



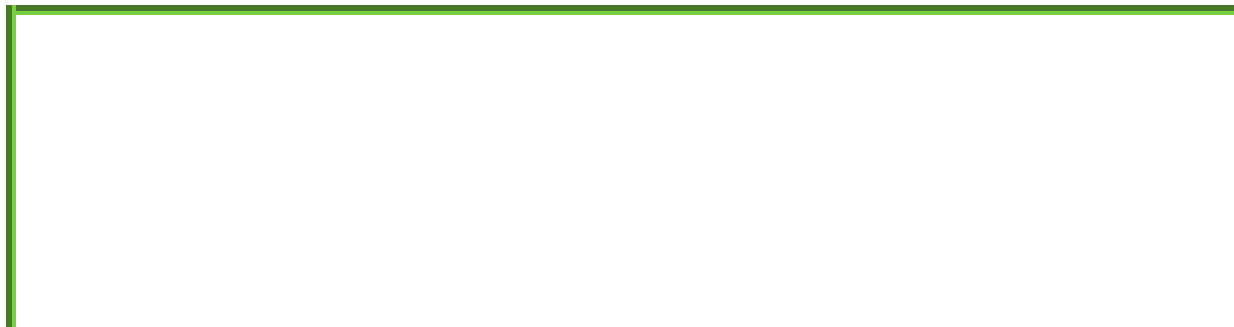
***Protecting our rural environment by promoting citizen participation
in sustainable land use planning since 2006***

***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.***

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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

December 6, 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.

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, 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.

Board Of Supervisors November 9, 2021

[Agenda](#)

Redistricting Public Hearing

The hearing will commence at 11:00 am or immediately after the conclusion of any item being discussed or acted upon at 11:00 am.

Planning Commission November 10, 2021

[Agenda](#)

Local News

First Calaveras Important Farmland Map to be Released

From CAP Governing Committee member Muriel Zeller / November 4, 2021

According to a representative of the Department of Conservation (DOC) Division of Land Resource Protection, release of the Calaveras County Important Farmland Map is imminent. Completion and release of the map was one of the updated General Plan implementation priorities established by the Board of Supervisors in January 2020 and reiterated in January 2021.

According to the DOC website, "The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) produces maps and statistical data used for analyzing impacts on California's agricultural resources. Agricultural land is rated according to soil quality and irrigation status; the best quality land is called Prime Farmland. The maps are updated every two years with the use of a computer mapping system, aerial imagery, public review, and field reconnaissance." For more information:

<https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/>.

The release of the Calaveras map was delayed, because the Board of Supervisors, appropriately, passed a resolution in August 2020 establishing a Farmland of Local Importance category and the components that qualify land for that category. The resolution defines Farmland of Local Importance as, "Cultivated lands that do not qualify as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance or Unique Farmland, or lands zoned General Agricultural (A1) and/or enrolled in the California Land Conservation Act." This assumes the county knows which cultivated lands do not qualify for another category and which lands are zoned A1 and/or enrolled in the California Land Conservation Act, commonly known as the Williamson Act.

To compile the Calaveras Farmland of Local Importance category, the DOC made repeated attempts to obtain GIS data from the county for parcels enrolled in the Williamson Act during fiscal year 2018-2019, to coincide with the Important Farmland map year of 2018, which is the most recent. Unfortunately, the DOC was forced to use fiscal year 2012-2013 enrollment data which was the last Williamson Act data submitted to the DOC Division of Land Resource Protection by Calaveras County.

The staff report submitted to the Board of Supervisors with the proposed resolution defining Farmland of Local Importance on August 2, 2020, indicated, "Future costs may accrue to provide DOC with updated mapping of agriculture zoning and

agricultural preserve data. These updates will occur through the routine updates of zoning maps on GIS and will be minimal.” It is clearly implied that there are “routine updates of zoning maps.”

There is currently a zoning map posted on the Calaveras County Planning Department website created to bring interim and inconsistent zoning into compliance with the land use designations in the General Plan adopted in November 2019. There is a layer on the zoning map that shows parcels with a Williamson Act contract, which would necessitate Agricultural Preserve (AP) zoning. However, according to an email earlier this week from the Planning Department, “The zoning layer doesn’t properly reflect numbers of parcels currently restricted by an Agriculture Preserve Contract as parcels no longer in the Ag Preserve have not been re-zoned from AP for at least 10 years now.”

As the DOC representative indicated, “The map and data are intended to provide an inventory of agricultural resources for the County to make land use planning decisions with. We will do our best to make the best maps and data, but until we get cooperation, the Farmland of Local Importance category will suffer.” He went on to say that even if the county were to provide the proper data now, “We will not re-issue the 2018 map/data, it is final. Any updated Williamson Act enrollment GIS data will be incorporated into the next update, 2020. The correct WA enrollment data for the 2020 Important Farmland map/data would need to be fiscal year 20-21, to coincide with the 2020 map date. I would guess that Calaveras 2020 is approximately 2 years away.” So our next chance for an accurate map is in December 2023.

