

Loss of Habitat Threatens the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle

In 1980 when the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle was classified as a Threatened Species under the federal Endangered Species Act, it was known to exist in only ten locations in the world: near the Lower American River, the Merced River and Putah Creek which flows through Solano and Yolo Counties to the Yolo Bypass.

Today, state and federal wildlife officials have found it in 190 locations from Shasta County to Fresno County. But the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle (*Desmocerus californicus dimorphus*) is still classified as Threatened and could one day go extinct if its habitat is lost to urbanization, agriculture, rip-rapping of river banks and the clear-cutting on the American River Parkway by a PG&E contractor. The beetle also is being preyed upon by non-native critters such as the Argentine Ant.

The beetles are usually found on or close to red or blue elderberry bushes along rivers and streams. The males range up to one inch in length and have knobby antennae nearly as long as their bodies.

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Stumps along the bike trail. Photo by Dale Steele

PG&E is Clear-cutting the American River Parkway

BY STEPHEN GREEN

In response to the devastating fires and class-action law suits, Pacific Gas & Electric Co. (PG&E) has been clearing trees and vegetation along its power line easements in Northern and Central California.

In the American River Parkway, PG&E has clear-cut easement corridors from Discovery Park to Howe Avenue and beyond, removing many healthy, mature trees. They also ripped out other vegetation including elderberry bushes which host the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle, a Threatened Species under the California and Federal Endangered Species Acts.

Save the American River Association (SARA) was joined by Trees for Sacramento, the California Native Plant Society the Sierra Club and many others in calling on PG&E and Sacramento County to halt tree and vegetation removals in the Parkway – to no avail.

This was the most destructive project we have seen on our Parkway. The clear-cut operation was unprecedented and contrary to the American River Parkway Plan and other environmental protections.

The county should have insisted that all work stop until PG&E showed their project complied with environmental requirements and other safeguards we have

worked to attain for the Parkway.

SARA repeatedly asked PG&E to produce evidence of an environmental review, consultation or permits for undertaking tree removal and disturbing protected plant and animal species. In response, PG&E only offered vague and general assurances. On January 15, SARA representatives attended a meeting of the county supervisors and displayed photos of the damage to the Parkway. They insisted that the county should convene a hearing on what has happened and on what actions should be taken in response. The supervisors instructed its staff to schedule a hearing.

Our Parkway is far too important to the community for county officials to turn a blind eye to this “scorched earth” approach to tree and vegetation removal. The county is charged with the protection of our Parkway and its fragile and rare riparian habitat. Other communities, with local agency support, have been able to persuade PG&E to be reasonable in tree removal. But our county made no effort to prevent the removal of trees and other vegetation that pose no fire safety threat.

Power lines have been in the Parkway since the 1940s and there have been no

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PG&E

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documented fires due to trees and vegetation interfering with the transmission lines in the Parkway. In addition, the Parkway is far more accessible for fire suppression than other areas of the state where fires have occurred.

Both the Sacramento Municipal Utility District and the Western Area Power Administration also have power line easements in the Parkway. What PG&E has done cannot establish a precedent for other utilities.

PG&E must modify its practices to better balance protection from fires and conservation of irreplaceable natural resources. In many areas of the Parkway, power lines are far above the treetops, and there is no possibility that a falling tree would impact a power line or damage towers. These trees are part

In many areas of the Parkway, power lines are far above the treetops, and there is no possibility that a falling tree would impact a power line or damage towers.

of what makes the Parkway a special place for humans to enjoy and good habitat for species. Ninety-five percent of the valley oak trees have been taken out of the Central Valley. And many of the remaining oaks are in the Parkway.

Ground that has been cleared and disturbed is rapidly colonized by an

invasive, noxious thistle. The thistle poses a greater potential fire threat to PG&E power lines than the native vegetation. We still have seen no plan for restoration or mitigation of the environmental damage. And since PG&E has now filed for bankruptcy, it's unlikely that the utility will be restoring critical habitat in the Parkway.

We hope that our groups, along with the concerned public, force change both at PG&E and the county to ensure future Parkway clearing is done in a much more protective manner. In addition, damage done so far must be properly mitigated within the Parkway — not in some far-off place.

