



THE

Highlander

Nov./Dec. 2024

The Rural Bonny Doon Association Newsletter

RBDA Virtual Public Meeting

Living in a High Fire Danger Zone: Programs for Improved Safety and Resilience

Wednesday, November 13th, 7:30 p.m.

Virtual via Zoom Only

Drought, extreme climate events, and fire are facts of life here in the Doon. We have all asked ourselves, "What are the best strategies we can implement to keep our homes, our families and ourselves safe?"

To help answer that question, the RBDA is presenting an evening focused on four local programs dedicated to fire prevention, emergency communications and wildfire recovery. Learn more about how these programs have changed and grown, the benefits of each and how to get started with them.

Firewise: This is a framework that helps neighbors work together in a community to reduce wildfire risk through education and collaboration on defensible space, home hardening, evacuation planning, and more. Several of our neighborhoods have qualified as Firewise communities with more currently being certified. Homes in Firewise certified areas can receive a 10% discount on insurance.

Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) Audits: The Bonny Doon Fire Safe Council HIZ Assessor will, at no charge, visit your home to provide you an assessment of your fire preparedness and address any questions or concerns specific to your property. The assessment provides information related to Home Hardening and Defensible Space. Learn about this and other Council programs.

Bios of panel members can be found on Page 3 along with **Virtual Meeting Login Instructions**.

Bonny Doon Neighborhood Communications: This volunteer network of handheld and ham radios enables communications within our community when the power goes out during big storms, fires or other emergencies. This system has been put to good use in many neighborhoods. Hundreds of Dooners now have handheld radios that allow them to communicate in emergency situations.

The Santa Cruz Long Term Recovery Group: Formed in response to the devastating CZU Complex Lightning fire, it is a collaboration of agencies and organizations to coordinate recovery services for individuals, families, and communities that were adversely impacted by the fire.



Trina Barton

Our Guest Speakers



Lynn Sestack
Fire Safe Council



Susan Mason
Firewise USA



Glen Haimovitz
BD Neighborhood
Communications



Tonje Wold-Switzer
SC County Long
Term Recovery Group

Supervisor's Update with Trina Barton

Trina Barton, Special Assistant to Supervisor Cummings, will join us to provide the latest information on the issues and activities the Supervisor and his team are engaged with on our behalf.

The Impact of Court Ruling Invalidating UCSC Growth Plan

While it is still in its first round, the implications for Bonny Doon from the recent court ruling that invalidated UCSC's 2021-2040 Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) are beginning to emerge. In a decision in late August on a suit brought by the citizens' group Habitat and Watershed Caretakers (HAWC) and the City and County of Santa Cruz, Superior Court Judge Timothy Schmal ruled that the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the LRDP didn't adequately analyze the proposed growths' impact on housing (which mostly affects the city of Santa Cruz and Bonny Doon). Judge Schmal said there wasn't substantial evidence that the university can achieve its goal of housing 100% of the new students on campus.

He also ruled that the LRDP's analysis of a possible evacuation of the campus due to a wildfire was inadequate. Much of the new student housing and other infrastructure is planned for the Upper Campus, east of Cave Gulch, in Bonny Doon. The evacuation route would be onto Empire Grade, which of course is one of the main evacuation routes for Dooners. It isn't hard to foresee the traffic jam that could cause.

Finally, the judge confirmed an earlier court decision that upended UCSC's long-stated position that the City of Santa Cruz is legally obligated to provide water and sewer services to the upper campus, which is outside city limits, without the approval of the Santa Cruz Local Agency Formation

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The California Homeowners Insurance Crisis, Part 2: The Present Situation, Where We Are Going, and What Homeowners Can Do

In California, the factors discussed in Part 1 (environmental factors, insurance regulations, and soaring home prices) have conspired to:

- Significantly increase the probability of catastrophic events (wildfires) occurring at scale (e.g., the Park Fire, Camp Fire, etc.)
- Dramatically raise the cost of covering homeowner's losses
- Limit the ability of insurers to raise rates in response.

