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Blue Oak Group



Butte, Glenn, Lassen, Plumas & Tehama Counties

The Biomass Quandary

Biomass is the hot issue of this edition of the paper! In particular, the Sierra Club's Mother Lode Chapter is one of the organizations that is trying to decide what position they/we should take on burning biomass.

The focus for the Club is on biomass in the form of dead trees and tree limbs, although biomass can include other heating materials as well. If your main concern is increasing CO2 and its effects on our planet, you might be opposed to all wood burning except prescribed burning by Native Americans (Bill McKibbin's position). On the other hand, if you think that downed trees and limbs are a source of fires, then you might believe that burning them would be the easiest way to be remove them from forests - despite the CO2 issue.

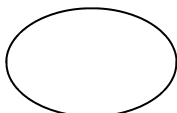
Reviewing the literature shows how complex the issue is!

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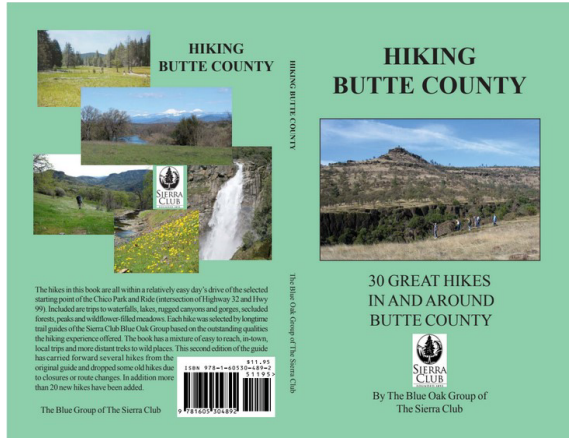
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New Edition of Hiking Butte County Book

By Alan Mendoza and Suzette Welch



The updated new third edition of the Blue Oak Group Sierra Club’s **Hiking Butte County** book is now available. The book has several updated hikes and adds more hiking suggestions. The cost is \$14.95, and it is available at **Mountain Sports** and **The Bookstore** in Chico. For more information, contact Alan Mendoza at 530-891-8789 or ajmendoza@prodigy.net.

Blue Oak Group looking for volunteers to help us sell books by tabling or contacting commercial outlets. If interested contact Suzette Welch at booksontape@rocketmail.com.

2024 Blue Oak Group Sierra Club

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Newsletter Information

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For submissions, comments, or inquiries, contact: Suzette Welch, booksontape@rocketmail.com 530 570-3240. Please include name, phone number, and address with each submission. Short, single-topic articles are preferred. Deadlines for proposed articles and letters to the editor: February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1.

Blue Oak Group News reserves the right to edit all submissions for reasons of space, clarity and potential libel. The opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Sierra Club or the Blue Oak Group.

Blue Oak Summer 2024 Outings and Events

Coordinated by Alan Mendoza. For updated outings information and for general information about outings and meeting places, please see our web site at: www.sierraclub.org/mother-lode/blue-oak

Thursday-Sunday, June 13-16 - Backpack

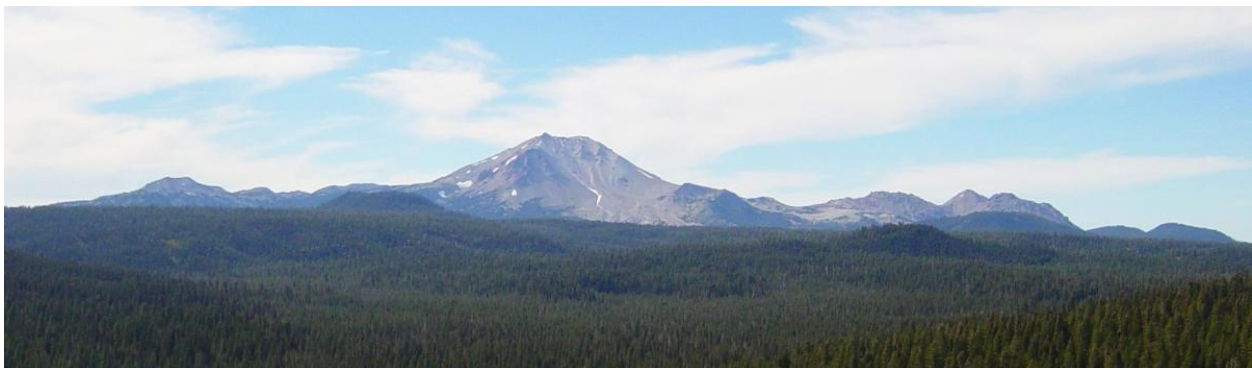
Yosemite National Park North Rim (3,C) A four day loop backpack starting from the Yosemite Creek trailhead in Yosemite National Park. We will begin by setting up a car shuttle and then hike to the top of Yosemite Falls, 7.5 miles with full packs, and set up camp above the falls. On day two we will day hike to Eagle Peak for great views of Yosemite Valley and Half Dome. On day three we will pack 3-4 miles north to Lehamite Creek and set up camp. In the afternoon we will hike to North Dome for more great views. On day four we will pack out 4-5 miles and climb 1000' to our vehicles at Porcupine Creek. Shuttle required. Cost \$10 per person for permits. For experienced backpackers only. Individual commissary, and you must bring full backpacking equipment. Leader has extra backpacks, tents, sleeping bags, pads, stoves, bear canisters to share. Bear canister required or you can also rent one at the entrance station to park. Limited space. Contact leader for more information and to make reservation and payment: Leader: Alan, 530-588-8031 or ajmendoza@prodigy.net.

