



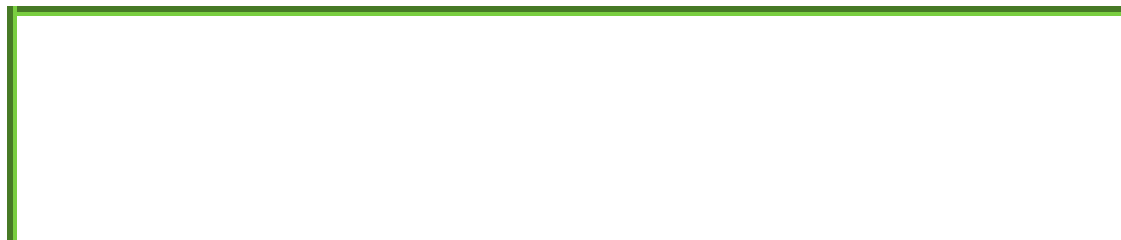
***Protecting our rural environment by promoting citizen participation in sustainable land use planning since 2006***

***The Community Action Project (CAP) administers the Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC), which is comprised of regional and local organizations, community groups, and concerned individuals who promote public participation in land use and resource planning to ensure a healthy human, natural, and economic environment now and in the future.***

**Learn more at [www.calaverascap.com](http://www.calaverascap.com)**

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**Join Us!**

*Get a glimpse into what CPC membership is like by attending a meeting.  
There is no commitment, just show up and listen in!*

### **Next Calaveras Planning Coalition Meeting**

**July 5, 2021 3 P.M. - 5 P.M.**

### **New Members Welcome at CPC Meetings**

Organizations, groups, and individuals (known as associate members) may join the Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC). Prospective members may attend two consecutive meetings before making a final decision on membership in the Coalition. The membership form is a pledge to support and advocate for the Coalition's eleven Land Use and Development Principles, which you will find on our website:

[www.calaverascap.com](http://www.calaverascap.com).

There is no membership fee. However, members are encouraged to donate to the Community Action Project/Calaveras Planning Coalition. Visitors and prospective members will, by necessity, be excluded from attorney/client privileged discussions.

If you are interested in membership, please email CPC Facilitator Tom Infusino, [tomi@volcano.net](mailto:tomi@volcano.net), to receive a membership form, agenda, and the Zoom meeting connection.

*To help prevent the spread of Covid-19 in our county, all CAP and CPC meetings will be held online via Zoom until restrictions are lifted by the Public Health Department.*

## **CPC Member Spotlight**

### ***Ralph Copeland***

District 4 - Copperopolis



Ralph retired after 35 years in the waterworks industry as a pipeline material supplier and project manager. He supplied pipe, valves, and fittings for various SFPUC Hetch Hetchy projects including a 96" Crystal Springs pipeline expansion. He supplied the 108" sluice gate and associated piping at Woodward Reservoir. Ralph also supplied the water, fire, sewer, and storm piping material for the Town Square in Copperopolis.

He has been valuable in addressing water system issues, particularly in Copperopolis where Ralph lives. He has become our go-to person for most things Calaveras County Water District (CCWD) related. Ralph has been a phenomenal "watchdog," keeping up with all the CCWD meetings and project proposals. The comment letter CPC submitted regarding the Urban Water Management Plan was a collaborative effort, but Ralph's expertise and in-depth knowledge of the CCWD system informed many of the substantive aspects of the letter.

**We cannot thank Ralph enough for his dedication and involvement with CCWD and the CPC!**

**BOS Regular Meeting Tuesday, July 13, 2021**

[Agenda Upcoming](#)

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**Planning Commission Meeting July 8, 2021**

[Agenda](#)

## **Local News**

**PG&E Pilots microgrids in response to**

# wildfires

*Ravyn Cullor / The Hanford Sentinel / June 24, 2021*

Jun. 24—Pacific Gas and Electric announced in June the launch of their first microgrid program — a small power plant which serves fewer people — in response to more active fire seasons.

The pilot, installed to serve three homes in Briceburg in Mariposa County, includes a solar field, batteries to maintain power at night and a propane generator for emergencies.

The program is intended to reduce the risk of starting a fire and lessens the cost of restoring power after a wildfire, said spokesman Denny Boyles. He said microgrids, which PG&E is planning to expand, would serve remote customers who might rely on up to five miles of power line to get electricity.

"We're looking at high fire risk areas, these customers were affected by a fire recently," Boyles said. "It lessens the risk of wildfires, it provides clean power and its overall an easier way to serve remote customers."

The company has taken a number of other steps to mitigate the impacts of fire season. They announced Thursday \$800,000 in grants to communities to improve fire resilience, reserved for research, infrastructure, planning and to "increase the coping capacity of communities and households to climate hazards."

