroots movement. In this article, we address common misconceptions and outline our vision for creating the Range of Light National Monument.

Environmental Importance: A Biological Hot Spot

The proposed monument is in a special place. It sits in the center of the longest interconnected wilderness in the lower 48 and between two major National Parks, Yosemite and Kings Canyon; for more than 150 miles, no road crosses over the range. By protecting the center-piece, the monument will create an extensive interconnected habitat area in one of the most vital landscapes in the country. Half of California's native plant species live in Sierra Nevada; more than 400 are found nowhere else on earth, including the Giant Sequoia. In particular, the Sierra National Forest is home to 93 at-risk species, 12 of which are on the endangered species list such as the Sierra Nevada Red Fox, the Sierra Marten, and the Great Gray Owl.

Threats: Extractive Use and Abuse of Land

Threats to the area are numerous, complex and interrelated. The federal land outside of wilderness (about 660,000 acres) is the most vulnerable. It is grazed, sprayed with herbicides, and commercially logged. In addition, past clear-cutting and replanting of single tree species has weakened the forest's integrity. This weakened forest is threatened by global warming, ongoing commercial and salvage logging, current mismanagement, and more than 2500 miles of logging roads. These logging roads disrupt habitat, threaten wildlife, cause soil erosion, increase the likelihood of wildfires, and create a management crisis. Recreation sites are polluted and abused, and wildfires are easily started. Most wildfires



on public land are human-caused (84 percent), and without effective resource control and education, communities will remain vulnerable.

What about Fire & Beetle-Killed Trees?

While fire and beetle-killed trees grab headlines and are often used to support an increase in logging, the scientific data shows that beetle-killed trees are **not** correlated with an increase in fire severity.¹ In addition, logged landscapes have more severe fires. Scientists recently examined the severity of 1,500 forest fires affecting over 23 million acres in 11 western states. Forests with the highest levels of protection (wilderness, parks and roadless areas) had fire cycles operating within historic bounds,



while those with the most logging had the highest amounts of uncharacteristically severe fire.

Controlled burns are the most effective way to maintain forest health² and fire safety, (in addition to making homes more fire-safe³). It is also less costly to manage with fire. On average, controlled burns cost \$145 per acre, and mechanical thinning costs \$565 per acre.⁴ The National Parks use effective let-burn and controlled burn strategies and mechanical thinning to a very limited extent (less than 1 percent annually), with great success.

In June 2019, 200 scientists signed a support letter,⁵ validating this proposal and its approach.

Save the Environment. Save the Economy

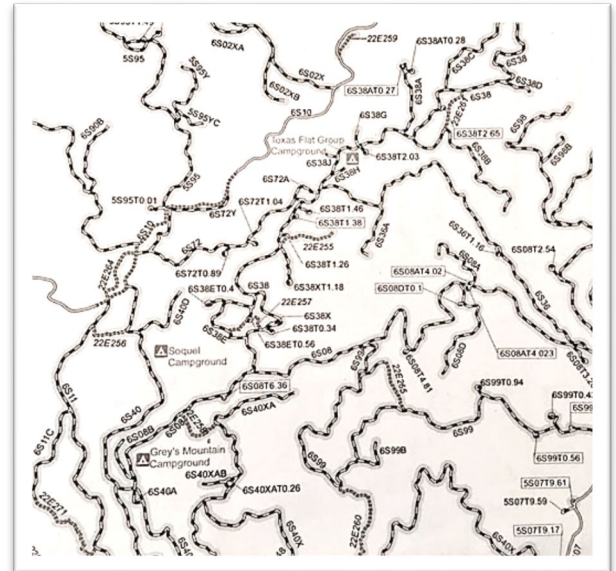
In addition, Yosemite directly employs nearly 4 times as many people as the Sierra National Forest in the summer, (about 9 times



as many in the winter), and the forest is nearly twice as large as the park. More protection = more jobs. See statistics below; numbers are approximate and based on 2017 and 2018 budget cycle. The table shows the statistics for federal employees. It does not include recreational and tourism jobs, which are considered the primary economic force in the area.

