Volume 20, No. 1 November 2020

This year's *Journal* highlights climate change on Sonoma Mountain.

Inside

The first peoples of southern Sonoma County, the Coast Miwok, placed *oona-pa'is* — Sonoma Mountain — at the center of the world, imagining its summit as an island in the primordial ocean at the beginning of time.

Geologists tell a similar story —that Sonoma Mountain's layers of volcanic and sedimentary rock, pushed upward by tectonic forces, rose from the depths of a shallow sea.

Our mission is to preserve Sonoma Mountain's scenic, agricultural, and natural resources by cultivating a sense of place, engaging people in the landscape, and inspiring them to become mountain stewards.

Heat & Hope:
Climate Change on Sonoma Mountain

Arthur Dawson

Go anywhere on Sonoma Mountain and you're bound to discover something that speaks of the past. It might be a thousand-year-old redwood or the logged-off stump of one, the tumbled-down stone wall of an early homesteader, a strand of rusty barbed wire on a rotting fence post, or an obsidian shard glinting in the dust. They're good reminders of how things change over time and the many conditions under which humans have lived here. People were already living here at the close of the last ice age, ten thousand or more years ago, when the climate was several degrees cooler than it is today. Sonoma Mountain probably supported trees and plants that are now more common farther north in California and the Pacific Northwest.

The mountain's time magic works on a smaller scale too. Hike up the mountain in April and you'll find yourself walking back the season as you rise. By that time, wildflowers like buttercups, paintbrush and hound's tongue are already faded and going to seed lower down. But high up they're still brightly colored and in full bloom. Modest as it is, Sonoma Mountain's elevation makes the difference. Following the laws of physics, the air temperature drops about 3.5 degrees (all temperatures in this article are in Fahrenheit) for every thousand feet of elevation, so the upper mountain tends to be six or seven degrees cooler than nearby valleys (days of summer fog are an exception—Petaluma can be swathed in bone-chilling gray while the mountain's summit is blistering hot and sunny).

Just a few years ago, climate change's more serious effects were predicted to be decades away. But we're already living in the world of heat waves and megafires I feared my grandkids might face much later in this century. It's a sobering time, and this is the effect of just two degrees of warming. By 2050, Santa Rosa is expected to be another two degrees warmer. By 2100, there's a good chance our regional climate will average nine degrees higher than in 2000. Of course, the future remains unknown. But even the most optimistic scenarios, with high levels of human cooperation and technological advancement, predict the temperature will rise by three or four degrees over the next eighty years.

For comparison, it took 10,000 years after the end of the last ice age for the climate to warm seven degrees. Things are heating up much faster now. One way to imagine Sonoma Mountain's future is to identify a "climate analog"—a place where the current climate closely matches what is projected for the future. Depending on the model used and on how things play out, Sonoma Mountain's climate analog for 2050 could be as distant as the mountains of San Diego County, or as close as the San Jose/Watsonville area.

What might Sonoma Mountain look like in the future?

Sonoma Mountain supports a wide range of habitats, from grassland to forests with various combinations of oak, madrone, bay, Douglas fir, redwood and other species. These habitats, in

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Letter from the Chair

The Mountain Endures

Meg Beeler

Despite everything this year, our mountain endures, just as it has for tens of thousands of years.

Once again Sonoma Mountain has been spared in our 2020 climate-change-induced fires, yet the sorrow of losing familiar lands nearby, and homes we love, weighs heavy.

We know burned lands will sprout amazing wildflower blooms in the first two to three years. We know they will recover as they always have.

Will we? Will we garner the courage and resources to address climate change? This edition of the *Journal* dives into how what we know affects the mountain.

Get to the Top at North Slope Regional Park!
This beautiful 820-acre property on the north of the mountain is in the planning stages for improvements and, best of all, finally opening the top of the mountain to the public. Sonoma County Regional Parks is considering three plan alternatives for public use, development, trails, camping, cabin use, access, benches, bike and horse use on trails, and additional parking.

Eldridge Transition (Sonoma Developmental Center)
The shutdown of water resources is a worry in terms of valley groundwater and emergency resources. The community process has bogged down because of COVID, fires, and personnel changes (the project manager for the county moved on; outreach from the consultant now running things, Emmanuel Ursu, has been minimal).

