

# Redwood Needles



Spring 2020

Sierra Club Redwood Chapter

Volume 62, No. 2



California Poppy  
Photo / Shelby Erickson

**INSIDE: March Election Results • New Gas Stations Need to Stop  
• Climate Action Ramps Up • Mountains & Rivers Campaign**

# On the Path

a note from  
Chapter Director Jeff Morris

As the COVID-19 pandemic shuts down communities, stretches health care systems to the breaking point and lays down a paralyzing shroud of anxiety, it is also making it even more clear that we need a huge shift away from the current economic model prioritizing corporate profits and wealth over public welfare and environmental protection.

Adam Smith's invisible hand of market dynamics still prevails in this capitalistic society, but this crisis may provide an opportunity to communicate these changed priorities as new models for a hybrid capitalism that emphasizes health of community and environment over private and corporate profit. The demographic shifts we are experiencing, from baby boomers to millennials, from euro-Caucasian centric to racially diverse, from patriarchy to gender equal, all can fall under this same philosophical umbrella of human respect, community health and environmental ethics.

In addition to working for new leadership on the federal level, part of our task over the next several months is to influence whoever opposes Donald J. Trump to lead our country in directions away from the status quo. Pandemics like COVID-19 (with their associated impact to economic security and quality of life) will continue to emerge as climate disruption continues. The most vulnerable members of our human community are at the highest risk and we have a shared responsibility to ensure their safety and our own. The same goes for the most threatened natural ecosystems and individual species.

Over the coming months we may see opportunities for bold action on these fronts towards more evolved priorities, locally, statewide and nationally. For the presidential race, that may involve making financial donations or volunteering on the ground in the Sierra Club's priority battleground states of Arizona, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Florida. Within California, it will require being active regionally to ensure effective communication with our key representatives and the governor's office. Locally, we need to hold ALL elected leaders accountable for short- and long-term decision making while taking responsibility for our own individual actions.

We also need to take good care of our selves so that we survive, physically and mentally. To quote the sage advice of Edward Abbey, "Save the other half of yourselves and your lives for pleasure and adventure. It is not enough to fight for the land; it is even more important to enjoy it. While you can. While it's still here."

Get outdoors and breathe the air, sniff the flowers, work up a sweat, get winded and then rest to be ready for our next collective pitch up the mountain. We can do this.



A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Jeff Morris" with a stylized arrow pointing to the right.



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# March 3 Primary Produces a Mixed Bag

In an age when the fragility of our democracy seems to hang by a frayed thread, voters took to the polls on March 3 to have their say on candidates from president to city council and state and local initiatives.

Turnout was slightly lower than the last presidential primary in 2016, at a total of 46 percent statewide with our region faring an average of 52.6 percent.

Many of Redwood Chapter's endorsed candidates performed well on election night, going on to win handily. They will appear on the Nov. 3 ballot.

As always, we can see that the importance of voting for and supporting environmentally friendly candidates and initiatives is a huge way to influence policy decisions that affect our open spaces, air and water quality and action on climate change.

## Voters Derail SMART Initiative to Maintain & Expand Service

By Steve Birdlebough  
*Transportation Chair*

Supporters of the SMART Train reacted with dismay as the votes were tallied for the March 3 Primary Election. Renewal of the quarter-percent sales tax in Sonoma and Marin counties fell well short of the 2/3 majority needed for approval.

Known as Measure I, the 30-year tax renewal would have enabled SMART to refinance its bonds and maintain its current robust passenger schedule. Also, it would have put the agency in a position to pay the operating costs of future rail service north of Windsor.

The current sales tax measure expires in 2029, which is not very far off for an operating railroad. It needs to plan years in advance to obtain funding and engage contractors.

Now, agency officials will be looking for ways to cut as much as \$9 million from the agency's annual budget.

