



# News from the Redwood Empire

## Town Hall Coalition Annual Report -- 2002

Town Hall Coalition's mission is to build a social movement that promotes ecologically and economically healthy communities through responsible land use.

Dear Friends,

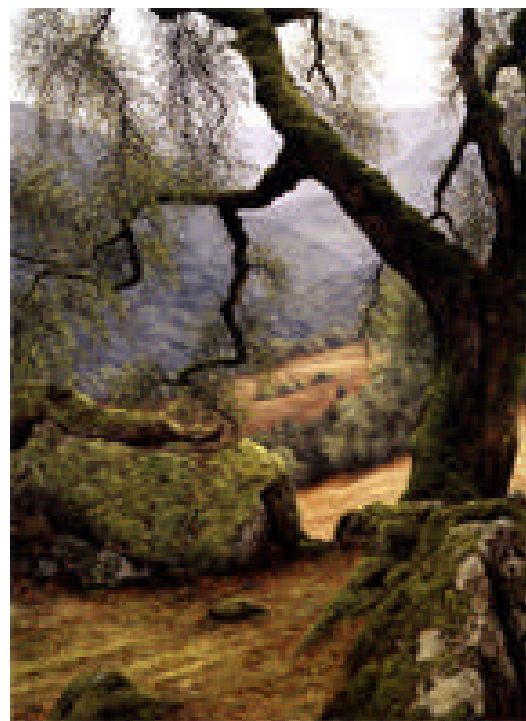
Many Americans, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11 and during the build up and invasion of Iraq, flocked to places where they could ease their shock and feelings of fear, stress and sadness-to parks, forests, streams, beaches, and other natural areas. All over the country neighborhood parks have been transformed with makeshift memorials, monuments to peace, and healing centers. A few months ago Town Hall Coalition staff and board members met with a young father who had just been diagnosed with fast growing cancer. He told us he was able to cope with fear and start healing from this life-threatening disease by visiting parks and places with undisturbed wild nature. He claimed that his communion with nature gave him strength to heal.

Francesca Lyman stated in an article titled "The Geography of Health" (Fall 2002 Trust for Public Land publication, *Land and People*), "research shows that contact with nature can make us well." Lyman explains that for millennia people looked to nature not just for sources of food and medicinal plants but also, as psychologist Carl J. Jung put it, "for the nourishing soil of the soul". Lyman goes on to recognize, "Philosophers since ancient times have prescribed nature as an antidote to stress and disease. Only a century ago Henry David Thoreau wrote that humans need "the tonic of wildness" and "in wildness is the preservation of the world". The belief among earlier cultures, both Western and Eastern, that contact with nature can have beneficial health effects supported the creation of parks, gardens, and other landscaping in cities. The tradition of "healing gardens" in hospitals goes back to at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century in Europe." It is time to rediscover and apply this old wisdom.

Seeking solace in nature is in some fundamental way important for the human psyche and well being, and as such is really central to public health. What is this magic in nature to which we humans respond, to which we retreat for healing and restoration? Novelist Wallace Stegner once wrote, "we need the connection to wild places as a reassurance of our common bond with other creatures". He called this connection to nature our "geography of hope". The importance of connecting with nature is a neglected place in contemporary health care.

Protecting nature can have positive impacts on protecting clean air and water which also has a direct impact on improving public health. Recent evidence suggests that keeping ecosystems intact, with a variety of habitats for plants and small animals, provides hosts-or sinks-for viruses and bacteria that might otherwise spread to humans. Vector-borne diseases such as Lyme's disease, would have formerly been kept in check by the critters of undisturbed forest, field and meadows.

The Town Hall Coalition is working to preserve and protect wild nature. We believe that if people destroy forests and natural areas near towns or in the heart of a neighborhood we lose that restoration and healing potential forever. Unfortunately the Bush/Cheney neo-conservative extremists have managed to brainwash people into believing that forests are to be feared and cut down because they might catch on fire, wetlands are prairie potholes and must be drained and bulldozed, and nature is for drilling, pumping, mining and extraction for profit. Any person who threatens to destroy nature, wilderness and wildlife is threatening to destroy your personal physical and mental health and that of your family and community. It is time for a regime change in the USA.



*Beneath the Oak* by Thomas Creed [www.thomascreed.com](http://www.thomascreed.com)

# Town Hall Forums and Regulatory Enforcement Workshops

## North Coast Water Coalition Forum

On February 2002 Town Hall Coalition (THC) organized a gathering of over 100 environmental activists from Mendocino, Sonoma and Marin Counties working on issues that impact water quality such as gravel mining, wastewater discharges, logging and protection of wildlands. North Coast Watershed Coalition formed as an outgrowth of this forum. The NCWC sends out regular Watershed Alerts to inform people about current events and activities within our local watersheds. Please check out their website [www.sonomaconnection.com/community](http://www.sonomaconnection.com/community). To register with the Watershed Alert Network, contact [info@sonomaconnection.com](mailto:info@sonomaconnection.com).

