Water (or lack thereof) is on our minds
On the Path  
am note from  
Chapter Director Jeff Morris

As we begin to collectively wend our way out of a global pandemic, there are many calls for getting things back to “normal” and hopes of renewal and a reset. While that’s certainly a hopeful perspective, it is more likely that as a society, locally and globally, we’ll still be living with viral events in the near term and into the foreseeable future.

The same can be said of climate conditions in the Redwood Chapter territory, and the greater world.

One of the key impacts is drought. While there has been a lot of press about California “re-entering” drought conditions, it seems like a more rational argument to say that any variance from the previous drought conditions from four years ago have now realigned themselves. Public policy, unfortunately, is not completely following along.

Unlike the aphorism that “rain follows the plough,” the false harbinger sales pitch that drove on the dustbowl conditions of the 1930s, drought and wildfire conditions are sadly linked. Like so many other results of climate change, they also have a more profound impact on the most vulnerable communities.

During the last eight months, our Redwood Chapter activists have been involved in elevating all of these combined issues, externally, through webinars on the impact of wildfires and need for defensible space and home hardening in addition to our combined work with the Loma Prieta and San Francisco Bay chapters on sea-level rise impacts in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The work is internal, as well. Through collaboration with the SF Bay Chapter, we have conducted workshops on equity and inclusion and how we can be better allies for all vulnerable populations on any issue, including climate. The workshop series has ended, but we will continue to work on implementing strategies and ideas to make sure Redwood Chapter is as inclusive and representative of all the diversity in our geographically expansive region.

While there are challenges ahead, especially around wildfires as we enter what is expected to be a significant fire season, there is also reason for hope that we are facing these challenges with new perspectives and renewed energy that will help support our fellow community members here within the Redwood Chapter and beyond.

Cover Photo: Dawna Mirante
It’s Not a Drought
Water ‘abundance’ is gone as we adjust to the new water supply

By Shoshana Hebshi
Chapter Communications Coordinator

It’s no secret that we are in a severe water crisis. Exploring waterways throughout our region will find rivers and streams quite low. This time of year, the Russian and the Eel rivers would normally be recreational attractions. Seasonal creeks would be rippling through stone-laden corridors. But this summer, we see our reservoirs and lakes, like Lake Sonoma and Lake Mendocino, at shockingly low levels that expose banks so eerily it’s nearly desert-like. All life that has been supported by the flows is at critical risk.

Agencies and jurisdictions are delivering notifications to curb water use. The City of Santa Rosa has asked its residents to cut back by 20 percent. On June 7, the Healdsburg City Council declared a local drought emergency and implemented Stage 3 water restrictions to achieve a 40 percent systemwide reduction in water demand by establishing residential water allowances and commercial business reduction goals. Well owners along the Russian River, including small, food-producing farms, have received Emergency Regulation Notices from the Department of Water Resources.

While we as individual water users can (and should) certainly take more personal responsibility for reduction, there’s another story brewing that turns a sharper lens on agricultural and industrial water use and how these operations figure into the water equation.

Of course, agriculture needs water to grow crops, raise animals and operate production facilities. And industrial water use is necessary for the functioning of our economy and infrastructure. But how much? Can water regulators do more to rein in excess or illegal use so the water is shared more equitably?

Rue Furch, a member of Redwood Chapter’s executive committee, wears many hats, including serving on the Advisory Committee for the Santa Rosa Plain Groundwater Sustainability Agency. She holds historic knowledge about local water issues, and she relies on a well on her rural Sebastopol property.

“My perspective is that we need to use less and store more,” she said. “Everyone could do a little more to conserve, but it is absolutely necessary to take a broad look at everything that needs to happen.”

Furch, also active in the Sonoma County Water Coalition, emphasized that this is a complex issue with a lot of moving parts to get to sustainable solutions. But “people must be a part of the solution or there is no solution. That includes everyone: businesses, farmers, residents…”

These solutions include better monitoring and greater understanding of water usage. For example, some agricultural ponds that store water from rains and/or diversions are required to drain the ponds before the season when the water is most needed.