PG&E also launched a \$2 million Community Fire Safety Program, which granted funding to both the Yosemite/Sequoia Resource Conservation and Development Council and Yosemite/Sequoia Regional Centre for Development Cooperation.

"We focus on reducing wildfire risk by meeting and exceeding state vegetation safety standards, continuing to harden our electric grid with stronger power lines and poles and by integrating new tools and technologies," said PG&E's Peter Kenny, interim vice president of vegetation management in a press release.

While the Central Valley is at lower risk of wildfires than forested areas, Boyles said it's still important for residents to develop emergency preparedness, especially when they travel to high-risk areas.

He said checking the fire risk, making an evacuation plan and knowing what to bring with you are important to know when traveling to high fire risk areas.





You can watch "First Date" for a small charge on YouTube - this film features Valley Springs and Angels Camp and was produced by two locals who grew up in Calaveras County

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## Regional News

### Hundreds of miles of blue oak tree cover exclusive to California have vanished. Why?

*Katie Camero / Raleigh News & Observer / June 30, 2021*

Sprinkled along the foothills of California's Central Valley stand the iconic blue oak woodlands.

Towering up to 80 feet tall and some reaching over 400 years old, the trees are home to one of the most biologically diverse ecosystems in the state. But extreme drought and wildfires are forcing the woodlands into an uncertain future.

A new study conducted by U.S. Geological Survey researchers found that the historic drought of 2012-2016 alone caused nearly 490 square miles of tree cover loss — or the reduction of leaves and branches — in the blue oak woodlands.

That's about 37% of the entire tree cover loss in the study's 32-year period.

Put another way, it was a stressful couple of years for the trees.. Blue oak cover loss in 2015 and 2016 was 5.2 and 3.2 times greater, respectively, than the average annual tree cover loss in the entire study period.

Tree cover loss occurred even during periods without forest fires, with the greatest damage done during the driest and hottest years, according to the [study](#) published Tuesday in the journal *Frontiers in Climate*.

The findings don't necessarily suggest the trees are dead. However these changes are indicators of tree mortality, reduced productivity, the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and overall ecosystem degradation.

Researchers say the "alarming" amount of loss during California's five-year drought, the hottest in over a century, reveals how vulnerable blue oaks are to extreme climate events, which are expected to become more frequent and severe over the years because of human-induced global warming.

It's a positive feedback loop of destruction, the team suggests.

"Our findings signal a concerning future where multi-year droughts under elevated temperatures may trigger more severe forest die-off, pathogens, fire regimes and insect outbreaks," the study reads. "Moreover, a drier and warmer post-fire environment in concert with high severity fires can severely inhibit forest recovery, thereby reducing resilience of ecosystems to fire."

It's not all gloom and doom. Researchers say their study can help in "identifying and prioritizing the most vulnerable areas of the woodlands" so experts can adapt conservation strategies as the climate changes.

The map shows the transition from (A) that shows land cover in California in 1985 before wildfires and drought consumed the area to (E) that shows land cover in 2016 post fires and drought, indicating tree cover loss.

A 2017 study limited to a small section of blue oak woodlands found that after California's historic drought, 19% of standing blue oaks and 14% of all trees were killed. But little has been known about how wildfires affect the vulnerability of blue oak woodlands.

So, the team combined new data from the U.S. Geological Survey Land Change Monitoring, Assessment and Projection (LCMAP) project with climate and wildfire records between 1985 and 2016.



On top of the nearly 490 square miles of tree cover lost during the drought, the team also found about 238 square miles of tree cover “conditional change,” or the amount of tree cover that has been altered or degraded.

The more severe and frequent droughts become, the more trees die and generate fine fuels that exacerbate and spark more wildfires, the researchers said, as was the case in 2015 when over 880,000 acres burned, seven people died and more than 3,000 structures were damaged in California.

But the researchers are hopeful that fieldwork, together with models and satellite measurements that regularly monitor blue oak tree cover, can inspire new conservation strategies that will not only protect the blue oak woodlands, but also other ecosystems vulnerable to global warming in the West.



*Blue oak and lupine (c) [yosemitenorthphotography.com](http://yosemitenorthphotography.com)*

## **Did you know ... California's oak woodlands support over 300 species?!?**

Oak woodlands in California are arguably the most biodiverse terrestrial ecosystem in the state.



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## Sierra Nevada Conservancy Funding Opportunities Newsletter for July/August



*This is an electronic newsletter published every two months containing information on upcoming grant and funding opportunities for the Sierra Nevada region. The newsletter includes federal, state, and private foundation funders as well as additional resources and information related to grant funding. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy provides the Funding Opportunities Newsletter as a free resource under its Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program.*

## It's Some Of America's Richest Farmland - But What Is It Without Water?

*NY Times / Somini Sengupta / June 30, 2021*

ORDBEND, Calif. — In America's fruit and nut basket, water is now the most precious crop of all.

