



Image courtesy of Skyhigh Perspectives.

GEI Consultants Environmental Insights

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People Updates

GEI Welcomes New Staff



Michael D. Smith, Ph.D., recently joined GEI's Environmental Practice group as the leader of the CEQA/NEPA Environmental Practice team. He is a nationally-recognized leader in CEQA/NEPA compliance with more than 20 years of experience in project and program management, technical analysis, policy development, and training and education for a wide range of public and private sector clients. Dr. Smith's current work focuses on providing project and program management, technical analysis and review, policy development and review, and training and education focused on CEQA and NEPA compliance for some of California's and the nation's most complex and controversial projects relating to energy development, and water and transportation infrastructure projects. He frequently provides training and strategic advice for NEPA, CEQA and related environmental compliance requirements as an adjunct faculty member at numerous educational institutions (see article under "Practice Updates" below).

GEI Contact: Michael Smith, Ph.D., mismith@geiconsultants.com



Ryan Jolley, recently joined GEI's Environmental Practice group as a senior CEQA/NEPA project manager. He has 13 years of experience managing water resources and energy projects in northern and central California. He specializes in managing and preparing CEQA and NEPA documents and obtaining environmental permits and approvals from Federal and State agencies. Mr. Jolley has managed water rights permitting, water supply assessments, and land rights acquisitions (easements and licenses) for siting numerous linear utility facilities. He has completed work on surface and groundwater water supply, water infrastructure, stream restoration, flood protection, water quality improvement, dam/reservoir, hydropower, desalination, recreation, and numerous gas and electric transmission projects.

GEI Contact: Ryan Jolley, rjolley@geiconsultants.com



Kesha Chapman, recently joined GEI's Environmental Practice group as a senior restoration designer. With 25 years of experience working on restoration planning and design projects, Mr. Chapman will work with the Ecological Restoration team to provide planning services and manage design implementation for a diverse range of natural resource and landscape architecture projects, including recreation and public access facilities (such as parks and trails); erosion control; and oak woodland, riparian, and wetland habitat mitigation and restoration. He has extensive experience in restoration construction management and supervision; construction cost estimating; and preparing construction specifications and drawings, land use analysis and planning, and conceptual designs.

GEI Contact: Kesha Chapman, kchapman@geiconsultants.com



GEI biologists conducting field monitoring.

Invitation – Join Us!

GEI's Providing CEQA For Biologists Training

In mid-January, Kelly Holland and Anne King – senior wildlife biologists in GEI's Environmental Practice – led a 4-hour training titled “CEQA for Biologists.” The training, which was organized by the Association of Environmental Professionals in Sacramento, provided an overview of CEQA and described a step-by-step process for approaching, developing, and preparing a biological resources section in a CEQA document. Ms. Holland and Ms. King led an in-depth discussion of field work needed to support the Biological Resources section, ways to focus the setting, how to evaluate impacts, and how to develop mitigation. **GEI is offering this half-day training to our clients on Monday, March 11. Please contact Kelly Holland to register!**



GEI biologists conducting field monitoring.

GEI Contact:



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Anne King
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Project Updates

Multi-Benefit Levee Improvement Project at Bethel Island Completed

GEI recently assisted the Bethel Island Municipal Improvement District in the design and implementation of a multi-benefit levee improvement project at Horseshoe Bend. The project included creation of fish-friendly waterside levee habitat, by incorporating an approximately 18-foot-wide stepped waterside bench at appropriate elevations for creation of tidal marsh and riparian scrub-shrub/shaded riverine aquatic habitat, installing temporary erosion control measures, and planting the waterside bench densely with appropriate native species. GEI engineers led the levee improvement design and provided levee construction oversight, while GEI's restoration ecologists and landscape architects designed and provided oversight of installation of habitat elements, prepared a habitat restoration and monitoring plan for approval by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), procured plant materials, and will conduct habitat monitoring and maintenance guidance throughout the habitat establishment period. The project, which was funded by a DWR Delta Levees Program grant for multi-benefit levee projects, was completed in December 2018 and appears to be on track to provide functional waterside habitat for native fish and other aquatic organisms as designed.

