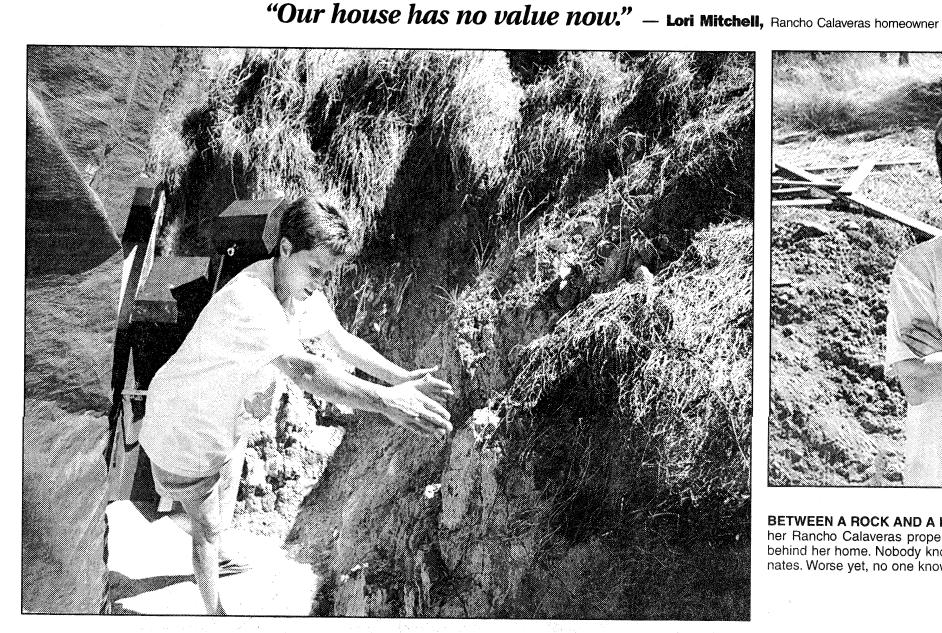
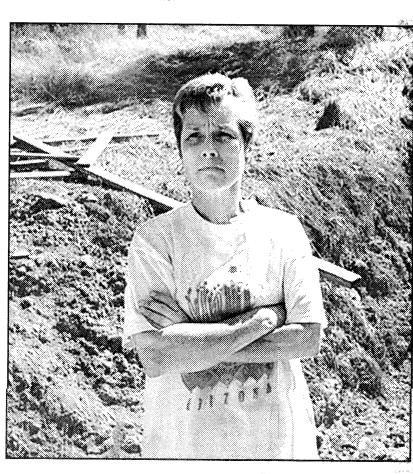
The Record





BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE: Lori Mitchell stands on her Rancho Calaveras property, where raw sewage is leaking from behind her home. Nobody knows quite where the sewage flow originates. Worse yet, no one knows how to stop it.

# Rancho Calaveras subdivision defines crisis

■ Leaking sewage makes dream a nightmare for some residents

By Richard Hanner

When it was created, Rancho Calaveras was promoted as a slice of foothill paradise. It held forests of oak and buckeye, fields of golden grass, sprinklings of wildflow-

the flow just after moving into her The development boasted miles of hiking trails and seven shim-

mering lakes. It boasted, too, the promise of a leisurely lifestyle far

Rancho Calaveras, it seemed, would be a place where lucky homeowners could make the California dream a reality.

Their dream property has

That's because raw sewage is leaking onto their property. It emerges as a milky-blue ooze from a rocky shelf behind their home. Nobody knows where the stinking flow originates. And nobody knows quite what to do

"Our house has no value now," said Lori Mitchell, who discovered

She and her husband are fighting Calaveras County, claiming the county should have prevented the from the madding crowds and problem through better planning the subdivision-development busi- Infrastructure in the hills is especongestion of the cities to the and inspections. County officials,

Developed by Boise-Cascade in monly referred to by locals, is Rancho Calaveras.

among the biggest subdivisions in

It is not, say residents and planners alike, among the best planned. Septic problems have driven some residents out. Traffic congestion has increased, but money to provide improvements

Hiking and horse trails have been abandoned. Several lakes envisioned as community jewels have dried up or become choked

A spokesman for Boise-Cascade declined to comment at length on the infrastructure needs of

"Boise-Cascade has been out of ness since 1972," said Dave cially expensive — and revenues general counsel. "There are very few people here now who were the 1960s, "Rancho," as it is com- connected in any way with

imperfect example

Rancho Calaveras, say some planners and public officials, reflects the planning — or lack of it — that has defined growth in many parts of the Sierra foothills. Thousands of new homes have been allowed to go up, and new residents allowed to move in, without adequate streets or sewers or parks or fire or police protec-

"There was a kind of a naivete at work for many years. A sense taken care of," said James Coyne, who was appointed to the Calaveras County Planning Commission earlier this year. But it was not all taken care of.

More rocks must be blasted aside, more earth moved to make way for utility lines and roads. Yet

There are fewer factories and corporate headquarters to enrich city or county coffers. Instead, what have risen in the foothills have been homes, either solitary ranchettes on a few acres or vast subdivisions such as Rancho

"But they haven't paid their own way," said Russ Evitt, a former Amador County supervisor. "They may pay some of the upfront costs for new streets and sewers. But what about the costs for maintaining them? What about police protection and parks and a Those are the hidden costs that,

swiftest growth in the foothills has been in El Dorado, Nevada and Placer counties. But many landuse experts say the next 20 years compared to the tax base in will bring a similar surge into

still a big question — where are

they going to get the water?"

300 homes, you still have to have

Some critics of Shenandoah

Springs, which would be built

near the junction of Highways 16,

Amador, Calaveras and Tuolumne

And they say those counties must plan now - or accept increasingly clogged roads, crowded schools, and strained water

Some Placer County leaders wish they had taken stronger

A study in 1992 showed the county needed \$100 million to catch up and build new jail cells, government offices and other

The county did not have the money and still doesn't. "Our experience here has

infrastructure," said Fred Yeager, Yet there are signs that the Mother Lode counties are already

Please see SUBDIVISION, SR8

shown very clearly that it is never

too early to think about providing

"I don't think you could come up with a single plus." — Gary Colburn, Plymouth resident

# Huge development planned for small town

Shenandoah Springs would nearly double Plymouth

By Francis P. Garland

PLYMOUTH — Gary Colburn can't think of a single good thing that might come from 300 new homes springing up and practically doubling the size of this quiet Gold Country town. John C. Andreason can't see how a town like this can survive

and have any hopes of prospering

without growth, as long as it pays

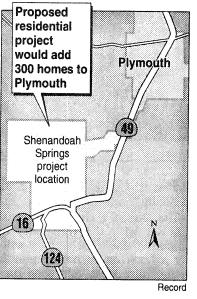
its own way. At the crux of their disagreement is a bold proposal known as Shenandoah Springs — a mixeduse development whose plans call for 300 homes, 12 acres of open space and parks, an 11-acre vil-

lage center with shops and medical clinics and two job centers. Colburn and Andreason, both longtime Plymouth residents. aren't alone in their disagreement. But just how many residents are for and against the proposed development won't be known until next month, when an advisory measure appears on the ballot. The debate over Shenandoah

Springs contains elements that can be found in virtually any discussion about growth in the Is it better, as the Sierra Business Council report contends, for towns to grow by adding new

homes to existing neighborhoods and building new neighborhoods adjacent to existing towns? hundreds of homes, commercial

centers and the infrastructure course to go with commercial and



needed to serve them a better way to handle the tide of growth that forecasters predict is coming

Not the size that counts

Terri Bailey, chairwoman of the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors, said in general she supports the concept of a "masterlanned" development. Such a development, known as Flowers Ranch, is in the works near Copperopolis.

