

Redwood Needles



Summer 2020

Sierra Club Redwood Chapter

Volume 62, No. 3

“We are stronger together when people who have the most at stake are part of the decision-making on how we move forward to heal our communities, our states, our nation and our planet.”

— Dr. Robert Bullard, *The Father of Environmental Justice*

On the Path

a note from
Chapter Director Jeff Morris

Our world and futures continue to unfold before us in unexpected ways that should be somewhat predictable to those who are students of history.

Over the last several weeks we have seen a massive collective response to multiple violent deaths and other inequities caused by systemic racism. Acknowledging these events and talking about them and the underlying issues is the only way to find a path forward. We must understand how far we still have to go, as a society, as communities, as an organization and, for the vast majority of us, as individuals.

I was very young in the early 1970s, the child of rural white parents, and I have vivid memories of some events and personalities. Richard Nixon and the Watergate hearings on TV, the impact of the Vietnam War draft on impoverished communities, and the power of Muhammad Ali, whom I have followed with reverence for most of my life. Despite having studied Ali (and, later, other heroes like Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Dr. Cornell West), as a white man, I still have little idea of the struggles of the Black community and absolutely no concept of what it is like to be an African-American (or a woman, or LGBTQ individual for that matter).

The impacts of the recent weeks have resounded everywhere, even here in rural, mostly-white Trinity County. When a local Sheriff's deputy posted a racist meme on social media days after the George Floyd murder, my community came together to demand action grounded in racial equity. Thankfully, our Sheriff acted swiftly, removing the deputy and joining local citizens marching in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. While changes like this are a reason for hope, I also know that we have been here before.

Here is the pattern: A horrifying event happens. Outraged, we take immediate community action. As time passes, we drift back toward discriminatory assumptions and behaviors grounded in bigotry and white privilege. We must not fall prey to those habits this time.

As supporters of environmental ethics, we should understand that what impacts one part of an ecosystem inevitably affects the whole; our ethos should include equality in all forms for all peoples. Unfortunately, many of us are still warped by biases that influence our day-to-day and long-term behavior. The injuries that people of color continue to experience at the hands of white folks occur outdoors as well as in. It will take serious self-reflection and discipline for historically-white environmental groups, like Sierra Club, to break the chains of their own complicity in perpetuating racism.

Change can be uncomfortable. As a white man, I am practicing being quiet and listening to our brothers and sisters who are showing organizations like ours that even with our "good intentions," we are the byproduct of an inherently bigoted society that has for centuries capitalized off of Black labor and suppression and oppression.

Nationwide, Sierra Club is taking this very seriously. We are taking our cues from organizations who are directly involved in this fight and supporting their efforts. While a good deal of our communications are in "quiet mode" to ensure there is ample bandwidth for other organizations, our national media team is still responding to Trump administration outrages, like the undoing of clean water rules, and calling out injustice wherever we see it.

For the Redwood Chapter, my goal is for us to engage in this work as an organization while individually working to create spaces, work environments – and ultimately communities – where everyone can feel safe to speak their mind, be who they are, and feel that they can be themselves naturally and authentically without fear of attack, bias, or prejudice.



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



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PHOTO: Shoshana Hebshi

Environmental Justice = Racial & Social Justice

By Shoshana Hebshi

This is a moment. A decisive moment in history presenting huge, existential crises that have caused an upheaval in what we thought was normal, what we overlooked, what we ignored and what seems most important.

In the environmental community, we have been staring down climate change, advocating endlessly for policy change and sounding the alarm that we are out of time. We've been fighting assaults from profit-hungry developers and a national administration that wants to sacrifice the natural world for every bit of financial gain that can be squeezed out of it, regardless of the impacts on local communities or the ecosystems. Then Covid-19 came and showed us just how vulnerable we really are, exposing our hubris in the face of nature. And then the tragedies of Ahmaud

Redwood Chapter's work on a set of issues around the region is a reminder that to save the planet we must achieve equality

Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd broke the other great façade of complacency.

For some of us this was nothing new. For many others, it stopped us in our tracks. We took a deep breath and contemplated how we got here. Some of us started listening a little harder, and some of us started writing about the intrinsic link between the environmental work we do and the racial and social injustices that saturate our communities and exist all over the world.

This moment is upon us all, finally shaking us awake with screaming

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Note from Sierra Club :

As people across the country protest in defense of Black lives, the Sierra Club recognizes the need to dismantle systemic racism in the United States and within our own organization. We must reckon with how white supremacy -- both past and present -- has shaped our institutions and do the critical anti-racism work necessary to repair the harm done. The environmental movement does not exist in a vacuum, and it is our responsibility to use our power to help abolish systemic racism which is destroying lives, communities, and the planet.

