

THE

Highlander

April - June 2025

The Rural Bonny Doon Association Newsletter

RBDA Public Meeting The Birds of Bonny Doon

Wednesday, April 30, 7:30 p.m.

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

Join us for Dr. Grey Hayes' and Storey Montagne's joint presentation about the diversity of birdlife in Bonny Doon. Learn about the species that call Bonny Doon home and how we can help our feathered neighbors persist for generations to come. The presentation will discuss our avian population, past and present, covering the variety of species, changes that have taken place over time and how best to coexist with them.

We plan on including photos and videos taken by Bonny Dooners, as we did in a previous meeting. Submit your contribution(s) at tinyurl.com/BonnyDoonBirds, then email Grey Hayes at coastalprairie@aol.com to let him know about it. We will not use any submissions outside of this presentation. Let us know if you have any specific restrictions on the use of your photo and how you would like the attribution.

Also, email Grey and let him know about changes in numbers or types of birds you've noticed before and after the fire. Those and other bird stories are very welcome.

Virtual Meeting Login Instructions can be found on page 3

Storey Montagne has, since retiring from the world of technology, become an avid citizen scientist in the world of birds. She monitors nest boxes at UCSC's arboretum and has started her own nest box program at Pie Ranch in Pescadero. She has taken the Wild Farm Alliance online course to understand the role of birds on farms and how they can be used in pest control. Observing birds in their natural habitat and learning about their needs brings joy and inspiration to her day.



Dr. Grey Hayes

Dr. Grey Hayes is an ecologist and group facilitator working to create a community for nature in Santa Cruz County. He's published extensively, including peer-reviewed science, in natural history books and magazines, and in online periodicals and blogs. Since 1989, Grey's group facilitation and organizing work has focused on helping people to better work together to restore natural vitality to California's landscape for many generations of humans and non-humans, alike. He strives to increase our understanding of the ecology of Santa Cruz County's North Coast and increase community investment in the restoration of that landscape's biodiversity. Grey invites people to participate in this restoration through a variety of opportunities.

To network into various restoration communities, drop Grey an email at coastalprairie@aol.com. To stay up-to-date on ecological observations and trends, follow Grey at greyhayes.net.



Justin Cummings

Update from Supervisor Justin Cummings

Supervisor Cummings will join us to provide the latest information on county issues and his work on our behalf.

The State's Zombie LICA Bill has Come Back to Life and Returned to Haunt Us

Hipcamp, an online platform that facilitates campsite-rental bookings on private land, has sponsored a new "Low-impact camping areas (LICA)" bill (AB 518, 2025-2026) that was introduced in February by State Assemblymember Chris Ward (D, 78th District that includes San Diego).

This bill is substantially similar to the 2024 bill (SB 620), which was authored by State Senator Mark McGuire and also sponsored by Hipcamp. Like SB 620, the new bill would allow properties of two acres or more to establish up to 9 campsites (1 per acre), and contains astonishingly few restrictions. It allows camping even on properties that CalFire has mapped as very high fire hazard and on properties that private insurance companies won't insure; open fires are not restricted; no water storage is required; no property manager is required to be present. The bill specifies no allocation of resources for additional fire protection, law enforcement, emergency responders, protection of wildlife areas, or even the enforcement of the bill-specified quiet hours. Last year, SB 620 was strongly opposed by the RBDA and many Bonny Doon residents who wrote letters to the State Assembly with concerns including fire hazard, noise from campers and generators, sanitation, environmental impacts, and possible impacts on insurance coverage. Despite having sailed through multiple committees with no recorded opposition, SB 620 ultimately died pending a vote on the Assembly Floor.

You may recall that, in addition to the defeat of SB 620, a local 2024 LICA ordinance was voted down by our

Board of Supervisors (BoS), thanks largely to the efforts of our community and our Supervisor Justin Cummings. In regards to the newly-introduced State LICA bill, reassuringly, our current BoS has written an excellent letter in opposition that you can read on the RBDA website (rbda.us). The RBDA also wrote in opposition, and on March 21, the RBDA board had a 30-minute Zoom call with Alfonso Gomez, the staff person for Chris Ward, the State Assemblymember who authored AB 518.

