

Redwood Needles



Summer 2022

Sierra Club Redwood Chapter

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On the Path

a note from
Chapter Director Jeff Morris

"The Boys of Summer" by Roger Kahn is a notable book about the Brooklyn Dodgers, which creates an analogy to represent everything youthful and vibrant with which the narrator can no longer compete.

Absorbing recent tragedies, reflecting on environmental transgressions, aging in general, and thinking about what lies ahead can sometimes steer us towards a nihilistic attitude that includes tropes like: "Does anything matter anymore?" or "Am I really making a difference?" and even "Is any of this worth it?"

Like Kahn's story, sometimes we feel like we can no longer "compete" with the dynamic challenges of our current world. It's a lot to carry around.

Yet, here in the Redwood Chapter, I think we are actually increasing our competitive advantage. This is largely due to the efforts of very active volunteers and partner organizations who are stepping up to the plate against some of the biggest opposing teams out there.

One such volunteer is Walter Smith from Mendocino County. A member of our Chapter's Forest Committee, Walter has been working diligently to halt the over-reaching practices of PG&E, which, in the name of fire prevention, has been systematically clear cutting (with non-verbalized/complicit approval from state agencies) outside of its established right-of-way boundaries on public and private property.

While prudent fuels reduction around power lines can make sense (in lieu of undergrounding and infrastructure improvements, which should be the ACTUAL priority), PG&E's behavior is destructive and, in many cases, outright theft of private property. In addition, its practices are making fire conditions WORSE with debris left in place and decreasing canopy cover, which accelerates brush and undergrowth development and warms the soil.

Walter, and countless others across our region (including Jeanne Chinn, our stalwart Forest Committee chair), are fighting back, getting organized, and contacting agencies and elected officials, demanding action.

In late May, the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors sent strong letters to both Gov. Newsom and the Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety, urging them to use their power to stop PG&E's destructive practices.

Sierra Club chapters are organizing to intensify this effort in addition to putting pressure on the CPUC (what appears to be the only real regulatory authority) to demand a moratorium of cutting outside of PG&E's right of way and other reforms. Time is of the essence. Every day that we're working our way up the political food chain, more destruction is done.

I have personally received calls from people living all over PG&E's service territory who want to engage and make a difference. With our combined efforts we will harness our collective energy to hold PG&E accountable and make a difference, beyond this summer and beyond what might otherwise be expected from a disparate crowd of volunteers. Whether it's a walk, a base hit or a walk-on double, we're committed to making it to post-season play, and thanks to volunteers like Walter and Jeanne, I think we've got solid odds.

Steady on and keep at it,



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Mailing Address

P.O. Box 466, Santa Rosa, CA 95402

Office Address

Sonoma County Environmental Center
55A Ridgway Ave. Santa Rosa, CA
(707) 544-7651

redwood.chapter@sierraclub.org

www.sierraclub.org/redwood

Editor

Shoshana Hebshi
shoshana.hebshi@sierraclub.org

Proofreader

Judi Danner

Chapter Chair

Victoria Brandon

Cover photo by Phil Weil.

Advertising information and questions can be directed to shoshana.hebshi@sierraclub.org

Address corrections should be sent to address.changes@sierraclub.org or Sierra Club, P.O. Box 52968, Boulder, CO 80322-2968 or (415) 977-5653.

You can manage your Sierra Club account at myaccount.sierraclub.org or email member.care@sierraclub.org

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North Coast Coal Train: Dead in the Water?

By Victoria Brandon
Redwood Chapter Chair

During a long-anticipated town hall meeting on June 1, our local State Sen. Mike McGuire was set to detail the development of a project that was taking shape to transport coal through the North Coast Railway to be shipped out of Humboldt Bay. But during the meeting, McGuire instead announced the project had hit a major roadblock and would not proceed.

The “Toxic Coal Train,” as it was dubbed, was gaining fierce opposition from many directions, including from Redwood Chapter, and this development is a huge win for those who want to see an end to dirty energy, and for those who support the transformation of the defunct railway into a 350-mile span of pedestrian and bike path known as the Great Redwood Trail.

Since the online town hall came just days after federal regulators had ruled that fossil fuel corporations were entitled to submit a formal proposal to run noisy, polluting coal trains right through the heart of our communities, most of the 2,000 people in attendance logged on with the expectation of hearing bad news, along with advice from the senator—who has demonstrated exemplary leadership on this issue—about the most effective way to stop this

disastrous proposal in its tracks.

It was a happy surprise for the attendees to hear the news.

“We have beat back big coal and the toxic train,” McGuire told the attendees.