Due to lack of transparency the public is not aware of much of anything that is going on. The Advisory Commission (aka PAT) has rarely met. We hear that the results of all our prior community meetings are essentially being ignored by the current consultants. SMP is very concerned, and working as usual behind the scenes to help shift the trajectory.

SMP Initiatives 2020
We're working to implement a pilot school program in 2021 focused on the mountain and kids' connections across it. Our dream is to extend the program to every school around the mountain, making sure that our youth are rooted in place and aware of the mountain in their midst.

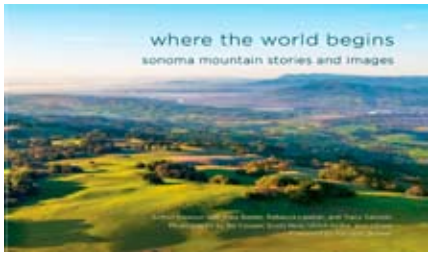
Regarding access to our mountain, SMP is commenting on and following the North Slope expansion project, the too-slow pace of SDC plans, and the eventual opening of Petaluma's Lafferty Ranch.

SMP introduced monthly emails in late 2018, just as we were about to publish our book. They are a great way to get up-to-date info on what's happening on the mountain—whether it's North Slope camping possibilities, SDC community events, or (hopefully) in-person experiential events. Sign up here.

Future Initiatives: We think a conference or gathering bringing landowners, SMP, and PRMD together for better understanding and collaboration on wildlife corridors, fire protection, open space access, and related mountain issues, would be very useful. Is this something that interests you?

Guidestar Silver Seal of Transparency: SMP earned this higher rating in 2020, giving you one more reason to support our work on the mountain! You can donate on our website through Paypal (scroll to 'DONATE' button) or mail your check to PO Box 1772, Glen Ellen, CA 95442. Thank you!

Welcome New Board Members!
This year, after rewriting SMP's bylaws, we welcomed seven new members to our Board of Directors: Tracy Salcedo of Glen Ellen, Teri Shore of Sonoma, Kim Batchelder of Santa Rosa, and three west-side folks: Matt McGuire and Avery Hellman of Petaluma, and John Sheehy of Penngrove. We also named five loyal, long-time SMP Steering Committee members as Emeritus Board members: Mickey Cooke of Glen Ellen, Marilyn Goode of Sonoma, Lucy Kortum of Petaluma, and Helen Bates and David Hansen of Santa Rosa.



GIFTS!

Where the World Begins makes a fine holiday gift for family and friends. Have it mailed to anyone in the US by purchasing at sonomamountain.org/book. Or get your copies at Readers Books, Copperfields, Jack London and Sugarloaf State Parks, Laurel Glen, Talisman, Kenwood Press.

A Mountain for All

Tracy Salcedo

Since the last *Sonoma Mountain Preservation Journal* was published, our world has been upended. The orange sky of early September brought the country's angst home, right here, to Sonoma Mountain. Like pandemic, wildfire, and human conflict, the orange sky evoked apocalypse, doom, and zombies.

Sunset all day was fundamentally unsettling. We have, after all, brought much of this chaos upon ourselves. It is up to us to set things right. Sonoma Mountain Preservation, as an organization, is equipped to take on some of the challenges. Through stewardship, advocacy, and community activism, we can do our part to address climate change and wildfire risks, and to help our neighbors cultivate healthy lifestyles and mindsets.

Addressing social inequities and racism is more difficult. The board of directors of SMP does not reflect the diversity of the community living around Sonoma Mountain—not now, nor in the past. Who are we to presume we know what's best for Sonoma Mountain? People of different tribes were here long before we were, and their roots tap deep into the heart of the mountain. We have come lately, and while our intentions spring from love of the place, our white privilege has allowed us to usurp power that rightly belongs to those who came before. It is a great tragedy that we have to invite those who are not white to join us. They should always have been with us.

I acknowledge this, and hope we will reach out so that Native voices, Hispanic voices, Black voices, and Asian voices may be included in our leadership as we move forward.

I can't say exactly how this will happen, but look to the natural diversity on Sonoma Mountain as a guide. Annual grasses brought in on the hooves of Spanish cattle have invaded the mountain's oak savannas, but still, bunchgrasses and wildflowers endure. In the skies overhead birds circle and squabble, but resident species and seasonal migrants nest in the same canopies and forage in the same thickets. The mightiest flora grows alongside the humblest, the sorrel with the redwood, the oak with the lichen. Separate communities harmonize and synchronize, even in their separateness (because there can't be a meadow if the trees overrun it).