Shenandoah Springs will never get off the ground, even if residents approve the advisory measure on annexing the 655 acres needed to make the development a part of

recently, plans for Shenandoah Springs had called for 800 homes and a 200-acre golf



to the Mother Lode?

Some say it's not the size or location but the quality of the development that is the key.

DOWNTOWN: Plymouth is quiet on a weekday. But opment planned for a site near the junction of that could change if Shenandoah Springs, a devel- Highways 16, 49 and 124, is built. professional office space. Only within the last two weeks convinced have planners for the property

owners — the Putnam family of Woodside — announced the project was being scaled back.

Old plan 'a dinosaur' Gary Clark, Amador County's land-use agency director, called

the old Shenandoah Springs pro-

posal "a dinosaur" because it survive with 300 homes because would have cost too much to of its rural appeal. "But there's

Clark said he doesn't see developments much larger than 100 asked Clark. "Whether it's 800 or homes ever coming to fruition in Amador County — and only in areas where nearby services can

be extended. But he said if the upfront development costs can be kept in check, Shenandoah Springs could ple of "leapfrog" development, by a narrow strip. Colburn and others say even with 300 homes and no golf course, Shenandoah Springs could

the existing city of Plymouth -

leave this sleepy town of woodframe and masonry buildings, a small City Hall and park fiscally bankrupt because residential development doesn't pay the bills. "I don't think there's any type of development that size — you're

talking about dropping a Rancho Murieta down inside our city limits — that could benefit anyone living here right now," Colburn said. "I don't think you could come up with a single plus."

## Neighbors agree

Susan Bragstad, the mayor of nearby Amador City, won't argue. She fears the development would trigger traffic, air quality and water problems, and would degrade the surroundings that draw so many visitors to the area. Bragstad would prefer to see growth occur at a much slower rate. Amador City, for example, grows at a snail's pace, perhaps adding one or two new homes a year which Bragstad said is just

Andreason, though, doesn't see 'Small cities like Plymouth are

like small businesses," he said. "There is a size necessary for the overhead of city government to be tax base than a small city like Plymouth currently has in order to favorably affect the public facilities. That's why I favor some entrepreneurs with 15 to 25 employees development, as long as it can carry the net cost of the addi-

tional improvements like sewers, Please see PLYMOUTH, SR8

# Lode mines jobs from tourism

## New economy works on service, commuting

By Francis P. Garland Lode Bureau Chief

here's an economic revolution under way in the Sierra

The region made famous for the wealth mined from its generous ground and harvested from its verdant forests is steadily moving away from its reliance on resource-based industries.

Taking hold is a new economy grounded in a surging demand for jobs catering to new settlers who commute to distant employment centers, or jobs that serve the needs of weekend tourists who make the foothills a year-round playground. And then there is the increasing number of telecommuting "lone eagles" who make up a quasiunderground labor sector.

Will this new economy open the door for 24-hour convenience stores, fast-food franchises and other hallmarks of suburban sprawl? Can it provide jobs that sustain families and generate the taxes local governments need to provide services? Many who live and work in the region

say the success of the emerging economy will depend on how well they protect the You can have your olive-oil boutiques

and rock-climbing adventure tours, they say. But there's also room for more traditional resource-based jobs without clearcutting, hydraulic mining and other methods that have scarred the land. The signs of the changing economy are

Job hubs like the former Georgia-Pacific sawmill in Martell are closing. And new agritourist attractions, such as the multimillion-dollar Kautz Ironstone Vineyards near Murphys, are opening. Two regional ski resorts — Kirkwood and

Dodge Ridge — are planning expansions Added to the fluid economic picture is the flight of "lone eagles." The eagles are independent techno-consultants and contract workers who have found they can survive, and even thrive, by soaring beyond the big city and feathering new foothills nests with modems and multiple megabytes of RAM.

The eagles are a fairly new phenomenon. But as it becomes more acceptable to travel to work via fiber-optic cable than on concrete and asphalt, those eagles — in concert with the growing tourism and recreation industries could help jump-start a Mother Lode economy stunted by the closure of mills, mines and other industries in recent

As the foothill counties grow and attract more residents, the key to economic prosperity will be how well — and how quickly — they can diversify, said Ron Mittelbrunn, executive director of the Amador Economic Development Corp.

### **Diversify economy** Relying on one major economic engine

to pull an entire community won't cut it in the 21st century. Amador County learned as much earlier this year when more than 200 people lost their jobs after Georgia-Pacific sold its Martell operations to Sierra Pacific Industries in a \$320 million transaction.

Dozens of families are still trying to recover from the sawmill's closure at the end of March. "It's been devastating," said LaRynn Beard, whose husband, Ron, was among those who lost their jobs. "He lost his retirement, he lost his benefits. He lost that security.'

Although the shutdown left some scrambling, it did not prove as devastating as first feared, according to a task force that looked at the mill closure and studied what steps could be taken to

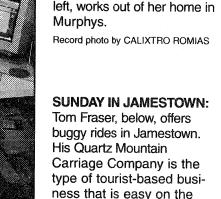
Mittelbrunn and others in the Mother Lode say they don't expect an influx of high-tech job centers like those that have invaded Gold Country counties to the north. There, firms such as Intel, Hewlett Packard and NEC have set up shop in It was the quality of life that attracted recent years, providing hundreds of jobs him up here. Personally, I felt my life had

But those areas have transportation advantages that Amador, Calaveras and Tuolumne counties do not have. There are no multilane Highway 50s or Interstate 80s here, said Kathy Zancanella, immediate past president of the Calaveras don't lock your doors. And I don't hit a County Economic Development Company's board of directors. "That's one thing businesses look for, a

good transportation system," she said. "And our roads need help. They are probably what has stagnated our growth to a

Even without major freeways, the Mother Lode could be fertile ground for some light industry, particularly those that piggyback off the success of the NECs and Hewlett Packards and supply "It's the support firms — the small

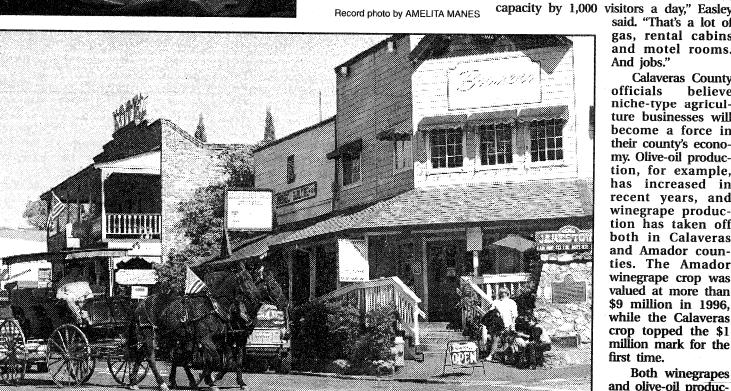
that we'd like to target and attract," Mittelbrunn said. "But we want to do it without ruining our rural character and our quality of life.



LONE EAGLE: Using her

computer, Kate Reynolds,

have the potential for even more growth. type of tourist-based busi-She also pointed to the \$2 million ness that is easy on the planned expansion at Dodge Ridge. "That could increase the ski area's



## "I think a lot of our jobs will be based on the tourism industry ... restaurants, travel agents, retail sales, hotels, service industries in general."

