



NEVADA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Giving Native Plants a Head Start this Fall

by Alex Kovary-Turnsek, Walker Basin Conservancy Nursery Manager

Fall is a wonderful time of year, when the temperatures start dropping and the days start to shorten. Along with the changing of seasons comes the perfect time to settle new native plants into your garden. As part of the Great Basin, Nevada has highly variable seasons across its landscapes (Svecjer et al 2017), making it tricky for native plant gardeners and restoration practitioners to plan for success. But whether you sow seeds directly or plant plugs with developed roots, fall is typically the best time to get them in the ground.

Many native plant species have some form of seed dormancy; this can include physical, physiological, morphological, morphophysiological, and combinational (Baskin & Baskin, 2014). Seed dormancy prevents seeds from being established under conditions that may harm a new plant before it has the time and resources it needs to thrive. For example, a seed without dormancy that germinates too early in the spring may be subjected to a late-season frost; likewise, a seed that germinates too late into the summer season may be exposed to excessive drought and heat stress. Thus, seed dormancy is important for the long-term establishment and success of new plants and helps to give them the best chance at establishment and survival.

Overcoming dormancy can be a tricky feat for a novice native plant gardener. Especially since many species of the Great Basin have a type of seed dormancy called physiological dormancy (Kildisheva et al., 2019).



Fall planting at WBC ©Melissa Sinka

For this adaptation, seeds must experience specific environmental cues, such as a period of cold moisture, before dormancy can be broken and germination can occur. This cold, moist exposure is referred to as cold stratification. One way that gardeners and restoration practitioners can overcome physiological dormancy is through fall seed sowing. This is one reason that in years with sufficient cold temperatures and winter precipitation, we see the highest spring seedling yields (Boyd and Lemos 2015). With the projected super El Niño looming, Nevada may be in for an excellent year for native seed establishment.

Seedlings completed in fall, before the ground freezes, will allow for dormant seeds to go through necessary temperature fluctuations over the course of the winter that will lead to germination in the spring (Aldrich 2002). Planning your native garden around seasonal changes can help remove some of the uncertainty of seed dormancy. If you plan to use the direct sowing method in your garden this fall, consider using an inert media mixed in with your seeds to evenly distribute them and keep lighter seeds from blowing away (Shaw et al 2020). Weighing down your seeds can help protect them from wind and hide them from sneaky seed predators. Just before sowing, mixing your seeds with moistened sterile play sand can help imbibe your seeds and keep lighter seeds in your desired sowing location.

Although direct seeding is a great low effort option for overcoming seed dormancy, if you want more control over where your plants end up on your landscape, you can also start native seeds to grow out as plugs in the fall. One method is to sow seeds directly into containers and keep them outdoors over the winter. Typically sowing between 1-3 seeds per container depending on the viability and size of the seed will result in germination in the spring (Nursery Manual for Native Plants p. 140). Watch out for seed predators who might take interest in the seeds in your containers before they germinate. One way to avoid seed predation is by covering your containers with a wire mesh to exclude them. Another method that you can use to produce native plant plugs is to mimic winter conditions in your refrigerator or freezer at home. Many native plants can be tricked into breaking their dormancy through imbibition with water followed by 2 or more weeks in a cool, temperature-controlled setting, like your home fridge. Maintaining moisture through the length of your cold stratification period is important so your seeds don't dry out. It is also important to avoid over-saturation, as this can lead to mold growth and subsequent seed damage. Experimenting with different media to hold seeds during this process can help ensure even moisture levels over time.

After your seeds have completed their cold moist stratification, you may want to place them in a small greenhouse or cold frame in early spring to encourage germination. Native seedlings may be ready in the spring to outplant; however, slower growing species may need to be held back until the following fall to ensure protection from herbivory.



Artemisia tridentata plug planting during some fall precipitation ©Melissa Sinka

In rugged environments like the Great Basin, the use of transplanting plant plugs instead of direct seeding can help avoid problems like environmental stress, competition from neighboring plants, and unsuccessful establishment after seeding (Shaw et al 2015). By selecting a fall planting date, many environmental stressors that your new plants might face after a late spring or summer planting can be mitigated. Seedlings planted in summer months face low periods of natural moisture (Svecjer et al 2017), and high competition for resources with summer annual weeds that thrive in warm conditions (McAdoo et al 2005). In contrast, seedlings planted in fall months have higher natural soil moisture levels and face less weed pressure than their counterparts planted in the summer. When transplanting plugs this fall, it is important to time your gardening schedule.

The best time to transplant your plugs is before the first hard frost, so that your new plants will have time to root outside of the boundaries of their container and anchor themselves into the soil. If your planting date gets pushed back too close to when soil temperatures experience hard freezing, you may notice that your plugs are forced up and out of the surrounding soil. This is called frost heaving and occurs as water held within the media of a plant plug freezes and expands (Taber 1929). The expanded ice within the media then pushes the roots up and out of their planting location. Frost heaving can be solved by adjusting your planting timeline so that your new garden plants have a couple of weeks to expand their roots into the surrounding soil before winter weather.

So, whether you were holding on to seeds unsure of the best time to plant them or looking to pick up some end-of-season plant plugs, now is the perfect time to get your hands dirty. You will reap the benefits of planning ahead when spring comes around, and your native plants are well on their way to establishment.

Happy planting!

In the events section of this newsletter, you can find upcoming fall plant sales for 2026 or visit this [Native Plant and Seed directory from the University of Nevada, Reno Extension](#).

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Penstemon speciosus seed. Many *Penstemon* species have seeds with physiological dormancy
©Bend Seed Extractory, Seeds of Success.



Sierra Nevada Fens and New Additions to the Nevada Flora

by Chantal Iosso, Patrick Silbey, and Arnold Tiehm

Uncommon and interesting plants are often found in uncommon and interesting habitats. Although savvy seekers of Nevada rare plant know to pull over and look closely when they see white ash-tuff outcrops, sand dunes, or alkali wetlands, efforts to botanically inventory rare habitat types have typically not been comprehensive. Efforts like the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Ecological Site Descriptions project and NatureServe's National Vegetation Classification taxonomy are useful undertakings, but are not consistently field-verified, mapped, and inventoried. The fact that many conservation rules operate at the unit of the taxon rather than the ecosystem likely contributes to this blind spot.

In 2025, we were excited by the rediscovery of *Kyhosia bolanderi* and the first record of *Carex cusickii* in Nevada (Tiehm, 2025 & 2026). Both species were located in a Carson Range fen, named Liz Fen, that botanists were directed to through the first author's efforts to catalog and assess Nevada's fens. This summer, the same work resulted in more new additions to the Nevada flora.