It explains why, amid a historic drought parching much of the American West, a grower of premium sushi rice has concluded that it makes better business sense to sell the water he would have used to grow rice than to actually grow rice. Or why a melon farmer has left a

third of his fields fallow. Or why a large landholder farther south is thinking of planting a solar array on his fields rather than the thirsty almonds that delivered steady profit for years.

“You want to sit there and say, ‘We want to monetize the water?’ No, we don’t,” said Seth Fiack, a rice grower here in Ordbend, on the banks of the Sacramento River, who this year sowed virtually no rice and instead sold his unused water to desperate farmers farther south. “It’s not what we prefer to do, but it’s what we kind of need to, have to.”

These are among the signs of a huge transformation up and down California’s Central Valley, the country’s most lucrative agricultural belt, as it confronts both an exceptional drought and the consequences of years of pumping far too much water out of its aquifers. Across the state, reservoir levels are dropping and electric grids are at risk if hydroelectric dams don’t get enough water to produce power.

Climate change is supercharging the scarcity. Rising temperatures dry out the soil, which in turn can worsen heat waves. Recently, temperatures in parts of California and the Pacific Northwest have been shattering records.

By 2040, the San Joaquin Valley is projected to lose at least 535,000 acres of agricultural production. That’s more than a tenth of the area farmed.

And if the drought perseveres and no new water can be found, nearly double that amount of land is projected to go idle, with potentially dire consequences for the nation’s food supply. California’s \$50 billion agricultural sector supplies two-thirds of the country’s fruits and nuts and more than a third of America’s vegetables — the tomatoes, pistachios, grapes and strawberries that line grocery store shelves from coast to coast.

Glimpses of that future are evident now. Vast stretches of land are fallow because there’s no water. New calculations are being made about what crops to grow, how much, where. Millions of dollars are being spent on replenishing the aquifer that has been depleted for so long.

“Each time we have a drought you’re seeing a little glimpse into what will happen more frequently in our climate future,” said Morgan Levy, a professor specializing in water science and policy at the University of California, San Diego.

### **For Rice Farmers, a Tricky Decision**

California’s fertile Central Valley begins in the north, where the water begins. In normal times, winter rain and spring snowmelt swell the Sacramento River, nourishing one of the country’s most important rice belts. On an average year, growers around the Sacramento River produce 500,000 acres of sticky, medium-grain rice vital to sushi. Some 40% is exported to Asia.

But these are not normal times. There’s less snowpack, and, this year, much less water in the reservoirs and rivers that ultimately irrigate fields, provide spawning places for fish and supply drinking water for 39 million Californians.

That crisis presents rice farmers in the Sacramento Valley, which forms the northern part of the Central Valley, with a tricky choice: Should they plant rice with what water they have, or save themselves the toil and stress and sell their water instead?

Fiack, a second-generation rice farmer, chose to sell almost all of it.

His one 30-acre field of rice glistens green in the June sunshine, guzzling water that pours out of a wide-mouthed spigot. His remaining 500 acres are bare and brown. What water he would have used to grow rice he has signed away for sale to growers of thirsty crops hundreds of miles south, where water is even more scarce.

At \$575 per acre-foot (a volume of water 1 acre in size, 1 foot deep) the revenue compares favorably to what he would have made growing rice — without the headaches. It makes “economic sense,” Fiack said flatly.

Rice is far less lucrative than, say, almonds and walnuts, which is why Fiack’s fields are surrounded by nut trees and even he is dabbling in walnuts. But rice farmers are uniquely advantaged. Because their lands have been in production for so long, they tend to have first dibs on water that comes out of the Sacramento River, before it is channeled through canals and tunnels down south.

Also, unlike the owners of fruit and nut trees, whose investments would wither in a few weeks without water, rice farmers can leave a field fallow for a year, even two. In the era of climate change, when water can be unreliable, that flexibility is an asset. Rice water transfers have been an important part of California’s drought coping strategy.

This year, rice farmers in the Sacramento Valley will produce around 20% less rice.

Not everyone is enthusiastic about that.

Kim Gallagher, a third-generation rice farmer, left fallow only 15% of her fields. She worries about the effect on the rice mills and crop-duster pilots who live off rice farming, not to mention the birds that come to winter in the flooded fields. “These are trade-offs every farmer has to make, what they can fallow and what they can’t,” she said. “Everyone has a different number.”

Fritz Durst, a fourth-generation rice farmer, worries that California rice buyers would come to see his region as an unreliable supplier.

He, too, hedged his bets. He is growing rice on about 60% of his 527 acres, which enables him to sell the Sacramento River water he would have used on the rest.

