Stewardship - Education - Advocacy

Shasta Environmental Alliance

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June Newsletter

What's New

Why Accessible Open Spaces Strengthen Conservation

By Kat Camplin

There are places in this region where the light shifts through oak branches, where the sound of water settles the mind, and where the horizon opens enough for a person to breathe a little more deeply. These are not luxuries. They are part of what ties a community to the land. Yet many of these experiences are out of reach for people who cannot easily navigate uneven ground, steep grades, or narrow natural paths. Roughly 85 million people in the United States live with some form of disability. Most are not avoiding the outdoors because they lack interest. The barrier is the environment formed by terrain, infrastructure choices, and long-standing assumptions about who outdoor spaces are designed for.

Many people who benefit from accessible design want the same restorative experiences that others take for granted, yet a single rocky step or a narrow path can transform a gentle walk

sake of access. It is a matter of basic participation. People want to experience the landscape in a real way, and when the only option is a short paved loop that ends at a parking lot view, they do not come back. Inclusive access allows everyone to enter the natural world with comfort and dignity, without erasing the wild character of the land.

There is a persistent assumption that accessibility requires heavy alteration of natural places, as if inclusion and landscape integrity are in opposition. That assumption is wrong. Accessibility is not defined by pavement or urbanization. Many effective approaches rely on subtle, low visibility design choices that support movement while respecting the land. Stable trail surfaces that blend into the environment, clear information about slope and terrain conditions, and rest areas that allow people to pause comfortably can expand access while preserving the character of a place. These same features can also support conservation goals. When visitors are guided along stable, intentional routes, movement becomes more predictable and less disruptive. Fragile meadows, stream banks, and habitat areas experience less pressure, reducing the likelihood of dispersed impacts across the landscape. In this way, accessibility and habitat protection often reinforce one another rather than compete.

The Americans with Disabilities Act recognizes access as a civil right, but it leaves much of the implementation to land managers. In many outdoor settings, that means accessibility is treated as optional rather than foundational. Many well known recreation areas have invested in accessible infrastructure, yet gaps often remain between individual elements. Accessible parking, restrooms, trails, and viewpoints may exist, but they are not always connected in ways that allow visitors to move easily between them. Access depends not only on the presence of accessible features, but on how those features work together as a system. The result is a landscape where access is uneven, limiting full participation for many visitors.

This matters because people tend to care for places they know. Familiarity grows from time spent in a landscape, not from distant appreciation alone. When access is limited, that relationship never fully forms. As a result, the broader community of people who might advocate for protection, funding, and stewardship is smaller than it could be.

Conservation is often discussed as if it depends only on limiting use. In reality, it also depends on building connection. The more people who can meaningfully enter a landscape, the more people there are who understand what is at stake when those places are threatened.

Accessible design is part of how people move through landscapes, just like wildlife corridors, trail placement, and seasonal closures. It shapes use in ways that can concentrate impact away from sensitive areas and make space easier to navigate for more people. The result is not a different kind of landscape, but a more legible and shared one, where access and protection are designed together instead of treated as competing goals.

Get to Know Your Watershed

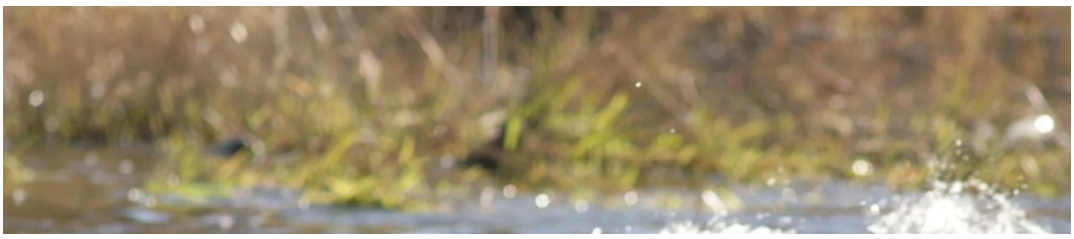
Species of the Month:
Chinook Salmon, *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha* (Part 1)

by Stacey Alexander

moons ago, and since then have loved all things salmon, so be forewarned this may be a multipart series, since I could go on about how awesome salmon are indefinitely. But I need to go over some salmon basics first! You may (or may not know) that right in your back yard, here in the Sacramento River, is the largest run of Chinook Salmon in the state. Chinook Salmon, or King Salmon, are the largest Pacific Salomon species (that is why they are the king!) and can be identified by their small dark spots on the head, back, and caudal fin, and black gums (likely seen if you have caught one fishing; otherwise I don't know how you are getting so close to a salmon's mouth), and when migrating their olive-brown, red, or purplish coloring.