The county and PG&E must find a better path to providing sensible fire protection along utility easements in the Parkway. ■

Beetle

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The outer wings or elytra are bright red with four, oblong dark spots. The females have wider bodies and shorter antennae. Their wings are a dark green.

The adults are active from March to June, feeding on elderberry leaves and mating. Females lay their eggs on the elderberry bark. They prefer well-established bushes with stems at least one-inch thick. The larvae hatch and burrow into the stems where they tunnel and eat. The larvae may live in the stems for up to two years when they enter into a pupae stage and then transform to adulthood.

Stakeholder groups in the American River Parkway have made restoration of elderberry habitat one of their priorities. ■



Water Temperatures Must be Lowered in Two Northwest Rivers to Protect Fish

In a court case likely to have implications for water flows in California rivers, a federal judge in Seattle has ruled that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency must lower water temperatures in two major Northwest rivers where overheated waters have decimated salmon and steelhead fisheries.

U.S. District Judge Ricardo Martinez ordered the EPA to develop a plan to lower water temperatures in the Columbia River and its main tributary, the Snake, to protect fish protected by the Endangered Species Act.

The ruling was in a case filed by environmental and fisheries groups. And it could influence similar cases pending in California courts and regulatory actions by state agencies.

The ruling was handed down last October as the State Water Resources Control Board was finishing development of the first phase of the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan to increase water flows through the Lower San Joaquin River and its main tributaries, the Stanislaus, Tuolumne and Merced Rivers.

The plan was in development for nine years while water flows in the San Joaquin and its main tributaries have dropped as low as six percent of normal in drought years.

The plan calls for unimpaired flows of 40 percent in the rivers water volumes during critical times to prevent further collapse of the rivers and Bay-Delta fisheries, and address the ecological crisis in The Delta. The plan also revises the salinity standard for the southern Delta to provide more fresh water for the ecosystem and to protect agriculture in the region.

In 2010, the board adopted a report concluding that an unimpaired flow of

60 percent would be needed to restore the ecosystem. But the board members concluded that would impose severe impacts on other water users and they adopted the 40 percent unimpaired flow.

The plan relies on voluntary agreements with agencies that divert water from the watersheds to reduce their intake and develop projects to improve conditions for fish and wildlife such as habitat restoration and reducing predation.

So far, voluntary agreements have been reached with diverters from the Tuolumne watershed. The agencies are engaging in conservation efforts and will allow some farmland to go fallow. Some crops that require high water intake will be replaced with crops that demand less water. Agreements with diverters from the Stanislaus and Merced watersheds still are being negotiated.

Environmental and fishery organizations contend that unimpaired flows of 40 percent in the rivers isn't nearly enough. But at least it's a start after years of procrastination while fisheries and The Delta ecosystem have been collapsing. They continue to lobby for a higher unimpaired flow, reducing water temperature to at least 58 degrees, and are pursuing legal options.

Meanwhile, the board is working to update flow requirements for the Sacramento River and its major tributaries, the American, Feather and Yuba Rivers. Inadequate flows and high temperatures have devastated the fisheries in each of those watersheds. A draft plan and staff report analyzing alternatives is to be released later this year. For more information on the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan, go to:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/bay_delta/ ■

Support County Parks — Buy An Annual Pass

The Pass pays for itself in 10 visits and all funds go directly towards maintaining and operating the 15,000-acre system. For as little as \$50 per year, you can have unlimited access and parking in the parks.

Pass holders receive free daily entry into Regional Parks and annual passes are valid for one year from date of purchase.

Pass Fees Are Based On Use:

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Vehicle and small watercraft:	\$80
Parks supporter pass*	\$50

** This pass is for those who want to support Parks but do not drive to Parks facilities*

Where to Purchase Your Parks Pass

- Online through the American River Parkway Foundation Web site <http://arpf.org/visit/>
- At REI stores in Sacramento, Roseville and Folsom
- Patriot Cycles in Fair Oaks
- Effie Yeaw Nature Center at Ancil Hoffman Park
- Regional Park offices and park kiosks
- American River Parkway Foundation office at the William B. Pond Recreation Area ■

Bikers Built a Trail Along the Lower American River in 1896

The Jedediah Smith Memorial Trail was not the first bike trail along the Lower American River.

