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Blue Oak Group



Butte, Glenn, Lassen, Plumas & Tehama Counties

Valley's Edge Development Update *by Susan Tchudi, Smart Growth Advocates*

The Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Valley's Edge Specific Plan was released in the middle of November. This 1448 acre sprawl housing development project, in the rangeland and foothills, is located east of Bruce Road, between Stilson Canyon and Honey Run Road. More than 2000 units are proposed, only a handful of which will be affordable housing. There are myriad reasons to oppose the development of this project, one of the biggest in the history of Chico.



Natural resources: This riparian woodland consists of vernal pools, wetlands, and oak trees and has both endangered and threatened species that could be destroyed by this project. This territory is home 38 species of nesting and migratory birds, including Burrowing Owls (already in steep decline), the Loggerhead Shrike, Yellow Warblers, and the Swainson's Hawk. *continued on next page*

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Valley's Edge Development Update *continued from page 1*

This land has some of the few remaining Butte County Meadowfoam. This project would truly be a disaster for wildlife.

Wildfire: The land has burned three times in the past 19 years, most recently during the 2018 Camp Fire. This acreage provides a buffer for the City of Chico. Chico's official Community Wildfire Protection Plan identifies this land as high risk for wildfires.

Traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions: If Valley's Edge is completed, there could be as many as 29,000 vehicle trips per day. Not only would this increase congestion, but it would increase Chico's greenhouse gas emissions. The city Council unanimously passed the Climate Action Plan which calls for Chico to reduce its emissions to net zero by 2045. The increase in vehicle miles travelled will make that virtually impossible. The Environmental Impact Report acknowledges that greenhouse gas emission is an unmitigable impact.

Water depletion: The water use of as many as 6000 residents and businesses in VE would come from Cal Water. Chico gets its water from the lower Tuscan water basin and that source is already overtaxed. Chico can't risk this pressure on local groundwater.

Local housing needs: Chico needs affordable housing for the people who live and work here. The houses in Valley's Edge are not affordable. In fact, Valley's Edge will have an HOA, making the cost of living there even more out of reach for those who need housing. Moreover, the HOA will make the planned parks, trails, and greenways unavailable to those who don't live there.

Where things stand:

The Final EIR for Valley's Edge is being reviewed by Chico's Planning Department. That report, and the Valley's Edge Specific Plan and the final EIR, will go to the Planning Commission and then the City Council. It is scheduled to go to the Planning Commission on December 1. Now is the time to act.

Please write to the Planning Commission and the City Council. Come to those meetings if you can.

If the City Council approves VE, two things are likely to happen: 1) there will be a lawsuit (collaboration of Smart Growth Advocates and the Sierra Club); 2) there will be a referendum. We need your support to stop this project.

Please go to smartgrowthchico.org to donate and to sign up to receive information.

2023 ExCom Election

It is again time for Blue Oak Group Members to vote for people to represent them on the Blue Oak Group Executive Committee (ExCom). This year we have five empty seats and three candidates: Betty Volker, Suzette Welch and Jane Coleman. You can read the candidates statements on the ballot form included with this newsletter. For those members who do not receive a mailed newsletter but instead get an email notification that the Newsletter is available online, that email will include the link for your downloadable ballot.

Please take a few minutes to participate in this important process. Ballots should be filled out, folded, taped, stamped and mailed by December 31, 2022.

Newsletter Information

Blue Oak Group News is published four times a year, in March, June, September, and December, by the Blue Oak Group of the Sierra Club, P.O. Box 2012, Chico, CA 95927. For changes in mailing address or email address, contact Suzette Welch, booksontape@rocketmail.com.

For submissions, comments, or inquiries, contact: Suzette Welch, booksontape@rocketmail.com
530 570-3240

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 Winter 2022-2023 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

On-going Volleyball. Join Blue Oak Group members and friends for friendly, co-ed volleyball every Tuesday 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 contact Betty, 530-588-8918.

Saturday, December 10 Day Hike (2,B) Lower Bidwell Park

Join us to walk the paved loop from the One Mile Recreation Area to the east end of Lower Bidwell Park and back. About a 4-5 mile, moderately paced walk through the beautiful creekside scenery. Rain cancels. Meet at 9:30AM at the bridge crossing Big Chico Creek closest to the One Mile parking lot. Leader: Alan, 530-891-8789 or ajmendoza666@gmail.com.

