# Redwood Needles

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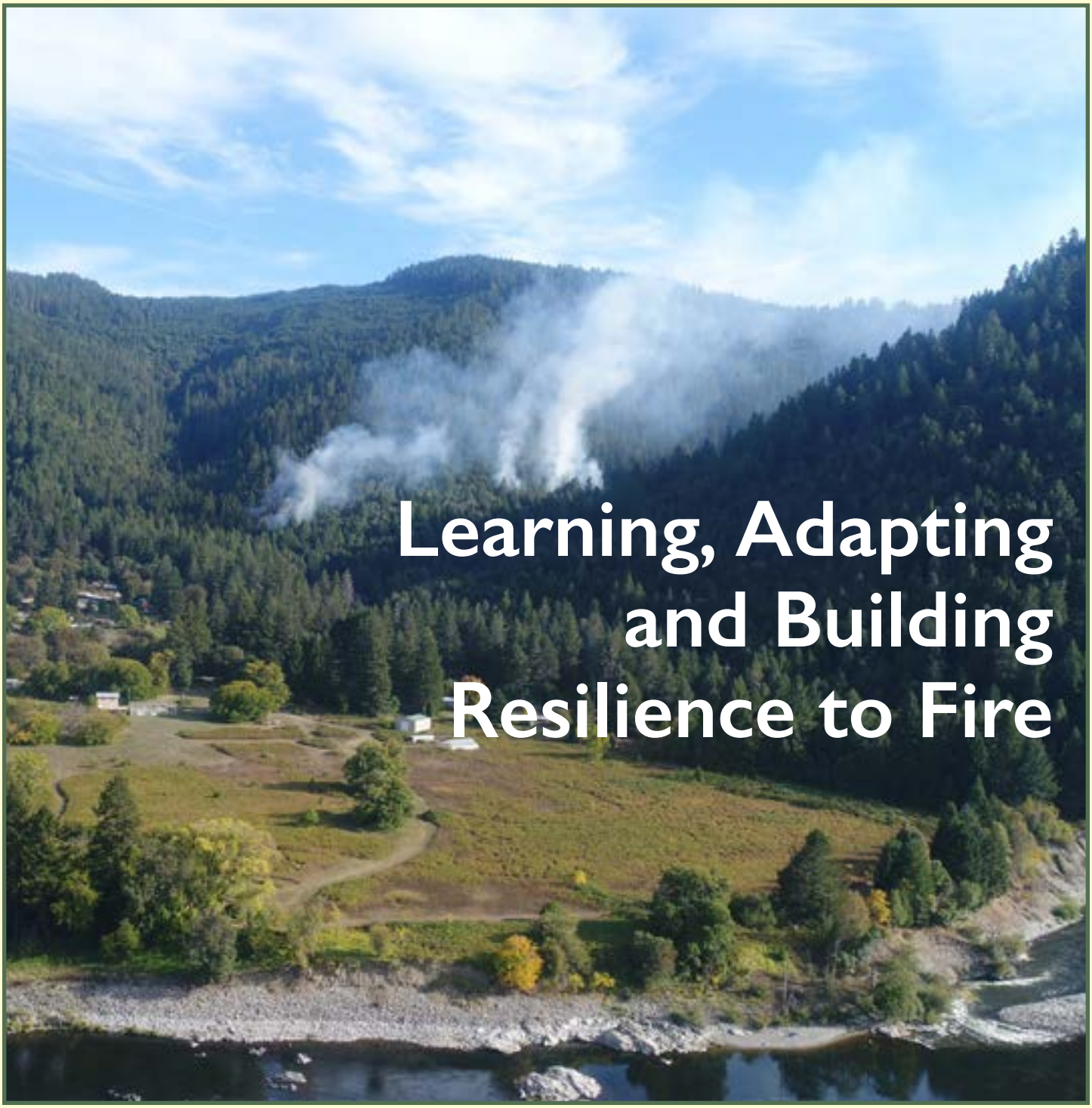

# Learning, Adapting and Building Resilience to Fire

# On the Path

*a note from*

**Chapter Director Jeff Morris**

I had somehow gotten downtown quickly enough. Within minutes I found myself on the roof of the Trinity County courthouse, where my friend worked in the local District Attorney's office. The fire had crested over the top of Oregon Mountain, and we spent the next hour watching it roll through the southwest section of Weaverville and toward my house—which I had just vacated—blowing up residential propane tanks every few minutes until a key fire line was put in place and the wind, thankfully, died down.

Later we would find out that our friend, Eric Ohde, who grew up with us and was a fire captain for the City of Redding at the time, had turned his car around on I-5 when he heard about the fire and raced up Highway 299 toward the blaze that was threatening his childhood home in Weaverville. Eric was the key on-the-ground intelligence that helped CalFire place the crucial fire line.

A few weeks later my sister, who was working as a contracts lawyer in New York, emerged from the subway line closest to the World Trade Center to see people jumping out of the twin towers while NYFD crews raced toward that horrific danger.

August and September of 2001 changed all of our lives.

Now, more than two decades later, Trinity County, like so many other communities across the West, has seen a major wildfire almost every other year. Local response has been the development of Community Wildfire Protection plans, Fire Safe councils and robust community awareness campaigns.

The Weaverville Community Forest, an award-winning partnership between the local Resource Conservation District, Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service, manages more than 13,000 acres within the Weaverville Basin. Its founding was a direct outcome of the 2001 fire event.