The public has a vested interest in having an accurate Important Farmland Map, as an up-to-date map of agricultural land will be important in crafting an open space preservation plan for the county and for identifying priority lands for preservation. It will also be critical for crafting an open space zoning district as part of the zoning code update which is currently underway, to say nothing of how helpful it would be in the California Environmental Quality Act process for discretionary projects. Perhaps the county can start with correctly identifying Williamson Act and Agricultural Preserve parcels on the zoning map.

Letter to the Editor: Complaints are being collected for Calaveras Grand Jury

Letter to the Editor by Megan Fiske / Calaveras Enterprise / October 20, 2021

Dear Editor,

Every year each county in California selects a set of jurors to serve on the Civil Grand Jury which then investigates the operations of County government. The Civil Grand Jury selects which officers, departments, and local agencies it will investigate based on prior grand jury recommendations, current juror recommendations, and citizen complaints.

As Calaveras County begins its Civil Grand Jury process for 2022, we have an opportunity to let the jury know which officers, departments, and local agencies we want them to investigate. This is an important

opportunity for local citizens. Send in a Letter of Concern outlining what you believe needs to be investigated, and provide as much supporting evidence as possible.

Submit your citizen complaint online at grandjury.calaverasgov.us , or via email to ccgrandjuryfore@gmail.com , or via U.S. mail to P.O. Box 1414, San Andreas, CA 95249. Your complaint will be kept confidential. It is important to remember this is a CIVIL Grand Jury examining COUNTY officers, departments, and agencies.

You can also review all previous grand jury reports online to see the results of past investigations. In 2019-2020, the Grand Jury produced 7 reports which, in part, discovered property taxes being collected to build a college in Valley Springs that has never materialized and that animal control facilities and operations are severely inadequate and unsafe.

In 2016, an investigation into the Sheriff's Department system for filing complaints against the department revealed a lack of consistency by the department in investigating the complaints filed, which meant complaints were not always addressed. Grand jury investigations can also reveal that a department is operating well such as the county recycling program which was found to be meeting its goals in 2016.

The Community Action Project and the Calaveras Planning Coalition urge you to stay involved in local issues. Learn more at calaverascap.com.

Sincerely,

Megan Fiske, Outreach Coordinator

CAP/CPC

California judge rejects water deal for major farm supplier

Kathleen Ronayne / AP / October 28, 2021

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — A California judge has rejected a federal contract granting permanent access to U.S. government-controlled water for the nation's largest agricultural water supplier, saying it lacked details on costs and appropriate public notice.

Environmentalists had blasted the contract with Westlands Water District as a sweetheart arrangement designed to benefit corporate agricultural interests over environmental needs and taxpayers. It was [crafted during the Trump administration](#) under then-Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, a former lobbyist for Westlands, a public entity based in Fresno that supplies water to private farmers.

“This was an effort to basically steal public resources and put them into private pockets,” said Stephan Volker, an attorney for the Winnemem Wintu Tribe, the North Coast Rivers Alliance and several other groups.

Westlands is evaluating the court’s ruling and may appeal if the case is dismissed, spokesperson Shelley Cartwright said. The water district rejects claims it received special treatment, with Cartwright saying it has “acted transparently” and followed the steps required by law.

Fresno County Superior Court Judge D. Tyler Tharpe declined Wednesday to validate the contract between Westlands and the federal Bureau of Reclamation, a requirement for it to be legal. Tharpe scheduled another hearing on Dec. 2 to potentially dismiss the case, which would send Westlands back to the drawing board.

The water Westlands doles out to its agricultural customers comes from the Central Valley Project, a federally run network of dams, tunnels and canals that brings water from California’s wetter north to the farm-rich San Joaquin Valley and heavily populated Southern California.

The case raises questions about how much water major districts that serve corporate interests should be entitled to at the expense of tribes and environmental interests that rely on certain water flows, said Patricia Schifferle of Pacific Advocates, a natural resources consulting firm.

“The argument really is: Are we going to allocate that much water to Westlands Water District without conditions?” she said.

The contract gives Westlands access to 1.15 million acre-feet of water for irrigation and other purposes, though it doesn't guarantee all of that water in drier years like the one California is now experiencing. Since 1988, Westlands has only received its full allocation from the Central Valley Project six times, according to the district's website.

An acre foot is 325,851 gallons (about 1.23 million liters). An average household uses one-half to one acre-foot of water a year, according to the Water Education Foundation, meaning the contract gave Westlands access to enough water to serve up to 2.3 million households.

Westlands has long operated on an interim contract basis, renewing its water deal with the federal government every two years. But a law passed at the end of the Obama administration allows contractors to convert those contracts into permanent ones, so long as they agree to pay back the federal government for the cost of the water infrastructure.

The deal also allows Westlands to get around acreage limits that have historically constrained how much water contractors can access.

