
THE MENDOCINO INSTITUTE

The Mendocino Coast – An Eco-communitarian Project

When the West fully learns that cooperation, not rugged individualism, is the quality that most characterizes and preserves it, then it will have achieved itself and outlived its origins. Then it has a chance to create a society to match its scenery.

———Wallace Stegner

A Conference Presented by

The Mendocino Institute

In conjunction with the Commons Group, Retort and PM Press

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February 18, 19, 20, 2011: Caspar Community Center, Caspar: CA
and Jug Handle Farm Nature Center, Caspar, CA

**The Mendocino Coast – An Eco-communitarian Project
A Conference**

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The Mendocino Coast is known for the breathtaking beauty of its coastline, its steep canyons, and redwood forests, as well as for the diversity and independence of its communities.

This coastal eco-region of Mendocino County, in addition to its physical magnificence, is also home to a rich history of creativity and experimentation, of environmentalism and deep concern for the fate of the planet. It is loved by residents and visitors alike.

Today, Mendocino County is in transition. Its future is unclear. Both its beauty and way of life are threatened. Traditional industries, chiefly timber and fisheries, have all but come to a halt – and not just as the result of recession and the housing crisis. The forests are scarred and exhausted. The watersheds are fouled; the once rich seas are virtually empty of salmon. Coastal waters have experienced a rapid increase in the loss of marine biodiversity and habitat degradation. Species and habitat loss is a reality.

A new economy has yet to emerge – high expectations for a high tech revolution have not been realized. The remains of the giant Georgia Pacific mill are ghostly reminders of the past – they suggest that manufacturing is not in Fort Bragg's future, light or otherwise. The California crisis in education dims any prospect of a new university – long the dream of many. Now even the stream of well-to-do retirees has been reduced to a trickle, undermining with it what remains of the construction trade and the local service economy.

This situation, alas, is not so unusual in California. As elsewhere, war, recession and California's financial crisis bring high unemployment, increasing poverty – also education in decline, social services in a state of collapse. Income gaps widen, increasingly the population is comprised of well-to-do retirees and business owners on the one side, marginal whites and poorly paid service workers, native peoples, and, increasingly, Latinos, on the other. These workers, in the absence of affordable housing, crowd into substandard housing in Fort Bragg, doubling up in trailers and apartments, commuting as far as Pt. Arena for employment. The clear prospect of a two-tier society emerges, one prosperous, the other poor, the gap widens, destructive divisions are exacerbated. This undermines any meaningful prospect of community.

Residents continue to extol the virtues of this coastal “paradise” – often quite rightly – and there is great pride in community but an accurate appraisal is more complex. The fact is that these conditions bring new problems – already a kind of unspoken despair undermines the confidence of the people and opens the door to activity historically widely opposed.

Thus, climate change, the world energy crisis, combine with local unemployment, to bring new proposals for off-shore drilling, industrial biomass projects in our forests and plans for massive corporate coastal wave-energy projects. They bring appeals, not for increased conservation but for the loosening of restrictions on logging and fishing. The tourist industry languishes; it too seeks relief, while always overcrowded parks sit unattended, many threatened with closure. Nevertheless, developers await; one group has already designed what essentially would transform Fort Bragg's magnificent headlands into a mall with a view.

Purpose and Goals

This is a proposal for a study of the coastal region of Mendocino County, one that will lead to a coastal plan, that is an alternative plan for the Mendocino Coast, a plan deliberately educational at this time, but framed with the intention of creating practical new visions for the County.

This is a crucial time for a new vision. The recession and environmental crisis have opened space normally occupied by the developers and the state's managers. This hiatus offers the time – a pause, space for reflection and creative, alternative ways of thinking about conservation, sustainable living and the climate, but a pause that will not, of course, last for long.

Most importantly, it allows for a discussion of what we, the residents of the Coast would like – and what we ourselves are capable of doing. What can a community do? There already exists, for example, a vibrant discussion of “the local” – local sustainability, food, energy, etc. But what of, “the global?” And can we, at the same time, inspire a discussion of integration, living wages, healthy, affordable housing? And what about the environmental crisis and the global climate crisis that are immediate threats to us all, as is social decay. The challenges are inescapable – how can a community respond and make a positive contribution?

A problem is that this discussion rarely gets beyond individual initiatives – so the question remains, what can a community do, what can we do together? We have a long tradition of community effort, the co-operatives of the Finnish immigrants, rusticators of many varieties – back-to-the-landers, communards, artists and dreamers and newcomers seeking more quality in life. The Woodlands and Cotton Auditorium (legacies of the New Deal) are powerful reminders of working together for the common good – but also local expressions of a larger national project.

This is a proposal to begin this project with a conference, one that will bring authorities on such issues as marine protection, reforestation,

affordable housing, eco-tourism and recreation to Mendocino to join local authorities and activists to chart new directions and formulate new visions. The conference will be the first step in the project – it will be organized to facilitate thoughtful discussion among a diverse group of local planners, environmentalists and activists plus invited “experts” from the region. It will produce recommendations concerning what is and what is not possible, how to go forward, plus immediate next steps.