The Trinity Collaborative, the Western Klamath Resource Partnership and other similar larger scale groups have been established and nurtured in the intervening years. Klamath Mountain communities have made good progress in gaining a better understanding for fire, our role in causing it with roads and carelessness, and our vulnerability when we're in its path.

Unfortunately, like so many other issues, we've learned this the hard way even though the lessons, and teachers, have been right in front of us.

Inside this edition of *Redwood Needles*, you'll find an article featuring the modern (and ancient) work of the Karuk Tribe, which has "used fire to manage the landscape since time immemorial" and which is continuing to set the bar for the use of prescribed fire in our region. The tribe's methods have been replicated in non-tribal communities across the West and have established precedent on how communities live with fire. I am grateful to be connected to tribal members through our shared work, and I hope I can learn more as our paths continue to merge.

Steady on and keep at it,


SIERRA CLUB
REDWOOD CHAPTER

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# Living with Fire

## Communities across our region cope with rebuilds, tree destruction & anxiety while forging resilience, new practices

***Editor's Note***

It's spring in Northern California, and with another dry winter now past, this spring feels combustible. Fire season has no parameters now, and while we feel fire weary, we are more prepared, more knowledgeable and understanding of the reality that living with fire is the new normal.

Home hardening, prescriptive burns, intelligent forest management and heightened fire awareness are now part of our lexicon. As we move into longer, warmer days, we know fire will come, and we will be more ready than before.

We are grateful for this issue's contributors of fire-related articles, as we know the intense wildfires during the last decade in our region have deeply affected every one of us.

Thank you for reading and continuing to pay attention to this and other important conversations.

— Shoshana Hebshi, *editor*

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A cut tree lies on the property of a home destroyed by the Glass Fire in Deer Park in 2020. The pace of rebuilding in this rural part of Napa County is slow, and fallen, cut and charred trees leave views of the valley unobstructed. Photo: Yvonne Baginski

**By Yvonne Baginski**
*Napa Group*

It's been almost two years since the devastating Glass Fire, and Napa County's Howell Mountain is barely returning to life. The views are scarred with blackened trees, piles of abandoned brush and landscapes reminiscent of war-torn lands.

The fire, active for 23 days, destroyed 67,482 acres and 1,555 buildings in Napa and Sonoma counties. About 300 or so of those were houses on Howell Mountain, mostly in Deer Park.

The fire is believed to have started near a machine shed in Deer Park, which is midway up the mountain, on the road to the top, where the small town of Angwin, surrounded by fiery blasts, mostly survived.

Deer Park, however, the home of St. Helena Hospital, is devastated. Gone are the low-income trailer parks, the 100-year-old homes, and the beauty of the trees shading the narrow lanes defining the rural character of the community. Now, empty lots with fallen rocks are dotted with white RVs where people live until they rebuild. With trees charred and crashed, views of the valley are unobstructed, and the beauty of what was taken in those 23 days is evident to anyone taking a drive up the hill.

Lots are mostly cleared, some surrounded by orange plastic hazard tape. Orange California poppies, purple lupine and even yellow sunflowers are blooming in the wreckage, but other life has mostly disappeared. Silence prevails on the hillsides.

A few new homes have popped up, maybe larger than before, and a few signs of upcoming builds are scattered throughout the area. Several lots have been converted to vineyards.

The pace of rebuilding here, compared to Solano and Sonoma counties' wildfire rebuilds, is much slower, according to Amy Christopherson of Christopherson Builders, a construction company

*Continued on Page 9*

## 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 over Zoom.

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VIEW FROM THE COAST

# A flurry of protective measures on Sonoma Coast after Meyers Fire

**By Tom Roth**
*Chair, Chapter Conservation Committee*

Aug. 17 will mark the second anniversary of a massive dry lightning storm that set ablaze more than 363,000 acres in six northern California counties. In Sonoma County, the Walbridge Fire started in isolated hills north of the Austin Creek Recreation area and moved south and west toward the coast, burning 55,000 acres. At the same time, lightning strikes in forested gullies on Meyers Grade ridge caused a 2,600-acre conflagration, burning down to Highway 1 and threatening Fort Ross State Park.

Our hilltop home was nearly flanked by the two fires on the east and west, and we did not hesitate to leave when the evacuation order came.

Even before the series of massive wildfires in our region starting in 2017, our community has had wildfires always in the back of our minds. In 1978 the area was devastated by the Creighton Ridge Fire, which burned 17,000 acres and destroyed nearly all the dwellings built by back-to-the landers on three former ranches.

> Our community has had wildfires always in the back of our minds.

Locals established the Fort Ross Volunteer Fire Department, who were given the responsibility to protect a steep and, in places, thickly forested area about the size of San Francisco. Back then, CDF (now known as CalFire) and the Department of Corrections ran a "Conservation Camp" near Russian Gulch, which was manned by about 100 inmates, who provided added fire protection. But the camp was closed in the late '80s leaving fire response to more distant CDF crews and the local VFDs.

Over the years, that vacuum was somewhat filled by ever closer working relationships of the Fort Ross Road, Timber Cove and Cazadero VFDs.

Following the 2017 fires came a series of community meetings on fire protection, the development of a Wildfire Protection Plan, and a grant program, which provided water storage tanks to homeowners for rooftop rain collection systems. Instrumental in all of these efforts was another local group, the Coastal Hills Community Forest Council, and the county's Fire Safe Sonoma.