The permanent contracts have to be validated by a state court, but Westlands moved ahead anyway in early 2020. Tharpe is the second state judge who ruled against it.

The first judge said Westlands brought forward an incomplete contract that lacked key details including how much money the district would pay the government and when. Westlands also failed to provide appropriate notice to the public and left the contract open ended, potentially allowing for later changes not subject to public scrutiny or court approval, the judge ruled.

Westlands moved forward anyway, finalizing the contract in early 2020. The district again sought approval. But Tharpe said the district's decision to move forward with a more detailed contract didn't change the fact that it initially sought approval for something incomplete. In his ruling, he again declined to validate the contract.

Meanwhile, environmental groups and other opponents charge Westlands isn't paying back all of what it owes the federal government for use of the water infrastructure. The Interior Department previously said Westlands owed the federal government \$480 million. That was eventually brought down to about \$210 million, which Cartwright said the district has "fully repaid."

But opponents say Westlands owes significantly more money for projects designed to mitigate damage and restore habitats for fish and wildfire through the water system, including the chinook salmon. Under a 1992 law, Central Valley Project contractors owe a combined \$400 million for environmental work, with much of that cost falling to Westlands as the largest contractor.

Westlands says it is following the same process as other water districts for converting its contract and that it's received no special treatment. "The suggestion that the permanent nature of the proposed Westlands repayment contract makes it an 'unusually good deal' is simply false," the district wrote in a 2020 "fact sheet" about the contract.

Bureau of Reclamation spokesperson Mary Lee Knecht declined to comment because the issue still is being litigated.

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Regional News

Talking Development: How one company built wildfire into the plan

Staff / FAC Net / September 16, 2021

Editor's Note: Earlier this spring as part of the Southwest Idaho Fire Adapted Communities Forum hosted by [Idaho Firewise](#), Justin Milander from [Boise Hunter Homes](#) shared the story of the Harris North development. Justin's presentation was an excellent opportunity to hear the unique perspective of a developer and learn more about how the integration of wildfire mitigation strategies occurs throughout all phases of a project. We thought this presentation was so valuable that we wanted to share more about it in this week's blog. This blog was written by FAC Net staff using information from Milander's presentation. Staff are not endorsing or recommending the use of any specific private company, but simply sharing lessons learned from this educational event.

[See his entire presentation here](#)

Harris North is a 173 unit development located on 145 acres southeast of Boise, Idaho. As a relatively new development, Harris North provided an opportunity to approach fire preparedness from the beginning of the process– incorporating it into planning, implementation and maintenance. In addition, the partnerships with the City of Boise and Boise Fire Department created an environment where fire-related requirements were clear. The transparency and clear expectations for buyers created by the developers allowed wildfire mitigation strategies to be incorporated into every step of the process and maintained after the initial purchase.

Key themes and lessons shared by Justin Milander during his presentation are presented below. Justin broke them down into three primary phases: planning, implementation and maintenance.

—

Planning

Boise Hunter Homes went through the preliminary planning process with the City of Boise. During this process, City staff provided formal feedback from a number of different departments (e.g., public works, parks, transportation and more). This feedback was incredibly important as it facilitated overall site planning. Key elements of the feedback and requirements provided by the City of Boise included:

- Compliance with codes, including a Wildland-Urban Interface Code
- Design considerations for the emergency access road. These considerations included paving the road based on road grade to facilitate emergency vehicle access.
- Requirements for in-home fire suppression systems such as sprinklers.

The Harris North Wildland-Urban Interface Fire Safety Plan provided a comprehensive assessment of wildfire potential as well as mitigation requirements. This Fire Safety Plan provided the foundation for much of the development process as well as what was communicated to potential home buyers throughout development. Key wildfire mitigation measures within the plan included construction and landscaping requirements, as well as designated responsibilities for the common areas to ensure they were maintained in a way that reduced wildfire risk.

Other important design elements of the community include:

- A water tank at the top of the community. Design of that tank was based upon communication and requirements from the City of Boise.
- Roundabouts for fire suppression apparatus to allow them to maneuver.
- Thoughtful lot placement. Most lots do not immediately abut wildlands. While a few do, those lots are designed to be deeper to provide more of a fuel break between the structures and the wildlands. The community was designed in a way to maximize the benefit of roads and common areas to create defensible space.

A theme throughout all phases of the Harris North project was the desire to create clear expectations for potential home buyers. These clear expectations and requirements were formalized in Community Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs). In the case of Harris Ranch North, Firewise USA® community recognition was included in the CC&Rs. The CC&Rs provided an opportunity for transparency

with prospective purchasers, ensuring that information and obligations are clear at the outset. CC&Rs included:

- An assessment of \$2.00 per year paid to the Homeowners Association to be used to further fire resilience actions.
- The requirement that owners shall maintain defensible space consistent with the Harris North Wildland-Urban Interface Fire Safety Plan.