Tuesday, August 20—Blue Oak Newsletter Prep for Mailing

Join the mail crew on Tuesday, August 20, 2024, at 2:00 pm to process the Blue Oak Group Newsletter for mailing. The meeting place is the Lodge at the Terraces in California Park located at 2750 Sierra Sunrise Terrace. The Lodge is the older independent living section of California Park. Everyone is welcome to come and help. Please join us so we can quickly get the Newsletters ready to mail. The processing gathering provides a great excuse to get together, catch up on news and meet new people. Leader: Suzette Welch, Coeditor Blue Oak Group Sierra Club Newsletter.

Saturday, August 31 - Day Hike

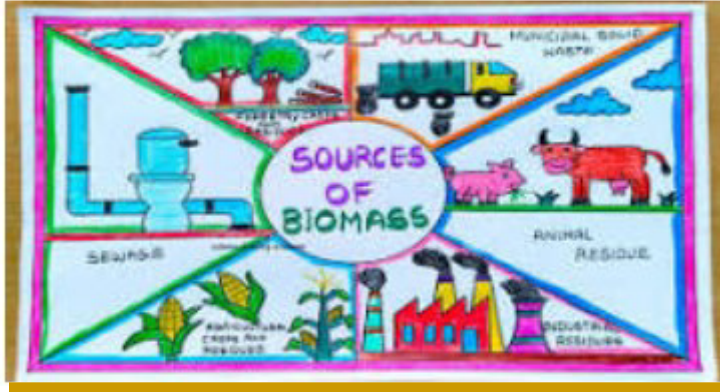
Brokeoff Mountain Peak Climb (3,C) Climb 9235' Mt. Brokeoff in Lassen National Park. A climb of about 2600' and 7 miles round trip through a variety of conifers and meadows. Beautiful views along the way and at the top of Mt. Shasta, Mt. Lassen and the surrounding area. Bring lunch, water, hiking footwear and \$ for drivers. Meet at Chico Park and Ride at 7:30AM. Leader: Alan, 530-588-8031 or amendoza@prodigy.net.



Brokeoff Mountain. Photograph by Daniel Mayer. Wikimedia Commons

Dangers of Biomass

By Grace M. Marvin, Blue Oak Group Board Member and Conservation Chair;
Blue Oak Group Representative to the Mother Lode Chapter's Conservation and Executive Committees



Biomass is a term that is frequently used to designate the trees used in biomass burning. But biomass materials can be made from many kinds of living organisms, *e.g.*, not only wood, but also many plants, waste products, and scraps from paper or lumber mills. These can all be burned directly for electricity, for example, or processed to make biofuels used in, say, stoves and in running cars. Corn is a well known source of ethanol where

100 acres of corn can produce 400 gallons of ethanol fuel. And, as you know, there is now a huge demand for fuel throughout the world, with biofuels particularly popular.

Our concern should include the role of the Sierra Club, and what the Club states about biomass production. In my opinion, our voices should also be heard concerning the vast number of large trees being cut down for biomass energy--as in our southeastern states and from the Stanislaus Forest in California. Just because food is grown, it doesn't necessarily mean food for people's stomachs.

