



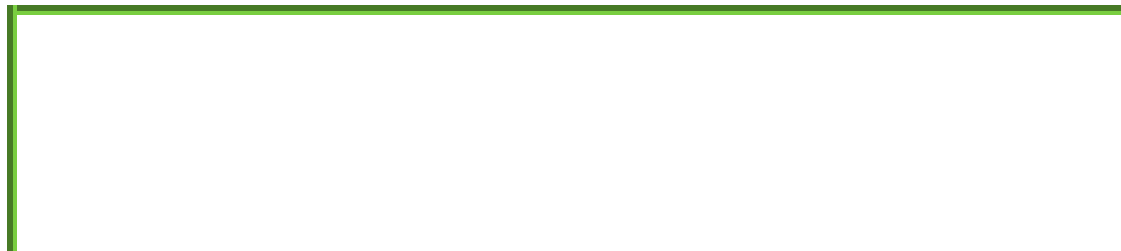
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*The Community Action Project (CAP) administers the Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC), which is comprised of regional and local organizations, community groups, and concerned individuals who promote public participation in land use and resource planning 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**  
**September 13, 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.*

**Board Of Supervisors September 14, 2021**

[Agenda](#)

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**Planning Commission Meeting September 23, 2021**

[Cancelled](#)

## State Water Curtailment Order Prompts Lawsuit

*Tracey Petersen / MyMotherlode / September 3, 2021*

Sonora, CA — An emergency drought order issued by the State Water Resources Control Board last month to curtail water diversions has triggered a lawsuit.

On Thursday, the Oakdale (OID) and South San Joaquin Irrigation Districts (SSJID) joined the San Joaquin Tributaries Association (SJTA), which includes Turlock and Modesto Irrigation Districts and the City and County of San Francisco, in filing a lawsuit against the board in Fresno Superior Court.

At issue is whether the board has the authority to prevent the water agencies from diverting and storing water. For OID and SSJID that impacts Stanislaus River runoff into the Donnellis, Beardsley, New Melones, and Tulloch Reservoirs. Both Districts relay they have the ability to use water previously stored behind those reservoirs and anticipate no immediate impacts to their agricultural and municipal customers.

The water curtailments are necessary, according to the board, to keep saltwater from building up in the Delta, protect fish, and maintain drinking water supplies for cities. Water agencies say the problem is that the order has no specific end date for when irrigation districts can once again divert and store water. The lawsuit contends that violates the districts' due process rights.

"Concerns about next year's water are developing now; we want to make sure we're in a good position," said Peter Rietkerk, SSJID's general manager. "No one knows – and the state won't say – how and when the decision will be made to lift the order."

As California suffering from a second straight year of drought that is affecting water supplies across the state, OID and SSJID argue there is no telling what may happen next year if rain and snowfall are well below average for the third year in a row.

"It's really about next irrigation season," said Steve Knell, OID's general manager. "We want to put ourselves in the best position so that whatever rain comes, we can capture it, store it and make it available. It all comes down to how much rain and snow. If we're looking at another dry year, similar to this year, there may have to be cutbacks."

Knell added that runoff in the Stanislaus River watershed this year was about 350,000 acre-feet – well below the historic average of about 1 million acre-feet into New Melones Reservoir, making 2021 the third-driest year on record going back nearly 100 years ago.

New Melones, managed by the federal Bureau of Reclamation and the state's fourth-largest

reservoir with a capacity of 2.4 million acre-feet as of yesterday held about 899,000 acre-feet. That is about 37% of total capacity and only 65% of what it typically has in early September, detail district officials.

"This year, the Stanislaus River has been a lifeline to the rest of the state," Rietkerk said. "But for an already oversubscribed river system, how can the Stanislaus sustain our Districts, the communities we serve, and the needs of the rest of the state? Our Districts and our partners in the SJTA often have no other recourse other than to file these lawsuits and fight for our communities."

Water agency officials maintain that they are "gravely concerned" over the way the Bureau has managed New Melones water this summer. Reporting that from late June through mid-August, the Bureau increased flows in the Stanislaus River from 350 cubic feet per second to 1,500 cfs. With the extra water ending up in the Delta and then the ocean. They add that was intended to make up for what was not being released at Shasta and Oroville Reservoirs because state and federal water officials wanted to retain cold water in those two lakes to release this fall to help protect spawning salmon on the Sacramento River and its tributaries.