Fens are peat-forming wetlands supported by nearly constant groundwater inflow (Bedford & Godwin, 2003) that are typically dominated by sedges and low-growing willows (Smith & Lemly, 2019). Cold conditions and continual saturation create oxygen-deprived soils with very low rates of decomposition that allow the accumulation of organic matter produced by wetland plants (Smith & Lemly, 2019). For an ecosystem to be classified as peatland in the U.S., the thickness of organic soil must equal or exceed 40 cm (Soil Survey Staff, 2014). Studies from similar regions suggest this depth of peat may take hundreds or thousands of years to form (Chimner & Cooper, 2002; Drexler et al., 2015).



The fen viewed from above ©Patrick Silbey

Fens support numerous rare species, improve water quality, and can be highly effective at carbon sequestration when intact (Bedford & Godwin, 2003; Chimner & Cooper, 2003; Drexler et al., 2015; Millar et al., 2023).

In the arid west, fens are uncommon but can be found in high elevation, consistently wet areas (Cooper et al., 2012). Numerous western states (California, Colorado, Oregon) and the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (HTNF) recognize fens as a rare habitat type. However, knowledge of fens in Nevada was largely limited to surveys in the Tahoe Basin (Sikes et al., 2011) and a satellite imagery analysis identifying potential fens on the HTNF in Nevada and beyond (Smith & Lemly, 2019).

Lacking field verification, little was known about the distribution, characteristics, floristics, and threats to fens in Nevada beyond the Tahoe Basin. Because fens form extremely slowly and can be difficult to restore, proactive knowledge and protection of these rare wetlands is necessary to ensure their preservation.

Guided by the prior work of Sikes et al. (2011) and Smith and Lemly (2019), Chantal Iosso and other staff at the Nevada Division of Natural Heritage, including botanists Patrick Silbey and Tessa Bartz, visited 50 potential fens across 6 mountain ranges in Nevada, ultimately identifying and surveying 35 fens between 2023 and 2026. Although this effort was not exhaustive, it likely documents most of the fens present in the state, and resulted in the observation of numerous rare species. This information will be critical for land managers to protect this unique resource going forward.

Iosso is preparing a full report on the distribution, characteristics, floristics, and condition of Nevada's fens, expected later this year, which will be widely distributed and freely available on

<https://heritage.nv.gov/programs/wetland-program/nevadas-wetlands>.

In 2025 Tiehm and Nachlinger published a checklist for the Flora of Nevada (Tiehm & Nachlinger, 2025). As with every checklist or flora, it is a snapshot in time. There are always more places to visit, perhaps at different times of the year, or in good flowering years. *Contained in the checklist's Excluded List was Eriophorum gracile*. They simply had not found a specimen from Nevada. It was considered for inclusion because Flora of North America lists *Eriophorum gracile* as occurring in Nevada (Ball & Wujek, 2002).

The location nearest to Nevada for *Eriophorum gracile* is at Tahoe Vista in Placer County, California, at the north end of Lake Tahoe. This is only 2.2 miles due west of the Nevada state line. The specimen was collected by Steve Matson. We spoke to Steve about the possibility of *Eriophorum gracile* occurring in Nevada. He saw no reason it should not occur in Nevada but, like us, was at a loss for new areas to investigate.

The first author had visited and inventoried the "East of Genoa Peak" fen in 2024, working from the Sikes et al. (2011) report. Like the CNPS crew, she found and identified *Eriophorum gracile* at the site, but did not realize that it was of any particular floristic significance in Nevada and did not collect a specimen.

Jerry & Jan botanizing the fen ©Patrick Silbey



The second author belatedly realized that it was, and revisited the site alone and with Arnold Tiehm and Jan Nachlinger in July and August 2026 to make collections and see what other plants might be growing in and around the fen.

The East of Genoa Peak fen (named by Sikes et al. (2011) – perhaps we can come up with something catchier) is different from other inventoried Carson Range fens, but it is difficult to quantify exactly why. The dominant plant species, *Carex utriculata* and *Carex simulata*, are common elsewhere, the pH and temperature of the water are within normal ranges, and the soil and peat profiles are similar (NDNH, 2026). The basic geomorphology and hydrology of the area, a large flat catching water flowing from a snowmelt- and spring-fed creek, do not appear exceptional either. It is still unclear to us why *Eriophorum gracile* would grow here and nowhere else in Nevada. Data for the East of Genoa Peak Fen is included in Sikes et al. (2011), but the site is not listed in their Sites Visited table. Therefore, we are unable to ascertain exactly when *Eriophorum gracile* was first documented in Nevada.

In the western United States, *Eriophorum gracile* is known from Washington, Oregon, California as far south as Madera and Tuolumne counties, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado. It also occurs in the eastern United States, Canada, and Alaska (Ball & Wujek, 2002). They also list it for Nevada (see above) and Utah. Welsh et al. (2008) note this Utah reference and state, “*Eriophorum gracile* . . . has been reported for Utah (FNA 2002). No specimens from Utah seen for this treatment could clearly be assigned to that taxon.”

The inflow and outflow areas of East of Genoa Peak fen held an impressive number of wetland plants. Among these was *Gentianella amarella* var. *acuta*. This is first record for Douglas County. In Nevada it was previously known from Elko, Eureka, Lander, Lincoln, Nye, Washoe, and White Pine counties.



Top: *Eriophorum gracile* **Bottom:** *Oxypolis occidentalis* (fruits) ©Patrick Silbey

The single Washoe County record – the only other record of this taxon from the Carson Range – is a 1906 collection with the locality of “Incline, Lake Tahoe” (Kennedy 1480 RENO). The closest California locations for *Gentianella amarella* var. *acuta* are Sagehen Creek in Nevada Co. and two historic collections with vague localities from El Dorado County around the south shore of Lake Tahoe.

Another plant found along the inflow to East of Genoa Peak fen was *Oxypolis occidentalis*. It was growing with similar species in the genera *Heracleum*, *Perideridea*, and *Angelica*. *Oxypolis* can be distinguished by its leaves and fruits, and tends to grow with its feet in the water along small, flowing creeks. This is the first record of this carrot family plant from Nevada. It was previously known in the Tahoe Basin from Osgood Swamp and Grass Lake. The Osgood Swamp locality is about 15 miles SW of East of Genoa Peak fen. We visited the East of Genoa Peak fen in late August and did not find any other plants not documented from Nevada.

In addition to fens, Sikes et al. (2011) conducted surveys of *Other Wet Meadows*. The upper meadows of the Prey Meadows complex, in Carson City County, are classified in this category. In those wet meadows is *Veronica scutellata*. This is the only known Nevada location. The closest California location is from Washoe Meadows State Park in El Dorado County just south of Lake Tahoe. This is about 15 miles SSE of the Prey Meadows location. There are more wet meadow areas in the vicinity of East of Genoa Peak fen and we hope to hike to these on future forays.

If botanists and ecologists can occasionally put aside the debate over whether the forests or the trees are more important, collaboration between the two can result in exciting discoveries for both groups. The Nevada Division of Natural Heritage is one home for such collaborations, which we hope to continue and deepen in the future.

