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Blue Oak Group



Butte, Glenn, Lassen, Plumas & Tehama Counties

Stop Valley's Edge: Vote NO!

By Susan Tchudi, Smart Growth Advocates

Stop Valley's Edge has been the most hotly debated issue of this election season. As you receive this newsletter, the election is drawing to a close. Mail-in ballots must be postmarked by March 5. If you have not yet done so, Please Vote NO on O and P.

As I'm writing this at the end of January, I'm feeling optimistic about stopping this development. The Stop Valley's Edge team has been indefatigable in its efforts to educate people about the negative impacts of Valley's Edge.

We were able to rent office space from the Yoga Center of Chico for the two months leading up to the election. There, people signed up to canvas neighborhoods to inform them about Valley's Edge and to encourage them to vote NO. We reprinted "Stop Valley's Edge" yard signs more than once to keep up with the desire of Chicoans to make their objections known. We wrote letters to the editor and guest commentaries and editorials. When we began this effort, we had no money, but with newsletters, phone calls, tabling, canvassing, and myriad

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Stop Valley's Edge *(continued from p. 1)*



fundraisers, we got out the word about our financial needs. We were thus able to print information cards and yard signs, rent billboards, create videos, and buy advertising on television. The groundswell of support was heartening and maybe even a little surprising. Clearly, this issue resonated with Chicoans.

So I'm feeling optimistic. We think we'll win, but we might not.

What happens next?

If we win, we've slowed down the development of 1448 acres of beautiful and important open space of grasslands, oak savannah, and wetlands.

But that's not the end of the story. This land is still considered to be a Chico Special Planning Area. Another developer could propose another plan to build on that land. Or the current developers could return with a revised plan. We would then have to go through the whole approval/disapproval process again. The original Environmental Impact Report would still have validity, but we believe it is seriously flawed.

There are other options after a "NO" vote:

We hope to find a land conservancy or land trust that might purchase this land as a nature preserve or park. Such a designation could provide opportunities for education and research. It might also allow access for gentle use by hikers and bikers that would not disrupt animal habitats or endangered meadowfoam or valuable wetlands.

If we lose? If Chicoans approve Valley's Edge?

First, the Sierra Club, along with AquAlliance and the Environmental Defense Fund, has a pending lawsuit that will be taken up based on the inadequacy of the Environmental Impact Report.

An ideal solution whether we win or lose would be to vote in a new City Council--one that is more dedicated to the General Plan--one committed to density and infill; one more attuned to

(concluded on page 3)

Newsletter Information

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For submissions, comments, or inquiries, contact: Suzette Welch, booksontape@rocketmail.com 530 570-3240. Please include name, phone number, and address with each submission. Short, single-topic articles are preferred. Deadlines for proposed articles and letters to the editor: February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1.

Blue Oak Group News reserves the right to edit all submissions for reasons of space, clarity and potential libel. The opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Sierra Club or the Blue Oak Group.

Stop Valley's Edge *(continued from p. 2)*

environmental issues surrounding land use; one that knows that climate change means taking care of our housing needs with smart growth, not urban sprawl and increased CO2 emissions. In fact, a more progressive City Council could move Chico toward a solutions-based decision-making process. We need Council members who are concerned about the people who live in Chico, both the people who need affordable homes and the people who have no homes at all. We need a Council that isn't eager to attract wealthy people from outside Chico and that commits to a healthy, sustainable community for those who live here. We want a Council that responds to the natural growth of Chico, rather than stimulating artificial growth. We want a Council that will take care of the infrastructure we already have rather than saddling us with new development that Chicoan's taxes have to maintain.

As candidate season begins, please learn about who's running and who will care about the social and environmental needs of Chico.