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## Stanislaus river archivist donates museum collection to Columbia College

*Giuseppe Ricapito / Union Democrat / September 1, 2021*

When Stanislaus River archivist Martin Blake transferred the contents of his "Save the Stanislaus" museum to the special collections of the Columbia College Library last week, he told librarian Brian Greene a story that Greene had never heard before.

"Marty just flipped through one of the books he had and told me about it," Greene said.

It was the story of Mark Dubois, a radical environmentalist who chained himself to rocks in the Stanislaus River Canyon in 1979 to oppose the filling of the New Melones Reservoir.

"It's clear this was a big deal and a big deal to a lot of people. Now, you drive over the bridge and you see how much water is in there and I don't think much about it beyond that. But looking in the books, you see there's so much more than that," Greene said.

The Stanislaus River Archives is characterized by Blake as a collection of historical narratives concerning the battle to save the Stanislaus River with an emphasis on the Native and Gold Rush history which preceded it.

Once the contents of a downtown Sonora River Museum for many decades, and an exhibit at the Bureau of Reclamation Office near New Melones Reservoir, the museum was up until recently set up in Blake's home.

He wanted to find some place permanent, he told The Union Democrat on Tuesday, a place where it would be retained for future students seeking to explore an environmental, ecological, political and economic movement unique to one of the Mother Lode's most abiding landmarks. Blake said many students at Columbia College today may not know the history of the Stanislaus River because the crescendo of that conflict happened before that time.

"Most students going there today probably don't have much of an idea of what happened, what occurred in the Stanislaus Canyon, right next to their school," he said. "Many students at Columbia College were involved in this controversy on both sides of the issue."

Blake, then a documentary filmmaking teacher at the University of Southern California, moved to Tuolumne County in 1976, working for an archaeological mitigation company in the canyon.

Even then, Blake said he believed the conflict over the river canyon was "a microcosm of water issues in the United States and around the world."

He still does now.

"I felt it was important to archive it," Blake said. "Environmental activism is one of the keys to saving the world today, I think. The battle to save the Stanislaus was a precursor of environmental activism and the understanding of water politics in America."

The archive is considered the most complete documentation of the Stanislaus River saga and the subsequent environmental movement that grew from it.

The documents include articles from The Union Democrat, letters, information on protests (and counter protests), photographs, maps, speeches, interviews, narratives about the leading characters

The documents include six binders worth of material (and a seventh overview book) which will be housed in the Special Collections section of the library.

They will be classified in the alpha-numerical Library of Congress system and alongside other materials related to the Stanislaus River.

The notebooks are guided by what was lost and what was saved, how people of all sides responded to the proposed flooding of the canyon, the lessons that were learned from it, and the saving of other rivers, Blake said.

"In this collection there are some of the greatest photographs and the greatest writers of the Stanislaus River Canyon," Blake said. "With our world and environmental turmoil today, we need to look back to our past, to how generations took action to change the planet."

Blake counted among his friends some of the well-known players of the movement, including Ron Pickup, who chained himself to rocks at the same time as Dubois, and Dale Batchelor, a photographer of the region.

"I think it's a very valuable asset to the college, to the students and to the community at large," Blake said. "It's kind of a heavy responsibility to try and get out all of this

information."

The movement to save Stanislaus River Canyon goes back many decades, with Prop. 17 in the 1970s (a narrowly defeated attempt to classify the Stanislaus as a Natural Wild and Scenic River) and a temporary limit on filling the New Melones Reservoir after the dam was completed in 1979.

The Stanislaus River Canyon eventually flooded in 1982 and 1983 during back-to-back high water years, but the river preservation movement gained international attention due to the peaceful protests by Pickup, Dubois and the Friends of the River advocacy group.

Greene said the items were received last week and are available in the system for students and the public.

Later, Greene hopes to make a more detailed classification of the materials within the binder based on names, locations and other schemata; and even plans to digitize them.

"One of our duties is to preserve things of a historical nature for the college and the surrounding community so these materials fit within that," he said.

Green is in charge of managing the day to day operations of the library, which includes serving staff and students with the materials they may need. That responsibility includes working with faculty on specific assignments.

Green said Dr. Tom Hofstra, a forestry and natural resources instructor at Columbia College, planned to use the materials for some of his classes.

Hofstra previously worked with Blake in the classroom, Greene said, and coordinated the connection with the library for the donation.

The materials have not yet been officially accepted by the college, but will likely be done so during the October board meeting, Greene said.