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. The meetings are being held over Zoom during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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* Signifies voting member of the ExCom

Sierra Club elections for group and chapter leadership in progress

The Sierra Club Redwood Chapter and Group Executive Committee election is now underway. Nominating Committee Chairs have been selected, and the slate for candidates for open seats is proceeding.

If you are interested in running for a position, please contact the relevant nominating committee chair.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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ELECTION SEASON DEADLINES

Aug. 3: Chapter and Group slate is complete and submitted.

Sept. 4: Candidate statements are due for publication in the Fall *Needles* newsletter and receipt of any ballot petitions are due to the Election Committee Chair.

Oct. 1: Voting begins. Ballots and Candidate statements are published in the Fall *Needles*.

Dec. 31: Voting closed. All votes must be in.

Our Newest Staff Member

Meet Jacob Klein: SC Regional Coal Organizer

Name: Jacob Klein

Position: Regional Coal Organizer

Areas of Environmental Interest: Coal, Air Quality, Just Transitions

Residence: Oakland, Alameda County

Hometown: La Mesa, CA

Q: How and when did you first become involved with Sierra Club?

A: Although I'd been aware of Sierra Club for most of my life, I only became involved when I started this position in February of this year. I had been looking to shift into an organizer role that focused on environmental justice. Thanks to a fellowship I'd undertaken in the past, I found out about this position that filled those requirements precisely. I'm grateful to be doing this work on an issue that I care deeply about.

Describe your position:

A: As the Regional Coal Organizer, I'm shared between three chapters—Redwood, Mother Lode and San Francisco Bay. The broad aim of my role is to get coal out of the Bay Area and Delta regions, which occupies most of my work in the SF Bay and Stockton areas. However, since the Redwood Chapter was part of the successful prevention of developing a coal terminal in Vallejo, coal is not as pressing of an issue.

The main areas within this chapter I'm focusing on are Napa, Solano, and Sonoma counties. For now, my position is more of a classic organizer—bridging connections, building up a base of support, working for environmental justice, and supporting campaigns like SR-37, Mare Island, and others.

One project that crosscuts all three of the chapter areas is the SF Bay to Stockton Navigation project which intends to dredge the Carquinez Strait to deepen it allowing for greater oil exportation from the refineries on the corridor, including the one in Vallejo.

Q: How has your involvement with Sierra Club changed your life?

A: Something that's very inspiring to see is the life-long commitment of many members to these issues. It gives me a lot of hope for the resilience and necessity of this work.

Q: What is one of your fondest memories participating in a Sierra Club event or activity?



A: This is a tough question to answer because nearly one month to the day after I started, shelter-in-place was instituted making most events and activities impossible. For me, getting a chance to meet with individuals, learn about their work, and hear why they're so impassioned about their causes is always an enriching experience.

Q: What do you see as Sierra Club's fundamental role in your community?

A: I think that Sierra Club holds a powerful place in being grassroots and membership-led while still holding many relationships with governments and agencies. Sierra Club has a particular privilege in the ways that we can leverage access and connections to resource campaigns and push community goals forward.

Q: What is your favorite thing about living in Northern California?

A: Despite being born and raised in Southern California, I never enjoyed the heat much. Northern California's cooler temperatures and lush environments are a joy for me. I love being able to walk down my street and see California poppies and ginkgo trees turning yellow. On top of that, there's a beautiful nature spot only 15 minutes away and only a couple hours to some deserted areas for trips.

Q: Where in the outdoors would we most likely find you?

A: I live in Oakland so when I need to experience nature as quickly as possible, I usually head to Albany Bulb where I wander through the circuitous paths and crawl over some rocks.

Environmental Justice = Racial Justice

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urgency. This moment is calling for action in so many different ways. For those of us who have been focused on the plight of the environment, we must listen and respond in a way that addresses the larger message of justice.

Sierra Club's mission is to promote environmental conservation—preserving the spaces we love to explore and appreciate. Our founder, John Muir, was an enthusiastic naturalist, who raised awareness of the importance of protecting the outdoors from a recreation and ecological point of view.

Today, 128 years later, the systemic racism from all those years ago still exists. People of color do not have equal access to the outdoors that Muir was working so hard to protect.