Recreation & Restoration Supported by Legislation

Our goal is to create a refuge that brings forth the best aspects of park’s management and retains the forest’s wild beauty and rugged freedom — to create a place to refresh the mind, body, and spirit. The Range of Light National Monument will restore wildlife habitat, create a non-motorized trail system, and improve public recreation sites like campgrounds and picnic areas. It will also halt commercial logging, retire grazing leases, close selected roads, and introduce a controlled burn program. We support mountain bicycling and



¹ http://sequoiaforestkeeper.org/pdfs/comment_letters/wishon/Ex_G-Meigs_et_al_2016-Do_insect_outbreaks_reduce_the_severity_of_subsequent_forest_fires.pdf
² <https://massivesci.com/articles/wildfire-prevention-california-controlled-burn/>
³ <https://www.latimes.com/projects/wildfire-california-fuel-breaks-newsom-paradise/?fbclid=IwAR015qpnPghYzS0mc9sNqZvL2KtnAzDIL9UGmI8vhl-Q42AiDvoTd-xBoDk>
⁴ https://www.fs.fed.us/psw/publications/north/psw_2013_north004.pdf
⁵ <http://nebula.wsimg.com/b640739af6ee67d5cf136d5417721726?AccessKeyId=4DF69BDDDC4EBF357537&disposition=0&alloworigi=1>

Management Agency	Summer/Winter Jobs	Miles of Roads	Size of Area
Sierra National Forest	358/96	2500 + dirt and paved	1,420,750 acres
Yosemite National Park	1200/800	214 paved	761,266 acres

dispersed camping in the front country, recreational cabin leases, and tribal use of native plant species. Our proposal provides habitat for wildlife and accommodates a diversity of non-motorized users and four-wheel drive enthusiasts with street legal vehicles.



About the Campaign

This grassroots campaign was built from the ground up, starting in 2013. It is the primary work of the 501c3 non-profit Unite the Parks.⁶ Today, more than 137 businesses and organizations support the Range of Light National Monument. The California Democratic Party adopted a resolution supporting the Range of Light National Monument in 2018⁷, and the Democratic National Committee followed in 2019.⁸ The project has been featured on NPR,⁹ in the Fresno Bee,¹⁰ and the Merced Sun Star.^{11,12} The San Jose Mercury News,¹³ the third largest paper in California, endorsed it in 2015.

The Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club endorsed in 2014, and this September, the Sierra Club Council of Club Leaders adopted a resolution in support. We ask that you endorse it at our website, [unitetheparks.org](http://www.unitetheparks.org). You can also donate there. To learn about Sierra Club involvement, contact Gary Lasky of the Tehipite Chapter at data.nations@gmail.com, and to learn about the Unite the Parks effort, contact **Deanna Lynn Wulff** at director@unitetheparks.org.



⁶ <http://www.unitetheparks.org/>

⁷ <https://www.cadem.org/our-party/standing-committees/body/Not-shortened-Consent.pdf>

⁸ https://gallery.mailchimp.com/b575b9e5364b5673b6f9df3f1/files/c2b4bc54-57a1-45a8-870b-4f1fb9d03393/Resolutions_Packet_Final_Post_DNC_Meeting.pdf

⁹ <https://www.kqed.org/news/10779458/one-womans-quest-to-unite-the-parks>

¹⁰ <https://www.fresnobee.com/news/local/article96900372.html>

¹¹ <https://www.mercedsunstar.com/living/liv-columns-blogs/debbie-croft-mariposa-life/article109668137.html>

¹² <https://www.mercedsunstar.com/living/liv-columns-blogs/debbie-croft-mariposa-life/article111112147.html>

¹³ <https://www.mercurynews.com/2015/12/10/mercury-news-editorial-sierra-national-monument-makes-sense/>



