WESTERN ASPEN ALLIANCE

TREMBLINGS

NEWSLETTER & BULLETIN BOARD

Vol. 14(4), November 2023

Partnering to preserve and restore healthy aspen ecosystems

MEMBER PARTICIPATION: The WAA is a virtual science-based community. Send us aspen-related publications, management plans, and media mentions and we'll help spread the word. Contact Paul Rogers, Director: p.rogers@usu.edu.

Share *Tremblings* with your friends and colleagues.

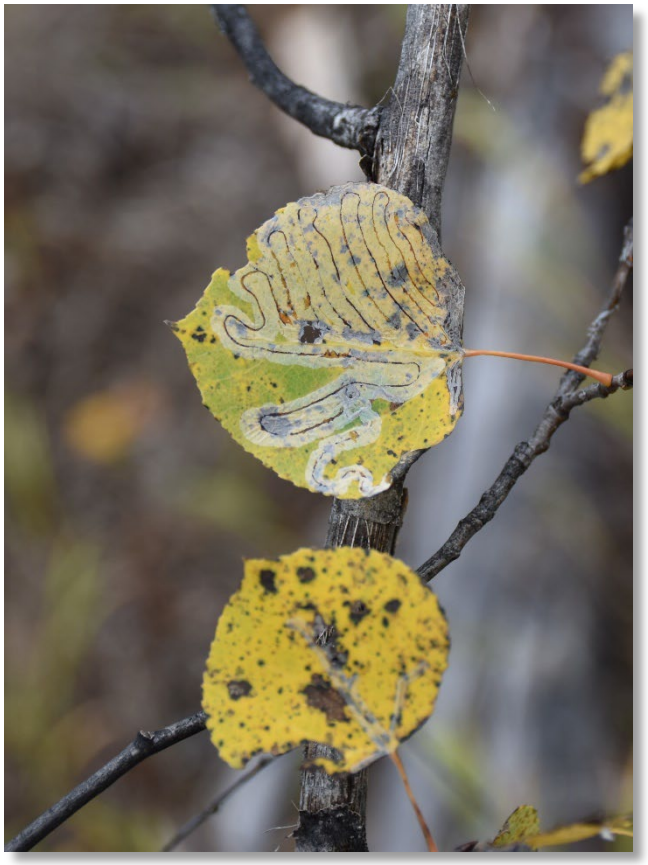
New members welcome! Sign up here

WAA HAPPENINGS

The WAA Funding Challenge—In recent months it has become clear that the Western Aspen Alliance needs to step up its base support from users and donors. When we conducted a member's poll two years ago folks overwhelmingly said that they preferred to support the WAA via monetary contributions (rather than donating their time). Please know that even small donations are helpful. We also would like to hear your suggestions regarding potential philanthropic donors. We know there are many individuals and foundations who prefer to support conservation science; we simply need to identify the right people with a passion for aspen ecosystems. Please reach out to the WAA Director if you have suggestions for benefactors.

Aspen Common Garden Site Needed—Seeking a home for an aspen common garden. UC-Berkeley has a collection of 350+ aspen genotypes from across the continent growing in replicate greenhouse pots. We are looking for a location where they could be permanently planted as a long-term genetics research collection beginning late 2024. An ideal location would be >1 hectare and include the potential for irrigation, fencing, and mowing/weeding, and would have some local staff for plant care. Agencies, researchers, and nonprofits are all welcome! There is initial funding available to support a transfer. If interested in partnering or managing, please email Dr. Benjamin Wong Blonder.

Call for Winter Aspen Art—For aspen enthusiasts, spring is vibrant, summer is fluttery, and fall is golden. The somber and silent tones of winter are less celebrated…until now! We'd like to see your snowy season interpretations and reflections on all things aspen. Prints, paintings, poetry, and plaster renderings are all welcome. Send images or PDFs of art pieces to the WAA Director by January 15, 2024 and we'll present a virtual winter gallery issue of *Tremblings* showcasing all usable offerings.