Finally, THANK YOU, Sierra Club members who have donated time and money to stop this development. You made a difference! I also want to thank the amazing people who've given so much to this (exhausting!) work. So many! I can only mention a few: Elizabeth Devereaux, Pamela Posey, David Welch, Marty Dunlap, Eric Nilsson, Suellen Rowilson, Erin Wade, Nancy McCune, Gabrielle Broche, Jared Geiser. Many thanks!

Blue Oak Holiday Potluck

By Suzette Welch, Blue Oak Group Chair

The Blue Oak Group Holiday party was held this year on Friday, Dec. 15, at the common room of the Valley Oaks Village. 30 people attended the potluck providing a varied array of delicious food. Alan Mendoza gave a lively program showing slides of his many hiking trips throughout the west. Alan also made the announcement that the new edition of the **Hiking Butte County** book is at the printers and will be out this spring. It was a good party and enabled members to celebrate the holidays together.

New Edition of Hiking Butte County Book

The updated, new, third edition of the Blue Oak Group's **Hiking Butte County** book will be available this spring. The book has updated several of the hikes and added more hiking suggestions. For more information, contact Alan Mendoza at 530-891-8789 or ajmendoza@prodigy.net

Interested in Becoming a Sierra Club Outings Leader?

The Blue Oak Group of the Sierra Club is always looking for new outings leaders. Being an outings leader allows you to share the special places you like to visit with others and meet fantastic people. We are starting a contact list for those interested in becoming a leader for when the Sierra Club will offer outings leader training and first aid training. All expenses will be covered by the Sierra Club. Please contact Alan Mendoza at ajmendoza666@gmail.com or 530-891-8789 if you would like to be added to our list for our upcoming training.

Results of the 2024 Blue Oak Group Sierra Club ExCom Election and Appointment of Officers

ExCom Members:

- **Chair:** Suzette Welch—booksontape@rocketmail.com.
- **Interim Secretary:** Betty Volker—bettyinchico@gmail.com
- **Treasurer:** John Hollister—hubhollister@yahoo.com
- **Board Member:** Jane Coleman—volecole@juno.com 530-343-4768
- **Board Member:** Marissa Maxey—mmaxey@healthcollaborative.org.
- **Board Member:** Grace Marvin—g-marvin@comcast.net
Grace Marvin Rep. to Motherlode, Conservation Chair and long time member of the Sierra Club is a newly elected Board Member

Committee Chairs and Other Contacts:

- **Rep. To Motherlode:** Grace Marvin—g-marvin@comcast.net
- **Conservation Chair:** Grace Marvin - g-marvin@comcast.net
- **Facebook Administrator:** Suzette Welch—booksontape@rocketmail.com
- **Forest activist:** Patricia Puterbaugh—pmputerbaugh@yahoo.com
- **Membership Chair:** Position Open
- **Newsletter CoEditors:** Suzette Welch—booksontape@rocketmail.com and Louise Casey – louise.carol.casey@gmail.com
- **Newsletter Distribution:** Steve Miller—530-345-0806, Dave Nopel—530-342-4118 and Suzette Welch—booksontape@rocketmail.com
- **Newsletter Advertising:** Position Open
- **Outings Chair:** Alan Mendoza—ajmendoza@prodigy.net
- **Outreach Chair:** Position Open
- **Political Chair:** Position Open
- **Program Chair:** Position Open
- **Publicity :** Position Open
- **Treasurer:** John Hollister—hubhollister@yahoo.com
- **Blue Oak Website :** Louise Casey—louise.carol.casey@gmail.com
- **Youth Activities:** Position Open

As you can see we have a number of positions which are open or as in the case of secretary have an interim person in the position. If you are interested in more information about any of the position or would like to volunteer please contact Suzette Welch booksontape@rocketmail.com.

A Special Thanks

We would like to express our thanks to Laura Grossman for her very generous contribution to the Blue Oak Group Sierra Club. Her contribution will be used to help defray the cost of printing and mailing this quarterly Newsletter. The Blue Oak Group Newsletter is free but is not free to produce.

