



THE

# Highlander

Nov./Dec. 2023

The Rural Bonny Doon Association Newsletter

## **Updates on Cotoni-Coast Dairies and Wildfire Mitigation Strategies**

**BLM Central Coast Field Manager Zachary Ormsby**

Wednesday, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 p.m.

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

Bureau of Land Management Central Coast Field Manager Zachary Ormsby will discuss BLM's myriad activities at Cotoni-Coast Dairies National Monument and associated fuel reduction projects as they move through the planning and implementation process of opening the property to public access. He will present conceptual renderings for potential parking lot designs and introduce us to several new members of his team.

*Virtual Meeting Login Instructions can be found on Page 4*

**Zachary Ormsby** was named BLM Central Coast Field Manager in December 2022. He brings nearly 20 years of natural resource management experience to this position, in which he oversees approximately 315,000 acres of public lands in 12 counties.



*Zachary Ormsby*

Ormsby graduated with a B.A.S., in Anthropology with a focus on Traditional Ecological Knowledge from the University of San Diego and worked for 10 years as a biological consultant. In 2014, Zachary was attacked by a wild boar while conducting Golden Eagle surveys in the southern Sierra Nevada back country. His resulting disabilities led him to pursue a master's degree in Natural Resource Planning, Policy, and Law at the University of Nevada, Reno. Upon completing his studies, he worked in a series of conservation positions of increasing responsibility for the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, then joined BLM as a National Monuments and National Conservation Lands Specialist.

Ormsby says he is passionate about communicating science and working with stakeholders to produce conservation outcomes. He grew up spending summers in Santa Cruz with family and is excited about this opportunity to serve the land and public in this area.



*Justin Cummings*

## **An Update from Supervisor Justin Cummings**

Supervisor Cummings will also be joining us to provide the latest news about his work on our behalf. He has much to talk about.

## **What's Happening Around County District 3**

*Editor's Note: This article is an invited contribution from Supervisor Justin Cummings*

Last week the North Coast Facilities Management Working Group met for the final time before releasing their plan's final draft. This group was initially formed in 2021 to help coordinate long-term facilities management and plan projects along the north coast. After many years of coordination and review, the group has identified and prioritized numerous projects for the north coast. We anticipate this document will be available to the public in early November, and the public will have an opportunity to provide feedback up until Monday December 18. We will share links to the document and to information about public meetings once the documents are available. We would like to thank the many people who have provided feedback over the years and have helped us get to this critical point.

Our office recently met with AT&T to advocate for residents who lost landlines during the CZU fires and to learn more about emergency communications and other communication options. As we mentioned in our September newsletter, AT&T informed us that if you or someone you know lost their landline during the CZU fires, you can have it reinstalled at no cost by AT&T. You can contact Clint Smith at AT&T by email ([ts8178@att.com](mailto:ts8178@att.com)) or phone (404-754-1722). AT&T has initiated the reinstallation of 120 poles that were lost in the fire in White House Canyon, which will restore service to residents in that area once the project is completed in the next three to six months. We were also informed that the County has signed a contract with AT&T for First Net service that will provide first responders with priority communications during emergency events. The County will have access to a variety of technologies to increase first responder communication including drones, satellites, and mobile cell towers. We will be meeting with AT&T again soon to learn more about their small cell technology and how that may help improve communications in areas with little reception.

On September 29, the application period for PG&E wood hauling ended. The County is now working with PG&E to submit an amendment to their Coastal Commission coastal development permit. Once approved, PG&E will be able to begin wood hauling on the remaining properties. We want to thank everyone for their patience during this time and hope that we can finish wood hauling soon.

# ***RBDA Position on Cotoni-Coast Dairies National Monument***

## **Background**

Shortly before the end of his term as president, Barack Obama converted the Coast Dairies lands donated by Trust for Public Land (TPL) to the US Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in 2014 into a unit of the California Coastal National Monument, to be known as Cotoni-Coast Dairies. While he was considering this conversion to monument status, the RBDA gathered signatures of several hundred Santa Cruz County residents opposed to this plan. Why did our community and our organization oppose Monument status? First, the lands were already designated for use as open space and protected from all activities except agriculture and public access for recreation and enjoyment to the extent consistent with the protection and preservation of its natural resources. Claims by proponents of the monument designation that the lands might be otherwise subjected to mining or other activities were false; the lands were protected by strict deed restrictions imposed by TPL prior to the transfer and reinforced in its Coastal Development Permit. Second, we were concerned that the monument would not receive adequate funding to protect its resources from the influx of visitors that designation as a National Monument would attract (Fort Ord went from 40,000 annual visitors to 400,000 upon receiving monument status).

It is too early to tell how justified these concerns were, although BLM projects visitation to Cotoni-Coast Dairies will be 250,000 annually. We note in a positive vein that the new monument status of the land does, in fact, offer some greater protections than the existing deed restrictions—not because the lands are now part of a National Monument, but because the lands were designated for management as part of the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS), which prioritizes preservation over recreation. Of our nation's 160 National Monuments, only Cotoni-Coast Dairies and 29 others have received such designation.