Community actions only accelerated following the 2020 fires. On the ranches, residents got out their chain saws and joined

*Continued on Page 12*

Smoke from a low-intensity prescribed fire near Orleans in Humboldt County. Photo: Stormy Staats

# Karuk Tribe intensifies efforts to reclaim, contribute to fire mitigation strategies

**By Connor McGuigan & Bill Tripp**
*Karuk Tribe Department of Natural Resources*

September 2020 air quality was the stuff of national headlines. Accounts of "apocalyptic skies" and "smoke blotting out the sun" came from the San Francisco Bay Area, and a photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge shrouded in orange haze made the front page of *The New York Times*.

That same week, national media outlets reported that Portland had the worst air quality of any major city in the world.

For those living on the fire's edge in less populated regions of California, Oregon and Washington, the orange skies were a familiar sight.

"We've been dealing with this every year for a long time," said Bill Tripp, director of the Karuk Tribe Department of Natural Resources (DNR), about hazardous wildfire smoke levels in the Klamath river basin, where the tribe's ancestral lands are situated.

The climate crisis, combined with more than a century of practicing fire suppression over traditional tribal land stewardship, has brought catastrophic fire and pollution to the doorstep of Karuk tribe members. More than 95 percent of the tribe's aboriginal territory is classified by the USDA Forest Service as having a "very high" fire hazard rating.

On the day Portland's air quality made headlines, the average Air Quality Index (AQI) in the tribal seat of Happy Camp just south of the Oregon border in Siskiyou county reached nearly 1,600—more than three times the highest reading in Portland. The Slater Fire had just torn through the area, burning almost 200 homes and leaving smoke in its wake. The following year, the nearby town of Orleans was inundated with heavy smoke for several months straight.

The Karuk Tribe is deeply invested in combating the detrimental effects of wildfire and wildfire smoke. In 2020, the tribe, in partnership with the

*Continued on Page 6*

# Karuk Tribe paves the way for fire and smoke management

*Continued from Page 5*

Blue Lake Rancheria and Humboldt State University (HSU) researchers, helped initiate the "Smoke, Air, Fire, Energy (SAFE) in Rural California" project.

This 2.5-year venture was founded around a shared motivation to provide resilient technology to help people manage smoke, air quality and energy.

SAFE researchers installed five outdoor PurpleAir sensors at different locations and elevations within Karuk lands to fill gaps in monitoring smoke during wildfire season. During last year's fires, the tribe included data from these air monitors in public service announcements posted on social media.

The SAFE team has also installed in-home filtration systems in nine households and is currently studying their usability. Staff at HSU and the Karuk Tribe are currently pursuing grant funding to purchase and distribute 100 more in-home filtration systems.

During wildfire season, electric utilities sometime shut off service at times when indoor air filtration is needed most. Our project partners at the Blue Lake Rancheria are nationwide experts in deploying micro-grid technology. Working with them and DNR staff, HSU researchers are developing a community-scale resilient energy plan for the town of Orleans. The project team is currently seeking funding to build a solar micro-grid in Orleans that would supply energy to key facilities during power shut-offs.

Karuk people have used fire to manage the landscape since time immemorial, and the DNR maintains this tradition through carrying out prescribed fires and cultural burns. These low-intensity fires bring myriad benefits to the ecosystem, including fuels reduction and prevention of catastrophic wildfires.

To compare the smoke produced by intentional burning to wildfire smoke, SAFE researchers temporarily installed air monitors at different locations during multiple burns. They found that a week of prescribed fire caused PM 2.5 to reach "unhealthy" levels for only one day, whereas wildfires that year had produced such levels of smoke in the area for longer than a month straight.

There are many beneficial aspects to fire and smoke. The Karuk Tribe depends on these benefits as do our territorial forests, plants and animals. This extends to fish and water considerations, which can be understood more by reading the Karuk Climate Adaptation Plan available here: https://karuktribe-climatechangeprojects.com/climate-adaptation-plan

There is no "no fire" or "no smoke" alternative. SAFE project research helps support the Karuk Tribe DNR's mission to restore the practice of using good fire and emphasizes what traditional ecological knowledge tells us—that working with fire is the solution to it working against us.

Smoke descending on Orleans one morning in August 2021. Photo: Peter Alstone

Karuk people have used fire to manage the landscape since time immemorial, and the Department of Natural Resources maintains this tradition through carrying out prescribed fires and cultural burns.

# Lake County addresses causes, remedy for dead, dying trees throughout region

**By Victoria Brandon**
*Redwood Chapter, Chair*

Many residents of our region, especially in Lake County where I live, have been distressed in recent years by the large numbers of dead and dying trees so sadly displayed on the hillsides. What is happening? Can anything be done to prevent these losses? Don't the dead trees pose a significant additional fire risk?

To address these and other questions, on March 10 Lake County Supervisor Jessica Pyska presided over a virtual town hall co-hosted by the county Risk Reduction Authority and recently formed Tree Mortality Task Force.

The first presentation came from entomologist Dr. Michael Jones, University of California Cooperative Extension forestry advisory for Lake County, who explained that forests are very dynamic systems with fire a crucial element in maintaining their health. It's known that bark beetles are the direct cause of the excess tree mortality we have been observing lately, but the beetles themselves — members of several distinct species and all natives — play the crucial role of removing dead and dying plant materials and allowing the nutrients they contain to be returned to the soil where they can nourish the next generation of healthy trees. They are also important food for wildlife.