As water becomes scarcer and rates increase, however, we will see changes occur, like the closing of the McClure Dairy in Point Reyes this summer. Owner Bob McClure, whose family has been operating a dairy on Point Reyes National Seashore for four generations, cited water shortages as the main factor driving his decision to sell his organic cows to an out-of-state buyer and shut down his farm.

Continued on Page 5
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 in either Santa Rosa or Willits. The meetings are being held over Zoom during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chapter Director:
Jeff Morris • (530) 355-9880 • jeff.morris@sierraclub.org

Chapter Communications Coordinator:
Shoshana Hebshi • shoshana.hebshi@sierraclub.org

Administrative Staff:
Tom Devlin • (707) 544-7651 • tdevlin@sonic.net

Regional Coal Organizer:
Jacob Klein • jacob.klein@sierraclub.org

Chapter Chair • At Large • Political Chair • RCC Delegate • Wilderness Chair:
Victoria Brandon* • (707) 994-1931 • vbrandon95457@gmail.com

Vice Chair • Solano Group Delegate to Chapter:
Joe Feller* • (415) 902-3395

Secretary:
Christine Hutfles

Treasurer & Finance Committe Chair:
Jana Selph • (707) 829-5356

At Large • Council of Club Leaders Alternate • RCC Delegate: Rue Furch* • (707) 823-3555

At Large • Conservation Chair • Council of Club Leaders Delegate: Tom Roth* • (707) 632-5873

At Large • Energy and Climate Chair: Randy MacDonald* • (707) 391-0833

Transportation Chair:
Steve Birdlebough • (707) 576-6632

At Large • Legal Chair: Elizabeth Johnson*

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

Forest Chair:
Jeanne Wetzel Chinn

Lake Group Delegate to Chapter:
Debi Sally* • (707) 235-9011

Lake Group Delegate Alternate:
Denise Rushing • (707) 560-1166

Mendocino Group Delegate to Chapter:
Mary Walsh* • (707) 937-0572

Mendocino Group Delegate Alternate: Robin Leler

Napa Group Delegate to Chapter:
Chris Benz *

North Group Delegate to Chapter:
Ned Forsyth* • (707) 826-2417

North Group Delegate Alternate:
Joyce Yowell • (559) 916-8575

Sonoma Group Delegate to Chapter:
Shirley Johnson-Foell* • (707) 206-1138

Chapter Webmaster: Melanie Matway

* Signifies voting member of the ExCom

TALKIN’ TRASH

Methane reduction via green waste diversion is underway

By Theresa Ryan
Sonoma Group Zero Waste Chair

Despite legislative attempts to delay implementation of SB 1383, a statewide bill passed in 2016 to set methane emissions reduction targets, Zero Waste Sonoma, also known as Sonoma County Waste Management Agency, is moving forward to implement the policy countywide.

SB 1383 aims to reduce short-lived climate pollutants (SLCP) by curbing organic waste disposal and divert edible food from landfills.

According to Calrecycle, methane, though a short-lived pollutant, is 84 times more powerful than CO2 and a major contributor to climate change. It is emitted through organics, like food scraps, yard trimmings, paper, and cardboard, which make up half of what Californians dump in landfills.

Calrecycle says reducing SLCPs like organic waste will have the fastest impact on the climate crisis.

SB 1383 mandates that 50 percent of organics need to be diverted from the landfill and 75 percent by 2025 from 2014 levels. The law also requires at least 20 percent of edible food be recovered before it hits the landfill; subsequently, it has to be distributed to food recovery programs.

Another benefit of not wasting edible food is related to water conservation, which becomes increasingly important with evolving drought conditions. Water is used to produce food, and water and energy are involved in transporting and disposing of wasted food. So, SB 1383 potentially is an environmental trifecta: climate mitigation, food insecurity and water/energy conservation.

