



SIERRA CLUB
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Blue Oak Group



Butte, Glenn, Lassen, Plumas & Tehama Counties

Time for PG&E to Upgrade Equipment *by Suzette Welch*

Public utility companies need to stop cutting down trees, and work on upgrading their equipment.

It is time for PG&E and other utility companies to upgrade and fireproof their equipment. They need to fix uninsulated lines, replace older transformers and old dangerous equipment since they caused six of the last 20 most destructive California wildfires including the Camp Fire.

Chico ER on April 9, 2022 reported:

- 2017 Wine Country fires. PG& E equipment was linked to multiple fatal fires in a series of infernos.



PG&E transmission lines starting fires

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Time to Upgrade *Continued from page 1*

- 2018 Camp Fire in Butte County. PG& E equipment was determined to be the cause of the deadly wildfire that killed 85 people and destroyed the town of Paradise.
- 2021 Dixie Fire in Butte, Plumas, Lassen, Shasta and Tehama counties. PG& E equipment was found to be the cause of the enormous blaze that became California's second-largest wildfire.

It doesn't take a tree to start a fire with utility companies' equipment. Debris blowing around can strike the wires and spark flames. Instead of having the utility companies declare war against trees by trimming them to death or cutting down many of our environmentally important and precious trees, they need to upgrade and fireproof their equipment. Trees and their natural beauty are one of the factors that lead people to move to towns like Paradise and Greenville. We need to be planting trees to mitigate climate change and satisfy our need for natural beauty and relaxation and stop cutting them down. As Wolfy Rouble has said "Plant trees—not too many—mostly oaks.

California Officials need to hold utility companies accountable for preventing wildfires caused by their equipment. As reported in the Chico Enterprise Record "Acting state Auditor Michael Tilden issued a scathing report blasting the California Public Utilities Commission and the recently formed Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety for approving the utility's "seriously deficient" wildfire prevention plans. Tilden's most damning criticism was aimed at the Energy Infrastructure Safety Office, established last July to ensure electric utilities reduce wildfire risk from their equipment. The audit ripped the office for approving the wildfire mitigation plans of three major California utilities—PG&E, Southern California Edison, and San Diego Gas & Electric—even though their plans contained serious deficiencies. The audit also criticized the PUC for failing to use its authority to punish utilities when its own audits uncover violations.

It is time for California to hold utility companies accountable for preventing wildfires caused by their equipment.

Poem by Kathy Brazil

I like to sleep where the moon bathes my pillow,
 the frogs serenade my mind from the creek
 from dusk til dawn
 and I awake to bird neighbors singing.

—KBrazil



Newsletter Information

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Please include name, phone number, and address with each submittal. Short, single-topic articles are preferred. Deadlines for proposed articles and letters to the editor: February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1.

Blue Oak Group News reserves the right to edit all submissions for reasons of space, clarity and potential libel. The opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Sierra Club or the Blue Oak Group.

Blue Oak Group Summer 2022 Outings

Coordinated by Alan Mendoza. For updated outings information, and for general information about outings and meetings places, please see our website:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/mother-lode/blue-oak/outings>

Tuesdays, 7–8PM Volleyball

Ongoing Tuesday Volleyball. Join Blue Oak Group members and friends for friendly, co-ed volleyball every Tuesday night at 7PM at the Chapman Center (corner of E. 16th Street and B Street in Chico). Cost: \$6 per night. Free lessons included. For more information call Betty 530-588-8918 or Alan 530-891-8789

Friday–Sunday, June 24–26 Backpack (3,C) Warner Mountains

Join us for a backpack to the mystical Warner Mountains, just south of Alturas in northeast California. We'll backpack in 6-7 miles and climb 2200' on the first day along the majestic Summit Trail to beautiful Patterson Lake at 9025' to set up camp. On day two we will climb nearby Warren Peak for great views of Mt. Shasta, Mt. Lassen, Nevada and Oregon, or day hike south on the Summit Trail. On day three we will pack out and drive home. Individual commissary, and participants must be ready for a strenuous hike in with full packs. Leader has extra backpacking equipment to share. Contact leader to sign up or get more information. Leader: Alan, ajmendoza666@gmail.com or 530-891-8789.

