

Community Forum

Striking a balance between development, open space preservation on Noyo Headlands

By Fort Bragg Headlands
Consortium

The Fort Bragg Headlands Consortium, or FBHC, is a science-based group of organizations and individuals promoting informed and engaged understanding of the Fort Bragg Headlands. Among other services, we have created an interactive and publicly accessible mapping site, that is linked to our website. It maps a wealth of information about the headlands with easily clickable layers.

We have been actively involved in the mill site re-zoning process, which goes by the name of "amending the LCP." Any zoning changes for the former mill site will have a profound impact on our coastal community and our ability to adapt to the climate emergency and sea level rise.

No zoning changes have yet been made. There is at least a two-stage approval process, which includes both city and California Coastal Commission approval. The purchase of land out on the former mill site does not confer the "rights" to do whatever the buyer might wish. Our community and the Coastal Commission are the "deciders." We in the FBHC have been advocating for the policy issues listed below.

Finish the cleanup. Georgia-Pacific has only done what our community and State regulators have demanded. The work is far from finished. G-P has systematically done as little as they can get away with. This stalling must end. Our lives and the health of our community depend on their finishing the cleanup.

We believe a substantial wildlife corridor on the north-

ern section is essential for the health, wellbeing and long-term viability of the entire mill site. This will benefit all communities here on the coast. A substantial wildlife corridor will create a unique opportunity for re-wilding a restored central parkland area, providing a natural corridor up to the Pudding Creek watershed.

Communities need projects to rally around. The Big River acquisition was such a project. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a dedicated group of community members spearheaded the effort to save the Big River estuary from logging. The climate emergency demands that our coastal community come together to protect and nurture our forest lands, our coastal prairie and the marine environment.

In the central parkland area, creek daylighting can be such a project. Daylighting is the term for restoration of an originally open-air watercourse, which had at some point been diverted below ground. Typically, the rationale behind restoring the riparian environment of a stream, wash, or river to a more natural state is to reduce runoff, create habitat for species in need of it, or improve an area's aesthetics. In addition to its use in urban design and planning, the term also refers to the public process of advancing such projects.

Successful daylighting efforts are found the world around. The Fort Bragg Headlands are an especially unique opportunity. Alder and Maple Creek daylighting would provide such a benefit to the Fort Bragg Headlands.

Locally, Doolan and Gibson creeks in the city of Ukiah

help reconnect the public to the advantages of wildlife corridors and open space within municipal boundaries.

The United Nations, the World Economic Forum, environmentalists and climate scientists are all calling for the planting of trees — billions of trees — to sequester carbon naturally. Wetland restoration is another powerful way to sequester carbon and prepare for sea level rise. Fort Bragg can be a tree-friendly, bee-friendly, garden-friendly and climate-friendly city. This means protecting what we have as well as restoring that which has been damaged.

We are advocates of a "save for later" recommendation for the South Parcel of the mill site. Our community focus must be on the long-term best use philosophy other communities have developed in efforts to regenerate resources for the broader good.

The former mill site will be a magnet for the local community and those visiting here. We need open space accessible to the public, especially open space uniquely positioned around designated wetlands and forested areas. We now have a chance to proceed with actions that assure a balanced development and preserve expanses of restored natural beauty.

What we do now can have lasting benefit for the economy and resilience of the Mendocino Coast.

*Signed by Fort Bragg
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