The resulting losses from extreme wildfire incidents have wiped out the reserve funds of even the largest insurers in the state. While the insurers as a whole in California made a cumulative \$10.1 billion in profits from 1991 through 2016, these profits were more than erased by the combined losses of \$13.2 billion in the years 2017 to 2021. The Tubbs Fire (2017) and Camp Fire (2018) alone cost insurers \$21.3 billion. As of July 2024, State Farm General reported a loss of \$880 million leaving it with reserves of just \$1.3 billion. A large event like the Tubbs or Camp Fire could well push the company over the brink into insolvency.

Because of the 2017 and 2018 fire seasons and aforementioned issues, many of the insurers in the state began to re-assess their level of exposure to the California market, particularly in rural, wildland areas that are at the highest risk for wildfires. Unable to raise their premium rates in a timely manner or to use forward looking models to set those rates, insurers began to drop or non-renew the riskier policies and stop issuing new policies in the state. State Farm announced in March 2024 that it would not renew some 30,000 homeowners, renters and other property insurance policies. In 2023, State Farm, Allstate and Farmers Insurance, three of the largest insurers in the state, all stopped writing new policies in California. Smaller insurers such as Falls Lake Insurance and Tokio Marine have withdrawn altogether from the California market.

Insurers have also been scrutinizing the properties to look for evidence of issues that would allow them to drop coverage. They have increasingly scrutinized policy holder's properties using drones, dropping these if there is even the hint of violation of terms or evidence of high-risk items.

Once dropped or non-renewed by insurers, many homeowners find it difficult to impossible to obtain a new policy from an admitted insurer. Their only recourse is to obtain coverage through the California FAIR Plan or through surplus lines of insurance. Many too, faced with eye watering high insurance premiums, have forgone homeowner's insurance altogether

The California FAIR Plan, Insurer of Last Resort

The FAIR plan is a private insurance plan that is managed and funded by the combined resources of all admitted private insurers doing business in the state. The insurers are mandated by the state to participate in the FAIR plan; their exposure to the plan is proportional to their share of the California market. This means that, for example, State Farm General who has 21.2% market share in California for homeowner's policies, would be exposed to 21.2% of net profits

or losses incurred by the FAIR plan. The FAIR plan distributes its profits to the participating insurance companies and does not have a reserve to fall back on. The participating insurers provide that backstop.

Unlike regular insurers, the FAIR plan is exempt from many Proposition 103 requirements and is required by law (AB1754 - 1996) to be "actuarially sound". That is, the plan should take in sufficient revenues to cover assessed risk. Thus, the FAIR plan can, for instance, use predictive modelling techniques to estimate future risk in setting premiums. However, like private insurers, the FAIR plan still must go through the CDI regulatory approval process for rate increases. The FAIR plan is also allowed purchase re-insurance. Yet, like the private insurers, it is barred from passing on those costs to its customers.

Because the plan covers a high concentration of high-risk properties, insurance premiums run many thousands of dollars more than a traditional insurer would charge, doubling or trebling the homeowner's insurance costs. Anecdotally, we have found that FAIR plan annual premiums have run from \$10,000 to \$18,000 in Bonny Doon and the vicinity. Furthermore, this insurance is limited to covering fire, lightning or smoke damage only. An additional difference in condition" (DIC) insurance policy is required to cover other perils

Despite the high rates it charges for its premiums, the FAIR Plan is in financial jeopardy. This insurer of last resort is increasingly becoming the insurer of first resort for Californians living in wildfire zones. As of June 2024, the FAIR plan had 408,432 policies in force, a 27% increase over 2023 and 164% increase over 2019. This is an exposure to \$392.1 billion, a 38.3% increase since 2023. Meanwhile the plan took in only \$1.11 billion in premiums up through June 2024, covering barely 0.2% of its exposure. Given that the plan holds mainly high-risk properties in its portfolio and that it has no reserves, one moderate sized event could send it into insolvency and expose private insurers to billions more in losses to cover. That in turn could drive those insurers also into insolvency.