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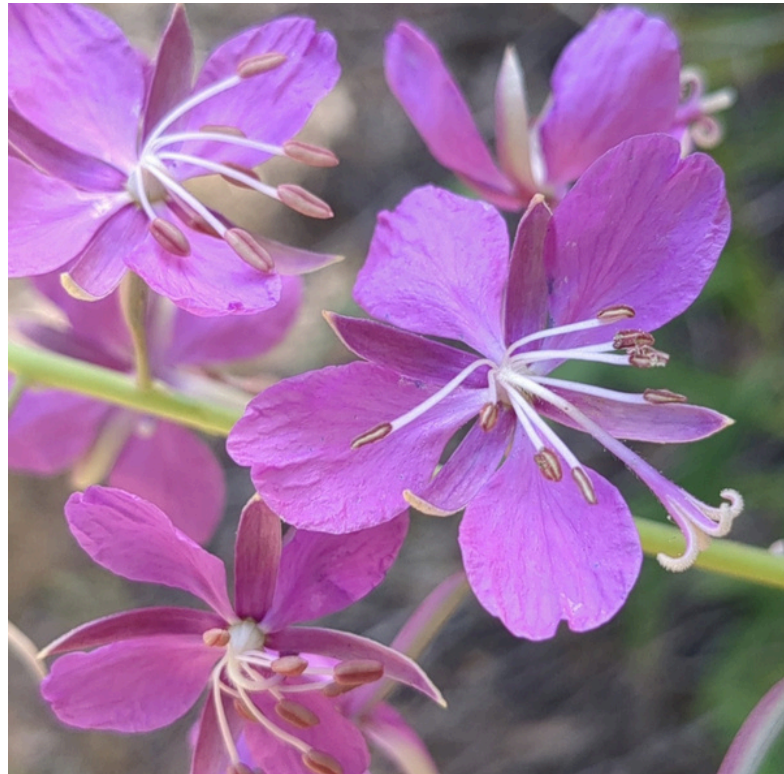
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Featured plant: *Chamaenerion angustifolium*, fireweed by Christopher Mackessy, Trash Panda Permaculture

There is an Alaskan saying that, “When the weed turns to cotton, summer is forgotten”. In our early romps in the woods, we were always similarly taught that the blooming of the first fireweed (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*) marks the beginning of Summer and that once the final flowers began to wither, fall was then upon us.

This showy plant grows from 1-6’ and is often very strongly colonial. We frequently encounter locations with hundreds, if not thousands, of plants growing closely together. The leaves are generally alternate, lanceolate, and with conspicuous white main veins; one of the best ways to identify it in the early stages. In addition to these bold central veins, it has a fascinating veining pattern which see the secondary veins looping forward and linking just before touching the leaf margins. The raceme inflorescence is loaded with showy rose to lilac-purple flowers and generally canescent (grayish-white hairs). Petals entire. Stamens white with blue-gray pollen. Stigma strongly exerted and four-lobed. Check that lady out! Fruit is a thin, 2-3” long capsule; splitting at maturity, releasing the small wooly-tufted 1-2mm seeds to disperse in the wind.

Like others in *Onagraceae*, it has an amazing capacity to produce unimaginable amounts of seeds (some sources place them at upwards of 100,000 per individual plant!) which spread far and wide. Additionally, they enjoy a high germination rate and a habitat of preference which includes open and newly disturbed sites, the name Fireweed coming from it’s tendency to occupy fire scars and their ability to fill meadows with an array of reds, yellows and oranges during the fall. Throw in the fact that they also spread well via rhizomes and this, as one can imagine, makes it an excellent candidate for both restoration and for the home



Chamaenerion angustifolium flowers ©Christopher Mackessy

garden. It also inhabits what is perhaps one of the widest ranges of any plant we can recall, growing from sea level to nearly 15,000’ and broadly distributed throughout the northern hemisphere from the shores of Alaska to the Himalayan Mountains. While their habitat of preference is broadly riparian, pickiness is definitely not an adjective we’d use to describe *C. angustifolium*.

For humans, nearly the entire plant is used for edible purposes. While sometimes considered slightly bitter, we use the young shoots and leaves as a delicious vegetable, often eating them raw in the field. While they are quite at home in a stir fry, the flavors really shine as a beverage. Over the past year, we’ve been trying (highly unsuccessfully) to quit, or at least quell, our current dose of caffeine.

Thankfully, we live among some of the most delicious floral flavors one could ask for, including the centerpiece of this drug replacement therapy: our beloved Fireweed! The star ingredient in our Sierra Nevada Chai, they have an complex palette, with the wet fermented leaves being, in our humble opinions, a vast improvement to black tea. Normally dried leaves are reminiscent of green teas. Throw in some exceptional Fireweed honey and you'd be hard-pressed to locate a more satisfying drink for the tastebuds.

However, perhaps the most important gift Fireweed imparts through its remarkable ability to rehabilitate habitat and reconnect us with the land. It is the reminder that wonder and

beauty are woven into even the most difficult moments. As fires rage around us, homes are lost, and we witness the undeniable consequences of our strained relationship with the earth, this plant encourages us to hold fast to those small moments of connection. In its quiet return to damaged landscapes, Fireweed reminds us of the stewardship, tending, and friendships that once bound humans more closely to our non-human relations. Amidst despair, it offers a profound hope that change is possible, and that the winds may yet carry us toward renewed relationships with the living communities that have sustained us throughout our existence.



©Christopher Mackessy



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September Evening Presentation: Native Orchids of Nevada

presented by Allison Autry, California Botanic Garden
reported by Jim Morefield, NNPS



Of all the plants most people would associate with Nevada, driest state in the nation, orchids would be right near the bottom of the list. Particularly native orchids. Yet here they are, 14 different kinds according to Tiehm & Nachlinger (2025), and Allison Autry did an admirable job of introducing us to their diversity and, with her and colleagues' spectacular photographs, their subtle (or not so subtle) beauty. She also highlighted the challenges they face in continuing to thrive in Nevada, where most of the landscape is already hostile to orchid survival.

Allison is one of two 2024 recipients of a NNPS Margaret Williams Research Grant, and is now in her final year as a Ph.D. Candidate at the California Botanic Garden and Claremont Graduate University. The topic of her successful grant proposal was Conserving Rare and Disjunct Orchids in a Changing American West. In Nevada this mostly means our (still) endemic Ash Meadows ladies tresses (*Spiranthes infernalis*). This was the main focus of Allison's presentation, but only after she gave us a whirlwind tour of our other Nevada native orchids and how they fit into the orchid family worldwide.