Blue Oak Spring 2024 Outings and Events

Coordinated by Alan Mendoza. For updated outings information and for general information about outings and meeting places, please see our web site at: www.sierraclub.org/mother-lode/blue-oak

Sunday, March 24 – Day Hike

Table Mountain (2,B) Enjoy the spring wildflowers and waterfalls of spectacular Table Mountain north of Oroville. We will hike for a total distance of 7-8 miles and visit Coal Canyon and Beatson Canyon and see multiple waterfalls. Bring lunch, water, sunscreen, boots and \$ for drivers. Meet at Chico Park & Ride at 7:30AM or at Table Mountain parking lot at 8:15AM. Recommended purchase of day land pass from state of California at: ca.wildlifelicenses.com/InternetSales Rain cancels. Leader: Alan, 530-588-8031 or ajmendoza@prodigy.net.

Saturday, April 27 - Day Hike and Visit to Nature Center

Feather River Nature Center and Dan Beebe Trail (2,B) A 5-6 mile out and back hike from the Nature Center in Oroville to the top of Sycamore Hill and down to a view of the Oroville Dam spillway and Feather River. Nice views also of Oroville and the surrounding area from the top. We will begin with a tour of the exhibits at the Nature Center, which will open for the first time this year. Meet at 8:45AM at the Chico Park and Ride or 9:30AM at the Nature Center in Oroville (Montgomery Street and Old Ferry Road). Rain Cancels. Leader: Alan, 530-588-8031 or ajmendoza@prodigy.net

Tuesday, May 21 —Blue Oak Newsletter Prep for Mailing

Join the mail crew on Tuesday, May 21, 2024, at 2:00 PM to process the Blue Oak Group Newsletter for mailing. The meeting place is the Lodge at the Terraces in California Park located at 2750 Sierra Sunrise Terrace. The Lodge is the older independent living section of California Park. Everyone is welcome to come and help. Please join us so we can quickly get the Newsletters ready to mail. The processing gathering provides a great excuse to get together, catch up on news and meet new people. Suzette Welch, Coeditor Blue Oak Group Sierra Club Newsletter.

Thursday-Sunday, June 13-16 - Backpack

Yosemite National Park North Rim (3,C) A four day loop backpack starting from the Yosemite Creek trailhead in Yosemite National Park. We will begin by setting up a car shuttle and then hike to the top of Yosemite Falls 7.5 miles with full packs and set up camp above the falls. On day two we will day hike to Eagle Peak for great views of Yosemite Valley and Half Dome. On day three we will pack 3-4 miles north to Lehamite Creek and set up camp. In the afternoon we will hike to North Dome for more great views. On day four we will pack out 4-5 miles and climb 1000' to our vehicles at Porcupine Creek. Shuttle required. Cost \$10 per person for permits. For experienced backpackers only. Individual commissary, and you must bring full backpacking equipment. Leader has extra backpacks, tents, sleeping bags, pads, stoves, bear canisters to share. Bear canister required or you can also rent one at the entrance station to the park. Limited space. Reservation and advance payment of \$10 required to reserve your spot. Contact leader for more information and to make reservation and payment: Alan, 530-588-8031 or ajmendoza@prodigy.net

Volcano Adventure Camp at Lassen Volcanic National Park

By Paul & Kathy Coots, *Lassen Park Foundation, Youth & Projects Committee Chair and Lifetime Sierra Club Members*



Courtesy of Girl Scout Troop 20060, Klamath Falls, OR

The non-profit **Lassen Park Foundation** (Foundation) works closely with **Lassen Volcanic National Park** (LAVO) to introduce youth to engage in the wonder of our nearby National Park. By jointly supporting outdoor learning and environmental education, LAVO and the Foundation hope to provide the catalyst for change in the lives of a new generation of National Park stewards. Since 1996, through the Foundation's **Youth Camping Program**, kids have discovered the stars in Lassen's dark sky environment, nature they would never have seen in their urban homes, and expanded their understanding of our precious resource that is our National Park system. Help us spread the word about this wonderful opportunity that continues for summer 2024 and gets even better.