These are times of reckoning, and we have a lot of work to do. The way forward remains shrouded, like a trail headed uphill into the fog. But this is how we begin. We begin by asking those who support SMP, as well as those in the broader community, to help us broaden our racial and ethnic scope. Send us your ideas, your critiques, your advice. Help us become as diverse and welcoming and accepting of change as the forests and meadows on the mountain we love.

NOTE: SMP has not taken an official stance on these issues. We will be discussing them at our next board meeting in January.

The 'New Abnormal': Conversations with Two Grape Growers

Arthur Dawson

Phil Coturri grew up on Sonoma Mountain in the 1950s, '60s and '70s. Well known for his organic approach to grape growing, today he manages two mountain vineyards—Laurel Glen, off Sonoma Mountain Road on the north slope, and another above Sobre Vista on the east. Phil remembers a "certain lushness" on the mountain that is disappearing. Rain in recent years has been only 40% of normal, and creeks that used to run into August no longer do. The region is experiencing more heat as well, with 26 "hundred-degree days" in 2020. Meanwhile, the summer fog that redwoods and other plants rely on in the dry season is in decline. This September, the temperature hit 116 degrees in one of his vineyards. He's begun installing cooling systems on some properties. Sonoma Mountain and the valley below are facing drought and desiccation.

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Join Us in 2021!

Quarterly Board Meetings:

Guest speakers deepen our knowledge
of the mountain & we address local development challenges.

January 20, April 21, July 21 & October 20 (Wednesdays)
3:30 to 5:30 PM

By Zoom or at the Sonoma Ecology Center as appropriate.
For link/location: baseline@vom.com or (707) 996-9967

Keep Up with Issues and Events:

Monthly newsletter sign up at sonomamountain.org

SMP on Facebook: www.facebook.com/sonomamountain

SDC Updates: www.sdcspecificplan.com/

Questions: email sonomamountainpreserve@gmail.com

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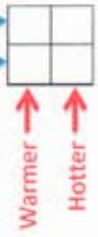
P.O. Box 1772, Glen Ellen, CA 95442
or at:
www.sonomamountain.org

What are the potential native plant winners and losers for Sonoma Mountain?

The color shows the projected response of vegetation to future climate.
Red: Dramatic Decline - 25% less than current
Orange: Moderate Decline - 25-75% less than current
Gray: Relative Stability - 75-125% current
Green: Increase - 125% more than current

The four squares represent different climate futures: combinations of warmer (up to 4.5°F) vs. hotter (+4.5°F or more) temperatures and lower vs. higher rainfall



Possibly Expanding		California Bay		Sensitive to hot, dry summers, but responds positively to warmer winters; the balance of these two makes projections uncertain. Bay regenerates vigorously from seed and seems to be expanding in many North Bay woodlands.
		Chamise Chaparral		Occupies hot, dry, steep slopes, and favorable conditions are projected to expand throughout the Bay Area under future climates. Seed dispersal and establishment may limit expansion. For existing chaparral stands, succession to oak woodland can happen over time in the absence of fire.
Likely Stable		Baccharis		Aggressive invader of grasslands in the absence of fire or grazing, and spreads rapidly in wet years. Models project expansion in interior regions of the Bay Area, especially under higher rainfall future scenarios.
		Coast Live Oak		Reaches its northern range limit in the Bay Area, and may persist or even expand under warmer climates. While it is sensitive to warmer summers, it may be favored by increasing winter temperatures.
		Douglas-fir		Establishes in grasslands, shrublands and oak woodlands, and in the absence of fire invades and overtops oak woodlands. It responds positively to modest winter warming, but is sensitive to drier summers and reduced rainfall.
		Interior Live Oak		Models disagree on future projections for Interior Live Oak. It appears to be sensitive to warmer winter temperatures, and may decline in southern parts of the region, while staying stable or expanding in the north and in interior ranges.
Possibly Declining		Buckbrush		Buckbrush is an obligate seeder, depending on wildfire for regeneration. Seeds persist for some time in the seed bank. It would probably be able to persist anywhere there is chaparral, if it can get there.
		Grassland		Widespread across Bay Area climate gradients, usually maintained by grazing, mowing, and/or fire. Vulnerable to shrub invasion. Climate change and N-deposition are expected to alter species composition, but impacts on overall distribution and amount of grassland more likely depend on management strategies.
		Oregon Oak		Near the southern limit of distribution along the California coast. Declining suitability is projected under all future climate scenarios, due to drier summers and warmer winters. Recruitment failure has been observed in some populations, though causes are uncertain.