"There are a lot of unique and historical items of interest in the special collection and I think it's great the college preserves them and makes them available for the community," Greene said. "I think it's a rather impressive collection that clearly took Marty a lot of time to compile."

The special collection means the documents cannot be checked out of the library, but may be viewed within the library.

The special collection includes older Gold Rush era paraphernalia, and written and oral materials related to the history of the college and local area, Greene said.

Go to the website [www.stanislausriver.org](http://www.stanislausriver.org) for more information on the history of the campaign to save the Stanislaus River.

Contact Giuseppe Ricapito at [gricapito@uniondemocrat.net](mailto:gricapito@uniondemocrat.net) or (209) 588-4526.

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# Editorial: Lake Tahoe is California's gem. Climate change could devastate it.

*Editorial Board / L.A. Times / September 1, 2021*

Across the West, megafires are no longer uncommon, and unprecedented fire behavior is no longer unexpected. Welcome to the California of climate change, where the new normal is extreme weather and terrifying consequences.

Already, the 2021 fire season has confounded expectations. Before this year, no fire was known to have burned from one side of the Sierra Nevada to the other. Now it's happened twice — with the Dixie fire in the northern Sierra and now the Caldor fire near Lake Tahoe. The Dixie fire is the second largest in state history and still burning.

On the Caldor fire, more than 4,000 firefighters have been working night and day to try and save communities around Lake Tahoe. Some 35,000 homes, hotels and other businesses are at risk if the fire takes a turn for the worse. Even if the properties and the city of South Lake Tahoe are saved, the landscape is scarred.

This is one of the most beautiful and beloved corners of California. And while Lake Tahoe's dazzling blue hue will most likely return in time, there are real concerns about what lies ahead for the region's ecosystem and economy if the calamity of this summer becomes a regular occurrence.

Countless researchers and government reports have warned for years that climate change would amplify natural variations in the weather, leading to more frequent and more destructive wildfires. The extremes are happening faster than many predicted or wished, and it's clear that California isn't prepared — and won't be for a while.

There's one reason the Caldor fire is so disturbing: State and federal authorities have thrown tremendous numbers of firefighters and resources into fighting this blaze and they haven't been able to stop it. Plus, the Tahoe Basin is more prepared for wildfires than other regions in California. Authorities have spent millions of dollars over the last 15 years on prescribed burns and thinning projects to reduce excess vegetation that becomes fuel for a fire, according to the Sacramento Bee. The region has developed programs to make homes and yards more resistant to fire.

That is exactly what California should be doing. And yet it's not nearly enough, as these two fires illustrate. The state is dealing with dangerous conditions created by climate change and exacerbated by more than a century of well-intentioned but ultimately damaging forest management.

The ecosystem once relied upon low-intensity fires to clear excess vegetation. But as logging took off and homes and businesses moved to the forest, authorities began putting out fires to protect lives and property. The forests are now dense with fuel that nature would have



otherwise cleared out. Many areas have gone decades without fire. And when they finally do burn, it becomes a conflagration.

Despite the efforts to educate residents on how to make their homes more resistant to fire, there are still many older homes around Tahoe and other forest communities that have shake roofs and wood decks, surrounded by a carpet of dry pine needles. These conditions fuel extreme fires. And while there's a lot of talk about what should be done, the reality is there's not enough money, manpower or urgency to complete the [mass retrofitting](#) needed to help older communities withstand the new normal.

The path forward should be clear, even if it's not easy. Of course, California should be doing much more, much faster to make communities resilient to wildfires. The state should stop sprawling in high fire-risk areas.

But these devastating wildfires should be a visceral reminder that the world has moved too slowly to stop climate change, and we are already feeling the effects of a warming planet. We can't stop the megafires of today, but with radical action to phase out fossil fuels and slash carbon emissions we can help prevent even greater devastation in the coming decades.

This story originally appeared in [Los Angeles Times](#).

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## Wildscaping

*Becky Miller-Cripps / UC Cooperative Extension*

In a conversation with my photographer son, we marveled at the indigenous and endemic—existing only in this area—plant species in California. He has camped and backpacked through Sequoia/Kings Canyon (Seki) National Park, amazed at the giant trees.

Sequoiadendron giganteum, the largest trees in the world, grow only in a narrow band along the western side of the north/central Sierra Nevada as far south as Tulare County. Coast redwoods, Sequoia sempervirens, grow only in foggy climates along the northern California and Oregon coast, or where there is sufficient summer rain.

