

## **GREEN ACRES: Mountain Living at its Finest** Kellie Flanagan

### **SNAMP**

Riding shotgun in the big truck on a bumpy forest road, I kept the window down. The smell of incense cedar warming up in the morning sun: that's a great whiff. For half the trip my main thought was "man, this would never happen back in LA." This was totally in my wheelhouse of fun stuff to do.

Steam rose from fallen logs as the first rays of light hit mossy trees, and ground squirrels dodged our tires. We were out on tour with Anne Lombardo, the friendly public representative for a project known as SNAMP, the Sierra Nevada Adaptive Management Program.

SNAMP is a cooperative effort by the University of California, state and federal agencies, and the public. The program studies new ways to manage forest lands in the Sierra Nevada, uniting groups that have long been at odds and sharing with them neutral science to balance the interests. Loggers and environmentalist statewide have been engaged in lawsuits over projects that date back decades, while much of the history between these factions has been made in court.

Instead, the SNAMP project presents a new model for cooperative communication, bringing individuals of differing disciplines together in and among the trees, with the goal of creating a unified front along with a realistic plan for forest management from a holistic perspective. Great news: it seems to be working.

With Anne at the wheel talking about SNAMP, we drove through areas around Nelder Grove, Sugar Pine and Calvin Crest. Anne pointed out the blue markings on trees that are scheduled for treatment (cutting) and told me that thinning is limited to trees 30" in diameter, at roughly chest-height; the only exception being "hazard" trees threatening the safety of roads or structures.

The talk soon turned to fishers, as it often does when Anne is around. The large, weasel-like creature with bright white claws, thought to be limited in number, is part of SNAMP under the heading Fisher Project. My lovely ginger haired daughter has done two posters on the nocturnal fisher, and admittedly if it weren't for her reports, I may not have known what a fisher even was.

Yet here we were, moving at a decently slow pace so as not to alarm the local wildlife, on dirt road in prime fisher territory. I learned that the UC expert has collars on about thirty fishers, give or take, representing about ten percent of the local fisher population. Since fisher habitat is right smack in the middle of the forest, they are the perfect creature to investigate when you're trying to make sure that thinning the forest isn't bothering the animals any more than it has to.

In primitive days, our local surroundings would have been the sight of many fires. Now, with humanity spread thick like jam on a bagel, it's imperative to prevent catastrophic fires. That's why the forest needs "treating," or thinning. In order for the treatment to have as little negative impact as possible, the people at SNAMP are monitoring the habits of the fisher, especially when it comes to "denning," or having babies.

The female fishers use a few different tree hollows as their litter matures, so it's vital that the people who are out tagging trees for cutting know what a fisher den looks like. It's really that simple. Instead of being locked up in court battles with digital re-enactments of fishers climbing trees, SNAMP puts actual humans out in the forest together to make the important decisions that will help our resources thrive and hopefully, give Smokey the Bear a little break, too. This study is "transparent," meaning, it's open to the public and your input is actively sought. Check out the SNAMP website at <http://snamp.cnr.berkeley.edu/> and let them know if you have any questions or if your group would like to learn more about this model project.