



THE

Highlander

March/April 2023

The Rural Bonny Doon Association Newsletter

Natural Disasters in Santa Cruz County: The Winters of 1982, 1983 and 2023

UCSC Professor and Author Gary Griggs

Wednesday, March 8, 7:30 p.m.

In Person at the Bonny Doon Elementary School Multi-Purpose Room

And

Virtually via the Internet (Zoom)

The RBDA is pleased to announce that Prof. Gary Griggs (a former RBDA board member) will be speaking at our public meeting at 7:30 pm, March 8. Gary is world-renowned for his work on the California coast, and he will put into perspective our recent storms and their impact. Gary is an exceptional speaker, and has been busy giving interviews to the press about the storms last month. We are fortunate he could fit us in, and we expect this to be a great presentation. You have your choice of attending in person at the BD Elementary School, or by zoom.



Gary Griggs

Virtual Meeting Login Instructions can be found on Page 2

Gary Griggs is a Professor of Earth & Planetary Sciences at the University of California Santa Cruz where he has taught for 55 years. He also served as the Director of the Institute of Marine Sciences for 26 years, where he led the development of the Coastal Sciences Campus and the Seymour Marine Discovery Center. His research, teaching and writing have been focused on geologic hazards and the coast of California, including coastal processes, hazards, and sea-level rise. The UCSC Alumni Association honored him with a Distinguished Teaching Award in 2006. In 2009 the California Coastal Commission and Sunset Magazine named him one of California's Coastal Heroes. He has been a member of the Ocean Protection Council's Science Advisory Team since 2008 and was appointed to the California Ocean Sciences Trust in 2016.

Understanding and Improving Fire Response Policies: Part 1

Editor's Note: The following article is an invited contribution from Bonny Doon resident Eric Hoffmann. The opinions stated below are not necessarily those of the RBDA Executive Board.

While this winter's rain was welcomed, it will increase the fire danger on our mountain, and for the most part, we are no more prepared for fire now than we were on August 16, 2020, when lightning strikes ignited a wildfire that blackened 63,740 acres and destroyed 1,431 buildings, including 911 homes, 310 of them in Bonny Doon. There are 20,858 homes in what the County calls the Wildfire/Urban Interface, which is about 20% of the homes in the county. A preliminary estimate of the damage caused was \$340 million. The cost of fighting the fire was \$68 million

In the first part of this two-part article, I will explore the lessons learned from the fire, and what responses have been taken. Part two will look at fire abatement measures in other California counties.

The 2020-21 Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury's focus was to review the response of the Board of Supervisors to fire victims, especially those in Bonny Doon, Boulder Creek, Ben Lomond, Davenport, and Last Chance, but did not include Cal Fire's response. Cal Fire, being a state agency, was outside of the purview of the Grand Jury and left out of its investigation. County Civil Grand Juries form a part of the judicial system (though are entirely independent of it) and are convened once a year. They have the duty to examine all aspects of city and county governments and special districts through their investigations.

"The CZU Lightning Complex Fire - Learn or Burn?" report by the Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury was released on June 24, 2021, nine months after the fire (https://www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/Portals/0/County/GrandJury/GJ2021_final/8_AfterCZU_Report.pdf). The Grand Jury zeroed in on the accountability of the Board of Supervisors and "investigated the loss of life, loss of property, and stress and anxiety felt by so many." It recognized that without accepting what went wrong, and making a commitment to improve evacuation, maximize resources, providing sufficient fire fighters, and enforcing fire codes throughout rural communities, citizens will continue to live with the threat of fire (<https://tpgonlinedaily.com/grand-jury-wants-more-oversight-after-czu-fire>).

The Grand Jury gathered information from citizen input, public forums, interviews with the Board of Supervisors, and Cal Fire meetings about their fire response.

Residents' Statements and Comments:

- "There was confusion on evacuations and communication was often unreliable"
- "Use and management of volunteer firefighters was confusing." In Bonny Doon, the volunteer fire fighters were sent home.

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KEEPING BONNY DOON RURAL AND NATURAL SINCE 1957

Understanding and Improving Fire Response Policies: Part 1

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- “The BoS [Board of Supervisors] doesn’t take oversight of Cal Fire seriously. Once the money is authorized, the BoS feels that’s the end of its responsibility.”
- “Vegetation Management and Fuel Reduction is a problem.”
- [Then] Cal Fire Unit Chief Ian Larkin: “We have not been able to achieve our goals of fuel reduction. It is a difficult topic in Santa Cruz County. A lot has been done but there is a lot more work that needs to be done. [...] But we need to increase it with a greater emphasis on greater compliance from the property owner. It’s easy to go out and do a couple of inspections, gaining some compliance; but we really need to have defensible space around these structures so it makes it more defensible when we have the resources to defend them.”

