

Special projects or programs candidate responsible for accomplishing:

Jo Smith graduated from Stanford University with a degree in art. She was not only an accomplished artist but an artist with a passion for preserving the environment with her actions and with her pen. Jo moved to the Sacramento region in the early 1960's. She became instant friends with Effie Yeaw and together they embarked on projects that would change the course of our natural history, preserving and promoting the diversity of nature found in our own community. Jo became the illustrator, the vision for the outdoor world of the Sacramento region. She could create the true essence of a bird or a black-tailed deer or a blue oak leaf through her superb artwork. She co-edited and illustrated over eight publications related to the American River Parkway and the Sacramento Region. She helped to keep Effie Yeaws' The Outdoor World of the Sacramento Region current and was involved in all eight revisions of the book, most recently in 2004. The book includes details and drawings of over 600 plants, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and insects. Jos' illustrations brought life to the descriptions. School children today can envision a ruddy duck or a Cooper's Hawk or a Chicory Flower from the wonderful illustrations Jo shared with our region. Her illustrations in An American River Journal are truly inspiring. She and her friend Peter Hayes created a journal that will delight your senses and give you a whole new appreciation of the American River. Jo not only wrote and illustrated, she led. For more than 40 years Jo shared nature with children so they could explore and appreciate their local environment and wildlife. She and Effie Yeaw voluntarily led children through the Deterding Woods which came to be known as the Effie Yeaw Nature Area. With Effie's passing in 1970, Jo continued her vision of bringing children into nature to discover the wonders of the woods along the American River. In 1976, with the opening of the Effie Yeaw Nature Center Jo again volunteered to develop and deliver programs to the public. In 1980, the center was threatened with closure and Jo worked to form the American River Natural History Association to partner with the County. This group continues to be active today and has most recently taken over management of the Nature Center. Jo also co-founded the Sacramento Chapter of the Urban Creeks Council and coordinated the first annual Neighborhood Creek Cleanup that started in 1990. The event now takes place in several counties throughout the region. Several events are planned throughout the week leading up to the weekend cleanup and celebration. The event emphasizes that everyone has creeks and the cleanup is one way for people throughout the region to connect with each other. Jo, a humble and unpretentious lover of nature left her mark on our region. She spent years devoting time to the community and sharing her passion. Her quest to bring people into nature, to savor their environment and explore the natural ecosystems was realized and continues to live on in her publications and her accomplishments, as her legacy.

Leadership Positions held:

Founding member - American River Natural History Association (1981)

ARNHA was organized and incorporated as a private foundation in 1981 by a group of citizens to promote, aid and augment the educational and interpretive programs of the Sacramento County Department of Parks and Recreation, especially at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center and throughout the American River Parkway

Founding Member - Effie Yeaw Nature Center (1976)

Cofounder - Sacramento Chapter – Urban Creeks Council

Service included:

Sacramento County Parks & Recreation Commission

Advisory Committee to update the American River Parkway Plan

Sacramento County Open Space Task Force

Arden Arcade Community Planning Council

Girl Scout Leader, environmental mentor

Sacramento Science Center Board of Directors

Sacramento County Grand Jury

Arcade Creek Recreation and Park District Board of Directors

American River Parkway Advisory Committee

Active member of many nature groups including:

Audubon Society

American River Parkway Foundation

Save the American River Association (SARA)

Sacramento Tree Foundation



#### Service to Public Groups and Organizations:

Jo, as stated in a tribute to her, was an environmental evangelist in the tradition of naturalist Effie Yeaw, her mentor and friend. She made much of the natural world come alive for people, especially children. Jo was a passionate volunteer who enjoyed helping others to savor the beauty of their natural surroundings in a way no other person could. Someone once said "Mrs. Smith was a forceful organizer but reluctant leader. Her passion for preserving the environment inspired others to get involved." Jo not only inspired others, she herself put in an immeasurable amount of time as a dedicated volunteer who shared her gift with several different organizations. Be it as a volunteer leading a school group down a trail at Effie Yeaw Nature Center, or picking up trash in the creeks on Creek Week, or staffing a booth for the Sacramento Tree Foundation, Jo Smith seemed to be everywhere, giving a hand. This hand was not only extended to groups that touched the environment. Among other things, Jo was also a state leader and member of the League of Women Voters for more than 50 years, serving on the State Board as Legislative Director for several years.

Jo Smith, a prominent Sacramento naturalist and environmental advocate who inspired others to save nature by savoring the beauty of its wildlife and habitats, passed away in December of 2008. In a letter from the County Parks and Recreation Commission, it was stated, "Jo has left a legacy of good work, stewardship, and important publications that will encourage children and adults that visit the Effie Yeaw Nature Center, or see and read her work elsewhere, to take up the cause of beneficial stewardship for our natural areas. All who enjoy and benefit from clean creeks and the American River Parkway have her to thank. Her energy and guidance will be missed, but never forgotten."

#### Awards and Honors:

Although Jo was not the kind of person who expected to be recognized or rewarded, her good deeds did not go unnoticed. Some of the awards Jo received include:

National Chevron Conservation Award, one of 25 people honored in the oldest privately sponsored conservation recognition program in the nation. The awards ceremony was held in Washington D.C.

Sacramento Regional Pride Award

Tierra del Oro Girl Scout Council, Girl Scout Role Model Award

Jo Smith Nature Trail, a trail along Arcade Creek adjacent to a bridge crossing and interpretive exhibits, near American River College, was named in her honor.

Professional Publications:

Jo was known for her remarkable abilities as an illustrator, writer and editor.  
Her publications included:

An American River Journal (illustrator)

Wild Neighbors – the American River Parkway Activity Book (co-illustrator)

Discovering the American River Parkway (co-writer and illustrator)

The Outdoor World of the Sacramento Region (co-editor and illustrator)

Nature's Window (co-editor and illustrator)

Otti: A Child of the Nisenan (revision and illustrator)

Sacramento's Outdoor World (co-editor and illustrator)

The American River Almanac (co-editor and illustrator)

SARA filmed an oral history interview with Jo, one of the American River Parkway pioneers, in October of 2007

Training and Education:

Jo became interested in nature as a child while playing and exploring in open fields and a creek behind her family's home in Los Altos. She earned a bachelor's degree in art at Stanford University. Jo's education and appreciation of the outdoor world of the region came when she moved to Sacramento and met Effie Yeaw in the 1960's. "It was my introduction into appreciating what we have right here, in our own back yard". Her education and interest continued to blossom over her nearly 50 year involvement as an environmental evangelist for the Sacramento Region.

Other Noteworthy Information:

As professional park people, when we look for someone who has made a contribution for many generations to come, we often times over look those who prefer to work behind the scene. Jo Smith was one of those people. Her contribution was having the foresight to be a part of those doing the leg work to create the world renowned American River Parkway, and then following up with helping to provoke and educate others about its value will live on as long as there is an American River Parkway.

Jo's legacy will also live on in the many natural and cultural history publications she illustrated, co-wrote, revised and edited. Her publications can be found throughout the region in the hands of grade school teachers as well as college professors. They have also been used throughout the country as fine examples of how providing information on one's outdoor world can truly make a difference.

Jo was quoted in a publication as saying, "We must accept responsibility for the condition of our society and the environment and do what we can to make a better world."

She did just that...