Implementation

Ignition-resistant materials, consistent with those specified in the Harris North Wildland-Urban Interface Fire Safety Plan, were used throughout construction. Homes were required to have a Class A roof, cementitious soffits, noncombustible gutters, multilayered exterior glazing and appropriate vent locations. Those specifications (and more!) were part of a standards specifications sheet that was disclosed to home buyers during the purchase process. This was key to ensuring buyers understood the materials used and the reasons those materials were necessary.

Landscaping plans and materials also accounted for wildfire risk. Landscape planning included the consideration of home ignition zones and provided a “fuel-free” first four feet adjacent to each home. While purchasers had the opportunity to customize their landscaping through the construction process, all landscaping still had to be appropriate for wildfire.

Vegetation management inside the common areas focused on the reduction of fuel density and continuity. In addition, the common areas are maintained by the homeowners association. This ensures that vegetation around the homes supports the overall and ongoing reduction of wildfire risk to the community.

These wildfire risk reduction elements of the development were routinely communicated to buyers. The continued emphasis on buyer education and transparency resulted in marketing materials that were clearly branded as part of a Firewise USA® recognized site. The very intentional inclusion of Firewise USA® logos on marketing materials helped make wildfire a continuous point of discussion with buyers prior to their purchase.

During the Firewise USA® accreditation process, Boise Hunter Homes worked with the [Boise Fire Department](#) to create an action plan for vegetation management and homeowners association responsibilities. In many ways, it was easier to build wildfire mitigation into the development from the beginning as opposed to creating an action plan based on what needed to change.

Maintenance

Ongoing homeowner education is important to the continued wildfire risk reduction in the Harris North area. As homes are sold, new residents move into the area. Availability of Firewise USA® handouts, community pool parties which include discussion of wildfire risk and seasonal newsletters help keep wildfire mitigation at the forefront in the community.

Both the CC&Rs and Firewise USA® action plans are considered living documents. There is also clear responsibility for the enforcement of the CC&Rs, with the homeowners association being responsible for review and approval of improvements made after the initial sale.

For tribes, 'good fire' a key to restoring nature and people

John Flesher / AP/ October 28, 2021

WEITCHPEC, Calif. (AP) — Elizabeth Azzuz stood in prayer on a Northern California mountainside, arms outstretched, grasping a handmade torch of dried wormwood branches, the fuel her Native American ancestors used for generations to burn underbrush in thick forest.

“Guide our hands as we bring fire back to the land,” she intoned before crouching and igniting dead leaves and needles carpeting the ground.

Others joined her. And soon dancing flames and pungent smoke rose from the slope high above the distant Klamath River.

Over several days in early October, about 80 acres (32.4 hectares) on the Yurok reservation would be set aflame. The burning was monitored by crews wearing protective helmets and clothing — firefighting gear and water trucks ready. They were part of a program that teaches Yurok and other tribes the ancient skills of treating land with fire.

Such an act could have meant jail a century ago. But state and federal agencies that long banned “cultural burns” in the U.S. West are coming to terms with them — and even collaborating — as the wildfire crisis worsens.

Wildfires have blackened nearly 6,000 square miles (15,540 square kilometers) in California the past two years and more elsewhere amid prolonged drought and rising temperatures linked to climate change. Dozens have died; thousands of homes have been lost.

Scientific research increasingly confirms what tribes argued all along: Low-intensity burns on designated parcels, under the right conditions, reduce the risk by consuming dead wood and other fire fuels on forest floors.

To the Yurok, Karuk and Hupa in the mid-Klamath region, the resurgence of cultural burning is about reclaiming a way of life violently suppressed with the arrival of white settlers in the 1800s.

Indigenous people had their land seized, and many were killed or forced onto reservations. Children were sent to schools that forbade their languages and customs. And their hunter-gatherer lifestyle was devastated by prohibitions on fire that tribes had used for thousands of years to treat the landscape.

It enriched the land with berries, medicinal herbs and tan oak acorns while killing bugs. It opened browsing space for deer and elk. It let more rainwater reach streams, boosting salmon numbers. It spurred hazelnut stems and bear grass used for intricate baskets and ceremonial regalia.

Now, descendants of those who quietly kept the old ways alive are practicing them openly, creating “good fire.”

"Fire is a tool left by the Creator to restore our environment and the health of our people," said Azzuz, board secretary for the Cultural Fire Management Council, which promotes burning on ancestral Yurok lands.

"Fire is life for us."

PERSECUTION AND PERSEVERANCE

Nine years ago, Margo Robbins got a facial tattoo — two dark stripes from the edges of her mouth to below her chin, and another midway between them. It once was a common mark for Yurok women, including her great-grandmother.

"I got mine to represent my commitment to continuing the traditions of our ancestors," said Robbins, 59, whose jokes and cackling laugh mask a steely resolve.