It's the quality of life here that has Do I want to go back to that world?' I attracted new residents and businesses to the foothills in recent years. Take long denim pinafore and sandals. And Pneucon Manufacturing, which since 1989 I'm thinking: 'Not likely.' has made pneumatic air valves in a plant near Valley Springs. The company had East Bay city with its share of urban problems, said Brian Miner, a company

"The quality of life was low," Miner

said. "The owner bought 500 acres outside Valley Springs and said let's move up. come to an end when I was transferred." But Miner made the move, found a nice home in Paloma and discovered the

quality of life is better. "The crime rate's lower," he said, "and you don't worry about your car being stolen and you single stoplight on my way to work."

one of the so-called "Lone Eagles," said

### 'Lone Eagles' work at home Kate Reynolds, a Murphys resident and

she has come to appreciate those qualities and others since arriving in 1994. Revnolds has done economic development work for 20 years and formerly served as executive vice president of the California Association for Local Economic Development. Recently, she fielded a Sacramento job offer and found herself veighing a return to the fast-paced busi-

"I was walking through Nordstrom, looking at suits," she recalled. "I'm thinking: 'I've traveled around, I've been there.

looked down. I'm in a white blouse, a That's because Reynolds can sit at

Terri Bailey, Calaveras County supervisor

home in Murphys with a "modem and a machine" and do her contract work. In a sense, she said, she and others like her are no different from those who punch a clock in a conventional work setting. "It's a different kind of service sector, but there's a significant number of peo

ple making money working that way. It's a guieter economy. Larry Busby, executive director of the Central Sierra Economic Development District, said it's difficult to estimate the

number of lone eagles living in the

"We've tried to identify them," he said. "But they do their own things, and it's basically like an underground economy." Reynolds said Calaveras County and the foothills attract workers like her

because they're drawn to the natural beauty and the slower pace of life. That's what attracted Ross King. Like Reynolds, King had been living in

an urban setting, in the Bay Area, before he and his wife, Dianne, began looking for a place in the country. What they found was their own personal paradise on 51 acres near Pioneer, in Amador County, where King can do his market research for companies in the semicon-He said his clients had no problem

with him abandoning the Bay Area for conducts business on his home comput-

towns like Murphys into tourist magnets. Officials say tourism can boost a local economy. "It brings money in without taking a lot away in terms of services, schools, fire protection and hospitals," Reynolds said. "But tourist-related jobs generally are lower paying, and they're seasonal. And they're much more vulnerable to state, national and regional eco-

restaurants and shops are converting

er and doesn't seem to be any worse off

for it. "I'm working on the other side of

Not everyone, though, can be a lone

eagle. That's why economic development

groups continue to work at bringing in

new business and industry and helping

Terry Easley, executive director of the

Economic Development Company of

Tuolumne County, said the electronics

and industrial die-mold businesses have

gained a foothold in recent years and

said. "That's a lot of

gas, rental cabins

and motel rooms.

Calaveras County

niche-type agricul-

their county's econo-

has increased in

recent years, and

tion has taken off

both in Calaveras

ties. The Amador

while the Calaveras

Both winegrapes

and olive-oil produc-

tion dovetail nicely

with the burgeoning

its way through the

Mother Lode. Not

attracting boaters,

ers and outdoors-

men, but new winer-

waterways

first time.

the world, virtually speaking," he said. "I

can't imagine living any other way."

existing businesses expand.

## Tourism important sector

Terri Bailey, chairwoman of the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors, said tourism will continue to shoulder a large share of the economic load. "I know the county wants to become active in computers and possibly getting some assembly plants here," she said, "but I don't know if that's realistic.

"I think a lot of our jobs will be based on the tourism industry and by that I mean restaurants, travel agents, retail sales, hotels, service industries in gener-

The growth in service-sector jobs in the Mother Lode in recent years has been staggering. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis, the number of those jobs in Amador and Calaveras counties nearly doubled between 1980 and 1990 and grew by another 23 percent between

The service jobs are, by and large, environmentally friendly, said Ciro Toma, an Amador County developer and memthe Amador County upcountry. Now, he ber of the local economic development



**SERVING TOURISTS:** Lisa Moser pours wine at the Kautz Ironstone Vineyards in Murphys. The Lode economy

"They're clean," he said. "And generally speaking they're better paying than the retail-type jobs. But they're dependent on people to serve."

Tourist-related jobs also can be rela said, particularly if they're clustered in a small area. Murphys, for example, has a half-dozen wineries in close proximity, so tourists can make a day or a weekend of it without "driving all over the hills," as

new job sources, one old reliable — timber — struggles to survive as a viable economic force. And another even older, reliable — gold mining — is attempting

## **Gold mining returns**

In Amador County, the Sutter Gold Mining Co. is working to amend a conditional use permit that would open the gates to the Lincoln Mine - an underground mining and processing facility that also would include a visitor's center to cater to tourists.

Michael Sweeney of the Sutter Gold Mining Co. said the project eventually would provide between 110 and 130 jobs The company hopes to start crushing rock sometime next year - the 150th anniversary of the discovery of gold in

Gold isn't the only thing in the ground worth mining, according to Mittelbrunn of the Amador Economic Development Corp. He said an effort is under way to woo manufacturers interested in tapping the millions of tons of clay and other

minerals in Amador County. Already. Amador County is home to about a dozen mines that extract lignite sand, gravel, clay and other materials. "We've got products used in everything from floor tile to roofing granules to road

base," Mittelbrunn said. While Sweeney and Mittelbrunn look underground, those whose hearts and wallets reside in the forest will continue

to debate the merits of cutting trees. Despite government regulations that have resulted in reductions in cutting in the Stanislaus National Forest in recent years, Easley said: "The timber industry is not going away. It's shifting, changing

Even the environmental community ecognizes the importance of the industry and the need to keep it healthy, although some say its importance to the overall economy and job scene has been exag-

"No one in the conservation community is trying to stop the timber industry from continuing to be an important part of the socioeconomics of this region," said John Buckley of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center.

However, Buckley said, many in the timber industry overstate the impact that reductions in logging on the Stanislaus National Forest have had on the job market. Statistics from the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis aren't specific as to the location of timber jobs. But the numbers show that in Tuolumne County, the amount of forestry, agricultural services and related industry jobs actually has increased from 153 in 1985 to 288 in 1990 and 310 in 1994.

Those statistics are challenged, though by Easley and a nonprofit group called the Tuolumne County Alliance for Resources and Environment.

Ginger Armstrong, spokeswoman for the group, said numerous jobs have been lost due to the cutback in logging, but they don't fall under the timber heading. She said when a mill closes or logging slows, it affects truck drivers, machineryrepair workers, the corner grocery and even the bank.

"We've lost 550 jobs in the last two or three years and most of them were family wage jobs," Armstrong said. "That's had a major impact on our economy. And that's a big concern for us."











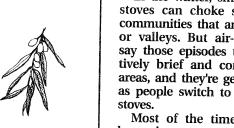
Mimulus whipplei











"We have severely reduced the ability of the landscape to hold (flood) water." — Pete Bell, Foothill Conservancy

# Erosion threatens Lode watersheds

## Precious water fuels more dreams than gold

**By Jim Nickles** 

Rich Hunter and Bob Stack are looking for bugs in the mud. Overturning rocks, then pushing a net into the crystalline water of Rose Creek to collect what they've stirred up, they find caddis-fly larvae, mayflies, stoneflies and tiny mud-dwellers known as water pen-

"These are the canaries in the coal mine," Stack said, holding up a handful of squiggling aquatic createm that supports a variety of fish, birds and mammals — and, not incidentally, much of the California

Biologists with the Sierra Watershed Health Assessment Project, Hunter and Stack are trying to find out how the creek's tiniest inhabitants have been affected by a recent dousing of herbicides in a government-sponsored reforestation

It's too soon to tell, they say.

### Rose Creek not so rosy But Rose Creek itself looks pretty

A tributary of the Stanislaus River in Tuolumne County, it's in a denuded canyon east of Sonora that's been logged, grazed, criss-crossed with roads and burned in a forest fire. Stripped of vegetation, the hillsides looming above it unleashed tons of rocks and mud during last winter's floods.

"The erosion problems are really significant in these watersheds,"

Along one stretch of Rose Creek,

rocks and a huge tangle of dead flooding in the Central Valley.

the barren channel is covered with

remodeled," Stack said. "All of this is

Streams overburdened

much more water development.

degraded streams can't support

"At this time, dams and diversions

environment in the Sierra Nevada,"

Hunter said. "Any addition to that

Instead, many environmentalists

For 150 years, the Sierra Nevada's streams and rivers have fueled the California dream.

