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## Yahi Group Newsletter

Butte, Colusa, Lassen, Plumas & Tehama Counties

Fall 2001    September, October, November    Volume VI, Issue III

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### Urban Affairs: A Blueprint for Sprawl

*by Mike Smith*

Currently making the rounds of public hearings is a document called, "General Plan Growth Area Analysis". The report attempts to lay basis to the claim that there is not enough land available for residential development in Chico and then analyzes a number of areas on the urban periphery - mostly agricultural - for their potential for re-zoning. This is a blueprint for sprawl. I find reading this document to be frustrating, demonstrating to me that a General Plan is important, but the implementation of that Plan is equally relevant to the outcome.

That this dubious analysis was performed at all demonstrates two truths:

- The agenda in Chico continues to be driven by land speculators who see high (even if unsustainable) growth rates as a means of wealth generation regardless of the effect on the community, and
- It is very difficult for the average citizen to gain an effective voice on the issue of development when that citizen needs to go about their business of making a living, but the land speculator's business is development to which they can devote 100% of their attentions.

#### **The Goal: Compact Urban Form**

A major tenant of the General Plan is to maintain a compact urban form and to accommodate residential growth with efficient land use in order to protect agricultural lands. The analysis shows that in the first eight years, we have not done all that well, but it is difficult to find any basis for expanding the residential area.

The analysis reports a concern that there is too little land available for residential development in several growth scenarios, but those scenarios are of sustained high growth, in some cases higher than we are now experiencing. As indicated by the accompanying table, most of the development in the early years of the Plan horizon has been in the lower density zoned areas; if this is the problem, it can be rectified by encouraging development in higher density zones and re-zoning for higher densities.

In short, the analysis tries to make the case for adding residential zoned land to Chico's General Plan area, but is weak both in its analysis of the problem - if a problem exists at all - and in the thoughtfulness of any solutions.

#### **Growth is Not the Answer**

There is now a growing body of evidence that sprawl degrades the economic and social fabric of a community. One of the best reads on this subject can be found in Sierra Club's anti-sprawl site at [www.sierraclub.org/sprawl/whitepaper.asp](http://www.sierraclub.org/sprawl/whitepaper.asp), "New Research on Population, Suburban Sprawl, and Smart Growth". It is a bit academic, but fully describes recent urban planning research and the experiences of cities that have grown thoughtfully and those that have not.

#### **Agricultural Land is Targeted**

Almost all of the parcels that are analyzed for potential re-zoning to residential are agricultural lands. The report summarily lists as

obstacles to development that the soils are prime agricultural or that the property is on the agriculture side of the Greenline, but then goes on to mention the attributes that are positive to development such as that the land is flat and not in a flood plain - as though these "positive attributes" were somehow equal to the "obstacles".

Typical of the comments: "The Alkop Farm area is flat and, except for agricultural resource values, has few other natural resource constraints [to development with residential zoning]." It seems too clear that the appropriate response is that "except for agricultural resource values", Chico would lose its vibrant farm economic base and the world would be poorer if prime agricultural lands are converted to residential subdivisions.

#### **Yahi Group Involvement**

The Yahi Group intends to maintain contact with this issue. The resource use - both in greater energy waste and destruction of habitat - is so much different between a city with sprawl and one without, that it is an issue that needs attention. In side bars to this article are

- 1) [the Group's stated position on urban development](#), and
- 2) excerpts from the Group's letter to the Planning Commission.

We would welcome any member interested in combating sprawl to contact me, 343-5411 or Betty Volker, 345-7205. A great deal of background information can be obtained from the Club's site at [www.sierraclub.org/sprawl/](http://www.sierraclub.org/sprawl/).

I know this article has talked mostly about Chico, but I hope that the discussion is helpful to members in other communities who may be seeing similar problems, or soon will.

### **How Much Energy Do We Use?**

*by Mike Smith*

How much energy do we use? In preparation for the next Newsletter - which will concentrate on energy usage reduction and alternative energy sources - this looked like an interesting question.

According to Margot Higgins of the Environmental News Network the average American contributes 1859 pounds of air pollution to the atmosphere each year. She also reports that each mile a person travels in an airplane accounts for 1.08 pounds of greenhouse gasses. Interesting stuff.

There is an energy calculator on the oddly named web site [www.airhead.org](http://www.airhead.org). Plug in information about your electric bill and driving habits and such and it will calculate your monthly usage and even, if you want, keep a log of your progress in saving energy. The AirHead site also contains a data base of over 70,000 products by brand name to help in making energy efficient choices.

### **Bidwell Park Trail Maintenance**

*Sponsored by Parks Department*

First Saturday of each month: September 1, October 6, November 3, December 1

8 a.m. to noon - Help maintain trails in Upper Bidwell Park. Suitable for all ages and a good way to learn more about the trails in the Park. Volunteers should meet at 8 a.m. in the parking lot located on the east side of Horseshoe Lake in Upper Bidwell Park.