Zero Waste Sonoma is considered a leader in the state for its success and momentum with SB 1383.

ZWS is tackling part of the food recovery piece of the law by using the Food Waste Prevention and Rescue grant it was awarded from Calrecycle to expand food recovery infrastructure that will result in diversion of 705,000 pounds of food and a reduction of 561 metric tons of CO2 over two years.

ZWS has also identified more than 500 businesses involved in food generation, such as commercial food distributors, grocery stores, schools and wholesale food vendors that will need to donate their excess food.

A recent setback to the local enactment of SB 1383 is that Renewable Sonoma, a proposed composting facility, did not receive funding to go forward, and local green waste will continue to be trucked out of the county to be processed.
“It’s going on all over,” Furch said.

One potential solution being explored is desalination. The practice has been growing in popularity in California, especially in the southern region, and it is coming north. Yet, this solution is energy intensive and may not be appropriate to implement.

And yet another solution water authorities are exploring, Furch said, is aquifer injection. By injecting excess water in the rainy season or from another source, into an aquifer, the water table can be replenished. But there’s a risk of contaminating the underground water due to chemical interactions that may not be predictable, and more research will be necessary.

Vineyards and other types of agriculture need to transition to more drought-tolerant crops or dry farming, and many of them have, Furch said. And, she added, “We have to think about plants that are part of the solution. Tree roots provide routes for water into the aquifers. They become little flow channels. We have to stop cutting down trees that are part of the solution for groundwater recharge. Greater awareness of the value of ‘Slow it, Spread it, Sink it,’ should lead to smart land use policies in recharge areas, and protection of soils where agriculture could thrive.”

Northern California water “abundance” will be a thing of the past as dramatic changes in rainfall and hotter weather brought on by impacts of climate change affect our seasons. Furch said this drastic shift in how we view water will change our behavior out of necessity.

“We have to be in it for the long haul. This is not a blip,” she said, adding that everyone has to be part of the solution. “We have to acknowledge that this is how it is. Don’t use the word ‘drought.’ This is weather. This is how it is. We have to get real with that.”
The next big step in protecting our public lands

By Victoria Brandon
Chair, Redwood Chapter

I’ve been fascinated with the natural world ever since I was a child paddling about on the Rippowam River in Connecticut among the sunfish and snapping turtles. Since landing in Lake County 40 years ago, most of that passion has been focused right here in northern California. It’s been a great privilege to advocate for Wild and Scenic Cache Creek, the Boxer/Thompson Wilderness Bill, Mt. Konooti Park, the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument, and others. Now I’m excited to campaign for a new bill that will benefit millions of Californians from remote Del Norte County to the San Gabriel Mountains.

Wilderness proponents in California had good reason to rejoice earlier this spring, when Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA) introduced the Protecting Unique and Beautiful Landscapes by Investing in California (PUBLIC) Lands Act. This ambitious legislation will protect some of the state’s iconic landscapes as designated wilderness or wild and scenic rivers; expand equitable access to nature for communities that need it most; improve wildfire protections; and promote the outdoor recreation economy.

The legislative package consists of three bills that passed the House of Representatives earlier in the year, including one bill that affects landscapes in my very own Redwood Chapter. Rep. Jared Huffman’s (D-CA) Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act would designate 262,000 acres of pristine federal lands as wilderness; permanently protect more than 480 miles of wild and scenic rivers; establish a 700,000-acre special restoration area in the South Fork Trinity River and Mad River watersheds; and require federal agencies to coordinate fire management, all without limiting recreation access or affecting private property.

This legislation will help achieve the goals set forth in Gov. Gavin Newsom and President Joe Biden’s executive orders to protect 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030 (an effort known as 30×30). California is currently in the process of putting together a statewide plan on how to implement this goal, and Sierra Club believes passing the PUBLIC Lands Act is key to our state achieving it.