*Autumn colors are highlighted in the trail of Aspen leaf miner (*Phyllocnistis populiella*) on a single leaf near Fairbanks, Alaska. Effects of leaf miner in boreal North American can predispose aspen to mortality from a variety of causes. Countering these potential negative effects, increased climate-related fires may be expanding aspen and birch coverage in northern latitudes (Photo: Paul Rogers).*

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UPCOMING EVENTS

14th NAFEW in North Carolina—The North American Forest Ecology Workshop will take place in Asheville, NC June 24-27, 2024. The theme of the 14th NAFEW will be "Integrating goals: balancing dynamic forest management objectives." This conference aims to bring field practitioners and researchers together around contemporary forest ecology issues. Proposals for special sessions are due November 13, 2023 and paper/poster abstracts will be due January 2024. Updates and organizer contact information related to the 14th NAFEW can be found at the conference website.

Summer 2024 Aspen Workshops:
The WAA will be taking a slightly different approach to scheduling summer workshops. We're open to aspen workshop proposals near you, but a new model for such events will require identifying support funding sources up front rather than the previous ad hoc approach. Please contact WAA Director Paul Rogers potential workshops.

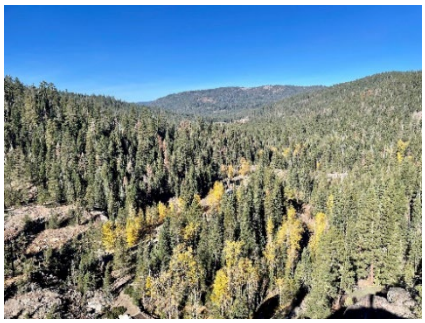
COMMENTARY

Sierra forest resilience and aspen restoration

Anne Marie Holt, Forest Conservation Project Manager
South Yuba River Citizens League, Nevada City, California

While searching for hidden aspen stands on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada, I scan the forest for a faint shimmer. The distinctive quaking of the aspen is a dead giveaway for the location. Rarely found in contiguous stands, aspen appear at meadow fringes, along streams, or where snow may persist. These seral stands need periodic disturbance to trigger aspen regeneration and to reset conifer growth. Without such events, the conifers continue to overtop the aspen until none remain. Western slope aspen may be sparse but are important habitat for flora and fauna; even surpassing the biodiversity of adjacent meadows. The question we asked ourselves at the Central Sierra Western Slope Aspen Workshop in California was, what is the best way to restore limited aspen that are intertwined with expansive conifer systems?

One conclusion of the workshop was that aspen is entwined with multiple resource issues. Increasing conifer density, meadow and riparian area degradation, and altered stream/wetland habitat all impact aspen and potential restoration efforts. For instance, actions aimed at restoring key forest processes (e.g., targeted burning) may be hampered by high fuel loads or proximity to roads and homes. A combination of treatments outside of aspen stands is important, because in order to use prescribed fire as an aspen restoration tool the risk of broad-scale conflagrations needs to be mitigated. Opportunity for aspen restoration is often a major component of project selection: if a fuels reduction project is already happening, then ensuring that aspen restoration is included in the prescription or in the environmental impact statement can facilitate treatment. This add-on approach also applies in stewardship of sensitive areas such as riparian areas or meadows. And a change of thinking: aspen stands are integrally linked to area hydrology, not just stand-alone units. Our practices must reflect this understanding.