Their population ranges from the San Joaquin Delta all the way to Alaska. Historically their population ran as far south as the Ventura River, but is now limited to the north of the Delta. The runs of salmon have also become limited in their range as well. You may be asking yourself, "what is a run? "Well, that is a great question; runs are used to distinguish distinct populations of salmon and are typically named for the season (fall, spring, winter, etc.) where the peak migrations from the ocean occur.

One important fact about salmon is that they are anadromous, meaning they are born in freshwater, migrate to the ocean, spend 1-3 years in the ocean growing, and return to freshwater to reproduce (aka spawn). These fish make a 300-mile journey from the ocean, traveling under the Golden Gate Bridge to the same spawning areas where they were born. When salmon enter fresh water, they no longer eat, and start to decay. They become zombie fish, with their only goal being to spawn. Females will build nests (aka redds), using their tails to dislodge stones and pebbles that look like large disturbed areas in the gravel where they deposit eggs into the gravel. Males will fight to fertilize these eggs, and once eggs are fertilized the females will cover the eggs with loose gravel and defend the area until they die. When salmon die, their carcasses supply the river habitat with nutrients and the seeds of the next generation, making this one of the coolest and most beautiful life cycles I can think of. Salmon act as ecological engines by transferring massive amounts of marine-derived nutrients into freshwater environments and provide a critical food source for over 130 wildlife species. In fact, studies have shown that forests that have salmon in their watercourses have trees that grow faster and larger than forests that don't.



The Sacramento River supports four distinct runs of Chinook Salmon: Fall, Late-Fall, Spring, and Winter, all of which are technically Chinook Salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), but their separate life histories are what makes them different.

Here is a quick cheat sheet guide to your salmon of the Sacramento River:

Fall Run: Most abundant run; migrate upstream as adults from July-December and spawn from October-December. Once the baby fish (or fry) 'emerge' from the redd, they only hang around for a couple months, and then head out to the ocean.

Late-fall Run: Migrate into the rivers from October-December and spawn from January-April, and also peace out to the ocean a couple months after emerging.

Spring Run: Now things are getting interesting! These guys migrate March through September and adults hold in cool water habitats through the summer, then spawn in the fall from mid-August-October. This run was historically the most abundant run but are now limited to the tributaries of the Sacramento River (Butte, Mill, Deer, Antelope, and Beegum Creeks) where they spawn. Spring-run juveniles migrate soon after emergence as young-of-the-year, or remain in freshwater and migrate as yearlings.

Winter Run: This is the smallest of the four runs of salmon. They enter freshwater in November through May and spawn in the upper mainstem Sacramento River from mid-April-August. Fry emigrate downstream from July-March. Historically, winter-run spawned in the upper reaches of Sacramento River tributaries, including the McCloud, Pit, and Little Sacramento Rivers. Shasta and Keswick Dams now block access to the historic spawning areas.

There is so much more to the salmon's story, but I have been told that wordcount is important, so tune in next month to hear: How are our

Sources:
"Chinook Salmon." California Department of Fish and Wildlife Home Page, wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Fishes/Chinook-Salmon. Accessed 15 June 2026.
"Chinook Salmon (Protected)." NOAA Fisheries, 16 Mar. 2026, www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/chinook-salmon-protected.

Species of the Month:
Wavyleaf Soap Plant, *Chlorogalum pomeridianum*

by Ren Redlich

Also known as California Soaproot, this perennial grows from a bulb whose properties give the plant its common name. Because of the saponins (organic chemicals that create a lather when agitated with water) the bulbs were utilized by Indigenous Californian peoples as a soap for skin,

to create a natural glue.

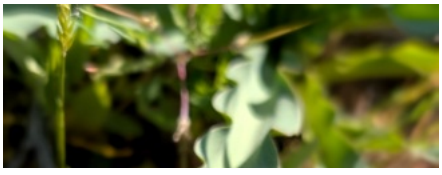
The species name, *pomeridianum,* is derived from "post meridiem," the Latin phrase that led to our use of "p.m." This is because the flowers of the soaproot open in the evening. Each flower blooms for just one night, starting from the bottom to the top of the stalk that the plant produces. This stalk is sent up from a basal rosette of wavy-edged leaves after 5-7 (up to 10 if grown from seed) years, which is how long it takes for this plant to reach sexual maturity. The flowers are pollinated by nocturnal insects, such as Sphingidae moths (commonly called hawk moths or sphinx moths), but also bumblebees, carpenter bees, hummingbirds, and more!