Moreover, what we often hear is that forests need to be thinned even well beyond the defensible space around houses. But we need to know that increasing amounts of scientific research show that denser forests are less likely to burn than thinned-out forests. And more importantly, BIOMASS IS A HUGE CONTRIBUTOR TO ATMOSPHERIC CARBON DIOXIDE.

Karen Makki, head of the Statewide Forest Committee, Bill McKibbin, and Chad Hanson are among many who have written articles against burning biomass. You could *Google* Hanson and McKibbin as well as many others who are either opposed or in support of biomass production. Note: biomass is a huge source of revenue, especially for U.S. producers of wood pellets, who sell and ship these pellets overseas. It currently is a source of controversy within the Club. I hope not much longer!

Local Forest News: Focus on Biomass

By Trish Puterbaugh
Lassen Forest Preservation Group - Forestry Committee of the Blue Oak Group Sierra Club

Biomass is a big issue in California. I attended an excellent presentation online by Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) regarding the plan for two industrial scale biomass plants in California, one planned for Lassen County and another in Tuolumne county. I have been following these plans for over a year, and I never expect to see them get off the ground. However, they have received grant funding and loans and have an agreement in place with the USFS to supply "biomass". In this case, biomass means trees. The plan is to turn trees and forest

(Continued on page 5)

Forest News: Biomass *(Concluded from page 4)*

waste into pellets and ship them overseas to burn for energy. The big rub is this burning of pellets is considered "clean energy" in our global climate change agreements. A huge loophole.

It's appalling this project ever got as far as it has. Many politicians think it's great, including Doug LaMalfa and Doug Teeter. These plans are being discussed in Fire Safe Council meetings and other collaboratives. Most agree it is completely unsustainable and an environmental disaster. NRDC is an excellent group to fight this plan.

There is cautious agreement among many in forestry that it would be helpful to turn so many burned and dead trees into some kind of clean energy. Especially energy that stores the carbon. There are kilns and biochar out there, but none of them are practical on a large scale basis. And biomass, so far, is dirty. There has been no machine designed yet that doesn't come with dirty emissions.

At the last Butte County Fire Safe Council meeting a man in Durham introduced a plan to use local, wood biomass to create organic compost. It was exciting, because it would be local, it would be organic, and it would hold carbon. The name of the business is "Real Good Soil". Of course it will take large grants to get them off the ground.

Here in Cohasset, we have thousands and thousands of dead and dying trees. Without natural fire or any sort of sustainable logging (small trees), California forests are extremely overcrowded. Unfortunately, it's often the big old trees that are dying.

There is a FEMA grant that is unfolding to take these trees from our evacuation routes. It would be so awesome to be able to somehow use the trees as a clean source of energy.

There is still a lot of hope for hydrogen power, but so far it is all very complicated.

It is quite the dilemma to figure out what to do with California's massive, glorious forests after over 100 years of resource extraction. Suppressing fire for over 100 years, grazing and logging have taken a heavy toll on our forests. There are very, very few "natural or wild places" in California. We humans have affected every bit of our state.

As one who has lived in a forest for 50 years, I think it is naive and dangerous to say "let nature take its course, or no cut". Unfortunately, many of the newer "forest health" plans coming out of the Plumas and Lassen National Forests propose to thin trees to absurdly low levels to prevent forest fire.

Our Butte County Resource Conservation District is helping with some of these projects. Luckily, we still have many environmental groups that are also engaged. I am always hopeful we humans can figure a way out of our dilemma.

In other news, it looks like the California spotted owl will get listed as an endangered species in the next months. Of course this is bad and good news. We'll see what the outcome is.

CO2 Increase and Its Relationship to Timber

By Grace M. Marvin, Blue Oak Group Board Member and Conservation Chair;
Blue Oak Group Representative to the Mother Lode Chapter's Conservation and Executive Committees



A big part of the EU's renewable energy comes from burning trees and other wood for fuel, which emits more CO2 per unit of energy than burning fossil fuels and releases forest carbon into the atmosphere – the opposite of what is needed if we are serious about addressing climate change. [Shutterstock / ClubhouseArts]

Our Club has always had a special focus on forests and their protection. The Club has a profound interest in the reduction of dangerously high and ever-growing CO2 levels. We recognize that forests play a major role in storing and containing CO2. Thus, many club members advocate against cutting down trees and/or burning slash timber even though cutting timber is a major source of *biomass* energy. That is, we do not want trees—whether cut by nature or by humans—to be burned for electricity or processed to make *biofuels* used, for example, in factories, stoves, and cars. This is despite the fact that there is a domestic and huge worldwide demand for more fuel.

