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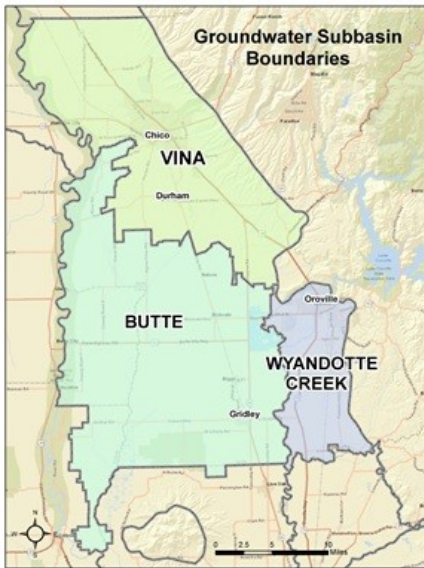
**Blue Oak  
Group**



**Butte, Glenn, Lassen, Plumas & Tehama Counties**

**Join the Conversation about the Future of our Groundwater**

*Blake Ellis, Groundwater for Butte*



Want to know more about the water that flows from your tap, that grows the food you eat, that supports our urban forest and riparian wetlands? Where it comes from, how much we use, and how you can get involved to protect and sustain it?

Chances are that if you live in Butte County, groundwater is your primary source of water supply. Some basics on our use of groundwater:

In wet years, groundwater provides 40% of state's total water supply. In dry years, when surface water is less available, it provides 60%.

In the Vina Subbasin (Chico urban area and northern Butte County), groundwater makes up 85-90% of the total water supply.

Of the roughly 234,000 acre-feet of groundwater pumped in the Vina Subbasin each year, 90% is used to irrigate agricultural crops and 10% is used for municipal and domestic supply.

One acre-foot of water is equal to 326,000 gallons or approximately the annual water use of two families of four living in Butte County.

Records from the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) document over 4,200 domestic wells in the Vina Subbasin with the majority relying on the shallow groundwater system (100 to 150 feet below ground surface).

Due to multiple dry years and increased pumping from the Vina Subbasin, groundwater has been overdrafted by approximately 20,000 acre-feet per year from 2000 to 2018.

The California Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) was passed in 2014 to return overdrafted groundwater basins to sustainable conditions by 2042. The Vina Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) is a joint powers authority formed by Butte County, the City of Chico, and Durham Irrigation District in 2018 to administer SGMA for the Vina Subbasin. Once formed, the first order of business was to prepare a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) to guide the steps needed to achieve sustainability by 2042. The Vina GSP was adopted in January 2022 and, with funding from a \$5.5 million grant from DWR, elements of the plan have been advanced and implemented to establish a fee structure, fill data gaps in the groundwater monitoring network, evaluate options to reduce the 20,000 acre-foot per year deficit, and support community outreach and engagement.

The first five years of GSP implementation are wrapping up in 2026 with a 5-Year Periodic Evaluation and GSP Amendments due to DWR by January 2027. ***The next six months present the best opportunity for you to help shape and refine the priorities, policies, and projects that will restore and protect our local groundwater system.***

There are a number of issues that warrant attention. SGMA requires that the GSP take into account and protect the interests of all groundwater users including agriculture, domestic drinking water, municipal and industrial supply, and groundwater dependent ecosystems (GDEs). GDEs that depend on groundwater for their survival include springs, wetlands, creeks, rivers, and deep-rooted vegetation that supports biodiversity.

Many domestic well users, including small farmers, have experienced receding groundwater levels, increased pumping costs, encroaching groundwater contaminant plumes and, in some cases, dry wells. They are particularly vulnerable to decreasing groundwater levels which can also impact GDEs. The GSP adopted in 2022 set statutory groundwater levels (referred to as Minimum Thresholds or MTs) for protection of shallow domestic wells that place 24% to 32% of the domestic wells at risk of going dry before triggering corrective actions. This is an unreasonable impact that could affect over 1,000 wells and will most likely be borne by those least able to pay for deepening or replacing their wells.

Proposed amendments to the 2022 GSP that will protect the most vulnerable users of groundwater include the following:

1. Raise the Vina GSP Minimum Thresholds to responsibly protect beneficial uses and users of shallow groundwater.
2. Revise the definition of undesirable results to remove the “non-dry year” condition.
3. Refine the mapping of groundwater dependent ecosystems in all three subbasins in Butte County (Vina, Butte, and Wyandotte Creek).
4. Develop and fund a Well Mitigation Program to support families facing loss of domestic wells due to receding groundwater levels in all three subbasins.
5. Require cost/benefit analysis to prioritize projects prior to submittal for grant funding.

