

Redwood Needles



Fall 2022

Sierra Club Redwood Chapter

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On the Path

a note from
Chapter Director Jeff Morris

My all-time favorite Will Rogers quote is: "I'm not a member of any organized political party, I'm a Democrat."

The California election process changed dramatically in 2010 with the adoption of the "top two" primary system which has sometimes resulted in the same candidates who faced off in the primary meeting again in the general election. Sometimes both of them are from the same party. In areas where voter registration leans heavily in one direction or another, choosing between them can devolve into a test of purity that may unfortunately yield bitter divisions among people who should be working. Let's not allow rhetoric to obscure our real objectives.



My own experience as a Congressional candidate in 2008 was quite different. I ran for the Congressional seat then held by Wally Herger, a Republican, that included my home in Trinity County, which, in addition to our stunning Wilderness areas, was the only county in California to vote for Ross Perot in the 1992 November Presidential election.

Herger had three opponents on the Democratic side: Myself, John Jacobson, a nationally known music teacher, and Dr. Arjinderpal "A.J." Sekhon. While A.J. was less of a presence on the campaign trail, John and I made an early pact that not only were we on the same side, but we would encourage our supporters to remain collegial for the greater good as we knew we shared a common foe. As we appeared at the same events across the vast district we became friends and, after I narrowly won the primary, John was a great supporter and even hosted a fundraiser for me at his home in Siskiyou County.

Relationships, if they're healthy, should outlive campaigns, especially when groups of people are generally on the same side of an issue or political horse-shoe. As we approach environmental challenges that are decadal (or longer) in nature, I think keeping our teams together and moving forward in a unified manner on our policy goals is essential.

I lost that election in November 2008, and since then Trinity County has reapportioned to the "new" 2nd District, represented by Jared Huffman. Huffman has proven to be an environmental ally, standing with Sierra Club and advocating for environmental policy that aligns with Sierra Club's vision.

Over the years the Sierra Club has established rules to guide the decision making surrounding the endorsement process. As an organization of activists with many strong individual opinions, those sideboards can assist in lessening the contention around which of several good candidates will receive our collective support. Sometimes our individually preferred candidates receive the nod, and sometimes they don't, but our mission is longer than a single election cycle. Keeping our eye on the ball, and our relationships strong, is essential to achieving real change.

As we move toward November, I encourage everyone to move our issues forward and keep our teams strong. After the election, the work will continue, and the need to work together as a team will be essential to make lasting change.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeff Morris".



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YOUR VOTE MATTERS

for our
Communities • Ecosystems • Planet

By Shoshana Hebshi
Editor

These days, stepping into the political sphere can feel overwhelming and unproductive. As Californians who care about the environment, we might have more interest in attending a talk about protecting open space or participating in a beach cleanup than getting involved in a political campaign or attending a city council meeting.

But the link between environmental protection and political involvement is deeply intertwined, and unless that connection is strong, our dreams of maintaining clean water and air, building healthy ecosystems and carbon neutrality and living in a community that values the natural world will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

It is because of this reality, that Redwood Chapter Chair Victoria Brandon has dedicated so many years to building political partnerships with elected leaders throughout our region, especially in her own backyard of Lake County.

Her experience has demonstrated again and again that when meaningful relationships are formed between environmental and political leaders, positive contributions are achieved, and we all benefit.

"We make our voice much more magnified because we have a conduit to people with real power," she said.

I chatted with Brandon in September to learn more about her thoughts on why she has dedicated so much of her time to politics, and what she sees as the benefits of her work.

First, we agreed we are lucky to live in a region where our political leaders at the state and national levels are relatively environmentally friendly, such as Rep. Jared Huffman and state Sen. Mike McGuire. It makes our effort a bit easier, if sometimes less thrilling.

In Lake County, where Brandon has lived for more than 40 years, her political work began in earnest with a voter registration drive in 2004. It jumped into high gear as a core team volunteer in a 2006 supervisorial campaign, and continued the following year with the campaign leading to the creation of the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument in 2015.

When that campaign began she had been the Redwood Chapter political chair for a year, and as chair of the Lake Group knew all the Lake County supervisors. Her relationships with them were eventually "instrumental in getting some of them to support the conservation act—a campaign that lasted seven years.

"It was a real struggle at that point to get the Board of Supervisors to extend a letter of support," she said. "It took a lot of arguing, and it was not unanimous, and I think the changed relationship there has been something that the local Sierra Club has built up over the years, establishing a relationship of candor and trust."