GEI Contact:



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Planted waterside bench.

Project Updates (continued)

West Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency Completes Southport Levee Improvement Project

In December 2018, the West Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency (WSAFCA) completed construction of the Southport Early Implementation Project. This project included 4 miles of new setback levee and 2.5 miles of repair-in-place levee improvements, provided advanced mitigation for the congressionally authorized West Sacramento Project, and reestablished the historic floodplain along the Sacramento River. The project also improved public safety and emergency response by relocating an existing road off a seismically vulnerable levee that provided both flood operations and evacuation routes during high water events. GEI provided biological and archaeological monitoring and cultural resources studies to support compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. GEI's restoration ecologists continue to assist WSAFCA with implementation of the restoration plan (see below).

The project has many ecosystem benefits, including: creating approximately 200 acres of tule marsh and fresh water habitat for salmonids and other species; reducing night light pollution on the river; establishing oak savannah plants which will provide shade onto the water and habitat for raptors, other birds, and savannah species; adding a Class 1 bike route; preserving Bee Lakes; and providing access points which will facilitate low-intensity recreation as well as river access for tribal cultural practices. In addition, GEI archaeologists and ecological restoration experts worked with WSAFCA and project engineers to redesign the project to avoid archaeological sites that were encountered during construction and help ensure that these significant cultural resources will be preserved for future generations.

GEI Contact:



Denise Jurich, RPA
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Aerial view of completed Southport levee improvements.

Southport Levee Improvement Project Moves into Floodplain Restoration Phase

As summarized above, WSAFCA recently completed construction of 4 miles of new setback levee along the Sacramento River in West Sacramento. The old levee was breached in three locations, creating 120 acres of new floodplain habitat connected to the Sacramento River. GEI recently prepared construction documents (i.e., plans and specifications) for restoration of the newly created floodplain. GEI helped determine floodplain elevations that support desired habitats to benefit target aquatic species, including salmonids and Delta smelt. GEI developed a planting plan to create mixed riparian woodlands, mixed riparian scrub, riparian cottonwood forest, emergent marsh, tule marsh, and open water habitats on the site. GEI will oversee restoration of the site, which is set to begin in May 2019 and be completed by early 2020.

GEI Contact:



Vance Howard,
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Newly created floodplain ready to be planted in 2019.

Practice Updates

Practice Leadership at Professional Conferences and Trainings

GEI's Environmental Practice Brings Focus to Health and Safety

Devin Barry, biologist with GEI's Environmental Practice group, presented on "Impacts of Transient Human Communities on Riparian Habitat and Wildlife, and Biological Field Staff Monitoring Practices and Safety" at the Annual Meeting of the Western Section of The Wildlife Society in February 2019. Using a case study of a construction monitoring project site in Sacramento County, Ms. Barry documented the impacts of human transient communities on wildlife and habitats (e.g., species diversity, density, and abundance). She acknowledged that there was no published literature on this topic, thus stirring professional interest in developing more focused research in this area of study. Further, she reviewed the unique set of health and safety risks for field staff and outlined the measures that GEI's Health and Safety Team developed to mitigate these risks.

GEI Contact:



Devin Barry
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GEI biologists conducting construction monitoring.

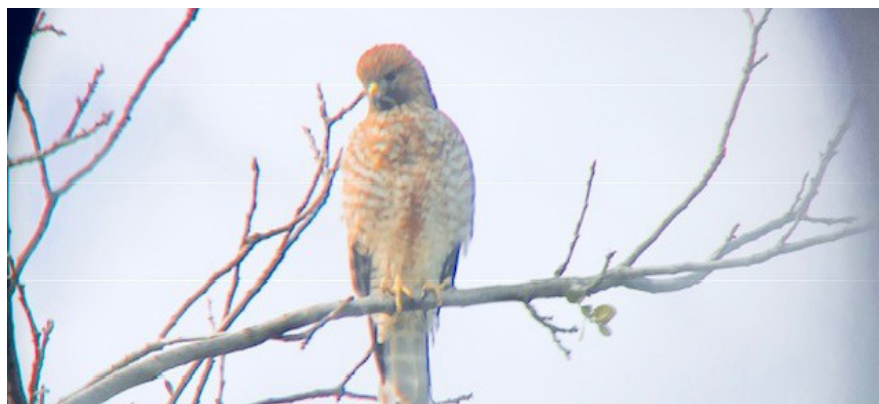
Developing New Tools for Data Analysis and Interpretation