So, too, rolling hillsides of oak savanna are characteristic of a specific elevation, climate, temperature and precipitation zone. Populated by blue, valley, black, white, coastal, canyon or interior live oaks, oak woodland is a sure indicator of native California landscape. The gold-brown hills with their dark-green-to-black bands of oaks provide unique California summer beauty.

In a University of California Division of Agriculture and National Resources report, the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program (now the UC Oaks program at UC Berkeley) states that Tuolumne County possesses 234,000 acres of oak woodland. Of the 41 California counties containing oak woodland, only 15 counties contain more oak acreage

than Tuolumne. However, in the last 45 years, 1 million acres of California oak woodland have fallen to development. Valley oaks, the largest of California oaks, with their graceful branches sweeping the ground, are endemic to California. According to *Trees and Shrubs of California*, "valley oak is considered an uncommon species, largely because of loss of habitat to agriculture and urbanization." Clearly, these species, indicators of the less-urban lifestyle we value in the foothills, are a resource we can't afford to squander.

Why, then, do we insist on destroying our unique foothill plants, only to replace them with exotics from other places requiring enormous amounts of water, fertilizer, and pesticides? Our family has a standing joke that development removes native plants and geologic features identifying an area, then names the replacement generic urban sprawl for whatever is no longer there!

A growing worldwide movement cherishes and protects remaining native habitat, landscaping our private spaces with native plants blending seamlessly into—not damaging or out competing—our native flora. This landscape ethic is referred to as wildscaping. According to "Audubon" writer Susan J. Tweit, wildscaping "aims to restore habitat and honor the character of the site by relying on indigenous plants and those nonnatives adapted to the local conditions and friendly to wildlife. It also avoids the use of pesticides, fertilizer, and supplemental water."

Check out the UC Oaks website: <https://oaks.cnr.berkeley.edu/>. You'll find ways to identify the oak trees on your property as well as determining whether your oak tree has a disease.

It's not necessary to plant lawn, vinca major, and ivy under your native oak trees. Not only are Bermuda grass, vinca and ivy invasive, escaping to strangle and replace our native plants, but the required water will someday kill that large oak tree. Consider alternatives such as bare ground or mulch under the oaks, a clump of native grass between two large rocks, or scatters of California poppies that don't require summer water.

If you prefer the more formal look of a hedge, consider planting one of the smaller Manzanita species. They have beautiful bark, flowers, berries, and branching form, but require no summer water once established.

To look at landscape ideas utilizing native California plants, go on-line to <https://www.bewaterwise.com/> and view their beautiful "Gardening with California Natives" page. This information is provided for Southern California residents, but is appropriate for and can be adapted to other California locations.

The next time you visit friends and family in the southland, consider taking a trip to the California Botanic Garden (formerly the Rancho Santa Ana Botanical Garden) in Claremont. It provides tours, classes, and information highlighting native plant species. Some of their ideas will surely work in your garden as well.

**Fire Safety Note:** Many California native species and non-invasive Mediterranean plants burn readily—adapted to a fire regime. In order to make them more fire safe, be vigilant in pruning out the deadwood that accumulates in the center and lower portions of plants like manzanita and rosemary

Rebecca Miller-Cripps is a University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener of Tuolumne County.

UCCE Master Gardeners of Calaveras and Tuolumne County can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or fill out our easy to use [Ask a Master Gardener of Tuolumne County](#) or [Ask a Master Gardener of Calaveras County](#) questionnaires. Check out our [UCCE Master Gardener website](#). You can also find us on [Tuolumne County Facebook](#) or [Calaveras County Facebook](#).

## **DYK:** Late fall is a great time to plant native species!

Early fall and summer are a bit too harsh for planting natives - but now is a perfect time to start planning your planting! Decide which species you want to plant where now, so that when late fall arrives and the rain returns, you are ready to put your plants in the ground. Buying from a local nursery promises your new plants are better adapted to the climate where you live. Make a plan now and enjoy the benefits of native plants for many years to come.

[An extensive list of native plant nurseries can be found here](#)



The Four Seasons nursery on the Tuolumne Me-Wuk reservation in Tuolumne carries a variety of California native plants, as well as plants they cultivate from seed collected locally!

# Rural counties see population losses the size of small towns, even as the minority groups grew

*Rick Rouan & Mike Stucka / USA Today / September 3, 2021*

Tom Martin remembers the clothing and jewelry stores, bakeries and pharmacies, restaurants and sundry shops that once lined the streets of Mt. Pulaski in Logan County, Illinois.

