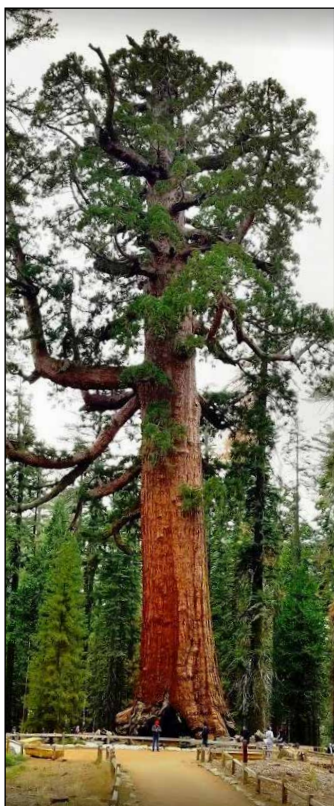




The Sequoia

2018 was Great Year for Hiking with Groveland Sierra Club Hiking Group

By Bob Asquith



Visiting Mariposa Grove's Grizzly Giant.



This stalwart group spent nearly 3 hours picking up trash along the Big Oak Flat Road in Yosemite on Jan 5th. We covered the road and associated areas from the entrance station to Valley View.

As 2018 draw to a close, we look back on the many adventures the band of Sierra Club hikers out of Groveland has experienced. Our group includes hikers from Turlock, Modesto, Oakdale, Twain Harte, Sonora, and many other places. We hike on Thursdays year round. Rain, snow – those do not scare away our hikers from their appointed mission. During 2018 we went to many places in Yosemite including the Valley, Tuolumne Meadows and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees (following its amazing restoration).

We chased wildflowers from Table Mountain and Lake Don Pedro (March) to the Tioga Pass and beyond (August). Yes, it was still spring at 10,000 feet, with lots of wildflowers.

We enjoyed waterfalls, streams and rivers from New Melones to Tioga Tarns. We visited Tenaya Lake, Wapama Falls, and Tamarack Creek.

We also followed ancient trails to Mono Pass and Bloody Canyon as well as segments of the old roads into Yosemite from Coulterville and Big Oak Flat. Our plan in 2019 is to explore more segments of these old ways.

We planted trees in the Rim Fire burn area and snowshoed as well.

A special event was hiking on the Anker Family Ranch at Priest Station in Big Oak Flat. Originally an 18,000 acre ranch established in 1849, five generations of the family have lived there. It is a treasury of local history. In the



Relaxing on the Tuolumne River.

early days, the ranch was a hotel and stagecoach stop for the stage route on Old Priest Grade.

Join us for one of our weekly hikes in the Sierra. For more information contact Outings Leader, Bob Asquith: bobasquith@gmail.com

INSIDE

STEPS TO REDUCE WILDFIRE
TRUMP=POLITICAL SCIENCE
MINUS THE SCIENCE

How can we manage our natural lands (forests, brushfields, oak woodlands) in a way that minimizes the risk of devastating firestorms and also allows fire to play its natural role in the environment?

Key Steps to Reduce the Risk of Devastating Wildfires

By John Buckley

If someone refers to “wildfire,” many Sierra Club members may immediately associate that word with destructive conflagrations, or Smokey the Bear’s admonishment to “prevent wildfire,” or Bambi fleeing from a wildfire in terror. Recent fires reinforce that view. But fire can also be good for the environment.

In reality, the ecosystem of our Sierra Nevada foothills and mountains has always had wildfire as a natural process that actually provides widespread benefits for plants and wildlife. But long-entrenched beliefs that

wildfires are “bad” and need to be suppressed resulted in a century of fire management policies that consistently extinguished fires. At times, under extreme conditions, controlling a wildfire can spare homes, habitat, watershed values and save human lives. But under a wide range of conditions, especially during the late spring and early fall seasons, allowing wildfires to be “managed” or intentionally lighting prescribed fires can be critically important for many reasons.

Fires burn only where there is “fuel” present — whether it be pine needles, dense forests, grass-covered oak woodlands, or thick brushfields. People’s homes can also be fuel. So how can we manage our natural lands (forests, brushfields, oak woodlands) in a way that minimizes the risk of devastating firestorms and also allows fire to play its natural role in the environment?