Although the beetles themselves are not the problem, excessive stress from drought and fire can lead to a feedback loop and explosive population growth that causes beetles to start to attack healthy trees in such quantity that the trees' usual defenses are ineffective. Insecticides are of little help; the best strategy is to remove infested materials, shred the woody waste that is full of eggs and larvae, and burn or shred the remainder. Firewood should always be burned as close to the area where it grew as possible, to avoid spreading both bark beetles and invasive insect pests, such as the Emerald Ash Borer.

Trees along the hillsides in Lake County have been suffering from bark beetle infestation intensified by drought and fire. Photo: Victoria Brandon.

Representatives from other agencies talked about planned improvements to firesafe corridors, the assistance available for homeowners to improve the defensible space around their residences, remove dead and dying trees and replant a fire-scarred landscape when necessary, and plans to resume the traditional tribal cultural burning that used to be such a vital element of landscape-level stewardship in this region. Unfortunately, the most important source of financial assistance for private landowners — the Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP) funding available through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) — specifically disqualifies work within the 100-foot defensible space perimeter, which is exactly where it is needed most.

It was also disquieting to hear CalFire Division Chief Paul Duncan state that there have been several potentially dangerous fires already, including some escaped control burns, and that current conditions are similar to those to be expected in mid-June of a normal year.

Representatives from PG&E were also on hand, who confirmed that routine inspections along utility lines have revealed "exponential" numbers of dead and dying trees, and that because of the prevalence of bark beetles they will now offer property owners the option of having woody debris removed. Nothing whatsoever was said about eliminating power lines as a source of wildfire ignition by upgrading their infrastructure, as Redwood Chapter advocates.

*To view the webinar in full, visit https://youtu.be/V9Bzn3sIiks*

## *'It won't be long, and most of the forests on this mountain will be gone.*

*Continued from Page 3*

leading much of the rebuilds in all three counties.

"In Deer Park," she explained, "a lot of the people had lived there for generations. Many of those houses are over 100 years old. They were built before permits were needed, and records are spotty. Some are on septic systems…the conditions are challenging, daunting, particularly for those on rocky slopes."


Charred mailboxes along a narrow road in Deer Park, Napa County. The community is slow to rebuild after the 2020 Glass Fire. *Photo: Yvonne Baginski*

The one-lane streets—Mund, Champion, Sunnyside—terracing the mountain, once squeezed square footage into every inch of land they could. The older, shingled, wooded homes were then added onto, built up and remodeled through time. The burn destroyed the history and affordability. Insurance payouts come based upon square footage, making claims difficult without a permit or record.

Current rebuilds would allow for larger homes than what was there before, but there are costs involved. Costs, Christopherson points out, that many current owners are unable to afford.

"Many of the homes burned down were insured by the California FAIR Plan, and there's not enough money to rebuild," she said. "They can build up to 124 percent of what was there before, but it is expensive, and they also must improve the roads."

The California FAIR Plan covers fire basic fire damage to structure and personal belongings. It is the insurer of last resort.

Christopherson is currently looking to build nine houses, she added.

On March 1, there were six Zillow listings for homes for sale in Angwin; the lowest priced was $750,000. Only one burned-out lot was listed in Deer Park, at $495,000.

Housing rebuilds aside, what made the mountain so valuable was the fact that it is the watershed for Napa Valley, said Kellie Anderson, an Angwin environmental activist. "This is where the water comes from, and watching these trees die without anyone paying attention is a disaster."

Driving up and down the empty streets, there is no evidence of tree replacement. With the advantage of the trees gone, there seems to only be more room for homes, vineyards and expansive views.

Anderson points out that it's not just the damage from the fires that is changing the ecology of mountain, but also the thousands of trees recently cut to stumps by PG&E contractors, and the ongoing death of the forests due to drought and beetle devastation.

As part of its controversial and devastating "vegetation management" plan, PG&E has hired contractors to cut down thousands of trees on the mountain in the name of fire prevention. Yellow Xs mark their fate. Those already felled are rolled on the sides of driveways and roads.

Other trees are also dying. Destined to fall, the pines and fir trees, eaten by beetles and dehydrated by drought, are browning by the hundreds. Throughout all this devastation, the bulldozers and graders continue to clear land for more vineyards.

"It won't be long, and most of the forests on this mountain will be gone," Anderson said. "These trees are important to our watershed. We don't have the rainfall anymore, and the only precipitation we get is the condensation on these trees. But, as we lose trees, we will also lose the water."

Twenty-eight years ago, Anderson moved to her one-acre property, which she bought with a low-income HUD loan for less than $100,000. Her home is one of five on a very short street, and a neighbor's house recently sold for more than $1 million. Seeing local trends, she isn't surprised at the monetary gain, but wonders how others will ever be able to live in these communities that were once the outliers for the

*Continued on Page 9*

## *These trees are important to our watershed.'* — Kellie Anderson, activist

*Continued from Page 8*

working poor.

"We used to say, 'drive until you can afford to buy,'" says Anderson, "But now, there's really no place left to buy, because nothing is cheap."

It's not just the affordability, but also the wildfire risk. Insurance rates have increased dramatically, and Anderson points out that her own insurance has gone up from $2,000 to $7,000 this year. She can't imagine how difficult it might be for long-term residents, many whom are low-income, to pay these increased rates.

Anderson believes Howell Mountain's aging population will also contribute to the changeover in homes. Older neighbors on her street recently moved into senior apartments closer to town. It wasn't just the fear of future wildfires that concerned them, but also the electricity shut offs, sometimes lasting several days at a time.