Communities of color, including Native Americans, have been subjected to harsh living environments and exploitation for centuries. Today, this exploitation includes industrial development in disadvantaged communities that pollutes the air and increases noise and truck traffic, oil spills that foul waterways, lack of access to open space or recreational facilities, to name just a few atrocities.

And as we are hearing a very loud call to action to shift the course of deeply embedded racist practices throughout the United States, in government, business and social structures, Sierra Club is taking a hard look at its own practices and asking how, as an organization, it can do better to be inclusive and elevate the voices of people of color.

The issue of environmental justice — that impoverished communities of color bear the brunt of environmental degradation and have less access to clean

air, clean water, food security, affordable housing, adequate public transportation and open space — is very much alive in Redwood Chapter. Issues ranging from failed ballot measures to

Lack of Access to Open Space in Solano County

A few months following the

The issue of environmental justice — that communities of color or of less economic prosperity bear the brunt of environmental damage in their neighborhoods and suffer reduced access to clean air, clean water, food security, affordable housing, adequate public transportation and open space — is very much alive in Redwood Chapter.

improve affordable housing and public transit, to proposals to build factories and push polluting industry into low-income neighborhoods, to incursions into open space and greenbelts continue to plague our region.

When we confront issues of environmental justice, it's not always apparent that what we are fighting is racism and generations of inequality, but, as the Black Lives Matter movement has been saying, this has been 400 years in the making—and the intensity of inequality becomes exponential when you include the genocide and exploitation of Native Americans throughout that same time.

Environmental justice is about bringing equity to all communities, and promoting equal access to healthy, livable and vibrant communities for all people—regardless of their economic standing, race or immigration status.

serendipitous withdrawal of a “green” cement plant proposed for a low-income neighborhood in South Vallejo, which Sierra Club rigorously opposed, residents were stunned when the city rescinded access to the Mare Island Shoreline Heritage Preserve, a popular destination for outdoors recreation in an area that doesn't have much access to open space.

Vallejo's population of about 120,000 has a very diverse racial make-up (only 30 percent white according to the 2010 census data) and is considered one of the last affordable places to live in the greater Bay Area. According to a mid-2019 a report by The Metropolitan Transportation Commission and Association of Bay Area Governments, even some current Vallejo residents are getting priced out of the Bay Area altogether. In addition to rising housing costs in Vallejo, residents also have limited access to open space and parks.

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Black Lives Matter protesters march to the Sonoma County Sheriff's building in Santa Rosa on Saturday, June 13. Santa Rosa has been a hub for demonstrations in the North Bay since the killing of George Floyd on May 25 in Minneapolis. Photo: Shoshana Hebshi.

In September 2019, the City of Vallejo closed the 215-acre Mare Island Preserve—a park home to extensive hiking trails and what many believe to be the best birdwatching in all of Northern California. The Preserve was maintained by volunteers and has become the center of controversy over access and management to local open space and recreation areas.

Sierra Club Solano Group Chair Joe Feller was angered by the decision to close the Preserve and the removal of longtime volunteer Myrna Hayes who ran the operation. He worked with volunteers to confront city officials and inform the public about the injustice.

“I can tell you what environmental injustice looks like, because I see it here every day,” Feller said.

After eight months of closure, on May 29 the Preserve re-opened with limited hours two days a week. In the meantime, according to Feller, the city had cut down dozens of trees and destroyed fencing around the adjoining historic graveyard.

Adjacent to the Preserve, Feller said they closed a recreation area that supported athletic activities for low-income residents. There are rumors that developers are preparing—with the city's blessing—Mare Island for significant residential development. As access shrinks on Mare Island, Solano

County is still without a parks district. It is the only county that touches the San Francisco Bay that does not have its own parks district, and because of this, access to open space has been stifled.

A ballot initiative to create a county parks district has been repeatedly delayed because of political and administrative reasons.

“This community needs more access to nature,” Feller said, “but it will take a lot of education for voters to understand that being outdoors benefits their health and well-being.”

Feller added that Sierra Club

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Solano Group wholeheartedly supports a county parks district and that while the Solano Land Trust has acquired large amounts of open space, that organization lacks the resources to maintain it properly.

Feller said residents and leaders look at parks as “icing on the cake” rather than a necessity and an “essential part of living in the United States.”

“We need staff devoted specifically to allow that space to be used by people and wildlife and to provide recreational and outdoor opportunities, especially to our citizens who don’t have the wherewithal to go up to the Sierras for a week. We think it’s critical for our local people who may be economically challenged to have a low-cost resource they can access.”