## Water Privatization Hits the North Coast Forums—Defending the Commons

Town Hall Coalition was actively involved in the successful campaign to oppose an application by Ric Davidge and Alaska Water Exports Inc. to appropriate and export “excess” water from the mouths of the Gualala and Albion Rivers to San Diego for profit. The application included many dangerous assumptions about “excess” water, and could have had implications on water rights in all watersheds in California. It was a prime example of globalization’s impact on water and the public trust, the commodification and export of natural resources through hidden subsidy, and loss of community control over common assets.

THC sponsored two forums regarding water privatization. In October 2002 we joined with other North Coast activists in sponsoring “*Gualala and Albion River Water Bags, Privatization, and the Public Trust*.” A panel discussion featured California State Assemblymember Patricia Wiggins, Antonia Juhasz of the International Forum on Globalization, Ursula Jones and Don Kemp from Friends of the Gualala River, and Bernie MacDonald of the Albion River Watershed Protection Association. The event was followed by a workshop led by Friends of the Gualala River where participants filed official water export protest forms with the California State Water Board.

A second forum, titled “*Stop Corporate Water Theft*” was held in December 2002 in Santa Rosa. This forum featured Juliette Beck of Public Citizen’s Water for All Campaign, Nancy Price, National Co-chair of Alliance for Democracy, Michael Warburton of the Public Trust Alliance, and Fifth District Supervisor Mike Reilly. The event was organized by a diverse coalition of organizations including Alliance for Democracy, Community Clean Water Institute, Sonoma County Peace and Justice Center, Town Hall Coalition, and World Stewardship Institute.

On December 13, 2002, the application was withdrawn largely due to community opposition but the larger issues remain. Davidge quickly filed another application to appropriate Mad River water in Humboldt County. Rather than lay pipes underneath the riverbed, Alaska Water Exports Inc. proposed to contract with Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District to buy “excess water” previously utilized by the old Samoa Sawmill and ship it in water bags pulled by tugboats to sell in San Diego for profit. Town Hall Coalition has committed to fight this and all future proposals to privatize water.

## Regulatory Enforcement Workshops and Round Table Working Groups

With all of our tax dollars and resources going to fund eternal war and tax cuts for the rich, citizens and communities are left to fend for themselves when it comes to protecting public health and safety and the natural environment. In order to coordinate a grassroots response to this New World Order, THC has initiated a series of workshops and roundtable discussions with regulatory agencies, elected officials, non-profit environmental organizations and grass roots citizen groups. The goal is to coordinate monitoring and enforcement of laws and regulations designed to protect public health, safety and natural resources.

- **Water Quality Workshop**—THC and New College of Santa Rosa are currently holding the first in a series of three workshops focusing on the identification of water pollution sources and protection of water quality.
- **Future workshops** and round table discussion will focus on protection of ancient forests, wildlands, wildlife habitat and preservation of private and public land through conservation easements and public funding.

# Wildlands Protection and Participatory Democracy

## Taking a Stand for Sonoma County's Forests

Town Hall Coalition formed as a result of the destruction and conversion of our beautiful redwood forests to vineyards and other uses. Sonoma County is currently updating the General Plan and we have a rare opportunity to strengthen zoning and regulations to protect the forests of Sonoma County. We have been attending meetings of the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC), submitting comments for the public record, sending out alerts, writing letters to the editor and joining with other environmental groups to get "Option 3" adopted as part of the Sonoma County General Plan Update on the issue of timber conversions. Option 3 affords the maximum protection for the vast majority of forests left in the county. This option will protect all 194,000 acres of forest in the RRD (Resource and Rural Development) Land Use category. None of the other options being considered for the General Plan Update will provide anywhere near this much protection. The CAC meeting is tentatively scheduled for June 19th at the PRMD bldg at 2550 Ventura Ave. in Santa Rosa. We need a strong turnout in order to voice our concerns for protecting Sonoma County's remaining forestland from being converted!

## Participatory Democracy

The goal of the Town Hall Coalition's Participatory Democracy Campaign is to inform people about how they can become active, organized and involved in decision-making processes at the local, state, and national levels. It is also to serve as a guide for those wanting to run for numerous non-partisan elected positions throughout Sonoma County and North Coast region.