Construction of the first bike trail was launched in 1896 – more than 80 years before the Jed Smith trail was built.

The Capital City Wheelmen was the first recreational bicycle club in the Sacramento area when it was organized on June 25, 1886. It disbanded in 1894, but another club with the same name came together on June 17, 1895.

There were no good roads in the area for their rides. So on March 30, 1896, the Wheelmen voted to build a cinder path along the river. The first link started at 31st and J Streets and ran to Brighton Junction, an agricultural community where Sacramento State University's campus is today.

The trail became so popular that the Wheelmen decided to extend it on to Folsom. Each member was assessed \$1 and Sacramento merchants and residents donated another \$900. Contributors were given an orange ribbon which read: "Patron of the Wheelway, C.C.W."

That got the trail built to Alder Creek. Folsom merchants then took up a collection and the trail was completed into Folsom.

The trail was named the C.C. Wheelman Bikeway. The first speed record between Sacramento and Folsom was set at 1 hour and 40 minutes.

The county Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance prohibiting other

vehicles from using the trail. But farmers were soon using the trail during wet winters. So, the cinders were eventually replaced with decomposed granite. That allowed a new speed record to be set: 1 hour and 2 minutes.

After several decades, the trail began to deteriorate and eventually it was abandoned. By then there were some decent roads in the area for bikers to use.

The trail was resurrected in 1967 when the supervisors voted to build the Jedediah Smith Memorial Trail. The final link to Beals Point on Folsom Lake was built in 1985, giving the Parkway a 31-mile bike trail. ■

THE BICYCLE OF 1896.

Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op's Bag Token Program for 2019

Last year, for the first time, SARA became a beneficiary of the Co-op's "Make Everyday Earth Day" Bag Token Program. Not only has this been an honor, but it has enhanced our visibility locally and provided significant financial support for our program.

SARA was one of only five environmental organizations selected last May through the votes of Co-op shoppers during the weeks leading up to Earth Day. We will apply again this year

for nomination to the ballot. Look for announcements from SARA around April 1, regarding the voting period and special events at the Co-op leading up to Earth Day. SARA will participate again this year at the Co-op's fun-for-all-ages kick-off event that includes information tables, games, and food tastings.

In the meantime, you can support SARA by visiting the Co-op, bringing in your reusable bags to receive tokens, and depositing the tokens in the collection box near the store's

exit. The Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op is located at 2820 R Street, Sacramento. ■



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In Memoriam

Save the American River Association has received donations honoring the memory of the following friends:

Ernest Carboni
Donald A. Kenmonth
Targe Lindsay
David Mitchell
William B. Pond

Save the American River Association frequently receives donations in memory of lost loved ones, many of whom were users and supporters of the American River Parkway. Some donors give names. Others prefer to remain anonymous. SARA notifies family members when donations are made.

The money is used to further SARA's advocacy work on behalf of the Parkway. Contributions may be made by check or online via SARA's website.

SARA also has a Legacy program. For information on the program, please call the SARA office (916) 936-4555. ■

Kirk & Kris Vyverberg
 Alan Wade
 David Ward
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 Steve & Tracy Wetzel
 Liz Williamson
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SARA appreciates the support of our generous members. Without your support, SARA would not be able to continue our role as *Guardians of the American River and Parkway since 1961*. New and renewing members are listed in *RiverWatch* according to their preference (indicated on the SARA membership/renewal form).

California Will Continue to Honor The Migratory Bird Treaty Act

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra and the state Dept. of Fish & Wildlife have issued a legal advisory proclaiming that the state will continue to enforce laws that prohibit commercial or industrial activities that unintentionally result in the killing migratory birds.

The advisory was issued in response to the Trump Administration's decision to no longer enforce provisions of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act that prohibit activities that result in the unintentional killing of birds, commonly called an "incidental take."