The Surface Transportation Board, which oversees the nation’s rail system and authorizes plans such

**‘The bottom line is this: Our communities are united in our response—Hell No to Coal!’
— Mike McGuire**

as this coal train project, set a hard deadline of midnight May 31 to receive proposals to rehabilitate the line as a freight carrier. As of this printing, it was unknown if the STB would grant leniency on the deadline, as earlier in the day of June 1, a shell company backed by shadowy out-of-state interests filed paperwork, citing a delay from vacation travel.

It has been previously reported that the North Coast Railroad Company, privately held by coal interest based out of Wyoming intends to ship coal from Utah, Wyoming and Montana to Asia through the Port of Humboldt.

In a statement released following this revelation, McGuire said his

office’s opposition, joined by opposition from Rep. Jared Huffman and outraged residents, will not stop.

“We are flabbergasted and appalled that Big Coal thinks they can play by their own rules,” the statement read. “The bottom line is this: Our communities are united in our response—Hell No to Coal!”

Much of the opposition cites the instability of the land the railway rests upon. It has been inoperable for more than 25 years because of the hazardous terrain it crosses.

Rebuilding the line would take an estimated billions of dollars.

Yet, if the coal train plans are approved, the Great Redwood Trail plan would be abandoned. The trail would run along the SMART commuter train tracks from Larkspur Landing in Marin County to Willits, then follow the NCRA right of way to Humboldt Bay. It would be the longest “rail to trail” conversion in the United States, and probably the most spectacular from a scenic perspective—and the funding is already in the bank!

McGuire has collected nearly 8,000 signatures on a petition to stop the coal train. You can view and sign the petition here: <https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/no-coal>

To learn more about the Great Redwood Trail, visit greatredwoodtrail.org.

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.

Chapter Director:

Jeff Morris • (530) 355-9880 • jeff.morris@sierraclub.org

Chapter Communications Coordinator:

Shoshana Hebshi • shoshana.hebshi@sierraclub.org

Administrative Staff:

Tom Devlin • (707) 544-7651 • tdevlin@sonic.net

Regional Coal Organizer:

Jacob Klein • jacob.klein@sierraclub.org

Chapter Chair • At Large • Political Chair • RCC Delegate • Wilderness Chair:

Victoria Brandon* • (707) 994-1931 •
vbrandon95457@gmail.com

Vice Chair • Solano Group Delegate to Chapter:

Joe Feller* • (415) 902-3395

Secretary: Jim Horn

Treasurer & Finance Committee Chair:

Jana Selph • (707) 829-5356

At Large • Council of Club Leaders Alternate • RCC Delegate: Rue Furch* • (707) 823-3555

At Large: Roland Dumas

At Large: Chris Rogers

Political Compliance Officer: Michael Melton

Transportation Chair:

Steve Birdlebough • (707) 576-6632

At Large • Legal Chair: Elizabeth Johnson*

Grazing Chair: Felice Pace • (707) 954-6588

Forest Chair:

Jeanne Wetzel Chinn

Lake Group Delegate to Chapter:

Deb Sally* • (707) 235-9011

Mendocino Group Delegate to Chapter:

Mary Walsh* • (707) 937-0572

Mendocino Group Delegate Alternate: Robin Leler

Napa Group Delegate to Chapter:

David Campbell *

North Group Delegate to Chapter:

Ned Forsyth* • (707) 826-2417

North Group Delegate Alternate:

Joyce Yowell • (559) 916-8575

Sonoma Group Delegate to Chapter:

Shirley Johnson-Foell* • (707) 206-1138

Chapter Webmaster: Melanie Matway

* Signifies voting member of the ExCom

Preparing for Chapter and Group elections

The Redwood Chapter and Group Executive Committee election season has begun. Nominating Committee Chairs have been selected, and candidate recruitment is proceeding.

Three Chapter At-Large seats will be up this year, as well as either three or four Group seats.

These positions require attendance at regular meetings, contribution to voting on a variety of matters and collaboration of ideas on how to best use our resources to further our mission and goals. Time commitment is estimated between 5 and 20 hours a month depending upon group or chapter role.

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

GROUP NOMINATING COMMITTEE CHAIRS

- **Chapter Elections Chair:** Jim Horn, jhorn@hornengineers.com
- **Lake Group:** Victoria Brandon, vbrandon95457@gmail.com
- **Mendocino Group:** Robin Leler, robin@leler.com
- **Napa Group:** Nick Cheranich, ncheranich@yahoo.com
- **Solano Group:** Joe Feller, joe56feller@gmail.com
- **Sonoma Group:** Shirley Johnson, johnsons@sonoma.edu
- **North Group:** Ned Forsyth, nedforsyth48@gmail.com

ELECTION SCHEDULE

- **Aug. 19:** Chapter and Group candidate slates are complete and submitted to Elections Committee Chair Jim Horn (jhorn@hornengineers.com).
- **Sept. 5:** Deadline for submission of candidate statements for publication in the Fall Redwood Needles. Deadline for submission of ballot petitions to the Election Committee Chair.
- **Oct. 3:** Ballots and candidate statements are published in the Fall Needles, and voting begins in both hard copy and electronic formats.
- **Dec. 31:** Voting closed. All votes must be in.