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Saturday, July 9 Day Hike (2,B) Lassen National Park

Bumpass Hell to Cold Boiling Lake, Conard Meadows and Mill Creek Falls. Car shuttle required. A 8-9 mile trip to see several of the wonders of Lassen National Park, Subject to park summer trail closures due to Dixie Fire. After shuttling our vehicles we start at the Bumpass Hell parking area and go past the largest hydrothermal area in the park to Cold Boiling Lake. From Cold Boiling Lake we turn south to have lunch at Crumbaugh Lake and then ascend to Mill Creek Falls and then reach our vehicles at the Visitor Center at the South Entrance. Bring lunch, water, boots, hat, camera, sunscreen and carpool \$.

Meet at Chico Park & Ride at 7:30AM. Leader: Alan, 530-891-8789 or ajmendoza666@gmail.com

Friday–Sunday, September 16–18 Car Camp and Day Hikes (2,B) Lakes Basin

Spend a fun weekend with us in hiker's paradise at the stunning, glacier-carved Lakes Basin area near Graeagle. We will camp at the Lakes Basin Campground starting on Friday. Great optional hikes each day to the top of Mt. Elwell, Bear, Cub, Long Lake or up to the PCT along with great swimming in a nearby swimming hole. About a 125 mile drive from Chico off the Gold Lake Highway near Graeagle/Blairsden. Individual commissary and bring all your own camping equipment. No RVs allowed. Limited space. Email or call leader to reserve a spot and pay for campsite. Cost \$10 per person for the 2 nights. Leader: Alan, 530-891-8789 or ajmendoza666@gmail.com; Asst. Leader: Ed Schilling.

Forestry News

by Trish Puterbaugh

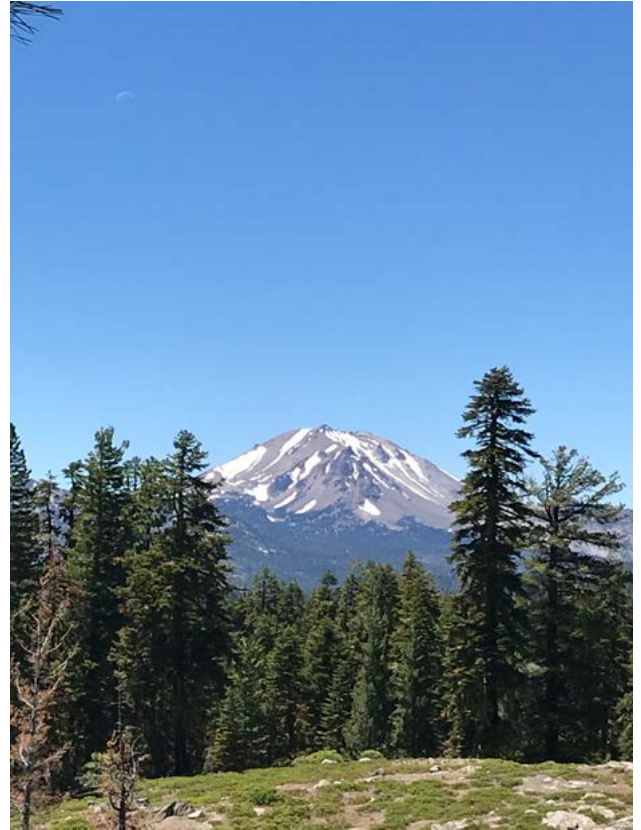
The biggest news, which we are all painfully aware of, is that our California Forests are “out of wack.” Over 100 years of fire suppression, logging, mining and grazing have extremely altered our forest ecosystems. Add 3 years of drought and we are scrambling to “restore” our forests to some semblance of normality.

Butte and Plumas County alone have had 700,000 acres burned since the Camp Fire in 2018.