Because this plant takes so long to bloom, its flowers, leaves, and bulb should be respected and admired. While soaproot is technically edible, it is mildly toxic when raw. The leaves can be eaten and are most palatable as young shoots. The bulb must be cooked to be considered edible. Historically, soap plant was eaten in times of acorn scarcity, but it was also used for food in another way. While this method is illegal now, the toxins from Wavyleaf soap plant can be utilized by crushing the bulb and adding the foam to a stream to stupefy fish. The interaction of the saponins and the water affects the gills of the fish, creating a lack of oxygen, which kills or incapacitates them, making it easy to gather them from the surface of the water.

Fun Facts:

- The leaves were wrapped around dough in the process of baking acorn bread.
- The genus name *Chlorogalum* means "green milk," and the leaves were used to prick the skin to create green tattoo marks.
- The natural glue from the plant's bulb was used to fasten feathers to arrows and applied to bows by mixing it with soot to darken them.
- The Wailaki name for the plant is "gos'-chū", the Numlaki call it "shlā", and the Pomo call it "äm"

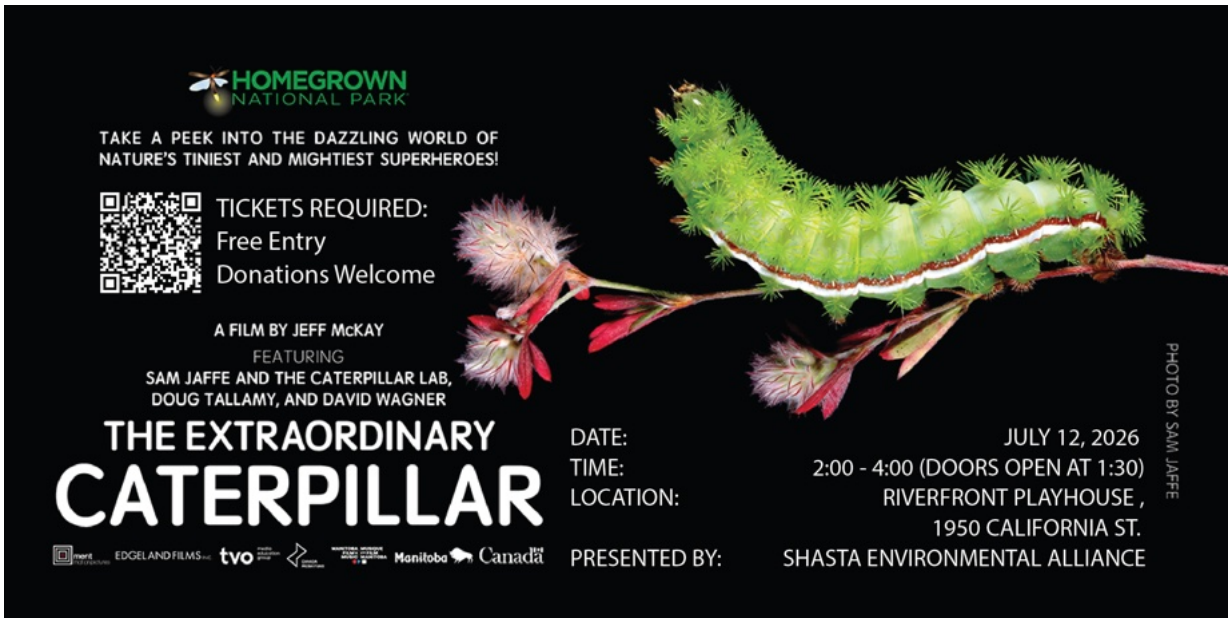
Sources: "Plants Used by the Indians of Mendocino County, California", Victor King Chesnut
"Plant of the Week: Soap Plant (Chlorogalum pomeridianum (DC.) Kunth)", Forest Jay Gauna, Modoc National Forest




(Left): The wavy leaves of the Wavyleaf Soap Plant

White-lined sphinx moth, *Hyles lineata*. A pollinator of *Chlorogalum pomeridianum*

Upcoming Events



Time: 2pm-4pm (Doors open at 1:30)
Location: Riverfront Playhouse, 1950 California Street, Redding, CA
Cost: FREE with suggested donation

Tickets required. Get tickets **HERE**

Looking for a fun family event to escape the summer heat? Join us in an exploration of nature's tiniest superheroes.