We listed our numerous objections to the bill (detailed in the RBDA report on LICAs that is posted on our website) and Gomez said they would try to work out a compromise to address our concerns, but he stopped short of specifying how they would change it. We asked him for the date that the Assembly will consider the bill. He thought the Housing Committee would discuss and vote on it in early April, but he wasn't certain about this. He said he would send us the schedule by email. On April 9th, an amended version of AB 518 was considered and passed by the Committee by 10 "yes" votes, one "no", and one "no-vote-recorded" (a link to the bill's full text is on our website). The committee amendments include requiring each county to establish a registry of approved LICAs, to establish a complaint program to support LICA-related code enforcement, and to require LICA owners and operators to conspicuously post any permit or registration required by the county to operate the LICA, as well as contact information for the county for complaints.

While the amendments to AB 518 are welcome, they

Continued on Page 3

California Homeowner's Insurance Crisis Update

As we began 2025, it appeared that the state was turning a corner on the slow-moving homeowner's insurance crisis. At the end of December 2024, Insurance Commissioner Lara implemented the significant reforms to the California's insurance regulation that gave the insurance industry most of the changes they had long sought. As of January 1, 2025, insurers can for the first time use catastrophe modeling to set insurance premium rates and pass on the cost of re-insurance to customers. In return, insurers agreed to begin issuing new policies in high fire risk areas and limit re-insurance costs to California only costs. With these reforms in place, insurers who had halted issuing new policies would begin issuing new policies, rebuilding their reserve funds, and stabilizing the market.

These hopes were unfortunately short-lived. On January 7 numerous wildfires erupted in the Los Angeles basin and spread rapidly. This was a worst-case scenario: parched southern California that had seen less than a quarter of an inch of rain since early 2024, with tinder dry vegetation, was primed to explode under 100 mph dry Santa Ana wind conditions. Local firefighting resources were quickly overwhelmed and blazes tore through Pacific Palisades and Altadena, burning through some of the most expensive real estate in the nation. In the end, the Palisades fire consumed 1900 structures (homes and businesses) and 12 deaths and destroyed 56% of Pacific Palisades and portions of Malibu and Topanga. The Eaton fire consumed a staggering 9400 structures and had 18 deaths. In total, it is estimated that insured losses could reach \$34 billion for both fires with the total economic impact stretching to \$250 billion.

Effects of the LA Fires on Insurance

Exposure of the FAIR plan to claims from the LA fires could come to \$4 billion. So far claims have wiped out the approximately \$200 million reserve fund the FAIR plan had, forcing the plan to draw on its insurer members to cover an additional \$1 billion. Presumably the plan has also drawn on its \$350 million reinsurance policy. Beyond this, it has access co-insurance where costs get split between its member insurers and reinsurance. In total, the plan has access to \$5.75 billion in funds from all sources to cover wildfire losses.

One thing is certain: California consumers and not just homeowners will all be paying much higher rates for insurance. California insurance regulatory changes from mid-2024 now allow insurers to pass on up to \$2 billion of insurance losses from the FAIR plan to their customers. State Farm asked and received approval in March to implement an average emergency 22% rate increase on all its California policies in order to shore up its financial

situation. The company estimates it has exposure of \$7.6 billion to the LA fires and has so far paid out \$2.75 billion in claims. The increases will take effect on May 1, 2025 and affect all policies renewed after that date.

But we are only in April. Peak fire season has not yet started in earnest. If there is yet another massive conflagration, the FAIR plan will again not have sufficient reserves to cover the costs and be forced to draw on its members. State Farm and other insurers will also be directly exposed to any further losses. It appears likely that there will be further appeals by insurers to the State Dept. of Insurance (DOI) for emergency rate hikes.

In summary, the recently enacted regulatory reforms are starting to have some positive effects on the market but the LA fires no doubt push out the date by which the market will stabilize well into the future.