Climate Change

continued from page 1

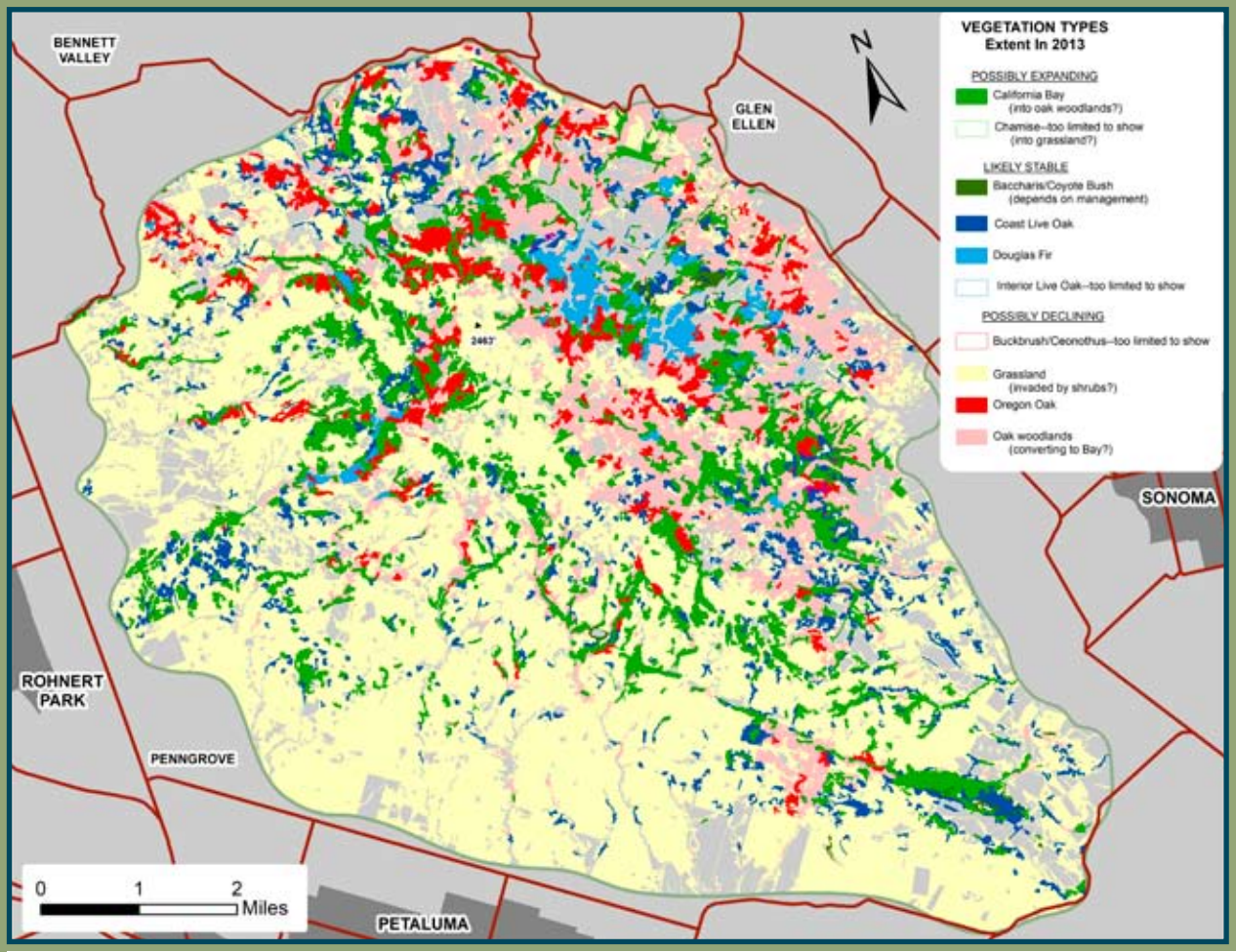
turn, support the mountain's diverse and abundant wildlife. The vegetation patterns we see today were created by many complex factors. No one knows exactly how climate change will alter these patterns. But modeling changes in these factors offers a glimpse of the mountain's possible futures.

