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Sierra Club Lake Group

September-October 2016 Newsletter

Next Meeting: RCD Fire Recovery Projects

The first Lake Group public meeting of the fall will be held at 7PM on Wednesday September 21, at the Lower Lake Methodist Church social hall, 16255 Second St. Lake Group Conservation Chair Victoria Brandon is going to put on her hat as a member of the Lake County Resource Conservation District Board of Directors to talk about the recent merger of the East Lake and West Lake RCDs, and their work helping the community recover from the devastating wildfires of 2015 and 2016. These efforts include distribution of both hardwoods and conifers to landowners, organizing volunteers to replant Trailside Park in Middletown, and provision of free chipping services. As always the meeting is free and open to the public. For more information contact Victoria at 994 1931 or vbrandon@lakelive.info.

Please note that while the 170-year old Lower Lake Methodist sanctuary was destroyed in the Clayton Fire, the social hall survived, and is still available to serve the community.

Middletown Dollar General: Not Over Yet

As previously discussed in the July edition of this newsletter, on July 19 the Board of Supervisors considered Cross Development's appeal of the Planning Commission's unanimous rejection of their application to build an outlet on the northern edge of Middletown. The Planning Commission—very correctly, in our opinion—had turned the project down because of numerous inconsistencies with the General Plan and Area Plan.

Given the Supervisors' rejection of a similar appeal on a Dollar General proposed in Kelseyville (where Area Plan language is far less stringent) it came as a surprise to many people when the BOS voted 3-2 to support the appeal and grant the Major Use Permit pending Planning Commission Design Review.

Then on August 23 the BOS reaffirmed their decision by approving findings of fact, despite the submission of at least two lawyer's letters detailing planning inconsistencies and pointing out legal pitfalls. At the same time both Supervisors and county counsel explicitly confirmed that the Planning Commission, sitting as the Design Review Board, retains full authority to determine whether the Project as presented is in conformity with the General Plan and MAP, and that the July 19 BOS decision is "subject to" and "contingent upon" the Commission's review of the Project. Nor is the Commission's purview strictly limited to design elements.

When the Planning Commission met on August 25 a lively discussion took place (con't)

(Dollar General, con't) on all these points, with members of the public (led by Lake Group chair Ed Robey) urging the PC to reaffirm their original rejection of the project.

In testimony that had not been previously presented, Middletown School District Superintendent Catherine Snow pointed out several problems related to the project's site across Highway 29 from several schools, and Beth Rudiger expressed the concerns of the Middletown Area Merchants Association. Neither had weighed in at previous hearings.

Photographs of Dollar General facilities elsewhere also demonstrated that the company has sometimes been willing to make far more substantial modifications to both architecture and signage than those presented to date—IF the community insists.

Another hearing will be scheduled at an unspecified future date, probably in October. In the meantime local residents have been asked to work with the developer to come up with a design that meets local needs. The question remains whether visual modifications can EVER satisfy the fundamental discrepancy between the business, the building, and the will of the community as expressed in the Middletown Area Plan. Stay tuned.



Let's Go Digital

Lake Group members are invited to help fight deforestation by receiving this bimonthly newsletter electronically rather than on paper. To get it as an email attachment in pdf format instead, send a request to join the "Lake Group Paper Free" list to vbrandon@lakelive.info—not only does this save some trees, it also benefits the Group financially.

The Parks Over the Mountain

Lake Group has recently learned that Pete McGee, one of the original members of the Lake Group executive committee, is now President of the Napa Valley State Parks Association, NVSPA. The state parks in Napa County include Robert Louis Stevenson, Bothe and the Bale Mill. Essentially the Bale Mill is part of Bothe—separated on the highway, but joined by a lovely hiking trail in the hills.

Bothe State Park is a lovely coastal mountain park with hiking trails, picnic areas, and a lovely swimming pool. Campgrounds, cabins and yurts are also available for overnighting. Robert Louis Stevenson ("RLS") includes a hiking trail to the summits on Mt. St. Helena, and a trail to the Palisades region and beyond.

At Bale Mill, the focus continues to be on restoring and operating the water-powered grist mill, which produces ground grain products for sale to the public

All this is just over the hill—take a look!