Legislative Work

On a more positive note, the legislature is actively considering numerous pieces of legislation to help put the FAIR plan on a better financial footing and provide relief to fire victims and financial support to homeowners hardening their homes. Here are brief summaries of a few bills under consideration

- **AB 888 California Safe Homes Grant Program:** This creates a tax-free grant program administered by the DOI for low-income homeowners for hardening their homes against wildfires. The bill establishes the Sustainable Insurance Account within the Insurance Fund, which would be funded from a portion of gross premiums tax collected from property and casualty insurers. Per Commissioner Lara, the grant program would pay out up to \$10,000 per applicant towards home hardening work.
- **AB 226 The FAIR Plan Stability Act:** The bill aims to strengthen the financial position of the FAIR Plan by allowing it to access catastrophe bonds through the California Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank. This provides the FAIR Plan with an added layer of financial support to help boost its solvency.
- **SB 495 Eliminate "The List" Act:** The bill will require insurance companies to pay wildfire survivors 100 percent of their contents coverage without needing a detailed inventory list. Consumers would also be allowed additional time, up to 180 days, to provide proof of loss to their insurance company following a declared state of emergency.

For the full list of bills under consideration see www.insurance.ca.gov/0400-news/0100-press-releases/2025/release017-2025.cfm



Cell Tower Update: Something Old, Something New

CTI's Summit Drive Tower Application Denied

The Planning Commissioners denied CTI's application to build a cell tower at 186 Summit Drive at the Planning Commission hearing on February 12 of this year. CTI's application had been previously approved by the Zoning Administrator in January 2024. Bonny Doon Residents for Responsible Cell Coverage filed an appeal to the Planning Commission which was granted. Commissioners Trina Barton, Yesenia Jimenez and Renee Shepard voted to deny the application; Commissioners Shane Pavonetti and Allyson Violante voted to approve it. CTI appealed the Planning Commission decision, and the Board of Supervisors will consider it on May 6th in a closed hearing to decide whether to take jurisdiction of the appeal. If the Supervisors decide to take it up, the Board of Supervisors will hold a public meeting on June 10th to hear CTI's appeal.

CTI's application was denied because the company did not demonstrate to the Commissioners' satisfaction that its tower met the conditions of the County's Wireless Communication Facility Use Permit. The Commissioners' found that the company failed to prove the following

requirements: "There are no other environmentally equivalent and/or superior and technically feasible alternatives..."; "The proposed facility eliminates or substantially reduces one or more significant gaps in the applicant carrier's network..."; and "The proposed facility is located on the least visually obtrusive site and least visually obtrusive portion of the site, where the applicant provides substantial evidence that it chose the best solution..."

The Commissioners full findings and minutes of the hearing are available at www2.santacruzcountyca.gov/planning/plnmeetings/PLNSupMaterial/PC/agendas/2025/20250409/005.pdf

The County is Negotiating on a Different Tower Site

The new news is that the County is actively negotiating a lease agreement with an unnamed tower developer for a multi-tenant cell tower site at the McDermott fire station where AT&T currently has a temporary tower. This negotiation is unrelated to CTI's Summit Drive tower application. Few details are available except for the report that the County and the developer are currently redlining the agreement. More to follow.

The State's Zombie LICA Bill has Come Back to Life and Returned to Haunt Us

Continued from Page 1

do not go far enough to address the concerns raised by members of the Bonny Doon community, our BoS, or the RBDA. For example, in the "Arguments in Opposition" section there is no mention of fire safety, generator noise due to insufficient setbacks, or environmental damage as concerns, although these issues were raised repeatedly in letters sent to the author and committee members. There are five organizations that have thus far opposed the bill: The California Outdoor Hospitality Association, the County of Santa Cruz, the County of Siskiyou, the County of Solano, and the Rural Bonny Doon Association. There are 35 in support, including Hipcamp (the sponsor), REI, the California Trails Foundation, the California Farm Bureau, and, surprisingly, Audubon

California and Save the Redwoods League. Since the bill has passed its Committee review, it will likely be headed for a full Assembly Chamber debate and vote. If the bill ultimately passes, it will be up to local jurisdictions to decide whether or not to have a LICA ordinance, and we hope that the BoS maintains its opposition to LICAs in our county. We would like to see, however, as many common-sense regulations as possible in the State bill that would address the very real impact that a proliferation of temporary campsites could have on rural communities such as Bonny Doon. We will be in contact with Justin Cummings' office for further advice on the most effective way our community can further pressure our elected representatives to modify this bill. Stay tuned.