Gloves, tools, training and beverages are provide by the Parks Department. Wear sturdy shoes or boots (and appropriate clothing if the weather is inclement). Rain cancels. For more information, contact Steve Hogue at the Parks Department, 895-4758 or [shogue@ci.chico.ca.us](mailto:shogue@ci.chico.ca.us).

### **Outings**

#### **Updated Club Liability Release**

*by Mike Smith*

Risk management has become a topic of concern for all organizations, including the Sierra Club. The Club has a remarkably good record for safety on its outings - both National and local. In the main, this is because the leaders are well trained, there is a careful blend of experience with innovation, and the participants self-select for trips that are within their limits.

However, in our litigious society risk management means more than doing a good job; it also means ensuring that legal tees are crossed, remaining abreast of the changing language of protection on the legal landscape.

The Club has recently updated its liability waiver language for Chapter and Group outings. Since each leader and participant will need to sign this as part of going on the outing, Alan Mendoza, the Outings Chair, and I thought we should post the language for you to review.

Here are some answers to questions you may have:

#### **Why this new policy exists**

Q. Why is the Club using a liability waiver?

A. While no document can be relied upon to prevent a lawsuit or protect anyone from grossly negligent conduct, a participant

liability waiver is of value in protecting individual outing leaders and the Club.

Q. Who decided that the Club should use liability waivers?

A. Use of liability waivers was a key recommendation from recently conducted program-wide risk review of Outdoor Activities. This recommendation was adopted by the Outdoor Activity Governance Committee in October 2000.

Q. Is the Club currently using liability waivers on any outings?

A. Liability waivers have been used for a number of years on foreign and mountaineering outings, and for the last two years on all National Outings. Some chapters, groups, sections, and Inner City Outings groups have also been using liability waivers.

Q. Is it mandatory that all outings use a liability waiver?

A. Yes.

#### **Legality of liability waivers**

Q. Are liability waivers enforceable?

A. Although some say that liability waivers are worthless, our legal counsel and outdoor industry professionals believe that they are of great value. There is an emerging body of case law in which liability waivers have afforded very real protection. You may have noticed that when you use the services of other outdoor organizations, you are asked to sign liability waivers when doing anything from renting a kayak to going horseback riding. This is a reflection of the belief that liability waivers will protect those organizations from liability.

#### **Sign-in location**

You may notice another element of the recent review of our risk management program. By matter of policy, the sign-in for most outings will be at the trailhead, not at the parking lot where participants may first meet. The reason for this is straight-forward: the trip starts at the trailhead and does not include the drive there, so this should be emphasized by the location of the actual sign-in. Effective risk management will continue to emphasize good training, effective procedures, and thoughtful implementation. Doesn't

## Club News

### **25-year Members Honored**

*by Gerda Lydon*

Congratulations and a big Thank You for your continued support to the following members of the Yahi Group who have 25 year of membership with the Sierra Club:

Fred Boos, Chico

Byron Brown, Paradise

Dr. Bruce Burke, Chico

Fred B Ely, Orland

Fran Farley, Chico

Linda Mendoza, Chico

Jerry and Helen Novotny, Paradise

Ilean Powert, Chico

Judith Walker, Corning

June Watts, Chico.

A certificate of appreciation for their 25-year membership has been sent.

### **Group Election**

### **Executive Committee Nominations**

*by Mike Smith*

We will be holding Yahi Group Executive Committee elections in November. In preparation for that, the Nominating Committee consisting of Gerda Lydon, Betty Volker, and Steve Green has been appointed to seek out the best qualified candidates from our membership.

The Executive Committee (ExCom) is the only entity in the Yahi Group that is elected by the full membership, and has significant responsibility and authority to engage in activities on behalf of the membership. Quoting from the Bylaws: "Such activities may include but are not limited to financial management, membership services, production of publications, and conservation, outings and political programs. Authority may be delegated to carry out such activities, but the ExCom shall retain overall responsibility and control."

The procedure is that the membership votes to elect to the ExCom, then the Committee decides which elected person will fill the various open offices and positions. The normal term is two years. We have two regular openings this year as Kevin Birkes and Joanne Gerson's terms are completed.

If you are interested in being nominated for the ExCom election, please contact any one of the members of the Nominating Committee: Gerda at 343-9277, or Betty at 345-7205, or Steve at 899-1076.

## Publications Committee

### Newsletter Survey

*by Mike Smith*

The Publications Committee is embarked on a top-to-bottom review of our communication effectiveness in general with a focus on the Newsletter. There are three inter-related goals:

1. Return the Newsletter to a break-even status.
2. Ensure that any publication format that is selected can be routinely performed by volunteers with limited time availability.
3. Provide the publication(s) that satisfy the needs of members for information and the needs of Group leadership for communication.

Let's look at these one at a time.