The Conference

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The conference will consider the coastal region and its communities in three broad areas:

1. Community – how to go beyond clichés about community and begin to move toward the realities of community, of a living, integrated commons, with expanded, shared work and living, particular in housing, education, health and social welfare. How to create here in rural coastal California, what Wallace Stegner has suggested, “a society to match its scenery...”
- 2: Conservation – if and how to preserve the forests and coastal waters. Can our forests, revived, be part of a more sustainable, nature-friendly economy? Can they play a part in the reforestation of the once great temperate forests of the Pacific Coast, of the planet – both for our own sake and the health of the planet and its atmosphere? How to respond to modest conservation measures such as the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) and local opposition to it? How to respond to degradation of watersheds and the poisoning of streams and rivers?
3. Sustainability – how to create and expand a local economy (within a regional and global economy) that can sustain the environment of the region, in an era of concern for energy resources, independent food sources and meaningful work, while at the same time allowing for, building on recreational opportunities for a very crowded state. Sustainability that is based on high standards of quality of life – including living wages, an integrated population, one that offers affordable housing, quality education and healthcare, plus the positive qualities we find in the rural, coastal region.

The conference format will be round-table; twenty-five to thirty-five invited participants representing a wide range of experience and expertise in the areas to be considered. This format is intended to ensure ample time for thorough discussion, back and forth, debate plus informed participation.

Public Sessions

Iain Boal (author of *The Long Theft*, forthcoming), Ignacio Chapela (Professor of Biology, UC Berkeley), Gray Brechin of the New Deal Project and Raj Patel (author, *Stuffed and Starved* and *The Value of Nothing*) will contribute public lectures, open to the broader communities.

Pre-conference Meeting

Proposed gathering of coastal residents with experience in communal, and cooperative and collectives activities: the purpose of this will be to help focus discussion on what has worked, what might have lessons for the future.

We intend to have a concluding session – for evaluation. We also intend to produce transcriptions and summaries of the sessions, plus to collect written papers and presentations. These will be circulated for comment to all participants following the conference.

PM Press in Oakland has agreed to do the transcriptions and recordings. It also has agreed in principle to reproducing sections of these in a pamphlet/booklet.

Finally we propose to establish a working group for follow-up – a local group organized to develop specific targets, goals and campaigns for continuing the coastal planning project, including seeking further funding and staffing.

Challenges

The great challenge will be to turn this discussion to action. There is no guarantee that this can be done; nevertheless, it can be said that this project is an indication of an obvious need and the goal of bringing together disparate efforts – oceans, forests, housing, integration, education, health, etc. - is widely supported.

The short-term challenges are to get local participants, first to commit to two days of meetings and second to come prepared. This will take some work but past experience here shows it can be done. Another challenge is to consider the issue of the marijuana economy – in context – without turning the meeting into (yet another) marijuana conference. The same can be said for the issue of marine life protection, now the subject of intense local debate – nevertheless a subject of the greatest importance. These will take precautionary efforts – mainly in terms of seeing that fair discussion of these topics is allowed but does not dominate.

Submitted by Cal Winslow,
Director, Mendocino Institute, October 2010

Addendum:

The Mendocino Institute was founded in the year 2000 with the purpose of providing research, educational activities and forums on the Mendocino Coast. It has a Director and Three trustees one of whom is the Director. These are all volunteer positions.

Trustees

Cal Winslow, Director

Cal Winslow is a social historian, educated at Antioch College and Warwick University in the UK where he wrote his Ph.D. dissertation under the direction of the late Edward Thompson. Prior to coming to Northern California, he worked at the City College, City University of New York. He has also taught at the Northern College for Residential Adult Education in Yorkshire, at York University in the UK and the Evergreen College in Olympia, Washington. He is currently a Fellow in Environmental Politics at the University of California, Berkeley. He is co-author with the late Edward Thompson of *Albion's Fatal Tree* (Penguin and Pantheon), a study of crime and society in Eighteenth Century England and editor of *Waterfront Workers: New Perspectives on Race and Class* (Illinois). He is author of *Labor's Civil Wars in California* (PM 2010) and co-editor with Robert Brenner of *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt during the Long Seventies*, (Verso Press, 2010). He is collaborating with Michael Watts, Iain Boal and Janferie Stone on a study of communalism in Northern California in the 60s and 70s (*West of Eden*, forthcoming, PM Press 2011). He is also working on a social and environmental history of the Redwood Forest. He is a founder of the Mendocino Institute. He lives with his family near Caspar on the Mendocino Coast.

Iain Boal, Trustee

Iain Boal is an Irish social historian of science and technics, educated at Oxford, Cambridge and London Universities. He moved to Boston in the early 80s where he was a member of the Pumping Station Collective. He has taught at Harvard, Stanford and the University of California at Santa Cruz and Berkeley, where he is affiliated with the Geography Department. He is associated with the Retort group, and is one of the co-authors of Retort's *Afflicted Power: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (Verso).