But there’s a long-term risk, as he sees it, in selling too much water, too often. “You also have people here who are concerned that we’re setting a dangerous precedent,” he said. “If we start allowing our water to go south of the Delta, those people are going to say, ‘Well, you don’t need that water. It’s ours now.’”

### **Fish vs. Field**

Federico Barajas is in the unenviable position of having to find water. As the manager of the San Luis and Delta-Mendota Water Authority, he has negotiated a deal to buy from water

districts like Durst's.

There's just one problem: Because the rivers are so hot and dry this year, the federal government, which runs the Shasta Dam, where cold Sacramento River water is stored, has said the water needs to stay in the reservoir through the summer months for another source of food: fish that hatch in California's rivers.

He's not accepting defeat. "We're still looking for anybody out there who has any drop of water we can purchase and transfer," he said gamely.

Nearby, off Interstate 5, Joe Del Bosque had been counting on that rice water from the north. It's how he's survived the droughts of the past, he said. "This is the worst year we've had," Del Bosque said.

Del Bosque grew up working on melon farms with his farmworker father. Today, Del Bosque owns a melon farm near the town of Firebaugh. He grows organic cantaloupes and watermelons on most of his 2,000 acres, destined for supermarket shelves nationwide. The license plate on his GMC truck reads "MELONS."

This year, he's left a third of his land fallow. There's just not enough water. He had planted asparagus on a few fields, too, only to pull it out. A neighbor pulled out his almonds.

### **History Shaped by Water**

The hot, dry San Joaquin Valley became cotton farms at the turn of the 20th century, at the time with water flowing from the north through fields of alfalfa and then strawberries and grapes. Almonds took over as prices soared. And with more demands on the surface water flowing through the river — to maintain river flows, for instance, or flush seawater out of the California Delta — farmers turned increasingly to the water under their land.

It provides 40% of the water for California agriculture in a normal year, and far more in dry years. In parts of the state, chiefly in the San Joaquin Valley, at the southern end of the Central Valley, more groundwater is taken out than nature can replenish.

Now, for the first time, under the state's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, growers in some parts of the San Joaquin Valley face restrictions on how much water they can pump. That is set to transform the landscape. If you can't pump as much water from under the ground, you simply can't farm as much land in the San Joaquin Valley.

"There's just no way around that," said Eric Limas, the son of farmers who now manages one of the most depleted irrigated districts, called Pixley, a checkerboard of almond orchards and dairies. "The numbers just don't add up."

So thoroughly have aquifers been depleted that farmers are now investing millions of dollars to put water back into the ground. They're buying land that can absorb the rains. They're creating ponds and ditches, carving up the landscape, again, to restore the groundwater squandered for so long.

"That is the single biggest water system adaptation we can do — getting more water into the ground," said Ellen Hanak, director of the water policy center at the Public Policy Institute of

California.

Meanwhile, towns in the Central Valley are beginning to run out of municipal water, including Teviston, just south of Limas' office, where town officials have been delivering bottled water to 1,200 residents for nearly two weeks.

### **From Almond Trees to Solar Arrays**

Stuart Woolf embodies the changing landscape of the San Joaquin Valley.

Woolf took over his father's farm, headquartered in Huron, in 1986, retired most of the cotton his dad grew, switched to tomatoes and bought a factory that turns his tomatoes into tomato paste for ketchup. His operations expanded across 25,000 acres. Its highest value crop: almonds.

Woolf now sees the next change coming. The rice water from the north won't come when he needs it. The groundwater restrictions will soon limit his ability to pump.

He has ripped out 400 acres of almonds. He's not sure he will replant them anytime soon. In the coming years, he estimates he will stop growing on 30% to 40% of his land.

He has left one field bare to serve as a pond to recharge the aquifer and bought land in the north, where the water is, close to Fiack's rice fields. Now, he is considering replacing some of his crops with another source of revenue altogether: a solar farm, from which he can harvest energy to sell back to the grid.

"Look, I'm a farmer in California. The tools we had to manage drought are getting limited," he said. "I've got to fallow a lot of my ranch."

## **California developers want to build a city in the wildlands. It could all go up in flames.**

*Maanvi Singh / The Guardian / June 29, 2021*

About an hour's drive north of Los Angeles lies one of the last remaining pieces of the truly wild, wild west.

The 270,000-acre Tejon Ranch is dotted with centuries-old native oaks. Endangered mountain lions roam the grounds, and California condors soar above it. Rains paint the hills bright orange with poppies, and purple with lupine. But in the summer, and during drought years, the landscape dries to a shimmering gold. A small group of cowboys still run cattle here.

Soon all of it could go up in smoke, scientists and climate activists fear.

The Tejon Ranch Company, the publicly traded corporation that owns the land, wants to build 20,000 houses, as well as shopping centers, offices, gyms and restaurants along this frontier. The company first pitched the project, called Centennial, two decades ago as a solution to California's housing crisis.