There was a well-funded opposition campaign, bankrolled by the 35-year-old daughter of a prominent Sonoma County developer. According to press reports, Molly Gallahe Flater spent \$1.8 million to oppose Measure I, asserting that SMART lacked transparency and wasted funds. The campaign was the most expensive in Sonoma County history, and unfortunately it was enough to sway the voters.

SMART began running trains between San Rafael and the Sonoma County Airport in August 2017. It opened an extension to the Larkspur ferry terminal in December 2019, and the additional ridership exceeded expectations. The original plan for a 70-mile line from Larkspur to Cloverdale near the Sonoma-Mendocino County Line may now be delayed

indefinitely. It is also likely that SMART's 200-person workforce will need to be reduced.

For many years, the Sonoma County environmental community has sought to preserve agricultural land and open space, favoring city-centered growth rather than sprawl. The SMART train and its adjacent pathway for cyclists and pedestrians have been seen as an important part of this strategy.

Proponents of the train service and its expansion recognize that driving cars as much as we do makes transportation the largest single contributor to greenhouse

## How our Endorsements Fared

### UNITED STATES CONGRESS

- Jared Huffman (CA-02) — 68%\*
- Mike Thompson (CA-05) — 67.8%\*

### STATE LEGISLATURE

- Sen. Bill Dodd — UNOPPOSED\*
- Assemblymember Jim Wood — 70.6%\*

### COUNTY SUPERVISORS

- Lake County: Tina Scott — 61.25%\*
- Sonoma County: Susan Gorin — 61.91%\*
- Sonoma County : Chris Coursey — 52.39%\*
- Lake County - Jessica Pyska — 45.08%\*
- Mendocino County - Glenn McGourty — 52.09%\*
- Mendocino County - Maureen Mulheren — 39.85%\*
- Humboldt County - Cliff Berkowitz — LOST
- Napa County - Amber Manfree — LOST

### BALLOT MEASURES

**Napa County Measure K — LOST (63.8% with 2/3 needed)**  
A quarter-cent sales tax supporting water, parks and open space did extremely well in the abstract but did not pass the crippling 2/3 majority required for most voter-approved tax measures.

All our endorsements can be found on our website at:  
<https://www.sierraclub.org/redwood/endorsements>

\*Advances to Nov. 3 General Election

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## Redwood Chapter Executive Committee

The executive committee is the governing body of the chapter, with one (1) member delegated by each of six (6) regional groups and six (6) members elected at large. Each group elects its own executive committee. The chapter ExCom meets every-other month in either Santa Rosa or Willits.

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\* Signifies voting member of the ExCom

# SMART derailed by voters

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gas emissions that propel the climate crisis. This fact has begun to affect climate policy; the California Air Resources Board staff tells us that we need to reduce our driving significantly by the year 2035. We wonder what we can do locally to reduce our carbon footprint, and the SMART train is one real way to address this concern.

Another benefit according to many SMART riders, is that riding the train greatly reduces the stress of commuting.

Most significantly, the SMART train is expected to encourage transit-oriented development in cities. Petaluma and Santa Rosa grew up along the historic Northwestern Pacific Railroad at the beginning of the 20th Century, but too much of those cities' recent growth has been at their edges. Train service can lead to development of more vibrant downtowns with more residents, businesses and services clustered around the transit stations.

The prospect of train service has already improved central Windsor, where three-story buildings have been built next to the train station that will be served by SMART. Rohnert Park is planning for development near its station, as is Cotati. Plans are also in the works for improvements at the new Downtown Novato Station.

If SMART can find the funding for its extensions to Healdsburg and Cloverdale, those cities would see economic benefit from increased tourism and non-automobile commuting.

In addition to extension of service on the north-south rail corridor, the California State Rail Plan calls for passenger train service to link the North Bay to cities in the east, such as Fairfield and Sacramento. Imagine riding trains from Santa Rosa to Sacramento! A study of the tracks that now provide freight service from Novato to the national rail network at Suisun City shows that passenger service on that route could be provided more quickly and at less cost than adding a lane to Highway 37.

