



# THE *Highlander*

Jan. - March 2025

The Rural Bonny Doon Association Newsletter

RBDA Public Meeting

**Coming Soon to Your Neighborhood:**

**The North Coast Rail Trail and Cotoni-Coast Dairies Opening**

*Wednesday, January 29, 7:30 p.m.*

*In Person at the Bonny Doon Elementary School Multi-Purpose Room; Virtually via Zoom*

Two major recreational initiatives, The North Coast Rail Trail and public access to Cotoni-Coast Dairies National Monument, are rapidly becoming realities. The scale and scope of each of these projects, and the people they will draw to the area, will have a major impact on all of us living on the North Coast and in Bonny Doon. Cotoni-Coast Dairies is slated to open this summer, while the Rail Trail is expected to open in March 2026.

Join us to hear two presentations and learn about the latest updates on both projects as well as a Q&A session with the speakers.

*Virtual Meeting Login Instructions can be found on page 3*

## North Coast Rail Trail

**Grace Blakeslee**, Senior Transportation Planner for the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC), will bring us up to date on the North Coast Rail Trail's status as well as offer a look forward as the work progresses towards the completion of the hiking and biking trail running from Wilder Ranch to Davenport.

Ms. Blakeslee has multiple responsibilities that include Coastal Rail Trail Planning and Coordination, North Coast Rail Trail, North Coast Resiliency, Measure D Active Transportation Program Implementation, Environmental Review, Regional Mitigation Planning, and Planning Coordination. She is a graduate of the University of California Santa Cruz where she majored in Economics and Latin American Studies.



*Justin Cummings*

## **Update from Supervisor Justin Cummings**

Supervisor Cummings, who was recently appointed as chairman of the California Coastal Commission, will join us to provide the latest information on county issues and his work on our behalf.

## **It's Time to Renew Your Membership or Join Us if You're Not a Member!**

***Joining the RBDA isn't just good for us, it's good for you. The more of us that become RBDA members, the more strongly we can advocate for you!***

Bonny Doon residents may have different views and opinions on the issues in front of us, but the RBDA believes we can pull together on the ones that really matter. The RBDA is here to educate, inform, listen, and advocate for you. We encourage all Bonny Dooners to join and help us make a difference here on the mountain. For over 60 years the RBDA has worked to represent and advocate for the Bonny Doon community. The RBDA is **your** community organization and makes your voice heard by the many different agencies, public and private, that work on issues and legislation that directly affect us here on our mountain.

Volunteer RBDA board members donate their time and expertise to the many diverse issues that affect us all here on Bald Mountain. We research and write the informative articles that make up The Highlander and we hold public meetings on many different subjects of interest to our residents. We are now gathering email addresses so we can act quickly when there is an urgent issue (e.g. the Low Income Camping (LICA) Ordinance) requiring an immediate response from our neighbors.

In the past, the RBDA fought to restrain RV parks and toxic goat farms on the coast, strip malls at the local

## Cotoni-Coast Dairies

**Ben Hoke**, Assistant Field Manager for the BLM Central Coast Office, will be presenting updates on the Cotoni-Coast Dairies Onshore Unit of the California Coastal National Monument, including the Davenport Fuels Reduction Project, Bonny Doon Road Fuel Break Project, and the recently released decision on the Northern Parking Lot and Trailhead.



*Ben Hoke*

Mr. Hoke is the Assistant Field Manager for the Bureau of Land Management Central Coast Field Office and has been working for the agency in various roles since 2017. He got his start with an internship program in the Washington D.C. office before being hired full time as a geologist in Elko, Nevada. In 2021 he joined the Central Coast Field Office as the staff geologist. In early 2023 he was named the Assistant Field Manager by local BLM chief Zachary Ormsby.

airport, UCSC expansion and much more. In 2024 we had great success reaching out to residents when the community was threatened by the LICA legislation, generating many emails of protest from our active and concerned members. Over 100 residents showed up at the Supervisors meeting to condemn and ultimately kill the county ordinance!

The RBDA also hosted a public meeting on the escalating crisis in home insurance that drew an audience of over 150 concerned citizens. Joining that meeting were many important stakeholders including California's Insurance Commissioner, State legislators, insurance lobbyists, consumer advocates, and retail insurance agents.

### **When we come together as a community, we all win**

We mail The Highlander to every household in Bonny Doon, not just RBDA members, because a key part of our mission is to educate and inform all Bonny Doon residents about the issues that affect us.