First we learned that the orchid family (*Orchidaceae*) is one of the two largest families of plants on the planet, the other being the sunflower family (*Asteraceae*). Both families are found worldwide, but unlike *Asteraceae*, orchid diversity is more concentrated in the tropics, and less so toward high latitudes and arid regions. Less than 1% of world orchid diversity is native to the United States and Canada, and less than 10% of North American orchid species are native to Nevada. (Odd fact, Hawaii has even fewer native orchids, only three having been able to reach those islands on their own and survive, probably due to the specializations noted next.)

Next we learned that orchids are monocots and share characteristics like parallel leaf veins and flower parts in threes. Other characteristics specific to orchids include stamens and style fused into a single column, specialized pollinia (pollen masses) transported by pollinators, and one of the three petals (usually the lowest) highly modified into a labellum (lip) that helps guide pollinators past the stigmas to the pollinia.

*Epipactis gigantea* ©Jim Morefield*Spiranthes infernalis* ©glittergravel, iNaturalist*Platanthera tescamnis* ©Jim Morefield

Orchids also produce abundant tiny wind-dispersed seeds with no internal food supply (endosperm) of their own. Instead they germinate and grow in parasitic association with fungi which supply the needed nutrients while photosynthesis is developing. Some orchids, like most coralroots (*Corallorhiza*), never become green with chlorophyll, and remain fully parasitic mycoheterotrophs throughout their lives, deriving their food (-troph) externally (hetero-) from the root fungi (myco-) of nearby green plants.

Allison pointed out several different factors that threaten orchid survival by disrupting these specialized relationships with pollinators and root fungi. Alteration of hydrology by groundwater diversion is primary among these, along with soil disruption by livestock, recreational vehicles, and other habitat disturbances, and rapid climate change. Orchid "tourism" and poaching of more desirable species is also a concern, and Allison recommends obscuring the locations of such species when posting their observations on iNaturalist and other public sites.

Nevada's native orchid species are generally limited to montane and/or reliably wet

habitats, and are classified in five or six genera, and 14-16 species or varieties, depending on the taxonomy in use. Allison gave us a beautifully photographed review of our orchids and their distributions in the state. The most common, and arguably the showiest, is the widespread stream orchid (*Epipactis gigantea*), documented in 11 of Nevada's 17 counties (Tiehm & Nachlinger 2025). Other common species, each found in 10 Nevada counties, are spotted coralroot (*Corallorhiza maculata*, used medicinally by indigenous peoples), white bog orchid (*Platanthera dilatata* var. *leucostachys*), and Great Basin bog orchid (*Platanthera tescamnis*).

The genus *Spiranthes* (collectively, ladies tresses) is named for its whitish flowers arranged in spirals up the stem, and includes four of Nevada's rarest orchid species. Allison's studies have been focusing on Ash Meadows ladies tresses (*Spiranthes infernalis*), globally the rarest of any Nevada orchid. Named by orchid expert Charles J. Sheviak (1989), it is among the two most recently recognized and named Nevada orchids, the other being *Platanthera tescamnis* in 2006.

As one result of Allison's research so far, *Spiranthes infernalis* remains Nevada's only endemic orchid species, found nowhere else in the world. There has been some question about this as botanists have continued to discover new *Spiranthes* populations in and adjacent to the state. Originally the species was only known from Ash Meadows in southern Nye County, where recent surveys found just over 500 individuals in about six subpopulations. In 2020, Dr. Naomi Fraga of the California Botanic Garden discovered new and larger populations about 150 miles (250 km) to the northeast in Railroad Valley, still in Nye County. In 2023 she also re-discovered similar plants at Fish Slough north of Bishop, California, based on a historical collection from there. Allison's preliminary genetic and molecular data show that the Railroad Valley plants are most closely related to the Ash Meadows population, but the Fish Slough population appears more similar to a different relatively common species, *Spiranthes porrifolia*.

Allison pointed out that the habitat in all three of these isolated locations is unusual for ladies tresses, consisting of low-elevation, ground-water fed alkaline desert seeps. Continued presence of the orchids indicates that the groundwater supply in these locations has so far been reliable from year to year long-term, unlike many other alkaline desert seeps that can go dry during periods of drought. In these habitats the plants flower in the full heat of summer, and so far Allison has observed good seed set but no pollination, suggesting that these small-flowered plants self-fertilize in order to reproduce under such harsh conditions. This probably contributes to the low heterozygosity (genetic diversity) within populations that Allison has observed, constituting another threat to their long-term survival along with the intrinsic rarity of their habitat.

On the other hand, the wide geographic isolation between Ash Meadows, Railroad Valley, and Fish Slough appears to have permitted some level of genetic drift

and differentiation between the populations. Allison found different genetic groupings for each of the three locations, with two different groups in Railroad Valley alone. Conservation of the full range of genetic diversity in these isolated desert ladies tresses will be important to their long-term survival. Allison outlined her plans to establish seed bank collections, write conservation plans, and petition for appropriate legal protection of these populations.

Continued basic surveys and DNA studies will also be important. In Allison's field surveys already, she was able to use special satellite imagery to identify appropriate habitat and locate two new *Spiranthes infernalis* subpopulations at Ash Meadows, and another two in Railroad Valley.

Every year since 2000, after the passing of NNPS co-founder Margaret Williams, the Society has awarded up to two Margaret Williams Research Grants to support promising studies of Nevada's native flora. Proposals are due on February 1st each year, and more information can be found at <https://www.nvnps.org/grants>. Thank you Allison for returning to show us some of the fruits of your work and of the NNPS grants program. We wish you all success in completing and publishing your studies, and in helping to conserve and protect Nevada's native orchids.

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Down the *Aphyllon arizonicum* Rabbit-Hole: A Conversation With Dr. Collins

by Lily Rice

Many scientific discoveries occur thanks to the simple fact that someone happened to be at the right place at the right time, often for the wrong reasons. New populations of plants are discovered quite frequently because someone lumbered into the backcountry and looked down at the exact right moment to see something unfamiliar, leading them to ask the question, “what in the world am I looking at?” That question can lead you down the rabbit-hole many of us find ourselves willfully crawling into, depositing us in our own wonderland of academic journals speaking at length on the taxonomic changes of a cryptic group of plants. This is exactly what happened to me in early May, where outside of Pioche, NV in the rolling drainages of the Mojave Transition Zone, I carried my camera hoping to take pictures of *Centrostegia thurberi*, but instead glanced the deep-purple inflorescence of an alien holoparasite, *Aphyllon arizonicum*.

Historically, this species was not thought to have occurrences in Nevada, but recent evidence is mounting that there are more populations hidden around pickle-scented shrubs waiting for discovery. Many thanks to Jerry Tiehm and Dr. Alison Colwell for putting me in contact with the authority on this species, Dr. Turner Collins, who gave me the absolute pleasure of picking his brain on the tricky taxonomy of *Aphyllon*.