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act was signed by the United States and Great Britain (acting on behalf of Canada) in 1918 for the purpose of ending the commercial trade in feathers.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the plumes many bird species grew for breeding season were highly desirable fashion accessories and tens of thousands of birds were indiscriminately slaughtered for profit.

Implementation of the treaty prohibited the hunting, killing, capturing, possession, sale, transportation and exportation of birds, feathers, eggs and nests. Provisions also applied to the incidental take of migratory birds. In later years, the treaty was signed by Mexico (1936), Japan (1972) and Russia (1976).

In a statement accompanying the legal advisory, Dept. of Fish & Wildlife Director Chuck Bonham and Attorney General Becerra said: "The protection of birds is of critical importance to both the California Dept. of Fish & Wildlife, which holds fish and wildlife resources in California in trust for the people of the State and has jurisdiction over conservation, protection, and management of those resources ... and to the Attorney General, who enforces state law, including statutes protecting birds."

They also stated: "The broad definition of "take" in Fish & Game Code section 86 ensures that (the Dept. of Fish & Wildlife) can maintain legal control over actions interfering with threatened, endangered and full protected animals even where those actions may not have been intended to kill or hurt the animal."

California courts have upheld the state laws protecting fish and wildlife including one ruling that a "take" includes allowing pesticides to drain into water where it kills fish.

Unless the Fish & Game Code or its regulations provide otherwise, under California law it is illegal to:

- Take a bird, mammal, fish, reptile or amphibian (F&G Code 2000).
- Take, possess, or needlessly destroy the nest or eggs of any bird (F&G Code 3503).
- Take, possess, or destroy any bird of prey in the orders *Strigiformes* (owls) and *Falconiformes* (such as falcons, hawks and eagles) or the nests or eggs of such bird (F&G Code 3503.5).
- Take or possess any of the thirteen

fully protected bird species listed in Fish & Game Code section 3511.

- Take any non-game bird (i.e., bird that is naturally occurring in California that is not a game bird, migratory game bird, or fully protected bird (F&G Code 3800)).
- Take or possess any migratory non-game bird as designated by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or any part of such bird, except as provided by rules or regulation adopted by the Secretary of the Interior under the Act (F&G Code 3513).
- Take, import, export, possess, purchase, or sell any bird (or products of a bird) listed as endangered or threatened species under the California Endangered Species Act unless the person or entity possesses an incidental Take Permit or equivalent authorization from the Dept. of Fish & Wildlife (F&G Code 2050).

To report the illegal take of birds and other wildlife, call the CaTIP hotline, 1-888-334-2258 or visit: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/enforcement/caltip>



Bald Eagles nesting near Lake Natoma. Photo by Kathy Kayner

Warming Weather Imperils the Sierra Nevada Snowpack

As the world warms, the peak water volume in the Sierra Nevada snowpack could decline by an average of 79.3 percent by the year 2100, according to new study by the U.S. Dept. of Energy's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

The Sierra Nevada's peak snowpack normally occurs about April 1. But the researchers projected that the peak could occur up to four weeks earlier by the end of the century. That would cause snow to melt earlier, increasing the time lag between when water is available and when it is in greatest demand in the summer and early fall.

The study analyzed the headwater regions of ten Sierra Nevada reservoirs which account for nearly half of California's surface water storage. They included the Shasta, Oroville and Folsom reservoirs in the Northern Sierra; New Melones, Don Pedro and Exchequer reservoirs in the Central Sierra; and Pine Flat, Terminus, Success and Isabella reservoirs in the Southern Sierra.

The snowpack feeding Northern Sierra reservoirs probably would see the greatest decline in water volume since they are at lower elevations than the Central and Southern Sierra reservoirs, the researchers concluded.

The study was published last November in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters* under the title: "The Changing Character of the California Sierra Nevada as a Natural Reservoir."