**SIERRA
CLUB**



UNITE THE PARKS

“The battle we have fought, and are still fighting, for the forests is a part of the eternal conflict between right and wrong, and we cannot expect to see the end of it. I trust, however that our Club will not weary in this forest well-doing. The fight for the Yosemite Park and other forest parks and reserves is by no means over; nor would the fighting cease, however much the boundaries were contracted. Every good thing, great and small, needs defense. The smallest forest reserve, and the first I ever heard of, was in the Garden of Eden; and though its boundaries were drawn by the Lord, and embraced only one tree, yet even so moderate a reserve as this was attacked. And I doubt not, if only one of our grand trees in the Sierra were reserved as an example and type of all that is most noble and glorious in mountain trees, it would not be long before you would find a lumberman and a lawyer at the foot of it, eagerly proving by every law terrestrial and celestial that that tree must come down. So, we must count on watching and striving for these trees, and should always be glad to find anything so surely good and noble to strive for.”

John Muir

Ways to help

Watch the Video Series:

www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLWDgxxRDXzp0IMn61RT84JEoKJYlaDfQI

Join Friends of Unite the Parks:

www.facebook.com/groups/1340374845986689/

Like our open Facebook Page:

www.facebook.com/unitetheparks/

Endorse:

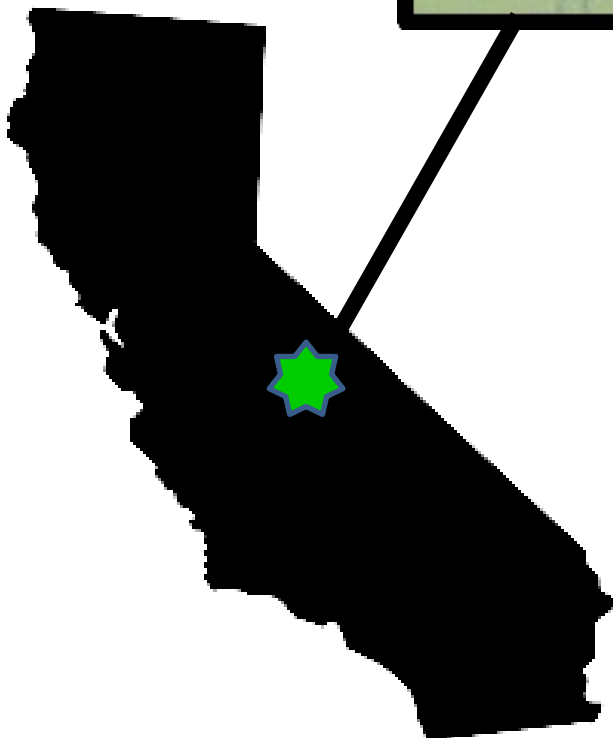
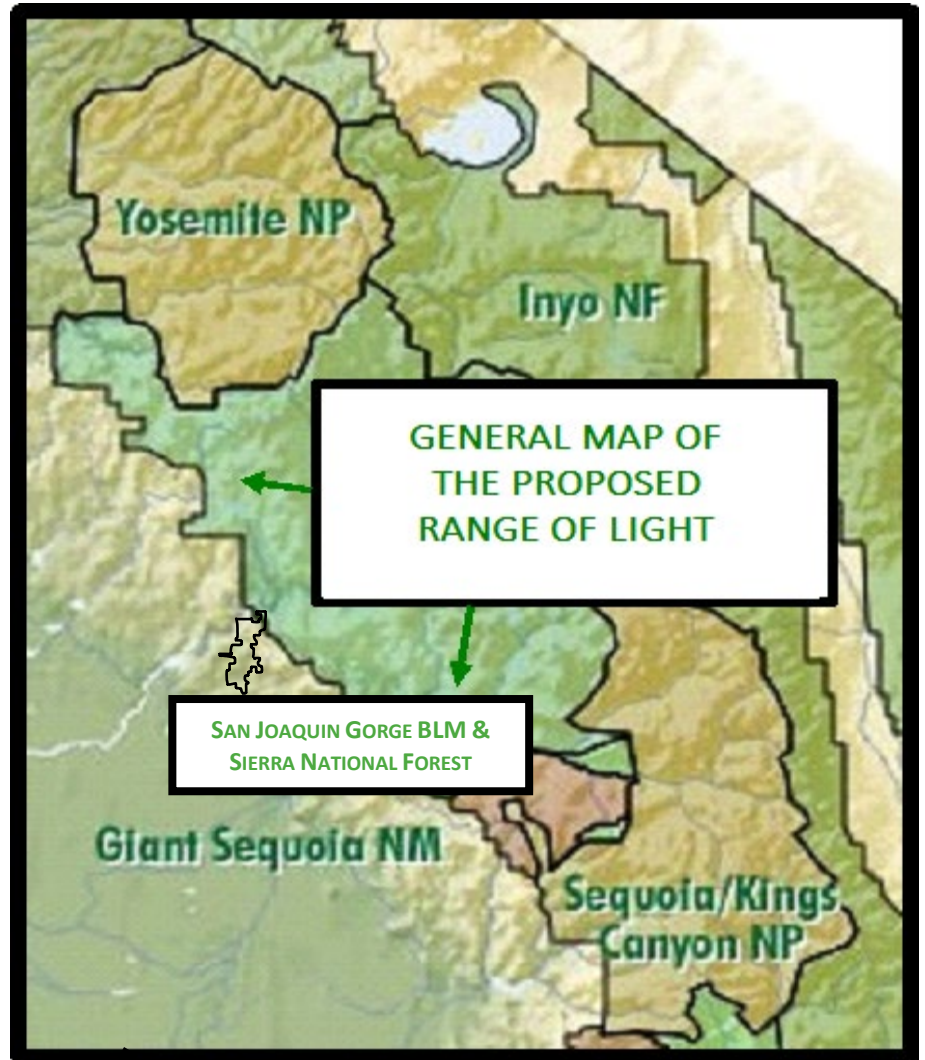
www.unitetheparks.org/endorse.html