Dr. Turner Collins was born in 1937 in Polk County Texas. Before becoming the authority on four species of *Aphyllon*, he taught high school science class in Shepard, Texas for 5 years, was the principal, and even served as the acting superintendent for 1 year. Currently, he is Professor Emeritus at Evangel University, where he taught as a professor for 33 years before retiring from teaching, but not from his love of research. To this day he is still publishing, and he and his colleagues are currently awaiting a publication in the Linnean Society about a new species of *Kopsiopsis* from Baja California.



LAR_5297: Racemose *A. arizonicum* growing in a sandy wash outside Pioche, NV. ©Lily Rice

His history with this genus dates back to his 1966 master's dissertation, “Vascular Flora of the Concho Bluff Ecotone,” where being in the right place at the right time brought him into admiration with plant parasitism.

Dr. Collins: “Well, in these sand dunes, I discovered the largest population of *Orobanche* that I have seen to date. I mean, just hundreds of plants in more than one location, and I had never seen a root parasite, and I got fascinated with them.”

Down the rabbit-hole he went.

On the other side the *Orobanche ludoviciana* complex awaited him- a tangled web of specimens across time, space, and morphology- a worthy foe for his doctoral dissertation. Confoundingly, the complex proved complex thanks to the lack of available resources.

Dr. Collins: “I couldn't find anything other than P.A. Munz's 1930 paper which didn't answer my questions, and I went from there.”

Since then, Dr. Collins and his collaborators have teased apart the *Orobanche ludoviciana* complex, revealing a web of distinct taxa, in which *Orobanche arizonica* was identified.

In revealing these distinct lineages, the evidence began to mount that the new-world sections of *Orobanche* belonged to a genus all on their own, the resurrected *Aphyllon*. Dr. Collins, along with his colleagues Dr. George Yatskievych and the aforementioned Dr. Colwell, were responsible for the treatments for *Orobanche* in the Flora of North America project, where the mounting evidence troubled them.

Dr. Collins: “We felt like it's just going to be a nightmare for us to back up and rewrite and do all the taxonomy and do all the synonyms and so forth. It would almost be like starting over... I've always felt like they should have been separated just based on morphology, because the flower structure of the Eurasian species is very different from the flower structure of the North American species.”

As always with taxonomic history, it's filled with a list of names reassembling branches on the tree of life as one might reconstruct a Lego set. *Aphyllon* was first described by John Mitchell in his 1769 work, “Dissertatio brevis de principiis botanicorum et zoologorum.” In 1876, the preeminent Asa Gray put his prescient nickel down, lumping all of the New-World *Orobanche* into the genus *Aphyllon* with two sections, *Aphyllon* & *Nothaphyllon*. Shortly after, Günther Beck-Mannagetta's 1890 work, “Monographie der Gattung Orobanche,” subsumed the genus *Aphyllon* into *Orobanche*, where it stayed for many years, but the taxonomic quibbling would not stop. The famous Per Axel Rydberg launched into the fray in 1906, with an unsuccessful proposal to make Gray's *Nothaphyllon* section into its own genus, *Myzorhiza*. Flash forward to 2016 where Dr. Adam Schneider utilized molecular phylogenetic evidence to separate the new-world *Orobanche* sections *Gymnocaulis* & *Nothaphyllon* into their own sections under the genus *Aphyllon*, sect. *Aphyllon* & *Nothaphyllon* respectively (Schneider, 2016), upholding Gray's delineation.

For our species of focus, *A. arizonicum*, its history is (thankfully) more succinct. The type

specimen for the species comes from the 1935 Flora of Arizona by Kearney and Peebles who added a note to a specimen of *Aphyllon cooperi* stating, “this looks different,” (Collins & Yatskievych, 2015).

Many collectors would continue to be confused by *A. arizonicum*, mislabeling them as various members of *Aphyllon*, most frequently *A. cooperi*, *A. ludoviciana*, or less frequently *A. multiflora*. Dr. Collins had his first contact with the species as a graduate student in 1969 where on a field trip he found a specimen he presumed to be a small-flowered *A. cooperi*, “...which had stayed for a long time until I worked on the Flora of North America, and I began to see things I hadn't noticed before.” During the team's work on the FNA treatments for *Orobanche*, the team had 5 or 6 cabinets reserved in the Missouri Botanical Garden, filled to the brim with maybe five or six-thousand *Orobanche* specimens on loan, of which, somewhere around the ballpark of 45 sheets were identified as this mysterious small-flowered *A. cooperi*. Cue the 2015 paper- one year before Dr. Schneider's *Aphyllon* necromancy- by Dr. Collins and Dr. Yatskievych where *A. arizonicum* was announced to the botanical world (Collins & Yatskievych, 2015). Since then identifications and collections have popped up mostly across the four corners of Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona; and recently, eastern Nevada.



A. arizonicum collage: *A. arizonicum* distinguishing characters starting with top left: 1. anthers lacking distinct glands 2. narrow-acute corolla lobes without an apiculate tooth and noticeable yellow palatal folds 3. glandular, cream-colored tube leading to deep-purple, reflexed lobes. ©Lily Rice

Currently, there are three sightings of this species in Nevada. The first is a specimen north of Elko, NV that is a collection by A.H. Holmgren from 1941, that was relabelled to *A. arizonicum* in late May 2026. Second, an iNaturalist observation by user “duncanbell” near Jean, NV in late April 2022. Finally, my recent addition to the species’ Nevadan range-expansion near Pioche, NV in early May 2026. At the time of seeing this species, I was inundated by species in eastern Nevada that were sparsely showing up on iNaturalist, which struck me as odd because they seemed to be apparent on the landscape. My conclusion was that these organisms weren’t truly that uncommon, just that there weren’t many botanical eyes out east to see them. I figured this might be the case with *A. arizonicum* as well. In my conversation with Dr. Collins, that hypothesis tapped into some support, as a haustorial root might tap into a host.

Lily: “Do you think it’s in recent times that *Aphyllon arizonicum* is making its way out westward and expanding its range or...?”

Dr. Collins: “No, I think it’s another one of those cases where it was hiding in plain sight. You know, my description of *Aphyllon riparium*, 30 years ago, it had been right there in plain sight and completely misunderstood for over a century. But when I got into it, it was clear that it was not *Orobanche ludoviciana*, which is what it had been called.”

I think it appropriate at this time to share a quote that Dr. Collins’ first taxonomy professor would proclaim, which he lovingly shared to this budding taxonomist: “Species do not exist in nature. They only exist in the minds of taxonomists.”

From Dr. Collins’ taxonomic mind we gained several characters with which we might distinguish *A. arizonicum* from the closely related *A. cooperi*. *A. arizonicum* is an annual holoparasite specialized to *Gutierrezia sarothrae* instead of species of *Ambrosia*,

has shorter corollas (15-20mm vs. 16-32mm), has aglandular anthers, typically flowers in summer instead of late-winter to spring, has narrow-acute corolla lobes that lack an apiculate tooth (unlike *A. cooperi*), and its range is mostly above the Mogollon Rim at higher elevations (> 1,500m) instead of below the Mogollon Rim at lower elevations (< 1,000m) (Collins & Yatskievych, 2015).