Affordable Housing in Santa Rosa

Vallejo may be one of the most affordable cities in the Bay Area, but it is still financially out of reach for many people. This affordability problem echoes throughout the Redwood Chapter region, especially in Napa and Sonoma counties, which have struggled with affordable housing shortages for years.

After the devastating fires of October 2017 in Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino and Lake counties, affordable housing became even more scarce.

Redwood Chapter’s Sonoma Group supported a rent control ballot measure in June 2017 for the city of Santa Rosa; however, it failed at the polls. The measure would have created more housing security for the many people who found themselves at the mercy of price-gouging landlords following



The Tubbs Fire in October 2017 devastated neighborhoods in Santa Rosa, including Fountain Grove and Coffey Park (pictured). The fire consumed 3,000 homes and squeezed an already choked housing market leaving many people vulnerable to price gouging and soaring housing prices that caused many people to move away from the area.

Photo: Shoshana Hebshi.

the fires.

Not only did the loss of 4,700 homes in the region—3,000 in Santa Rosa alone—amount to a choke hold on the already squeezed housing market, many landlords were able to lease homes to well-insured fire victims at premium rates. The results were unprecedented rent increases and inflated home prices.

In spite of Santa Rosa’s ordinance to restrict rent gouging, average rents rose quickly. By November 2017, according to a UC Davis report, median rents in Napa County had increased by \$2.25 a square foot, meaning a 1,300-square foot house would rent for more than \$2,900 a month. In Sonoma County, median rents rose to a median \$2.40 a square foot or

more than \$3,000 a month for a 1,300-square foot house.

In response, many people left the area to find cheaper housing. For some, that wasn’t an option, and the high cost of housing is a state-wide problem.

Sierra Club California’s director, Kathryn Phillips, wrote in 2018 that Sierra Club has long been active in housing and growth issues, supporting infill development, public transit and affordable housing to create resilient and diverse communities.

“Building enough affordable housing for California’s families and workers is one of the most important challenges facing California. State and local officials and elected officials need to work

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together to spur development of affordable and infill housing while upholding tenants' rights, reducing emissions and protecting wildlands," said Phillips, "It's possible to achieve these goals, but it will require collaboration."

Following the 2017 fires, Redwood Chapter joined with an alliance of community organizations, the Another World is Possible Coalition, to establish the Just and Resilient Future Fund (JRFF). The goals of the fund were twofold: First, provide immediate funding for the most vulnerable fire victims, and second, (perhaps uniquely) support longer term projects that build more healthy and resilient communities to better prepare us for future disasters.

Implementation of the first goal was kicked off with a \$50,000 grant to the Farmers' Alliance—Community Alliance with Family Farmers' program to assist family farmers who suffered losses in the fire and \$25,000 to the Undocufund, which provides assistance to undocumented workers who are often excluded from traditional relief programs. Half of the funds allocated to Undocufund helped pay for a much-needed case worker to manage individual grants.

In Fall 2019, national Sierra Club updated its Infill Development Policy to help cities and towns address the housing and climate crises, calling on leaders to focus on developing compact, walkable communities with a jobs-housing balance that reduces day-to-day carbon footprint while providing affordable housing and better quality of life. The updated policy emphasizes the importance of locating living-wage jobs close to affordable housing, while advocating for mixed-use developments, which support small businesses

such as diverse food markets and neighborhood cafes. Such developments must not reinforce existing racial, ethnic and class segregation, and people from all social classes and backgrounds should be involved in planning them.

Chapter leaders continue to strive for environmental justice by advocating for infill development, more efficient, affordable and expanded public transportation and opposing highway expansion that encourages commuting by car.

Steve Birdlebough, the chapter's transportation chair and chair of the statewide committee on transportation and sustainable commu-

ning to get a bit more momentum. There are lots of places where you now see rows of housing rather than sprawling developments in the outlying areas.

Greed for Oil on the Backs of the Vulnerable

In mid-2018, Sierra Club Sonoma Group got involved in a gas station dispute in Petaluma where Safeway wanted to build a 16-pump gas station in a working-class neighborhood off South McDowell Boulevard. A grassroots group of neighbors discovered the proposal

Building enough affordable housing for California's families and workers is one of the most important challenges facing California. State and local officials and elected officials need to work together to spur development of affordable and infill housing while upholding tenants' rights, reducing emissions and protecting wildlands. It's possible to achieve these goals, but it will require collaboration.

— Kathryn Phillips, Sierra Club California

nities, said, "Infill developments are good for the environment and promote environmental justice. It is a desirable alternative to more costly development in the outlying areas. More affordable living space can be located in walkable city centers around public transit and close to services. A greater sense of community develops when every errand doesn't require a trip in a car. Also, the cost of living is generally lower for people who live in walkable neighborhoods where people can drive less."