Volcano Adventure Camp

Beginning in 2016 the Foundation worked to build the infrastructure that now houses **Volcano Adventure Camp** (VAC). Situated in the former Crags Campground, the VAC is located well-beyond any Wi-Fi or cellphone reception, and its location in LAVO allows for youth groups to enjoy multiple recreational opportunities. The VAC has two sections, each with five tent-cabins; each tent-cabin has eight bunk cots. The two sections each have a screened picnic shelter with propane BBQs, bear lockers and a campfire amphitheater. There are additionally four tent pads available for smaller groups or those wishing to 'rough it'. Nearby restrooms and hot showers are conveniently located.

Non-profit youth groups ranging in size from six up to a maximum of 104 are eligible to reserve this facility. Indeed, the VAC hosts hundreds of youths aged 6 to 18 each summer, typically from mid-June to mid-September, depending on the weather. Youth groups travel from all over California, Oregon, and Nevada to stay for up to a week. The facilities of the VAC allow groups without much 'camping' experience to stay without bringing or purchasing all the usual camping equipment. A short distance away is a group campground, Lost Creek. This nearby group facility allows for family members to be nearby and join their children in various activities associated with their stay at the VAC.

To enhance this experience for youth, the Foundation traditionally provides designated funding to LAVO for two park rangers who facilitate a wide variety of environmental learning activities for groups staying at the VAC. These Rangers work closely with each youth group leader to plan an itinerary specific to that group's needs. Group leaders can choose from an extensive menu that includes ranger-led in-camp or field activities, as well as activities that can be Youth Group Leader-led, both in-camp and around the Park. Groups sometimes choose to complete in-park activities to become Junior Rangers or members of the Volcano Club. Groups often visit the Loomis Museum or Kohm Yah-mah-nee Visitor Center, where they learn about the history of Lassen, culture, and so much more. Engaging in these various activities helps to build stewardship and respect for public lands as well as teamwork and individual responsibility.

New this year, researchers from the University of California, Davis will begin staying in nearby tent-cabins as their home away from home as they conduct research in the Park. There may be unique

opportunities in Summer 2024 to connect these research teams to our youth groups, facilitating discussions around the campfire about climate change and resilience.

Youth Group Eligibility to Camp at VAC

Any youth group meeting the eligibility requirements can apply to stay at the VAC. Eligibility includes youth organizations serving youth ages 6-18 that are non-profits, public schools, or government agencies or youth organizations with a non-profit fiscal sponsor. Youth group size must be a minimum of six people, and up to 104. LAVO waives Park admission and campground fees for approved applicants.

Grant Funding for Eligible Youth Groups Summer 2024

While any qualified youth group can reserve the VAC, the Foundation offers grant funding through our Youth Camp Program (YCP) to help cover the expenses of bringing youth groups to the Park. The grant helps the groups purchase equipment such as sleeping bags or flashlights; supplies such as band aids and sunscreen; food for the group; and transportation expenses such as car rental and fuel. Youth groups serving underserved or at-risk youth receive priority for the grant funds. The grant application window typically opens in February every year and closes by March 31st. The Foundation reviews and scores all grants and announces awards by the end of April. The National Parks Foundation recently awarded the Foundation a grant for Summer 2024. As part of that NPF grant award there is a special focus to bring youth groups from wildfire-impacted communities or those serving Indigenous youth to stay at the VAC.

The Foundation works with all youth groups receiving grants to reserve the VAC based on their preferred dates. Then typically about May 1, the window opens for other youth groups to reserve the VAC. The use of the VAC is free to all eligible youth groups.