That relationship building is necessary and involved. Brandon said she attended a lot of meetings and submitted a lot of comment letters. She participated in redistricting and fire safety workshops where the supervisors were present. When she showed up to things that mattered to them, it built trust.

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Making a Difference in 2022

The Nov. 8 election is shaping up as one of the pivots of our age. On one hand, we have an administration and Congress that, however imperfectly, are starting to take the climate crisis and environmental justice seriously, and on the other hand, there's a frightening group of extremists who seem willing to overturn democracy itself in support of their deluded world view.

The results this November will not only provide an advance look at the political climate two years from now, they will also make it possible to achieve solid gains in the next session of Congress and the legislature. Or not—it's up to us, the voters, to determine.

What can we do? First and foremost, be sure to vote! Check out the endorsement list on page 7 and posted on our website at <https://www.sierraclub.org/redwood/endorsements>. You might also consider volunteering for a campaign or making a financial donation.

If that doesn't seem like enough, you can join the national Sierra Club's epic grassroots voter mobilization campaign. This massive Get-Out-The-Vote campaign was launched in 2020 and targeted climate-conscious infrequent voters in four battleground states (Florida, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Arizona). By the November election, 33,000 volunteers had sent 20 million text messages, mailed 1.3 million letters, and made 5 million phone calls, in areas where strong voter turnout was crucial to the result.

The same program has been up and running for much of this year as well, with the focus this time on Arizona, Michigan, Nevada, Minnesota, and Georgia. Volunteers are provided with cutting edge online tools that maximize their effectiveness, and can work individually or in teams at times that fit their schedules.

Learn more: <https://www.sierraclubindependentaction.org/#takeaction>

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.

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Chris Rogers*

At Large: Dan Mayhew*

Political Compliance Officer: Michael Melton

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

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Jeanne Wetzell Chinn

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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:

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North Group Delegate Alternate:

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* Signifies voting member of the ExCom

Elections matter: vote for the planet

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“It’s easier in a small, rural community, but everything is a village. In the middle of the biggest city, there are local neighborhood bodies that give you the opportunity to intersect with people who run things,” she said. “It’s important to maintain relationships, to be available for questions and comments and all the rest of it.”

Another key aspect of building political capital is to become the go-to person for a particular issue. For Brandon, it was Berryessa Snow Mountain in Lake County. Her stature was key in working with Rep. Mike Thompson and gaining his support for Berryessa Snow Mountain among a myriad of other environmental issues over the many years they have worked together.

“We’ve built up a good relationship,” she said.

Indeed, Thompson honored Brandon in the spring with his first ever Climate Crisis Champion Award for her years of dedication in Lake County and beyond.

Being part of the political arm of Sierra Club has involved countless endorsement interviews with candidates, discussions about ballot measures and, of course, lobbying.

Brandon said she divides the work into two parts: the electoral side and the lobbying side. The lobbying aspect, directly talking to representatives about an issue and seeking their support or opposition, she said is often more directly impactful. But on the electoral side, getting a bloc of people (Redwood Chapter members, for instance) to vote for a candidate en force can give Sierra Club the “ammunition” they need to build influence. The two parts are equally important and can work together to first get people elected into seats who are aligned with the Sierra Club values and then to encourage those elected leaders to stand with Sierra Club on specific issues.

When Sierra Club members actively engage their political

leaders by writing letters, signing petitions, or by making phone calls on specific issues, Brandon said, if the leader is doing their job, that pressure from constituents will make a difference.

“Practically speaking, it’s most important when we have people working at the group level, influencing local elections,” she said. “That’s where we have the most influence. When you’ve got elections that turn on a few hundred votes, grassroots activism can make all the difference in the world.”

Brandon’s ongoing political activism is fed by a rewarding sense of making things happen and being with a group of like-minded people working toward the same outcome. “And, of course, it’s thrilling when you win,” she said. “The feeling after you win that you have an open door to affect the course of events, it’s the important tool to accomplishing some of our objectives.”

For the past eight years, she has served as the co-chair of the Sierra Club California Political Committee, which supervises the political affairs of the whole state and processes endorsements for governor, senator and state constitutional officers.

Brandon also held membership on the Sierra Club national political team from 2013 until after the 2020 election, and she was its volunteer co-lead her last four years on the team. When new activists come on, Brandon said, the political program can feel overwhelming to them. She said she enjoys mentoring and shepherding them through the program.

Her advice for anyone interested in getting involved with Sierra Club at the political level, is to start with their local group to get a feel for the process and organization.