The prospect of increasing passenger rail service throughout the region made the idea of asking voters to extend the sales tax attractive, so the months-long process of placing Measure I on the ballot began the spring of 2019.

The SMART Board and its Citizens Oversight Committee saw Measure I as a way to support its current investment in long-lasting tracks and rail-cars, staff and a convenient train schedule. And, gradually, travel habits would change as more people reduced their reliance on single-occupant automobiles.

The thought that a wealthy opponent of SMART might spend more than \$1 million to defeat an extension of the tax was far from anyone's mind. Incessant radio and television advertisements criticizing SMART shortly after the ballot measure was announced were a huge surprise. At that point it was too late for the train's supporters to build the broad campaign needed to counter allegations of mismanagement.

The decision by voters to deny renewal of the SMART tax was not the only casualty of a primary election season that was

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# Work Locally for Climate Action as a Climate Protector!

By Randal MacDonald  
*Climate Committee Chair*

Are you concerned about how serious the climate crisis has already become? Frustrated with the failure of our federal government to do anything meaningful about it? Inspired by the young people around the world who are rising up demanding climate action? Are you ready to help bring about real climate solutions in your own community and beyond?

Then join us!

We are the Climate Protectors, and we invite you to become a Climate Protector, too.

A couple of years ago, the Sierra Club's Sonoma Group created its Climate Protectors program to empower people like you who want to make a difference in the battle against climate change. We are working to expand this effort throughout Redwood Chapter's nine-county region.

As Climate Protectors, we take responsibility to understand climate science so our actions are based upon a solid factual foundation. We do what we can to minimize our own carbon footprint, and we work with others locally and regionally on meaningful actions to address climate change, such as:

- Getting our cities and counties to commit to a rapid, just transition to using 100 percent clean, renewable energy. More than 150 cities, 10 counties and seven states across the United States have already done so through the Sierra Club's Ready for 100 campaign!

- Calling on our elected leaders to declare a climate emergency and adopt emergency action plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and safely sequester atmospheric carbon, as the Club's Grassroots Network Climate Emergency Mobilization Team is calling for.

- Working with local schools and school districts to

increase climate literacy and take action on climate solutions within the education sector.

- Protecting local ecosystems as "climactic strongholds" to help wildlife cope with the impacts of climate change.

- Collaborating with farmers, foresters and other landowners to increase natural carbon storage through regenerative agriculture and climate-wise forest management.

- Encouraging businesses and organizations to become local climate champions by reducing their carbon footprints.

- Identifying climate risks and opportunities for worthwhile climate action in our communities and building action plans to make

real local progress in our quest for a healthy planet.

- Helping local groups concerned about climate change to cooperate in shared and coordinated efforts to address our climate crisis.

Our work as Climate Protectors is grounded in inclusivity, grassroots organizing, empowerment of each individual as we work together in solidarity and mutuality, building just relationships among ourselves while making a commitment to self-transformation through climate action.

If you're ready to get involved, we can sure use your help!

To get started, please visit our website at [climateprotectors.net](http://climateprotectors.net) where you can read all about us and provide us with your contact information.

The Sierra Club's motto is "Explore, Enjoy and Protect the Planet." Our planet Earth needs us now more than ever as climate change threatens the stability of life on the only home our species has ever known. Humanity's own actions brought about the climate crisis we now face, and it's up to each of us to take responsibility for this by working for real climate solutions.

Become a Climate Protector today!

Visit [www.climateprotectors.net](http://www.climateprotectors.net)



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rife with mistrust of government. Many other bond and tax measures were defeated all across California.

There is no doubt that voters will see another proposal to extend taxpayer support for SMART,

because all forms of transportation—automobiles, ships, aircraft and trains—require public subsidies.

Between now and the next vote, SMART's leadership will need to listen more closely for the concerns of businesses, residents, cyclists,

and environmentalists. While the enthusiasm and complements of train riders are encouraging, they have proved insufficient to generate the support needed to renew a tax measure.