Passing the bill would be a milestone victory for Californians. By expanding protections to include more than a million acres, the bill will increase equitable access to the outdoors, like in the Los Angeles area, where an expanded San Gabriel Mountains National Monument will connect nearly 17 million people to the region’s largest green space. The bill establishes new tools and protocols to protect the landscapes that were devastated by wildfires last year. And expanded access to the outdoors will help boost California’s economy. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, California’s outdoor recreation economy generated more than $57 billion in revenue and supported more than 578,000 jobs. Increased access to protected wilderness could push those numbers even higher.

Local conservationists have prioritized some of these special places for a long time, but political considerations made permanent protection unachievable during previous rounds of wilderness legislation in 1984 and 2006. That changed after the 2010 census with the creation of a new Second Congressional District, now represented by Huffman, a long-time environmental champion. Starting not long after the 2012 election, a broad stakeholder group led by the Wilderness Society and the California Wilderness Coalition worked to define boundaries, identify outstanding natural features, and hold discussions with neighboring private landowners, federal agencies, and local tribes as part of the “Mountains and Rivers” campaign.

With the support of the Sierra Club, Huffman’s legislation was consolidated with three other California bills and two bills from other states, creating a package that easily passed the House in February 2020 and was then attached to the House version of the must-pass National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Unfortunately, some of the public lands provisions did not make it into the final version of the NDAA. When the new Congress convened in 2021, however, the bills found a new champion in Sen. Padilla.

This is the best opportunity we’ve had in at least a generation to permanently protect these lands—and the clock is ticking. The expanded protections included in the PUBLIC Lands Act are essential not only for protecting lands, water, and wildlife and expanding equitable access to the outdoors. They will also bring mental and physical health benefits to our communities, create healthier and safer landscapes and environments for all, and build up the natural infrastructure we need to take on the climate crisis and the extinction crisis.

My 20 years as an environmental advocate have been deeply rewarding, and I’m particularly looking forward to popping the cork on a bottle of good champagne when the PUBLIC Lands Act becomes the law of the land.

Chapter & Group leadership elections

The Redwood Chapter and Group Executive Committee election season has begun. Nominating Committee Chairs have been selected, and candidate recruitment is proceeding. Three Chapter At-Large seats will be up this year, and either three or four Group seats. If you are interested in running for a position, please contact the relevant nominating committee chair.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE CHAIRS

- **Chapter Elections Chair:** Jim Horn, jhorn@hornengineers.com
- **Lake Group:** JoAnn Saccato, shyilla@cluemail.com
- **Mendocino Group:** Jeanne Wetzel Chinn, jeannechinn@gmail.com
- **Napa Group:** Samantha Smith, samsmithitaly@yahoo.com
- **Solano Group:** Joe Feller,Joe56feller@gmail.com
- **Sonoma Group:** Shirley Johnson, johnsons@sonoma.edu
- **North Group:** Ned Forsyth, nedforsyth18@gmail.com

ELECTION SEASON DEADLINES

- **Aug. 20:** Chapter and Group candidate slates are complete and submitted to Elections Committee Chair Jim Horn.
- **Sept. 6:** Deadline for submission of candidate statements for publication in the Fall Redwood Needles. Deadline for submission of ballot petitions to the Election Committee Chair.
- **Oct. 4:** Ballots and candidate statements are published in the Fall Needles, and voting begins in both hard copy and electronic formats.
- **Dec. 31:** Voting closed. All votes must be in.
“If Sonoma County is to reach carbon neutrality by 2030, an action that we most certainly must take is to reduce our driving by 5 percent or more each year, over the next nine years,” according to Sierra Club Transportation Chair Steve Birdlebough.

Birdlebough described this goal during Sonoma County's April 6 Climate Action and Resiliency Town Hall, organized by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors.

Cars and trucks are responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than any other part of the economy, according to California’s Air Resources Board.

