

Conservation Report:

More about Valley's Edge!

Most of my most recent conservation activity involves working with others to prevent the Valley's Edge project from becoming reality in Butte County. It is a severely problematic housing development (as reported elsewhere in this paper). Briefly, the city plans on annexing 1446 acres of County land up against the foothills, i.e., land that now consists of old growth forests, numerous endangered species, and vernal pools -- almost twice the area of Central Park in New York City. It would be SE of Chico between 20th Street and the Skyway and between Bruce and Honey Run roads. 1400 homes are planned, and only one of its parks will be open to the public. (Does this sound like a gated community?)

There are many reasons why we object to the project, not only because of the plundering of the land but also because it is in a location frequented by fires and flooding. Just as important is that the housing that is planned will not be affordable to those needing homes in Chico. Thus, wealthy people will be lured to this area to contribute to the city's tax base but will also severely aggravate air pollution and climate change with newly added cars that they drive to the city for shopping, work, schooling, or pleasure.

Several environmental groups have joined the Sierra Club (which well may pay \$15,000 to lawyers) and Smart Growth Advocates in this fight, including the California Native Plant Society, Altacal Audubon Society, Friends of Butte Creek, and Butte Environmental Council.

The Mother Lode Chapter (MLC) of the Sierra Club was able to quickly hire an environmental lawyer to respond excellently and quickly to the Draft Environmental Impact Report developed by the City of Chico last December. And now the Club, with the help of individual donors and organizations is getting ready to fund an essential legal response to the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) -- projected for this summer. Typically, the opponents have only 30 days to respond to the FEIR, and we want to be intellectually and financially ready.

P.S. Since I am the representative from the Blue Oak Group to the Mother Lode Chapter (MCL), I attend all MLC meetings. (You may listen as well.) Here one can find out about the work of Sierra Club members on a variety of issues. Recent issues have included: forest destruction, major dam issues (such as in Oroville and the Shasta Dam), herbicides in the Tahoe Keys, removal of tobacco waste, wildfire danger, environmentally damaging housing projects, biodiversity decline, climate change, violations of CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act), and much more. At one meeting, the leaders voted not only to fund the fight against Valley's Edge but also to fund trashcans for Chico's homeless, a project now headed by Betty Volker. But that's another story....