Please visit the Foundation website for more information and detailed resources:

<https://lassenparkfoundation.org/volcano-adventure-camp>

- Harry Spanglet, Sierra Club, Sacramento, ICO Summer 2023:

This experience opened their eyes to what it's like to be in 'the wilderness,' and showed them opportunities for outdoor experiences on public lands, which they did not know existed.



Courtesy of Stone Bridge School, Napa, CA Summer 2023



Housing Market Issues

By David Welch



Whether people in any community can find a home is affected by a lot more factors than just the supply of homes versus the number of people who need them. When folks have trouble finding a home, it's natural to think that the solution is as simple as increasing the supply. And that is a big part of it, but far from the whole story.

My personal observation in traveling around Chico on foot and bicycle is that we have an extraordinary number of rental

vacancies. Numerous apartment complexes have displayed "Now Leasing" signs continuously for months or even a couple of years. There are newer complexes, finished a year or more ago, that have never filled. At the same time there are many working people with lower wage jobs who cannot find a decent place to live.

Market theory would tell us that, if an apartment is sitting empty at the asking price, the owner would lower the price to find a tenant. But it's not that simple. Large corporate owners with deep pockets, and even small scale landlords who have no mortgage debt to service, can afford to let a few units sit empty. And, apparently, many think it's a better business choice to do that than to lower rents.

In the rental market, there can be many barriers besides the monthly rent. Application fees, income requirements, large deposits, and background checks that weed out anyone with a history of prison time, bankruptcy, or eviction can also be substantial barriers.

In the home ownership market, there is also a distorting force many people are unaware of: corporate investors buying large numbers of single-family homes, formerly owner occupied, and converting them to rentals. This took off in a big way in the 2008 financial crisis, when the wave of foreclosures provided an opportunity for vulture capitalists to snatch up houses at bargain prices. But it didn't end then and continues today. The little roadside signs saying "We buy homes for cash" represent a continuation of this trend. There is no simple registry of such corporate owners but at least hundreds and perhaps thousands of single family homes in Chico are corporate owned, shutting families out from one of the main pathways for middle class people to build wealth and retirement security.

None of these problems have simple answers but, in some places, ideas such as a vacancy tax and limits on corporate ownership have been advanced. At the least, we need a better understanding of the impact of these issues on our housing crisis.

Tuscan Water District Established, Still Needs Funding

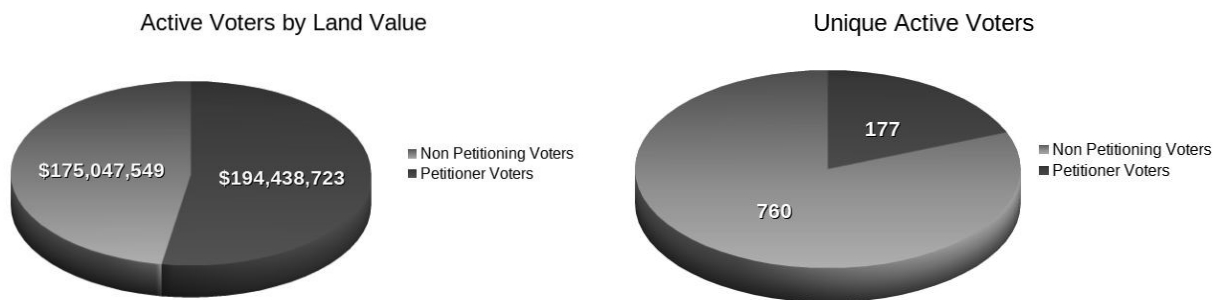
By Jeffrey Obser, Executive Director, Groundwater for Butte

The Tuscan Water District was formally established in a “landowner” election on Dec. 5, 2023. Unlike normal elections (one person, one vote), this one allotted one vote per dollar of land owned. With the biggest landowners heavily represented among those who sought the district – and with less than half the ballots returned – the district passed by almost 80%.