It has been known since Senate Bill 375 was enacted in 2008 that curbing greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles will require more than a shift to battery-powered cars. While electric vehicles somewhat reduce the environmental impact of driving, production of batteries adds significant greenhouse gases to the planet, and all vehicles cause road wear and tear, which requires greenhouse gas-intensive repairs.

Communities can help reduce driving by making new and existing development less dependent on automobiles. Locating services in every neighborhood enables people to walk, bike or take public transportation rather than driving.

Birdlebough outlined four major ways to reduce driving without harming the economy:

1. Focus growth in walkable urbanized areas.
2. Expand a safe and attractive network of bike and pedestrian routes.
3. Create seamless, transportation systems with easy connections of all modes.
4. Shift heavy goods movement from trucks to trains.

“There is a silver lining in all of these changes: we won’t be investing money in construction of many new roads, nor will we be paying to widen many existing roads,” he said. “And with all of us driving our cars and trucks less and less every year, the county’s budget for pothole repair may finally begin to catch up with the need for upkeep.”

In the state budget, Gov. Gavin Newsom has allocated some added funding for bike and pedestrian pathways, as well as other “active transportation” activities. However it is recognized that such funding needs to increase further to meet the demand for significant improvements to make biking and walking more convenient and safe, and Birdlebough urges us to “put pressure on the legislature to get more funding.”

Other ways for individuals to be proactive is to think about which trips can be made by foot or by bike, and to leave the car parked as much as possible.

“Buy a bicycle if you don’t already have one. Maybe it’s electric, so if you have to go up a hill, the motor kicks in and makes it easier to ride,” he said.

“There is a silver lining in all of these changes: we won’t be investing money in construction of many new roads, nor will we be paying to widen many existing roads,” he said. “And with all of us driving our cars and trucks less and less every year, the county’s budget for pothole repair may finally begin to catch up with the need for upkeep.”

In the state budget, Gov. Gavin Newsom has allocated some added funding for bike and pedestrian pathways, as well as other “active transportation” activities. However it is recognized that such funding needs to increase further to meet the demand for significant improvements to make biking and walking more convenient and safe, and Birdlebough urges us to “put pressure on the legislature to get more funding.”

Other ways for individuals to be proactive is to think about which trips can be made by foot or by bike, and to leave the car parked as much as possible.

“Buy a bicycle if you don’t already have one. Maybe it’s electric, so if you have to go up a hill, the motor kicks in and makes it easier to ride,” he said.

"There is a silver lining in all of these changes: we won’t be investing money in construction of many new roads, nor will we be paying to widen many existing roads,” he said. “And with all of us driving our cars and trucks less and less every year, the county’s budget for pothole repair may finally begin to catch up with the need for upkeep.”

In the state budget, Gov. Gavin Newsom has allocated some added funding for bike and pedestrian pathways, as well as other “active transportation” activities. However it is recognized that such funding needs to increase further to meet the demand for significant improvements to make biking and walking more convenient and safe, and Birdlebough urges us to “put pressure on the legislature to get more funding.”

Other ways for individuals to be proactive is to think about which trips can be made by foot or by bike, and to leave the car parked as much as possible.

“Buy a bicycle if you don’t already have one. Maybe it’s electric, so if you have to go up a hill, the motor kicks in and makes it easier to ride,” he said.
RAISE YOUR VOICE

Help Hold PG&E Accountable for its Negligence

Join us to demand that PG&E stops ravaging our trees and instead invests in modern infrastructure that will greatly reduce wildfire risk. State leaders must hold PG&E accountable for its negligence.

We have launched a petition to show state leaders that their constituents care about this issue and do not want to see PG&E continue to devastate healthy trees, impose on private landowners and neglect to quickly update its antiquated infrastructure as we face another fire season.

Sign the petition here:


www.sierraclub.org/redwood
Sonoma • Napa • Solano • Lake • Mendocino • Humboldt • Del Norte • Trinity • Western Siskiyou