Thank you in advance for your support! Dues and donations go to publishing The Highlander, insurance for our in-person public meetings, costs for developing and maintaining our new website, and other advocacy-related expenses.



Yearly dues are \$20 per person/household. You can join for multiple years/members per household. Our website now allows credit card payments! Go to our website at [www.RBDA.us](http://www.RBDA.us) or scan the QR code to join/renew by credit card. You can also drop a check in the pre-paid envelope enclosed, if you prefer. ***Thank you for supporting us, we can't do it without you!***

## Cotoni Coast Dairies Status Update and RBDA Position

In mid-November, The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced a decision approving a revised project to build a northern parking area and trailhead for Cotoni-Coast Dairies (C-CD), a unit of the California Coastal National Monument, near Davenport. To our knowledge, no appeal has been filed, and we anticipate BLM will open this Northern Entrance to C-CD in 2025. This Revised Project Decision was facilitated when BLM went outside of its ongoing Revised Environmental Assessment process and on October 19, 2024 issued itself a Decision approving the immediate removal of “fire hazard trees” which coincidentally were also part of a documented Monarch Overwintering Habitat, based on a Categorical Environmental Exclusion. BLM has cut down 12 Monarch Overwintering Habitat trees to date.

BLM’s Central Coast Field Manager Zachary Ormsby reports that: “This parking area and trailhead will provide public access to recreational opportunities in this spectacular natural area and provide social and economic benefits to the region, while preserving public lands for present and future generations...The BLM is working with the local community, non-government organizations, and federal, state, and county agencies to provide public access to Cotoni-Coast Dairies...Together with these agencies, partners, and the public, the BLM can help address concerns related to increased traffic, public safety, and protection of natural and cultural resources.”

## Calif. Dept. of Insurance Implements Major Homeowners Insurance Reforms

In September 2023, Governor Newsom issued an executive order to insurance commissioner Ricardo Lara to implement regulatory changes to strengthen and stabilize California’s insurance market. On December 30, 2024, after 13 months of public hearings, comments and negotiations with the insurance industry, the California Department of Insurance (DOI) implemented a set of reforms to the California Insurance code. Here are some of the key changes to the code:

- Insurance companies will need to cover 85% of their statewide market share in high wildfire risk communities.
  - » For example, if a company writes policies for 20 out of 100 homes statewide, it must write 17 out of 100 for homes in each distressed area.
  - » Insurers must continuously increase the percentage of coverage in distressed areas by 5% every two years until the 85% threshold is met or exceeded.
- Insurers will be able to use forward looking catastrophe models to set home insurance rates
  - » The models will be reviewed and approved by the DOI before they can be used by insurers.
  - » The DOI is developing a “public” catastrophe model to use as a baseline to compare insurer models against, ensuring that their models are accurate and the rates that are set are fair.
- Insurers will be required to account for mitigation efforts by homeowners, businesses, and communities in catastrophe modeling.
- Insurers will be allowed to pass on California-only reinsurance costs to homeowners.
  - » Insurer reinsurance costs from other parts of the US cannot be lumped in with California costs.
  - » The DOI will develop a standard net cost of reinsurance (NCOR) to set a benchmark for all insurance companies to ensure that reinsurance costs do not exceed allowable levels set by the standard.

### Impact of the New Regulations

The objective of the new regulations is principally to bring insurers back into the California market to prevent its collapse. With the concessions on catastrophe

Cotoni-Coast Dairies was donated to the BLM by the Trust for Public Land in 2014. In January 2017, the Cotoni-Coast Dairies property was added to the California Coastal National Monument. Information about the project is available on the BLM NEPA National Register ([eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2021942/510](https://www.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2021942/510)). To learn more about California Coastal National Monument visit their website ([www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/california/california-coastal](https://www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/california/california-coastal)).

The RBDA is supportive of the goal of preserving these spectacular lands and opening them to the public, but as ecologist Grey Hayes has told our community at RBDA’s public presentations, these two goals often conflict. In the case of C-CD, we’re concerned that public access may lead to development of illegal mountain bike trails (as in Grey Whale Ranch area of Wilder Ranch State Park), facilitate illegal camping and fires, and impact habitat of pumas and other wildlife.