The law establishing the NLCS requires the managing agency, BLM, to follow specific rules (listed at [https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/uploads/mediacenter\\_blmpolicymanual6100.pdf](https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/uploads/mediacenter_blmpolicymanual6100.pdf)).

The NLCS Act requires that lands be managed "in a manner that protects the values for which the components of the system were designated." (Cotoni-Coast Dairies is a "component" of the NLCS.)

Specifically, the BLM must:

*"Establish policy and guidance to ensure that conserving, protecting, and restoring the values for which NLCS units were designated are the highest priorities in the planning for and management of these lands."*

*"Subject to designating legislation or proclamation and other applicable law, provide appropriate recreational opportunities, education, interpretation, and visitor services to enhance the public's understanding and enjoyment of the NLCS."*

*"Highlight and promote the cultural, ecological, social, scenic, scientific, and economic values and benefits of NLCS units."*

*"The BLM will inventory and monitor the values for which NLCS units were designated. Monitoring data will be collected and stored in accordance with BLM data standards."*

*"The BLM recognizes that NLCS units encompass some of the West's most scenic and iconic landscapes and will emphasize the conservation, protection, and restoration of these scenic values."*

*"In harmony with, and subject to, applicable designating legislation or proclamations, the BLM will work to maintain and promote ecological connectivity and resilience and to restore, to the extent feasible, the natural system function and species composition of disturbed areas within NLCS units."*

*"The BLM will use the best available science in managing NLCS units."*

Indeed, the National Landscape Conservation System's 15-Year Strategy (2010-2025) states that: "All NLCS units are designated in keeping with an overarching and explicit commitment: to conserve, protect, and restore natural and cultural resources as the prevailing activities within those areas, shaping all other aspects of management." NLCS Strategy, p. 8.

## **Recent Events**

BLM has begun preparations to open Cotoni-Coast Dairies to the public, including (1) contracting with Santa Cruz Mountain Trail Stewards (formerly known as Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz) to build trails, and (2) preparing a Resource Management Plan that would require dispersed northern and southern parking lots so as to avoid concentration of impacts. Before the Resource Management Plan was approved BLM learned that it did not have access to its proposed southern parking lot, which would result in concentrated usage of the northern lot in excess of BLM's designed capacity. Consequently, RBDA joined Friends of the North Coast (FONC) and Davenport North Coast Association (DNCA) in appealing BLM's proposed Implementation Actions for the parking lots. Although such appeals have seldom prevailed in the Department of Interior, this was one such case where the Board of Land Appeals ruled in favor of the appellants and set aside its proposed parking lot Implementation Action. In November 2022 BLM commenced a new Scoping Process to enable it to make the necessary changes. Also in November 2022 a monarch butterfly overwintering site was discovered near the site of the northern lot, which further complicates planning.

RBDA, FONC, DNCA, as well as five other organizations have long been proposing to BLM alternative sites for both a northern and a southern parking area. We have submitted professionally prepared plans for these, and BLM supports the southern alternative in concept and appears open to discussing the northern alternative.

## **RBDA positions**

**Baseline environmental studies:** RBDA hosted a public meeting on March 16, 2022, with Benjamin Blom, then Field Manager for BLM's Central Coast Office. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires BLM to conduct baseline environmental studies, and we were disappointed when Blom told us that BLM did not have funds to conduct such studies (substantiating our earlier fears regarding funding levels). Blom left Federal Service in May 2022 and was replaced about seven months later by Zachary Ormsby. We are hopeful that he will be able to obtain such funds and implement a science plan that includes baseline studies. Without them, how will managers know if monument activities are having an adverse impact on the resources that the monument was established to protect?

RBDA has several other concerns regarding Cotoni-Coast Dairies developments. We believe that wildlife preservation should be given priority over trails and visitation, as specified by the NLCS requirements to prioritize ecology protection.

BLM initially proposed building picnic structures, barbeque grills and other facilities on the second terrace, as well as long, fenced access roads. We think that such facilities and road access should be excluded from the second terrace, because they will increase the likelihood of fire and will adversely impact wildlife, particularly pumas and bobcats. Moreover, enforcement of all monument regulations will be more difficult if parking and other facilities are dispersed farther away from the access points off Highway 1.

*Continued on page 3*

## **RBDA Position on Cotoni-Coast Dairies National Monument**

*Continued from page 2*

Local residents who have opposed development activities in Cotoni-Coast Dairies have been accused of having a NIMBY ("Not in My Back Yard") attitude. This is not the case with RBDA's concerns regarding Cotoni-Coast Dairies! We are glad that the monument lands have been given the more stringent protection of the NLCS, and we hope to continue working with BLM to achieve a management plan that will provide enjoyable and educational visitor experiences, while prioritizing protection of the resources for which the monument was established.