- **Youth Activist Convergence**-In April of 2002, the Town Hall Coalition sponsored the first annual Youth Activist Convergence in Sebastopol. This youth-inspired, youth-driven event brought together students and educators, representatives of over 75 non-profit organizations, and community members for a weekend of workshops, keynote speakers, musical events, and hands-on demonstrations.
- In April of this year, Town Hall Coalition co-sponsored the 2nd Annual Youth Activist Convergence Conference that took place in Petaluma. The event was being organized by a group of dedicated high school activists who chose the theme *Change is Possible* to symbolize their vision of a more just and sustainable world.

The Youth Activist Convergence is part of the Town Hall Coalition's "Participatory Democracy Campaign" launched in 2001. The campaign's primary purpose is to enable people to become informed, activate, organize, and participate in decision-making processes at the local, state, and national levels. It is also to serve as a guide for those wanting to run for numerous non-partisan elected positions throughout Sonoma County and North Coast region.



**Special District Elections** - For 2003, Town Hall Coalition will focus on distributing election and voter information for all Special District Elections in Sonoma County. Special District Elections for 2003 will include Community Service Districts, Fire Protection Districts, Mosquito Abatement Districts, Recreation and Park Districts, and Water Districts. Property owners within the boundaries of special districts pay additional taxes that are administered by these boards. Members of these boards make critical decisions about pesticide and herbicide applications on public landscaping, park and recreation facilities and programs, water and sewer systems and services, public health, education programs, ambulance services, fire protection and more.

**Organic Wine List** -Active citizen participation requires an educated and well-informed populace. This year, Town Hall Coalition will update, republish and distribute the Organic Wine List as part of our ongoing effort to advocate for sustainable agricultural practices within the wine industry. The list will contain an updated directory of organic wines, reasons to support organic vintners, and will be made available at restaurants and natural foods stores near you! You can get a copy of the Organic Wine List on our web site or call our office.

**Candlelight Vigil for Peace** -Town Hall Coalition organized a candlelight peace vigil in downtown Occidental which brought together over 200 people in silence and song demonstrating their solidarity against a pending war.

**Town Hall Coalition**  
**Profit and Loss Summary**  
**January through December 2002**

**Income**

Major Donors	8,400
Individual Donations	7,677
Members	18,907
Foundations	1,000
Total Income	<u>\$35,984</u>
2001 Carryover Funds	6,394

**Expense**

Administration	3,272
Fundraising	2,189
Programs	35,016
Total Expense	<u>\$40,477</u>
Net Income	-4,493
Retained Earnings w/ Carryover Funds	1,901

**Help Us Protect the Quality of Life, Public Health, and Environment of the  
North Coast Redwood Empire - Become a Member of the Town Hall Coalition**

The Town Hall Coalition office, located in downtown Occidental, continues to act as a resource center for the community. We continue to collect information for our library, respond to citizen complaints, and comment on all important issues that effect the communities of the North Coast. We need your support to keep things running and continue our advocacy as a voice for environmental protection, public health, sustainability, and participatory democracy.

I want to contribute to the Town Hall Coalition:

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **\$15**   **\$25**   **\$50**   **\$100**   **\$500**   **\$ Other**  
**Address** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Phone, Fax, E-mail** \_\_\_\_\_

Send Contributions to: Town Hall Coalition, PO Box 1005 Occidental CA 95465  
Ph 707 874-9110 / F 707 874-2579      townhall@sonic.net  
[www.townhallcoalition.org](http://www.townhallcoalition.org)

The Town Hall Coalition is a California nonprofit corporation organized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.  
Donations are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law (Tax ID #68-0458664).

## Land Use and Community Response

Town Hall Coalition's Environmental Resource Center continues to act as a powerful vehicle for citizen advocacy, action and information. Staff and members of the Town Hall Coalition submit comments for the public record and appear before elected and regulatory bodies. We distribute Action Alerts, election information, newsletters, special events, and information about community forums. We also respond to citizen complaints by notifying elected officials, regulatory agencies, and communities about potential dangers or developments in or near their neighborhood. Examples have included illegal forest conversions, exposure to pesticide spray or drift, contaminated wells, bird depredation by toxic chemicals, destruction of riparian forests, fill or proposed development of fragile wetlands, and illegal water appropriations. Many of these complaints have led to positive enforcement by regulatory agencies and received successful environmental remediation.