She would become a leading voice in the struggle to return fire to her people's historical territory, much under state and federal management. The more than 5,000-member tribe's reservation courses along a 44-mile (70.8-kilometer) stretch of the Klamath.

Since 1910, when infernos consumed more than 3 million (1.2 million hectares) western acres, federal policy had considered fire an enemy. "Only you can prevent forest fires," Smokey Bear later proclaimed in commercials.

"They considered tribal people arsonists, didn't understand the relationship between fires and a healthy forest," said Merv George, 48, a former Hoopa Valley Tribe chairman who now supervises Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest in Northern California. "I heard stories of people getting thrown in jail if they were caught."

But when George joined the U.S. Forest Service as a tribal relations manager in 2008, western wildfires were growing bigger and more frequent; officials knew something needed to change.

Two national forests — Six Rivers and Klamath — joined a landscape restoration partnership with the Karuk tribe and nonprofit groups. It released a 2014 plan endorsing "prescribed," or intentional, burns.

A year earlier, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire, had approved a small cultural burn on Yurok land.

It was a victory for Robbins. As a young girl of Yurok, Hupa and Irish descent, she learned the basketry fundamental to her native identity. Tribes use baskets for gathering food and medicinal plants, trapping eels, ceremonial dancing, cradling babies, even prayer.

"Weaving is really, really soothing. It's kind of like medicine for your soul," she said, displaying finely crafted baskets at a Yurok firehouse near the village of Weitchpec.

But weaving materials had become scarce, particularly hazel wood. Burns in bygone days helped the shoots grow straight and strong. Under no-fire management, hazel was stunted by shrubs, downed trees, matted leaves.

With grandchildren on the way, Robbins wanted them carried in traditional baby baskets. She needed tribal forests to produce high-quality hazel once more. That meant fire.

After the state-sanctioned Yurok small burn, Robbins and other community members established the Cultural Fire Management Council to push for more.

They allied with Karuk and Hupa activists and The Nature Conservancy to create the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network, which conducts training burns that have drawn hundreds of participants from across the U.S. and other countries. It has expanded into Oregon, Minnesota and New Mexico.

“It’s really exciting and gives me a lot of hope that the tide is changing,” Robbins said. “We revived our language, our dances, and now, bringing back fire, we’ll restore the land.”

‘FINALLY BEING HEARD’

To prepare for the one this month in the Klamath region, Yurok leaders studied weather forecasts, scouted mountainous burn areas, positioned water tanks, uncoiled fire hoses, equipped and drilled 30-plus crew members.

As Azzuz finished her ceremonial prayer, the wormwood that coaxed the first flames was replaced with modern “drip torches” — canisters of gasoline and diesel with spouts and wicks. Team members moved quickly along a dirt trail, flicking droplets of burning fuel.

Smoke billowed. Flames crackled and hissed. Tangles of green and brown foliage were reduced to ash. Young Douglas firs that squeeze out other species were another target.

But larger trees — oaks, madrones, conifers — were largely unscathed, aside from patches of scorched bark.

“It’s beautiful and black,” Azzuz exulted. “By next spring, there will be a lot of hazel shoots.”

Hour by hour, torch bearers moved down the slope, igniting swaths of forest floor. Co-workers in radio contact watched firebreaks, ready to douse or beat down stray flames.

There were young and middle-aged, native and non-native, novices and veterans — some from area tribes, others from far away.

Jose Luis Dulce, a firefighter in his native Spain and Ecuador, said he wanted to help revive Indigenous techniques in Europe and South America. Stoney Timmons said his tribe — the Robinson Rancheria Pomo Indians of California — wants to host its own training session next year.

“I’m getting some good lessons to take back,” Timmons said.

The exercise was especially satisfying for Robert McConnell Jr., who spent years with Forest Service wildfire crews, attacking from helicopters and driving bulldozers. Now a prescribed fire specialist with Six Rivers National Forest, he works with fire instead of against it.

“I get to feel like I’m Indian again when I get to burn,” he said. “It’s encoded in my DNA. It’s like there’s a spark in my eye when I see fire get put on the ground.”

As shadows lengthened, cheery yips gave way to shrieks: “Log! Log!” A chunk of flaming timber jounced down a sharply angled slope, smacked onto a two-lane road and hurtled into a thicket below, igniting brush along the way.

Although crew members quickly extinguished the flames, the runaway log was a reminder of the job's hazards.

Nick Hillman, 18, his face glistening with grimy sweat, was unfazed. "I know my ancestors want me to be doing this," he said.

When Yurok forestry director Dawn Blake helped light the hillside, she felt a connection with her grandmother, who wove baskets and set fires in the area long ago.

"We've been talking and begging about doing this for so long, just spinning our wheels," said Blake, 49. "It feels like we're finally being heard."

BIGGER AMBITIONS

But tribes want to go beyond training exercises and "family burns" on small plots. They're pushing to operate throughout the vast territories their ancestors occupied.