The Grand Jury discovered that explanations by Cal Fire were often contradicted by people living in the fire area. While Chief Larkin said the lack of resources was a serious problem for them, attendees at meetings pointed out that this could have been dealt with prior to fire season by contracting fire fighters from out of state. Furthermore, the long-standing Bonny Doon Volunteer Fire Team was told not to participate in the fire fighting.

At a Cal Fire presentation for Santa Cruz and San Mateo Counties, District 5 (Scotts and San Lorenzo Valleys) Supervisor Bruce McPherson asked, “What will you do better the next time we have widespread fires and resources are spread too thin? How will you know what to do differently if you don’t do an ‘after-incident report?’ Not doing an ‘after-incident report’ implies Cal Fire did everything perfectly and has no need to review and reflect on what you did well and what mistakes you made.”

Grand Jury Findings:

F1. Residents are still concerned about the response, evacuation and future preparation in the aftermath of the CZU Lightning Complex Fire. They are understandably irate. The supervisors, elected to their positions by our community, fail to recognize that they are responsible to adequately address these concerns.

F2. There was a marked difference in content and depth of analysis between Cal Fire’s Virtual District Meeting presentation given to San Mateo County and the two given in Santa Cruz County. The discrepancy is disappointing and not acceptable.

F3. The Board of Supervisors did not adequately respond to their constituents’ concerns and questions.

F4. The Board of Supervisors has not held Cal Fire accountable for their lack of analysis of their performance in the CZU Lightning Complex fire.

F5. No provision exists in the current contract between the county and Cal Fire to develop after-action reports during the non-fire season.

F6. The Board of Supervisors’ responses to the Findings and Recommendations of the 2020 Ready? Aim? Fire! report show a lack of engagement with the material and a lack of understanding of their role as advocates for the county.

F7. The adequacy of resources for firefighting in the future is questioned due to uncertainty of mutual aid assistance, deployment and management of volunteer companies, and availability of funding.

Recommendations of the Grand Jury’s report (see https://www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/Portals/0/County/GrandJury/GJ2021_final/8a_AfterCZU_BoS_Required_Response.pdf):

R1. In the next 30 days the Board of Supervisors should conduct an investigation to challenge Cal Fire on their preparation for future fire events, Cal Fire’s response to the CZU Complex Fire, and give satisfactory answers to all residents’ questions and concerns as documented in the report. (F1, F2, F3)

R2. Within the next six months, the Board of Supervisors should require that Cal Fire produce timely after-action reports for all major incidents. (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5)

R3. In the next 90 days the Board of Supervisors should direct staff to produce a lessons-learned document for the public summarizing their investigation of Cal Fire and an action plan detailing how preparation for the future fire events and response will be improved. (F1, F2, F4, F5)

R4. The Board of Supervisors should revisit its responses to the Grand Jury’s 2020 “Ready? Aim? Fire!” Report, and rewrite their responses by December 31, 2021 in a document posted on their website to demonstrate hands-on engagement and better preparation for the next fire season. (F6)

R5. Within six months the Board of Supervisors should direct staff to advocate for additional funding for fire preparation and prevention resources from the state of California. (F7)

Virtual Meeting Participation

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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. For this meeting, we will be utilizing all the available security features, including password-protection and waiting rooms managed by the host. Zoom Meeting Instructions:

To join by internet:

- 1) go to <http://zoom.us/join>
- 2) Enter the Meeting ID. **987 3871 7843**
- 3) Click join
- 4) Enter passcode: **418702**

To join by phone:

- 1) Call **+1 669 900 6833**
- 2) When prompted enter the Meeting ID. **987 3871 7843**
- 3) When prompted enter passcode: **418702**

We will be utilizing waiting rooms managed by the host.

City and County Lawsuit Over UCSC Growth Plan

It's now been almost a year and a half since the UC Regents approved UCSC's 2021 Long Range Development Plan (LRDP), that calls for the university to add 9,500 students over the next 20 years, to reach an enrollment of 28,000. The Santa Cruz City Council and the County Board of Supervisors have expressed grave concerns that UCSC has not planned to house all the additional students, faculty and staff on the campus, which would continue the upward pressure on the city of Santa Cruz housing costs. Consequently, they filed a lawsuit against UCSC, charging that the Environmental Impact Report for the LRDP does not contain a contingency plan if the university fails to build the necessary housing but still grows its enrollment.

How could this happen? UCSC must surely be obligated to build the additional housing if they admit the additional students?

The short answer is, "No." At least, that's the way UCSC has seen it in the past. Perhaps the current lawsuit, like the ones in the early 2000s that led to the Comprehensive Settlement Agreement (CSA) of 2008, in which the university agreed to create the needed beds (and did), will ensure that the housing is built. But bear in mind that no new dormitories were actually built as a result of the CSA. UCSC created the additional beds by converting student lounges (and any other useable spaces) into bedrooms and adding a third bed in rooms that used to contain two. UCSC admits that they have now exhausted all those possibilities.