The development has been controversial from the start, but as California braces for an extreme wildfire season, debate over whether the project should go forward has taken on renewed urgency. Environmental

groups are warning that in the age of western megafires, building along these windy, arid grasslands would put tens of thousands of people, as well as highly endangered plants and animals, in harm's way.

"Centennial embodies this vision and lifestyle that just doesn't fit in the 21st century," said Nick Jensen, a botanist with the California Native Plant Society, who has been protesting against the development for years. The idea of taming the wildlands, of propagating it with picket-fenced homes was once integral to the American dream, he said. "But in the modern age, in the age of climate change and in the age of wildfires – it just doesn't fit."

### **The fight for Centennial**

Tejon Ranch is the largest private landholding in California, spanning 422 sq miles. It's bigger than the New York metro area, and nearly as big as the city of Los Angeles.

Jensen, who has spent a decade studying, and fighting to conserve this landscape, can't help but get excited as he talks about it. As a graduate student, he discovered a previously unknown species of wildflower – the Tejon jewel flower – here.

The landscape is unlike any other in the world, constantly transmorphing over time and space. Rugged, rocky terrain gives way to rolling hills, which transition into dusty desert dotted with Joshua trees. Fourteen per cent of all California native plant species, sub-species and varieties grow within the ranch's boundaries.

The property's untamed valleys and jagged mountain peaks often serve as a backdrop for luxury car commercials and fashion shoots. Annie Leibovitz photographed Rihanna, crouched amid Tejon's golden grasslands, for a Vogue magazine cover. The movie Seabiscuit was largely filmed on the ranch; so was Taylor Swift's Wildest Dreams music video.

"I love this place," said Jensen – who was banned from the premises after he began advocating against Centennial. "But I sure as hell wouldn't want to live here," he said.

The Tejon Ranch Company pitched Centennial in 1999 as an opportunity for middle class families priced out of Los Angeles to buy their very own plot of paradise. Since then, Tejon developers have been trying to sell that vision.

Even after the company secured approval for two other developments on the ranch – a small suburb called Grapevine and a luxury retreat called Mountain Village, it worked for years to assuage concerns that Centennial would be built atop what the state's fire agency describes as "high" and "very high" fire hazard zones.

The company's proposal assured that developers would employ the "most stringent available" measures for "fire mitigation". Homes and offices would be built to survive fires. The city would include "three to four fire stations and a sheriff's station" to respond to any blazes sparked within Centennial and in neighboring communities. And "careful consideration" would be given to clearing out fire-fueling brush in the area. Ultimately, the company argued, the development would also help neighboring communities, and "protect natural resources and areas of development". The county's fire chief, Daryl Osby, testified that he was "confident and comfortable" with the developer's plans.

"Given California's housing crisis, which is a crisis of availability, affordability, California needs to immediately and dramatically increase its supply of housing," Barry Zoeller, a senior vice-president of

Tejon Ranch Company, told the Guardian. “It will be a modern, cutting-edge master planned community, the type of development that has proven to be innovative, efficient, sustainable and fire resilient.”

Fire scientists, however, have always been skeptical. “If it wasn’t so terrifying, it would be funny,” said Char Miller, a professor of environmental analysis at Pomona College. “I tip my hat to the developers. They have done a lot of work trying to figure out how to make that site as fire safe as they can,” he said. “But while new building practices have made houses more fire safe, they certainly have not made them fireproof.”

*I love this place ... but I sure as hell wouldn't want to live here*

*Nick Jensen*

Moreover, in recent years, global heating has triggered extended droughts and severe heatwaves that have desiccated the region, transforming it into a tinderbox. The development itself will inevitably cause fires, Miller said. In California, almost 95% of fires are started by people, according to the California department of forestry and fire protection (Cal Fire). An overheated vehicle, a faulty electrical line, a carelessly discarded cigarette, or a lawnmower hitting a rock would be all it takes to start a catastrophic blaze. One spark catching on a blade of dry grass, “and that’s it”, Miller said. Grass fires burn especially fast, and high winds could carry the fires across Tejon’s 270,000 acres, into surrounding communities.

The idea that adding 60,000 humans to a landscape that’s already primed to burn wouldn’t increase wildfires, is “just magical thinking”, he said.

The growing threat of megafires has become increasingly difficult to ignore. The December 2018 Los Angeles county board of supervisors hearing on whether to grant Tejon the final approvals to build Centennial began with a prayer for the victims of the Woolsey fire, the blaze that had become the worst in county history just weeks earlier. Farther north, the Camp fire had killed 85 around the same time. “Heavenly father,” the local fire department’s chaplain implored, “may you bring healing to our hearts”.

A few minutes later, supporters of the development made their case. “A critical issue that has come up recently has been fire,” Greg Medeiros, an executive at Tejon, admitted at the hearing. But, he said, “this is an issue that has been thoroughly addressed.”