Donate:

www.unitetheparks.org/donate.html

Get in touch. Email:

director@unitetheparks.org



“The welfare of the people in the valleys of California and the welfare of the trees on the mountains are so closely related that the farmers might say that oranges grow on pine-trees, and wheat, and grass. Now any kind of forest on the flank of the Sierra would be of inestimable value as a cover for the irrigating streams. But in our forests, we have not only a perfect cover, but also the most attractive and interesting trees in every way, and of the highest value, spiritual and material, so that even the angels of heaven might well be eager to come down and camp in their leafy temples.”

John Muir

authentic materials and methods. This is a significant breakthrough and recognition by a federal agency. It is also significant from the standpoint of the tribe, which needs to demonstrate a historical pattern of recognition of the SSMN by federal agencies in order to establish its claim to federal acknowledgment.

The official OFA report recognizes that two treaties signed by Natives with the federal government in 1851 were signed by the ancestors of the SSMN, but what is disputed is whether the SSMN can demonstrate a connection to the tribelets which existed at that time. These and nine other treaties, negotiated with the federal government on or about 1851 by California tribes, were never ratified by the U.S. Senate, at the request of the two California Senators from what was then a brand-new state. It is worth noting that the ejection of the SSMN from Yosemite Valley, at gunpoint, by state and federal authorities (including the Buffalo Soldiers of the U.S. Army following the Civil War), is a direct cause of the diaspora of this specific tribe, and a valid reason for their difficulties in demonstrating a cohesive government to the federal authorities today. Give them a break. Of the seven tribes originally inhabiting what is now Yosemite National Park, some have achieved federal recognition and been granted lands by the state, while others have not.