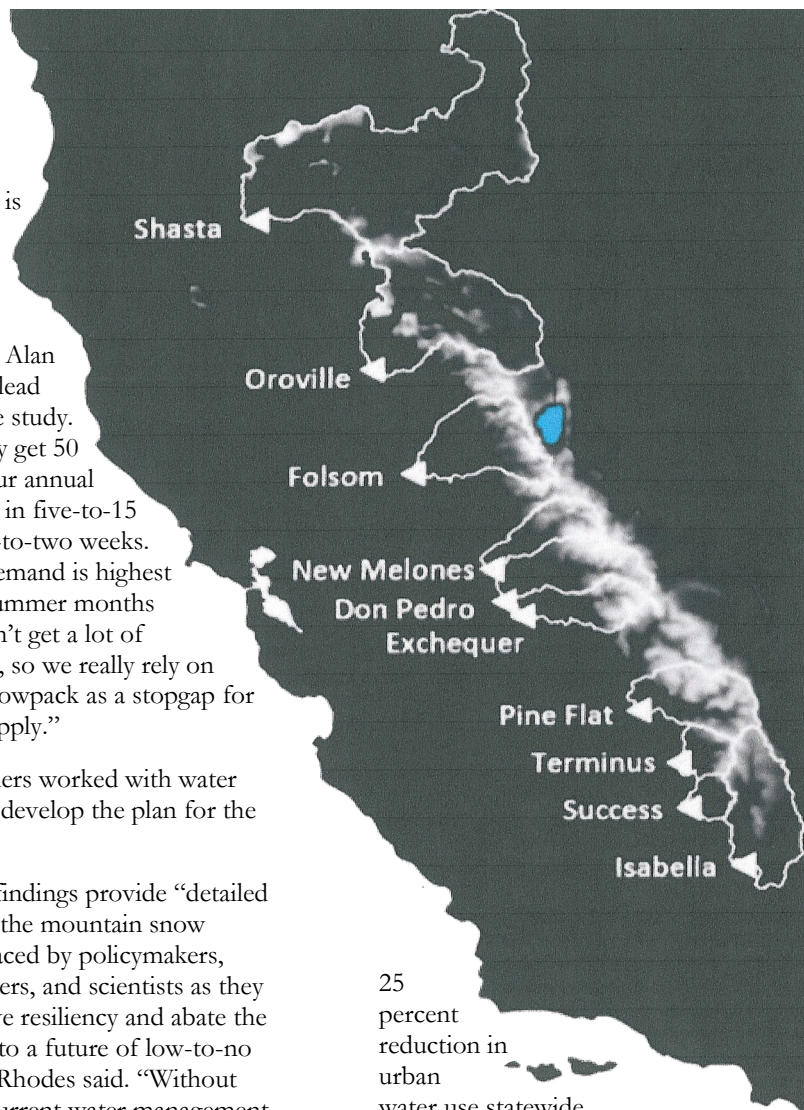
The Sierra Nevada snowpack is a critical source of water for the state and it accumulates in a brief time frame.

"Our precipitation is really intermittent and extremes-driven," said Alan Rhodes, the lead author of the study. "We basically get 50 percent of our annual precipitation in five-to-15 days, or one-to-two weeks. Our water demand is highest during the summer months when we don't get a lot of precipitation, so we really rely on mountain snowpack as a stopgap for our water supply."

The researchers worked with water managers to develop the plan for the study.

The study's findings provide "detailed guidance on the mountain snow conditions faced by policymakers, water managers, and scientists as they build adaptive resiliency and abate the risks related to a future of low-to-no snowpack," Rhodes said. "Without changes to current water management practice based on assumption of an abundance of mountain snowpack, deleterious impacts on water resources could affect the prosperity of California's future."

Water managers got a wake-up call during California's 2012-16 drought. Lack of water during that period led to a loss of 2.7 billion dollars in agricultural revenue, 21,000 jobs, a diminished ski season and fisheries were pushed to the brink of extinction. Gov. Jerry Brown was forced to order a



25 percent reduction in urban water use statewide.

Despite that, water conservation and recycling efforts are going forward in only parts of the state. Groundwater is still being over-drafted in the San Joaquin Valley where ground subsidence is damaging infrastructure. Fracking continues. And some growers are converting fields to high water-use crops such as almonds.

And California still has "disadvantaged communities" where the water is not safe to drink. ■

"Without changes to current water management practice based on assumption of an abundance of mountain snowpack, deleterious impacts on water resources could affect the prosperity of California's future."

ALAN RHODES

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