An Open Letter to the Director of California State Parks

Director Lisa Mangat, Director of California State Parks,

As the president of the Calaveras Big Trees Association, I want to express the gratitude of the entire Board and the public that our Park serves for the many benefits and improvements in the Park during the tenure of Superintendent Gary Olson who is retiring at the end of the year. He has always been cooperative and hardworking, has kept us informed and was an honest representative of the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) during his time as superintendent and cooperating association liaison (CAL). We have been fortunate to work with him and regret his leaving.

Gary was our CAL when I first joined the Board three years ago, and I noted that he honestly and well explained what was going on in the Park and how CBTA could help. Although no longer the CAL, I meet with him regularly. He has an excellent knowledge of how a cooperating association can navigate the intricacies of the DPR, and his advice has been crucial in helping us help the Park.

Gary has had many creative ideas for enhancing the visitor experience. Summer Sweetness, our best fundraiser, was actually his idea. Gary has brought Arts of Bear Valley to the Park each summer. Artists give lessons and demonstrations and show off their Park-centered art. Another of his creative ideas was to bring the California Naturalist Program to Calaveras Big Trees. For eight weeks last year we had over twenty students take the challenging course from U.C. Davis, which included projects that benefitted the Park. One of our Board members took the class and will be in charge next year when CBTA sponsors the course.

Gary has been most helpful in bringing technology to the Park. We now have limited cell phone service and wireless in the Park. He has been most helpful in advising us on how to generate a smart phone application for our trail guides. Speaking of trails, Gary was instrumental in finding volunteers to man a trail crew years ago. The trails were in disrepair, but the crew of 15 to 20 persons has restored first-class trails in the last few years. Our trail crew actually received the Golden Poppy award a few years ago. I found out recently that Gary was responsible for upgrading trails in his previous park in Southern California.

Gary is both personable and totally honest. When there were cutbacks during the Great Recession, he knew how to get the most from his decimated staff and the volunteers. During the construction of our new Visitor Center, Gary was the champion of CBTA concerns during construction.

CBTA owes a lot to Gary, and we will be sad to see him move on.

Paul Prescott, President
Calaveras Big Trees Association
7th Annual Winter Wonderland Carnival
Wednesday, December 28, 2016
11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Ticket price includes a carriage ride and entrance into Jack Knight Hall where you will enjoy hot cocoa, hot apple cider and cookies, hot dogs and chili and many more surprises!

Tickets are $15.00 for adults and $10.00 for children under 12. Tickets include entrance into the Park if tickets are purchased online.

This event sells out every year. Buy your tickets early.

If space is available, tickets at the door are $20.00 for adults and $15.00 for children 12 and under plus $10.00 for the Park entrance fee.

Please call 209-795-1196 for more information.

Toast Your Toes in the Warming Hut!

With winter around the corner it is Warming Hut time again! The 2016/2017 Warming Hut season will kick off on Thanksgiving Day and continue through the end of March. Open every weekend and throughout the Christmas holidays, the Warming Hut offers our chilled visitors free hot chocolate, hot apple cider, coffee, tea and a roaring fire.

Constructed in 2002 and located at the end of the North Grove Trail, the Warming Hut’s design is based on the original warming hut, which goes all the way back to the 1930s and was located on the north side of the meadow, now occupied by camping sites. Last season the Warming Hut entertained nearly 15,000 visitors from around the world. Staffed by Calaveras Big Trees Association volunteers, the Warming Hut is open from noon to 4:00 p.m.
Park Update  
by Superintendent Greg Martin

Not that it takes a holiday to give thanks, but with Thanksgiving just around the corner, it seems a very appropriate time to give thanks for all that is good at Calaveras Big Trees State Park (CBTSP).

Last fiscal year, which ended June 30, saw an increase of over 8,000 visitors at CBTSP from the previous year. Great weather, cheaper gas prices and new recreational opportunities are some of the reasons that may be attributed to this increase. Part of the State Park’s charge is to respond to contemporary recreation trends and changing demographics without trading the traditional goals of preserving biological diversity, resource protection and providing access to high quality outdoor recreation. Locally, we have made progress in this arena. Some examples include offering free wi-fi near the Visitor Center, offering alternative camping (cabins) and working with a consultant on a facility plan which evaluates new opportunities and considers overall facility development needs.

Another area for which we are thankful is the dedicated and talented volunteers who spent well over 13,000 hours helping Park guests have an enjoyable experience in the Park. This is an incredible amount of time for which guests and Park staff are extremely thankful.

I am also very proud and thankful to work with a wonderful, dedicated and talented group of Park employees, volunteers and partners. Ranger Robyn Mendoza and Park maintenance assistant Mike Reith have been valuable additions to the CBTSP team, and the new Park maintenance supervisor, Brian Robertson, is already jumping in with both feet to insure Park facilities meet the highest standards. It is expected that a third ranger, a new supervising ranger and an interpreter will join the CBTSP team in 2017.

We have strengthened our relationships with entities such as Save the Redwoods League and Sierra Nevada Conservancy and continue to be thankful for the financial support offered by Calaveras Big Trees Association, the only partner group which was specifically created to support the Park’s interpretive efforts.