Many of these acres have been salvage cut and logged. Industrial private land owners immediately log burned areas, as the lumber is more valuable and usable shortly after the fire. Unfortunately, plantations are then installed. Many of us have contended, and studies show that plantations are more flammable than older forests. There is a new study out, “Higher Incidence of High-Severity Fire in and near industrially managed forests”, Levine et al 2022. This study finds the odds of high severity fire on “private industrial lands are 1.8 x greater than on “public” lands. It is extremely frustrating for the environmental community to see “business as usual” by private logging companies when we are experiencing a climate crisis and enormous die-off and severe fire in our forests.

There is a Sierra Club group headed by Perry Metzger (pmetzger2005@yahoo.com), meeting via Zoom to educate and incite members and others to work against Industrial logging in California. They keep track of significant “Timber Harvest Plans” (THPs) ongoing in the state. The Battle Creek Alliance has been working for years on this issue. The Jackson Demonstration Forest near Ft. Bragg has also been in the news and there is lots of push back from locals regarding the plan to log very large Redwoods.

The US Forest Service (USFS) does not immediately salvage our lands. Environmental planning is first conducted and focus is on hazard tree removal near roads, buildings and infrastructure. Because of the enormous number of hazard trees after the recent fires, Region 5 (the USFS Western region), is conducting a Region-wide Hazard Tree Removal Plan. Many groups are engaged in the planning and



A view of Lassen Peak from Mount Harkness

we are hopeful that priority areas, as mentioned above, will be the focus. There is an unfolding plan for the Feather Falls area, burned in the North Complex in 2020. It could take years to get the work completed. The burned USFS land near the community of Berry Creek will probably be logged in the next year.

The Almanor Ranger District, as well as Lassen National Park were heavily impacted by the almost 1 million acre Dixie Fire. There has been ecologists doing extensive surveys and a Region 5 science team has written a “General Technical Report (GTR) on Post Fire Restoration”. Many scientists say we should focus on what is left, “restore and work on the green areas” inside the fire to help prepare for the next fire. The USFS has been allocated large sums of money to work on our forests, but is overwhelming and complicated to say the least. Many districts are understaffed and with so much forest work going on, it is hard to recruit workers! Luckily non-profits and public organizations like our Butte County Resource Conservation District are working hard along-side the USFS now.

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Forestry News *Continued from page 4*



Prescribed fire in Cohasset

Generally the plan is to prioritize and go big. Most scientists say we cannot “thin our way” out of this dilemma. We need to do lots more prescribed fire and larger projects to restore landscapes.

There are several upcoming plans on the Almanor Ranger District including the Upper Butte Creek Watershed, and the West Lassen Headwater Projects. These will be large projects that will be years in the planning. You will see work starting on the West Almanor Project in and around the campground. The public is always welcome to have input. There are collaboratives on almost every district of every forest now, so becoming involved is possible.

I have been very involved with the Butte County Fire Safe Council (BCFSC) and the great work they are doing. This organization is a leader in the state on education and fire prevention. There are many programs to educate and assist those of us living in the “Wildland Urban Interface” (WUI) and the BCFSC is administering dozen of grants to this purpose.

Landowners all over the state have been empowered and forced into the realization that it is our responsibility to take care of our lands. Prescribed fire, chipper, goats, and lots of pile burning is taking place all over the foothills. I like the quote by Gifford Pinchot one of the earliest US Foresters, “The vast possibilities of our great future will become realities only if we make ourselves responsible for that future”.

You are welcome to email me with questions:
pmpueterbaugh@yahoo.com

Paradise Future

by Ed Schilling

New construction and the return of people to Paradise is one tangible way to address our statewide housing crisis. The 2018 pre-fire population of Paradise was almost 27,000. Less than ten percent of that number remained in the year right after the fire. From January 2020 to January 2021, however, there was a leap from 4,608 residents to 6,046. Paradise is now approaching one-third of its pre-fire population at an estimated 7,500 residents. Yet our statewide housing crisis continues to grow.

To find out more about what was in the cards for the future of Paradise, I attended a town hall meeting on April 12, 2022. Town council members and Paradise Mayor Steve Crowder sat facing a mostly vacant room with rows of over one hundred chairs. I sat amid the empty rows toward the front, with maybe eight or ten people huddled in the back.