To get involved at the chapter level, Brandon will happily have a discussion about joining the political committee. Reach Victoria Brandon at vbrandon95457@gmail.com

Vote local for leverage on local issues

By Woody Hastings
Co-chair CONGAS

Tip O'Neill, speaker of the House of Representatives from 1977 to 1987 is probably best known for his assertion that "all politics is local." Questions about the context, interpretation, and origin of that phrase aside, it is certain that what happens at the local level matters in our everyday lives. And it is largely driven by local politics, and at the heart of it, by local voters.

Local media and civic engagement has declined over the past few decades as local newspapers and other outlets have vanished or been gobbled up by media conglomerates. We tend to become preoccupied with the horse race reporting of the presidential and maybe a handful of congressional races.

Where do local communities have the most leverage? In their own communities! So this is a reminder to pay attention to local elections, and at the very least, vote carefully for your local representatives.

As co-coordinator of the Coalition Opposing New Gas Stations (CONGAS), I have seen how important it is to have thoughtful, forward-thinking elected officials at the helm of our cities and counties. Sonoma County has been buffeted by consequences of climate change including unprecedented wildfire, drought, flooding, extreme heat episodes, and more.

In the past four years, all of the jurisdictions in the county have adopted climate emergency declarations acknowledging that the crisis is real and that policies should reflect that reality. Policies like ceasing to accept permits for new gas stations are increasingly being seen as a logical result.

Since its inception in 2019, CONGAS has reached out to potential supporters who have lobbied their City Council and Planning Commission members and County Supervisors, both individually and by attending meetings, submitting letters and petitions, sometimes holding visible protests at proposed gas station sites. Their efforts have been reported in local and even national media.

All these actions have impacted our local decision-makers. Not only have individual gas station planning applications been withdrawn, but as a result of such actions, the City Councils of Petaluma*, Sebastopol, Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa and Windsor have voted, almost all unanimously, to enact ordinances prohibiting the permitting of new gas stations, or expansion of



Woody Hastings, co-chair of the Coalition Against New Gas Stations, demonstrates with other concerned residents at the site of a proposed gas station in Sonoma County.

Photo courtesy Woody Hastings.

existing ones, in their jurisdictions.

The remaining cities and the County of Sonoma are working on it, and similar actions have taken place in neighboring Napa and Marin counties, with the movement attracting much wider attention. We have gotten to know the mayors and council members in our towns, people you can bump into at a coffee shop or farmers market.

Of course, it is not enough to stop building new gas stations. We need to speak up for urban planning and design that emphasizes better facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists and better clean-emission public transportation. What about social justice, housing, public health, land use, youth and senior issues, water, food security? The list goes on and on. Elected officials make so many decisions that can directly impact our lives.

Even with our best efforts things don't always go the way we expect. Some elected leaders turn out to be disappointing. That is not a reason to give up. In fact, we need to double down on recruiting leaders who think long-term for the good of the community.

Once you've played your part in getting some good people elected, don't fade into the background. It's super-important to maintain the relationships after good candidates have been elected and to keep open lines of communication and accountability.

Here's one final thought. City councils are often the first step in the ladder for politicians to higher county, state, or federal elected positions. Being active in supporting good candidates at the local level can help ensure that our county, state, and federal electeds are people that we know and trust to make the best decisions they can on our behalf.

*Petaluma has a different history, thanks to another community-based organization, No Gas Here.

Good environmental policy stems from appreciation of and connection to nature

By Chris Rogers

Mayor, City of Santa Rosa

Member, Redwood Chapter Executive Committee

The crashing of waves against the shore and the gob-smacking height of our mountain tops have a way of making us feel small. We stand in awe amongst our noble redwoods and feel the wonderment of a canoe ride down our rivers and tributaries.

Environmentalists aren't born, they're created. I grew up in Sonoma County and went to school in Santa Barbara. For me, physical health and my profound appreciation for our natural beauties grew together, intertwined.

Some of my strongest memories are sunset jogs from Goleta's campus point to the Santa Barbara pier, dodging snowy plovers as they snuck a snack between the cascading waves. They're that final, exhausting step out on Gunsight Rock, revealing a clear view of San Francisco 60 miles away, or getting lost playing hide and go seek in Armstrong Woods.

I wasn't born an environmentalist, but I became one as my personal connection grew to our world's wonders.

As a policy maker, I know that there is no greater responsibility than to provide environmental steward-

ship and make sure that we preserve and protect our natural spaces for my kids and their kids to discover. Many of the causes we fight can only be lost once—and it's lost forever.