"My ultimate goal is to restore all this land back to a natural state," said Blaine McKinnon, battalion chief for the Yurok Fire Department and a leader of the recent cultural burn.

Relations with federal and state authorities have improved, but complaints persist about permits denied, burns postponed and heavy-handed oversight.

Cultural fire leaders say pledges of cooperation from agency higher-ups aren't always carried out by local officials, who fear dismissal if fires get out of hand.

It's a fair point, said Craig Tolmie, chief deputy director of Cal Fire, which struggles to balance the tribes' desires for more fire with opposition from a jittery public.

"People have really been traumatized and shocked by the last two fire seasons," Tolmie said.

Under state laws enacted this year, tribal burners and front-line regulators will work more closely, he said. One measure requires his department to appoint a cultural burning liaison and provide training and certification for prescribed fire "burn bosses."

Another makes it easier to get liability insurance by raising the bar for requiring burn professionals to pay for extinguishing out-of-control fires — a rarity but always a risk. Lawmakers also budgeted \$40 million for a prescribed fire insurance fund and tribal burn programs.

Still, prescribed burns alone can't rid forests of more than a century's accumulation of woody debris, Tolmie said, arguing that many areas should be "pre-treated" with mechanical grinding and tree thinning before fires are set.

Ancient wisdom and scientific research show otherwise, said Chad Hanson, forest ecologist with the John Muir Project of Earth Island Institute in California. Regulators are "trying to extort tribes" by making cultural burns contingent on logging, he said.

Bill Tripp, the Karuk tribe's natural resources director, said the solution is empowering tribes to handle prescribed burns while Cal Fire and the Forest Service focus on suppressing wildfires.

The mid-Klamath area is ideal for a teaching center where cultural burners could "guide us into a new era of living with fire," said Tripp, who learned from his great-grandmother and was setting small blazes in his

remote village by age 8.

Tribes are uniquely positioned to train younger generations about stewardship-oriented fire management, said Scott Stephens, an environmental policy professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

"We'd need literally thousands of people doing this burning to ramp it up to a scale that's meaningful," he said.

Talon Davis, 27, a member of the Yurok crew, welcomed the opportunity "to show the world what good fire is." He is Robbins' son-in-law; his own toddler has been carried in her baskets, as she wished.

"This is how we're supposed to care for Mother Earth," he said. "Put fire back on the ground, bring our home back into balance."

Associated Press reporter Gillian Flaccus contributed to this story.

In the rural West, some residents are taking firefighting into their own hands

Ilie Mitaru / NY Times / October 30, 2021

PALISADES, Wash. — Molly Linville vividly remembers the "wall of flame" that tore through the grasslands of her 600-acre ranch during the Sutherland fire four years ago. Working quickly, she managed to guide her 125 cattle into the irrigated field surrounding her home three hours east of Seattle. After that day, Linville resolved she would never go through an experience like that again.

Linville is one of a growing number of Americans across the rural West who are taking fire management into their own hands: buying surplus firetrucks, construction rigs and converted military vehicles online to protect their homes and land. Some have maintained fire defenses for decades. Others were spurred by a close call with a recent wildfire.

Many professional firefighters look warily on the movement, concerned it may give untrained homeowners a false sense of security, especially when residents disregard evacuation orders to stay and fight fires.

Deputy Chief Nick Schuler, a spokesperson for Cal Fire, California's firefighting agency, put it starkly: "A person who has a gun and can fly in a helicopter doesn't make them trained for war. And just because the civilian is able to buy a fire engine does not make them properly trained to utilize it."

Marin County Fire Battalion Chief Graham Groneman advises residents to invest in home hardening, the process of modifying a home so it is more fire-resistant, and defensible space rather than heavy machinery. He worries that residents eager to protect their property may put themselves at greater risk.

Still, he said his department tries to work collaboratively with property owners who are determined to help fight a fire. “They want to take some ownership in the protection of their property. That’s a very American ideal and a core fundamental right.”

It is a right that property owners across the West are increasingly willing to exercise.

—

Nicholas Holliday — Burnt Ranch, California

Nicholas Holliday began building up his own fire defenses when he moved to Burnt Ranch in Northern California nine years ago to start a cannabis farm.

Such defenses are common in the Emerald Triangle — Humboldt, Trinity and Mendocino counties — where farmers began cultivating marijuana decades before legalization. Those early growers, ineligible for fire insurance, developed a culture of self-reliance and skepticism of government agencies.

“Each year, I’d grab at least another piece of equipment,” said Holliday, who has become one of the largest growers in Trinity County. “It’s not if your place is going to burn; it’s when.”

In August, Holliday was ordered to evacuate as the Monument fire approached the region. But leaving would have meant forfeiting the entire season’s crop. Instead, using back roads to avoid evacuation checkpoints, he and a group of residents stayed.

