



The Shooting Star

SIERRA FOOTHILLS CHAPTER

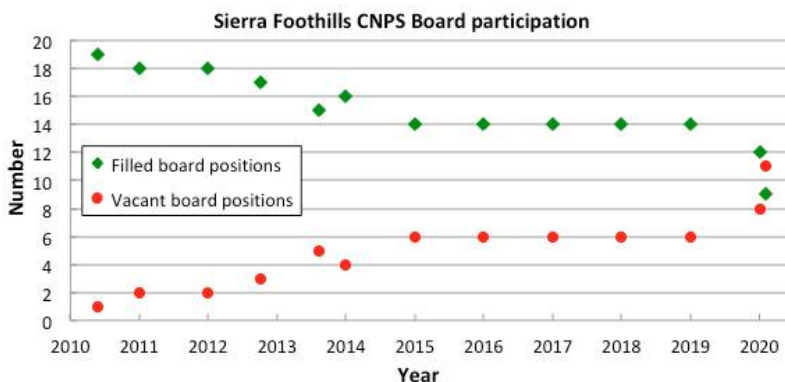
CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

FEBRUARY 2020

* * * *URGENT EDITION OF SHOOTING STAR* * * *

On January 31, after many years of devoted service, Jennie Haas – one of our founding members – resigned from the board. From economics, you may be familiar with the expression “inverted yield curve.” This is when short-term debt instruments have higher yields than long-term instruments. Our chapter has just experienced the equivalent of the inverted yield curve. For the first time ever, the number of VACANT board positions has dropped below the number of FILLED board positions.

I spent a few hours browsing the back issues of Shooting Star which are preserved on the website. I encourage you to do the same. The back issues extend to 2010. I prepared a graph, showing how board participation has declined over time. In 2010, 19 out of 20 board positions were FILLED. From 2015 to 2019, there is a seemingly stable plateau, with 14 out of 20 board positions filled. But this hides the fact that two critical positions – President and VP Tuolumne – have been...

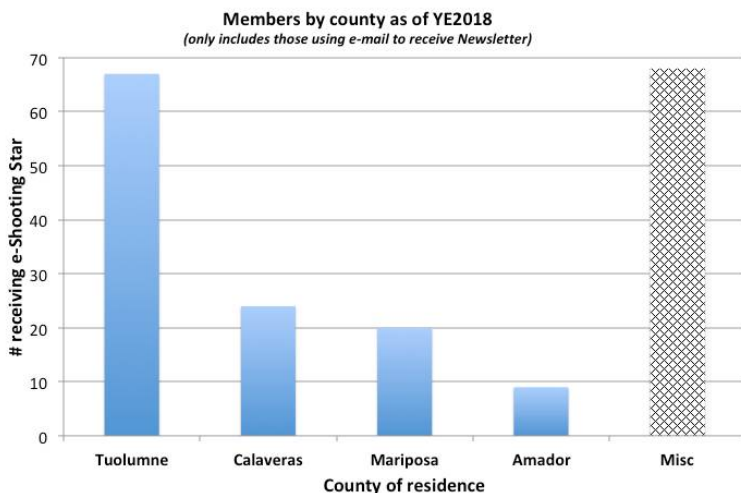


... unfilled for more than two years. Now two more critical positions are unfilled: Membership Coordinator and Field Trip Coordinator (cf. table on p.4).

The purpose of this delayed February Newsletter is merely to alert you to the facts. The remaining board members are striving to determine a path forward. Bob Dean is the focal point of this effort.

On the bright side, I can assure you that there will be Field Trips this year. A planning meeting is scheduled for February 22 in Greeley Hill. (e-mail me at djkran@comcast.net if you want to participate.)

The viability of our other chapter functions depends on YOU, our members. The lower graph shows membership by county as of YE2018, including only e-mail subscribers. The Misc category includes people like me who live outside our chapter area. Please Stay Tuned, and think about Getting Involved!
– Doug K., Editor



The Sierra Foothills Membership Coordinator position is currently vacant. If you change your mailing or e-mail address, please inform the CNPS state organization in Sacramento so that the change(s) are recorded.