He co-edited with James Brook, *Resisting the Virtual Life: The Culture and Politics of Information* (City Lights), and with Michael Watts, Cal Winslow and Janferie Stone is editing *West of Eden*, an anthology on the flowering of communalism in California during the 60s and 70s. In 2005/6 he held a Guggenheim Fellowship in science and technology to research "the bicycle in world culture". His book on the history of the commons - *The Long Theft: Episodes in the History of Enclosure* - is forthcoming from Faber and Faber. He lives in Berkeley.

Will Russell, Trustee

Will Russell is a forest ecologist and activist, educated at the University of California, Berkeley. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies at San Jose State University where he teaches courses on forest restoration and management and coordinates the graduate program. In addition he has also taught at the New College of California and the San Francisco State University field campus; he has worked as a research associate for the U.S. Forest Service, the USGS Biological Resources Division, and California State Parks. He is currently involved in research projects related to the conservation and restoration of redwood forest communities including studies on natural regeneration, fire behavior, and the value of ecotourism.

Will Russell has deep roots in the Mendocino Coast region. A long-term resident of the area, he learned about forest ecology and preservation from his Grandfather Lewis Henry Russell (nature poet and forest activist) and his grandmother "Skilly" Russell (amateur botanist and wildcrafter) on their 120-acre mixed old-growth property near the town of Mendocino. The Russell land, now part of the State Park system, serves as a classroom and laboratory for Will and his students in his role as a Professor of Environmental Studies at San Jose State University. His research on the recovery of redwood forests following logging has direct applications to the restoration and management of Mendocino Coast ecosystems.

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Will has published numerous research papers in scientific journals and conference proceedings including the “The Influence of Timber Harvest on the Structure and Composition of Riparian Forests in the Coastal Redwood Region” in *Forest Ecology and Management*; “The Effects of Timber Harvesting on the Structure and Composition of Adjacent Old-Growth Coast Redwood Forest” in *Landscape Ecology*; and “Edge Effects and the Effective Size of Old-Growth Coast Redwood Preserves” in the *Proceedings of the Wilderness Science in a Time of Change Conference*.

The Institute is governed by its Trustees. They meet twice annually.

Mendocino Institute Projects

In 2000-2001, the Institute helped launch the Campaign to Restore Jackson State, the 55,000 acre state forest in Mendocino County. This involved developing the Campaign as an organization, organizing its founding conference, and producing the booklet, “Proceedings of the Conference on the Restoration and Management of Coast Redwood Forests,” Cal Winslow, ed. (Fort Bragg, 2001). The Campaign continues to advocate for the restriction of logging in the park and to enhance recreational opportunity. Funding by the Dharma Cloud Foundation.

In 2002, the Institute conducted a need assessment on the topic of affordable housing. The findings were the topic of the February 23, 2002, conference at the College of the Redwoods on the North Coast of Mendocino County. The conference was cosponsored by the Mendocino County Community Development Commission. Funding by The Mendocino Coast Community Coordinating Council (MC4).

In 2004, the Institute initiated “Community and Democracy: Mendocino, The Communal Experience (1965-1985),” a project in partnership with the Institute for International Studies, University of California, Berkeley. This consisted of a workshop and a conference in Caspar as well as two conferences in Berkeley. One outcome is the volume, edited by Iain Boal, Janferie Stone, Michael Watts and Cal Winslow, *West of Eden, Communes and Utopia in Northern California* (PM Press, forthcoming 2011). Funding by the Ford Foundation and the Institute for International Relations, UC Berkeley.

Institute Trustee William Russell led the following projects beginning in 2006, working in partnership with the Department of Environmental Studies, San Jose State University, the Save the Redwoods League and the Department of Parks, San Francisco. “Ecological Monitoring of Remnant

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Coastal Plant Communities in San Francisco, California” (with the San Francisco Department of Parks and Recreation). “Natural Regeneration Following Timber-Harvest in Coast Redwood Forests in Big River State Park (with the Save the Redwoods League).

In 2008, the Institute cosponsored the statewide conference “The Crisis of the California Commons,” held in Berkeley, April 27-29, with the California Studies Association and Heyday Books. Mendocino Institute Trustees Boal and Winslow served on the planning committee, Winslow and Russell led sessions on forest devastation and restoration, Boal on the communal experience in Northern California. Funding by the California Studies Association.

"NB. *West of Eden: Communes and Utopia in Northern California* is forthcoming from PM Press in 2011. Winslow is continuing his history, *The Redwood Region, A Forest and Its People* (as well as work within the healthcare movement, having published *Labor's Civil Wars in California* (PM Press: Oakland, 2010) and edited *Rebel Rank and File* (Verso, 2010); Guggenheim Fellow Iain Boal, author of *Resisting the Virtual Life* (City Lights Books) is completing *The Green Machine*, a history of the bicycle (Notting Hill Editions, 2011); and William Russell routinely brings graduate students to Mendocino's Redwood forests on research projects. He is now a candidate for tenure at San Jose State University."