OUTINGS

Sat. Oct. 29 **Six Sigma Ranch hike.** We will hike the historic old stagecoach route from Lower Lake to Knoxville, following the ranch road through Six Sigma ranch heading east toward Morgan Valley road. We will stop by the Ranch tasting room on the way, so bring along cash or credit card if so inclined. Much of the hike will follow Asbill Creek and canyon to the confluence with Soda Creek. We will return aboard the ranch's Pinzgauer, a vintage European military 6X6, making the hike approximately 6 miles one way. This limits the number of hikers to 10 people. Class E-6-A. Carpools 8:30 am Lower Lake Coffee Company, Main St. Lower Lake. By reservation only. Leader Tom McFarling (707) 994-5490. Rain cancels.

At press time, no information about other Lake Group outings was available. When scheduled they will be listed in the *Redwood Needles* and at sierraclub.org/redwood/lake/outings

“Wild Diamond”: what’s really going on?

This project would put a vineyard, winery, tasting room and visitor center on partially-developed land off Spruce Grove Road near Hidden Valley Lake.

Probably because of its close proximity to a residential neighborhood, concerns have been expressed (sometimes quite fervently) that the project would have untenable impacts on the environment and on the quality of life of nearby residents. Although the Community Development Department was willing to base approvals on a mitigated negative declaration, the applicants very commendably decided to engage in the more rigorous evaluation and broader public process provided by an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), and by doing so have possibly set a precedent that will apply to projects of a similar complexity in the future.

Although Lake Group has not yet taken a formal position on the project, after careful review of the EIR we have concluded that few if any of the sometimes dramatically-expressed concerns are warranted, and that all potentially negative impacts can probably be mitigated below the level of significance. We also identified several ways to reduce environmental damage and possible negative effects on near by neighbors.

We are making the case for our recommendations before the Planning Commission and urge all concerned members of the community to participate. These hearings provide a priceless opportunity to find out the truth about what Wild Diamond really is and how it will (and will not) affect its neighbors, and also to simultaneously improve the outcome, learn about sustainable viticultural practices, and relieve rumor-fed anxieties. Visit the Planning Commission webpage for details of upcoming meetings.

Lake Group Executive Committee

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Other contacts:

Steve Devoto (Outings): 279-8308,
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ExCom meetings are held at 7PM on the third Wednesday of every other month, at locations that vary. All members are cordially invited to attend, but requested to contact the Chair first to confirm time and location

Rent This Space

The Lake Group now accepting (in other words, selling) advertisements in this newsletter: a two-inch (business card size) ad like this costs \$25 per issue, or—Great Bargain—\$100 for a year (six issues) To submit an ad send an email to vbrandon@lakelive.info or call Victoria at 994-1931.

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A Few Upcoming Events

*Sept 10, 7PM -- **Anderson Marsh Interpretive Association fundraiser concert** featuring Blithedale Canyon, The Thin Air String Band, and The California State Old Time Fiddlers Soper Reese Community Theatre, 275 S. Main in Lakeport, tickets \$25

*Sept 14, 5:30-7PM -- **Community Conversation on the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument** management plan, co-hosted by the BLM and USFS at the Upper Lake Grange, 9355 Government St. This meeting is organized as an open format, with resource specialists at individual stations to talk one-on-one with interested individuals. More info: call Forest Planner Sharen Parker at 530-934-1141, or BLM Planner Jonna Hildenbrand at 707-468-4024.

*Sept 15, 7PM -- Redbud Audubon meeting, "Lessons from Green Water": Dr. Harry Lyons will explore the similarities and differences between the Hudson River and Clear Lake. St Peter's Catholic church, 4085 Main St in Kelseyville.

*Sept 17, 9AM -- Redbud Audubon field trip to the McVicar Trail at Anderson Marsh SHP: a long but easy walk. Bring lunch, water and binoculars.

*Sept 17, 9AM-12PM -- annual Coastal Cleanup Day, the state's largest volunteer event. Projects will take place in central Clearlake and (for kayakers and canoers) at Shady Acres Campground, 7805 Cache Creek Way. For more information and to register, contact Carolyn Ruttan at 263 2256 or carolyn.ruttan@lakecountyca.gov.