# Sonoma County Activists Call for Progress on Climate Action, Halting New Gas Stations

By Woody Hastings  
& Jenny Blaker  
*Sonoma Group*

More than 1,000 petition signers, 100 listserv subscribers, and about 15 Sonoma County-based organizations have joined together to form the grassroots “Coalition Opposing New Gas Stations” (CONGAS), with a mission to “stop the construction of new gasoline stations in Sonoma County and its nine cities.” Sierra Club members are among this diverse group that sees the contradiction in the elected officials’ “commitment” to drawing down greenhouse gas emissions with the bevy of proposed new gas stations popping up throughout the county.

Most people “get it” and immediately question the need for a new gas station—especially when there are so many existing stations within a few miles of all of the proposed new ones. But as we reach out beyond the environmental community, we find people who wonder why it matters.

To them, gas stations are just a given, a fact of life, and even a necessity. For everyone alive today gas stations have always been here, they are with us now, and there is an assumption that they will always be part of our lives. But with climate change upon us and immediate action required to draw down greenhouse gas emissions and to change the way we have always done things, is that assumption correct?

Transportation accounts for a roughly 60-percent slice of Sonoma County’s greenhouse gas (GHG) pie. If we are to have any hope of achieving state climate and energy policy and local GHG-reduction



Members of CONGAS and the northeast Santa Rosa community show up during the morning commute hours to raise awareness about the 7/11 gas station proposal at the corner of Middle Rincon Road and Highway 12. / Photo by Karen Preuss.

goals, we need to rapidly reduce emissions from this sector. To do this, we need to cease building new fossil fuel infrastructure that services gasoline and diesel-powered transportation.

## California Policy Goals

On Sept. 10, 2018, Gov. Jerry Brown issued Executive Order B-55-18, which set a new statewide goal to “achieve carbon neutrality as soon as possible, and no later than 2045...in addition to the existing statewide targets of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.”

Gov. Gavin Newsom, since taking office in 2019, has affirmed this policy. Given the state legislature’s history of commitment to addressing the climate crisis, it is likely that this, or very similar policy will be codified. This is an ambitious goal, but the policy trajectory is clear. In order to achieve a goal like this, local actions of permitting authorities

must be in alignment, and must begin now. The financing of new gas stations includes amortization of construction and start-up costs typically over 20-year time periods. At best, a new gas station built today will still be paying off loans in the early 2040s, just a few years shy of the date we are supposed to be totally off of fossil fuels.

The transportation technology trajectory is also clear. In January 2018, Gov. Brown issued Executive Order B-48-18 calling for 5 million zero-emission vehicles by 2030 and the installation of 250,000 electric vehicle (EV) chargers in the state. Currently, the national EV fleet is greater than 1.2 million, with about 600,000 EVs in California alone. With the rapid rise of practical and affordable EVs, the need for charging infrastructure will grow as the need for gas pumps diminishes.

Current trends indicate that gas

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stations built in 2020 may be abandoned as unprofitable in a few short years.

Sonoma County should make wise investments based on these trends. Equally, if not more important than investments in EVs and other technology, are investments in bicycling and pedestrian infrastructure and amenities, and safe, clean, efficient, affordable, frequent, intermodally interconnected, and accessible public transportation.

## SoCo Commitments to Address the Climate Crisis

Sonoma County has a well-established history of soundly reasoned commitments in response to the global climate crisis, including a Climate Emergency Resolution adopted in September 2019 and an earlier Climate Change Action Resolution adopted in May 2018.