A very positive presentation on Paradise future development came from Susan Hartman, Community Development Director for Paradise. Her brief slide show clarified how the Paradise downtown area, the central part of Paradise right on the Skyway, would be “pedestrian oriented,” with “trailways,” and “different ways to access buildings.” Signs around the buildings would be “oriented to pedestrians.” It all sounded good, especially the “outdoor dining” and the “memorial area” to the Campfire located in the road enclosed triangular island at Foster and Skyway. Clark road, the other main thoroughfare that runs parallel to Skyway, would feature more car-oriented businesses.

To my surprise, Congressman Doug LaMalfa showed up and spoke to the council about new approval by FEMA for the \$615K Paradise emergency alert system. I secretly wished, feeling strangely conspicuous with LaMalfa and his wife sitting just two rows in front of me in that mostly vacant chamber, that our congressman could have been more “alert” over the years to the dangers posed by climate change. Say about twenty years ago? Or thirty? I think he still denies climate change is happening. An expensive emergency alert system is one thing, acknowledging and building awareness of

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Paradise Future

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our current climate emergency should have been our first priority long ago.

Looking for more information about the future of Paradise I decided to attend an “In Person Open House” later in the month on April 28. The event featured community input on the updated long term Paradise Recovery Plan. I was curious about all those “trailways” and “pedestrian oriented” buildings that Susan Hartman had reported on to the council. Would they have some scale models?

There were no scale models. A very large basketball court sized room, previously used by the CMA church on Clark Road for weekly free dinners that extended years after the Paradise Campfire, was the site for the community meeting. It featured twenty or so three by five-foot posterboard displays mounted on sandwich boards scattered around the perimeter of the room. These displays were interactive. Community members filed by from one to the other, posting suggestions with sticky notes, or simply placing a round sticky green dot for a thumbs up, or red for thumbs down. There were various titles to respond to such as: “Beautification” or “Prioritizing Road Construction” and “New Insurance Alternatives.” All had a paragraph describing “recovery project” efforts. For example, under “Beautification” the paragraph began with: “Where possible, restore shade and beauty in Paradise with a plant palette that supports local insect and wildlife populations without compromising fire safety.” Responses on sticky notes suggested different plants to be introduced, even milkweed to attract monarch butterflies. Under “Walkability and Bikeability” it suggested we “connect walking and biking facilities into neighborhoods,” and I immediately thought of the bike path, which runs through Paradise. It could be enhanced with plants and shrubs, and even extended



mural by: @seizer_one “here we grow” located on Skyway, Paradise

into central neighborhoods. Overhead lights for night walking on hot summer nights now run alongside most of the bike path, a project that was completed just before the Campfire. “Prioritizing Road Construction” called for acknowledging “resident frustration with the damaged condition of streets by improving community awareness on the reconstruction schedule.” In other words, give residents a “heads up” on where road crews will be working near their homes! Roadwork in Paradise has been unrelenting. It is mostly for underground PG&E cables. The display entitled “New Insurance

Alternatives” for homeowners would

be just that. Homeowners could potentially, for example, “collaborate with insurance companies on fire safe improvements,” or even “create community-based insurance” to lower insurance costs, which have skyrocketed since the fire.

One of the most important ideas mentioned on one of the displays called for “contractor accountability.” Many people on the ridge, after losing their homes to the Campfire, had terrible experiences with bad contractors who took advantage of their plight. In an article dated April 28 in the Sacramento Bee entitled “From prison to Paradise: Builder brought criminal past to California town ruined by wildfire,” one such case about “Aurora Ridge Homes,” formerly located in Paradise, is recounted. Is there a way that the Paradise Building Resiliency Center could somehow check out or vet contractors during the permit process, before they take advantage of unsuspecting clients who simply want to rebuild their homes?

Paradise continues to grow, in spite of all the obstacles. We are getting closer to bringing back a third of the Paradise population that was here before the fire, just as the Mayor of Paradise had hoped for over a year ago. In the shadow of our yearly loss of housing in the State of California due to wildfires, Paradise slowly rebuilds.