Water is the Sierra's most valuable commodity, with an average annual value to California cities and farms of nearly \$1.4 billion, say scientists who recently concluded a comprehensive study of the range's environmental health

But they also found evidence that caused primarily by the fire and the ies by the state Department of the source of so much bounty is in massive storm."

At a time when many foothill Creek and other Sierra streams raises questions about their ability to meet a growing demand for water statewide and among the fast-grow- are the biggest single factor for the ing communities of the Mother

The rivers and deep canyons are would be a problem." the most degraded habitats in the Sierra Nevada, said scientists who and scientists are calling for reform worked on the federally sponsored of the Sierra's existing network of



ON ROSE CREEK: Biologist Bob Stack searches Rose Creek for bugs in Sierra Watershed Health Assessment Project. And the tiny creatures he the mud, which he will study to determine if the water insects have been is searching for are vital to the Sierra's health because they support an

affected by a recent dousing of herbicides. Stack is a biologist with the entire ecosystem. They're either under water — that flows for fish and recreation. They tor, who foresees a 7,000 acre-foot eral manager of the Tuolumne is, at the bottom of giant reservoirs also advocate fixing the upper deficit in his county by 2020, at - polluted, clogged with sediment, watersheds - the high-country invaded by non-native species or streams, meadows and hillsides

"The dry years are the critical otherwise dried up by water diver- where the water originates - which they say will improve water supplies, An acre-foot, about 325,000 galprovide more freshwater flows to the lons, is about what two families use Delta and even reduce the threat of

Though few specific projects are But the foothill counties are in in the works, many foothill officials and water managers say their only Without additional supplies, much sediment that's been flushed down of the region will be short of water from the hillside. ... This erosion is by the year 2020, according to stud-

many options," said Chris Williams, Water Resources. Under drought executive director of the Mountain conditions, the annual shortages Counties Water Resources Associcould range from 3,900 acre-feet in ation, which represents water Amador County to 13,300 acre-feet providers from Yuba to Mariposa in Tuolumne County, say departcounties. "We need surface ... onment studies that compared growth stream storage to meet our future patterns and water availability in needs.'

In Tuolumne County, officials As a whole, the three Mother don't have any big plans for Rose Lode counties - Amador, Tuolumne Creek. But they are eyeing the overand Calaveras - will be short all Stanislaus River watershed, of 28,400 acre-feet of water in a dry which Rose Creek is a part.

The South Fork of the Stanislaus If anything, the numbers are too should have sufficient flow to meet conservative, said Rod Schuler, water demands well into the next Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project. dams to assure more downstream Amador County's public-works direc- century, said Tim McCullough, gen-

Utilities District. But that water will have to be captured, stored and delivered, possibly by enlarging Pacific Gas and Electric Co.'s Lyons

"Up here, I think there is adequate water to accommodate growth. But that water has to be developed," McCullough said.

Under longstanding state laws known as the "area of origin" statutes, the mountain counties have been assured of enough water to accommodate their growth. But they must have the facilities to use the water, officials said.

Bill Dunn, a director of the Calaveras County Water District. which is seeking new supplies on both the Stanislaus and Mokelumne Building new projects, however,

raises a host of questions, not only about their environmental cost but whether they are feasible physically or financially. wildlife, and it's not friendly to people," said Joe Boss, asset manager for Please see EROSION, SR8 Nearon Enterprises, developer of the

> planned with swaths of oak woodlands and restored ponds and creeks. Where roads cross wildlife areas, the

> nels so foxes and coyotes aren't hit by "We can go listen to the frogs or the ducks quacking," Boss said. "We

But environmentalists and scientists worry that not enough is being done

In the Copperopolis area alone, what were 2,800 residents in 1990 could swell to more than 16,000 residents if and when several subdivisions, either under construction or planned, are completed.

Buckley said Saddle Creek's wildlife corridors are "a narrow strip between ... where the houses are going to be and the golf course. The quality of the habitat compared to what was there before the development will be pretty questionable."

He pointed to tule-lined marshes, many of which had been drained decades ago to provide water for

"We put back in place quite a few of the natural springs and wetlands that were there (before grazing)," he

The foothill belt from the brown, rolling savannahs just above the deer herd of the whole Sierra basi-Central Valley to the lower conifer cally wintering in the foothills and forests - from, say, the elevation of the edge of the foothills. This is a Oakdale to Calaveras Big Trees State critical piece of ground for a lot of Park — plays a key role in the sur- deer," said Banky Curtis, regional vival of a variety of species.

crucial to the health of the Sierra," said Jane Baxter, director of Range Watch, a conservation group seeking Valley, such as the blunt-nosed leopto reform federal grazing policies. ard lizard. "It's that buffer belt between the Central Valley and the coniferous (species') range, but it was all that Sierra Nevada. ... It's a tremendous- was left," said David Graber, senior ly rich interface where the two habi-scientist at Sequoia and Kings

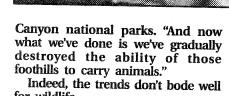


grounds for birds and mammals that spend the summer higher up. Deer, black bears and mountain lions use stream corridors and ridgelines to move between lower elevations and the high country. "You have the whole migratory

Fish and Game.

wildlife forced out of the Central

"It wasn't the center of the

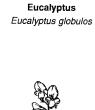


A handful of Sierra species, such

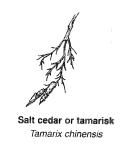
as the grizzly bear and the condor,

Of 86 species of mammals, reptiles, almost past retrieving."











**ENDANGERED** SIERRA ANIMALS



Great gray ow

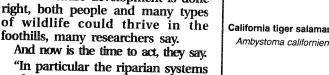


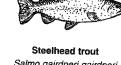












# Valley smog creeping into Sierra foothills

year, a 25 percent shortfall.

each county.

something of a pickle over water.

## Pollution can take a toll on sensitive plants

By Jim Nickles Record Staff Writer

Every afternoon during the warm months of the year, a yellowish brown haze builds up in the Central

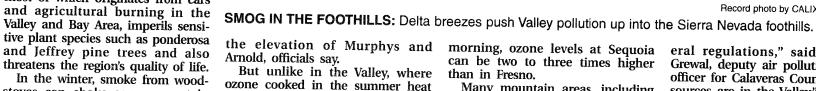
As the temperature climbs, the blanket of smog begins to move eastward, pushed by the prevailing Delta breezes up the canyons and burnished hillsides of the Sierra Nevada foothills. Given California's topography and

weather patterns, when the Valley has smog, so do the mountains. "We're like a bathtub ring up here," said Mike Waugh, deputy air pollution-control officer for Tuolumne County. Smog experts say the pollution, most of which originates from cars

tive plant species such as ponderosa and Jeffrey pine trees and also threatens the region's quality of life. In the winter, smoke from woodstoves can choke some mountain communities that are in deep bowls

or valleys. But air-quality officials say those episodes tend to be relatively brief and confined to small as people switch to cleaner-burning into the evening and the next morn-

Most of the time, the inversion mer and fall appears to settle at the Sequoia National Park as high as in Bay Area, we certainly will be in the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air bringing with it. But you just don't 3,000-foot level, somewhere between the Valley itself. But early in the compliance with the state and fed-



But unlike in the Valley, where ozone cooked in the summer heat dissipates at night, mountain smog doesn't go away after the sun goes down. There, levels of ozone  $\stackrel{\smile}{-}$  a poisonous gas created when hydro- the California Air Resources Board carbons and other pollutants interareas, and they're getting less severe act chemically — can be high well ties to adopt cleanup plans because For instance, ozone has been

morning, ozone levels at Sequoia eral regulations," said Lakhmir can be two to three times higher Many mountain areas, including Tuolumne and Calaveras counties,

have violated state and federal ozone standards in recent years. But has not required the foothill counmost of the smog floats in from the

"If we eliminated this transport of

Grewal, deputy air pollution-control officer for Calaveras County. "All the sources are in the Valley.' For their part, San Joaquin Valley air-quality officials acknowledge that their area is responsible for smog in

Record photo by CALIXTRO ROMIAS

But just as they are studying how pollution drifts in to the Valley from the Bay Area, more study is needed on how much Valley smog is trans-

At least some of the pollution may originate in the Bay Area or Sacramento, Jones said. "We'd like to be able to really

identify where the stuff is coming from," he said. For now, car owners in the mountain areas don't have to comply with the stringent requirements of Smog Check II.