To learn more about the Groundwater Sustainability Plan and opportunities for public engagement, please go to the Vina GSA Board of Director’s website at:  
<https://www.vinagsa.org/board-of-directors>.

Board of Directors meetings are held the second Wednesday of the month at 3:30 pm in the Chico City Council Chambers. The Vina Stakeholder Advisory Committee meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 9:00 am in the Butte County Library at 1108 Sherman Avenue in Chico.

To learn more about SGMA projects and opportunities to comment on reports, go to the Vina GSA SGMA Projects website: <https://www.vinagsa.org/>

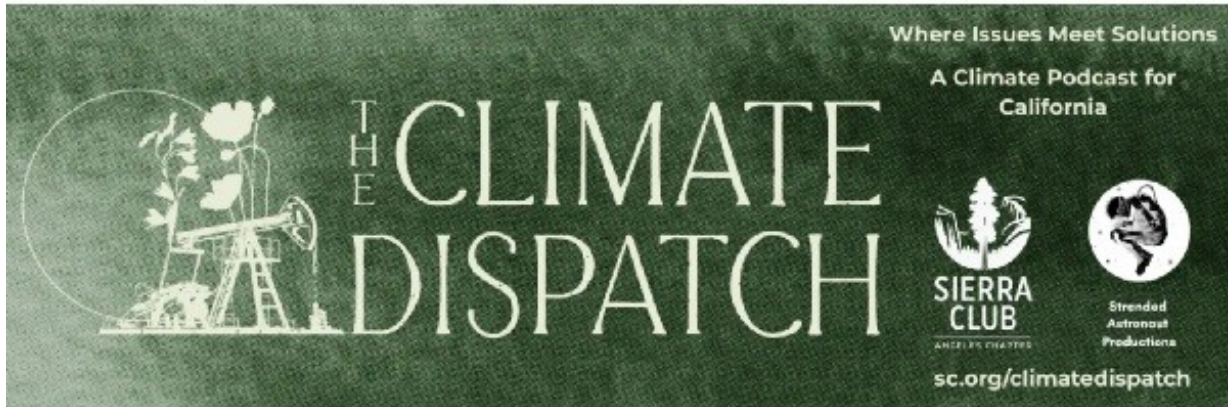
For background on groundwater fundamentals, SGMA regulations, and the critical issues facing Butte County, please see the materials provided at two Community Groundwater Forums that were conducted in March 2026. The forums were supported by the Sierra Club Blue Oak Group, Butte Environmental Council, Friends of Butte Creek, and Groundwater for Butte. Recordings of the two forums can be found at either:

Groundwater for Butte website: <https://groundwaterforbutte.blogspot.com/>  
or Butte Environmental Council website: <https://www.becnet.org/>

**Blake Ellis** received her Master’s in Social Work from Chico State. For the past decade, Blake has been working at the intersection of human and environmental health. She has taught outdoor and garden education, provided horticultural therapy to adults with developmental disabilities, and now provides nature-based mental health therapies to individuals impacted by catastrophic wildfire. Blake is a Type 2 Wildland Firefighter and passionate about stewarding local landscapes. She is a domestic well owner, an avid gardener, and outdoor enthusiast who is proud to protect this place we are lucky enough to call home.

# New Sierra Club Podcast Called Climate Dispatch

By Suzette Welch, Chair Blue Oak Group



California sits on the frontlines of the climate crisis. From devastating wildfires and prolonged drought to rising housing pressures and climate-driven migration, communities across the state are experiencing profound environmental and social change.

To explore these challenges and the people working to address them, the Sierra Club California community has launched a new podcast: The Climate Dispatch.

Produced by the Sierra Club Angeles Chapter in partnership with Stranded Astronaut Productions, The Climate Dispatch dives into the climate issues shaping California today. Each episode examines a different topic affecting the state through conversations with experts, organizers, and community leaders working on the ground.

Rather than focusing solely on policy or headlines, the podcast highlights lived experiences and local perspectives. Listeners will hear stories of resilience, struggle, and innovation from the people most affected by climate change and those working toward solutions.