Birdlebough added that while infill development takes a long time to implement, "we are begin-

late in the game, seeing that Safeway was about to slip this project through the planning process without doing any real environmental review, such as an Environmental Impact Report.

Neighbors overwhelmingly oppose this project for a multitude of reasons, including the proximity to a school, playing fields and an existing gas station.

Sonoma Group executive committee member Richard Sachen, a Petaluma resident, said this is the wrong project at the wrong time. "With the urgent call to cut greenhouse gas emissions,

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building new gas stations is simply an irresponsible move. More important, the toxic fumes and leaks the gas stations emit into the environment are linked to cancer, asthma and emphysema. This is an unnecessary evil. It's like building a gas lamp factory after Thomas Edison invented the light bulb."

A group of activists arose from this Petaluma fight, and is now trying to stop all new gas station construction in Sonoma County.

Sonoma Group members Jenny Blaker and Woody Hastings launched the Coalition Opposing New Gas Stations (CONGAS), a coalition of residents from all over the county that is currently fighting four active proposals, including one in Rincon Valley in Santa Rosa, where a 7/ Eleven wants to expand and evict residents from a home on the property.

Fossil fuels and their products are a textbook example of exploitation and destruction of vulnerable communities worldwide.

Hastings said the environmental justice work around CONGAS's efforts stem from the belief that everyone should have the right to live free from pollutants and toxins spread into the environment—especially vulnerable communities—by corporations that don't care about anything but the profit margin.

"In every drop that comes out of a gasoline dispenser, there is a trail of devastation for communities and the environment around the world that leads all the way back to the point of extraction of the crude oil from the ground," Hast-

ings said. "Low-income communities of color in the United States and around the world, 'frontline communities,' are poisoned by effluent and emissions from these operations; low-income communities along rail and roadways are threatened by the hazard of oil and gas transportation; similar histori-

including numerous people of color, endure long and difficult commutes.

In the Bay Area, these commutes also tend to be expensive.

Redwood Chapter has been working on a number of initiatives to improve public transit service, with the goals of improving



In June, activists staged a demonstration along the proposed site for a new gas station on Llano Road and Highway 12 close to Sebastopol. Photo: Camille Armstrong.

cally disadvantaged communities of color near refineries and gas processing facilities, 'fenceline communities,' face respiratory disorders, cancer, and death rates much higher than the national average. This is why we fight to stop the construction of new gasoline stations."

Highway 37, SMART and Commuters

When you talk about equity, you have to look at the way people work, if and how they commute and what that looks like.

Many low-income workers,

quality of life for local residents, reducing vehicle miles traveled and making transportation options more equitable.

As the shortest route between affordable housing in Vallejo and jobs in Marin and Sonoma counties, State Route 37 has seen steady increases in traffic. The highway is now quite congested during rush hours, and the situation has drawn attention from policy makers in Solano, Napa, Sonoma and Marin counties.

The highway has flooded several times in recent winters, and with climate change making sea-level rise inevitable, repeated flooding is

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also certain to occur.

The Chapter's transportation chair, Steve Birdlebough, has been working diligently along with Tony Norris from Napa Group, Joe Green-Heffren from Solano Group and Nancy Okada from the Bay Chapter to assure that the multi-county plan to upgrade the road doesn't induce more driving. Taking into account the plight of workers, Birdlebough and other environmental activists have worked to include a carpool lane in the plan, as well as advocated for improved public transportation to run the route via buses and van pools, with trains to run beside the highway.

Elevating the highway is expected to cost \$4 or \$5 billion, and some of that cost would likely be met with a bridge toll that would disproportionately affect low-income workers who travel the road to go to work. Birdlebough said options have been floated to make the tolls a sliding scale based on income or provide other offsets for low-income workers.

Rail service has long been touted as a way to get people out of their cars during their work commutes.

The Bay Area Rapid Transit System (BART) has provided options for decades, but that service does not reach the Redwood Chapter's region. Yet, with the creation of the SMART system, the North Bay was provided reliable and comfortable connection to central Marin County, where commuters can catch ferry service into San Francisco or hop on a bus that will travel all over the region.

Recent expansion of the SMART route linked the San Rafael transit center to the Larkspur ferry terminal for a seamless connection. But



Highway 37, a busy commute corridor between Solano County and Sonoma and Marin counties could serve workers much better with added support for public transportation options along the route.

after a ballot measure was voted down last November to maintain sales tax funding for the rail service, the SMART board of directors has been scrambling to figure out how to continue to provide a high level of service and follow through with its plans to expand northward into Healdsburg and Cloverdale.