But this is a controversial topic within the Club, such that taking a stand on biomass production is being considered by the Club on statewide and national levels, e.g., at the Spring, 2024, California Conservation Committee meetings. Some say forests need to be thinned to prevent fires. But for many of us club members, there are problems with that statement. Yes, it is true that houses need “defensible space” around them to be protected from fire, but that does not justify removing fallen trees or cutting down others. Why? Because much scientific research shows that denser forests are less likely to burn *hot* than thinned-out forests, while cutting trees actually emits CO2. Dense old forests maintain more moisture and slow wind velocity. (CalFire states that low humidity and strong wind are the major drivers of large forest fires.)

Moreover, preserving trees is crucial for offsetting all kinds of CO2 emissions. When trees are removed through logging or burning, we are producing more CO2 - thus destroying trees that could be protecting our planet from rising heat and from heat's deadly consequences for our people and our planet. Note: it takes some 40 some years for a replacement tree to grow, and burning trees emit even more carbon dioxide than burning fossil fuels. We need to limit our emissions now!

We also need to address those who advocate the cutting down of trees to make fuel because the demand for fuel is so huge. These supporters encourage the production of massive amounts of wood pellets, which many U.S. companies and foreign countries are eager to purchase. Examples include the pellets produced from the Stanislaus Forest in California and from southeastern states in the U.S. with huge shipments of pellets going to Europe and China.

Karen Makki, head of the Club's statewide Forest Committee, Bill McKibbin, and Chad Hanson are among many who have written articles against burning biomass. Consider *Googling* Hanson and McKibbin as well as others who are in support of biomass production. What do you think? Should timber be a source of conservation and protection from rising CO2 levels or as highly prized and lucrative sources of biomass energy?

Update: Stop Valley's Edge

By Susan Tchudi, Smart Growth Advocates

The citizens of Chico did it. With a resounding NO! The clear voice of the people is worth looking at again. Here are the results:

Measure O:	Measure P:
Yes: 7,175 (38%)	Yes: 7,274 (38%)
No: 11,864 (62%)	No: 11,803 (62%)

In both propositions, 62% rejected the Valley's Edge Specific Plan and the effort to change the General Plan to accommodate it.

This is a clear defeat of Valley's Edge, but it's not the end of the story. The Special Planning Area is still available for development. What will happen next to the 1446 acres east of Bruce Road, extending up into the foothills farther than the eye can see, land that encompasses three ecosystems--wetlands, meadowlands, and oak woodlands--each with diverse and important habitat?

One possibility is that the current developer or a new developer (if the land changes ownership) could create a different project for that same piece of land--maybe a bunch of ranchettes, or a smaller housing project with more affordable housing, or perhaps a housing project that avoids the most vulnerable ecosystems, or another compromise to placate Chico voters.

However, there is a lawsuit under way. Over a year ago, the Sierra Club, AquAlliance (a local nonprofit protecting water), and the Center for Biological Diversity asked the court to rule on the adequacy of the Environmental Report (EIR). The suit argues that the City, in approving the original EIR, didn't fully consider wildfire risks and cumulative impacts in terms of water use, evacuation routes, and traffic and greenhouse gas emissions. It's unclear when the EIR suit will move forward.

Another possibility is that the City Council could remove this land as a Special Planning Area, an area (unlikely with the current Council), slated for growth at some time in the future. The County would then have decision-making power over that land.

A better solution would be to hold this land in perpetuity as open, protected land or as a land preserve, perhaps with light-on-the-land trails for allowing appreciation of its beauty. Smart Growth Advocates is currently talking to land conservation organizations to purchase this land--an ideal solution.

The need for housing was a major argument made by proponents of Valley's Edge. A better solution is to leave the land alone and provide sufficient affordable homes through infill, redevelopment, and changing zoning and parking requirements.

In coming months, Smart Growth Advocates will tell our story of saving open space, providing housing with density and infill, and developing creative ideas for improved neighborhoods, restored infrastructure, and creative housing ideas (such as cottages and tiny homes). Sierra Club members have provided wonderful support during the long process of stopping Valley's Edge. Now we can work together to grow reasonably while maintaining a healthy environment and vibrant neighborhoods.

If you would like to keep up with the plans of Smart Growth Advocates or if you would like to get more involved in our work, please email me: susantchudi@gmail.com.

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