Saturday, January 21 Day Hike (2,A) Hike Along Feather River in Oroville

A pleasant 3–4 mile stroll along the paved, scenic Feather River Parkway to the Nature Center and back. Afterwards we will have a group lunch at Tong Fong Low Chinese Restaurant in downtown Oroville. Please bring water, comfortable walking shoes and restaurant/carpool \$\$\$. Rain cancels. Meet at Chico Park & Ride to carpool at 9:30AM or at trailhead in Oroville (Riverbend Park - Hwy 70 & Montgomery Street) at 10:00AM. Leader: Alan, 530-891-8789 or ajmendozaa666@gmail.com.



Big Chico Creek, photo by Alan Mendoza

Saturday, February 25 Day Hike (2,B) South Side of Bidwell Park

Enjoy the amazing spring beauty of upper Bidwell Park along with beautiful views as we hike the South Rim/Annie Bidwell trail. A 6-7 mile hike paralleling Big Chico Creek with several short 100' up and down climbs. Bring boots, water and lunch. Rain cancels. Car shuttle required. Meet at 9AM at Five Mile parking lot in Chico. Leader: Alan, 530-891-8789 or ajmendoza666@gmail.com

Blue Oak Group Board and Chairs

2022 Blue Oak Executive Committee

Chair: Wendy McCall

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Vice Chair: Suzette Welch

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Interim Secretary: Betty Volker

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Treasurer: John Hollister

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Board Member: Jane Coleman

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Conservation Report: Protecting our People, Land, and Planet

by Grace M. Marvin, Conservation Chair of the Blue Oak Group

Our houseless brothers and sisters are being forced to leave campgrounds in Chico, but there are serious questions about where else many of them can go, despite the Federal Judge's settlement with Chico. For half a year the Sierra Club has been funding (via the Motherlode Chapter) two dumpsters for our houseless ones, although many more were needed and recommended by the club to the city. Sierra Club's local Blue Oak group has had several volunteers step up to the plate to help implement the trash pickup at the two dumpsters that the city allowed. Thank you, Sierra Club!

Many volunteers have continued to be fully involved in organizing efforts to combat the faults in the Valley's Edge project planned for Chico (via annexation of land from Butte County). Susan Tchudi is covering Valley's Edge in this edition, nonetheless, I want to report how much we need your support: Please see the link below for the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR). We need you to respond to the city about deficiencies in it as soon as possible. For simplicity's sake you might choose a letter someone else wrote that is in the FEIR, then see if you are satisfied with the city planners' responses, *e.g.*, re fire, water, traffic, greenhouse gasses, housing needs, wildlife, and more. (When you receive this newsletter, it might be too late to give feedback to the Chico Planning Commission, but there still is time for your letter to go to the Deciders, *i.e.*, Chico City Council.)

You can get more information by going to SmartGrowthChico.org on your computer or tablet. Smart Growth Advocates is a very active organization that includes many Sierra Club members, including myself.

Mike Sawley, Chico's Principal Planner, sent a note in October to those writing the city about Valley's Edge last year. He noted that the Valley's Edge (final) Specific Plan (VESP) is on the City's website at <https://chico.ca.us/post/valleys-edge-specific-plan>. "The Final EIR includes copies of the comments received on the Draft EIR, City responses to each unique comment, and a section containing revisions to the text of the Draft EIR. The web link above also

includes copies of the Draft EIR and the Updated Public Review Draft VESP."