But that could change as more people move into the Mother Lode and the region's highways become clogged with commuters to the

"We will become increasingly responsible for our own pollution," Waugh said. "Smog Check will be coming. Rules on some of the smaller sources like auto-body shops will be coming. I don't know when." While many Mother Lode residents pride themselves on the region's air quality - especially compared with the Valley and Southern California — they concede pollution is getting worse.

"The air quality is not anywhere as good," lifetime Angels Camp resident Jo Ann Andersen said.

At a medical clinic in Copperopolis, physician's assistant Robert Patch said he moved to Sonora from Sacramento largely because of the pure mountain air. Many days he looks down on the Valley's smog belt — "that puke in the air" — and is glad he moved

into the high country. "When driving around the foothills, you don't see the smog," he said. But he added, "The wind layer that traps smog in the summeasured at the 6,000-foot level in air pollution from the Valley and the
Dave Jones, planning manager for most days. So you know what it's ported to the high country, said is coming from west to east on "I consider my area a wildlife sanctuary. And that goes for mountain lions." — Gary Fregien, ecologist

The report, the Sierra Nevada

Ecosystem Project, calls for pre-

serving the Calaveras and other

streams that haven't been heavily

diverted to farms or cities or inun-

dated with non-native species like

Fregien, who provided informa-

The canyon bottom and sur-

rounding hills are covered with

live oaks, blue oaks, Valley oaks,

big leaf maple and California wild

California roach — a pretty little minnow-like fish with an ugly

name - school up in the river's

And Fregien spots a foothill yel-

low-legged frog, which scoots

under a rock along the bank and

But the stream is not without

Some of his neighbors ponded

nearby Indian Gulch Creek and planted it with bass, bluegill and

bullfrogs — all non-native species.

If they made their way into the

Calaveras, the bullfrogs could eat

the yellow-legged frogs, a federally

And a couple of years ago, a

few folks from "up the hill" treed

a mountain lion on Fregien's prop-

erty while he was away. According

to reports that filtered back to him, they considered shooting it,

but the cat slipped away while

That was when Fregien passed

they were getting their rifles.

protected species, Fregien said.

eludes his grasp.

tion to SNEP researchers, has already done a pretty good job

bullfrogs and brown trout.

# Wildlife has its way with 80-acre haven

All creatures, creepy or scary, welcome on private reserve

By Jim Nickles

Gary Fregien is preserving his own little slice of the Mother Lode. He gets there at the end of a twisting, rock-strewn road, bouncing his pickup through several cattle gates and a small creek where the creeping vines of berry bushes — an exotic invader — swat the windshield.

His 80-acre spread, in the canyon of the North Fork of the Calaveras River near Mokelumne Hill, is dotted with the ruins of 19th century homesteads and other artifacts that go back far longer. On a sun-baked rock next to the river, an ancient mortar shows where American Indians

Aside from those few signs of human activity — and an aging trailer Fregien stays in during weekends — the land has been allowed to go wild. An ecologist for the state Department of Parks and

Recreation who grew up in

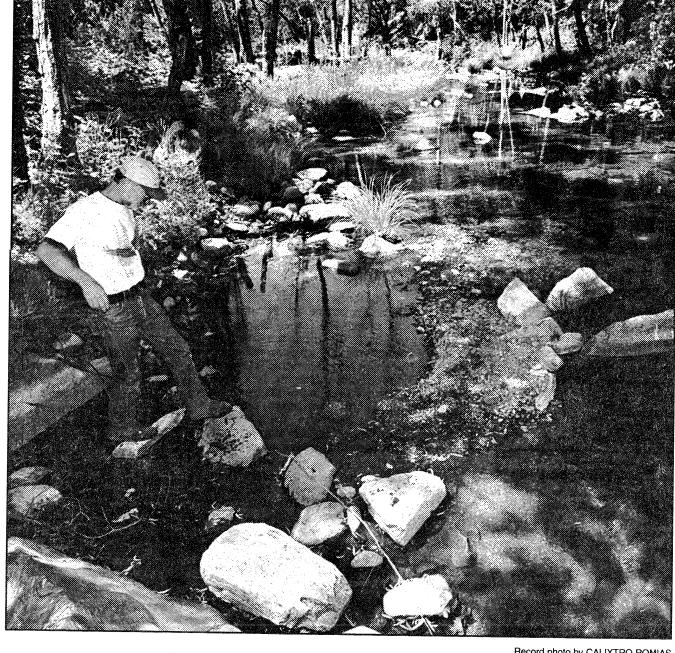
Stockton, Fregien wants his land

to be a haven for native plants "I consider my area a wildlife sanctuary. And that goes for mountain lions, rattlesnakes and everything else," he said.

the efforts of private landowners like Fregien, the North Fork of the Calaveras upstream of New Hogan Reservoir is one of the best-preserved streams in the Sierra Nevada, say scientists who recent- that as vermin," he said. "There's ly completed a comprehensive sur- others of us who think they vey of the range's environmental

Due to several factors, including

the word among his neighbors that wildlife on his land was off-"Some of these people have been in these hills for a long, long time, and they view critters like belong here."



- or nearly one in five - are at

aid. They include the foothill vel-

The reasons for the declines vary,

low-legged frog, the burrowing owl

scientists say. Some are obvious,

such as the loss of habitat or the

introduction of non-native species.

Invaders such as bullfrogs or

European starlings outcompete and

Fragmentation of habitat is prob-

ably the main reason why deer

numbers have dropped, even though

they're not officially threatened or

endangered, Fish and Game biolo-

Referring to areas in Calaveras

County where he has surveyed deer

populations for years. Gifford said:

I can't count deer in areas where I

could count them in 1980. ... That's

typical. You'd find the same thing in

Moreover, as habitat areas shrink.

the distance between them grows,

forcing deer and other wanderers to

"They get hit by cars. They get

chased by dogs. They find barriers

Other threats to wildlife are more

Movle, who has spent years survey-

ing fauna in California's rivers and

streams, said he believes the sharp

decline in foothill yellow-legged frogs

"has got to be related to air pollution.

Because no other pattern seems to fit"

Even famous frogs at risk

The frog, once so abundant that

Movle "had to kick the frogs out of

the way to get down to the

streams," has virtually disappeared

in recent years, part of a worldwide

Joaquin foothills will tell you that

you just don't see yellow-legged

frogs. There are only probably a

handful of small populations scat-

Perhaps some Mother Lode

species like the yellow-legged frog

But if future development is done

— the streams and the surrounding

areas - could be recovered if peo-

ple wanted to and wanted to pay

hand, once you develop those into

suburbs and exurbs and a certain

level of density of settlement, that's

for it," Graber said. "On the other

tered around," he said.

are doomed.

"Anybody who knows the San

trend of vanishing amphibians.

**Fuolumne, Amador (counties)."** 

run man-made gauntlets.

in their path," he said.

gist Dan Gifford said.

ultimately displace native wildlife.

and the western pond turtle.