RBDA joined Friends of the North Coast and Davenport North Coast Association in appealing previous plans for C-CD, and our appeal was upheld in 2022 by the Department of Interior Board of Appeals. We continue to advocate for rigorous enforcement of regulations to protect the values for which the National Monument was established, including working toward a Southern Entrance location proposed in 2021 by 8 Organizations (including the Puma Project) and which BLM has by response letter supported in concept.

modeling and reinsurance costs that the industry was looking for, it seems that this objective should be met. Already in December, Farmer’s Insurance said that in the upcoming months they will begin issuing new dwelling fire coverage policies which they had stopped writing in 2023. This will in turn allow homeowners on the California FAIR plan, the insurer of last resort, to migrate onto private insurance plans, reducing the risk of FAIR plan insolvency.

The changes will undoubtedly raise the cost of homeowner’s insurance for Dooners and others living in high wildfire risk areas of California. The ability to make use of forward-looking catastrophe models and to pass on the cost of reinsurance can only make insurance premiums more expensive. How much more expensive is not clear. Requiring insurers to factor in homeowners’ wildfire mitigation efforts may help reduce premiums but it is unknown how much that will help. It should encourage our communities to harden their homes, establish fire perimeters, and join or establish FireSafe Councils. Depending on the scale, these developments could have a sizeable impact on preventing destruction of homes in future wildfires.

Having more insurers in the market will increase competition, which will help drive down prices. Yet, the rate at which insurers are being required to increase their issuance of policies in high fire risk areas is very low. It could be well over a decade before insurers have significant presence there. As an example, consider an insurer who completely exited all distressed areas in California and would start at 0% in those areas; at a rate of 5% every 2 years, it could take as long as 34 years to reach 85% of its statewide market share. One can imagine a scenario where insurers slow pedal their re-entry into distressed areas while maintaining high premium prices. So long as there is little competition in a distressed area, premiums will remain high.

All these changes to the regulations will take many years to fully implement and to improve the insurance situation in California. Premium costs will likely soon increase and it seems probable that they will stay high for the foreseeable future.

## CZU Recovery Permit Center Transfers from 4Leaf to SC County Oversight

In November of 2020, the Board of Supervisors (BoS) created the CZU Recovery Permit Center (RPC) to act as a center focused on rebuilding efforts, guiding the building permit and reconstruction process and streamlining and expediting it. However, the County recognized that its

own resources were insufficient and would be unable to fast track rebuilding efforts. Thus, since 2021, Santa Cruz County has contracted with Pleasanton, CA based 4Leaf to manage the RPC to provide the county with their expertise in recovery efforts and additional resources.

## What's Happening Around County District 3

By Supervisor Justin Cummings

Thank you to all the residents of Bonny Doon for your incredible collaboration, support, and commitment to making our County a place we can all be proud to call home. Looking back on the year, your partnership helped us achieve several important milestones across

multiple areas. Together, we made significant progress in emergency preparedness, supporting families, environmental protection, and advancing important advocacy efforts.

*To read the rest of Justin's column please visit [rbda.us](http://rbda.us)*

### UCSC Victory in Water, Sewer Service Suit Has Far-Reaching Implications for Bonny Doon

On November 21, 2024, the State's 6th District Court of Appeal ruled that two 60-year-old agreements between the City of Santa Cruz and UCSC obligate the City to provide water and sewer service to the entire 2,000-acre campus, not just the part within the City limits.

Politically, the court decision negates a significant tool that opponents of UCSC growth hoped to use to keep it from expanding into the undeveloped north campus, in Bonny Doon

However, UCSC's growth no longer impacts the City's water reserves: successful efforts by the university to reduce water consumption over the last 20 years have resulted in it now using less water than at the turn of the century, but it does impact the area's housing costs and availability, and will have a huge effect on the quality of life in the Cave Gulch area of Bonny Doon which adjoins the North Campus. Perhaps most importantly, it could have a disastrous effect on Bonny Dooners' ability to flee another wildfire, if hundreds of students and university personnel also need to use Empire Grade as an escape route.

A State level entity, the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) of Santa Cruz County (every county has one), is normally required to approve territorial expansions of service areas. The North Campus is outside

the City boundary. However, for decades, without LAFCO approval, the City has supplied water and sewer service to dormitories and classrooms on a tiny portion of the main campus just outside the City limits, as a favor to UCSC. Because of that accommodation, the court ruled, the City no longer has the right to require LAFCO review and approval of whether it must serve the rest of the campus, beyond City limits and outside the County's Urban Services Boundary. That boundary has long been part of the County and City's policy to retain a green belt and limit urban sprawl.