"Many of the homes are being bought by people who are making them their second, or vacation homes," she said. "My husband and I, when we talk about our plans for aging… well, we don't talk about leaving our home due to age, we talk about what we'll do when our house burns down…that's a when, not an if."

Trees get tagged or marked with spray paint when they are slated for destruction by PG&E crews as part of its shortsighted "vegetation management" strategy that clear-cutting swaths of forest land on public and private property. *Photo: Shoshana Hebshi.*

She points out that many of the streets winding up hillsides are too narrow for fire trucks, and there are no fire hydrants in many areas.

However, wildfire threat and power shutdowns haven't stopped people from building, buying or investing in the area.

Even the Napa County Board of Supervisors has pushed back against the state Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, which, in 2021, recommended that rebuilding and expansion of wineries and residences be restricted alongside these narrow and dead-end roadways unless specified conditions be met. These conditions included widening driveways, putting in turnarounds and secondary access roads.

Some of these conditions, according to Christopherson, are already in place for the rebuilds, and the road improvements can be an impediment. On the private roads, the rebuilds must pay for the road improvements, while on public roads, it is up to the county. Part of Sunnyside, for example, is a public road, she said.

The Napa County Board of Supervisors wrote a letter on March 17, 2021, stating, "The new regulations proposed by the BOF staff will have dire consequences for many communities throughout the state, effectively prohibiting residential construction and business expansion in large parts of our counties."

These regulations have not been adopted.

In a tour of the area, Anderson pulled off the roads several times to allow tour buses and other cars to pass, pointing out, "see, you can hardly get by, and they want to build more wineries on this road…. How will people be able to evacuate during a wildfire?"

She recounts her own two evacuations where "so many people were trying to leave at once, that traffic just stopped. Look what happened to the road, it was completely incinerated."

With more vineyards, wineries and workers

*Continued on Page 10*

# Creating Defensible Space at Home

*Information taken from the Fire Safe Sonoma pamphlet "Living with Fire in Sonoma County." The full resource can be found at https://www.srcity.org/DocumentCenter/View/4776/Living-With-Fire-PDF?bidId=*

**In the 1980s, the term "defensible space" was coined to describe vegetation management practices aimed at reducing the wildfire threat to homes. This article responds to some of the commonly asked questions about defensible space.**

## WHAT IS DEFENSIBLE SPACE?

Defensible space is the area between a house and an oncoming wildfire where the vegetation has been modified to reduce the wildfire threat and to provide an opportunity for firefighters to effectively defend the house. Sometimes, a defensible space is simply a homeowner's properly maintained backyard.

## WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VEGETATION AND WILDFIRE THREAT?

Many people do not view the plants growing on their property as a threat. But in terms of wildfire, the vegetation adjacent to their homes can have considerable influence upon the survivability of their houses. All vegetation, including plants native to the area as well as ornamental plants, is potential wildfire fuel. If vegetation is properly modified and maintained, a wildfire can be slowed, the length of flames shortened, and the amount of heat reduced, all of which assist firefighters in defending the home against an oncoming wildfire.

## THE FIRE DEPT. IS SUPPOSED TO PROTECT MY HOUSE, SO WHY BOTHER WITH DEFENSIBLE SPACE?

Some individuals incorrectly assume that a fire engine will be parked in their driveway and firefighters will be actively defending their homes if a wildfire approaches. During a major wildfire, it is unlikely there will be enough firefighting resources available to defend every home. In these instances, firefighters will likely select homes they can most safely and effectively protect. Even with adequate resources, some wildfires may be so intense that there may be little firefighters can do to prevent a house from burning. The key is to reduce fire intensity as wildfire nears the house. This can be accomplished by reducing the amount of flammable vegetation surrounding a home. Consequently, the most important person in protecting a house from wildfire is not a firefighter, but the property owner. And it's the action taken by the owner before the wildfire occurs (such as proper landscaping) that is most critical.

## DOES DEFENSIBLE SPACE REQUIRE A LOT OF BARE GROUND IN MY LANDSCAPE?

No. Unfortunately, many people have this misconception. While bare ground is certainly effective in reducing the wildfire threat, it is unnecessary and unacceptable due to appearance, soil erosion, and other reasons. Many homes

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# Fire-ravaged Deer Park, Angwin suffering two years later

*Continued from Page 9*

destined for the mountain, Anderson also questions the viability of increased traffic and where these workers can possibly live. Before the fires, she knew of many who lived in the additions, back rooms, sheds and trailers on lots of some of the older homes.

"There were lots of little encampments on this mountain, we had an informal support system," she said. "Everything's been ruined."

As change mounts, Anderson is worried about the trees. She points out one after another that's destined for slaughter. Some trees are encircled with ribbons stating, "do not cut." On her own frontage property on Howell Mountain Road, 32 trees were cut down, with more destined for a similar fate.

She laughs, telling the story of neighbors physically encircling one tree in order to save it from the tree contractors employed by PG&E. Some of the tree-cutting work doesn't make sense to Anderson.

"I don't understand what it means to be fire resilient," she said. "What's this way of thinking now… that the tree is our enemy? The trees are dying. It's cataclysmic, and it's happening now. It's unstoppable. Our government doesn't give a shit, and there's nothing we can do, anyway."

But, she figured that if government won't stop the development, perhaps it will just be the matter of the insurance rates, which eventually may become unaffordable to many.

Christopherson agrees that getting fire insurance coverage can be an impediment.

"People are going to have problems getting insurance, " she said. "I don't think these areas are going to rebuild for a very long time. It is very challenging."