PRIVATE RESERVE: Gary Fregien tiptoes over a creek such creatures as frogs and other critters many considrunning through his 80-acre wildlife sanctuary. The ecoler, including a variety of snakes. Even mountain lions ogist has let nature take over the spread. It's home to have been sighted on Fregien's land.

# Nature: Better planning may minimize impact

Some projects use caution Developers of both Flowers Ranch and Saddle Creek say their projects will enhance wetlands and other open spaces. If anything, they say, the habitat will be better than when the lands were heavily grazed by cattle. "People who are buying property

and moving to the foothills do so because they like the open space," said Roger Pitto, a land-planner and spokesman for Flowers Ranch. The traditional pattern of urban sprawl is "not really friendly to

890-acre Saddle Creek. He said his project will be masterdevelopers have installed animal tun-

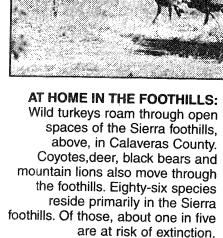
will still probably have rattlesnakes for years and years and years."

to preserve fragile ecosystems.

Foothills hold key to Sierra

Boss disagreed.

The foothill region is "absolutely



The foothills are the wintering

manager of the state Department of

The foothills are also a haven for

86 species roam foothills

vanished from the range decades Now, others are just hanging on.

AIR POLLUTION: From the

spring to the fall each year, smog

and smoke from the Central Valley

degrade visibility in the foothills.

Sensitive species of trees such as

Jeffrey and ponderosa pines are

damaged by ozone at low and

middle elevations. Peak daily

ozone levels at 6,000 feet in

Seguoia National Park have been

recorded as high as for Visalia on

MINING: The Mother Lode region

s dotted with abandoned mine

sites. The Penn Mine in Calaveras

County has polluted the

HYDRAULIC MINING: Until it was

banned in the 1880s, miners used

wash away hillsides to unlock gold

deposits. Billions of cubic yards of

sediment washed into streams

raising the bottoms of the rivers

and increasing the flood threat in

the Central Valley. In 1880 alone,

46 million cubic yards of sediment

left the mining areas and entered

the Sacramento and San Joaquir

rivers. Mercury and other pollu-

tants, the result of mining activi-

ties, have been detected in foothill

DAMS: In addition to flooding

canyon habitats, dams bring in

exotic species of fish like brown

trout and bass that in many cases

displace native species of trout

and amphibians like the yellow-

legged frog. They disrupt fish and

other wildlife downstream by

reducing water quality and flows.

Dams prevent regular springtime

flooding that rejuvenates down-

stream areas, clears away stream-

clogging brush and rejuvenates

URBANIZATION: The sprawl of

small, 5- and 10-acre "ranchettes"

habitats and cuts off key migration

corridors for many types of

GRAZING: Unregulated grazing

of sheep and cattle ended in the

early 1900s but caused wide-

spread and, in some cases, irre-

versible, ecological impacts.

Those included damaging mead-

ows and wetlands and wiping out

native plants, which were replaced

by exotic grasses and thistles from

Europe and Asia. While regulated.

grazing continues to exert pres-

sure on foothill and mountain

areas, causing erosion and pollu-

tion and damaging streamside

**INVASIVE SPECIES:** Non-native

species of plants and animals

have outcompeted and some

times replaced native species

Yellow star thistle was first intro-

duced into California decades

ago, probably by livestock, and

now infests 10 million acres

statewide, including much of the

Mother Lode, Non-native wildlife

includes bullfrogs, wild pigs, cow-

Source: Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project

house sparrows.

birds, European starlings and

subdivisions but little cluster ham-

lets surrounded by open space."

streams and in the Delta

# **Subdivision:** Rancho Calaveras residents cite sewer problems

years will be made by people like Terri Bailey, the Calaveras County supervisor whose district includes Rancho Calaveras. If projections for the next decade hold, Bailey represents what will be the fastest-growing district in one of the fastest-growing counties in the

Bailey is an energetic, personable sort who roams her district in a green Pontiac Bonneville with a personalized license plate that gives her phone number: '786VOTE." Her grass-roots campaign three years ago was triggered in part by concerns over a proposed subdivision near Rancho she felt would strain the area's

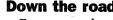
"But I am not against growth," she said, steering the Bonneville along a ridgetop road in Rancho. "I am against growth that is not planned or managed properly."

One of her continuing concerns is mustering services and improvements for Rancho, which straddles Highway 26 and covers more than 4,000 acres. Bailey steered the Bonneville along 26, pointing out the mounded front yards of several homes. The mounds are actually septic sys-

tanks in," Bailey said.

at this point, is unlikely. County water officials say a sewer plant for the enormous subdivision would probably cost \$30 million. In Rancho, Bailey said, the lots

were originally intended for modest vacation or weekend homes. But in the '70s and '80s, the subdivision drew commuters and retirees — folks who moved to Rancho full time, pressuring infra-



Even now, though, some bur-

At the top of the needs list: roads. Building them, improving

extra engineering and excavation vay for slope cuts.

funding shortfalls for future road needs. Many communities are looking at tax increases, or as an alternative, allowing some road surfaces to revert back to dusty

are becoming scarce as well.

"Lots of the people living up here now are commuters," said Jim Miner, Calaveras County fire warden. "They aren't available to run to fires. Our pool of qualified volunteers is shrinking." If volunteers cannot be found, said Miner, more full-time firefighters must be hired, steadily cranking up fire-

ingly congested route between Schools, too, are bracing for a She has asked citizens to

> Calaveras Unified recently sure to finance improvements in

said old-timers and newcomers Amador Unified, where there is alike must pitch in with both barely enough to maintain an money and perhaps muscle to

them, maintaining them. Roads in the hills cost at least

ally the backbone of the firefighting service in the Mother Lode,

### panic," said Darren Eaton, spokesman for the Building

three times as much to build as roads in the Valley because of and the need for larger rights-of-Most foothill counties face large

As more and larger homes are built in the hills, the need for additional fire engines to protect them is also increasing. Yet money for new equipment is scarce. Perhaps even more distressing is

Industry Council of Tuol-

"We don't need to stop building. And we don't need to build in place that is factually proven to be environmentally sensitive. There is a middle ground." Eaton said developers are willing and able to help pay for new improve-

ments — to a point. "It's unfair to expect a developer to put in everything. Costs go up too high. The developer is just going to roll up his plans and walk away. Growth does bring benefits, from struction jobs to increases in sales taxes. Those benefits need to be

Yeager, who has seen Placer

broader community, may not choose to recover all of the costs from the developer, but at least costs are going to be," he said.

That cuts sprawl and helps Continued from SR5 keep ongoing costs down. "If you wait until there is a public outcry over sprawl, it is probably too late," he said. "If possible, you need to direct and manage the

It is also important, he said, for people heading to the hills to know there will be trade-offs. parcels won't get police response

into the groundwater basins lars and you may not get there."

### Pressured by the same forces of plate tectonics that move continents and open oceans, the gigantic block of granite known as the Sierra Nevada mountain range tilted upward from the Earth's core, hinging on its western side. A young mountain range — only 2 million to 3 million years old - the Sierra Nevada vaults skyward along its eastern rim in one of the most dramatic walls of rock on the planet, in some places Only on the west does the land rise gradually from rolling

Gold ore in

Why does the western flank of the Sierra Nevada mountain

First of all, think of a hinged trapdoor, said geologist Jeffrey

As it opens, one side of the door moves upward while the other

range have gently rising foothills while the eastern flank does

And why was gold so abundant in the foothills?

Mount of University of California, Davis.

to the Central Valley

the Earth's core

Sierra geology 101

grasslands just above the Central Valley to the peaks along the Sierra crest. It's there that the great rivers of the Central Valley begin, fed by rain and snow from the Pacific Ocean. Along with other minerals, gold originated in the Earth's interior n molten form and was thrust upward into fissures in the granite core of the Sierra. In the 1840s and 1850s, miners could find gold that had eroded from the hillsides and washed into stream

Later they found what they called the Mother Lode, a hard-rock Tuolumne counties.