Board Members Needed!

The RBDA has two open Board positions (Treasurer and Recording Secretary) and we are encouraging anyone to consider volunteering. The Treasurer position involves keeping track of income and expenditures, writing occasional checks to vendors, preparing a simple monthly treasury report for the board, and filing very simple once-per-year tax forms. The Recording Secretary is responsible for recording the minutes at monthly board meetings and distributing them to the other board members. Both positions require very little time outside of attending once a month board meetings. They do not require any experience and are urgently needed to fulfill our organizational requirements. Please contact RBDA at board@rbda.us if you are interested in joining the board.

What's Happening Around County District 3

Continued from Page 4

enforcement is challenging, we're committed to working together for safer roads and responsible trail use.

Low-Impact Camping Proposal Returns

Many of you have heard that low-impact camping is back on the state legislative agenda with the introduction of Assembly Bill 518. My office placed a letter on the February 25th agenda, which was unanimously supported by the board to oppose AB 518, citing wildfire risks, potential losses of fire insurance, lack of emergency response capacity, absence of environmental review, and strong community concerns. I appreciate the role that the RBDA and the community has played in expressing those concerns at the County and at the State level. We will keep you posted as the bill moves through the legislature. You can also track the bill through the California Legislative Information website: leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/home.xhtml.

Public Input Sought for Hazard Mitigation Plan

An alliance of local jurisdictions led by the Santa Cruz

County Office of Response, Recovery & Resilience (OR3) is seeking public input to help mitigate impacts from future disasters, including lifesaving measures, property protection, and environmental resilience. By filling out a survey, members of the public can help outline natural hazards in Santa Cruz County, assess their potential impact, and propose targeted mitigation actions. Residents are encouraged to complete the survey here: mitigatehazards.com/santacruznmjhm/. The results of the survey will be used in preparing a regional Hazard Mitigation Plan, which will document the hazards we face and propose mitigations for reducing them.

Thank you for keeping me informed about issues affecting Bonny Doon residents! Please feel free to reach out to my staff with questions or for additional information at trina.barton@santacruzcountyca.gov and sandy.brown@santacruzcountyca.gov. And, as we move through Spring and into Summer, I hope you have time for fun and relaxation.

Support Our Sponsors

FRANS LANTING STUDIO

Photography Workshops
108 High Road
Santa Cruz CA 95060
831-429-1331
www.lanting.com

WE DRIVE DOONERS!

24/7 Airport Shuttles, Medical Appointments,
City Tours, Emergency Deliveries, and more.
All our drivers and cars are pet friendly!
Mimi 310-721-1464
Jackie 831-295-7239
Eliyahu 831-247-9167
Kischka 831-465-6784

MCHENRY VINEYARD

Estate Pinot Noir
Bonny Doon CA 95060
www.mchenryvineyard.com
530-756-3202

HEIDI E. HART, President, CEO

California Dreaming Real Estate
Local / Non-Corporate
myagentheidi@gmail.com
831-247-9410

THE FLOWER LADIES

Flower Arrangements for Weddings & Special Occasions
www.theflowerladies.com
831-423-0261

Sponsorships: \$100 a year (4 issues).