Concerns about the fire risk “ignore the conclusion of the LA county fire department, independent fire experts, and the board of supervisors that the Centennial fire management plan will protect Centennial and its residents from the risks of potential wildfire,” Zoeller said.

*While new building practices have made houses more fire safe, they certainly have not made them fireproof*

*Char Miller*

Criticism of the project was muted. In a 2008 agreement between environmental groups including the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Audubon California and Sierra Club, the ranch’s owners had agreed to protect 90% of the land from development, so long as those groups dropped their opposition to the company’s construction projects. In the years that ensued, Tejon also banned local activists and researchers like Jensen, who hadn’t signed on to the tit-for-tat agreement, from setting foot on the property.



“They made it so that getting Centennial approved was pretty much an inevitability,” said Jensen. “They tamped down opposing viewpoints.”

Katherine King, who lives near the ranch and testified against Centennial, had been a longtime member of the Sierra Club, but dropped out after the organization signed the agreement with Tejon. She was “annoyed,” she said, that the environmental groups had undercut their own advocacy against the project.

Representatives for the Sierra Club and the NRDC contacted by the Guardian said they were unable to discuss Centennial, due to the nature of the agreement. The groups have since sued the Tejon Ranch Company for breaching the contract by withholding funds needed to oversee conservation efforts on the ranch.

The company, which spends more than a quarter million dollars lobbying state legislators in any given year, had also spent months wooing local church leaders, business associations and charity groups.

Pastor William D Smart, Jr, who heads the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of southern California, said the company approached him in 2018. “I just saw this development as one avenue for upwardly mobile, African Americans and Latinos who could no longer afford to live in the city,” he said. Of course, it would be better if more housing options were built within the city, where people worked, he said, but for decades, he’d seen nimbyism and racism defeat proposals to build affordable housing in LA. “White racism has pushed and is pushing black folks out,” he said. Already, some members of his congregation commute into the city from three or four hours away.

He heard the concerns from environmentalists – but he didn’t see them offering any better alternatives. “And I noted that on that day of the hearing, pretty much all the people opposing the development were white,” he recalled.

In the end, after two decades of debate, the project was approved, 4-1. A sole supervisor objected over fire concerns. But victory was short-lived for the Tejon Ranch Company.

### **‘There will always be risk’**

This April, as a deepening drought threatened to bring on yet another destructive, deadly fire season, a judge in Los Angeles county halted the construction of Centennial, citing wildfire risk. The superior court judge Mitchell Beckloff ruled that while the environmental impact report that Tejon Ranch Co submitted with its proposal for Centennial adequately explained how the development would manage fires on site, its conclusion that the new construction wouldn’t impact fires in other areas was “problematic”.

For the environmental activists who had been fighting the project, “it was our first, big win,” said Jensen. Lawyers from the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Native Plant Society – who have also challenged Centennial over the project’s environmental impact were emboldened. “I don’t think Tejon will be able to get out of this easily,” said JP Rose, an attorney with CBD.

The state and county’s environmental rules have tightened since the company first envisioned its development, Rose said. And after the state experienced its worst fire season on record last year, building in fire zones is now looking even less appealing to lawmakers and local residents, he added.

The company is not giving up. “We are working with the county,” said Zoeller, to address remaining concerns raised by the judge.

Smart said the judge's ruling had made him think twice about the proposal. "If a judge thinks that the developers have not done their due diligence on the project, then they should go do their due diligence," the pastor said. "I don't want members of my congregation living up there, only to get caught in a fire."

The climate crisis and the housing crisis are on a collision course in California. As disaster after fiery disaster in California demonstrated over the past few years, low and middle income families often have the hardest time recovering after a disaster. Families still liable for mortgages on burned homes can't always afford to rent or buy elsewhere.

In March, the state's then attorney general Xavier Becerra joined lawsuits challenging developments in rural San Diego county, including a 1,900-home gated community in the fire-prone Jamul Mountains. "On the heels of another dry winter, Californians are looking toward wildfire season with a familiar pit of dread in their stomachs," said Becerra. "Local governments must address the wildfire risks associated with new developments." In June, California's insurance regulator endorsed [sweeping policy changes](#) to stop new construction in fire-prone areas. And state legislators are considering a [bill](#) that would make it much harder for local officials to approve development in "very high" fire severity zones.

For Ken Pimlott, the retired Cal Fire director who led the agency when fires leveled the neighborhood of Coffey Park in 2017 and Paradise in 2018, the question of whether Californians should continue to build in fire-prone wildlands is "complicated", he said. "People want the right to be out on the land – and you can't really take that away," he said.

He and his wife live on a 71-acre plot of land along the wildlands of El Dorado county. But the locale isn't for the faint of heart. "There will always be risk," he said.