The uptown area of this central Illinois hilltop town was the center of a thriving rural community when Martin was growing up in the 1960's. But then people left.

From nearly 34,000 people in 1960, Logan County now is home to fewer than 28,000, according to the 2020 Census. Mt. Pulaski's only grocery store closed in 2016.

While America's cities and suburbs grew over the last decade, its rural areas continued a multi-decade trend of population losses, census data released this month show.

The new data paint a more diverse picture of the country's rural communities and punctuate the vulnerability where the urban-rural divide is growing. The U.S. Census Bureau has warned that comparing race data between the 2020 and 2010 census "should be made with caution" because of changes in the way it asked questions and later analyzed the data in the latest decennial count.

Ramifications from the shift don't stop at America's rural borders. They will be felt in state capitols and in Washington, D.C., as states use the data to draw new state legislative and congressional boundaries.

In the jigsaw puzzle of America, rural counties account for the majority of the 3,143 pieces. But the 46 million people who live in those places represent only about 13.7% of the U.S. population.

And it's getting smaller.

Two-thirds of America's rural counties lost population between 2010 and 2020, a USA TODAY analysis of census data released last month shows. Of the one-third that grew, most were buoyed by a faster-growing minority population.

The 2,300 people Logan County lost over the last decade is more than the number who still call Mt. Pulaski home. And Logan County isn't the only place that lost as many people as the population of entire towns.

“A lot of the amenities are not there, when you lose your grocery store and you don’t have daycare and you’ve lost all those things that used to be very locally based and run by people you knew,” said Martin, who returned in the early 1980s to join the family farming business. “You had families that were long-term business people. Now people travel outside the community.”

### **Rural America is shrinking**

The urban-rural population divide is a fissure growing wider each decade.

National population growth was at its most sluggish since the Great Depression between 2010 and 2020, weighed down by population loss in smaller counties. While most rural counties shrank over the last decade, more than 81% of large suburban counties increased population, and 91% of large urban counties grew.

USA TODAY used a classification system from the National Center for Health Statistics, reworked into smaller groups by the Pew Research Center, to determine which of the more than 3,000 U.S. counties were considered rural.

Rural counties lost about 288,000 people from 2010 to 2020, a decrease of about 6.2%, the USA TODAY analysis shows. Smaller metropolitan counties gained about 6.6 million people, up 7.1% for the decade.

The population divide between rural and urban counties is greatest in the large urban and suburban counties that were the biggest drivers of population growth in the 2020 census.

Large urban counties were the biggest gainers: 8.5 million more people live there, about 9.1% more than in 2010. Large suburban counties added 7.9 million people, an increase of about 10.3%.

University of New Hampshire professor Kenneth M. Johnson said it can be difficult to pinpoint why people are leaving rural areas.

Two factors are clear, he said: Only about a third of rural counties had more people move to them than leave, and less than half had more births than deaths. Younger people are leaving rural areas before they have children, he said, accelerating the decline.

In Indiana, for example, more people were moving out than moving in for 30 years, but its population still grew because of the Baby Boom, said Matthew Kinghorn, senior demographic analyst with the Indiana Business Research Center at Indiana University.

More recent generations aren’t having enough children to balance out the migration losses, he said.

The loss of economic opportunity, as farming became more mechanized and manufacturing jobs moved overseas, has contributed to the loss of young people in rural America too, Johnson said.

“Once it starts it’s hard for it to stop. The only thing that can stop it is if there’s an influx of immigrants or people from other places,” he said.

Increasing diversity was the overwhelming factor driving growth in rural counties where USA TODAY found a population increase. More than 99% showed increases in diverse populations, while about 60% showed losses of white non-Hispanic people.

One factor that could be driving migration of people of color and Hispanic populations to some rural counties, Johnson said, is job opportunity. Farms that have grown beyond the manageable size for a family and other tentacles of the agriculture industry, such as food processing plants, need workers, he said.

A turkey processing plant and furniture manufacturers have been factors in the growing Latino population in Dubois County, Indiana, said Donna Balka, chairman of the Latino Collaboration Table.

Dubois County is one of the rare rural counties population grew over the last decade. In that time, its Hispanic white population increased by nearly 65%, the Census data show, and is the single largest minority group in the county.

The Latino Collaboration Table was formed in 2015, in part to try to address the shifting needs of the local population, Balka said. Some schools in the county, for example, have begun offering some resources translated in Spanish and offering bilingual study times at the local library.