To learn more or listen to the latest episodes, visit:  
<https://www.sierraclub.org/angeles>

## 2026 Blue Oak Group Sierra Club

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Rep. To Motherlode: Grace Marvin	Outings Chair: Alan Mendoza
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Forest Activist: Patricia Puterbaugh	Program Chair: Position Open
Membership Chair: Position Open	Publicity : Position Open
Newsletter Editors: Suzette Welch, Louise Casey	Website: Louise Casey
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# Chad Hanson: Wildfire Science Presentation

By Jean Marquardt, Member of Sierra Club StopClearcuttingCA Group and Blue Oak Board Member



Pageant Theater in Chico hosted a presentation by Chad Hanson, wildfire researcher on the latest wildfire science. He wrote the book **Smokescreen, Debunking Wildfire Myths to Save our Forests and Our Climate**. Hanson discussed the importance of communities to commit to home hardening efforts to protect ourselves from wildfires as well as to create effective defensible space and to plan for evacuations.

*Chad Hanson, John Muir Project*

He also talked about the John Muir Project lawsuit against the US Forest Service (USFS) opposing support of the logging industry to thin and clear-cut remote forests as a way to prevent wildfire. He stated that these remote logging activities have no real benefit to communities (such as Paradise and Greenville) that were decimated in wildfire. The USFS seems to be double-dipping because not only does it get taxpayer funding, it also gets paid for the leases from logging industries. These logging activities are called “Community Protection” projects and they will be part of the lawsuit.

Hanson discussed the euphuism of the word “thinning”. He provided photos of decimated landscapes that were thinned. The logging industry promoted them as thinning but were obviously clear-cut. The term “ladder-fuel” was debunked. Hanson stated that the reality is that dense and messy forests burn slower. The word “thinning” disguises logging that is really clear-cutting. According to a study by Zald and Dann in 2018, they state that there is no need to thin our forests. The density of a forest is the windbreak necessary to slow fires and that a thinned-out forest with wind burns at a higher intensity. The wind is what drives wildfires into faster and hotter fires. He discussed that thinning forests benefits the logging industry but does not protect communities.

When asked about the planned Oroville biofuel plant, Hanson stated that biomass energy is a dirty energy and that it is dirtier than burning coal. There are better alternatives, solar and wind, to generate electricity.

He ended the presentation by urging us to call on Congress to oppose the Fix our Forest Act. This Act increases logging without public oversight.

Call 202 224-3121, Ask for Senator Padilla and Senator Schiff to oppose the Fix our Forest Act.

Jean Marquardt



## Update From the Dioxin Education Committee

*By Bill Bynum, Secretary, Dioxin Education Committee*

The Dioxin Education Committee (Group formed to oppose Oroville Biomass Project ) had a long discussion about the outreach efforts to Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey, the Sierra Club, and the Butte Environmental Council (BEC). Don Noble had a good discussion with Mike Ramsey and feels like the DA will be someone we can work with going forward. Bill Bynum and Celeste Garcia met with Jean Marquardt, who is on the board of the Sierra Club, and found her to be very helpful. Jean has even volunteered to analyze a portion of the emails that we received from the City through a public records

request (PRR) regarding biomass. Celeste Garcia also made contact with Sean Wirth, who is on the board of the Motherlode Chapter of the Sierra Club in Sacramento. He is interested in helping us and has reached out to us to ask how far along the biomass process has progressed. And finally, I have met with Courtney Ellington, the new director of BEC twice. She has been very helpful and has committed to attending our meetings or sending a representative to them.

Our next order of business was an update on the emails from Oroville City concerning biomass. We have a meeting scheduled for Tuesday, April 7th to review all of them. There are 9 people who have analyzed those emails, and they will meet to put them in chronological order and come up with an overview of what has transpired over the past two years.

The mission statement for our website was discussed next, and it was agreed that Linda Draper and Don Noble did a great job of composing it.

Aaron Grogg then gave an update of our website. It is ready to go, and Yvonne Harbison is going to help with designing the content.

The issue of whether we should become a non-profit was discussed next, and it was decided to table that question because it was felt that it is too soon to even consider it.

Having a fundraiser was our last topic, and it was decided that we should form a committee to start planning one. Our group feels like we will need to raise money to hire an environmental lawyer to look into the possibility of litigation to stop the City from bringing biomass burning to South Oroville. We are looking to have some kind of a fundraiser on May 16th at the Southside Community Center. So far the members of the fundraiser committee are: Celeste, Linda, Don, Aaron, and myself. If you are interested in being on the fundraising committee, please respond to this email or text me Bill Bynum at 530-403-7401.

Respectfully, Bill Bynum

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wildlife, and our planet's future. But we've beaten threats like these before: by taking corporate giants to court, by organizing grassroots power in all 50 states, by filing lawsuits to protect bedrock environmental protections, and by mobilizing communities to pressure Congress. We will fight back with every tool at our disposal – but to face these challenges, we need your support.

<https://giving.sierraclub.org/donate>



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