



**SIERRA
CLUB**

INSIDE

**REGIONAL PRESCRIBED
BURN CHALLENGES
TUOLUMNE COUNTY PASSES
WEAK CLIMATE ACTION PLAN**

**YOUR
COMMENTS
CAN LET THE
PARK SERVICE
KNOW THAT
YOSEMITE
SHOULD
NOT JUST BE
MANAGED FOR
PROFITS FOR
COMMERCIAL
BUSINESSES
IN GATEWAY
COMMUNITIES.**

The Sequoia

Help Protect Yosemite From Being Completely Overwhelmed By Visitors and Tourism

Sierra-Tuolumne Sierra Club Group Executive Committee

For many years, during the peak tourism season, Yosemite Valley has suffered from too many cars and visitors. Over the past three years, Yosemite required day-use reservations during the busy season due to COVID and then due to high levels of construction in 2022. Reservations greatly reduced traffic jams and crowding. But due to pressure from regional businesses that profit from squeezing ever more visitors into the Park, Yosemite officials recently canceled the day-use reservation system for 2023. From now through Feb. 3rd the Park Service is inviting public comments on how to best manage visitor access in the Park.

A NEED FOR BALANCED SOLUTIONS

A well-designed day-use reservation system can allow a moderate level of visitor use (and still high economic profits for businesses), but can also reduce traffic jams, resource damage, and over-crowding that often ruins the visitor experience.

PLEASE TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO COMMENT

In your own words, help the Park to know that Yosemite Valley in particular suffers from far too many vehicles and too much congestion. Urge the Park to do what's needed to protect Yosemite. **Comment period closes at midnight on February 3rd.**



Traffic jams and 2-hour waits to get into the Park result in a terrible visitor experience. Crowds and congestion result in increased damage to riverbank vegetation, critical wildlife habitat, and air quality.

How to Send Your Comments to the Park Service

Go to our Sierra Club Group Website at: www.sierratuolumne.org

Click the link at the end of the Yosemite Action Alert on our home page.

This link will take you to the NPS Yosemite Visitor Access Comments Page.

Or go directly to NPS Comments Page at:

<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?documentID=125234>

Why the Sierra Club Celebrates Prescribed Burns in our Region; and some of the Challenges to Getting those Treatments Done

Betty Chase

Forests and brush fields are going to burn eventually, either under carefully managed conditions or via out-of-control wildfires. Yet many, if not most, forest managers continue to put off doing large burn treatments.

MOST OF US GREW UP WITH SMOKEY THE BEAR urging everyone to “prevent wildfires.” Sadly, that well-intended public campaign by the Forest Service reflected decades of insistence that all wildfires should be put out promptly. Yet natural fires from lightning have been widespread for centuries. Frequent, low-intensity fires consumed pine needles, fallen branches, logs, small trees, and thickets of brush. Fire kept forests parklike and helped our vast Sierra Nevada ecosystem to thrive.

Over decades of fire suppression, conifer forests and brush fields have grown denser with overstocked thickets of trees crowding public forests. Our forests have become highly flammable and susceptible to catastrophic fires.

Forest Service and academic scientists have long pushed for carefully igniting sections of forests during mild, cool conditions. Planned prescribed burns can consume huge amounts of forest fuels, leaving medium and large trees unharmed. The Sierra Club and other conservation groups strongly endorse prescribed burns to protect our forests against catastrophic fires. By protecting against catastrophic fires, prescribed burns protect our homes, communities, and our beloved forests.

What’s the holdup? Why aren’t we seeing more prescribed burns?

Each prescribed burn must overcome a daunting list of obstacles.

- *“Burn windows” are getting shorter* as hot weather stays with us longer into the fall. For a burn to proceed, it can’t be too hot, too windy, or too wet. Air quality conditions are also paramount, and the State Air Resources Board must sign off on burn plans.
- *Many layers of approvals are required.* Any one of the approvers can cancel the project.
- *Burns are expensive because they are “resource heavy.”* Extensive planning and preparation are needed, and fire lines must be constructed in advance. Onsite crews must be trained to safely light and monitor each burn project.

- *New federal regulations* require key certified Forest Service officials to be on site to oversee prescribed burn projects. Unfortunately, some forests, including our local Stanislaus Forest, had only one such trained and certified forest official this fall. All planned burns must wait for the availability of this one individual – no matter how short the burn window or how well the fire crews and burn area have been prepared.
- *Some forest officials are afraid of having responsibility* if a Forest Service-lit wildfire should burn out of control and damage private property.
- *Some forest managers prefer logging over fire treatments.* Forest officials recognize that they can sell millions of board feet of wood to the timber industry as part of agency-approved timber sales without any political risk for approving logging projects.