"We've seen this coming," Balka said.

### **‘Plugging the holes on Main Street’**

Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs Director Christopher Merrett calls rural population decreases a “wicked problem,” one so complicated that it’s hard to envision a solution. People leave rural areas for better jobs or because their town doesn’t have resources such as grocery stores or easy access to health care, and those institutions have fewer incentives to come to areas without a consistent customer base.

Officials in Mt. Pulaski talked to three grocery chains about opening a store in their town after a family-owned independent grocer closed in 2016, but Martin said they were told the town of less than 2,000 people was too small.

Working with the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Martin and others in Mt. Pulaski launched an idea for a community-owned grocery store. They raised \$120,000 in about 60 days and in June 2020 opened the store, which sells local produce and meat among other products, in the heart of uptown Mt. Pulaski.

The institute is part of Western Illinois University and acts as a clearinghouse for information about rural issues and works with agencies on projects to improve rural life.

It was the second store the institute helped establish, opening a similar operation in Winchester, a city of fewer than 50,000 people in Scott County, Illinois. Merrett said those and other “community support enterprises” the institute advocates for are “plugging the holes on Main Street.”

The store sits among some empty storefronts, but Martin said it is part of a longer-term plan to revitalize the town center. A pub serving local beer has opened nearby, and investors are working on plans for street-level businesses topped by apartments.

Officials also are developing a daycare center, Martin said, with before and after-school care likely to start in the fall before a full-fledged center can open next year.

Lacking infrastructure for health care, education, highspeed Internet and other amenities all have contributed to rural population declines, said Veronica Nigh, senior economist at the Farm Bureau, a lobbying group that represents the agriculture industry.

"People want access to the best things no matter where they are. If that perpetually isn't available in a rural place it makes it harder to stay," she said.

The COVID-19 pandemic that forced people to work from home and schools to shift to remote classrooms also further exposed inequities in access to highspeed Internet in rural communities, she said.

In Athens, Ohio, broadband providers mostly run to homes on slowercopper wires instead of fiber optic cables, Mayor Steve Patterson said. The southeast Ohio county, home to Ohio University, has about 62,400 people now, down about 2,300 people over the decade, according to the census. But Patterson questioned whether city counts were depressed by the pandemic.

Patterson said he wants to attract new residents whose employers continue to allow remote work after being forced to adapt during the pandemic. He calls them "digital commuters."

He plans to use federal funding to extend fiber networking to city buildings, including an armory near the heart of uptown Athens that he wants to convert into a co-working space with highspeed Internet.

Patterson acknowledges that his city is insulated from some of the problems plaguing other rural communities. Health care facilities are attracted to the area by the prospect of working with Ohio University's medical school. University-linked cultural programming and public services such as the courthouse attract people, who support business in the area.

Rural communities with reliable Internet, options to purchase food in town, good school districts and access to health care are in the best position to succeed, said Sean Park, a program manager at Western Illinois University who helped set up the grocery store in Mt. Pulaski.

"Those communities are the ones that are going to sustain themselves and the others, I think, will disappear," Park said.

This article originally appeared on USA TODAY: [Census shows rural America continues to shrink, but grow in diversity](#)

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# A wildfire took my home. Trust me, California needs to stop dreaming about rising from the ashes

Howard Hendrix / *SF Chronicle* / September 5, 2021

 **A pyrocumulonimbus cloud from the Creek Fire rises over the Sierra National Forest last September.**

A pyrocumulonimbus cloud from the Creek Fire rises over the Sierra National Forest last September. Thalia Dockery

By noon of Sept. 5, 2020, the cloud rising into the stratosphere above the Creek Fire looked like the spawn of a nuclear detonation's mushroom and an enormous angry [Boltzmann brain](#). The experts called it pyrocumulonimbus. To those of us who could see it from our road, it was the burning breath of wildfire, the dragon in the land.

Just two days later, that dragon would take my home in Pine Ridge, most of our forest and most of our community.

When you know a sleeping dragon lives in your neighborhood, you learn its lore and take precautions against its waking. Over the years we lived in Pine Ridge, we learned about how the millions of trees killed by bark beetles during drought serve to feed the beast. We learned about forest management issues involving fire suppression (a la Smokey the Bear) and “too many stems per acre.” We learned about California's overstretched firefighting resources, drought and climate change (though this last was too often dismissed as a hoax by many of our neighbors).