While there is no simple “one size fits all” solution to this complex and urgent issue, some positive actions can be taken. The following four steps could make a significant difference:

(1) Greatly increase the use of managed or prescribed fires on public forest lands during the safest times of year when fires burn with low intensity. Yes, there will be times with annoying smoke, but managed fires produce only a fraction of the unhealthy levels of smoke produced by massive wildfires.

(2) Treat a century of excessive fuel accumulation in our national forests by ramping up not only burning, but also science-based logging treatments that “thin” the forest selectively, sparing large trees, hardwoods, and sensitive habitat areas.

(3) Greatly increase accountability for all property owners in the “wildland urban interface” (WUI) to do the required 30 ft clearance of flammable fuels around structures and to also remove many flammable fuels out to 100 ft from their home or building. When many don’t do it in critical areas, the County or State should pay to have it done and then bill the property owners.

(4) From this time on, prohibit counties from approving new subdivisions or concentrated new development in extreme fire risk areas.

During the 13 years that I was a wildland firefighter, at times I watched the suffering caused by wind-driven fires roaring into residential communities, wiping out miles of precious forests, and charring watersheds to an extent that recovery takes decades, if ever. I have also seen where well-planned prescribed burns, carefully implemented thinning logging projects, and fire clearances around structures combined to enable threatened communities to escape high severity wildfire events.

Under the most extreme conditions – with severe winds and bone dry fuels – almost nothing can make a difference. But fire scientists say the strategies listed above can combine to make our Sierra Nevada forests more resilient and communities far safer. The status quo is not the answer.



Rim Fire aftermath in a high severity burn area...



Prescribed fire in thinned forest – USFS photo

Political Science Without Science

By Todd Stolp

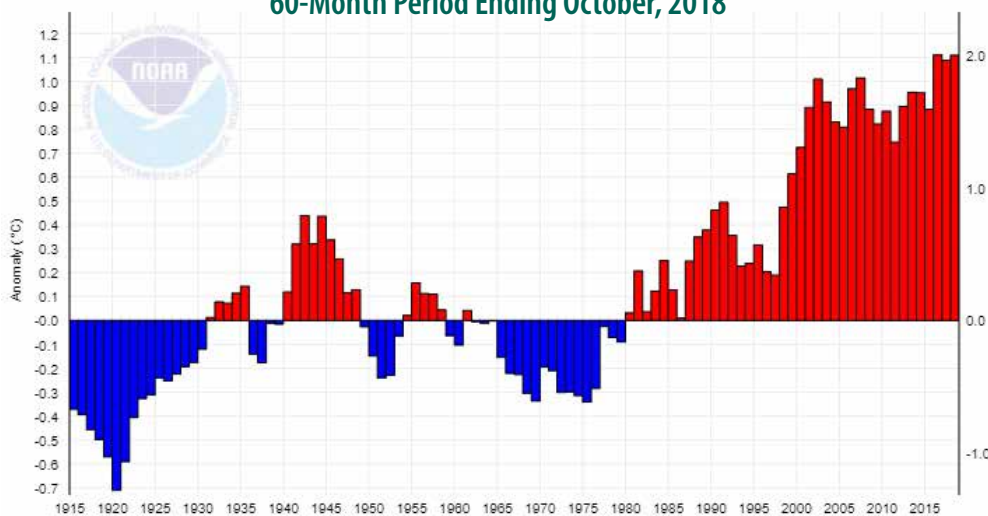
In July, 2018, 19 months into his presidency, President Donald Trump nominated meteorologist Kelvin Droegemeier to lead the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). Dr. Droegemeier was confirmed by the Senate Committee in September, 2018, and by the full Senate on January 2, 2019, as the primary science advisor to the President. Dr. Droegemeier faces enormous challenges advocating for science in an era where data and scientific study itself has been targeted by criticism and suspicion from political leaders. It is an important time to ask ourselves how we expect science to inform our political decision-making in this young century. What are the risks posed by policies that minimize input from the mainstream environmental and health sciences?

Legendary scientist Edwin Hubble carefully distinguished between Science and Values, pointing out that “the laws of science are derived from, as well as tested by, observation and experiment, and especially from measurement,” and that “positive, objective knowledge is public property.” On the other hand, according to Hubble, Values “are quite different... They are peculiar to the individual, and no methods exist by which universal agreement can be obtained.” In discussions of issues on the scientific frontier such as climate change and genetic engineering, scientists and politicians alike must remain aware of personal boundaries between Science and

Values if we hope to engage in a constructive debate. Most importantly, we must all be vigilant to study the objective data of science separate from what Hubble describes as “personal desires.” Doing so will help to prevent erosion of trust in the objective knowledge of science and reserve Value issues for the political stage.