In closing, I asked Dr. Collins if he might have any advice to botanists who want to try and find more occurrences of *A. arizonicum* in Nevada.

Dr. Collins: “I would say anywhere that you find relatively loose sand, even sand dunes, and there’s *Gutierrezia*, that’s a likely place to keep an eye out for... look for the host first, and then when you find a spot with the host species, you start poking around.”

There you have it, your guiding light from the authority on the species. If you find yourself in eastern Nevada during summer with a hankering to find new populations, get out there and find some populations of *Gutierrezia*- whose herbage I find to smell reminiscent of pickled cucumbers- and you may be the next person in long line of botanists remarking upon an alien-looking *Aphyllon*. If I may quote the highly unscientific 90s television show, X-Files, “The truth is out there.”

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Conservation News:

Roadless Area Conservation Rule Changes

by Hannah Bishop-Moser

The Roadless Area Conservation Rule is a National Policy enacted in 2001 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which establishes prohibitions on road construction, road reconstruction, and timber harvesting in inventoried “roadless areas” in National Forest Service lands. The USDA announced their intentions to rescind the Roadless Rule in 2025.

The impact: Rescinding this rule would strip protections from 3 million acres of inventoried roadless national forest land in Nevada and nearly 45 million acres of national forests (Regulations.gov, 2026). Roughly 54% (about 3.1 million acres) of National Forest System lands in Nevada consist of Inventoried Roadless Areas (duPre & on, 2025).

The argument in favor of rescinding the rule is that it will give decision making up to individual land managers to “reduce regulatory burden”. Additionally, it is argued that this will reduce fire risk (US Forest Service, 2025). Furthermore, this is seen as a way to meet the US Forest Services “Multiple Use Mission” (Special Areas; Roadless Area Conservation, 2026).

These arguments are not based in sound science and/or will irreparably damage ecosystems. It has been shown that forested areas near roads would increase fire risk (Aplet et al., 2026). Additionally, giving control to individual land managers could create an environment for corruption as individual decisions have little governmental oversight and there may be political or monetary incentives for managers to open land to lucrative businesses. Creating roads and removing vegetation will fragment habitat, which would disrupt corridors and territories of wildlife, and also create more opportunities for human-wildlife interaction. This will lead to wildlife death (National Wildlife Federation, 2019). Furthermore, removing old growth trees, which can take hundreds of years to regrow will irreversibly damage the ecosystem.

Current status: On August 18th, 2026, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins released the proposed rule as well as the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The comment period for responding to these is now open and was originally set to close September 21st, 2026, but has since been extended to October 6th, 2026 (Special Areas; Roadless Area Conservation, 2026).

Getting involved: NVNPS plans to make an official comment by October 6th. Members of NVNPS and the general public are encouraged to respond as well. More information can be found on the USDA website here: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/planning/roadless>.

A draft response can be found here: <https://saveroadlessforests.com/send-your-letter> as well as on other environmental activism websites. Will your voice matter? Yes. NEPA is required to take into account responses during the comment period (43 U.S.C 1538 Section 102(c)).

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” - Margaret Mead

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Mapping Nevada's Rare Flora, One Truck Breakdown at a Time

by Lee (Steve) Fram

I hope people will find the Nevada endemic plants map that I made helpful for visualizing the whereabouts, learning about, and locating the state's endemic and rare plants.

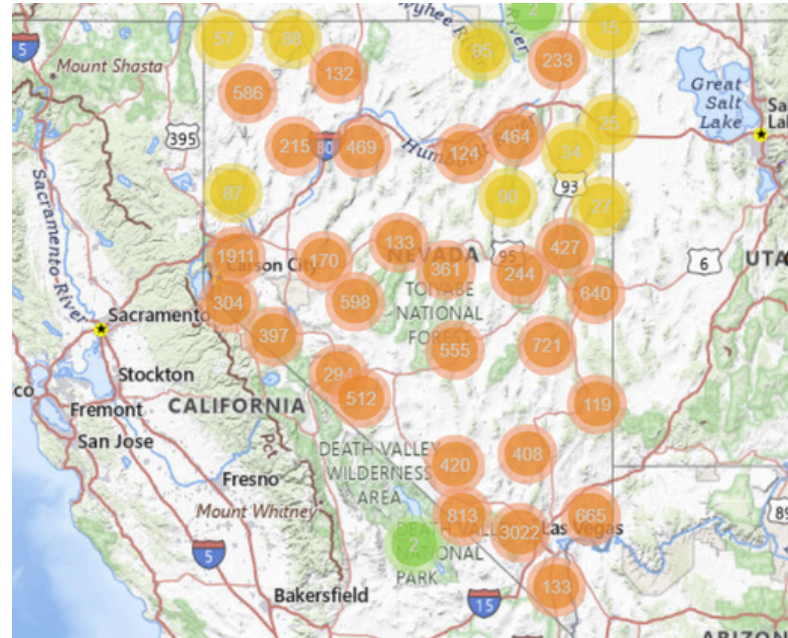
As a consulting botanist new to working in Nevada, I devoured Jerry Tiehm and Jan Nachlinger's book, *Nevada Vascular Plants: An Annotated Checklist of the State's Botanical Diversity*, when I got my hands on it in May. The rich introduction was bewildering to me geographically — I was constantly going online, at least once per paragraph, looking up different mountain ranges and localities as they came up in relation to the plants. That's when the idea started gestating: a map/database combining records from herbarium collections and iNaturalist observations, filterable in various ways.

Then my truck broke down and I was stuck in Elko for five days. I used that time to implement the idea — laid out the conceptualization and got a lot of help from Claude.ai, which did most of the actual coding. The basics took a few days, and I've been working on it here and there since. I almost immediately put it to use: downloading the locations of some Ruby Mountains endemics, loading them into the Gaia GPS app, so I could see them on my phone while hiking without cell service.

What it is

It's an interactive map of Nevada's endemic, near-endemic, and disjunct vascular plants — species found nowhere else, found almost nowhere else, or found here in a range far outside where you'd expect them. And, if you toggle the box for advanced filters & additional taxa, it will include non-endemic, special-status, or rarity-ranked plants (see below).

It draws on two sources: herbarium specimen records (via GBIF) and iNaturalist observations, plotted together so you can see, at a glance, everywhere a given species has actually been documented in the state.



Screenshot of Nevada endemic plants map

The curatorial backbone is Jerry Tiehm and Jan Nachlinger's *Nevada Vascular Plants: An Annotated Checklist of the State's Botanical Diversity* — this project is meant as a companion to that book, not a replacement for it. Their checklist determines which taxa are included and how they're categorized; the map exists to let you actually see where those taxa occur, filter them a dozen different ways, and export a working point set to take into the field.