These resolutions provide a framework for reducing GHGs. Denial of permits for new gas stations would be consistent with county policy, which includes:

- A countywide target to reduce GHG emissions by 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030 and 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050
- Working to increase the health and resilience of social, natural, and built resources to withstand the impacts of climate change
  - Promoting healthy, safe communities
  - Protecting water resources
  - Promoting a sustainable, climate-resilient economy
  - Increasing renewable energy use and switching to electric equipment
  - Encouraging low-GHG trans-

## Current Gas Station Proposals in Sonoma County

**5300 Sebastopol Rd.** (Llano & Hwy 12, just east of Sebastopol in unincorporated Sonoma County)  
Send your email in opposition to the County's planning consultant Daniel Hoffman: [dhoffman@migcom.com](mailto:dhoffman@migcom.com)

**874 N. Wright Rd., Santa Rosa** (Between Hwy 12 and Sebastopol Rd., on the western edge of Santa Rosa)  
Email City Planner Adam Ross: [aross@srcity.org](mailto:aross@srcity.org)

**43 Middle Rincon Road, Santa Rosa** (Hwy 12 just east of Mission Blvd)  
Email City Planner Adam Ross: [aross@srcity.org](mailto:aross@srcity.org)

**Safeway Petaluma, Washington Square Shopping Ctr.** (S. McDowell & Maria Drive). This case is in the Sonoma County Superior Court.  
For more info visit: [nogashere.org](http://nogashere.org)

Write or call your elected city and county representatives, the decision-makers in these cases (city planners, planning commissioners), and send letters to the editor of the Press Democrat: [letters@pressdemocrat.com](mailto:letters@pressdemocrat.com)

portation options and concentrating on focused growth to reduce travel demand

- Protecting and enhancing the value of open and working lands, while increasing carbon sequestration

These two resolutions, working together, provide enough of a framework to direct countywide policy that would benefit all residents through energy savings, air quality and public health improvements, local job creation, resource conservation, climate resilience and enhanced equity.

And rejecting new gas station proposals is perfectly consistent with these resolutions.

In addition to the county's policies, cities, including Petaluma and Santa Rosa, have adopted Climate Emergency Resolutions. If these resolutions are to have any meaning at all, activities such as building new gas stations must

come to an end.

## Other Issues

In addition to concerns directly related to the climate crisis, each proposed new gas station would have other detrimental effects, such as creating air and water pollution.

It is widely accepted that leaks from storage tanks contaminate surface and groundwater. There are already many leaking underground fuel storage tanks throughout the county. Benzene and other airborne chemicals that seep out of the tanks cause cancer and other health problems.

Traffic congestion and safety are already major issues at some of the proposed sites, where a new gas station would only exacerbate the prob-

lem.

Paving over undeveloped greenfield sites (such as at 874 N. Wright Rd. in Santa Rosa, which is dotted with oak trees and vernal pools), would adversely impact wildlife species and habitat.

## Making Headway

CONGAS has been organizing rapidly and opposing every new gas station proposal that arises within the county. Its members have attended planning meetings, written letters and op-eds and spread the word to neighbors and friends about the rapid need to inform and stand up against these proposed developments.

The group will continue to monitor and disseminate information as it becomes available.

To get involved, contact Woody Hastings at [woodyhastings@gmail.com](mailto:woodyhastings@gmail.com)

# Redwood Needles

Sierra Club

Redwood Chapter

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## Mountains & Rivers Bill Passes the House



On Feb. 10 the U.S. House of Representatives passed broad wilderness legislation that included Rep. Jared Huffman's Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act; altogether, this package would designate 1.37 million acres of federal lands as wilderness, protecting them from extractive industries and other abusive uses while expanding recreational opportunities, improving fire management, and boosting local economies. Portions of Redwood Chapter's North and Mendocino Groups are included in this sweeping designation.

The bill is now in the U.S. Senate where Sen. Kamala Harris has consolidated the Huffman legislation with San Gabriel and Central Coast wilderness legislation to form an omnibus bill tentatively titled the "Protecting Unique and Beautiful Landscapes by Investing in California (PUBLIC) Lands Act."

[www.sierraclub.org/redwood](http://www.sierraclub.org/redwood)

Sonoma • Napa • Solano • Lake • Mendocino • Humboldt  
Del Norte • Trinity • Western Siskiyou