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Blue Oak Group



Butte, Glenn, Lassen, Plumas & Tehama Counties



Fall Forest News

*By Trish Puterbaugh, Lassen Forest Preservation Group
Forestry Committee of the Blue Oak Group Sierra Club*

Summer is in full swing as I write this with hot days and lots of fire activity. It has been 2 years since the Park Fire burned much of our community, Cohasset. The fire is the background to our lives. We are the lucky ones with insurance. Those of us with insurance are slowly buying and building new homes here in Cohasset or other places. Two of our neighbors moved to Kentucky (think cheaper property) another to Denver. Many have come back to settle again, like us, in Cohasset. We are all thankful the core of our community was saved, allowing us to gather, work, and celebrate together.

Much of the forest news is about post-fire logging, because a large percentage of Butte, Plumas, Lassen, and Tehama counties have burned in the last decade.

Generally private landholders clear cut their lands and start replanting fairly quickly. Unfortunately, this usually involves destruction to the watershed and heavy use of herbicides. If you have driven up Highway 70

or Highway 32 you have seen the results. Our Northern California forests will not be the same for hundreds of years, if ever. Many are concerned about “type conversion”, where forests never reestablish and brush fields prevail. We know this will happen in some landscapes such as the steep Feather River Canyon and on the lava strewn forests fields near Lassen. It is possible these areas did not support forests before fire suppression changed the ecology of our landscapes.

The Plumas and Lassen National Forests border our neighbor counties. The Dixie (1 million acres), Park, Bear/North Complex and Camp fires burned thru these forests in the last decade creating a huge dilemma for forest landowners, like ourselves. The USFS treats the land differently than private land managers and is subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other regulations. These laws slow down the post-fire logging, although “emergency exemptions” are used to remove hazard trees over thousands of acres. These enormous “hazard trees” are often the beloved ones along roads, near campgrounds and facilities that have stood for hundreds of years. When they are totally dead, they create hazards for the public. Luckily, thousands of acres are left to naturally evolve post-fire. It is clear, these dead forests will potentially burn again as they fall. Post-fire science is evolving, right along with the fires and its difficult to keep up or know “what is best”.

There are some “green forest/burned forest” projects happening on the Plumas and Lassen. If you drive up to Jonesville, you will see some work on a “fuel break” thru Jonesville and Butte Meadows. Logging will be going on for years for this Upper Butte Creek project. There will be some meadow restoration and road closures also. The West Lassen Headwaters Project is a big one - encompassing much of the headwaters of Mill, Deer, Battle



and Antelope Creeks. Again, there will be restoration, widespread thinning and hazard tree removal. These two projects were planned by the Butte County Resource Conservation District, The Lassen National Forest, the Sierra Institute and others in collaboration. Environmental groups have been involved also, but generally it is very tough to challenge the heavy thinning agenda. There are no lawsuits against these projects as far as I know.

The Plumas National Forest has large logging projects planned surrounding Quincy to protect the community from wildfire. So many foothill communities have burned. There are also other projects on the Plumas where the Rancheria's are working in collaboration with the USFS on post-fire restoration plans in keeping with Native American values.

You have probably read about the widespread planned use of herbicides on our National Forests. If not, look up the article on Mother Jones website. We are glad to see this issue picked up by many news outlets and reported to the public. Private land managers have used herbicides for decades and now the USFS has begun the same practice. I would never recommend the use of herbicides, but it is very difficult to reforest "economically" without their use on these large scale landscapes. If we had our priorities right, we would spend money on restoring our forests ecologically instead of making war and creating more billionaires with our policies. But.....sadly, right now the administration is hell-bent against everything our public lands mean to us, except extraction.

It is an extremely hard time for the USFS. The headquarters will move from Washington DC to Utah - one of the most anti-environmental states in the union. Research labs have been closed, regional offices are consolidated and staffing is anemic, with layoffs from the top down. Good folks who have dedicated their careers to our public lands. District Rangers, like our Almanor District of the Lassen, can't make any moves without Washington oversight. The plan is more and more logging with less and less regulation. Roadless areas are threatened and Endangered Species are in the cross-hairs. The multiple use goal for our public lands is out the window and resource extraction, for the benefit of few, is the new normal.

Its also an extremely demanding time for those of us who love our natural world and especially our Northern California forests. Sierra Club is affiliated with the Sierra Forest Legacy, which is a coalition of California and national environmental groups. CALWILD, the Wilderness Society, Center for Biological Diversity, California Native Plant Society and others are determined to fight for our public lands every way we can. Please support your local and National environmental groups to help - the courts are often our only recourse right now.

Say No to Biofuel Plants in Butte County

By Jean Marquardt, Blue Oak Group Excom Member

The Sierra Club, the Center for Biological Diversity, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Dogwood Alliance and many other environmental groups oppose the building of biofuel plants that promote the burning of trees to make electricity. These organizations provide the research and scientific basis for the Dioxin Education Committee (DEC) to oppose the 3 proposed biofuel plants in Oroville. The Oroville City Council has been less than transparent in providing information about these plants which will ultimately pollute our air and water in Butte County.