## **Summit Drive Cell Tower Application Update**

*Continued from page 4*

The RBDA Board submitted in writing the following message in support of the application:

"The Rural Bonny Doon Association (RBDA) is writing to support CTI's application to modify the cell tower at 186 Summit Drive, Santa Cruz, 95060. Our support is based in part on AT&T's stated commitment to maintain the cell tower on Empire Grade [at the McDermott Fire Station], in addition to adding cell services to the new tower. We are concerned that replacing the existing Empire Grade tower with the new one on Summit Drive might result in a net reduction of cell coverage where Bonny Doon residents live and drive.

The RBDA has been advocating for improved communications infrastructure in our community since before the CZU Fire. We have held community meetings and discussions with representatives from AT&T, Verizon, Comcast, Cruzio, PG&E, California Public Utilities Commission Public Advocate's Office, Santa Cruz County Supervisor Justin Cummings and his predecessor Ryan Coonerty, and Assemblymember Mark Stone's staff. This application to modify the Summit Drive cell tower is the only improvement that has been formally proposed by any provider to improve communications in Bonny Doon. Although other technologies such as distributed antenna systems might provide even better communications services in Bonny Doon, no provider has expressed an interest in deploying them.

For these reasons, the RBDA supports CTI's application."

## **Board Nominations Open at November Public Meeting**

The RBDA is a vital organization for Bonny Doon, serving as a pipeline to the Santa Cruz County government and other agencies to advocate for public services like road maintenance, communications infrastructure and law enforcement, and for strong land use regulations that protect Bonny Doon from negatively impactful development. To continue to effectively serve in this role, we need your participation, both as members and as board officers.

At our November 8 meeting we will open nominations for positions on the RBDA Executive Board, and the election will be held at the January 10 Annual RBDA meeting. You can nominate yourself, or somebody not present. The three present Board members who plan to run again are Chairperson Dave Rubin; Vice Chairperson Eric Ornas, who was appointed to fill an open slot on the board, and Garret Hammack, who was appointed to fill out Russel Kleigel's remaining term. The fourth member up for re-election, Kendra Turk-Kubo, has indicated that she will not seek another term on the Board.

Many of our currently serving board members became involved through a desire to advocate for a particular issue facing their neighborhood. If you are interested and able to help Bonny Doon and the RBDA by serving as a Board officer, please contact the Board by email at [board@rbda.us](mailto:board@rbda.us). To be nominated, or to vote in January, you must be a member in good standing as of this upcoming meeting. You can join or renew your membership by using the form in this Highlander.

## **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 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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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.

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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.



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

E-mail us at:

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**RBDA, Rural Bonny Doon Association**

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Santa Cruz, CA 95060**

## **Nov. 8th RBDA Public Meeting: Cotoni Coast Dairies & Wildfire Mitigation Updates**

### **Summit Drive Cell Tower Application Update**

CTI's application for the modification of the existing Summit Drive wireless communication facility was finally accepted by the County Planning Department. The proposal includes the removal of the existing 70-foot tower and replacing it with a 151-foot tower. As the next step in the process, the assigned county project planner prepared and submitted a staff report to the Zoning Administrator. This report contains the description of the project, the county and federal requirements it must meet, and the concerns of the residents of the Summit neighborhood.

Zoning Administrator Jocelyn Drake held a public meeting on October 20 to review the staff report and accept public comment. At the meeting the county project planner presented a summary of the staff report that found that "the project is consistent with all applicable codes and policies of the Zoning Ordinance and General Plan/LCP" and recommended approval of the application.

Drake heard comments from the owner, CTI, and residents from the Summit neighborhood, who spoke eloquently about their heartfelt concerns. They objected to the appearance of the 151-foot tower that they believed would be an eyesore even if it is camouflaged as planned to look like an evergreen tree (a mono-pine). They believe

it will change the nature of their neighborhood. Their additional concerns included fire safety, noise, lighting, loss of property values, landscaping, property clean-up, ongoing maintenance of the facility and health effects. Bonny Doon residents outside the Summit neighborhood spoke in support of the application. Prior to the meeting, the RBDA Board also had submitted in writing a message in support of the application (see below).

After the comments section, Drake asked questions of the county project planner and CTI. She said that she had been out to the site and she was sympathetic to the neighbors' concerns. She did not make a decision on the application and scheduled another hearing for January 26th. In the interim, she instructed CTI to do the following:

- Resubmit its alternative site analysis to include Patrick Road,
- Resubmit its propagation (coverage) maps to confirm its findings on the height requirements for the tower
- Redesign the mono-pine camouflage to be more in keeping with surrounding trees
- Clean up and perform maintenance on the current site.

*Continued on page 3*

### **Virtual Meeting Participation**

Zoom ([zoom.us](http://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:

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

To join by phone:

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- 2) When prompted enter the Meeting ID. **609 031 3060**
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