As the new White House Science Advisor, Dr. Droegemeier is in a position to lead this effort. A case in point involves climate data sets that were removed from public access on the EPA website shortly after transition to the Trump administration under Scott Pruitt as the director of the EPA. Also, the recent rejection by the interim EPA administrator, Andrew Wheeler, of the November, 2018, Fourth National Climate Assessment findings supported by 13 federal agencies that describe dire projected economic consequences of global climate change. Data sets are the puzzle pieces of science and without them scientists have no hope of envisioning new hypotheses and testing creative solutions. Data and measurements, of course, have implied margins of error, but their validity should be open to scrutiny and scientific debate rather than discarded because of personal passions and beliefs. Environmental and health policies can only benefit from Dr. Droegemeier’s input and we await his efforts to promote the active engagement of and a renewed respect for science.

North America Temperature Anomalies, 60-Month Period Ending October, 2018



MEMBER PROFILE



Kevin Rice, Man of Many Hats

By Todd Stolp

When attrition began to take a toll on the membership of the Executive Committee of the Tuolumne Group, Kevin Rice, PhD, stepped up to fill an open seat. Little did he know that by the end of 2018 he'd be serving as Treasurer, Newsletter Production Manager, and both Conservation Group and Tuolumne Group Executive Committee Representative to the Mother Lode Chapter. We are fortunate to be represented by Kevin, a research scientist with an impressive background in conservation biology, restoration ecology and forest health.

Kevin received his Master's Degree in Biological Oceanography from the University of Miami and his PhD from UC Davis, in 1984. After post-doctorate work with Washington State University he returned to UC Davis to engage in further research and to teach. His research interests included vegetation management issues, including land restoration following wildfires.

One of the important contributions Kevin has made on behalf of the Tuolumne Group has been to highlight the importance of variable forest thinning as a tool for wildfire management as a supplement to controlled burns. He has provided science-based input to the Mother Lode Chapter during discussions of forest management practices and is gratified that our group's voice continues to be heard. At the same time, Kevin notes that more voices need to be raised in the interest of environmental protection. "Sierra Club membership needs to do more than just pay dues." With many legislative proposals being raised that have potential long term impacts on the environment, the importance of attending public deliberations and speaking up is a responsibility for all of us.

Kevin lives in Ponderosa Hills with his wife, Kathy Tellin, a retired Summerville Elementary teacher.



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Tuolumne Group Executive Committee meets monthly at the Tuolumne Utility District boardroom, 18885 Nugget Road in Sonora. For information on attending our next meeting, contact Trudy Craig at the email listed below.

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Treasurer Kevin Rice, kjrice@ucdavis.edu

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Newsletter Design Joe David, jd@daviddesign.com

Secretary & Programs, Open Positions

We welcome your input and feedback.

NOTES & UPDATES

NEW SEQUOIA

Welcome to the new Sequoia newsletter for 2019. Our new layout is designed to provide local Sierra Club members with a trusted source of information on people, events, and issues impacting our environment. Members can also find additional information on our updated web page: www.sierratuolumne.org.

INTERESTED IN RECEIVING NEWSLETTER VIA EMAIL?

If you would like to receive our newsletter via email either instead of or in addition to our printed edition, email your request to jd@daviddesign.com.

JOIN US FOR WEEKLY HIKES AND OUTINGS

Our Hiking Group meets every Thursday for day hikes to various points in the Sierra. Enjoy good company and explore some of the region's hidden treasures. Read about last year's hikes on page one of this newsletter. For details on upcoming hikes, contact trip leader, Bob Asquith via email at bobasquith@gmail.com.

GET INVOLVED

Interested in getting more involved with our Tuolumne Chapter? There are many ways to volunteer for whatever time you are able to give. Contact Co-Chair Trudy Craig by email at broadinski48@yahoo.com to find out ways to help. There are also opportunities to participate in forest hikes and projects occurring throughout the year. Find out more on our website, www.sierratuolumne.org.

