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The Future Starts Now

January 21, 2022

stop thinking of the next vacation

quit it with the narration

this is not a way station

be here without hesitation

it takes constant transformation

to find Life's elation

Motherlode Community Forum - February 9, 2022

Please join us Wednesday, February 9, 2022, 6 pm at the Amador City Community Hall for a brief presentation followed by an all hands on deck discussion session. Last forum resulted in a vibrant discussion regarding rainwater catchment systems and water conservation.

The delicious nutrient rich meals of Lucy's Spice Box will be available for a \$10 donation. There is also a cost for the hall rental and preparation so if you aren't a [patreon](#) of The Future Starts Now, we will also be asking for \$5 per adult to help cover the costs. Hope to see you there on Wednesday the 9th of February.



Home

“the rocks and trees knew me and were glad to have me back; they were friendly towards me. One finds harmony in one’s home that cannot exist in an alien place. It is best to die and be buried in the ground that knows a person, the ground that is waiting to receive home its children.” - Eben Tillotson Round Valley Yuki (1863-1948)

When we say, home, what do we really mean? People that inhabit an ecosystem over the course of lives and generations come to know it and the ecosystem comes to know them. Experience and knowledge passed down through generations help people in every microclimate of every continent tend the ecosystems of which they are part. In turn the ecosystem literally shapes people’s behavior and genetic development.

California’s first nation population is estimated at some 350,000 people, spread throughout the state and employing over 100 different languages. Every one of these individuals was brought into a world where they belonged. They lived in roughly the same place as their great grandparents, ate the same foods and spoke the same language.

In ‘Practices of the Wild’, Gary Snyder points out that, “in the old ways, the flora, fauna and landforms are part of the culture. There is no compartmentalization of nature from humans.” The California Indians embodied some 10,000 years of learning **how** to be the stewards of this place.

Today’s 40 million Californians are concentrated along the coast and in the former wetland of the Central Valley. Only 1% are employed in tending to the land : 52,000 in forestry and 400,000 in agriculture. This is a striking contrast to just 200 years ago, when nearly everyone invested their time in ecosystem stewardship.

Today’s land stewards operate under systems driven by two primary influences: the extraction economy and conservation. As M. Kat Anderson explains, “A primary way that we have responded to the loss of biodiversity, the degradation

of ecosystems, and the endangerment of particular species is by setting aside land and protecting it from virtually all human influences.”

This ‘protection’ of ecosystems by excluding humans is not just misplaced but also detrimental. The ‘hands off’ approach denies the fact that change is the only constant while artificially separating humans from the ecosystems of which we are part. ‘Hands off’ management is also a denial of the fact that, “much of what we consider wilderness today was in fact shaped by Indian burning, harvesting, tilling, pruning, sowing and tending.” The historian William Cronon continues; “the removal of Indians to create an ‘uninhabited wilderness’ - uninhabited as never before in the human history of the place - reminds us just how invented, just how constructed the American wilderness really is.”

There is a common belief among California Indians that when humans leave an area, they quickly lose the knowledge to interact with and tend to that ecosystem. This knowledge is no longer passed through generations and the landscape becomes inhospitable to life.

“The white man sure ruined this country” said James Rust, a Southern Sierra Miwok, “it’s turned back to wilderness”.

It is ludicrous to believe that setting aside land to be “free of human influence” is going to fix the damage that a lack of local knowledge and extractive economies have wrecked upon our State. Extractive economies, whose true costs have been lobbied right off the balance sheet and out of our collective consciousness.

During the last 200 years, our actions and inaction have laid waste to California’s ecosystems much like explosions lay waste to soldiers on a battlefield. Soldiers wounded in battle aren’t expected to ‘heal themselves’ and we should not expect the ecosystems we have ravaged to heal themselves either.

As this eternal river of change flows into the future, we can learn from the past to develop a vision of the future we want to inhabit, but we cannot go back. It is time to learn and chart the paths to a healthy, joyful and abundant future.

On the path forward, we have much to learn from the annals of ‘early’ California. Through an understanding of what has been before, we may

develop a vision for the possible future that we want to inhabit. The following are a few snapshots of what was:

James Hutchings, one of the first non-Indian inhabitants of Yosemite Valley, described the openness of this forest community: “Large sugar pine trees, from five to ten feet in diameter, and over two hundred feet in height... These forests are not covered up with a dense undergrowth, as in the East, but give long and ever-changing vistas for the eye to penetrate.”

Early accounts report that the canopy of oak trees sprawled outward from the trunk for a distance of sixty feet in every direction... their woodlands were likened to “highly cultivated parks.” - M. Kat Anderson

According to ornithologist William Dawson, in the mid-1870s, flocks of from one thousand to five thousand California quail were considered commonplace.

Maps from the 1830s labeled the entire Central Valley “Tule Marshes.” The Tulare Lake, at the Valley’s southern terminus, was the second largest lake west of the Mississippi River with an extent of over seven hundred square miles. These waterbodies formed a vast evaporative cooling system for California.

In stark contrast, today, fresh water is piped from the mountains directly to the coastal cities. It is then flushed into the sea to become salt water, never having been allowed to cool our climate. Meteorologists and climatologists recognize that the replacement of the vast Central Valley wetland with the current dry desert environment often results in high pressure systems forming over the area, preventing Pacific storms from entering central California.

How can we, the modern stewards of California, learn to move beyond stewardship approaches that are either extractive, or hands off to recognize the universal wisdom that ecosystems have the power of renewal, but only in the presence of appropriate human behavior.