Before COVID-19 hit, the SMART service was widely popular, with standing-room-only crowds during commute hours. But critics have cited that the train's high fares excludes a wide swath of the population and caters to older, wealthier people (mostly white). Affordability has been a subject of much debate, and the SMART board has pledged to look into how to make fares more accessible.

Since the pandemic began, SMART has been operating with just 10 percent of its ridership. "It's been coming back slowly," Birdlebough said.

Forging the Link and Doing the Work

The Black Lives Matter movement has amplified the scourge of racism in our communities and across the country. In a recent

Sierra Magazine article, Director of Strategic Partnerships Hop Hopkins writes that the environmental movement cannot continue to ignore racial inequality if we want to make progress.

"You can't have climate change without sacrifice zones, and you can't have sacrifice zones without disposable people, and you can't have disposable people without racism. We're in this global environmental mess because we have declared parts of our planet to be disposable. The watersheds where we frack the earth to extract gas are considered disposable."

While all of the Sierra Club grapples with ways to shed its implicit racial bias and stand in true solidarity with communities of color, Redwood Chapter leaders are looking beyond aligning our environmental goals with social justice to discover how our blind spots have led to such racial and class disparity in inclusion, access and activism among our ranks.

Our work on environmental justice issues will continue to evolve into a new vigor in the fight against the social and racial inequalities that impede Sierra Club's mission to enjoy, explore and protect the planet. *

Work in Your Community as a Climate Protector

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 climate protector is someone who takes the climate crisis seriously enough to:

- Learn the science of climate change so that our actions are based upon a solid factual foundation
- Take steps in our own lives to minimize our contributions to global warming
- Network with others locally and beyond to implement effective climate policies

Now is the time to do what we can! The Climate Protectors website is there to facilitate action needed for our community and planet to reach “Draw-down”—the point in the future when levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere stop climbing and start

to steadily decline.

We must work on all aspects of the climate equation—stopping the sources of greenhouse gas pollution, supporting and enhancing the sinks of carbon dioxide found in nature, and helping society achieve broader transformations.

Climate Protectors Network is a grassroots, home-grown project of the Sierra Club’s Redwood Chapter. Climate Protectors is initially focusing upon the chapter’s nine-county region of Northwestern California.

Look at our website, and let us know if you can join us to build local climate action in your community!

<https://climateprotectors.net/>

Our Mission: To inspire, enable and mobilize teams of informed grassroots volunteers to demand, facilitate, measure and enforce the bold local policies and personal actions needed to cut current greenhouse gas emissions and naturally sequester prior emissions in time to meet United Nations targets for preventing climate catastrophe.

If you missed our Climate Conversation from May 15, check out the recording of the webinar with Rep. Jared Huffman, climate scientist Linda Brown and chapter Climate & Energy Committee chair Randy MacDonald.

<https://www.sierraclub.org/redwood/blog/2020/06/climate-conversation-may-15-2020>

Meetings

Sat., July 18 - Redwood Chapter
Redwood Chapter Conservation Committee and Executive Committee meetings are being held virtually on the Zoom platform. All members are welcome to join us, and asked to contact Chapter Chair Victoria Brandon in advance for connection information Info: Victoria vbrandon@lakelive.info

Tues. July 21 — Lake Group, 2PM
Lake Group is meeting on the Zoom platform for the foreseeable future. All members are welcome to join us, but asked to contact Chair Denise Rushing for connection information. denise@productfrog.com (707) 560-1166.

Tues., July 21 - Napa Group, 6:30 p.m.
All members are welcome to attend Napa Group’s meetings, which are being held virtually for the time being. Please contact Chair Chris Benz for connection information. christinabenz@gmail.com (707) 492-0089.

Mon. Aug. 3 - Solano Group ExCom, 7 p.m.
Solano Group’s meetings are being held on the Zoom platform for the time being. All members are welcome to attend, and asked to contact Chair Joe Feller for connection information. joe56feller@gmail.com (707) 553-1138.