Partners are playing a greater role in our National Forests by taking on landscape projects such as fuels reduction, or treatment in sensitive areas. I myself work for an environmental non-profit, the South Yuba River Citizens League. Partnering with agencies on restoration projects in the Yuba River Watershed is key to successful project completion. Such cooperation allows for increased project completion while tapping expertise and resources outside federal or state governments. For instance, my organization has performed a watershed-wide

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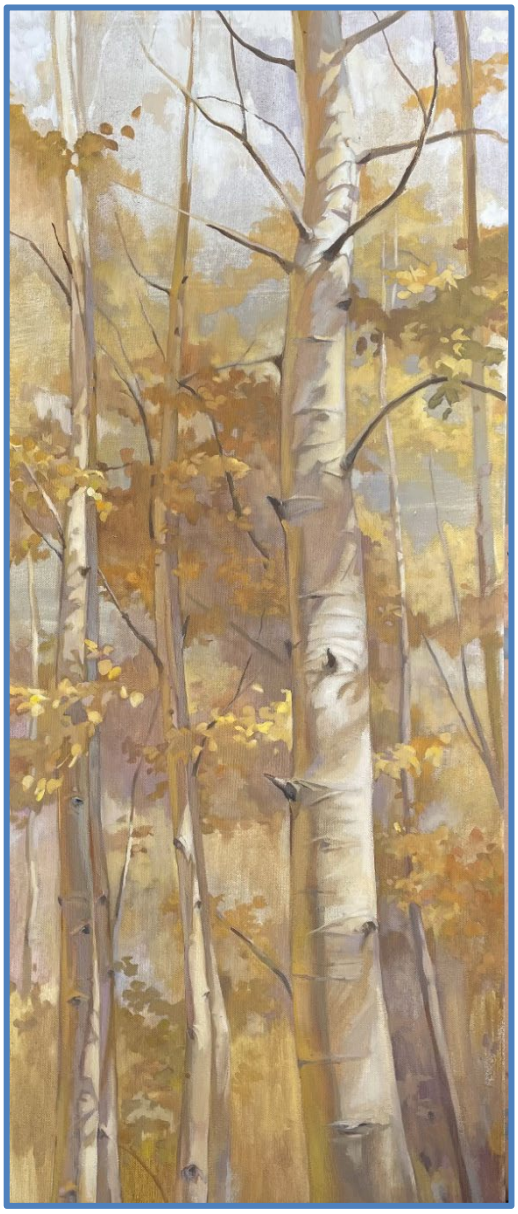
assessment to ground truth the location, size, and health of aspen stands.

The future of aspen restoration in the western Sierra Nevada has many different facets. Chief among those is the unique character of sparse aspen among towering conifers in this landscape. Due to this, it is essential that we integrate the wider ecosystem in restoration actions. Identifying diverse partners to collaborate in these complex ecosystems can shorten the timeline of restoration projects and increase the aspen and landscape resilience. In the future I hope western slope aspen stands will not need continuous human upkeep, but rather grow and shrink in response to the disturbance events that occur naturally in the forest.

WAA *Creates*

"WAA Creates" requests diverse artistic aspen-related contributions from across our membership. We encourage fiction, folklore, poetry, drawings, paintings, photography, and other artistic expressions. Send your stuff to Tremblings.

Golden Aspen
(oil on canvas)



Kati Gyulassy
Park City, Utah

From the artist: *What makes aspen so unique and dynamic as a subject for painting relates to the scintillating play of light filtered through the quaking*

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leaves or the ambient colors reflected on its pale bark. There is a softness in the transitions between light and shadow, while a starkness in the contrast between the bark color and its eyes. As a painter who focuses on the play of light on our landscape, aspen will forever be mesmerizing and elusive.

You may see more of Kati Gyulassy's work at KG Fine Art.

RECENT ASPEN PUBLICATIONS

A word on Open Access: The Western Aspen Alliance strongly supports open access publishing (CC-BY). Articles with hyperlinks below are available for download and sharing following Creative Commons rules for attribution.

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Lucash, M. S., A. M. Marshall, S. A. Weiss, J. W. McNabb, D. J. Nicolsky, G. N. Flerchinger, T. E. Link, J. G. Vogel, R. M. Scheller, and R. Z. Abramoff. 2023. Burning trees in frozen soil: Simulating fire, vegetation, soil, and hydrology in the boreal forests of Alaska. Ecological Modelling. 481: 110367.

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Website: http://www.western-aspen-alliance.org/

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