Under that election’s terms, a second election must be held to fund the district with a property-tax assessment. That election will require a 2/3 majority. But since these are “landowner” elections, with one vote per dollar of land owned, the big growers who have pushed TWD are well positioned to prevail in that election as well.

The wild card is voter participation, which could be more robust when property owners are asked for money. Fewer than half the December ballots were returned.

Crunching the numbers from the County Recorder, Groundwater for Butte found some interesting facts when multiple parcels belonging to one individual or firm were combined.



TWD petitioners – those who asked for this water district – comprised less than a quarter of voters if counted as individuals. But the value of their land holdings gave slightly more than half the vote.

It's one thing to hustle an obscure, barely comprehensible new layer of government into being by depending on voter apathy. To expect the same apathy when asking for money is another.

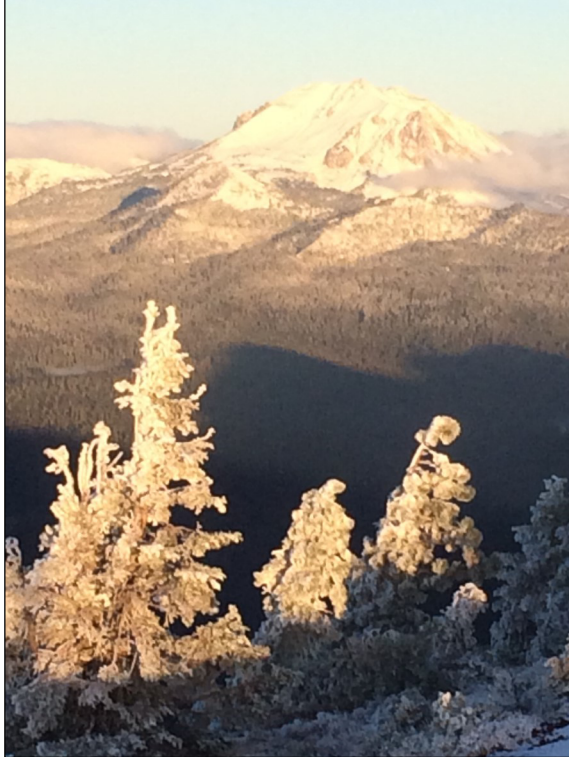
Groundwater For Butte got a late start in this game but it isn't going anywhere. We've built the infrastructure to serve as watchdog, news source, and focal point for the public interest. The conflicts over water resources never end, and considering how Butte County has been captured by narrow commercial interests in the past few years, they may only intensify.

Will you be paying attention and holding elected officials to account? We will. Stay tuned.

Lassen Forest Preservation Group

By Trish Puterbaugh

Lassen Forest Preservation Group - Forestry Committee of the Blue Oak Group Sierra Club



We are very happy to be getting quite a bit of rain up here in the Butte County Foothills. We are looking forward to more and maybe a little snow too!

Forest issues in Lassen (LNF) and Plumas National Forests (PNF) continue to focus mainly on fire cleanup, salvage, restoration and replanting in the Dixie and other fire scars.

The three projects of interest, especially to Butte County, are the Upper Butte Creek Project, the West Lassen Headwaters Project and the Dixie Fire Community Protection Project.

The Dixie Project was paused, but should be coming out again in the next few months. This is a huge salvage project encompassing the entire Dixie footprint. Most of the work will focus on the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), roads and other infrastructure. If you haven't been up to areas burned in the Dixie Fire, it will be a shock. This fire burned 1 million acres in Plumas and Lassen National Forests and private lands in between. Private lands have been salvaged

logged and some of the USFS lands have been salvaged as hazards along roads, communities, and campgrounds. We are not generally in favour of salvage logging, but along roads, and near infrastructure and communities it is necessary. This fire was so large, many are grappling with the best way forward for forest and ecological restoration.