Brook Constantz, biologist and GIS Specialist with GEI's Environmental Practice group, presented on "Nesting Behavior of Birds over Two Years During Major Levee Improvement Construction" at the Annual Meeting of the Western Section of The Wildlife Society in February 2019. Drawing on over 2 years of monitoring data collected on nesting birds during the construction of the Southport Levee Improvement Project, Mr. Constantz delivered a detailed analysis of nesting preferences, behavior, and success for a variety of nesting birds. He also developed GIS models to display a time lapse of nesting bird occurrences and nest success over the 2-year monitoring period.

GEI Contact:



Brook Constantz
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Red-shouldered hawk.

Practice Leadership at Professional Conferences and Trainings (Continued)

Leaders in NEPA Trainings



Senior Environmental Practice Leader, **Michael Smith, Ph.D.**, will be busy leading a number of NEPA training workshops in California and throughout the U.S. in the coming months. In January 2019, Dr. Smith led an Introduction to NEPA workshop for the U.C. Davis Land Use and Natural Resources Program, and this coming April, he will be teaching an Advanced NEPA Workshop there. He will be co-teaching a Cumulative Effects Assessment workshop as part of the International Association of Impact Assessment annual conference in Brisbane, Australia, in April, and he will also co-teach an Introductory NEPA workshop in partnership with the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) at the annual meeting of the National Association of Environmental Professionals (NAEP) in Baltimore, Maryland, in May. He will also lead the California Association of Environmental Professionals (AEP) NEPA Basics workshop series in October. GEI has also recently entered into a partnership with The Shipley Group, a Utah-based company that is the nation's oldest NEPA and environmental permitting training firms, and Dr. Smith will be leading several workshops for them this year, including NEPA Overview workshops with the U.S. Navy in San Diego, California, in February and Norfolk, Virginia, in June. He will also be teaching an Introductory NEPA/Tools for More Efficient NEPA Processes workshop in Denver, Colorado, in April.

GEI Contact: Michael D. Smith, Ph.D., mismith@geiconsultants.com

GEI is Key Sponsor of 2019 Society for California Archaeology Annual Meeting

The 53rd Annual Meeting of the Society for California Archaeology will be held March 7–10 in Sacramento, California. GEI will underwrite the meeting at the Diamond Level, and will be hosting a wine-tasting table at the Silent Auction event. The meeting is the largest professional gathering of archaeologists in California, and will be attended by senior archaeologist, **Denise Jurich**; archaeologists Jesse Martinez, Karen Gardner, and Julie Sage; and architectural historian, Patricia Ambacher.



GEI Contact: Denise Jurich, RPA, djurich@geiconsultants.com



GEI archaeologists assessing a discovery in the field.

Practice Updates (continued)

Practice Leadership in the Press

Senior Restoration Ecologist Featured in Journal of Applied Ecology



GEI's **Jennifer Burt, Ph.D.**, a senior restoration ecologist in our Rancho Cordova office, was recently featured in the article "The Scars of Skiing's Past" in Tahoe Quarterly Magazine. The article describes the results of research that Dr. Burt published in the Journal of Applied Ecology in 2016 on the slow rate of ecological recovery, on abandoned ski slopes in the Sierra Nevada. Dr. Burt works on diverse land management and restoration projects throughout the state of California, but has extensive experience and interest in the management and restoration of montane and subalpine ecosystems in the Sierra Nevada, and is considered by many to be an expert in the field of ski slope management and rehabilitation. Read the Tahoe Quarterly article [here](#).