#### **Finances**

There is no requirement that the Group's publications break even, but it sure makes the rest of the program work smoothly when any regular drain can be eliminated. In the early 1990s, the Newsletter expense was so high that the Group had few funds for other programs.

The late Char Seacrest revamped the publication into a format that is close to what we have today, and brought the publication to break-even, showing that it could be done. The effort on her part, however, was substantial and really more than could be expected of a volunteer.

In the last few years the Newsletter has been costing about \$300 per issue more than the revenue from advertisers, even though all but the actual printing is done by volunteers. The \$300 is somewhat of a burden, so the Publications Committee set the goal of break-even since we know it can be done.

#### **Volunteer Production**

The major drawback of the current format is that it requires a significant time commitment by one or two people. It was not designed to be this way; we have tried a number of times to spread out the work into chunks that can be more easily handled by volunteers, but the work seems to migrate back to one or two people. It may be that the format forces this undesired work flow.

We need to ensure that the work is spread out so that no volunteer becomes over-burdened, and so that the publication is not dependent on just a few people. This, in my view, is our most difficult task.

#### **Reader Values**

Central to this review process is the need to put information into the hands of the readers that is interesting and in a format that is enjoyable to view and useful. That means understanding reader values and preferences which brings us to the [Newsletter Survey](#). Please print and [complete the form](#), and send it to:

Sierra Club - Yahi Group  
Post Office Box 2012  
Chico, CA 95927

Thank you!

## Group Notes

*by Mike Smith*

#### **New Members**

In the last issue, we were remarking that a greater interest in environmental activism had boosted Sierra Club membership in the Yahi Group area to over 1250. That number is already out of date; in the last three months another 75 people have joined the Club in our area. Welcome!

All new members receive a letter from the Membership Chair that asks for areas of interest. That information goes to the committee chairs and others that are active in those areas.

The actual connection between a members interest and the many activities that are available is sometimes not as tight, in my view, as it could be. I know in my own areas of interest I frequently have my head so buried in the project that I don't look up to see that there are others who would like to help. I hope that new members - and old ones too! - will take the additional step of contacting committee chairs and other members that are active in their area of interest; the list on page two would be a good place to start.

If you have any questions or you are not able to make your connections, please do not hesitate to contact the Chair, Kevin Birkes, or the Membership Chair, Gerda Lydon. Be assured, there are lots of interesting volunteer jobs available that can make a real difference in our communities and backcountry.

#### **Sierra Singles**

For a number of years we have had a very active singles section. At times the Sierra Singles have rivaled the main Group as to level of activity and good results. The Singles section provide a somewhat more social organization within the general Sierra Club organization - a fine combination of fun, conservation, and outings.

In the recent past the Singles have become less active for no other reason than the normal ebb and flow of personal interests and choices. This month (August), Barb Kemp, the Singles Chair, has moved out of the area for personal reasons, and the section has become inactive, but I note still with outings in the schedule.

Members that would like to be active in and provide support for the Singles section can contact Karen Kern at 899-8305.

#### **Urban Affairs Again**

This issue has a bit more urban focus than I had hoped, but what is happening in Chico does need to be reported, and I hope this is useful to members living in other communities. Next issue we will be focusing on reducing energy usage and alternative energy sources. To help set up that issue there is a pointer on page x to an energy calculator.

#### **Liability Waiver for Outings**

There is an article and sample of a new liability waiver which will be required for all Group and Chapter outings. It is rather dull reading, but we did not want you to be surprised in any way when you arrived at the trailhead to find this legal document. The Sierra Club and this Group have an enviable record of safety on our outings, but in these times organizations must protect themselves and that is what the Club is doing here.

#### **Correction**

In the last issue, I mentioned a Moab, Utah newspaper, the Canyon Country Zephyr. It is issued bi-monthly, not monthly as indicated. The Zephyr can be reached at [www.canyoncountryzephyr.com](http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com).

### **About This Newsletter**

**SIERRA CLUB NEWSLETTER** is published quarterly in February, May, August and November by the **Yahi Group of the Sierra Club, Post Office Box 2012, Chico, CA 95927.**

The newsletter is mailed free to all current members of the Sierra Club residing in the Yahi area. It is also available, without charge, at selected public places and merchants in the Yahi Group area, as well as this web site.

For submissions, comments and inquiries, please write to Sierra Club, Post Office Box 2012, Chico, CA 95927 or contact the editor at 343-5411.

For advertising in the Newsletter, please call Goodie Sweatt, 849-3988.

For changes in membership address (which also affects the address for receiving the newsletter by mail) please write to Sierra Club Member Services, Post Office Box 52968, Boulder, CO 80328-2968; sending a mailing label for the old address will speed the process.

#### **Submission Guidelines**

Please include name, phone, 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. A one week extension is available if the submission is sent by email and advance advisory has been provided that the article is forthcoming. Submissions will be returned if specifically requested and accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

The right is reserved 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 of the Yahi Group.