The Upper Butte Creek Project Environmental Assessment (EA) will be out for comment very soon. I attend the South Lassen Watershed Group meetings and we had a report on this one 2 weeks ago. Our Butte County Resources Conservation District (BCRCD) is working very closely with the Lassen National Forest (LNF) to design this project. Some of the Dixie Fire is within the boundaries, as is the community of Jonesville and areas near the headwaters of Butte Creek. As I have written before, this project is in our critical Butte Creek anadromous fishery headwaters. The salmon are struggling and overzealous logging for fuels reduction is troublesome. The planned "ingress-egress" prescription along Humbug Summit Rd, Humboldt Rd., Colby Mtn Rd, Colby Mtn Lookout Rd and Jonesville Road would have a 200 foot wide swath of maximum 10% canopy cover on each side of the road - this is almost a clearcut. If you know these areas there are thousands of large trees along these roads. Trees over 30" will be cut in these areas. American Marten, California Spotted Owl, Northern Goshawk and wild salmon live in this area. They cannot tolerate this level of cutting.

This amount of thinning is unprecedented. It is very worrisome that communities in our forest lands such as Mineral, Butte Meadows, Prattville and others would be subject to this type of forest management. There is are no scientific studies to justify this level of thinning. Forests like these will have to be managed intensively for invasive species - most likely with herbicides. Stronger winds

and certainly stronger sun will affect these areas. It is very important that we all comment on this EA when it comes out. I will be posting information on the Blue Oak FB page.

Another project I have mentioned previously is the West Lassen Headwaters Project. It will be large and our BCRC is also doing planning on this project along with the Sierra Institute. Scoping will begin in February and there will be virtual public meeting on February 22 at 5pm regarding this project. I will also try to post about this project. The new "ingress-egress" prescription is also planned for this project. There are many miles of roads in this project totalling 6,000 acres of planned heavy thinning along roads. As stated above, we cannot let the Upper Butte Creek project set such a precedent.

The theory is that these areas will provide firefighters and firelighters with adequate operational space during a wildfire. The reality is that Lake Almanor, Highway 89 and the town of Chester did not provide operational space during Dixie - it blew right over and through. When weather conditions are right for a severe wildfire, many times firefighters can only hope to get out of the way to save their own lives.

In other news the California Spotted Owl (CSO) will probably be listed as endangered in the next year. This is big news and this species has been considered for more than a decade. Our USFS Region 5 will be reviewing all logging plans that have CSO within their boundaries. Many forest activists want to see our forests thinned and managed. However, so many times the logging plans (like the new ingress-egress prescription) are detrimental to old growth dependent species, our precious salmon, and water quality.

A project that can be commented on and looked at now is The Colby Mountain Recreation Project. This project creates 36 new miles of non-motorized single-track trails around Colby Mtn and Humboldt Summit. There will also be improvements to parking and accessibility at the Jonesville Snow Park. These will be mixed use trails for biking, equestrians and hikers. You can look at the project plan at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=63192> Here too, the Butte County RCD is involved in planning.

On the Plumas they have come out with the Plumas Community Protection Project. This is a huge project encompassing most of the Feather River Ranger District and surrounding communities. We are very pleased the Sierra Forest Legacy is commenting and taking the lead on this poorly planned project.

The Region 5 Post disturbance Hazard Tree project is also in the wings. Again, this is all salvage - most along roads in the entire north state.

The Butte Prescribed Fire Association did 3 pile burn days during January and more are planned for February. If all goes well we will be able to do some prescribed fire when things dry up this spring. Mother Nature is definitely in charge though.

Butte County Fire Safe Council continues to apply for and do extensive grant work on fuel reduction projects using mastication, grazing and thinning in the foothills and forests of Butte County. They are always busy organizing and communicating about opportunities for education and work. We are very lucky to have one of the most (maybe the most) active Fire Safe Councils in the state. Our Resource Conservation District is also very active obtaining grants and doing work around the county. As always, you are welcome to email me with questions or comments:

pmpueterbaugh@yahoo.com

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