*PG&E, Napa Firewise and the Napa County planning department did not respond to requests for comment for this article.*

have attractive, well vegetated landscapes that also serve as effective defensible space.

## DOES CREATING A DEFENSIBLE SPACE REQUIRE ANY SPECIAL SKILLS, EQUIPMENT?

No. For the most part, creating a defensible space employs routine gardening and landscape maintenance practices such as pruning, mowing, weeding, plant removal, appropriate plant selection, and irrigation. Equipment needed includes common tools like a chain saw, pruning saw, pruning shears, loppers, weed-eater, shovel, and a rake. A chipper, compost bin, or a large rented trash dumpster may be useful in disposing of unwanted plant material.

## HOW BIG IS AN EFFECTIVE DEFENSIBLE SPACE?

Defensible space size is not the same for everyone, but varies by slope and type of wildland vegetation growing near the house. See the article entitled "Creating An Effective Defensible Space" for specific information.

## DOES DEFENSIBLE SPACE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Yes. Investigations of homes threatened by wildfire indicate that houses with an effective defensible space are much more likely to survive a wildfire. Furthermore, homes with both an effective defensible space and a nonflammable roof (composition shingles, tile, metal, etc.) are many times more likely to survive a wildfire than those without defensible space and flammable roofs (wood shakes or shingles). Appropriate roofing materials and defensive space give firefighters the opportunity to effectively and safely defend the home.

## DOES HAVING DEFENSIBLE SPACE GUARANTEE MY HOUSE WILL SURVIVE A WILDFIRE?

No. Under extreme conditions, almost any house can burn. But having a defensible space will significantly improve the odds of your home surviving a wildfire.

## WHY DOESN'T EVERYONE LIVING IN A HIGH WILDFIRE HAZARD AREA CREATE A DEFENSIBLE SPACE?

The specific reasons for not creating a defensible space are varied. Some individuals believe "it won't happen to me." Others think the costs (time, money, effort, loss of privacy, etc.) outweigh the benefits. Some fail to implement defensible space practices simply because of misconceptions or lack of knowledge.

# HOW DO I CHANGE THE VEGETATION ON MY PROPERTY TO REDUCE THE WILDFIRE THREAT?

The objective of defensible space is to reduce the wildfire threat to a home by changing the characteristics of the adjacent vegetation.

**Defensible space practices include:**

- Increasing the moisture content of vegetation.
- Decreasing the amount of flammable vegetation.
- Shortening plant height.
- Altering the arrangement of plants.

**This is accomplished through the "Three R's of Defensible Space."**

**REMOVAL:** This technique involves the elimination of entire plants, particularly trees and shrubs, from the site. Examples of removal are cutting down a dead tree or cutting out a flammable shrub.

**REDUCTION:** The removal of plant parts, such as branches or leaves, constitute reduction. Examples of reduction are pruning dead wood from a shrub, removing low tree branches, and mowing dried grass.

**REPLACEMENT:** Replacement is substituting less flammable plants for more hazardous vegetation. Removal of a dense stand of flammable shrubs and planting an irrigated, well maintained flower bed is an example of replacement.

# VIEW FROM THE COAST: Preparing, protecting following Meyers Fire

*Continued from Page 4*

volunteer work days, cutting back some of the most dangerous fuel loads. More controversial to environmentalists, some of the private land on Meyers Grade Road that had burned over was stripped of some of its blackened trees and piles of slash were gathered and burned.

A major restoration plan was implemented in the upper forests of Fort Ross State Park, which had been ravaged by Sudden Oak Death. Acres and acres of dead trees had fallen in the thick forest, creating a tangle of bone-dry trunks and branches on the floor and leaning against still living trees. In a fire, Fort Ross Road down to the coast would have been impassible. The tangle has been greatly diminished, the forest floor now passable, and larger living trees untouched.

Meanwhile, the Coastal Hills Community Forest Council applied to the county for a Vegetation Management grant, and received funding to create a sheltered fuel break along Fort Ross Road, the sole evacuation route from Cazadero to Highway 1. Planning is underway and work will start this summer., when spotted owl breeding season ends.

The council has expanded the project twice: first to improve evacuation routes on the local ranches, including Munez Ranch, which has private roads to the coast, and to expand it even further by helping to create a Coastal Collaborative project involving big landowners, from Jenner to Stewarts Point, including the Kashia Pomo, whose land we all live on.

Four, 5,000-gallon water tanks were installed on a neighboring property as additional supply for fires and drought. Photo: Tom Roth.

The Council also purchased a chipper, which can be used for community projects or rented by individual property owners working on defensive space. The winter also brought two proscribed burns, and the formation of a private fire prevention crew.

Defensive space and structural hardening, which experts say give the biggest bang for the buck in fire protection, has also been stepped up. Vegetation near homes has been cleared (firewood a surplus commodity), and flammable materials around —and under—buildings have been removed. Two of my neighbors have replaced flammable siding with inflammable cement board.

These hills are known for their high winter rainfall—and long dry seasons. Even in a drought year, there is usually enough winter rainfall to recharge springs and wells, and plenty of roof water, thus providing enough water to fill storage tanks for the dry months. Two of my neighbors now have at least 30,000 gallons in storage capacity.

On these bright spring days, the hills still green, the tree frogs chirping, the fawns emerging from the mottled woodlands, its very clear why we live here. So our personal fire protection checklist grows rather than diminishes. Work continues as trees and more flammable vegetation are cut back or cleared in the defensive space zones. Another water tank is planned, flame-resistant paint will be applied to siding, and eaves will be covered with cement board.