California Native Plant Society
2707 K. St. Suite 1
Sacramento, CA 95816
www.cnps.org

Sierra Foothills Chapter
www.sierrafoothillscnps.org

Dedicated to the Preservation of California Native Flora.

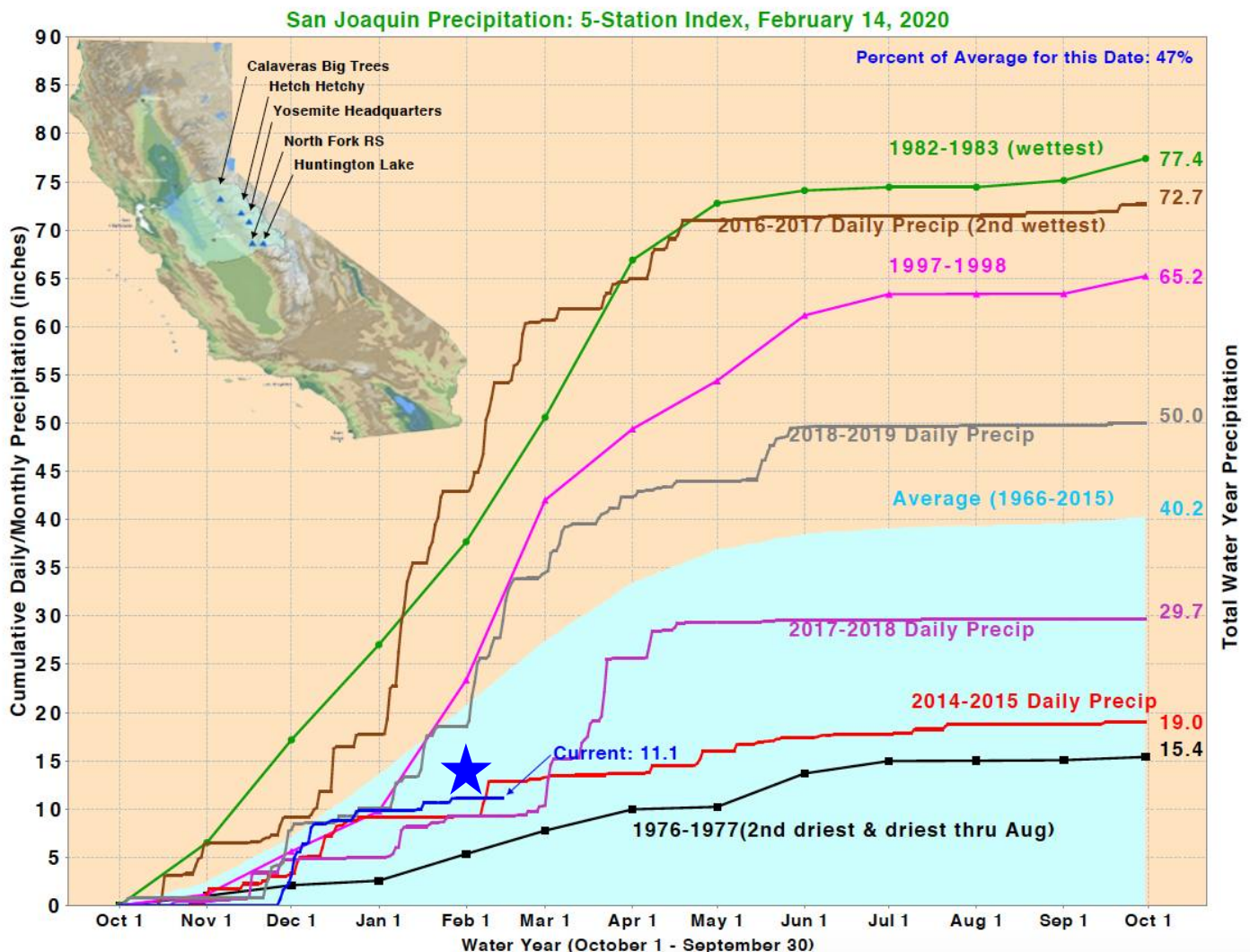
2019-2020 Water Year in Central Sierras

http://cdec.water.ca.gov/snow_rain.html

The Water Year got off to a great start with the Thanksgiving storm, but since then, boom has turned to bust. The graph, copied from the California Data Exchange, shows the current water year in blue, as of February 14, compared to prior years. We are running 47% of average for this date, but were it not for the Thanksgiving storm, this year would be underperforming even 1976-1977, which was driest water year on record through the month of August. (I remember the 1977 drought well, because that was the year I moved from Illinois to California.)