### Complaints and Enforcement Actions

- Town Hall Coalition received a complaint of Gallo Wine Corporation causing massive erosion and siltation resulting from their activities on the former MacMurray Ranch in Healdsburg. An official complaint was filed with the Department of Fish and Game, the Regional Water Quality Control Board that resulted in a referral to the Sonoma County District Attorney's Office. A record settlement was achieved by the DA's successful prosecution that also resulted in Gallo announcing a change in its policy in regard to planting on cleared hillsides.
- Received complaints about a proposed wine factory development in rural Freestone. Town Hall Coalition filed comments to the Permit and Resource Management Department and alerted neighbors to the plan. A new neighborhood organization was formed called the Freestone Valley Alliance, dedicated to preserving the area's rural lifestyle and creating a sustainable community. PRMD has also asked the project proponent to conduct several studies on the potential effects of this development.
- Town Hall Coalition and other community groups filed a complaint with Fish and Game, Regional Water Quality Control Board, and District Attorneys' Office in response to the clearing of a riparian forest and damage to Atascadero Creek by a landowner near Mill Station Road. The destruction was halted and the land will be restored per an enforcement order by the regulatory agencies brought on by citizen involvement.

### For the Public Record

Town Hall Coalition made comments into the public record on many different local issues throughout the year. Encouraging public participation in the decision-making process is vital to strengthening our ability as citizens to voice concerns or make recommendations that point to viable and sustainable land use practices. Examples include:

- Comments to California State Budget Conference Committee to uphold the Williamson Act.
- Submitted Comments and testimony to the General Plan Citizen's Advisory Committee on the issue of Timber Conversions.
- Comments to City of Sebastopol opposing the Laguna Vista housing development on fragile wetland habitat along the Laguna de Santa Rosa in Sebastopol.
- Comments to City of Santa Rosa regarding the controversial Incremental Recycled Water Project, expanding Santa Rosa's wastewater disposal.
- Comments and testimony to Regional Water Quality Control Board requesting the elimination of the use of waivers by the timber industry from having to report sediment discharges into rivers, creeks, and streams.
- Official protest form filed with the State Water Resources Control Board opposing the Gualala and Albion River waterbag proposals.
- Comments to California Department of Forestry regarding a controversial timber harvest plan conversion of forestland to vineyards along a hilltop in Pocket Canyon, Guerneville.
- Comments to Permit and Resource Management Department opposing a coastal wetland development project in Bodega Bay.
- Comments to US Army Corps of Engineers opposing the proposed wetlands fill by Peter Michael Winery during vineyard construction in Seaview Ranch near Fort Ross.

## Upcoming Events

### Wes "Scoop" Niskar performs "The Big Bang, The Buddha, and the Baby Boom"

Join us on Friday, May 9th, 7PM at the Sebastopol Veteran's Building as we present Wes "Scoop" Nisker for a book signing and performance of his latest book, **THE BIG BANG, THE BUDDHA, AND THE BABY BOOM**. Wes "Scoop" Nisker uses his unique brand of humor to expose the foolish human condition and the joys and sorrows of living in the modern age. Combining the best elements of memoir and social commentary, he uses his story to illuminate the baby boomers' roots of spiritual hunger in postwar America.

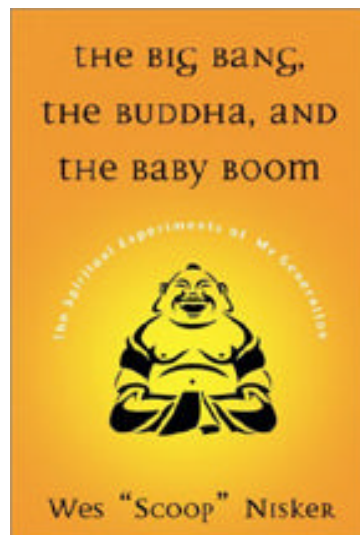
Wes "Scoop" Nisker is the editor of *Inquiring Mind* and has been an enduring celebrity on San Francisco Bay Area radio for more than 20 years, known for his signature tag line: "If you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own!" Scoop is a spokesperson for the anti-war movement past and present.

TICKETS ARE \$15 FOR THIS EVENT ARE AVAILABLE AT ALL COPPERFIELD'S BOOKSTORES or by calling the Town Hall Coalition office for reservations.

The event will also feature a Silent Auction and Raffle Drawing featuring 1<sup>st</sup> Prize *Gualala River*, an original painting by local artist Jack Stuppin. Other prizes include a night's stay at Mar Vista Cottages in Gualala, free all-day kayak rental on the Russian River, and many exciting prizes and gift certificates from local artists, businesses, and restaurants. Numerous items will also be displayed for a silent auction before the show. Check our website, [www.townhallcoalition.org](http://www.townhallcoalition.org), for a list of items.

### San Francisco Mime Troupe

Coming to Sebastopol on August 7th, Town Hall Coalition is proud to once-again host the San Francisco Mime Troupe for another amazing theatrical performance. The event will take place at the Analy High School Theatre. No title for this event has been released yet, but you can certainly guarantee an evening of comical relief from the present political climate. Tickets for this event will be available at all Copperfield's Bookstores or by reservation by calling the Town Hall Coalition Office (707) 874-9110



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