Making our own homes and community safer does help keep fear at bay. I'm in awe at the community efforts and the work of my neighbors.

Still, in the background there is a gnawing sense of anxiety. As the effects of climate change ramp up can we keep up?

Can we maintain and promote biodiversity while protecting our human communities?

What's next?

Making our own homes and community safer does help keep fear at bay. I'm in awe at the community efforts and the work of my neighbors.

# Condor Ridge campaign advances toward permanent protection of 4,000 acres

The Lake County portion of Condor Ridge (previously known as Walker Ridge) or Molok Luyuk in the Patwin language, has been proposed for inclusion in the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument

**By Victoria Brandon**
*Redwood Chapter, Chair*

A lot has been happening recently in the campaign for permanent protection of Condor Ridge, or Molok Luyuk in the Patwin language. The first pleasant surprise came on Feb. 25, when the Ukiah Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management definitively rejected the latest in a series of ill-advised wind energy proposals that would have installed dozens of huge turbines in this sensitive area, announcing that because of Colusa Wind LLC's failure to provide the information about environmental impacts needed to complete their permit application, it had been summarily denied.

"Given the application denial, the BLM will not be preparing an environmental impact statement or potential land use amendment for this project," the agency stated.

As has been previously mentioned, early in January Rep. John Garamendi introduced legislation to add the approximately 4,000 acres of Molok Luyuk in Lake County to the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument. The bill, HR 6366, would also officially change the ridge's name and establish a precedent-setting provision for tribal co-management.

Co-sponsored by Reps. Mike Thompson and Jared Huffman, supported by the Lake County Board of Supervisors and Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation, and with no perceptible opposition, chances for passage seemed good—eventually.

As a coalition of environmental groups, including Redwood Chapter, settled in to fashion a long-term campaign plan we were delighted to learn that the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands had already scheduled a hearing on the bill, which is very unusually prompt action.

At the hearing, held March 1, Yocha Dehe Tribal Chair Anthony Roberts provided testimony praising the legislation's unique provisions for "cooperative and collaborative tribal partnerships." He also recognized an aspirational conservation goal: "Condors once flew over the ridge in abundance and, if successful in protecting this area, ongoing habitat restoration efforts could allow the condor to return."

Since the area is already known to be an important migration corridor, and since plans are already underway for condor introduction in far northern California, the possibility of seeing condors soaring over the Lake and Colusa county borderland in the not-too-distant future is well within the realm of possibility.

Expansion of the monument has also been listed as a priority by Sierra Club California's 30 x 30 team, and would mark an important step toward helping both the State of California and the Biden administration meet their expressed critical goal of protecting 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by the year 2030.

The House subcommittee window for accepting additional testimony on HR 6366 expired before this edition of the *Redwood Needles* went to press, but it's never too late to express an opinion.

*To add your voice to those supporting this legislation, please send an email to Garamendi staff member Tigran Agdaian, Tigran.Agdaian@mail.house.gov*

# Redwood Chapter moves forward on internal equity and inclusion initiatives

**By Tom Roth**
*Chair, Chapter Conservation Committee*

Way back in 2001, Sierra Club's Board of Directors adopted a set of environmental justice principles, thus beginning a two-decade march toward integrating equity and inclusion into the myriad of environmental issues the organization addresses.

Through the work of national campaigns, Sierra Club joined with Native Americans in opposing pipelines through tribal lands, supported Black residents in Flint, Mich., fighting for clean water, and worked with native islanders facing the most dramatic effects of climate change: loss of the land itself.

The Club also began to look inward at its own biases and shortcomings on equity and inclusion. It elected its first Black president in 2015, followed by its first Latino president, and it has recently instituted new equity policies and trainings affecting all parts of the organization.

A critical look at the Club's founder, John Muir, led to acknowledgment of Muir's racist opinions early in his career, and the Club's own history as a predominantly white, middle-class organization, which, for years, viewed environmental issues through a narrow prism, frequently ignoring the needs and aspirations of the minority and disadvantaged communities who live on the front lines of the environmental struggle. The few efforts the Club made to bridge the gap were largely failures.

In 2021, Redwood Chapter leaders joined our colleagues from San Francisco Bay Chapter in a series of Equity and Social Justice trainings, which underlined how little progress had been made, despite widespread expressions of support for becoming a more inclusive organization that better represents the communities we serve.

As a result of the trainings, the chapter's executive committee began discussing what steps could be taken to further environmental justice and make the chapter more inclusive. To further this aim, every ExCom meeting now includes designated agenda space to address equity, justice and inclusion issues.

At its March 2022 meeting, the ExCom decided it was time for direct action on two fronts: (1) Recruiting a more diverse cohort of both new members and new volunteer leaders and (2) Reaching out to vulnerable communities and social justice organizations to try to establish collaborative relationships.

## Recruitment

Chapter bylaws require that an ongoing membership program be established, but are silent on the details. We are therefore proposing to amend the membership section to center the goal of recruiting a more diverse membership. Here is the proposed amendment:

> *"The Executive Committee shall establish a membership committee which will annually present a membership recruitment plan to the ExCom for implementation. The plan, at the minimum, shall provide for programs and/or activities intended to increase racial, cultural, gender and age diversity in chapter membership and will establish procedures for on-boarding and training future Club leaders."*

While there was wide support in the ExCom for establishing the committee, there was also the recognition that a change in the chapter bylaws is a long, arduous process, and so it should not be attempted without input from Club members.