If the precipitation outlook does not improve soon, the wildflowers will have an uphill struggle – especially compared to last year, which was phenomenally good from the foothills to the crest. However, if you are patient and persistent, there are treasures to discover even in the driest of years. Just as birds concentrate around available water sources in drought years, wildflowers concentrate around creeks, seeps, and melting patches of snow. If you join a field trip, and find yourself disappointed by the dearth of wildflowers, I encourage you to remember this good piece of advice from H. D. Thoreau:

*“When you think that your walk is profitless and a failure, and you can hardly persuade yourself **not** to return, it is on the point of being a success, for then you are in that subdued and knocking mood to which Nature never fails to open.”*



What's Blooming in January and February?

After the somewhat distressing news of page 1 and page 2, it's time for some good news. I have taken two walks so far this year at Red Hills – on Jan. 11 & Feb. 11. The Chaparral Currant was at peak bloom on Jan. 11, and still respectable on Feb. 11 as flowers were outnumbered by nascent fruits. Common Whiteleaf Manzanita was in bud on Jan. 11, but by Feb. 11, the shrubs were so loaded down with white flower bells that I thought they would undergo *gravitational collapse* if one more bell were added. The only other wildflower that I saw blooming at RH on Feb. 11 was Miner's Lettuce. That is not unusual for such an early date with many recent frosts. Not surprisingly, the number of shoots at RH is much lower this year compared to last.

I paid my first visit to Hite Cove on Jan. 22, expecting to see only Waterfall Buttercups and Western Rue Anemone. I found the first, but not the second. Can you guess what else I saw? A large patch of Spider Lupine at the entrance to the Upper Mine, some with well-developed inflorescences. In a gully-washer of a ditch near the old hotel site, Congdon's Milkvetch; Golden Yarrow; Old-Man-in-the-Spring; and lots of slimy, yellow Monkeyflowers (*moschata* or *floribunda*.) The aforementioned flowers usually bloom between March and May. Even more surprising, I found two specimens of Wand Wirelettuce (*Stephanomeria virgata*) – each showing dozens of pink ligulate flowers that looked fresh as could be. *Stephanomeria* usually blooms near HC in July; springtime visitors may not know that it grows here. These are fairly extreme examples, in my limited experience, of what fire can do to disrupt the seasonal rhythm of flowering plants. I plan to offer a field trip into the Hite Cove zone this spring, but if the Forest Service does not open the main trailhead at Savage Trading Post (Redbud Lodge), we will have to start at Cedar Lodge and walk up and over Pinoche Ridge, which turns a moderate walk into a rather serious excursion, comparable to the Four Mile Trail in Yosemite. – Editor



Precocious wildflowers encountered between Pinoche Ridge and Hite Cove on January 22, 2020. **CW from upper left:** Spider Lupine (*Lupinus benthamii*), NB inset of hairless keel; Congdon's Milkvetch (*Astragalus congdonii*); Musk or Many-flowered Monkeyflower (*Erythranthe moschata* or *floribunda*); Golden Yarrow (*Eriophyllum confertiflorum*); Wand Wirelettuce (*Stephanomeria virgata* ssp. *pleurocarpa*). Normal bloom times for these species are: late March for the lupine & monkeyflower; late April into May for the milkvetch & golden yarrow; July for the wirelettuce.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

For the record: Hardcopies of this newsletter did not get mailed.

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MEMBERSHIP COORD.	OPEN			
NEWSLETTER EDITOR	Doug Krajnovich	580-4595	djcran@comcast.net	
PLANT SALES CHAIR	Stephanie Garcia	586-3593	sjgarcia@mlode.com	
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