

Redwood Nation Earth First!

2023 began with huge flap over a pair of bald eagles and their traditional nest in a tall old pine tree, in someone's yard in tiny Potter Valley near the Eel River, in the Mendocino County outback. Observed by neighbors for over forty years, the multi-story stick structure and its avian occupants were being threatened with eviction by PG&E, for being too close to their power lines. PG&E was refusing to bury its problem line, notwithstanding a plethora of TV ads touting the company's underground line program, and was insisting the property owner bear the multi-thousand dollar expense. If they couldn't pay up, the tree would be cut down.

Shockingly, US Fish & Wildlife had already issued a permit to cut down the tree, as long as it was done before the eagles returned for the breeding season in late fall, after which the permit would be invalid. But the logging company had left it till the last minute, perhaps hoping the sparsely-scattered residents wouldn't show up to defend the tree during the wintry weather. They would be wrong.

On January 3, anticipating the eagles' annual return, neighbors, activists, and elders gathered at the tree to welcome the birds with prayers and songs, just as a pair of eagles circled overhead. The majestic birds descended, folded their wings and settled into their spacious penthouse. During

breaks in the storms, they could be seen carrying sticks and moss in their beaks, reinforcing the nest and refurbishing the nursery.

With PG&E bearing down and no legal relief in sight, we put out an Action Alert and pulled together an Action Camp. Folks from across the region rushed to the eagles' tree in response, camping out in the wind and rain all week. Donations of food and firewood flooded in. A nonviolence training was held on site and we plastered the press with eagle nest photos. When the PG&E crew arrived to cut the tree down on the day before -- can you believe it -- National Save the Eagles Day, the rain-gear clad protectors got in the way and held the line. After a brief, intense, but nonviolent confrontation with the crew boss, the workers turned around and left. Voilà!

Negotiations to spare the tree commenced. The Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians intervened, formally requesting government-to-government consultations with U.S. Fish and Wildlife, drawing Congressperson Jared Huffman into the fray at the federal level. PG&E company big shots arrived at the tree with engineers in tow. Huffman delivered a public dressing down to U.S. Fish and Wildlife for issuing permits to take habitat from eagles, ahem, our national emblem, until recently listed as endangered. EPIC and the Center for Biological Diversity warned that the permit was invalid, since the nest was now clearly occupied. In short order, the USF&W permit was withdrawn, PG&E agreed to put their power line underground at company expense and the eagles' nest tree of Potter Valley was saved!



Our initial eagles press release soared on social and print media and even landed a full length feature with photos and quotes in the London Guardian! By the end of the week, nonviolent direct action helped bring a swift and happy ending.

In other news, the two-year moratorium on logging and road building in Jackson Demonstration State Forest is still in force, Big Timber is stepping up pressure to get back to falling and hauling, and CalFire verges on approving new timber harvest plans (THPs). The “pause” may not last.

Equally disconcerting, the timber-friendly state agency is defying Governor Newsom’s express policies regarding tribal co-management on ancestral lands. Instead of early consultation with Tribes on all aspects of Jackson land management as required by law, CalFire has substituted a Tribal Advisory Council with no real power. CalFire wildly claims its so-called “New Vision” version of the old and out-of-date Management Plan doesn’t need an Environmental Impact Review, to stop public comment. The current Management Plan is a 2007 document last reviewed in 2016, woefully deficient in today’s world of climate change, and shamefully lacking in cultural protections for Indigenous sites. An update is much needed, but after so much foot-dragging, why the sudden rush?

In addition, State Law AB 52 requires that a lead agency consult with Native American tribes on any proposed project that has the potential to substantially affect Tribal cultural resources. Yet, CalFire has not even considered consulting with local Tribes before killing vast swaths of tanoaks in Jackson Forest, trees that are essential to the culture and sustenance of Native People. CalFire continues to “hack and squirt” -- injecting the herbicide Imazapyr into tanoak tree trunks, inducing slow tree death that increase fire hazards for decades. This also violates Mendocino County’s Measure V, an ordinance passed by an overwhelming majority vote in 2016.

The Jackson Advisory Group, aka the JAG, is an appointed body of eleven members with a “pro-timber” majority, one Tribal member and a couple of “pro-environment” reps. Originally designed as

a forum for public opinion to “advise” the Board of Forestry, it mainly rubber stamps THPs fed to it by Calfire, while deflecting public opinion. Flawed as it may be, the JAG, which meets locally rather than in Sacramento, is the only body easily accessed by the local public. Working with the Coalition to Save Jackson at a series of JAG meetings, we’ve stalled attempts to get THPs approved, resisted the proposed new management plan sans EIR and called for a new mandate, based on Indigenous land management principles.

Despite the public’s objections, the JAG did vote recently to approve a THP called Camp One, near a popular camping area with fish bearing waters. For the first time, however, they could not reach full consensus, with two no votes and one abstention, and could not agree on what to recommend to the Board of Forestry. On December 6th, Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the Coalition to Save Jackson addressed the Board of Forestry meeting in person to present their views on protecting Jackson.

Over the summer we tabled at county festivals, fairs, and events in Mendocino, Humboldt, and Sonoma and the Bay Area, collecting signatures on a Petition to the Governor. We informed the public on the importance of saving Jackson by changing the present mandate from industrial logging to one based on equal co-management with Tribes, cultural respect, restoration, and recreation. Our booths were beautiful, our EF! T-shirts flew off the shelves, and we have a ton of sign-ups for nonviolence training in the Spring.

Public land is ours to love and protect. Thank you for your support. It makes all the difference.

For the Earth,



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