Potter Valley Project sunsets, giving fish a reprieve on the Eel River



The Cape Horn Dam was built in 1908 and stands 96 feet tall. It has a fish ladder, though some species, like lamprey, have a hard time navigating the ladder.

Photo: Rob Badger.

This article was previously published in the "Close to Home" section of the Press Democrat.

By David Keller
Friends of the Eel River

PG&E is getting rid of its obsolete, dangerous and expensive Potter Valley Project on the Eel River. PG&E have declined to re-license the project with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and no other qualified entity is interested. Time is up: the license will be surrendered, and the project will be decommissioned.

PG&E recognizes that its century-old hydropower project loses money on the electricity generated (now shut down for the next few years due to major equipment failure), and was poorly designed and constructed too close to an earthquake fault and large, active landslide. It kills and harms protected salmon and steelhead. Cape Horn Dam's fish ladder is poorly designed, easily clogged with sediment and debris, and prevents the fish from volitional migration passage up and downstream. Scott Dam (forming Lake Pillsbury) is too high for a fish ladder, blocking access to more than 280 miles of superb cold-water salmonid habitat, according to recent National Marine Fisheries Service study, and does not meet current standards for safety and stability. In short, the Potter Valley Project is a major liability. That's not a "radical" evaluation, but reality.

Instead of recognizing that these changes will happen, some people are bitter, disingenuous and increasingly obstructionist. They built wealth using the cheap imported water from Potter Valley Project diversions. They've smeared our congressman, Jared Huffman, who has worked hard to guide and help craft a solution for the divergent interests of Eel River fisheries recovery and Russian River water supply reliability.

By hanging on to a delusion that the Potter Valley Project should not change, they are ramping up conflicts and confusion for Russian River stakeholders for decades to come. It's time to move on with the well-reasoned and modeled proposals for dam removal and run-of-the-river diversions from the Eel to Lake Mendocino and other storage.

Beneficiaries of water taken from the Eel River can recognize the inevitable changes coming and create an agency in Sonoma and Mendocino counties that can modernize, fund, own, operate and maintain the useful components of the 115-year-old Potter Valley Project. PG&E will undam the Eel, and we can honor the necessity of volitional salmonid passage and full recovery of the once magnificent Eel River, while providing long-term seasonal augmentation to water naturally flowing in the Russian River.

David Keller is Bay Area director for Friends of the Eel River. He lives in Petaluma.

Spring Photo Contest!

We received a good showing of photo submissions from around our region for our spring photo contest. On these two pages are submissions that received honorable mention. The cover photo and the back cover photo are the first and second place photos, respectively. Thank you to all who sent in photos! It was great to see our beautiful region through your eyes.



ABOVE: Darryl Miller took this shot on Knights Valley on Highway 128 on the Sonoma County side just off Franz Valley.

RIGHT: Kristen Ulmer snapped this in her backyard in Sebastopol.



FAR LEFT: Becky Lane took this shot on Oat Hill Road in Middletown.

LEFT: Wendy Iverson submitted this photo of the cactus blooming in San Anselmo.



LEFT: Chris Goodfellow shot this of a hiker and their dog at Taylor Mountain.

BELOW: Larry Robinson captured Sebastopol's Laguna Wetlands Preserve.



ABOVE: Rachel Lahn got this shot during a misty morning at Rancho Navarro in Comptche as the sun streamed through the trees.



RIGHT: Nancy Vallee captured a close-up of this bird in Sebastopol. She said the bird shows up once a year to get nectar from these flowers.



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Spring Photo Contest!

All entries have been received, and we are pleased to announce the winner, Phil Weil, whose photo of a beautiful swallowtail graces the cover of this issue. Weil took the photo in April in the parking area for the Van Hoosear (Sonoma Ecology Center) Preserve in Sonoma at the end of a wildflower walk he helped lead.

To the right is the runner up in our contest taken by Janice E. Twomey. She captured this dogwood blooming on April 18 at the Harvest Inn hotel in St. Helena.

All honorable mentions are printed inside. You can view all of the entries in color on our website.

Thank you to all who submitted photos!

We look forward to our next photo contest!



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