Conservation Report: Reviving Robin Hood in Chico

(Did you know that the 1930's movie, Robin Hood, was filmed in Chico's Bidwell Park?)

by Grace M. Marvin, Conservation Chair

Many Chicoans—both housed and unhoused—want to see far less trash in our parks and waterways. Prior to April, 2022, the city had not been willing to add more regular trash pickups where the unhoused are living—beyond incomplete pickups at Comanche Creek's homeless site. Yet, Charles Withun, head of North State Shelter Team, found about 30 sites where the unhoused were living in our city. It seemed as though the City wanted to deny the very existence of homeless in Chico, or hope that they would just go away. However, it is important to note that many of the city's homeless come from this immediate area, including victims of the recent major fires in Paradise and Concow. But Chico's government seemed to ask: why pick up their trash?

Four months before that, in December 2021, the Mother Lode Chapter (MLC) of the Sierra Club (based in Sacramento) unanimously supported my proposal that the MLC help do what our city officials would not do, namely finance trash pick up for the homeless. We needed to find a company with good insurance, and Waste Management (WM) fit the bill. Then I learned that the city had to approve sites where WM would pick up trash.

From December on, I sought to have the City of Chico approve removal of trash from more than 20 sites (for a period of six months) without any cost to the city, thanks to the Sierra Club. But only two were approved: Lost Park (behind Sierra Credit Union off East 1st Street) and Windchime, (a large open field on Humboldt Avenue).

After three months of negotiations with the city, they agreed that Waste Management could pick up trash at these two sites twice a week for six months.



Our local club was responsible for getting bags to the homeless, reminding them of the Monday and Thursday pickup dates, and to not overload the dumpsters (or an extra charge would occur).

There simply is not enough affordable housing—as is the case throughout our country. I recommend reading:

1. The recent ACLU report about the homeless in California: Chico is specifically mentioned, and
2. Federal Judge Morris England's legal judgment in Warren vs. Chico (1/13/22) about the city needing to help the homeless, who should not be penalized for living on public property if they have no place else to go.

Chico must provide both well-managed shelter and campgrounds if needed. Thus, 177 newly pallet shelters accompanied by a variety of regulations are now available for occupants. Time will tell if we'll need another Robin Hood to address the very basic needs of the "houseless" in Chico who far outnumber 177.

The club depends on volunteers to help distribute trash bags (donated both by members of the local Sierra Club's Blue Oak Group, and other donors). Other important responsibilities: make sure the homeless know what days the dumpsters will be emptied, and to be careful not to overload them. These wonderful volunteers are Dave Garcia, Sharon Fritch, Nelson Parmeter, Nancy Wirtz, Betty Volker, and Suzanne Hermanson. Trash bags are donated, including by the Sierra Club's Blue Oak Group. We heartily thank all of Robin Hood's "merry men" and women, as well as Charles Withun's Northstate Shelter Team!



Join the Blue Oak Facebook Page

The Blue Oak Group of the Sierra Club has a Facebook page where people can find information about local conservation issues and events and post items of interest. Anyone can go to the page and ask to become part of the conversation.

Valley's Edge *by Jared Geiser*

Valley's Edge is a proposed 1450 acre development in the Foothills above Chico which poses to exacerbate critical issues that are nearing their tipping points such as climate change, wildfire hazard, wetland destruction and biodiversity decline.