So what are some examples of appropriate stewardship in the Sierra Nevada?

UC Merced studies show that forest thinning can produce an increase in streamflow of over 10% and extend the flow further into the dry summer months. Not only will forest thinning produce more run-off, it also has the

potential to eliminate the risks of catastrophic wildfire. The 'extra' water will benefit downstream ecosystems and the state's climate as a whole.

In order to carry out this stewardship work, we need more people working in forestry and ecosystem stewardship. Currently less than 5% of the Amador/Calaveras workforce is engaged in farming and forestry. Even these workers are much more commonly working to extract resources from the ecosystem than in stewarding systems that are able to provide resources over the long haul.

We can develop systems through both government and non-government means that put more people to work in the forest, carrying out prescribed burns, thinning dense stands of trees, holistically managing ruminant animals... In short invigorating ecosystem cycles in part so that we can continue to extract resources for our human wants and needs.

Prescribed burn associations like the nascent one in Calaveras and Tuolumne are one example of a step forward. Community work parties can also be organized to clear brush and thick stands of trees, focusing first on the areas that will reduce the risk of structural damage and provide safe evacuation routes during inevitable summertime wildfire.

We can develop volunteer work programs like those CalaverasGROWN set up after the Butte Fire. Volunteers from all homes and walks of life can participate in forestry work on private lands without having to deal with permits.

Social forestry programs can be implemented which train urban and rural residents in the techniques of forest stewardship. Volunteer teams can then be organized to perform thinning, brushing, fire and herd management work on private and public lands. Social forestry programs often encourage the participants to camp on the land they are stewarding, thus deepening the human eco-system network along with inter-human connections.

These connections will be invaluable in charting the paths to a healthy, joyful and abundant future. The ways forward will be as unique and interrelated as the languages of the peoples that once stewarded these perpetually diverse ecosystems. It is time for us, the current stewards of this place to learn the

language of stewardship that is specific to our local ecosystem while also recognizing the needs and wants of the ecosystems around us.

We can realize a healthy, joyful, and abundant future if we recognize that a thriving ecosystem needs human stewards, embrace our role as the stewards and celebrate that yes, we belong here, this is home.

The future starts now!

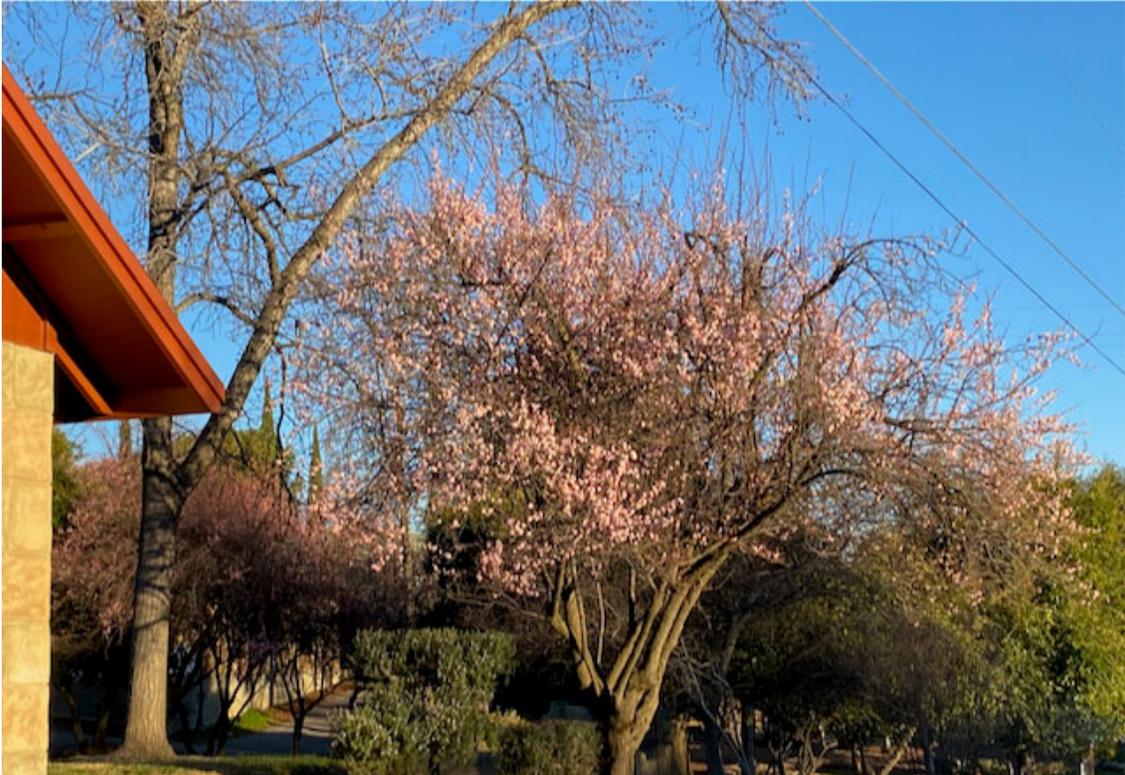


The Future Starts Now is dedicated to educating on and ultimately improving the stewardship of our California home. We welcome your tax deductible donation to continue the ceaseless quest towards a healthy, joyful and abundant future. Thank you for your consideration.

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Italian Plums Blooming in Mokelumne Hill - January, 2022



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