Mon. Aug. 3 - Sonoma Group
The elected members of the Excom meet on the first Monday of each month from 6:30-8:00p to take care of Group business. Conservation Committee: This committee meets before the Excom on the first Monday of the month from 5:30 to 6:30 for discussion, visitors, new members, and learning about new issues. Drop in to this meeting if you want to get involved. Contact Suzanne Doyle for virtual meeting details or to submit agenda items: songrp@sonic.net

See the most up-to-date meeting information on the chapter’s website: <https://sierraclub.org/redwood/upcoming-events>

ACTION ALERT: Protect Santa Rosa greenbelt from luxury resort and event center proposal

By Teri Shore
Sonoma Group

All the land and structures in and around this voter-approved community separator burned during the October 2017 fires. Now a developer wants to cash in and put hundreds more people in this high fire-risk zone. They hope to commercialize the greenbelt by building a brand new, year-round wedding and event center with multiple overnight party units.

The Sonoma County Board of Zoning Adjustments was slated to hear this project during its July 9 meeting. Outcome was not known at this publication's deadline.

The BZA board reviews architecture and design recently gave this outsized project a greenlight. Even worse, county planners are telling us that the large, new compound on never-developed rural land adjacent to an agricultural preserve in a protected community separator won't have significant environmental impacts. Something is wrong here!

In 2016, Sonoma County voted by 81 percent to protect community separators, the green spaces between our towns and cities. This luxury resort will put community separators to the test in front of the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, which will have the final say.

That's why several hundred people have signed the Greenbelt Alliance petition demanding that the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors put a halt to the Sonoma Solstice project at Buzzard's Gulch.

The land is inside the protected Santa Rosa-Larkfield-Windsor community separator, a stretch



The area known as Buzzard's Gulch sits in the greenbelt between Fountain Grove and Larkfield-Wikiup north of Santa Rosa. It burned in the Tubbs Fire in 2017. Now, the county is hearing a proposal to develop the property into a luxury resort and event center, which would go against the urban growth boundary ordinance passed by voters

Photo: Shoshana Hebshi

of greenbelt along Old Redwood Highway between Santa Rosa and Windsor.

It sits right outside of Santa Rosa's urban growth boundary, where development is supposed to end.

The 2017 Tubbs wildfire burned through this area of Fountain Grove and Larkfield-Wikiup, where hundreds of people lost their homes and are slowly rebuilding.

The site is next door to the historic Cloverleaf Ranch, an agricultural preserve and summer riding camp for children and teenagers, which is struggling to rebuild after the fires.

The proposal would add a dozen luxury 1, 2, and 3-bedroom wine country party houses on rural

land where no housing is allowed.

It would bring hundreds of weddings and high-end events year-round with wine and music until late at night.

If built, the development would threaten the creek, groundwater, mature oaks, air, and climate with increased pollution.

Its employees would be working low-paying service jobs that will exacerbate the housing crisis.

This article was originally published on the Greenbelt Alliance blog.

Follow their social media for the latest updates: www.facebook.com/greenbeltalliance You can also visit Greenbelt Alliance's website at: greenbelt.org

Brune: Lessons in Unity Brought by Covid

By Michael Brune
Sierra Club Executive Director

If there's one thing the Sierra Club has learned during its 128-year history, it's that we win when we bring people together. Building strong bonds among our members, supporters, and partners has been key to every victory we've been part of—from protecting public lands to getting cities to commit to 100 percent clean energy.

It's a lesson that's on my mind as our community is forced to stay physically apart during the COVID-19 pandemic. I'm proud and heartened to see the many innovative ways we're managing to come together during this difficult time. We're reimagining how to be good coworkers, good neighbors and friends, and good allies to those hit hardest by the virus.

Part of that coming together is happening person-to-person. We're sending texts and scheduling video calls to check in on one another. We're sharing pictures of our kids and pets—it's cute, and also a reminder that many of us are caretakers and might need a little extra caretaking ourselves.

TAKE ACTION: OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE MUST PRIORITIZE HEALTH, WORKERS, ENVIRONMENT AND DEMOCRACY

Our national staff and chapter leaders are also reimagining the Sierra Club's role in this moment. They're drawing connections between the COVID-19 crisis and what we traditionally think of as the Sierra Club's issues. There are the obvious parallels between the pandemic and the climate crisis: Both are foreseeable disasters that our leaders failed to prevent by not acting quickly enough, and both reveal the structural inequalities in

our society. Those are just a few of the takeaways from this crisis.

Take access to the outdoors. While sheltering in place, people everywhere are rediscovering just how important getting outside is for our mental health. But not everyone has access to nearby nature: More than half the people in this country don't live within walking distance of a park, and many people of color experience hostility in the outdoors. I hope we'll emerge from the pandemic more committed to enjoying and protecting the outdoors—and ensuring that everyone has safe access to it.