## **Erosion:** Sediment choking reservoirs

dam sites are gone, said Michael Jackson, a Quincy attorney who and the Regional Council of Rural

"Building more dams does not seem to be a very efficient way to get additional water supplies," he

## **Erosion chokes reservoirs**

that logging, grazing, road-building and other activities in the upper watersheds are increasing erosion that is choking many Mother Lode reservoirs, reducing their ability to store water or hold back flood flows.

of sediment per year flows into Pardee Reservoir on the years, the reservoir has lost about a tenth of its capacity as 20,000 acreacre-feet of water, said Robert for East Bay Municipal Utility District, which owns Pardee.

the mountains and the Central

released gradually into the streams throughout the spring

Now, with many meadows. scoured by erosion and hillsides barren of trees, much of that water can be lost in sudden floods.

as Saddle Creek.

The developer says Saddle Creek will be wildlife-friendly But Buckley isn't so sure. For hundreds of acres around, and up to 1,600 homes.

which has figured so prominently in California mythology and history, makes it the most threatened region of the Sierra, concluded the 1996 report of the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project, the multiyear study of the mountain range mandated by Congress.

muting distance of Valley cities and therefore under intense development pressure.

oak woodlands such as those surrounding Copperopolis are disappearing at a rate of 20,000 acres a year, the SNEP report said. That's 55 acres a day — or

more than two acres an hour making the oak woodlands the Sierra's most endangered habitat. In addition to providing food and shelter for a wide variety of

wildlife, oaks hold the soil together and absorb moisture, thereby maintaining the integrity of watersheds. That, in turn, improves water quality and reduces the threat of flooding in lowland areas. When you think about watersheds and having clean water, it is very important that we not trash those oak woodlands," said Janet Cobb, manager of the California Oaks Foundation.

Oak woodlands are "right where Robin Marose, co-author of the

Unless developers and local officials embrace dramatic new wildlife habitats and open spaces that are critical to the region's ecobe lost forever, scientists and envi-

"It's going to affect the economc future — not just the environmental future," said Tim Duane, a city and regional planner with the University of California, Berkeley, and a member of the SNEI research team.

Developers and local officials say they are changing their practices to ensure environmental pro-"We believe that you definitely

can balance growth with the environment," Tuolumne County Planning Director Bev Shane said "The key is directing growth to the appropriate locations. ... You won't see San Jose-type of development." But environmentalists say that type of sprawl is happening

"There's no planning in place, and there's no way to make it happen," said Glenda Edwards, a Tuolumne County resident and vice president of the Institute for

Edwards and other conservationists say the proliferation of malls is consuming thousands of

"If it's divided up piecemeal, we're going to lose an awful lot of species and distinctive habitats in fairly short order," said fisheries biologist Peter Moyle, a professor at UC Davis who also worked on the SNEP report.

environmental catastrophe looming in the Mother Lode.

sured as high as at Visalia on the Valley floor.

Smog will likely worsen - and the Mother Lode will be responsicials and scientists.

"We have an ozone problem, and it isn't getting better," said Tom Cahill, an air-quality researcher at UC Davis.

the result of decades of logging, grazing, road-building and other disturbances, say scientists and water managers. The damaged meadows and stream channels hurt the quality and quantity of the state's water supply and likely

"We believe that you definitely can balance growth with the environment." — Bev Shane, Tuolumne County planning director

Nature: Exurban sprawl gobbling up habitats

and the Central Valley. a spate of recent wildfires, some consuming tens of thousands of acres, have demonstrated. Late in September, a blaze in the foothills of Yuba County charred nearly 6,000 acres and several dozen

The fires have left vast tracts of Hart, who has studied the blue-

Ignoring the risk, and in some

"There will be more (large fires)." said Doug Leisz, a retired forester for the U.S. Forest Service and a forest-management consul-

traffic and pollution.

away from key habitat and fireprone areas and minimize vehicle "If we do cluster development,

"We encourage clustering in development," said Ray Waller,

### have services and public improve-Superintendent Ron Huebert said. library and parks will not be as "People want more dog catch-Despite the rising demands, close," Yeager said. "People need "Nobody," she said, "can get a builders urge a tempered to understand the limitations ers. They want parks and libraries. They want potholes filled or dirt free lunch anymore."

While newcomers and longtime residents are quick to point out the area's good points, they agree that one of the area's drawbacks oriented."

residents were white, compared with 69 percent for the state as a whole, according to the 1990 cen-Nancy Whittle, a longtime resi-

dent of Angels Camp, said she

would prefer more of an ethnic

mix because "if you have a

chance to be around all types of

people, any fears you have are Whittle and other longtime res-

"I'd say the people moving in are changed by the such a pleasant atmosphere." communities and they become more small-town

Terri Bailey, a Calaveras County

But some who have moved here

more than seven years ago, "but I figure it's their loss. Maybe it's just people who don't want growth."

In fact, Bailey said, she has

real estate agent in Amador County

area to their liking in recent years. years ago, said she has not noticed friction between old-

> been struck by the sense of community involvement she sees in "I used to kid my daughter

David Carlson, who has ridden - David Carlson, believes the mostly rural communities have been changed for the better by the new arrivals from

And the newcomers, too, have

when we first moved here because she was going through 'mall withidents say they harbor no resent- supervisor who moved from drawal," Bailey said. "And there want to slow down and enjoy

"I'd say the people moving in

"The people who are coming here want to get away from that. They

the 1980s and '90s.

underlying meadows, then For one thing, most of the good

the fate of native species in a mountain stream, for instance, affects downstream water quality

But they know, for example,

An average of a million cubic-feet Mokelumne River, in the foothills just east of Lodi. Over the last 20 feet of mud has replaced 20,000 Nuzum, natural-resources manager

And as is apparent on Rose Creek, the watersheds themselves - the meadows, hillsides and channels — don't hold as much water as they used to. That also increases the flood threat in both

Historically, much of the Sierra's rain and snowmelt was absorbed

"One of the main reasons we have as many floods as we have is we have severely reduced the ability of the landscape to hold that water," said Pete Bell, vice president of the Foothill Conservancy, an Amador County-based conservation

group. "A lot of the meadows have been totally trashed." If meadows were restored, that recharge — in effect, providing water storage with no additiona dams and flood-control with no. more levees, environmentalists sav. The groundwater basins would release water slowly throughout the summer, "when California needs water the most," said Laurel

Ames, executive director of the Sierra Nevada Alliance. "That's the biggest bang for the buck there is, and it's all done naturally. It's done with a minimum of concrete and man-made structures," she said.

Water managers support the concept of watershed restoration. Unfortunately, they say, such work is costly and takes years to complete, and the benefits can be difficult to quantify.

Moreover, even if watersheds

were to vield more water, they

And the water would still need to be captured, stored and delivered "It sounds good," Nuzum said of watershed efforts. "But you may spend millions and millions of dol-

ask, who would it belong to?

## ment for those who've found the Stockton to Rancho Calaveras six are some drawbacks. There's very what rural living is."

**About the writers** 

Nickles, Richard Hanner and Francis Garland. They tracked numer-

**Jim Nickles** Jim Nickles has been The Record's environmental reporter for five years. He covers the Delta and water issues, urban growth, air pol-

lution, endangered species and a variety of other stories. His series last year on the San Joaquin River was named the best California water story of 1996 by the Water Education Foundation An 18-year veteran of the newspaper

business, he has been with The Record Nickles graduated from the University of California, Berkelev.

**Richard Hanner** 

Richard Hanner has been a reporter and editor for The Record for 14 years. During that time, he has collaborated on projects dealing with such issues as youth

violence and problems in the state's board and care homes. He is a graduate of Sierra Community College, San Fransico State University and Stanford University.