Our community prided itself on lessening such risks, through its enduring efforts to reduce and mitigate fire hazards. These efforts ranged from fuel breaks and defensible space, to house hardening, to the formation of our own volunteer fire department. My wife and I labored to remove the beetle-killed trees from our property. Most of our neighbors did the same.

Perhaps in the back of our minds we all believed that the wildfires we knew were coming would somehow always be someone else's catastrophe. After all, our forest hadn't burned in recorded memory. It was so historically resistant to wildfire that a local U.S. Forest Service officer called the area “the Asbestos Forest” (after the notoriously carcinogenic but undeniably effective flame retardant).

Yet the Creek Fire was so extreme, so unprecedented in its behavior — flames of 100 to 200 feet, 60 mph winds, firebrands big as basketballs able to leap 400-foot wide fire lines in a single bound — that it overwhelmed all our defenses.

The Asbestos Forest burned. And our homes burned along with it.

We took solace in the fact that no firefighters or civilians died in the carnage. The devastation the fire left behind, however, made more than a few of us question the broader utility of our many efforts to make our



area “fire safe.” Some like myself even came to doubt the feasibility of continuing to reside in the wildland-urban interface.

Raising such questions did not make me or others of similar mind popular. Throughout the burn scar, displaced residents planted American flags on the ruins of their homes, perhaps to symbolize that, though they were down, they weren’t out.

In areas that did not burn, we saw many homemade signs thanking first responders (which, as long-time volunteer firefighters, my wife and I much appreciated). We also saw waves of slickly produced #MountainStrong banners and signs on which “Resilience” and “Rebuild” were the most commonly recurring words.

But what does that actually mean?

“Rebuilding” certainly means money for the building trades, resort property developers, real estate agents and other local businesses. “Resilience” means salvage-logging thousands of acres of burned but merchantable trees, as well as additional tree-thinning and replanting work, for the timber industry. Making a fortune out of other people’s misfortunes is a situation as old as that classic proverb, “It’s an ill wind that blows no one any good.”

Overall, though, the clear majority in our community brought up resilience and rebuilding from a place of openheartedness, kindness and compassion. They were devastated. They were willing to do whatever it took to make their community as close as they could to what it was before. Anything less was to admit defeat.

Yet, no matter how kindly meant, the rhetoric of resilience as “bouncing back” — as adapting the new situation to fit the old system — functions viscerally and emotionally to shut down discussion and debate.

Sometimes, when some things change, there’s no going back, no matter how hard you try. Even if you don’t want to talk about it.

Filling the silence where those conversations should be, the science is clear: warmer, drier post-fire climate and more frequent reburning of the landscape by high-severity wildfire is altering what grows back.

Throughout the American West, ponderosa pine forests are giving way to oak scrub (which also burns). Our landscapes are transforming, with some uncontrollable impacts to local economies, wildlife and watersheds. The forests as we once knew them will not bounce back to the way they were. Not as they were before the Creek Fire in our modest community of Pine Ridge, not as they were before the Caldor Fire, as it rips through the more affluent tourist destination of Lake Tahoe.

As Parul Sehgal once wrote of the Phoenix myth: “Why rise from the ashes without asking why you had to burn?”

The dragon too easily leaps the fuel breaks now. Homes burn. More and more of the owners - lowballed by insurance adjusters or having discovered that their policy’s inflation rider didn’t ride far enough — cannot rebuild on their ashes. Their pockets just aren’t deep enough. In the long-run that decrease in fire country housing may prove a good thing. But it’s unarguably tragic now.

Real resilience, however, requires honest discussion about the transformational changes under way in our forests. Only in that way can people — especially would-be rebuilders whose time and money are often in

short supply — make informed and transformative decisions about the future, rather than reflexive and emotional ones.

Fantasies about the dragon of wildfire and the phoenix of resilience are more powerful than ever. But it's time to demythologize both of them and live in reality.

Howard Hendrix is president of the Highway 168 Fire Safe Council as well as a long-time firefighter with the Pine Ridge Volunteer Fire Department. Originally trained as a biologist, he teaches literature and writing at Fresno State.

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## Our future on a hotter planet means more climate disasters happening simultaneously

*Dan Charles / NPR / September 2, 2021*

While the Gulf Coast and the Northeast struggle with flooding and power outages, it's easy to forget that wildfires are still raging in the West.