GEI Contact: Jennifer Burt, Ph.D., jburt@geiconsultants.com

Senior Wildlife Biologist Co-Authors Article in The Wildlife Professional

GEI's **Kelly Holland**, a senior wildlife biologist in our Rancho Cordova office, was a co-author on an article featured in the January/February 2019 edition of The Wildlife Professional, a magazine published by The Wildlife Society (TWS). This magazine provides news and analysis to inform wildlife professionals about advancements in wildlife science, conservation, management, policy, and education. Ms. Holland, who for the past 2 years has served on the Board of the Western Section of TWS, collaborated with Caroline Murphy (Government Relations Program Coordinator) and James Ramakka (Board member of the TWS Southwest Section) on "The Conservation Affairs Network in Action: Coordinating Wildlife Policy Issues Across TWS Sections and Chapters" article. This article highlighted the collaboration that can occur among TWS members in different regions of the U.S., in developing focused responses to national policies.



GEI Contact: Kelly Holland, kholland@geiconsultants.com

Practice Leadership in Professional Organizations

Participation in 2019 Water Leaders Class through the Water Education Foundation



Erica Bishop, a Senior Water Resources Planner with GEI, was recently chosen as a member of the Water Education Foundation's (WEF) 2019 William R. Gianelli Water Leaders Class – WEF's highly competitive and respected career development program. Initiated in 1997, Water Leaders is a 1-year program that identifies up-and-coming water leaders from diverse backgrounds and aims to deepen knowledge of water resources; enhance individual leadership skills; and prepare participants to take an active, cooperative approach to decision-making about water resource issues. This year's class is made up of 23, early to mid-career water professionals from across California, and includes engineers, lawyers, resource specialists, and others from a range of public and private entities and nongovernmental organizations. The group will spend the year examining the impact wildfires have on the supply and quality of water resources in California and offering policy recommendations to help address those impacts while also participating in networking, educational, and community events facilitated by WEF. At year's end, the group will present their policy recommendations to WEF's Board of Directors at the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) conference.

GEI Contact: Erica Bishop, ebishop@geiconsultants.com

California National Liaison for AEP

Dr. Michael Smith is currently an elected Board of Directors member of the California Association of Environmental Professionals (AEP) and serves as the California chapter representative on the Board of Directors of the National Association of Environmental Professionals (NAEP).

GEI Contact: Michael D. Smith, Ph.D., mismith@geiconsultants.com



Practice Leadership in Professional Organizations (continued)

President-Elect of the Western Section of The Wildlife Society



At the 2019 Annual Meeting of the Western Section of The Wildlife Society (TWS), it was announced that **Kelly Holland** was selected as the President-Elect for the Section. [The Wildlife Society](#) is an international non-profit scientific and educational association, representing over 15,000 wildlife biologists and managers dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. The [TWS Western Section](#) comprises over 1,000 professional wildlife managers, biologists, ecologists, botanists, and students from California, Hawaii, Nevada, and Guam – all devoted to the sustainable conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat in the western United States. As President-Elect, Ms. Holland will be instrumental in creating next year's Annual Meeting for the Section, which includes determining the conference theme, formulating and inviting speakers to the plenary session, and organizing and selecting presenters for the concurrent sessions. Section membership elected her from a group of three nominees for the position. She will serve a 3-year term (including President and Past-President).

GEI Contact: Kelly Holland, kholland@geiconsultants.com

Delta Conservancy Appointment by California Assembly Leader

On April 19, 2018, **Leo Winternitz**, a senior consultant with GEI, was appointed by the Honorable Anthony Rendon, Speaker of the California Assembly, to serve a 4-year term on the governing board of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy. The Delta Conservancy is a primary State agency that implements ecosystem restoration in the Delta and supports efforts that advance environmental protection and the economic well-being of Delta residents. The Delta Conservancy works with local communities and other parties to preserve, protect, and restore the natural resources, economy, and agriculture of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and Suisun Marsh. Mr. Winternitz has worked for over 35 years on behalf of state government, local government and non-governmental organizations on environmental and water resource related issues pertaining to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and its major tributaries.



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GEI biologist, Brook Constanz, conducting construction monitoring.