Had the university been required to get LAFCO approval for the services provision, it would also have necessitated the university and City to jointly file for the City to annex the North Campus, either immediately, or to commit to annexing it in the future. The LAFCO application would have required environmental review from the university, the LAFCO staff's legal review, and approval from the seven-member commission.

The City has not indicated whether it will appeal the Appeals Court decision to the State Supreme Court. Even if it does, the State's highest court might well decide not to review it, unless it thinks that the case would involve setting or changing a precedent.

### Former RBDA Chairman Bruce Bratton Dies at 90

Controversial, contentious, and paradoxical, Bruce Bratton, who served as chairman of the RBDA during the tumultuous years in the late '80s and early '90s when the community center controversy was inflaming Bonny Doon, died in his sleep on December 6.

Bruce moved to Santa Cruz County from Berkeley in the early 70s and worked as a reporter and columnist for pretty much every local news outlet, until he was fired for one reason or another, often because of a difference of opinion with the outlet's editor.

Born in Buffalo, New York, Bruce came west to study at UC Berkeley, majoring in communications and public policy, and began his career working for the Berkeley public radio station KPFA and the Daily Californian.

Devoted to left wing and environmental causes, Bruce quickly made his voice heard, writing for Good Times, the Santa Cruz Express (where I first got to know him as a fellow columnist for the short-lived weekly) and others, and later hosting an interview show on KZSC, the UCSC radio station. Irascible, quirky, and intolerant of people whose views he opposed; Bruce was a central character in Santa Cruz's progressive political scene.

He played a major role in the successful battles to keep a nuclear plant from being built in Davenport, to save Wilder Ranch from development as a new city of 10,000

homes, and to turn Lighthouse Field into a state park.

In the late 80s Bruce lived in Bonny Doon and was elected to the RBDA Board. The battle over whether there should be a community center in Bonny Doon split the RBDA and the community, and feelings ran high. Bruce, along with the late Paul Hostetter, led the opposition. RBDA public meetings were intense. Yes, a community center would be a great thing for Bonny Doon, all agreed, but its possible locations were a problem (no one wanted it to be near where they lived), as was the fact that the County, which would build it from dedicated "park" funds that were part of our property taxes, had a requirement that it be available for any county resident to rent for events. A non-binding community vote was eventually held, the community center opponents eked out a small victory, and the project eventually died.

I will miss Bruce, his feisty demeanor and opinions, his public-spirited harangues, and his seat-of-the-pants movie reviews (by writing one-sentence judgments in his columns, he got to see all the new releases for free). He was one of the few remaining individuals from the almost vanished free-spirited period of Santa Cruz history, and the community and the environment are all the richer thanks in no small part to him.

*-Ted Benhari*

### CZU Recovery Permit Center Transfers from 4Leaf to SC County Oversight

*Continued from Page 2*

Three years on the rebuilding process has been moving very slowly with only 140 homes rebuilt and a further 145 in construction. This represents barely half of the 697 that were lost in the fire. At this pace, many more years will be required to rebuild all the properties. The cost of \$2.3 million over the 3 years was unsustainable by the county which has had its budgets strained by a series of cataclysmic disasters over that same period. For this reason, the BoS in their December 11, 2024 meeting voted to end the contract with 4Leaf as of December 31st. Since the beginning of January 2025, the RPC is being run by the County's Unified Permit Center.

The County has said they will continue to prioritize CZU rebuilding efforts but with staffing levels still unchanged it is hard to see how they will manage this. Justin Cummings has stated that he is looking into finding \$150k to support the SC County Long Term Recovery Group (LTRG). Dooners who are struggling with the rebuild effort, you are highly encouraged to contact LTRG which, in partnership with SC County Office of Response, Recovery and Resilience (OR3), has been an invaluable resource supporting families in their efforts to rebuild. You can visit their webpage ([www.sccltrg.org/about-us](http://www.sccltrg.org/about-us)) to contact them.