In looking at the plans for Centennial, he said the proposal to build new fire stations and clear the perimeter of the fire-fueling brush were a start. But he wondered whether the county could guarantee that those fire stations would remain staffed and funded well into the future, whether there would be enough water to supply the community and the local stations. Last year, when the state was in the throes of the pandemic and one of the worst fire seasons [on record](#), fire crews were stretched thin – and competing for equipment and aircraft as they battled simultaneous mega blazes.

"Our crews will always do everything they can to protect our communities, always protect the public," Pimlott said. "But the problem is outpacing everyone's ability to try to stop these fires."

At Tejon Ranch, drought sucked some of the plant life so dry this spring it had faded to a deathly gray. As Jensen drove through the region in late May, winds were so strong that they caused his Prius to drift off the highway, its windows vibrating with each large gust. About 15 minutes from where Centennial would be built, a 300-acre wildfire blackened mostly uninhabited fields of dried grass. Fire crews sprawled across the char, tamping out the dying embers.

No injuries were reported, and no structures were burned. "But right now, this is all just empty," Jensen said. "Just imagine this if thousands of people were living here."



# Legislative and Regulatory Updates

***From: The Barbed Wire  
Produced by the RCRC***

Information related to the current status of legislation and regulations impacting California's rural counties.

Assembly Bill 1 (C. Garcia): Hazardous Waste: Assembly Bill 1 establishes several new governance, policy, and fiscal reforms to improve the Department of Toxic Substances Control, including significantly increasing several fees and repealing several important local government fee exemptions. Status: AB 1 awaits consideration in the Senate Environmental Quality. RCRC Status: Concerns

Assembly Bill 246 (Quirk) Contractors: disciplinary actions. Assembly Bill 246 allows the Contractors State Licensing Board to take disciplinary actions against a contractor who violates state or local laws prohibiting illegal dumping. Status: AB 246 passed the Legislature and awaits consideration by the Governor. RCRC Status: Support

Assembly Bill 297 (Gallagher) Fire Prevention. Increases funding for forest health improvement and wildfire risk reduction projects and makes other substantive changes to help expedite project completion. Status: AB 297 is a two-year bill. RCRC Status: Support

Assembly Bill 322 (Salas): Energy: Electric Program Investment Charge program: Requires the Energy Commission to consider bioenergy projects for biomass conversion when awarding funds under the Electric Program Investment Charge program. Status: AB awaits consideration Senate Energy, Utilities and Communications Committee. RCRC Status: Support

Assembly Bill 332 (ESTM): Hazardous waste: treated wood waste: Reestablishes a statutory pathway for the alternative management and disposal of treated wood waste in a landfill. Status: AB 332 consideration in the Senate Appropriations Committee. RCRC Status: Support

Assembly Bill 819 (Levine) California Environmental Quality Act: notices and documents: electronic filing and posting. Requires lead agencies to post California Environmental Quality Act notices and documents on their internet websites and to submit CEQA documents to the State Clearinghouse in electronic form. Status: AB 819 awaits Assembly Concurrence in Senate Amendments. RCRC Status: Watch

Assembly Bill 843 (Aguiar-Curry): California Renewables Portfolio Standard Program: renewable feed-in tariff: Allows Community Choice Aggregators (CCAs) to access the CPUC BioMAT program that provides funding for renewable bioenergy electricity projects, including

biomass and biogas. Status: AB 843 awaits consideration in the Senate Energy, Utilities and Communications Committee. RCRC Status: Support

Assembly Bill 1078 (Patterson) Energy: building standards: photovoltaic requirements. Exempts residential buildings damaged or destroyed in a disaster during the 2020 calendar year from having to install solar energy systems under the California Energy Commission's recently adopted building requirements. Status: AB 1078 is a 2-Year bill. RCRC Status: Support

Assembly Bill 1154 (Patterson) California Environmental Quality Act: exemption: egress route projects: fire safety. Exempts from the California Environmental Quality Act egress route projects undertaken by a public agency and that are recommended by the Board of Forestry to improve fire safety of an existing subdivision. Status: AB 1154 is a two-year bill. RCRC Status: Support

Assembly Bill 1311 (Wood) Recycling: beverage containers: certified recycling centers. Makes modest changes to the Beverage Container Recycling Act to increase consumer access to redemption opportunities. Status: AB 1311 awaits consideration in the Senate Environmental Quality Committee. RCRC Status: Support

Assembly Bill 1344 (Arambula) State Department of Public Health: Needle and Syringe Exchange Services. Exempts needle and syringe exchanges services from the California Environmental Quality Act. Status: AB 1344 awaits consideration in the Senate awaits consideration by the Senate Environmental Quality Committee. RCRC Status: Neutral