What I learned about this past year's efforts from the Club's statewide Conservation Committee (zoom) meetings in October:

1. The Club's Sierra Magazine goes to everyone who pays dues of at least \$25 each year. Half of all members report that it motivates them to become active in one or more causes. The editors are attempting to reach families via family centered activities and interests. The editors especially want to educate readers about differentiations in nature, for example, Central Park in New York City versus ranches versus forests. Noteworthy: during the 19th and 20th centuries, different types of nature were blended together in many people's minds. Nowadays, because we need to focus both on emergencies relevant to biodiversity and to our own extinction, we are much more exacting. Thus, another popular magazine topic was "forever chemicals!"
2. Of special interest to the readers was the story about the pipeline in Africa and the article about the Mountain Maidu and PG&E. (Personal note: we are increasingly, seeing more success in tribal efforts to take back land—even in Butte County.) Two stories people at this conference suggested for future editions: offshore drilling, and homeless people getting kicked out of parks.
3. The Director of Sierra Club California, Brandon Dawson, shared much of his politically charged conservation work, including:
 - Most of his staff consists of registered lobbyists.
 - 59 of more than 850 bills made it to the Governor's desk for his signature. Since CA has had unprecedented heatwaves, many items related to climate change were covered—everything from sequestration of natural lands

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Conservation Report *cont'd*

to reducing greenhouse gases (GHG).

- Victories included requiring setbacks for oil and gas drilling and prohibiting use of captured carbon for fossil fuel extraction. The Governor led a successful fight to invest monies into transportation and for building electrification. Only 5 of the 56 bills that SC-CA opposed went to the Governor's desk this past year.
- Most unfortunately, Governor Newsom extended the operations of Diablo Canyon nuclear plant.
- Other issues that the Legislature covered included water, cleaner trucking, transportation, getting natural gas out of homes and appliances, air quality, parks, coastal issues, and wind energy.
- Of special concern: the number of "moderate" Democrats coming into legislative power who do not support many Sierra Club positions.
- SC-CA will continue to work hard on the **30 X 30** project, *i.e.*, to protect 30% of land and water by 2030. Good news: California's Water Board is also hard at work trying to protect the Bay Delta, while the Coastal Commission is held in very high regard.

Brandon Dawson and his team are trying to figure out what our Club's priorities should be for next year. What do you think they should be?

Please share your ideas and passions with the Club's California Conservation Committee by going to the List View at www.sierraclub.org/california/cnrcc.

For local issues in which you would like to get involved please share with me at g-marvin@comcast.net

Paradise Builds a New Town

By Ed Schilling

Paradise is undergoing a huge transformation. Over the next three years, for example, the town of Paradise plans to repave about thirty miles of roads every year. If that number seems improbable, take a drive on the newly repaved Skyway from the Chico city limits all the way through Paradise. It is all newly paved. And it follows a long year of digging up roads and placing a lot of utility cables deep underground. FEMA and the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) granted funding for the town to repave all public roadways in Paradise after the fire. Thirty miles yearly is a lot, but very soon Paradise will have all new roads. This and several other recovery projects are slowly transforming Paradise into a very different place.

The town of Paradise was erased by the Camp fire in 2018, the most destructive fire in California history. This created a virtual "clean slate" for recovery. Plans for a pedestrian centered downtown area, new roads over underground utilities, new and mostly solar powered housing, all speak to core environmental values. Starting from scratch does have its benefits.

Paradise recently received the prestigious Helen Putnam Award of Excellence for the 2019 Long Term Community Recovery Plan. According to Recovery and Economic Development Director Colette Curtis, "this plan was derived from our residents and serves as the guiding vision for recovery. Of the 39 recovery projects identified in the plan, many are considered top priorities. Tree removal, housing, repairing of roads, improving evacuation routes, and installing an Early Warning System stand out as vital and

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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.

No Butts About It: Tobacco Litter Harms the Environment

Marissa Maxey – Project Director, LEAD Project

The opportunity for good health begins in our natural, and lived, environment. The places where we live, work, and play have lasting impacts on our health. We know that poisons in the natural environment eventually make their ways into the flora and fauna of a place, and into our bodies. One of the larger contributors to litter is waste created as a by-product of commercial tobacco use. I use the term commercial tobacco use, to differentiate from any tobacco use associated with the spiritual practices of indigenous peoples.

Most of us have found discarded cigarette butts while recreating outdoors. Finding any kind of litter in a beautiful natural space is annoying. Tobacco waste is not only annoying, but a particularly damaging and widespread form of litter. Studies show that discarded cigarette butts are the most commonly collected item during beach, park, and waterfront clean-ups. Now, the popularity of vaping (e-cigarettes) among youth is contributing to the problem. The youth epidemic of vaping means that the definition of tobacco waste has grown. Along with butts, commercial tobacco users now litter disposable vapes and the lithium-ion batteries contained within.