**Therefore, we are asking you, as valued Redwood Chapter members, to take a few minutes to provide your thoughts and suggestions for the proposed amendment.**

**You can contribute at https://www.sierraclub.org/redwood**

## Outreach

When this proposal came under discussion at the same March meeting, it was pointed out that the bylaws amendment, no matter how well intended, was still a "plan to make a plan" and that more immediate action should be taken.

Therefore, the following action plan was agreed to: Each of our chapter's six groups has a voting representative on the ExCom, and that person is tasked with requesting from their group leadership an examination of current programs and issues to identify local environmental justice components and organizations working on those components. Once that is established, the group will reach out directly to those organizations to offer collaboration and assistance.

We all recognize that it is up to us to make the effort to establish working relationships with social justice groups, to attend their meetings rather than expecting them to come to us, and to be prepared to take "no" for an answer.

All group representatives are expected to present an action plan and progress report to the chapter at our next meeting, which will be held on May 14.

We look forward to creating a more robust and dynamic incorporation of these important, inclusive principles into our ongoing work.

Again, your thoughts and suggestions will be highly valuable to us as we move forward.

**Please visit https://www.sierraclub.org/redwood to contribute to this effort.**

# Election cycle endorsements underway

In this electoral cycle redistricting forced California Sierra Club political activists to delay the endorsement process in races all over the state.

The succession of draft maps that were issued in the late summer and fall of 2021 presented district lines in both state and federal races that varied dramatically from one iteration to another, and in many cases made it impossible to determine which chapters were responsible for which district or sometimes even to predict which incumbents (including many environmental champions) would be competing where.

We all drew a big sigh of relief when the lines were finally announced just before New Year's, and we got ready to jump-start an endorsement process that, especially for incumbents, was a couple of months behind schedule.

Our political team reached out to colleagues in the Mother Lode and San Francisco Bay chapters, and started jointly devising questionnaires and scheduling interviews.

Barely two months after beginning, we're delighted to announce the following endorsements for candidates appearing on the June 7 election ballots within the Redwood Chapter region:

**U.S. Senate:**
**Alex Padilla**

**U.S. House, District 02:**
**Jared Huffman**

**U.S. House, District 04:**
**Mike Thompson**

**Statewide Constitutional Officers:**

**Secretary of State:**
**Dr. Shirley Weber**

**Lieutenant Governor:**
**Elena Kounalakis**

**Attorney General:**
**Rob Bonta**

**California State Senate**
**District 02:**
**Mike McGuire**

**Napa County**
**Board of Supervisors**
**District 1:**
**Joelle Gallagher**

At press time, recommendations in several other races at all levels were in progress.

As soon as they are approved, they will be posted to the chapter website at https://www.sierraclub.org/redwood/endorsements

Please bookmark the site and check back frequently.

## Current Volunteer Opportunities

### MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT CHAIR

Be the friendly face that introduces new members and volunteers to Redwood Chapter. This is a key position within the chapter to help it grow and maintain an engaged and active member and volunteer base.

Responsibilities include: creating a calendar for member engagement activities, carrying out social events for members and volunteers, recruiting and leading a member engagement team to help plan activities, welcoming new members, recruiting and tracking new members.

*Estimated Time Commitment: 10 hours a month.*

### OUTINGS LEADERS

Do you love the outdoors? Do you love sharing your love of the outdoors with others? Outings leaders are an integral part of Sierra Club, as they welcome people from all backgrounds into an outdoor adventure. Redwood Chapter is located in an incredible landscape with so many places to enjoy and explore. But chapter outings don't have to be confined to our region. You can lead groups on hikes, paddles, camping trips and more!

Sierra Club provides the training, you provide the inspiration and leadership.

To learn more about becoming an outings leader, please visit https://www.sierraclub.org/redwood/outings-leaderappandresources

*Estimated Time Commitment: 5 hours a month.*

### OUTINGS CHAIR

Provide leadership, direction and oversight to the chapter and group outings programs. Work to make outdoor activities an integrated and vital element of chapter efforts.

Responsibilities include ensuring all chapter and group outings follow Club policies and procedures, managing and minimizing the risks of local outings programs, maintaining training and First-Aid certification requirements for outings leaders, and ensuring active leaders meet these requirements.

*Estimated Time Commitment: 10-15 hours a month.*

*Redwood Chapter welcomes volunteers who are passionate about local environmental issues and want to help. If you're interested in getting more involved but don't see a volunteer position that calls to you and your skill set, please reach out. There are lots of ways for you to plug in, and we would love to have you! E-mail jeff.morris@sierraclub.org*

*For a fuller explanation of volunteer positions, please visit www.sierraclub.org/redwood/get-involved*

# Redwood Needles

Sierra Club
Redwood Chapter
P.O. Box 466, Santa Rosa, CA 95402

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SIERRA CLUB

## Spring Photo Contest!

Are you a shutterbug? Do you love capturing nature through your viewfinder? We would love to see your vision of spring through your lens!

Our 2022 Spring Photo Contest is underway, and we are accepting submissions through June 1.

Contest rules:

- 1 submission per person
- Must be taken within our Chapter's region
- Caption must include location & photographer's name & contact info

E-mail photo submissions to redwood.chapter@sierraclub.org
Subject Line: Spring Photo Contest Submission

Send an email to redwood.chapter@sierraclub.org with questions or for more information.