The Tribal Chair of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, Bill Leonard, attended our Tehipite Chapter Executive Committee meeting this past October 9 in which he patiently answered all questions to the satisfaction of our ExCom members and others present, including George Whitmore, who had expressed concerns about the Chapter weighing in on internal affairs among the tribes. Mr. Leonard explained that, if the SSMN is granted federal-recognized status, this could benefit other California tribes that are still seeking recognition. Mr. Leonard has two former staff of the Office of Federal Acknowledgment, a historian, and an anthropologist supporting his tribe's efforts. The SSMN has now completed a census and is presently conducting a survey of the tribe's members to attempt to satisfy the federal government's rather strict protocols.

On October 10, 2019, the Office of Federal Acknowledgment granted the SSMN a second six-month extension to continue their research to make the case of why OFA should grant them status as a federally recognized tribe. Public comment on this proposed action will remain open until May 2020.

For more information and background, visit the official website of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation at southernSierramiwuknation.org or contact Gary Lasky at the Tehipite Chapter at data.nations@gmail.com or 559-790-3495.

The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation ***Seeking Fair Treatment in the Federal Acknowledgment Process***

Who We Are

We are the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation (SSMN), descendants of the Southern Sierra Miwuk people who had villages in the areas now known as Yosemite National Park and its immediate vicinity in Mariposa County, California. Because of the unique historical circumstances of our Tribe, we are not yet officially recognized by the Federal Government.

Our History

Our relationship with the federal government began over 160 years ago. After the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo between the United States and Mexico and the discovery of gold in California, our ancestral lands were flooded with non-Indian miners, ranchers, and settlers seeking to exploit our natural resources and take our lands. In fact, private militias funded by the State of California engaged in a campaign to drive us from our homelands through the systematic destruction of our villages and food stores, and, in many cases, vigilante murders and enslavement of our people. In an effort to end the violence, the United States signed treaties in 1851-52 with our ancestors, the Southern Sierra Miwuk, and neighboring tribes. In the treaties, our ancestors reserved tracts of land within our ancestral territory and the United States promised to protect their occupancy of those lands and provide them with other support. Unfortunately, the lands reserved in the treaties in exchange for cession of large areas of our ancestral homeland were never confirmed to our people and the treaty promises never fulfilled. The U.S. Senate, in response to opposition from senators of the new State of California (1850), opposed ratification of all 19 treaties negotiated by the federal treaty commissioners with California tribes throughout the state.

This massive breach of trust by the federal government left our people, along with many other California tribes, homeless in their native homelands and resulted in widespread starvation, illness, and the random killings, including women and children. Our people survived this period only by consolidating and sharing resources, by retreating to areas of refuge, and by maintaining our relationships with neighboring tribes. The Yosemite Valley, because of its relative isolation and site of a number of our ancestral villages, became our main place of refuge from the violence and depredations of non-Indians, and a place where we had access to traditional food sources. However, even this limited refuge was denied to us when the federal government took

control of the Yosemite Valley and made it a National Park in 1905 under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service (NPS). Between 1900 and 1910, the Miwuk village sites in Yosemite were reduced to a single tent cabin village, where we continued to reside while we worked in the Park and were used in promoting the increasing tourism in the Park and special Park events. However, in 1969 the Park Service evicted us from our residences and destroyed our small village as part of a NPS fire-fighting exercise.

After our eviction from Yosemite National Park, we continued our efforts for fair treatment and recognition by the United States. In 1972, we established the American Indian Council of Mariposa County, a non-profit entity, which allowed us to compete for grants and initiate programs to advance the economic, social welfare, and education interests of our people. We also continued our cultural and religious practices, using the new policy protections accorded under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, by sponsoring and holding annual events in Yosemite National Park and other areas of cultural and religious significance to our people. And we worked with the NPS to establish the Indian Village of Ahwahnee in Yosemite Valley, on the site of one of our historic villages.

Our Participation in the Federal Acknowledgment Process

In 1982, we filed a petition with the Department of Interior seeking formal acknowledgment as a federally recognized Indian tribe. We were one of the first Indian groups to petition for federal acknowledgment. During the intervening 37 years, we have submitted thousands of pages of scholarly reports and supporting historical, anthropological, and genealogical information to the Interior Office of Federal Acknowledgment (OFA) establishing the connection between the members of our Tribe and the historical Southern Sierra Miwuk people who signed treaties with the United States in 1851-52.