We're hosting a special screening of The Extraordinary Caterpillar, a beautifully shot 60-minute documentary that reveals the vital—and often overlooked—role caterpillars play in our ecosystems.

Watch the trailer here! https://vimeo.com/1117213704

film celebrates the magic of nature while showing families practical ways to make a difference.

Along the way, you'll see the groundbreaking work of The Caterpillar Lab, entomologist David Wagner, and Doug Tallamy, co-founder of Homegrown National Park.

> Doors open at 1:30pm. Come early to explore information from local environmental organizations. After the film we encourage you to stick around for a Q&A session with local experts.

Adopt-A-Swim Beach Program

July 11th, 8am - 10am

Whiskeytown NRA has a created a program to keep beaches clean over the summer! SEA will be responsible for one of the three 'swim beaches' that Whiskeytown Lake has to offer. So far, we have picked up 20 lbs. of trash. Be sure to keep checking our social media pages for our clean-up days!

Click Here to Volunteer for the Adopt-A-Swim Beach Program with SEA!

There Is No Planet B Book Club

July 19, 2026

Our exploration of Ayana Elizabeth Johnson's *What If We Get It Right?* continues on July 19 from 2:15pm-4pm!
Join us for conversations about what's possible, biophilia, nature as teacher, reworking food systems, design justice, and surely much more. To receive meeting details and additional resources please join our TINPB book club contact list or contact juliet@ecoshasta.org.

Is your Email view of the newsletter clipped?
View the full message in your browser.

Trip Reports

Phillips Brothers Mill Tour

"Looking to the future while preserving our heritage and timber resources"

Tucked into the mixed conifer forest in Oak Run sits the Phillips Brothers Mill, a fully steam-powered sawmill still operating today, much like it has since its 1897 founding. On May 31 we

imbued with a deep connection to the land and appreciation for his heritage.

Our morning began with a brief history of the sawmill, which was established by Gregg's great-grandfather, Edmund Phillips. He spoke tenderly about his uncles who ran the mill when he was child, and who, after returning from World War II, decided to completely exit the lumber business and shift to making wooden fruit boxes instead. They built a steam-powered box factory and never looked back. Fruit growers eventually switched to cardboard boxes, so the mill pivoted to making custom decorative gift boxes, which are still being made today.

Our first stop on the tour was to what might be the company's greatest pride and joy: an enormous, still-operational 1906 steam-powered traction engine. Capable of pulling up to 270,000 pounds, it hauled its last load of logs in 1955, but occasionally Gregg fires it up (a four-hour process) to give rides to family members. Next, we toured the two buildings that house the circular saw mill, built in 1933, and other antique machines. All the machines are powered by steam engines beneath the floor. A massive 1920 Willamette boiler fueled by the sawmill's wood waste energizes all of the steam engines.

We asked Gregg about the work involved to keep these 19th century machines running, to which he responded, “these machines were built to last;” a notable understatement in our current hyper-disposable culture. It became very clear to our group as he explained how logs are processed and the maintenance and repair the machines require, that multiple skill sets are needed for this self-sufficient operation. Throughout his life at the mill, Gregg has learned to be a timber faller, truck driver, mechanic, welder, sawyer, saw filer, plumber, and electrician, to name just a few of his acquired skills. His uncles taught him young to figure out how to fix and build things himself, rather than pay someone else to do it.

mariposa lilies along the trail and the spring-fed pond that Gregg had dug a few years ago. Native willows and cattails are growing around the pond, providing more habitat for local wildlife, including migrating geese. At about 22 feet deep, this clean blue body of water also serves as a family swimming refuge in the summer and as the water source for a sprinkler system Gregg is constructing to protect the mill from wildfire.

In the box factory, Gregg showed us the machines used to build the gift boxes and other products like bird and bat houses, bird feeders, and salmon planks –all decorated with his father's artwork. Much of the box factory's products use blue stained pine, which is a beautiful outcome of a destructive natural process. The blue staining is caused by a fungus carried by the mountain pine beetle that prevents the flow of water and nutrients in the tree's phloem. This weakens and often kills the tree, but does not impact the integrity of the wood.

This tour was both engaging and restorative. While exploring this living history under a clear blue sky filled with birdsong, it was comforting to know that the mill's 920 acres of forest will remain sustainably managed in perpetuity due to its placement in a conservation easement with the Pacific Forest Trust. It was an experience that was well worth the time and miles traveled, so much so that we plan to make this an annual event. If you missed it this year, please check back next spring.

Be a Voice for the Environment

Do you care deeply about protecting our local environment and the wildlife, forests, 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.**

Join Us

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