The City of Oroville, with a \$2.5 million budget deficit, cannot take financial or health risks associated with these biofuel plants. Biofuel is a financial risk because it requires substantial government subsidies and will take funding from Oroville community services and infrastructure to operate these plants. Biofuel also has lower profit margins since the operational costs compared to coal or natural gas make the cost generally higher to produce.

Biofuel is a health hazard for Butte County residents because toxic air and water pollution add to cancer risks in Oroville that is already ranked #1 in California for pancreatic cancer and #7 for lung cancer. Biofuel is basically the burning of trees to make electricity or various fuels. The City has not been transparent on how it will deal with the toxic remains in water and soil. So, the City of Oroville needs to answer questions about air pollution, the source of feedstock for the plants and future ongoing needs to feed the plants. Oroville City Council has a duty to ensure financial health as well as health to the general public.

Another risk of building biofuel plants could be a stepping stone to support the building of large data centers in Butte County.

Oroville has been vague about the plants; however, it did spend public funds for a junket of City staff to Europe to view their biofuel plants. Information about that junket has not been made public.

For more information about these plans please see the DEC website, <https://dioxineducation.org/>

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From the National Sierra Club Website

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Butte Creek Salmon

By Allen Harthorn, Friends of Butte Creek

It has been quite the up and down situation for Butte Creek salmon over the last five years. We had a record run, 21,500 wild chinook salmon in 2021, however we saw 92% of the population die before spawning due to exacerbated water temperatures. There were extremely low runs in both 2023 and 2024 coincidental with lower runs in the Sacramento and Feather River, and a closed ocean and river fishing season. However, we had good runs in 2022 and as the cycle goes, again in 2025, mostly three-year-old fish in the cohort of 6,500 salmon. Surprisingly, in 2026, we had an extraordinary percentage of four-year-old fish and a run likely exceeding 5,000 fish, return to Butte Creek.

The high number of 4-year old fish is most likely the result of a closed ocean and river fishing season. This will be the second year in a row with over 5000 returning adults. Both last year and this year we have had pretty good summer holding conditions, flow, and temperature wise, and we can only hope that this trend will continue.

The bottom line is that Butte Creek has the tremendous capability of bouncing back from adversity on its own without a hatchery. These are wild fish living in a wild canyon, we need to do everything we can to protect it, make it better, and more accessible. There is lots of cold water habitat upstream. We need to take advantage of it by removing the two deadbeat PG&E dams.

Thank you all for your support.



20th Annual Wild and Scenic Film Festival On Tour

By Danielle Feulner, Friends of Butte Creek

This year is the Twentieth anniversary of Friends of Butte Creek (FBC) hosting the Wild & Scenic Film Festival On Tour, and they have a lot of fun things in store for this year's event. The festival will occur 9/24 - 9/26 and includes two-nights of films, field trips throughout the Butte Creek Watershed, a silent auction, prize drawings, and guest speakers. Featuring short films selected from the 2026 Wild & Scenic Film Festival held in Grass Valley and Nevada City, this year's films are all about wild adventures, wild creatures, and wild hearts.

Night One: 'Flock of Films' (co-sponsored by AltaCal Bird Alliance) will take place at the Pageant Theatre in Chico on Thursday, 9/24, and features films with stunning cinematography, all about bird conservation, biodiversity, and research.

Night Two: 'Mobilize' will take place at the beautiful Paradise Performing Arts Center on Saturday, 9/25. It will feature films about pioneering conservation, threatened species, and compelling stories of hopefulness and activism.

Attend one night, or both nights to see all the films! You'll also want to check out the Wild & Scenic On Tour field trips that are being hosted on 9/25 and 9/26 in Butte County. Field trips include forest therapy at the Forks of the Butte, visits to Butte Creek House and Willow Creek, tours of Butte Creek spawning grounds, and an introduction to the CDFW Floodplain Restoration Project. All proceeds from the festival go to Friends of Butte Creek and will help fund projects that will improve habitat for future runs of salmon and educate the community.

Tickets for all events go on sale 08/06. Visit <https://buttecreek.org/> to purchase tickets. If you would like to volunteer and/or sponsor this year's festival, please email allen@buttecreek.org

Blue Oak Group Annual Picnic

Sunday, October 4

By Betty Volker



Five Mile East End

SIXTH Annual Blue Oak Group fall picnic will be held on Sunday October 4, 2026, at 5 mile Recreation Area in the Group Picnic Table area at the extreme east end of 5 mile. Parking lot is off of Centennial Ave in Chico.

Arrive around 5 pm to socialize and food will be served around 5:30.

It's a potluck, so bring your favorite potluck dish to share, your own tableware and a favorite beverage.

For more information contact Betty Volker
Bettyinchico@gmail.com.

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