Send check and text to: RBDA, P.O. Box 551, Felton, CA 95018

Virtual Meeting Participation

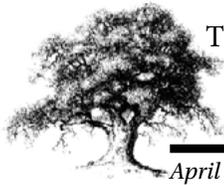
Zoom Meeting Instructions:

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

April - June 2025

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

Prsrt Std
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #236
Santa Cruz, CA

The Rural Bonny Doon Association Newsletter P.O. Box 551 • Felton, CA 95018

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

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: Jennifer Joslin (Acting)

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**

April 30 RBDA Public Meeting: The Birds of Bonny Doon

What's Happening Around County District 3

By Supervisor Justin Cummings

This month's report highlights recent road safety improvements, including completed safety upgrades on Smith Grade and storm damage repairs on Ice Cream and Smith Grade Roads. Ongoing efforts include addressing traffic hazards at the Pine Flat and Ice Cream Grade intersection, enhancing mountain biking safety on Smith Grade, and gathering public input for a Hazard Mitigation Plan to address future disasters. Additionally, the County opposes the latest proposed low-impact camping bill (AB 518) due to concerns over wildfire risks and environmental impact.

Completed: Safety improvements on Smith Grade

I am pleased to report that safety improvements have been completed at a dangerous curve on Smith Grade, about 0.7 miles from Empire Grade. The site had seen multiple accidents over the years, particularly involving drivers unfamiliar with the road at night. In response to community concerns, County staff implemented a safety plan that included new delineators along the curve, repainted centerlines with raised pavement markers, and curve warning signs with speed advisories in both directions. A final inspection confirmed the work was completed successfully, and the new measures are now in place to help prevent future accidents. I want to thank Ruby Lipsenthal for reaching out to my office and encourage others to notify us about issues in the district.

Completed: Ice Cream Grade and Smith Grade Storm Damage Repair

At our April 8th meeting, the Board of Supervisors accepted the final notice of completion for the Ice Cream and Smith Grade Road Storm Damage Repair project, successfully carried out by Granite Rock. The project

restored eight roadway locations damaged during the 2017 storm events, returning them to pre-disaster conditions. Additionally, it addressed further damage sustained at Smith Grade Road (Post Mile 0.52) during the December 2022 and March 2023 storms. Key repairs included:

- Replacement of a damaged culvert
- Headwall construction
- Slope repair and stitch pile wall construction
- Drainage improvements and rock slope protection
- Roadway restoration
- Erosion control and revegetation

In Progress: Ice Cream Grade at Pine Flat Road

We have heard community concerns about the dangers at the Pine Flat and Ice Cream Grade intersection, where speeding vehicles create a hazard—especially with an elementary and preschool nearby. We are working with County staff to explore ways to slow traffic and improve safety at this blind intersection.

In Progress: Mountain Biking at Smith Grade

We understand that vehicle and mountain biking safety is a serious concern in Bonny Doon, especially with the rise in illegal trail cutting and commercial shuttle operations in Gray Whale Ranch, as well as on private property. Fast-descending cyclists entering Smith Grade at blind curves pose increasing risks to cyclists and drivers. In response, we met with County Public Works staff and the State Parks Santa Cruz District Superintendent to explore options for addressing these risks. County staff recently met with RBDA Board Advisor Ted Benhari and will be installing warning signs for drivers. We're also exploring long-term solutions and will be meeting soon with neighbors, mountain bikers, trail stewards, and State Parks. While

Continued on Page 3

JOIN OR RENEW YOUR RBDA MEMBERSHIP!

Membership dues go to printing/ mailing *The Highlander* newsletter, maintaining our informative website, meeting insurance, and any additional advocacy costs. Additional donations are much appreciated! The RBDA is a 501(c)(4) non-profit organization.



Yearly dues are \$20 per person. You may join for multiple members/years. Memberships expire Jan 31st. Go to www.RBDA.us (or scan the QR code) to visit our website and join/renew by credit card. To pay by check, clip out and mail this form to: RBDA, P.O. Box 551, Felton, CA 95018

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

Yes, I'd like to make an additional donation to support the good work of the RBDA. Thank you!

Additional Donation \$ _____ Total amount of enclosed check \$ _____

Name _____ Address: _____ e-mail _____

Name _____ e-mail _____

Name _____ e-mail _____

Cell Phone# _____ (optional)