They readied a converted box truck and a converted garbage truck, both retrofitted with 2,000-gallon tanks. They dug fire lines with a bulldozer, encircled their homes in hoses and slept in shifts to monitor the fire. They maintained the routine for the nearly six weeks the evacuation order was in place.

Professional fire agencies strongly oppose this approach. “We’ve seen people who refused evacuation orders and warnings and then at the very last minute, when they realized they should have left, it puts firefighters in harm’s way,” said Schuler of Cal Fire. “We try to go save them. Ultimately, it can cost them their lives or lives of firefighters.”

But Holliday sees it differently.

“I don’t know when we took responsibility off the ranchers and homeowners and put it on the Forest Service and the firefighters to save us,” he said. “No one is going to save you. I ain’t waiting for Prince Charming.”

—

Cody Joe Pearce — Taylorsville, California

As the Dixie fire moved through the Sierra Nevada, the tiny town of Taylorsville, about 250 miles east of Burnt Ranch, was put under evacuation orders three times within 60 days.

Determined not to leave his property, Cody Joe Pearce, a sixth-generation rancher, started an ad hoc community fire service using his own water tender.

“I’d burn to death before I ever left home,” he said.

At first, Pearce made his nightly rounds alone, spraying down structures to prevent them from burning. As the threat continued, he bought two more water trucks and recruited friends to help.

“Maybe I’m crazy,” he said, “but it just seemed like somebody had to do something, because nobody was here.”

Matt Sanders, a fire engine captain with the U.S. Forest Service, said he understood residents’ desperation to protect their properties but added that without training, doing so could be extremely risky.

“I don’t think that anybody who doesn’t have training should be out there fighting fire, for any reason,” said Sanders, who fought the Dixie fire in August. “Prevention goes a lot farther than protection,” he said.

As word of Pearce’s efforts spread, community members began to offer their own equipment cheaply or even free — if he could get them running. A GoFundMe raised more than \$25,000 to help pay for fuel and repairs.

Pearce said he is committed to building up his arsenal for the coming years. “We’re going to try and get enough stuff built out so if we have a fire around here, we can go put it out and not have to wait on the agencies.”

—

Dale Martin — Burns, Oregon

In some remote parts of the West, an alternative model to firefighting has gained popularity: State officials are training and equipping local community members to fight fire.

Dale and Patricia Martin formed what is known as a Rangeland Fire Protection Association in Silver Creek, Oregon, in 2000. A hundred volunteer members serve the region — 780,000 acres of sagebrush and grassland that borders the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in southeastern Oregon.

“I just felt like the rural area needed something so we could get there more quickly than they could get out to us,” said Martin, 84, who runs a country store and archery shop with his wife.

Silver Creek members pay \$50 to \$500 in annual dues, based on acreage. The funds go toward converting donated military equipment into firefighting machinery.

Marvin Vetter, Oregon’s coordinator for rangeland associations, said the volunteer model appeals to rural communities. “The people get to decide on the level of protection and the rate and who’s responding or the training,” he said. “It’s not the government telling them, ‘Thou shalt do this.’”

The Silver Creek association’s 19 trucks are stationed at landholders’ homes across the region. Members receive wildfire training, protective gear and communications equipment. The goal is to dispatch trained local volunteers to contain fires until government agencies arrive. Martin estimates that they respond to about eight fires a year.

“I just want to see neighbors helping neighbors and people getting along and being helpful to each other,” he said.

—

Molly Linville — Palisades, Washington

After the Sutherland fire burned through her ranch in 2017, Molly Linville lobbied for legislation to recognize rangeland associations in her state. When the effort failed, she bought a firetruck for \$5,000.

“We don’t have the luxury to wait for permission,” she said.

Her ranch sits mostly on unprotected land, outside the jurisdiction of state or federal fire agencies.

Linville and her neighbors use a Facebook page to report smoke. She said they have stopped several fires from getting out of hand in the fast-fuel grassland plains.

“We know the land, and it makes all the sense in the world that we would be the ones fighting the fire out here,” said Linville, who started her career for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and maintained her annual wildfire training for a decade.

Firefighters unions have staunchly opposed Linville’s efforts, arguing that letting citizens fight fire is dangerous.

—

Robert Seals — Los Gatos, California

“In my firefighting history, this was called the ‘Asbestos Forest.’ We never came here,” Robert Seals said, describing the region in Los Gatos, California, where he moved after a five-decade career fighting fires. “And then three years ago, it started.”

Seals can tick through a list of close calls to his property, including the CZU Lightning Complex fire last year.

He worked his first fire at 17 — lying about his age to be hired. He went on to lead a team that specialized in felling large trees during fires in some of the most rugged terrain in the West.

He began building off-road vehicles to carry water through rough terrain. Through a contract with fire agencies, he would allow them to use his vehicles, and he would work the fires as well.

Now 76, he is building trucks again. But his vehicles sell mostly to individuals or communities looking for protection.

He is a fierce proponent for personal fire defense. Fire Breakers, his company, consults on fire risks and clears shrubs, brush and other fuels surrounding homes.