Assembly Bill 1454 (Bloom) Beverage Container and Litter Reduction Act. Assembly Bill 1454 makes several changes to the Beverage Container Recycling Program, including creation of a new \$25,000 startup loan for the creation of new recycling centers in unserved or underserved areas. Status: AB 1454 awaits referral by the Senate Environmental Quality Committee. RCRC Status: Support

Senate Bill 37 (Cortese) California Environmental Quality Act Exemption. Senate Bill 37 eliminates the ability to use a "common sense exemption" under the California Environmental Quality Act for any projects undertaken at over 40,000 sites throughout the state that appear on the Cortese List of currently or formerly contaminated properties. The bill will require discretionary projects with no environmental impact at those locations (including many local corp yards, fire stations, airports, etc.) to undergo an initial assessment and prepare a negative declaration. Status: SB 37 awaits consideration in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee. RCRC Status: Oppose.

Senate Bill 38 (Wieckowski): Beverage Containers: Replaces the existing Beverage Container Recycling Program (Bottle Bill) with a new recycling program administered by beverage container manufacturers and increases the CRV from \$0.05 to \$0.10 per container if the state fails to achieve specified recycling rates. Repeals the \$10.5 million annually set aside for payments to cities and counties to address recycling and litter. Status: SB 38 awaits consideration in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee. RCRC Status: Oppose Unless Amended

Senate Bill 52 (Dodd): State of Emergency: Power Outages. Senate Bill 52 clarifies that deenergization events (also known as PSPS events) qualify as events for which a local emergency can be declared under the California Emergency Services Act. Status: SB 52 awaits consideration in the Assembly Emergency Management Committee. RCRC Status: Support

Senate Bill 99 (Dodd): Community Energy Resilience Act of 2021. Senate Bill 99 requires the State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission to develop and implement a grant program for local governments to develop community energy resilience plans. Status: SB 99 awaits consideration in the Assembly Utilities and Energy Committee. RCRC Status: Support

Senate Bill 207 (Dahle): Photovoltaic Recycling Advisory Group: Senate Bill 207 seeks to spur the recycling and reuse of solar photovoltaic panels by requiring an advisory group to make recommendations to ensure that, to the extent possible, all solar photovoltaic panels in the state are reused or recycled at the end of their lives in a safe and cost-effective manner. Status: SB 207 awaits consideration in the Assembly Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials Committee. RCRC Status: Support

Senate Bill 244 (Archuleta): Lithium-ion batteries: illegal disposal: fire prevention: Senate Bill 244 seeks to prevent lithium-ion battery fires by requiring the state to develop training and best practices for the detection, safe handling, and suppression of fires that originate from discarded lithium-ion batteries in solid waste collection vehicles, transfer and processing stations, and disposal facilities. Status: SB 244 awaits consideration on the Assembly Natural Resources Committee. RCRC Status: Support

Senate Bill 341 (McGuire) Makes several changes to increase oversight and accountability of telecommunications service outages. Status: SB 341 awaits consideration in the Assembly Communications and Conveyance Committee. RCRC Status: Support

Senate Bill 343 (Allen) Prohibits the sale of any product or packaging using a deceptive or misleading claim about its recyclability, including using the chasing arrows symbol unless CalRecycle determines the product or packaging is recyclable. Requires CalRecycle to identify the types of plastic products and packaging from which a claim of recyclability may be made. Status: SB 343 awaits consideration on the Assembly Judiciary Committee. RCRC Status: Watch

Senate Bill 533 (Stern) Electrical corporations: wildfire mitigation plans: deenergization events: microgrids. Requires utilities to discuss in their Wildfire Mitigation Plans efforts to improve their electrical systems, focused on those areas and assets that have been deenergized the greatest number of times. Status: SB 533 awaits consideration in the Assembly Utilities & Energy Committee. RCRC Status: Support

Senate Bill 619 (Laird) Organic waste: reduction regulations. Will seek to provide local governments with additional flexibility to achieve the state's organic waste recycling requirements. Status: SB 619 awaits consideration by the Assembly Appropriations Committee. RCRC Status: Support



## His Eye on The Sparrow

BY AIREA D. MATTHEWS

I guess black people can write about flowers at a time like this since every poem turns on itself. Starts one way to end another. We see it in nature, too. How seed turns to leaf regardless of its earth or my rambling thoughts blossom into a hyacinth with as sweet a scent. I dream of Mamie Till often. She walks the church aisle toward her son's body while wisteria bloats the casket's brim and papered bougainvillea bracts emerge from where his eye once was. An entire garden from the nutrients of the body's soil. And not to mention all those awed birds circling Emmett's pillowed corpse. So many in the tabernacle. Not harbingers of his God's descent, not refugees fleeing his body exilic but ecstasy's plump arrows. We, living, have it all wrong. When eternity's concerned,

sparrows don't take leave. They fly into you.



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