On November 16, 2018, in the first formal review of our petition, the Assistant Secretary–Indian Affairs issued a Proposed Finding in our case denying our existence as a distinct Indian community “at present” (defined by OFA as 1982 to 2011) under 25 CFR § 83.7(b). We are in the process of challenging the validity of this deeply flawed Proposed Finding, which conflicts with our history and our tribal programs, and our relationship with neighboring tribes, including federally recognized tribes, our relationship with the Yosemite National Park, our relationship with the tribal organization providing health services to our people, and our relationship with State and local governments—all of whom recognize the SSMN as a distinct Indian community.

After 37 years, and almost eight years of “active consideration,” the Assistant Secretary issued a Proposed Finding on the basis of a single element of one of the seven mandatory criteria for federal acknowledgment, without addressing the historical context of our community in relation to the 1851-52 treaties and our more-than-century-long relationship with the National Park Service and connection to Yosemite National Park. This violates applicable federal regulations and precedent. In fact, three public comment letters submitted by former professional OFA staff members, one of whom was part of the 3-member team that reviewed the Proposed Finding, sharply question the transparency and fairness of the Proposed Finding and the OFA review process. (These and other public comment letters can be accessed at our website at www.southernsierramiwuknation.org.) These serious allegations by former OFA staff convince us that the Proposed Finding lacks the fundamental fairness and transparency required by this essential review process for establishing federal recognition.

Our Present-Day Tribal Community and Its Relationship with the National Park Service and Others

Today, with the assistance of our elders, we continue our ceremonies and celebrations in Yosemite Valley, which include the Bear Dance ceremony attended by many tribes in California. Our tribe administers a robust cultural monitoring program, we serve on the advisory board of the tribal organization that provides an Indian Health Service program to our people, we operate a behavioral health facility that services our members and the members of neighboring tribes, and we provide educational and social programs to serve our members. In addition, we continue to honor our tribal relations, both among our own people and with our surrounding tribal neighbors. We know, respect, and care for our sacred places and our ancestral village areas in the Yosemite National Park and other areas of our ancestral lands.

Our Appeal for Support

We respectfully ask for your support in our effort to convince the Assistant Secretary to withdraw the Proposed Finding, recommence Active Consideration of our petition, and issue a new Proposed Finding consistent with the federal acknowledgement regulations. We are also preparing a response to the Proposed Finding, which requires expert consultants and legal assistance, costs that we have to support through fund-raising.

For further information on how you can submit your comments on the Proposed Finding and/or to make a donation in support of our recognition effort, please visit our tribal website at: www.southernsierramiwuknation.org.

The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation



Seeking Fair Treatment in the Federal Acknowledgment Process



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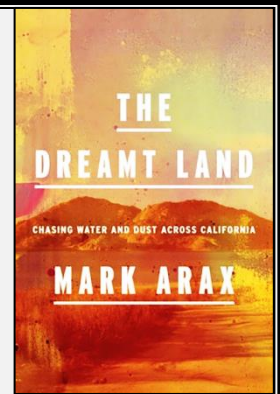
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Tehipite Topics is published up to three times a year. This issue is the only issue of 2019. Downloadable color versions are available on the chapter website at www.sierraclub.org/tehipite/newsletters. Back issues are archived on the website beginning from April 2004. Articles and photographs from Sierra Club members are always welcome for our coming issues. Send your contributions for the Winter 2020 issue by email to robertsturner52@gmail.com before February 1.



Save the Date
Saturday, March 28, 5–9 P.M.
for the
**Tehipite Chapter 2020
Annual Potluck Banquet**



***featuring acclaimed Central Valley journalist and historian
Mark Arax, author of 2019’s The Dreamt Land:
Chasing Water and Dust Across California***

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