How I picture this getting used

Planning a field season: For anyone planning a trip through Nevada: draw a box around an area you'll be passing through or exploring, and see what's already documented there — and what isn't. I'd especially suggest trying the Physiographic Region filters if you'll be in one of the areas the book's introduction describes.

For botanists contracted to conduct plant surveys, I hope it saves you the digging through GBIF and iNat separately that it used to take me, when looking for reference populations. For example, this June, I was contracted to survey for

rare plants in the southern Monitor Range, northeast of Tonopah. Before heading out, I drew a box around the project area and searched it against species I'd been asked to look for. One of them, *Eriogonum esmeraldense* var. *toiyabense*, turned up a single herbarium collection – sitting right inside the boundary of the area I'd been contracted to survey. A reference population, conveniently waiting inside the work site itself. And it happened that the same information about this population was given to me for work, but with GPS coordinates that were slightly off. So having my own, more accurate data was tremendously helpful in finding this tiny plant. (It turned out that it had been originally misidentified - it was actually *Eriogonum esmeraldense* var. *esmeraldense*. This has been confirmed by Jerry Tiehm, who had originally misidentified it. All of this was valuable information!)

NNPS members exploring their own patch of Nevada: If you've ever wondered what's rare or endemic near a favorite hike, a family property, or your own backyard, this is a fast way to find out.

Education and outreach: A visual, explorable map of Nevada's unique flora seems like a natural fit for talks, field trips, or introducing newer members to just how much of Nevada's plant life exists nowhere else on Earth.

Spotting gaps: Because the map shows exactly where records do and don't exist, it's also a way to notice where a species should be searched for but hasn't been recently – or ever.

A couple of things worth knowing

The site defaults to a simple view – just the endemics, near-endemics, and disjuncts from Tiehm & Nachlinger's checklist. There's also an "advanced" toggle that opens up a much larger layer: species with official BLM, U.S. Forest Service, Endangered Species Act, or Nevada state special status, plus a broader Nevada Division of Natural Heritage watch list ranked for rarity by NatureServe. That expanded layer roughly triples the number of taxa on the map – genuinely useful if you're doing conservation-adjacent work, but I didn't want it cluttering the experience for someone who just wants to see where Nevada's endemics grow.

The site also works offline once loaded – useful in the field, where cell service in rural Nevada is often nonexistent exactly where the interesting plants are.

Open, and open to feedback

The whole project is open source, and I'd genuinely welcome feedback, bug reports, or ideas from anyone who uses it – however small. If you spot a record that looks wrong, a filter that doesn't behave the way you'd expect, or a feature you wish existed, please reach out.

Nevada Endemics Interactive Map

<https://framL.github.io/nv-endemics/>

Code

github.com/FramL/nv-endemics

Contact

nv_endemics.ambiguous374@passmail.net

Thanks to Jerry Tiehm and Jan Nachlinger for the checklist that makes this whole project possible, and to NNPS for the chance to share it here.



Nevada endemic *Primula nevadensis*
© Lee, iNaturalist

Upcoming Events - October & November 2026

NVNPS Programs

In 2026 NVNPS will host seven in-person programs, held at 7:00 PM on February 5, March 5, April 2, May 7, September 3, October 1, and November 5. Programs are open to everyone and available via Zoom, with in-person meetings in Reno and Henderson. Social time begins at 6:30 PM for informal connection and refreshments.

Our next Nevada Native Plant Society program will be held Thursday, November 5th!

NVNPS Outreach Events

Pleistocene Palooza – National Fossil Day

Saturday, October 17, 2026 | 9:30 AM–12:30 PM

Discover what remains of Ice Age Las Vegas at Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument's annual National Fossil Day celebration. This free outdoor event features opportunities to meet scientists, get up close with fossils, participate in the Junior Paleontologist Program, see live animals, and learn about the Pleistocene plants, animals, and environments of Tule Springs. The Nevada Native Plant Society will be tabling at the event, so be sure to stop by and visit us!

Location: Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument, Durango Drive & Moccasin Road, Las Vegas, NV

Galena Creek Fall Festival

Friday, October 30, 2026 | 10:00 AM–8:00 PM

Celebrate fall at the Galena Creek Fall Festival at the Galena Creek Visitor Center! The event will feature pumpkin smashing and carving, music, local vendors and nonprofits, arts and crafts, raffles, kids' games, food, adult drinks, and more. Proceeds support environmental education programs that help kids connect with nature and become stewards of the planet. Galena Creek Fall Festival Flyer

The Nevada Native Plant Society will be tabling at the festival.

Location: Galena Creek Visitor Center

More information: galenacreek.org

Fall Native Plant Sales

Washoe Conservation Nursery – Fall Opening

Thursday, September 17, 2026 – Saturday, October 10, 2026 | Thursdays–Saturdays | 9:00 AM–3:00 PM

Browse a wide selection of Nevada native plants grown for restoration and home landscapes.

Location: 885 Eastlake Blvd., New Washoe City, NV 89704

Fall Native Plant Sale at Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve

Saturday, October 3, 2026 | 10:00 AM–1:00 PM

Shop a selection of bird- and desert-friendly native plants from Desert Love Native Plant Nursery while enjoying the natural beauty of the Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve. Free guided bird and plant tours begin at 10:00 AM, making this a great opportunity to learn more about native plants and the wildlife they support.

Location: Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve, 350 E. Galleria Dr., Henderson, NV

More Information:

<https://www.facebook.com/RRASMAIN/posts/join-us-the-city-of-henderson-and-our-friends-at-henderson-bi/1397468919221036/>

Walker Basin Conservancy Native Plant Sale

Saturday, October 10 – Sunday, October 11, 2026 | 9:00 AM–3:00 PM

Celebrate autumn by exploring a diverse selection of native plants suited to Nevada's landscapes while supporting the Walker Basin Conservancy's conservation efforts. Whether you're creating pollinator habitat, restoring a landscape, or simply adding beautiful native species to your garden.

Location: 170 Smith Gage Rd., Smith Valley, NV

Community Events and Volunteer Opportunities

Bird Fest 2026

Saturday, October 3, 2026 | 10:00 AM-2:00 PM

Celebrate the birds of Northern Nevada and World Migratory Bird Day with Nevada State Parks at Washoe Lake State Park.

Location: Washoe Lake State Park - South Day Use Area

More information:

<https://parks.nv.gov/events/bird-fest-2026>

UNR Native Seed Bank: Safeguarding Nevada's Wild Landscapes

Wednesday, October 14, 2026 | 9:00 AM | Virtual Event

Join Shannon Swim, Director of the UNR Native Seed Bank, to learn how the seed bank got started, what they do, and the importance of native seed in safeguarding Nevada's wild landscapes.