It's a taste of a future when simultaneous disasters grow more common, according to the [latest global report on climate science](#). Hurricanes, wildfires and torrential rain that triggers flooding are all amplified by heat, and the planet is getting hotter. Emergency managers are preparing for that future right now. They're hoping to speed up the pace of disaster response and also move people and critical infrastructure out of harm's way.

Craig Fugate, former administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, says it's clear to him that natural disasters are happening more often. "I've been doing this for over 30 years. I can remember when FEMA had really big disasters maybe every four or five years. Not every year. Certainly not multiple [disasters] in one year," he says.

Government [statistics](#) show that in the 1980s, there were fewer than four billion-dollar disasters driven by extreme weather annually, on average. The past five years have seen more than 12 such disasters each year. The damage totals are adjusted for inflation.

That has happened as the planet has warmed by almost 2 degrees Fahrenheit compared with the late-1800s. Average temperatures could rise another 2 degrees by 2100, and even more if countries fail to cut their greenhouse gas emissions.

Scientists generally avoid blaming climate change for a specific event like Hurricane Ida, since similar hurricanes have also occurred in the past. The most recent [report](#) from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change instead adopts the language of probability. It

says, for instance, that rainfall so heavy that it used to happen just once every decade in the pre-industrial era is now likely to occur 30% more often, and 70% more often in a world that has warmed by 2 degrees Celsius, or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit. The storms will also grow more intense.

The frequency of extreme heat waves could also jump more than fivefold, according to the report. Heat waves and drought can dry out the land, making it more vulnerable to wildfire.

Erin Coughlan de Perez, a researcher at Tufts University's Feinstein International Center, who also works with the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, says emergency managers around the world are focused on that future. "It's a big deal, right? If your job is disasters, and disasters are becoming more frequent, you've got a problem."

The first problem is simply shortages of people and money. Coughlan de Perez saw this a few years ago when a big flood was predicted for Bangladesh at a time when international aid agencies were focused on the war in Syria.

"People were saying, 'You know, you might have a forecast for flooding in Bangladesh, but we really can't divert our attention right now,' " she says. "Which was really kind of scary. And you see this all the time."

Also, one disaster quickly disappears from the headlines when the next one hits. As a result, people who still need a lot of help getting back on their feet can feel abandoned. Fugate says that's a danger right now for communities in Louisiana that were hit by hurricanes just last year.

"I was getting messages from people saying, 'I hope they don't forget about us. We have not rebuilt, and we still have places that haven't been repaired,'" he says.

Fugate and others say that the quickening pace of natural disasters demands changes in emergency response. For one thing, recovery efforts have to move faster, to keep up.

Samantha Montano, who teaches emergency management at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy, says that some aid currently gets slowed to a crawl by complicated paperwork that's supposed to prevent waste and fraud. "Obviously that's important, but when those measures prevent people from getting the help that they need, then something is wrong and something needs to change," she says.

Even more important, they say, is acting ahead of time to get people and critical infrastructure out of harm's way. "We've got to reduce the impacts" of extreme events like hurricanes, Fugate says. That can mean upgrading building codes, requiring sturdier buildings and, in some places, burying power lines. Those measures can be expensive.

Persuading people to move out of flood zones can be painful. But Montano says such measures can avoid more pain down the road.

Extreme weather by itself isn't the problem, she says. "It's when that hurricane comes ashore and meets a community that is living in poverty or doesn't have strong-enough building codes or doesn't have enough boats to do search and rescue — that's when it becomes a disaster," she says.

Coughlan de Perez says communities all over the world are trying to do this. But it's really hard to get ready for the dangers of a warming world "because we haven't seen it, right? So our past understanding of the world, based on our lived experience, is no longer a good predictor of our current risk and our future risk."

But with sea levels rising and hot summers turning forests into kindling, many people are realizing that places they thought were safe may now be vulnerable.

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## Sierra Nevada Conservancy Funding Opportunities Newsletter for September/ October



*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.*

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*The Iceberg after the 2018 Donnell Fire(c) [yosemitenorthphotography.com](http://yosemitenorthphotography.com)*

## ***The Broken Ground***

***By Wendell Berry***

The opening out and out,  
body yielding body:  
the breaking  
through which the new  
comes, perching above its shadow  
on the piling up  
darkened broken old  
husks of itself:  
bud opening to flower  
opening to fruit opening  
to the sweet marrow  
of the seed—

taken  
from what was, from  
what could have been.  
What is left  
is what is.

From COLLECTED POEMS, 1985, North Point Press

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