#### Virtual Meeting Participation

##### Zoom Meeting Instructions:

To join by internet:

- 1) go to <http://zoom.us/join>
- 2) Enter the Meeting ID. 609 031 3060 and Click join
- 3) Enter passcode: 802339

To join by phone:

- 1) Call +1-669-444-9171
- 2) When prompted enter the Meeting ID. 609 031 3060
- 3) When prompted enter passcode: 802339





THE

# Highlander

Jan.-March 2025

Advocating for a natural, safe, and sustainable future since 1957

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*Bonny Doon's voice in preserving our special quality of life, The Highlander, is mailed free 4 times a year. RBDA Public Meetings are usually held the second Wednesdays of January, March, May, September and November. We encourage you to participate. Send correspondence to The Highlander at the above address.*

Access the RBDA on the Internet at:

[www.rbda.us](http://www.rbda.us)

E-mail us at:

[board@rbda.us](mailto:board@rbda.us)

Facebook (RBDA Members Only):

**RBDA, Rural Bonny Doon Association**

#### RBDA EXECUTIVE BOARD

CHAIR: David Rubin

VICE CHAIR: Eric Ornas

TREASURER: Garret Hammack

MEMBERSHIP: Jennifer Joslin

RECORDING SECRETARY: David Rubin (Acting)

CORRESPONDING SECRETARY: Laura Lancaster

HIGHLANDER EDITOR: Martin Burmeister

ADVISORS: Ted Benhari and Marty Demare (former board members)

**Bonny Doon Resident  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060**

## Jan. 29 RBDA Public Meeting: North Coast Rail Trail and Cotoni-Coast Dairies Opening

### Three RBDA Board Members Are Up for Election

The election will be held at the next public meeting, which will be held by Zoom and in person at Bonny Doon Elementary at 7:30 p.m. January 29. In accordance with the RBDA Bylaws ([www.rbda.us/who-is-the-rbda/rbda-bylaws](http://www.rbda.us/who-is-the-rbda/rbda-bylaws)), nominations were made at the November

public meeting. The January meeting will be open to anyone who wants to attend, but as specified by the Bylaws, only active RBDA members (people who have paid their membership dues) are permitted to vote for the board.

### Candidate Biographies

**Martin Burmeister** I am originally from California's Central Valley, and I have spent my entire life living in various parts of California. My wife and I moved to Bonny Doon eight years ago, seeking a more peaceful, rural setting, away from the congestion of Silicon Valley where I work as an engineering project manager. We love the serenity of living within these redwood forests, minutes from the Pacific Coast below. We also enjoy the diverse community of individuals that populate this area. It is this combination of unique people and this beautiful setting that makes Bonny Doon special. I hope to continue to serve the community as editor of *The Highlander*.



*Martin Burmeister*

**Jennifer Joslin** I have been a Bonny Doon resident for 37 years, moving here with my husband in 1988. We chose Bonny Doon because of its open spaces, lack of development and the amazing natural beauty of the area. I am a strong environmental advocate, and for many years ran The Marine Mammal Center's membership and direct mail fundraising programs as their Director of Membership.



*Jennifer Joslin*

I am also a returning RBDA board member having served on the board both in the mid-90's and from 2018-2020. I have a background in marketing and advertising as well as membership development. I am deeply appreciative of our unique community of Bonny Doon and look forward to again being part of this dedicated organization that is working to find solutions to the many issues facing Bonny Doon today.

**Laura Lancaster** I am a molecular biologist doing research at UCSC. I moved to Santa Cruz in 1996, and then to Bonny Doon in 2008. Being back up here after rebuilding from the 2020 fire has given me a fresh perspective. I realize now how vulnerable our unique community can be, how much I love it, and that I want to do what I can to help preserve it. I believe in the RBDA's mission and was particularly impressed by their role in defeating the LICA ordinance, which I strongly opposed. If elected to the Board, I look forward to serving as the corresponding secretary.



*Laura Lancaster*

### A Special Note from the Editor: The Highlander is Changing!

After much discussion, the RBDA Board has decided to continue publishing and mailing the paper version of *The Highlander*, in addition to providing a digital version to those requesting it. You will notice that this issue of *The Highlander* that you have in your hands (or are viewing as a pdf) is different. With this January 2025 issue we are implementing a new larger size format that enables us to increase the font size we use, write longer more in-depth articles, and intersperse photos and other graphics throughout. Additionally, the pdf versions that we will be distributing to our subscriber e-mail list, will include embedded hyperlinks to pertinent web articles.

Additionally, with this *Highlander* issue we will be changing the publication schedule. *The Highlander* has been published up till now on a bi-monthly schedule. Going forward, starting with this issue, *The Highlander* will be published quarterly.