Surplus Lines : the Other Insurance of Last Resort

Increasingly Californians have turned to these insurers as an alternative to the FAIR plan. This is insurance that is provided by companies located out of state that are not admitted insurers. That is, they are not formally approved by the California DOI. And as such, the policies issued by these insurers are not backed by CIGA. Consequently, if the insurer fails, there is no recourse for policy holder for claims coverage or refund of premium paid. The DOI also does not regulate or cap rates offered by these insurers and they are more expensive but may be lower than one would pay for the FAIR plan plus DIC coverage. Consumers should carefully research any surplus line insurer they are considering engaging with to verify that they are solvent.

To read the rest of this article as well as the full text of Part 1, please see the digital version of the Highlander on the RBDA website, rbda.us

November Public Meeting: Our Guest Speakers

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Lynn Sestak is a volunteer and Board member with the Fire Safe Council of Santa Cruz County. For the past 4 years she has been a Firewise coach for communities throughout Santa Cruz County, in addition to being a Firewise leader for her own community in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Lynn co-founded the Fire Safe Council's Home Ignition Zone program (with Mike Phinn and Matt Abernathy) and is an active Home Ignition Zone assessor.

Susan Mason is currently the Board Secretary of the Bonny Doon Fire Safe Council. She also spent years volunteering with Bonny Doon Fire & Rescue where she served as Captain. During that period, she was presented the Santa Cruz County Fire Department's Volunteer Firefighter of the Year Award by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors.

Glen Haimovitz is the volunteer head of the Bonny Doon Neighborhood Communications initiative. By profession, he designs incident management systems for police, fire and EMS across the country. These systems are in use at police and fire departments, airports, hospitals, school districts, colleges and many other organizations. Glen's hobbies include bike riding, ham radio, sailing, archery, and kayaking, as well as hiking in our beautiful mountains.

Tonje Wold-Switzer is a professional in social services nonprofit project management. Tonje spent seven years in social services nonprofit administration and management at Community Bridges managing large grants and projects including the Disaster Case Management program following the CZU Fire and 2023 Atmospheric Rivers. In 2023 Tonje became Executive Director of the Long-Term Recovery Group of Santa Cruz County and is currently launching a variety of projects including a Volunteer Rebuild Program to bring un- and underinsured families home, and a Santa Cruz County VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters). As a total loss survivor of the 2020 CZU Lightning Complex Fire, Tonje connects on a personal level with the needs for streamlined preparedness and recovery efforts.

What's Happening Around County District 3

By Supervisor Justin Cummings

CZU Rebuild and 4Leaf Contract Termination

We have heard from residents concerned about the current state of recovery efforts for those impacted by the CZU fire, particularly in relation to the expiration of the 4Leaf contract and the ongoing services provided by the Santa Cruz County Recovery Permit Center (RPC). 4Leaf's role in helping residents navigate the building permit process at the RPC is slated to end December 31, 2024. There are numerous obstacles to obtaining necessary pre-clearances, which require extensive internal County support currently provided by 4Leaf as well as external support via the Long-Term Recovery Group (LTRG). As of now, the LTRG has received limited contact information for households needing assistance.

My office is working to expedite information sharing between LTRG and County Planning staff, especially for the properties that have advanced through pre-clearance but have not progressed in rebuilding due to insufficient resources. We're investigating possible options regarding the 4Leaf contract and

hoping to collaborate with other districts to bolster sustainable resources for LRTG, ensuring consistent support for survivors.

If you are facing barriers to rebuilding or have concerns about how the end of the 4Leaf contract might affect you, please contact Sandy or Trina in my office at Sandy.Brown@santacruzcountyca.gov or Trina.Barton@santacruzcountyca.gov or call us at (831) 454-2200.