Location: Virtual Event

More information:

<https://events.unr.edu/event/unr-native-seed-bank-safeguarding-nevadas-wild-landscapes>

Seed, Mud, Roll, Toss, Restore - National Public Lands Day

Saturday, October 17, 2026 | 9:00 AM-12:00 PM

Celebrate National Public Lands Day with the Bureau of Land Management! Participants will make native plant seed balls to help rejuvenate a nearby burned area and can visit hands-on educational booths. The event is free.

Location: Hafen Park, 450 E. Hafen Lane, Mesquite, NV 89027

More information:

<https://www.blm.gov/announcement/seed-mud-roll-toss-restore-lets-bring-desert-back-life>

Desert Refuge Native Species Planting

Sunday, October 18, 2026 | 10:00 AM

Join Friends of Nevada Wilderness and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to help restore native plant life at the Desert National Wildlife Refuge.

Location: Desert National Wildlife Refuge, Corn Creek Visitor Center

More information:

https://www.nevadawilderness.org/desert_refuge_native_species_planting

Gold Butte Springs Restoration

Thursday, October 29-Sunday, November 1, 2026

Join Friends of Nevada Wilderness and the Bureau of Land Management for a multi-day restoration project focused on restoring wildlife habitat in Gold Butte National Monument.

Location: Gold Butte National Monument

More information:

https://www.nevadawilderness.org/gold_butte_spring_restoration_10-29-26

Planting and Collecting Seeds: Mormon Mountains

Saturday, November 14 & Saturday, November 21, 2026 | 9:00 AM-1:00 PM

Join the Nevada Department of Wildlife for post-fire native plant restoration in the Mormon Mountains.

Location: Mormon Mountains area, Nevada 89008

More information:

https://ndow.galaxydigital.com/need/detail/?need_id=1292534

Mount Rose Native Seed Spreading

Late October-Mid-December 2026 | Date Dependent on Conditions

Help restore native habitat in the Mount Rose Wilderness! Volunteers will hike into recovering riparian areas to spread seeds from native grasses and pollinator-friendly plants. There is no set event date; volunteers who sign up will be contacted when weather and ground conditions are right, typically about a week before the outing. Projects generally take half a day and involve moderate hiking of 2-6 miles. RSVP is required.

Location: Hunter Creek Trailhead

More information:

https://www.nevadawilderness.org/2026_mount_rose_native_seed_spreading

Desert Love Native Plants: Climate Talks - Native Plants in Captivity

Saturday, December 19, 2026

Discover the challenges of incorporating native plants into home landscapes and what to consider when bringing desert natives into your yard. This free session is part of Desert Love Native Plants' monthly lecture series. **Registration is required.**

Location: Cactus Joe's Nursery, 12740 Blue Diamond Rd., Las Vegas

More information:

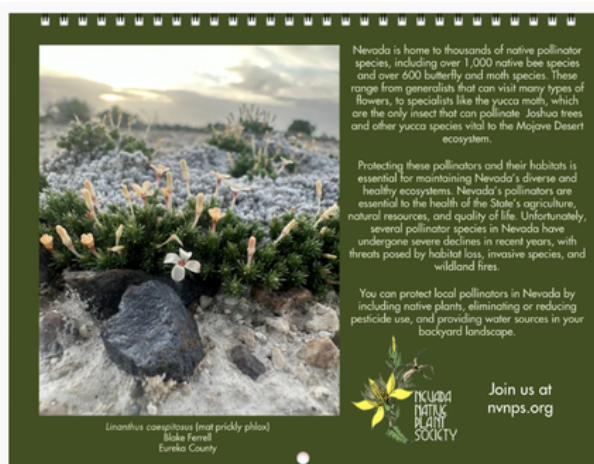
<https://www.desertlovelv.org/events>

Society updates

Calendar Time!

Our 2027 calendar is now at the printer! It features 22 photos by 15 photographers from 9 counties; all centered on the 2027 theme: plant-pollinator interactions. The calendar is printed on heavy-duty matte paper and remains \$15. Shipping costs have increased: S&H is \$8.00 for one calendar and \$10.00 for two. For orders of more than two calendars, please contact president@nvnps.org for a shipping quote.

Calendars can be ordered on our website (<https://www.nvnps.org/store>) beginning Monday, October 5th. If you live near UNR or the College of Southern Nevada in Henderson, you can choose the pickup option at checkout. Calendars will also be available for purchase at the monthly meeting on November 5.



Outreach Updates

A special welcome to our newest board member, Spencer Hurt! Spencer moved to Reno in May to join Dr. Elizabeth Leger's lab. He is our new Northern Nevada Outreach Coordinator.

At one recent event, board member Brianna Kramer attended the Pollinator Bioblitz at Floyd Lamb Park as a vendor. A table was set up with merch, NVNPS info, and educational material on pollinator interactions with native plants. Children participated in a fun activity demonstrating how bees spread pollen from flower to flower. The booth gained attention from various attendees who were excited to hear about NVNPS missions and interested in future field trips. The southern Nevada division of NVNPS hopes to continue expanding activity in Clark County by participating in more outreach events like this and coordinating more excursions.

Thank you to everyone who participated in outreach events this summer. These gatherings give us a chance to connect with local communities and share our appreciation for Nevada's wonderful native flora. There are still a few events ahead this year. You can find them in the events section of our newsletter or on our website:

<https://www.nvnps.org/events-1>

Welcome new members!

A special thank you to our new members who joined since August 1st, 2026

- Mary Collins, Reno
- Ian Winbrock, Sacramento, CA
- Shayleen Bowling, Gerlach
- Giuseppe Casalino, Santa Clara, UT
- Britney Keele, Winnemucca

Board of Directors

Officers

- President: Emma Wynn, president@nvnp.org
- President Emeritus: Arnold Tiehm
- Vice President: Alison Agneray, aagneray@gmail.com
- Recording Secretary: Esther Hwang, secretary@nvnp.org
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- Cory King
- Lara Derasary
- Hermi Hyatt
- Cody Ernst-Brock
- Brianna Kramer

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- Conservation: Hannah Bishop-Moser
- Outreach:
 - N. Nevada: Spencer Hurt
 - S. Nevada: Brianna Kramer and Hermi Hyatt
- Field Trips,
 - N. Nevada: Christopher Mackessy,
 - S. Nevada: Brianna Kramer and Hermi Hyatt
- Grants: Jim Morefield, grants@nvnp.org
- Horticulture: John Weiser and Charlie Duncan
- Membership Coordinator: Alison Agneray
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- UNLV Curator: Marcus Hooker
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 - N. Nevada: Sarah Kulpa
 - S. Nevada: Marcus Hooker
- Publications: Arnold Tiehm
- Rare Plants: Joshua Lovera, rareplants@nvnp.org
- Social media: Emma Wynn & Sarah Kulpa, social@nvnp.org
- Webmaster: Patrick Silbey, psilbey@gmail.com

