

# Jared Geiser in the *Sierra Club* *Newsletter*

Valley's Edge is a proposed **1448 acre development in the Foothills above Chico** which poses to **exacerbate critical issues** that are nearing their tipping points such as **climate change, wildfire hazard, wetland destruction and biodiversity decline.**

## **Climate Change**

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its 6th Assessment Report (AR6) in 2021 and articulated that “for a 66% chance of **limiting warming to 1.5C... the world has a remaining carbon budget of 360GtCO<sub>2</sub> – or nine years of current emissions.**” Not long after this report came out, the City of Chico Adopted an Updated Climate Action Plan which aims to completely eliminate greenhouse gas emissions in the City of Chico by 2045. The Environmental Impact Report for Valley's Edge estimates that this **project would emit 17,719.48 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent EACH YEAR** once the project is fully operational. This means that the approval and **development of Valley's Edge would obstruct the attainment of Chico's Updated Climate Action Plan Target** and the Minimum State Targets of **0 MT of CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions per capita.**

## **Wildfire Hazard**

The **grassland, oak and foothill pine woodland ecosystems** that make up this site are **fire adapted ecosystems that can be expected to burn regularly.** In the case of blue oak and foothill pine woodland, they have a typical “fire regime of five to fifteen years” according to the Draft EIR. Indigenous burning before colonization helped shape this landscape and the use of prescribed fire is still an important tool to maintain ecosystem health and reduce wildfire hazards to surrounding communities. **The Valley's Edge site burned in the Camp Fire** and the area has been **affected by two additional fires in the past 15 years.** It is precarious to build such a large quantity of **senior only housing (1,385 residences of the total 2,777) in a fire hazard zone.** Continuing to build large housing projects in fire hazard zones is unacceptable given the wildfire crisis that is hitting California year after year and is only getting worse from climate change. *Above: Butte County Fire Map.*

## **Wetland Destruction**

**More than 90% of wetlands (including vernal pools) have been lost in California,** largely due to agricultural and urbanization land use changes. It is no coincidence that so many endangered species depend upon wetlands. **Valley's Edge would directly develop on top of about 1.25 acres of wetlands** and would hydrologically interrupt many more wetlands by altering flow of water on the landscape upslope by converting much of the landscape into asphalt, concrete, and buildings. With so few wetlands left in

CA and the importance of these unique ecosystems, we can no longer accept any more wetland destruction!

### **Biodiversity Decline**

Planet Earth is currently enduring a 6th mass extinction which is being perpetuated by human activities rather than natural causes as with past extinctions. Scientists are calling this a "biodiversity crisis" as the diversity of life in the Earth's ecosystem is declining rapidly, and consequently ecosystems are losing their complexity and resiliency. Our local ecosystems have faced severe disruption in the past two centuries from European colonization. An array of species have already been extirpated from the local ecosystems such as grizzly bears, pronghorn, and elk. It is our responsibility as stewards of the land to protect and restore biodiversity. Urban sprawl converts diverse carbon sequestering landscapes into homogenized carbon emitting suburbs or strip malls.

Urban sprawl refers to the seemingly endless expansion of developed urban areas into the natural habitat or agricultural land surrounding cities. Sprawl has some characteristics that set it apart from other types of land use. General characteristics of sprawl include:

- (Very) Low density development - inefficient use of land
- Segregated homes, shops, and employment opportunities
- Increased cost of housing and transportation
- Autocentric neighborhood design
- Increased water, land, and air pollution

Sprawl developments typically produce housing that meets the needs of those with above moderate incomes leaving much of the local working class with unaffordable housing.

**What are the alternatives to suburban sprawl developments like Valley's Edge? SMART GROWTH—higher density, mixed-use, infill development—is a sustainable alternative** that provides a wider range of housing options while preserving open space around the city. This type of development can result in tremendous savings to the City and taxpayers because it uses existing municipal infrastructure. Residents of infill developments can utilize already existing roads, utility lines, and sewer; whereas suburban sprawl developments require all new infrastructure. **Smart growth is how cities can meet housing needs without endangering the climate and health of the environment.**

*Jared Geiser, Global citizen and advocate for a (sustainable) future for humanity on Earth*

### **References**

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*Chico Cap | Chico Cap*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 13, 2022, from [http://www.chicocap.rinconconsultants.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/19-08390\\_Chico-CAP-Update\\_Final-Draft-Complete.pdf](http://www.chicocap.rinconconsultants.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/19-08390_Chico-CAP-Update_Final-Draft-Complete.pdf) Page 4.14-5 "Valley's Edge Specific Plan DEIR"

*The Official City of Chico Website*. City of Chico. (n.d.). Retrieved September 13, 2022, from <https://chico.ca.us/>