Empty Cup Tax Helps Fund Fire Safe Antenna

Since 2022, the County has been collecting a 24¢ tax on single-use, disposable cups; the funding from which can be used on projects that support environmental protection and climate resiliency. The W6TUW station manager and the Bonny Doon Fire Safe Council shared with my office that last year's District 3 allocation to the Bonny Doon Fire Safe Council was used to purchase an antenna for the W6TUW repeater, which has been raised to the top of the tower in the Pineridge subdivision in Bonny Doon. We are elated to hear that funding from the empty cup tax has contributed to an improvement in emergency communications.

This investment will support ham radio communications, which are a reliable means of communication in the Santa Cruz mountains and support a vital part of the emergency communication network. Improved emergency communication on Highway 1 (from Santa Cruz to Davenport), Empire Grade (from UCSC to Summit Drive), the UCSC Campus, Wilder Ranch, and Bonny Doon Road (from the coast to Pine Flat) means we are better equipped to communicate during emergency situations.

Thank-you to our incredible community partners and we look forward to continuing support for the Bonny Doon Fire Safe Council and emergency communication needs.

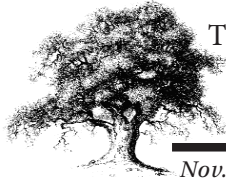
The Impact of Court Ruling Invalidating UCSC Growth Plan

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Commission (LAFCO). Since it is unknown whether LAFCO would approve UCSC's application for water and sewer service, UCSC can't assume it in the EIR analysis.

There is a lot of legal maneuvering still to be done before the dust settles, which may take a year or more. UCSC can appeal the decision or just decide to redo the portions of the EIR found inadequate, or negotiate a settlement, as happened nearly 20 years ago with the previous LRDP. Meanwhile, it must be determined whether the new court decision means that the previous LRDP settlement is again legally binding, and UCSC is limited to an enrollment of 19,500 students (which it may be close to or even exceeding at the present time) and how that could affect its admission of new students in the fall of 2025 if the legal issues are still outstanding.





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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 6 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

E-mail us at:

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: Eric Ornas (Acting)

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

Nov. 13th RBDA Public Meeting: Living in a High Fire Danger Zone

Become an RBDA Member!

Becoming a supporting member of the RBDA benefits the community. We use membership dues to pay for costs of public meetings (school insurance, video gear, and our zoom account) and for publishing the Highlander (to distribute to members and non-members alike). We also use membership dues for special purposes, as we did to hire attorney Bill Parkin to write a letter to the County arguing that their proposed LICA ordinance violated the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Supervisors read Parkin's letter, and when they voted down the proposed ordinance, they voted that any future LICA ordinance

would require full CEQA review.

Even without paying annual membership dues, community members can attend public meetings and receive the Highlander and action alerts about local issues (such as the proposed LICA ordinance)—provided you sign up on our website (www.rbda.us).

Board elections

RBDA members who are current on their dues are eligible to vote in elections of our (all-volunteer) Board. You can nominate candidates at the November public meeting and vote on candidates at the January public meeting.

Board Nominations Open at November Public Meeting

At our November 13 public meeting, we will open nominations for positions on the RBDA Executive Board. The election will be held at the January 2025 Annual RBDA meeting. Nominees must be an RBDA member, and only RBDA members may nominate candidates at the November meeting, and nominees must also be members.. You can nominate yourself, or someone else (whether present at the November meeting, or not).

an open slot on the board. We have two board vacancies with no present candidates as Membership Coordinator Cathy Bayer plans to step down, and one other unfilled seat. Three board members (Chair Dave Rubin, Vice-Chair Eric Ornas, and Treasurer Garret Hammack have the second year of their two-year terms to serve.

Two current Board members whose terms are up plan to run again: Highlander Editor Martin Burmeister and Corresponding Secretary Laura Lancaster, who was appointed recently to fill

If you are interested in helping the RBDA in its important work serving the Bonny Doon community, contact Nominating Committee Chair Ted Benhari via the RBDA board email address, board@rbda.us.

Virtual Meeting Participation

Zoom (zoom.us) is a video conference platform that is free to use through either a web browser or application, and audio participation is possible through a dial-up connection on your phone. 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**