Local prescribed burns

Over in Calaveras Big Trees State Park, state park officials have been assertive about approving and implementing prescribed burn projects. This fall, nearly 300 acres were burned in the north portion of the park. Unfortunately, the original plan to burn thousands of acres in the southern portion of the park was delayed until a future date.

Similarly, the Forest Service had planned to burn 2,000+ acres of the Stanislaus Forest in Tuolumne County this fall, but only a limited number of acres were actually burned.



Yosemite Park officials have intentionally lit prescribed burns for many years. Additionally, they often allow lightning fires to burn for weeks with minimal suppression efforts as if the “managed” wildfires pose minimal risk to Park facilities, iconic resources, or public safety.

Approved burn treatments must *not* end up as paper promises

Forests and brush fields are going to burn eventually, either under carefully managed conditions or via out-of-control wildfires. Yet many, if not most, forest managers continue to put off doing large burn treatments.

Local environmental advocates celebrated when the SERAL project – a large landscape forest treatment project in the Stanislaus Forest – was approved earlier this year. It authorized more than 50,000 acres of intentional, planned broadcast burn treatments. *Yet approval of burn treatments often means nothing unless the burn treatments actually get done.*

In national forests across the West, it is a common pattern for Forest Service and BLM officials to proclaim that broadcast burns are essential for restoring healthy forest conditions. But then those same federal forest officials consistently find excuses not to implement planned burn projects.

Large burn projects may never get done without public pressure

- Talk with your friends and neighbors about the importance of prescribed burns.
- Write letters to the editor, expressing your support of prescribed burning.
- Speak to your local officials and urge that planned burns actually get done.

As noted above, every forest in California will burn eventually. Prescribed burns benefit, rather than harm, forest resources. Let’s support careful, planned, intentional burning of the lands around our homes and communities.

**LOCAL
CONSERVATION NOTES**

Tuolumne County Passes Weak Climate Action Plan

Tuolumne County finally adopted a “Climate Action Plan” in November despite intense opposition from a well-organized group of climate change deniers who repeatedly argued that climate change is part of a global hoax by the United Nations and environmentalists.

Along with testimony from CSERC staff, a number of local Sierra Club members participated at key meetings and provided public input in support of the County adopting a CAP “plan.” The plan basically outlines possible options for the County to use grant funding to enhance public transit, reduce vehicle emissions, improve air quality, and increase the energy efficiency of county buildings. Nothing in the CAP mandates any of the list of actions, so despite the approval of the plan by the County, it is unclear whether adoption of the CAP will actually result in meaningful steps taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Nevertheless, it positions Tuolumne County to now apply for state and federal grants to take positive actions.



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TUOLUMNE GROUP

Due to COVID-19, the Tuolumne Group Executive Committee is currently only meeting by phone or with online sessions. For information on how to participate in the next ExCom meeting, contact Elaine Hagen at the email listed below.

Chair Jim Bearden, jbearden@ieee.org

Secretary-Treasurer

Karen Swanson, tuolumnegroupsecretary@gmail.com

Outings Keith & Beth Martin, keithwmartin@sbcglobal.net

Chapter Delegate Keith Martin, keithwmartin@sbcglobal.net

Climate Action Chair Gisselle Bourns,
tsclimateaction@gmail.com

Webmaster Jim Bearden, jbearden@ieee.org

Membership Elaine Hagen, elainehagen@att.net

News Editor Joe David, jd@daviddesign.com

We welcome your input and feedback.

NOTES & UPDATES

CONNECT WITH YOUR SIERRA CLUB TUOLUMNE GROUP

Want to put your support for the environment into action? Consider joining our Executive Committee. **Have a great idea for a local Sierra Club presentation?** There are many ways to volunteer with our local group. Interested members are invited to attend one of our ExCom meetings. Contact Membership Chair, Elaine Hagen at elainehagen@att.net.

SIERRA CLUB 2023 CALENDARS

Our Calendar sales went well. Calendar Coordinator Jennie Moiso still has 5 Engagement desk calendars (\$16), and 1 wall calendar (\$15) available for sale. Contact Jennie at johnjen47@hotmail.com, or call 209-533-9417 if you are interested.

GET INVOLVED • TAKE ACTION

Today, years of hard-fought environmental protections are under threat—and to influence governments and businesses, we need everyone to speak up and shout out. Explore how you can get involved: go to www.sierraclub.org/take-action

RATHER RECEIVE THIS NEWSLETTER VIA EMAIL?

If you would like to receive this newsletter via email either instead of, or in addition to our printed edition, email your request to mail@sierratuolumne.org.

The Sequoia Newsletter 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.