After decades working in wildfire prevention, Seals is deeply skeptical of fire agencies’ approach.

“All Cal Fire wants you to do is leave. That’s why all they talk about is the to-go bag; I’m the to-stay bag,” he said. “Yes, leave when you’re told if you don’t know what you’re doing — but there is so much you can do before you leave.”

California looks to natural gas to keep the lights on

this winter

Scott DiSavino & Nichola Groom / Reuters / November 3, 2021

(Reuters) - After years of restricting the growth of fossil fuel infrastructure, California is looking to natural gas for power generation this coming winter after drought and wildfires leave the state with few other options to keep the lights on.

California has spent years moving away from fossil fuels to reduce planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions. But U.S. states like California and Texas have faced notable challenges to their electrical grid in recent months, and worldwide power crunches have forced other countries to ramp up output of coal and other fossil fuels to maintain power.

This year, the state has leaned more on gas fired-power plants as extreme drought has cut hydropower output by more than half, while frequent wildfires often shut electricity imports from other states.

This week, California regulators could take another step towards boosting reliance on gas when utility regulators consider two proposals to increase the amount of gas stored at Aliso Canyon, its biggest underground storage field. That site experienced a devastating months-long leak in 2015, and the state is also considering shuttering it outright.

The state's Public Utilities Commission (PUC) will vote on Thursday whether to expand storage at the Los Angeles-area facility, owned by Southern California Gas Co (SoCalGas). Capacity at the site was capped at 34 billion cubic feet following the leak, and the proposals would allow that level to increase by either 21% or 100%.

Natural gas prices have surged worldwide as global demand has rebounded faster than anticipated following pandemic-induced lockdowns, and as energy shortages force utilities in Europe and Asia to compete for liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports. ([LINK](#))

Gas supplies have been tight in Southern California for years due to pipeline limitations and reduced availability of Aliso Canyon, resulting in curtailments to power generators and higher prices for consumers.

PUC Commissioner Martha Guzman Aceves said in a statement that a smaller capacity increase "will allow us to get through this winter while we continue our progress toward planning how to reduce or eliminate our use of Aliso Canyon by 2027 or 2035, or any time in between."

Environmental groups want the facility closed entirely and oppose the proposals.

"Instead of pursuing clean energy solutions that can eliminate the need for Aliso Canyon entirely, California is proposing to expand this dangerous facility - putting communities at greater risk of another catastrophic leak," said Alexandra Nagy, California director of Food & Water Watch.

Hydropower's contribution to electricity is set to fall to just 5% in 2021, from a five-year average of 12%, while non-hydro renewables, mainly wind and solar, are expected to rise to 37%, government data shows.

Gas-fired power plants, meanwhile, will provide about 45% of the power generated in the state this year, up from the five-year (2016-2020) average of 41%, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA).

In California, average gas prices were recently at multiyear highs near \$5 per million British thermal units (mmBtu) in the northern part of the state and over \$6 in the south.

Over the summer, Governor Gavin Newsom said extreme drought and wildfires put California's power grid in a "state of emergency" and ordered energy agencies to take action.

State agencies have responded through various steps, including spending \$196 million to install four 30-MW gas turbines at two sites in Northern California, keeping a Redondo Beach gas-fired plant open through 2023, and asking the federal government to allow some gas-fired plants to operate without pollution restrictions for 60 days.

California wants to produce all of its electricity from clean sources by 2045.

(Reporting by Scott DiSavino and Nichola Groom; editing by Richard Pullin)

Sierra Nevada
Conservancy
Funding
Opportunities
Newsletter
for October
/November



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.





The Mountain

by Emily Tuszynska

Each morning of my stay I walk down to the lake,

carrying my empty bowl. A line of beached canoes
lies tipped on the cut grass, hulls gray

as the low sky. No one ever seems
to take them out. The lake rests undisturbed,
flatly reflecting the mountains

that rise from its far shore, their steep flanks
half-sheared of Douglas fir, slashed by logging roads
that veer improbably straight up. I hardly look

at the mountains. I'm in the brambles,
reaching for blackberries so large you might
mistake them for plums, and by some miracle

even in this sun-less September, enough replenished
each morning to fill my bowl. For three days the air
is acrid with smoke held down by cloud.

Then overnight the wind changes, and the sky
lifts like a blue wing above new distance.
There, behind and above the slopes

I thought mountains, the real mountain
rises, as if fulfilling a promise I didn't know
had been made. The lake turns white

with its reflection. It is like the evening hour
when the day-long drone of trucks and chainsaws
finally halts and a massive silence swings open.

The next morning, a blue haze, the mountain
gone again. But now I feel how the whole landscape
shifts toward the submerged weight of it,

as the heart tilts toward a prayer too heavy
to put into words. Toward a hope not even named
as prayer. The common hope of a whole people, that large.

from: Terrain.org, October 6, 2020
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