Although there will always be things to fix and improvements needed, we all need to take time to revel in the accomplishments that have been made together these past few years. With help from all of these folks, CBTSP will continue to be a truly iconic park for generations to come. Enjoy your time in the Park!

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Save the Date!

Friday, November 18 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. come to our Annual Winter Sale. One day only
Most items 40% off, books 30% off

From November 19 to November 30 the sale is open to the public. Everything will be 20% off.

Please bring canned or non-perishable food for Santa’s Express

We have lots of new items in the Visitor Center. You just have to come in and see them all! It was a very busy season here. We are now winding down a bit and looking forward to the holidays. See you all soon!
Snowshoe Hikes
Get You Out and About

By Sanders LaMont

Winter is coming to the Big Trees, and free guided snowshoe hikes will once again be offered to the public every Saturday once the ground is blanketed with snow.

The snowshoe hikes offer Park visitors a chance to get a close look at the Big Trees sequoia grove and surrounding forest in winter and to learn how plants and animals adapt to the cold season. It’s also a great opportunity for photography in a beautiful place.

Experience on snowshoes is not required. Visitors are given basic instructions. The group stays together, hiking at an easy pace. Participants are required to stay with the tour from beginning to end as a safety precaution.

As part of the effort to enhance interpretive and educational programs within the Park, Calaveras Big Trees Association provides the Park and the public with the free use of snowshoes for guided tours every winter. Visitors may choose to bring their own snowshoes or use one of the thirty pair available from CBTA during the tours. Children’s sizes are available as well as adult’s.

Tours originate from the Warming Hut at the east end of the Visitor Center parking lot and begin every snow-covered weekend Saturday at 1:00 p.m. It is a good idea to arrive about thirty minutes early to check out and try on the snowshoes, just in case there is more demand than supply.

The Saturday tours are led by experienced volunteers and usually take about one and one-half hours, depending on the weather. The exact route of the tour varies depending upon the snow cover, safety considerations and the guide’s choice of routes. It usually encompasses at least a section of the North Grove trail under the giant sequoias, the same route taken by warm weather tours.

Clothing should be appropriate for the weather. Layers are recommended as the weather can change on short notice. Boots or stout shoes are required for safe use of snowshoes. Children are welcome, accompanied by adults, if they are able to keep up with the group.

Each tour begins with volunteers helping first-timers strap on the snowshoes, a quick demonstration and a safety briefing. In extreme winter weather, the route will be altered to a safe path. You can check the weather forecast for the park at the following web site:
https://www.wunderground.com/q/locid:CASPCALAB1;loctype:13

Tours for organizations or large parties may be arranged (for a fee) for days other than Saturday by contacting ranger Robyn Mendoza at Robyn.Mendoza@parks.ca.gov.

Nature Blitz!

By Vida Kenk

Some of you may have experienced Dr. Nancy E. Muleady-Mecham’s three-day workshops. Her workshops have received rave reviews from participants. Others may have wanted to attend in the past but found the investment of time and money prohibitive. In response to popular demand, Doc Nancy is preparing a special one-day Nature Blitz on Saturday June 3, 2017, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Join Doc Nancy for a day of in-depth nature exploration. In addition to topic presentations, walks and demonstrations, attendees will learn interpretive techniques as well.

This program is free to all interested persons and is sponsored by CBTA. RSVP with CBTA (795-1196), if you can, or just show up. Persons can come to any or all parts of the Nature Blitz.
(Nature Blitz continued)

Doc Nancy is a retired career National Park ranger and is a biology professor. She also conducts research on giant sequoias.

Here is a preview of the planned schedule:

9:00 -10:00 Introduction to Birds (bring binoculars, easy stroll)
10:20 -12:00 Giant Sequoias and the Mixed Conifer Forest (Hike the North Grove Trail)
12:00 -12:45 Lunch (Bring your own)
12:45 - 1:30 Geology (Education Building)
1:30 - 1:45 Break
1:45 - 3:00 Animal Adaptations (Visitor Center Museum)
3:30 - 5:00 Native Plants of the Sierra Nevada (Education Building and walk to the meadow)
8:30 The Night Sky (Meet at the Overlook – carpooling suggested)

This event is especially recommended for all Park docents. Come, have fun and learn more about our Park and how to share the wonders of this place with our visitors.

Welcome to New Members!

Fall 2016
Winifred Taylor-Edwards – Mountain View, CA
John and Christa Kell, Walnut Creek, CA
Michele Angeli Zaugg, Moraga, CA
Jennifer Welch, Sunnyvale, CA
Kameron Leal and Glenn Vaughn, Walnut Creek, CA
Copeland McKinley
Cheryl Manning, Ellicott City, MD
Catalina Cabot, Illes Baleavs, Spain
Lori Bautista, Pleasanton, CA
Sean Hagerty, Sacramento, CA
Carole Ruwart, Alameda, CA
Nora Braun, Davis, CA

Carrie Fontaine, Torrance CA
Kimberly Francis, Sonora CA
Kathleen Garmsen, Folsom, CA
Leann Basden, Elk Grove CA
Kaaren Stasko, Napa CA
Mark Snaer, Sacramento CA
Cornelius Gallagher, Fair Oaks CA
Cindy Thierry, Walnut Creek CA
Chris Kirkpatrick, Los Altos CA
James Hager, San Jose CA
Karen Chut and Steve Jones, Arnold CA
Paula O’Drain, Richmond CA
Barry Dansie, Brentwood CA
California Naturalist Program Offered

By Dexter Hardcastle

The very successful California Naturalist Program is returning to Calaveras Big Trees this coming summer.