Climate Change

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its 6th Assessment Report (AR6) in 2021 and articulated that “for a 66% chance of limiting warming to 1.5C... the world has a remaining carbon budget of 360GtCO₂ – or nine years of current emissions.”¹ Not long after this report came out, the City of Chico Adopted an Updated Climate Action Plan which aims to completely eliminate greenhouse gas emissions in the City of Chico by 2045. The Environmental Impact Report for Valley's Edge estimates that this project would emit 17,719.48 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent EACH YEAR once the project is fully operational.² This means that the approval and development of Valley's Edge would obstruct the attainment of Chico's Updated Climate Action Plan Target and the Minimum State Targets of 0 MT of CO₂e emissions per capita.³

Wildfire Hazard

The grassland, oak and foothill pine woodland ecosystems that make up this site are fire adapted ecosystems that can be expected to burn regularly. In the case of blue oak and foothill pine woodland, they have a typical “fire regime of five to fifteen years” according to the Draft EIR.⁴ Indigenous burning before colonization helped shape this landscape and the use of prescribed fire is still an important tool

to maintain ecosystem health and reduce wildfire hazards to surrounding communities. The Valley's Edge site burned in the Camp Fire and the area has been affected by two additional fires in the past 15 years. It is precarious to build such a large quantity of senior only housing (1,385 residences of the total 2,777) in a fire hazard zone. Do they intend to offer in-home cremation?! All jokes aside... Continuing to build large housing projects in fire hazard zones is unacceptable given the wildfire crisis that is hitting California year after year and is only getting worse from climate change.

Wetland Destruction

More than 90% of wetlands (including vernal pools) have been lost in California, largely due to agricultural and urbanization land use changes. It is no coincidence that so many endangered species depend upon wetlands. Valley's Edge would directly develop on top of about 1.25 acres of wetlands and would hydrologically interrupt many more wetlands by altering flow of water on the landscape upslope by converting much of the landscape into asphalt, concrete, and buildings.⁵ With so few wetlands left in CA and the importance of these unique ecosystems, we can no longer accept any more wetland destruction!

Biodiversity Decline

Planet Earth is currently enduring a 6th mass extinction which is being perpetuated by human activities rather than natural causes as with past extinctions. Scientists are calling this a “biodiversity crisis” as the diversity of life in the Earth's ecosystem is declining rapidly, and consequently ecosystems

1 In-depth Q&A: The IPCC's sixth assessment report on climate science from Carbon Brief

<https://www.carbonbrief.org/in-depth-qa-the-ipccs-sixth-assessment-report-on-climate-science>

2 Table 4.7-4 on page 4.7-27 in “Valley's Edge Specific Plan DEIR”

https://chico.ca.us/sites/main/files/file-attachments/00_draft_eir_valleys_edge_specific_plan_reduced.pdf?1635523572

3 Table 3-1 page 32 “Climate Action Plan Update”

http://chicocap.rinconconsultants.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/19-08390_Chico-CAP-Update_Final-Draft-Complete.pdf

