



**Shasta Environmental Alliance**

**Stewardship - Education - Advocacy**

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# September Newsletter



Image credit: Ren Redlich

## **Fall Yard Cleanup in Shasta County: Sustainable Practices for a Healthier Landscape**

turn their attention to seasonal yard cleanup. This annual routine is more than just tidying up, it is a chance to care for soil, conserve resources, and support the local ecosystem. With a few sustainable practices, fall cleanup can keep your yard healthy while also fitting the realities of living in a dry, fire-prone region.



## Rethink the Leaves

Instead of bagging leaves for disposal, consider their value. When shredded, leaves create mulch that enriches soil, helps retain moisture, and suppresses weeds.

Mowing them into small pieces allows them to break down naturally on the lawn. For garden beds, raked and shredded leaves can be spread as mulch, but avoid piling them too deeply. Keep leaves from building up against fences, decks, or buildings. In those spots they can trap moisture that damages wood and attracts pests, and once dried they can add unnecessary fuel right next to structures. Keeping leaf mulch a little farther out in the yard makes it healthier for the soil and safer for your property.

## Compost for Healthy Soil

Leaves and clippings make excellent “brown” material for compost, balancing the “green” nitrogen-rich scraps from kitchens. Fall is a perfect time to build a compost pile, since it will quietly decompose over the winter months and provide a nutrient-rich soil amendment by spring. This keeps organic matter out of landfills while closing the nutrient cycle right in your own backyard.

A certain amount of bare dirt is not only practical but also beneficial. Open soil areas discourage excessive fuel buildup, provide natural fire breaks, and create vital habitat for native insects such as ground-nesting bees. Many beneficial beetles and pollinators rely on bare soil for nesting or overwintering. To make the most of this resource, keep bare areas intentional: use them for paths, borders, or small open patches near gardens. Avoid compacting the soil, and protect slopes with mulch or plants to prevent erosion. When balanced with mulched beds and planted areas, bare soil supports both ecological health and practical yard care.

## Leave Some Habitat

Fall cleanup does not mean removing every last stem or branch. Seed heads from native plants provide food for finches and other birds through the winter, while small brush piles set away from main living areas create valuable shelter for pollinators and beneficial wildlife. By leaving a little habitat in place, you help support biodiversity and keep natural cycles intact.

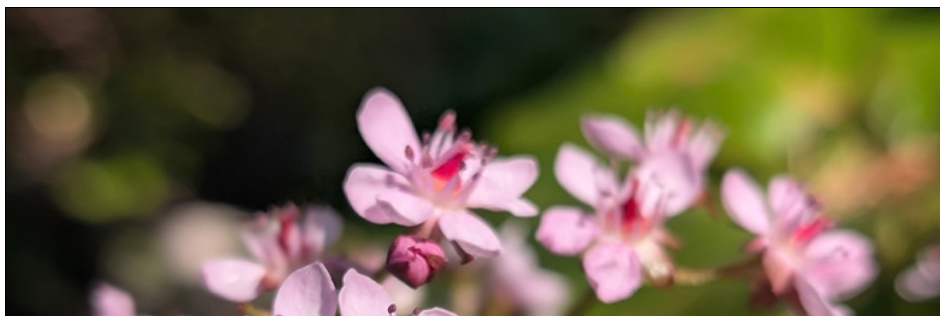
## Tree and Shrub Pruning

Fall and early winter are excellent times for tree work. Sustainable fall cleanup is about balance: tidying where needed, reusing natural materials wisely, and leaving space for the ecosystem to thrive. By composting leaves, pruning at the right time, setting aside some natural habitat, and maintaining intentional patches of bare soil, you can create a yard that is resilient, environmentally friendly, and well-prepared for the seasons ahead.

## A Balanced Approach

Sustainable fall cleanup is about balance: tidying where needed, reusing natural materials wisely, and leaving space for the ecosystem to thrive. By composting leaves, pruning at the right time, setting aside some natural habitat, and maintaining intentional patches of bare soil, you can create a yard that is resilient, environmentally friendly, and well-prepared for the seasons ahead.

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## Trip Report: Nature Walk and Bioblitz at Whiskeytown NRA

Written by Juliet Malik, Images by Ren Redlich

On Sunday, September 14, thirteen people from a diverse range of ages, interests and expertise gathered for the SEA/CNPS nature walk and bioblitz at the Lower Brandy Creek Trail in Whiskeytown National Recreation Area. We were very fortunate to be joined by Greta Davis, an AmeriCorps fellow serving as the Community Volunteer Ambassador for WNRA. Greta provided wonderful information about the park's history, immense biodiversity, and the many opportunities available for supporting and protecting this local treasure.