The mission of the California Naturalist Program is to foster a diverse community of naturalists and promote stewardship of California’s natural resources through education and service. It introduces Californians to the wonders of our unique ecology and engages the public in the study and stewardship of our natural communities. The program uses a science curriculum, hands-on learning, problem-solving, citizen science and community service to inspire individuals to be stewards of their local resources.

I would like to share the thoughts of two of our last year’s graduates of the Program held at CBTSP. The first graduate is Teddy Jackson, California State interpretive aide, docent and certified California Naturalist. Teddy reported that the program was very worthwhile. “I loved being a docent and talking to visitors about our wonderful Park, but I realized that I needed a broader background to be an effective communicator. The intense course work provided me with a lot of information, but even better, I became interested in a variety of subjects and continued to study and learn on my own after the course was over. In fact, I got a job as an interpretive aide at Big Trees and was able to use many things I learned in the California Naturalist course.”

The second graduate is Mary Hultgren, certified California Naturalist and participant in the CalFlora website. She said, “I greatly enjoyed the California Naturalist program. The quality of speakers was impressive and covered a wide range of topics. The field trips were an excellent way to further explore key topics while also experiencing beautiful spots in nature. It was a great opportunity to meet and become friends with like-minded individuals. The capstone project also provided me with a way to immediately give back and practice my new naturalist skills.”

For those of you who would love to expand your knowledge of California’s unique ecosystems and learn how to share this knowledge with others or participate in projects that enhance natural science, I would encourage you to participate in the upcoming California Naturalist Program to be held in June 2017 at CBTSP. Completion of the course can lead to the earning of four units from U.C. Davis for those of you who are interested. The course will be led by Wendy Harrison, retired California State Park interpreter, and Dexter Hardcastle, certified California Naturalist and docent. If you are interested, contact me at greenhornd@comcast.net or phone me at 209-736-9053.

New Nature Guide Out!

By Dexter Hardcastle

How often have you been walking on one of our trails or perhaps in the meadow and you came upon a flower and wondered what it was? Or you saw a bird and just could not think of its name. Well, I’m happy to announce that CBTSP now has a species guide available: “Trees, Flowers, and Wildlife of Calaveras Big Trees State Park”. It is a laminated and folded guide that has twelve panels. There are over 130 species identified with both common names as well as scientific names, for example, white-headed woodpecker (Picoides albolarvatus), and five spot (Nemophila maculata).

Most of the Park’s trees, shrubs and mammals have been included; however, due to the large number of flowers present, only the ones that are more likely seen by our visitors have been included (over 50). In addition, a few of the more prevalent butterflies, reptiles and amphibians have also been included.

An interesting side note, this project was first approved and funded by the Board in 2006! It is unclear as to why it was shelved for so many years. Then, in 2013 Steve Stocking began working on it again. Thanks to him it was resurrected and now has come to fruition. We will always be indebted to his expertise and to his love for Calaveras Big Trees State Park.
It’s Membership Renewal Time

By Sally Williams

Can you believe it’s been a year already since renewing your membership? Thanks to your support, it was a busy and productive year.

Did you know that Calaveras Big Trees Association is the sole source of funding for all the interpretive and educational programs that take place at Calaveras Big Trees State Park? Our educational and interpretive programs are exceptional and very well-known throughout the state, and they are offered free -- thanks to your membership dues, donations, fundraising and retail sales.

One of the most popular programs this summer was Creek Critters. There were as many as eighty kids at each session this year! Whew! My hat goes off to everyone who takes parts in our wonderful programs! CBTA is also the funding source of our Student Conservation Association Summer Interns who continue to get better each year, if that is even possible! The interns were responsible for many of the incredible programs that were offered this summer. Your membership dues also help provide the Park with seasonal interpretive aides to assist Park visitors. CBTA is in the final stages of producing the long-awaited “Field Guide to Calaveras Big Trees State Park”. These are only a few of the things CBTA was able to accomplish this year.

It is our hope that you will renew your Calaveras Big Trees membership, so that we are able to continue to provide all of the great programs and events at Calaveras Big Trees State Park. There is a membership category for everyone. You may fill out the form on this page, complete a CBTA brochure and mail it in, or renew online at www.bigtrees.org.

Thank you again for your continued support.
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The Board meets monthly the last Wednesday at 1:00 p.m., and the meeting is open to the public. Please call the office at 795-1196 to confirm meeting date, time and place.

The CBTA dues year is the calendar year. You may renew your membership by mailing a check payable to CBTA or renew/donate through our website www.bigtrees.org. Your membership/donation is tax deductible to the extent allowable by law.

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