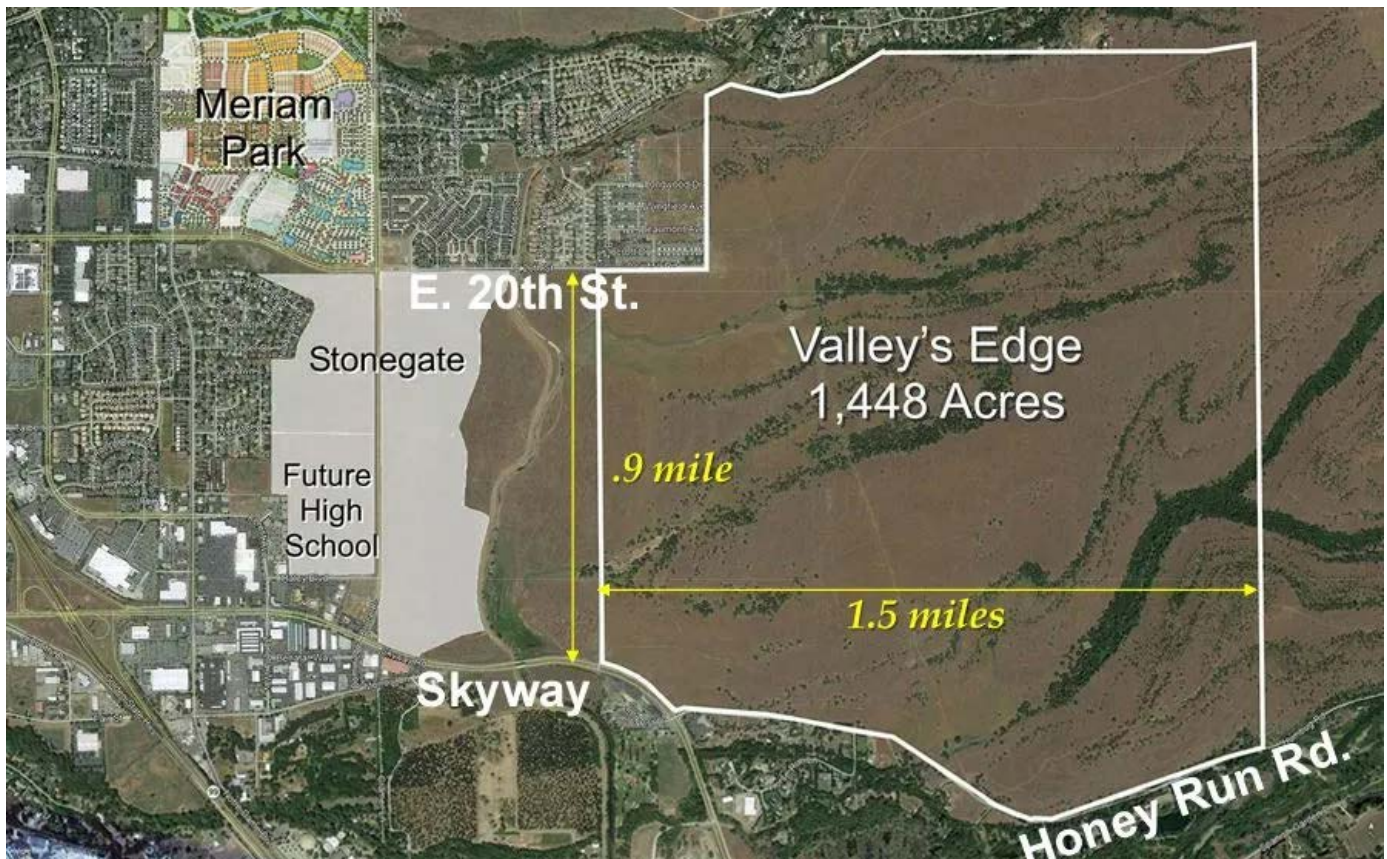
4 Page 4.14-5 “Valley's Edge Specific Plan DEIR”

https://chico.ca.us/sites/main/files/file-attachments/00_draft_eir_valleys_edge_specific_plan_reduced.pdf?1635523572

5 I explained this hydrologic disruption in detail in public comments on the DEIR to the City of Chico.

Continues on page 9

Valley's Edge *continued from page 8*



are losing their complexity and resiliency. Our local ecosystems have faced severe disruption in the past two centuries from European colonization. An array of species have already been extirpated from the local ecosystems such as grizzly bears, pronghorn, and elk. It is our responsibility as stewards of the land to protect and restore biodiversity. Urban sprawl converts diverse carbon sequestering landscapes into homogenized carbon emitting suburbs or strip malls.

Urban sprawl refers to the seemingly endless expansion of developed urban areas into the natural habitat or agricultural land surrounding cities. Sprawl has some characteristics that set it apart from other types of land use. General characteristics of sprawl include:

- (Very) Low density development - inefficient use of land
- Segregated homes, shops, and employment opportunities
- Increased cost of housing and transportation

- Autocentric neighborhood design
- Increased water, land, and air pollution

Sprawl developments typically produces housing that meets the needs of those with above moderate incomes leaving much of the local working class with unaffordable housing.

What are the alternatives to suburban sprawl developments like Valley's Edge? SMART GROWTH—higher density, mixed-use, infill development—is a sustainable alternative that provides a wider range of housing options while preserving open space around the city. This type of development can result in tremendous savings to the City and taxpayers because it uses existing municipal infrastructure. Residents of infill developments can utilize already existing roads, utility lines, and sewer; whereas suburban sprawl developments require all new infrastructure. Smart growth is how cities can meet housing needs without endangering the climate and health of the environment.

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