

Activist Will Parrish, who was extracted July 1st from the wick drain crane where he spent eleven grueling days and nights, shutting down the machine, was arraigned on Thursday, July 11 at 8:30 a.m. at the Ukiah courthouse.

Over 30 Highway Patrol personnel, 20 vehicles and a helicopter converged on the Caltrans Willits Bypass construction site Monday, July 1st to remove lone crane-sitter Will Parrish from his perch on a wick drain driver tower. Parrish lived on a 2' x 7' plank 50 feet from the ground for eleven days, through unseasonable rainstorms, nights in the 40's, and daytime temperatures hovering near 100 degrees. For several days last week he had no food, and for 2 days, no water. Supporters and foes alike thought Parrish might have had more than enough, but when he saw the SWAT team arrive, Parrish locked himself to the tower, determined to stay as long as possible.

Two cherry-picker trucks each lifted several law enforcement officers up to the tower. CHP had attempted to extract Parrish on the first day of his protest, but gave up the attempt when he locked to the steel framework. This time, CHP brought grinders and equipment. A plume of sparks went up as they ground through the steel locking device. The process took about 2 hours, while supporters gathered to watch and witness. Amanda "Warbler" Senseman, whose 2-month-long tree-sit ignited the protests last January, was arrested in solidarity with Parrish. Both were taken to Mendocino County Jail.

This has been perhaps the most dramatic episode yet in the 4 months of protests

against the freeway. While tree-sits are often used to protect forests and wildlands, an 11-day sit on a crane in the middle of a construction zone is not—especially one with law enforcement surveillance 'round the clock. Then, when Parrish ran out of food and water, a "ninja" climber went up the second wick drain tower, strung a traverse line across to get him supplies, and vanished without being caught.

Will Parrish said that his crane-sit was an act of nonviolent civil disobedience meant to prevent draining groundwater and wetlands for the building of the freeway. The day before his extraction, he stated: "Though the sun sizzles down on my platform, I am as committed to being on this crane as long as I physically can be, protecting Little Lake Valley with my body. The support of many courageous people is making this possible. I am ready for whatever the week brings."

In an action combining daring, danger and comedy, Earth First! activists succeeded in putting a climber atop the second wick drain driver, and stringing a traverse rope to the crane-sitter who had been without food and water for a week. The bold action was carried out in broad daylight Wednesday afternoon. To get to the tower, the climber had to cross a wide belt of bare earth, guarded by 2 CHP vehicles. In spite of floodlights and guards, the climber delivered his life-saving supplies, and vanished into the night.

One week ago Little Lake Valley Defender and writer Will Parrish set up residence on a 2-ft wide plank halfway up one of the two 100' towers. About 40 people entered the worksite Saturday evening to bring

supplies to Parrish, who had run out of food and water and was facing cold wet weather. In a dramatic confrontation, CHP officers cut his supply rope. After a standoff of several hours, six people were arrested, including a mother and daughter who were grabbed while attempting to comply with CHP orders to leave.

Concern for Parrish's safety after four days without food or water has been mounting, and a medical team sought permission to bring water. Communication was cut when his cell phone fell from the tower the first day. During Saturday's resupply attempt, Parrish called down from his perch: "I'll starve before I'll let this machine install another wick drain."

According to Parrish, who now has a phone, "I've just been resupplied by a real-life superhero. The machine operator started to lower the crane with him on it, and the CHP just watched." Bystanders and press recorded the life-threatening incident on camera and video. Carrying supplies and gear, the climber scaled the tower, and attached his safety harness about 60' up.

CHP officers were preoccupied with the effort to extract one of their vehicles from the deep mud near the site's entrance, about 100 yards away. The officers summoned several passing protesters to help them, apparently taking them for passersby walking their dogs. The protesters helped free the car, which then got stuck again. The patrol cars next to the machine were apparently unmanned at the time.

Surveying the sea of mud left by three days of rain, long-time Willits resident Freddie Long observed: "This is a perfect illustration of why the wick drains are such a bad idea. This should be wetland, not a freeway."

The gigantic wick-driving machine is pulled by an excavator and can drive up to 480 wick drains in a day. It sits in what was once a meadow scattered with ancient oak trees, part of the seasonal wetlands that feed the Eel River. The meadow has been cut, leveled, graded, and pierced with wick drains to dry out the wetlands so a freeway can run over the top. Rows of plastic wicks stick out of the ground, striking an eerie resemblance to a graveyard.

Will Parrish is a journalist and activist who has lived in Mendocino County for 5 years. "We have seen CalTrans flagrantly violate the conditions of its environmental permits", he writes. "We have seen the agencies involved in regulating this project roll over time and again. We have seen Caltrans install itself as a veritable occupying power in this Valley. In the last several years, it has used the threat of eminent domain — both explicit and implied — to gobble up 2,000 acres from valley ranchers to use for its sham 'environmental mitigation' projects. Today, Big Orange is Little Lake Valley's largest landowner."

Activists have been warning about this project for decades. The protests took to the streets in January when "Warbler" went aloft in a tree-sit lasting months. There have been many demonstrations, lock-downs, and tree-sits, in addition to public forums, letter-writing campaigns,

and petitions. Yesterday's work shut-down led to the arrests of Danielle Fristoe, Patricia Kovner, Freddie Long, and Chad Kemp and myself. We were booked for trespass and released. Their arrests brought the total to 30 since March.

We don't need to spend \$35 million dollars per mile for a white elephant. The \$210 million figure does not include the interest that taxpayers would pay on the money, since the project is funded by bonds, under the Proposition 1B initiative to reduce traffic congestion. That money should go to an area that actually has traffic congestion.

On July 02, Caltrans staged the first of what will be many humungous traffic jams on 101 north of Willits. For unknown reasons, CalTrans is constructing a fence along the north/west side of 101 opposite its planned northern interchange. The contractor chose the morning on which hundreds of campers from the Kate Wolf Festival were heading south to turn 101 into a one-lane highway. Traffic backed up to Reynolds Highway and then again through town, as workers trundled bundles of fencing to and fro on the roadway. Residents and businesses along the route found a new fence being constructed along their property lines, and CalTrans vehicles filled their turnouts.

More traffic is expected as Caltrans prepares to move hundreds of tons of fill dirt from one side of the highway to the other at both southern and northern interchanges in the process of constructing it's dike across Little Lake Valley.

Willits traffic is caused by Caltrans, not an insufficient 101. The bottleneck at Safeway is caused by Caltrans' road striping that funnels the two north bound lanes into one with a turn lane. The Bypass would form a new bottleneck at the northbound Walker Rd. exit where drivers must come to a full stop before entering town. Traffic from the Coast and Brooktrails will not be alleviated by the Bypass.

A 2003 study by a Willits citizens' group funded by the California Department of Transportation reviewed how to solve Willits traffic. This study proposed a two-lane ground level route from Baechtel Rd. along the railroad easement and other alternative routes. Caltrans did not consider this proposal.

This bypass would be the largest wetland fill project in northern California in over half a century. Obama recently identified climate change as the "greatest threat to America". Construction of the bypass alone would produce a minimum of 380,000 tons of CO2 emissions. Center for Biological Diversity attorneys Aruna Prabhala and Adam Keats recently made their final oral arguments to stop Caltrans' Willits Bypass. We need to hold back Caltrans until this lawsuit can win. Chaining ourselves to the problem is the way to do it. We need your help. Every time you send a check it means legal, media, and outreach assistance to direct action activists.