Similarly, the spread of this respiratory virus makes the fight for clean air even more urgent, especially in the communities of color and low-income neighborhoods where polluting facilities are often located. A Harvard University study found that those who breathe polluted air every day are more likely to die from COVID-19—which is one reason why African American and Latino people are dying from the virus at disproportionate rates.

In the midst of this crisis, the Sierra Club is continuing its work to build a bigger “we” that encompasses an ecosystem of organizations that share our vision for a better, more sustainable future. As the pandemic took hold, we raised money for groups providing food and emergency assistance to those hit hardest. We advocated for an end to utility shutoffs, so everyone has water to wash their hands. We joined over a thousand organizations to demand a “People's Bailout”—COVID-19 relief legislation centered on protecting public health and rebuilding our economy in a fair and environmentally smart way.

We are building a bigger “we” with organizations that share our vision for a more sustainable future.

This is a crucial moment for us



Photo: Josh Deware

to show up for one another. For instance, voters in more than a dozen states were already contending with voter-suppression tactics like closed polling places and new voter ID laws. This crisis has raised the stakes even higher. During the Wisconsin primary, voters were asked to wait at crowded polling places, sometimes for hours—endangering their lives and those of everyone in their community. We need a functioning democracy in which people can make their voices heard without putting themselves at risk.

We're building this bigger “we” not just because it's the right thing to do, but also because—as the pandemic reminds us daily—our fates are intertwined. We can only stay healthy if others in our communities have what they need to keep from falling ill and spreading the virus—things like paid sick leave, mail-in ballots, and access to running water.

That means investing in mutual aid and community care. Most of all, it means working to change the systems that devalue certain lives so a wealthy, connected few can profit. The Sierra Club isn't leading all this work. We're engaging in these struggles alongside our partners every day, becoming more powerful together.

This article appeared in the March/April 2020 edition of Sierra Magazine with the headline “Powerful Together.”

A Chance to Restore the Eel River?

By Victoria Brandon
Chair, Redwood Chapter

Redwood Chapter learned recently about a proposed project that could lead to the restoration of the South Fork Eel River as a free-flowing stream capable of supporting runs of threatened salmon and steelhead. Various aspects of the project would affect four of the chapter's six groups.

Since early in the last century fish passage has been blocked by a small Pacific Gas & Electric facility called the Potter Valley Project, which consists of Scott and Cape Horn dams, a small hydroelectric plant, and a system of pipes diverting water to the Russian River basin, where it is used for irrigation.

PG&E now intends to step away when its license expires in 2022, leaving the facility's future in doubt and potentially presenting significant risks and liabilities to local communities and the environment.

To fill this void, a working group calling itself the "Two-Basin Partnership" composed of California Trout, Humboldt County, the Mendocino County Inland Water and Power Commission, the Sonoma County Water Agency and the Round Valley Indian Tribes has developed a decommissioning plan to present to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The proposal would include removal of Scott Dam, modifications to Cape Horn Dam to improve fish passage, and construction of new infrastructure to maintain reliable water supply to the Potter Valley area and exports to the Russian River.

Project objectives explicitly include improved conditions for threatened and endangered native fish, maintenance of reliable water supply, respect for tribal rights, and mitigation of impacts to Lake County. A new entity would likely be established to oversee the operations of the project and generate revenue for it.

For more information, visit pottervalleyproject.org.

Removal of Scott Dam would result in the draining of Lake Pillsbury, a 2,000-acre reservoir in northwestern Lake County used for boating, fishing and camping. Although many of those recreational uses would cease or change with the removal of the lake, others could be developed to take their place.



The Scott Dam (top) holds back Lake Pillsbury in Lake County.
Photo: Mike Wier.

(Above): The geographic region affected by the damming of the South Fork of the Eel River.

Concern has also been expressed about loss of the lake's function as a fire-fighting resource and impacts to surrounding wildlife, such as the resident herd of Tule Elk.

Obviously, concerns like these will have to be addressed, along with others that have not emerged at this early stage of the project, but we remain cautiously optimistic that the benefits to the watershed and its endangered fish species can be realized.

Stay tuned!

Redwood Needles

Sierra Club

Redwood Chapter

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Note from Sierra Club:

The COVID-19 crisis has not passed and continues to disproportionately harm Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people and other communities of color. The pandemic has revealed how the communities hardest hit are often the same people that suffer from high levels of pollution and poor access to healthcare.

The fight for environmental justice cannot be separated from the fight for racial justice.

www.sierraclub.org/redwood

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