Even when UCSC has wanted to build new dormitories, stumbling blocks have cropped up, such as lawsuits over their location, like the current battle over the Student Housing West project which UCSC wants to erect at the base of the Great Meadow.

As for the lawsuit, apparently the last year has been largely spent in legal maneuverings that are referred to as creating the "administrative record," wherein the parties agree to the various facts and documents related to the case.

In the meantime, the makeup of the Board of Supervisors and the City Council has changed, as has the form of the city government, which now has a mayor and council members elected by district.

Justin Cummings, who switched from being a City Councilman in January to becoming our new 3rd District Supervisor, has strongly supported forcing UCSC to house greater amounts of its students on campus, including, if necessary, by litigation, such as the current lawsuit. The housing pressure created by the huge university growth over the years has been a major driver of increased housing costs in Santa Cruz, which in turn has contributed to people being unable to afford the rent and becoming homeless.

RBDA needs one more board member

Do you want to help the Bonny Doon community? The RBDA board has a vacancy for one new volunteer member to serve as Recording Secretary. The task requires taking minutes at one board meeting per month, responding to board emails, and (optionally) pursuing local issues that you find worthwhile. No experience is necessary, and you will learn more about what is happening in Bonny Doon. Contact the board at board@rbda.us

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RBDA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Yearly dues are \$20/pp or \$15/pp for multiple members at same address.

Memberships expire on Jan. 31 of the next year. *

Number of Members _____ Number of years you are joining or renewing for _____

Multiply years times number of memberships. Checks only, please, made out to RBDA.

Amount enclosed for dues: \$ _____

I also wish to support the RBDA with an additional contribution of \$ _____

Total amount of enclosed check \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-Mail Address(es) _____

I certify that I (we) live or own property in the Bonny Doon Planning District.

Clip out and mail to RBDA, P.O. Box 551, Felton, CA 95018.

Dues mostly go for printing and mailing ***The Highlander***,

your voice for keeping Bonny Doon rural and natural.

Additional contributions are gladly accepted and greatly appreciated!

*Dues paid after Nov. 30 count toward the next year.



THE Highlander

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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

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

March 8th RBDA Public Meeting: Natural Disasters in Santa Cruz County

Status of Event Center Site on Empire Grade

Last spring, residents in Bonny Doon contacted the County and Cal Fire to report non-permitted structures, non-permitted grading, non-permitted multi-day musical events, a trailer fire, and other violations at 5187 Empire Grade. Having recently suffered the CZU fire, the Pineridge neighbors were particularly concerned about fires at the 80-acre event center. On May 24, 2022, the County issued a Notice of Violation that cited non-permitted structures, a wood-fired sauna, and remains of a trailer destroyed by a fire. The County's citation also noted that the property is used as an event and retreat center.

While the County was investigating these activities, neighbors in Pineridge contacted the RBDA board and asked for support in their complaints to the County and State. The RBDA has no regulatory or enforcement authority, but it does have a 60+ year history of working for environmental protection in Bonny Doon. The RBDA board contacted the County and State as requested by the neighbors and, in November 2022, a representative of the property owner (an LLC) signed a "Stipulation and Order" agreeing to a remediation schedule. The owner agreed that by March 31, 2023, they would obtain permits to retain current use. If permits are not obtained, the owner will remove all trailers, RVs, tents, yurts, and saunas; cease use of the property as an event center with overnight parking; disconnect and remove all utility connections; and obtain all final inspections and approvals. If these conditions are not met, the owner will be fined \$10,000.

Understanding and Improving Fire Response Policies: Part 1

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Response to Grand Jury Findings and Recommendations

R5 is the only recommendation that was accepted by the Board of Supervisors and Cal Fire. We are currently unaware of funds being requested or received but are disappointed that so few of the recommendations were implemented by Cal Fire and the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors. (<https://tpgonlinedaily.com/grand-jury-wants-more-oversight-after-czu-fire/>).

Forester Bret Barker works throughout California as a consultant to PG&E, numerous cities and private clients. He believes that "Fire hazard severity in the state of California has been dynamically and radically changing, and wildfire threats will continue to increase. It is essential for public safety that all governing bodies work together, across platforms to protect citizens' well-being. Updating anachronous abatement codes and stepping up enforcement is crucial for public safety."

When asked for a comment, newly elected District 3 Supervisor Justin Cummings said, "Fire safety and defensible space are critically important to me and I look forward to working with the Bonny Doon community to strengthen policies and enforcement in the fire code"

Part 2 will explore fire prevention measures being implemented in many counties in California.