A native of Garland graduated from San Francisco

After having worked for over 12 years at several valley newspapers, he was hired as the Record's Mother Lode bureau chief in April 1995.

## For additional reprints of "Sierra Sprawl"

Additional reprints of the "Sierra Sprawl" series are available on a limited basis. Please write to The Record for more information: The Record, P.O. Box 900, Stockton, CA 95201

### From a hilltop near the tiny burg of Copperopolis, John Buckley could survey a valley and a nearby ridge that for all appearances were undisturbed since the original 49ers prowled the "This is a good example of what a lot, if not most, of this area looked like (historically)," said Buckley, director of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center. "There's a lot of diversity just among reptiles and amphib-

Probably half-a-dozen varieties

of snakes slither through the grass

or linger around the creeks and

springs, including the western

aquatic garter snake, the gopher

snake, the ringneck snake, the

sharp tailed snake, king snakes

To say nothing, of course, of

and racers.

rattlesnakes.

**Environment** 

under assault

## Homes threaten habitat

ians that will use an area like

But possibly not for long. The valley and ridge are part of the longtime Flowers Ranch, where Calaveras County officials have approved — at least in concept a developer's plans to build up to

2.200 homes. The Sierra foothills have been under assault since the Gold Rush started in 1849. The landscape has been marked by everything from logging, mining and grazing to water diversions and invasions by non-native plants and animals. Now, the Mother Lode environ-

ment faces a number of new threats, including air pollution, a growing risk of wildland fires and degradation of watersheds that provide critical water supplies. In addition, worry Buckley and other conservationists, the sprawl of suburban or "exurban" development could permanently transform the land, ruining the region's

rural character and driving out a host of wild species. As an example, Buckley cited the new subdivision in which he was standing, in a freshly created cul-de-sac awaiting the construction of six homes. His vantage point over Flowers Ranch was from an adjoining project known

hillsides have been shaved off, streets paved and lots graded and cleared for a winding golf course "It's quite a change for wildlife," he said wryly. The influx of newcomers to the rugged landscape above the fog line but below the snow belt.

Woodlands disappearing Unlike most of the Sierra's higher reaches, protected within the confines of national parks and forests, the foothills are mostly in private ownership, within com-

Throughout the foothills. blue-

But a recent study by the state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection warned that the foothills of the central Sierra could lose nearly half their remaining oaks in the next couple of decades if present growth trends continue. all the action is happening in terms of development," said CDF's

subdivisions, ranchettes and strip acres of wildlands and chopping up the remaining habitat smaller and smaller pieces, which are less viable for wildlife.

The loss of habitat isn't the only

**Pollution in Mother Lode** Air pollution created in the Bay Area and the Central Valley wafts into the foothills, degrading visibility and hurting sensitive trees such as Jeffrey and ponderosa pines. Ozone levels at 6,000 feet in Sequoia National Park, just above the foothill belt, have been mea-

ble for more and more of it - as land denuded, making many hill- oak woodlands. "Not cookie-cutter

the mountain counties grow and highways carry more commuters to Valley jobs, say air-quality offi-

cases increasing it, people contin-Meanwhile, watersheds are deteriorating at an accelerating rate,

worsened last winter's severe flooding in both the mountains And decades of fire suppression have left the hills a tinderbox, as

ue to build homes in fire-prone

No growth not an option Virtually no one, including scientists and conservation groups, is calling for a no-growth policy in the Mother Lode. In fact, development in the foothills may be better than on the flood plains and prime farmland of the Valley. But they say the key to preserving the region is to plan the development — to steer homes

it could be one of the better areas (for growth)," said biologist Jeff

Referring to projects that slice up valleys and hillsides into 1- or 5-acre parcels, he said: "That's the thing that really kills the environment. It's kind of the analogy of death by a thousand cuts. The cumulative action of everybody having their 5-acre parcel to get away from the city and enjoy the country, is that eventually that just becomes a city. There's no permanent open space, and people need

County planners and builders sav a number of new projects are being designed to be more environment-friendly. New homes and commercial developments are being grouped into higher-density areas, while oak woodlands and streams are set aside as open

to go somewhere else to get those

community-development director in Calaveras County.

Please see NATURE, SR7



"The whole project should have been on a sewer system to begin with."

Even so, Bailey feels a balance

can be struck between making the

best of what exists — and plan-

ning carefully for what may come.

Bailey has successfully lobbied

Caltrans to undertake some pro-

jects on Highway 26, the increas-

update a special plan for the

community, perhaps limiting the

number of animals allowed on

reclaim some of the equestrian

In an uncertain future, Bailey

- Terri Bailey

"The whole project should have been on a sewer system to begin with. The area is so rocky. They say some of the builders had to use dynamite to get their septic

Settlers: Better quality of life sought

is its lack of ethnic diversity. About 92 percent of all Sierra

**Plymouth:** Growing up schools and public facilities." David Wade, a planner working with the Shenandoah Springs property owners, said his project would do that and more. Wade said it would have state-of-the-art video-conferencing centers, socalled "hot" offices that could be

village center complete with clus-

ter shops that could serve as a

gateway to the city.

new great big projects." Wade said the project could appeal strongly to three different groups - retirees, traditional commuters looking to flee more urbanized areas and independent techno-workers who punch their time clock in their kitchen and rarely leave home during their business day. "The pitch would be: Bring your business and bring your

family and move into a place

that's designed to accommodate

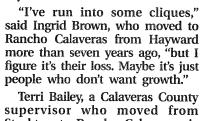
both," Wade said. "We're hoping

this will be a business and eco-

nomic development magnet as

much as it is a conventional res-

idential project. "The business-park component is



"I personally feel that towns should slowly build out all the vacant infill lost or the

Amador City mayor

subdivisions that used for business meetings and a aren't completed

before you propose any

Susan Bragstad,

not terribly big. But we see it as more of an incubator to establish a style of doing these kinds of things." Wade said as growth pressures increase in the foothills, masterplanned developments like Shenandoah Springs could play a

"People want to move to where

it's fairly nice and they want to be

able to bring their business with

them," he said. "We want to try

and figure out the best way to

dens are outpacing resources in

Questions loom as well about how fire service will be provided. the fact that volunteers, tradition-

passed a \$22 million bond meaeach lot and providing some con- coming years. "If the bond had tinuity of design and construction. not passed, our prospects for There may also be attempts to keeping up would be dismal." school district Superintendent Jim

weighed in this whole argument." So what are the answers?

County handle rapid-fire growth with mixed success, said it is important for all of the costs of the table early on. To help do that in Placer County, Yeager's staff now uses special computer programs to gauge the long-term financial impact of all major pro-"Elected officials, and the

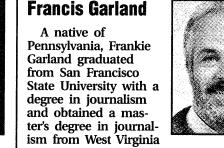
they have a clear idea what those Also, Yeager and other planners say communities should nudge new development close to existing

A bond may also be needed in aging stock of schoolhouses, let as quickly. They won't have ambumake sure their communities alone build new ones, acting lance service as quickly. The

> the real estate roller coaster twice since he began selling property in Amador County 20 years ago,

are changed by the communities and they become more smalltown oriented, rather than people coming in and all of a sudden changing us to a big city," he said.

"Sierra Sprawl" is a culmination of six months of work by Jim presented here. Supporting their efforts were photographers Calixtro Romias, Amelita Manes, and Craig Sanders; graphic artist ous sources, talked to dozens of people and pored over stacks of Maggie Leighly; and page design and layout by Assistant News reports to compile the information necessary to write the stories Editor JoAnn Kirby.



### Currently The Record's Lodi bureau chief, Hanner coordinates the weekly Lodi-Lode section, covers Lodi government and writes a weekly column.

It can also be viewed on the Record's web site at http://www.recordnet.com