Yet, far too many in our community now associate our climate with the visceral feeling they get when the humidity drops and the winds pick up. Far too many have experienced climate change without having experienced environmental stewardship.

If we are serious about building community and political will for protecting our environment, we need an unwavering effort to fight for public access to our natural resources; to make sure that today's youth have a personal connection to our iconic coast

and our majestic forests. It's harder to cut a tree when you spent your youth climbing it, or to pave a plot of land that still has youthful footsteps pressed into the earth.

Some of our elected officials could use a stroll through the redwoods, too.

A sincere thank you to everyone who brings that voice—your perspective—to city council meetings and board workshops around the state. Thanks to your efforts, another generation is being trained to carry the mantle and to continue to fight for our environment.

It's harder to cut a tree when you spent your youth climbing it, or to pave a plot of land that still has youthful footsteps pressed into the earth.

As discussed in previous editions of the *Needles*, Redwood Chapter is trying to stop PG&E from cutting down millions of acres of trees in the false name of fire prevention.

The national Sierra Club Our Wild America campaign has stepped up to support our work through the end of 2022 with a grant of more than \$25,000.

If you haven't done so already, please help the cause by signing our petition on our website: sierraclub.org/redwood



Photo: Shoshana Hebshi

Sierra Club Group & Chapter Elections

Ballots must be received by Dec. 31, 2022
Candidate statements are available on our website:
<https://www.sierraclub.org/redwood/candidate-statements>

Please mark your choices for Redwood Chapter and your local group executive committee on the ballot below and mail to:

Redwood Chapter Sierra Club, PO Box 466, Santa Rosa, CA 95402

Or save paper and postage by casting your ballot electronically at:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/redwood/>

SONOMA

Vote for four

- Tom Conlon
- Richard Sachen
- Theresa Ryan
- Shirley Johnson

NORTH

Vote for three

- Erin Gooch
- Richard Kreis
- Richard Stewart
- Dana Utman

MENDOCINO

Vote for two

- Mary Walsh
- Robin Leler

LAKE

Vote for three

- Eliot Hurwitz
- Ed Robey
- JoAnn Saccato

NAPA

Vote for two

- David Campbell
- Roland Dumas

SOLANO

Vote for four

- Joe Feller
- Bonnie Hamilton
- Greg Peterson
- Paul Theiss

REDWOOD CHAPTER

Vote for two

- Jeanne Wetzel Chinn
- Dan Mayhew

Sierra Club Redwood Chapter Endorsements For Federal, State & Local Offices in the Nov. 8 election

FEDERAL

US Senate: Alex Padilla
US Congress:
District 02: Jared Huffman
District 04: Mike Thompson
District 08: John Garamendi

STATE

Constitutional Officers

Lt. Governor: Eleni Kounalakis
Attorney General: Rob Bonta
Secretary of State:
Dr. Shirley Weber
State Controller: Malia Cohen

Insurance Commissioner:
Ricardo Lara
Superintendent of Public
Instruction: Tony Thurmond

State Legislature

Senate District 02: Mike McGuire
Assembly District 02: Jim Wood

Board of Equalization, District 2:
Sally Lieber

LOCAL

Napa County

Board of Supervisors, District 1:

Joelle Gallagher

Solano County

Board of Supervisors, District 3:
Wanda Williams
Benicia City Council: Kari Birdseye
and Terry Scott
Fairfield City Council, District 1:
George Kennedy
Suisun Mayor: Alma Hernandez
Suisun City Council: Princess
Washington
Vacaville Mayor: Jason Roberts
Vacaville City Council, District 4:
Sarah Chapman

Vacaville City Council, District 5:
Jeannette Wylie
Vallejo City Council, District 2:
Don Jordan
Vallejo City Council, District 4:
Ruscal Cayangyang

Sonoma County

Santa Rosa City Council, District
4: Victoria Fleming

Local Ballot Measures

City of Benicia Measure K,
extending Urban Growth
Boundary: Support

Redwood Needles

Sierra Club

Redwood Chapter

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Join Us!

It's been way too long since we last gathered. Won't you spend some time getting re-acquainted with your local Sierra Club chapter?

Food and drinks are provided.

Bring your friends and your ideas on environmental issues in your community and how we can address them.

All are welcome. Please RSVP on our website:
[sierraclub.org/redwood](https://www.sierraclub.org/redwood)



www.sierraclub.org/redwood

Sonoma • Napa • Solano • Lake • Mendocino • Humboldt • Del Norte • Trinity • Western Siskiyou