It is common belief that discarded cigarette butts will biodegrade. Unfortunately, that is untrue. Each butt is made of Cellulose Acetate which will deteriorate, but not biodegrade. As vapes and cigarette butts break down into smaller pieces (not biodegrade) they leach a slew of chemicals and harmful substances into the surrounding environment. Some of these toxins include pesticides, herbicides,



Cigarette butts are not biodegradable

insecticides, fungicides, rodenticides, carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), formaldehyde, acetone, nicotine, arsenic, heavy metals, and microplastics.

Tobacco waste is frequently swept into local bodies of water, and eventually the ocean. Studies have shown that the leaching toxins, and larger pieces of debris, cause environmental damage on macro and micro levels. Birds and fish mistake cigarette butts for food and ingest them, clogging their digestive tracts with garbage; aquatic microorganisms fail to thrive and develop mutations in water poisoned by tobacco waste; and microplastics from deteriorating tobacco waste is inhaled or ingested by wildlife and people.

The presence of tobacco waste can be minimized in communities through local policies that create smoke free spaces (community events, historical downtown areas, parks, etc). Less smoking and vaping leads to less waste. Awareness can also be brought to the issue during clean-up events at your local parks or creeks. Community members and policymakers may be surprised at the number of cigarette butts you find!

Paradise Builds a New Town

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immediate needs our community identified.” They are all in “various stages of work,” with installation of the Early Warning System, a system of 21 siren towers approved by FEMA in April 2022, set to begin in January 2023.

Tree removal and replanting are another concern for Paradise residents as they look out at the now visible yet housing and solar friendly rolling hills of the town. After the fire, FEMA granted funds “to create a reseeding plan for public rights of way, as well as an education campaign for replanting on private property,” said Colette Curtis. The town is still looking for funding to implement the plan. Hazardous tree removal, however, has been taking place since the first days after the fire, with 130,000 trees removed in two phases so far, and ten thousand more “hazard trees” to be removed on private property starting in Spring 2023.

Four years after the fire, the population has now grown to about 7,500 people, with 1,573 homes rebuilt, and 350 businesses opened or reopened. This includes new chain stores such as Grocery Outlet and Tractor Supply, along with scores of restaurants and new businesses. Although progress is steady, recovery will still last at least a decade.

Today Paradise seems like another place in time, far removed from when dense pine, fir and, oak trees crowded and obscured the streets, oak leaves and grey pine needles piled up everywhere, or wild grape vines inched up and alongside power poles and lines. Paradise after the Camp fire seems incombustible, a changed landscape, a different place. If you only have a memory of Paradise from before the Camp fire, it most likely will not match what exists today. And in a few short years, you probably will not recognize Paradise much at all.



Holiday Potluck

Friday, December 16, 2022 is the date for our annual Holiday Potluck. We are so happy to be able to have a party again this year. We hope that you will be able to join the fun at Valley Oaks Village 1950 Wild Oak Lane, Chico, CA. Party starts at 5:30PM. Limited parking so please carpool. Bring your own beer and wine. There will be a \$5 donation for room rental and cleanup.

The annual Holiday Party is a good time for visiting with old friends and meeting new people. So bring your favorite dish and plan to have a pleasant evening.

If you plan on attending, please notify Suzette Welch by e-mail booksontape@rocketmail.com or phone (530) 570-3240 stating number of people in your party and what you plan to bring.

Need For Volunteers

If you want to continue to have a local Sierra Club, fighting for the environment and providing hiking opportunities, we need to have more participation of the membership. Many of the founding members have either died or are too old to get very involved. So younger members need to start being active, or there won't be a club. We especially need more outings leaders so that we can offer more hikes. Also there are two seats open on the executive board. As a board member you will be able to influence the direction of the club. Board meetings are via Zoom, so you don't have to travel farther than your closest computer. If the silent majority of the Sierra Club doesn't step up and take an active part in future, there will not be a local group.

Contact Alan Mendoza ajmendoza@prodigy.net if interested in becoming outings leader. If you want to become an ExCom member contact Suzette Welch booksontape@rocketmail.com.

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