Shasta Environmental Alliance education coordinator Juliet Malik and California Naturalist and SEA volunteer Holly White-Wolfe organized this event to celebrate California Biodiversity Week and support the state's 30x30 initiative to conserve 30% of California's lands and coastal waters by 2030 by linking this event to the [Find 30 Species Challenge](#) on iNaturalist. iNaturalist is both an international database of observed biological species and a participatory science program open to anyone who can take a photo and learn how to upload it to the project.



Our challenge was to find, photograph, and upload at least 30 species from this trail, which, considering the vast biodiversity of this region, was quick work. Many of us walked away with over 40 or 50 observations in our phone's photo gallery and we didn't even make it a full mile up the trail. (Bioblitzing is a slow and meandering activity.) Some "research grade" observations (identifications at species level by two or more people) we logged include serpentine fern (*Aspidotis densa*), hairy brackenfern (*Pteridium aquilinum pubescens*), Pacific poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*), foothill yellow-legged frog (*Rana boylei*), green bird grasshopper (*Schistocerca shoshone*), giant chain fern (*Woodwardia fimbriata*), scarlet monkeyflower (*Erythranthe cardinalis*), and a mama mule deer and two fawns (*Odocoileus hemionus*).

While preserving our region's biodiversity is a task too large for an individual or a small group of 13, the coming together and sharing of curiosity, experience, passions, concerns, knowledge, and ideas is the foundation for meaningful change. Our group did much more than upload photos to the iNaturalist project. We connected and learned from each other. We found inspiration and opportunity to do more. We perhaps even made new friends. And of course, we had fun while we shared a couple of hours together under a canopy of conifers and oaks alongside the burbling sounds of Brandy Creek.

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## Upcoming Events

**National Public Lands Day** (<https://www.blm.gov/national-public-lands-day>) is September 27, 2025 and two of our local public land areas are hosting events! If you can't make it to one of the scheduled activities, take the opportunity to get outside and enjoy our public lands.

### Clear Creek Clean up

**Date:** September 27, 2025: 9:00am to 12:00pm

**Location:** Horsetown Clear Creek Preserve

Join BLM, Horsetown Clear Creek Preserve (HCCP) and other local non profits to benefit the lower Clear Creek Greenway. Meet at the HCCP parking area by 9am. Volunteers will pick up trash, remove graffiti and invasive weeds, and repair hiking trails.

[Click Here to Learn More](#)

### Tower House Historic District Appreciation Day

**Date:** September 27, 2025: 9:00am to 12:00pm

**Location:** Whiskeytown National Recreation Area

Volunteers will assist Resource Management and Cultural Resources operations by working alongside National Park Service staff to remove invasive species at well-visited sites. In addition to invasives removal, all volunteers will get to pick apples

### Family Nature Event

**Date:** October 26, 2025: 10:00am to 12:00pm

**Location:** TBD

Join SEA volunteers Holly White-Wolfe and her son, Bryles Wolfe, both certified California Naturalists, for a special outing designed for parents and young children. They will be joined by Juliet Malik, SEA Board Member and Chair of the Education Committee, to explore the many benefits of spending time in nature. As part of the adventure, we'll also hear from Mr. Grimalkin, a local gnome, who will share fun ways to recognize nearby mountains, waters, and plants. Together, we'll build a sense of belonging in a community that cares deeply for its ecosystem.

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## Species of the Month: Helianthus annuus (Common Sunflower)



Image Credit: Ren Redlich

The sunflower family, Asteraceae, contains over 32,000 known species. They are “composite flowers” which are actually a cluster of many tiny, individual flowers (florets) arranged on a shared receptacle, creating the appearance of a single large flower. California is home to nearly 1,100 species in the sunflower family, which is more than half the total genera found in North America!

To identify the Common Sunflower, note these features:

- Vibrant yellow petals span 6 to 12 inches in diameter.
  - Rough, heart-shaped leaves with serrated edges.
  - Achene fruit is ovoid, enclosed in a fibrous hull.
  - Stem is covered in rough, coarse hairs.
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## Be a Voice for the Environment

rivers, and public lands that make it special? Join our board and help guide advocacy efforts that shape land use, conserve natural habitats, and preserve spaces for recreation and enjoyment. Bring your ideas, energy, and passion to make a real difference for the environment and your community.

Ready to get involved? [Fill out our interest form here.](#)

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