In 2010, Sonoma County's Pepperwood Preserve and UC Berkeley's Department of Integrative Biology formed the Terrestrial Biodiversity Climate Change Consortium (TBC3) to investigate changes in the natural world. In one study, which included the bioregion of Sonoma Mountain, they modeled how four future scenarios—warmer dryer; warmer wetter; hotter dryer; and hotter wetter—might effect habitats on the mountain (see facing page and map below)

The changes may happen gradually; established trees can survive a long time even when conditions grow less ideal. On the other hand, major disturbances, like wildfire or severe drought, could speed up the process. Over time, oak woodlands may convert to California bay forest; the mountain's extensive grasslands shift to shrubs like chamise, manzanita and coyote bush; and Oregon oaks will likely retreat upslope toward cooler, moister conditions. For a time, live oak, Douglas fir and redwood forest may hold their own.

Sonoma Mountain has a vital role to play in protecting biodiversity during the coming years. The mountain itself has a strong influence on local climate and resilience. Its rugged terrain encompasses cool, shady, north-facing slopes and canyons; hot, dry, south-facing ones; and everything in between. Cool, moist locations will serve as "climate refugia." If conditions lower down become unsuitable for Oregon oaks, hound's tongue, scarlet warriors and other species, they should be able to hold on, for a while, higher on the mountain. The wildlife corridor not only offers a pathway for animals to adapt to seasonal change by moving; it also allows plants to do the same thing over the long term.

In the future, I can imagine families hiking up the mountain to see flowers that have disappeared from the valley. "I remember when these were all over the regional park," a parent might say to their kids. "Now we have to climb up here just to see them." There is some comfort in thinking of Sonoma Mountain as a refuge, a place where the natural world can find safekeeping amid the coming changes. But my deepest longing is that the human world will soon set itself on a path to net zero carbon emissions and allow us to slowly begin to turn the tide.



Possible Areas of Change and Stability

Based on the 2013 Sonoma Veg Map and the chart on page 4, this map shows trends that *may* play out on the mountain over the next century or more.

Modelers say, "All models are wrong but some are more useful than others." This map is intended to give an idea of possible changes over a large landscape rather than provide site-specific predictions.

NOTE: Gray areas on the mountain are agricultural or developed lands.

Data Sources: Sonoma County GIS sonomavegmap.org

Terrestrial Biodiversity Climate Change Consortium (TBC3): pepperwoodpreserve.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Climate-Ready-Vegetation-Report-Sonoma-Mountain.pdf

Winners & Losers:
Wildlife and Climate Change

Tracy Salcedo

We asked several experts about the impacts of climate change on the mountain's animals. Caitlin Cornwall, senior projects manager with Sonoma Ecology Center, says short-term consequences to wildlife from fire likely include deaths from the fires, and afterwards from starvation because food sources have been obliterated. "In our area, life is probably difficult for many species between a fire and the first rains," Cornwall says. "But not so much for predators, burrowing animals who store food underground, or any species that can travel to the next unburned patch." Over the longer term, studies find that "populations and biodiversity are higher after wildfire." Unless fire is too frequent, she notes, its impact on native animal life, as with native plant life, is positive overall.

Beyond wildfire, climate change translates to hotter, longer dry seasons. "Animals have the same difficulties at high temperatures that we do," Cornwall notes. Excessive heat causes "greater physiological stress," which can limit their activities and raise the risk of dehydration. The lack of available water in streams and seeps can be life-threatening.

Mountain lions are relatively well equipped to escape when wildfires erupt. Still, they can suffer dire consequences, says Dr. Winston Vickers, a veterinarian working with the UC Davis Wildlife Health Center and a colleague of Quinton Martins, who runs Living with Lions, a research and education project based at Audubon Canyon Ranch's Bouverie Preserve in Glen Ellen. In most cases, says Vickers, puma fatalities occur when the cats suffer burns on their paws, inhibiting their ability to hunt and move.

Loss of habitat is a long-term danger. After the 2018 Woolsey fire, "possibly because lions were overcrowded in the surviving habitat" there was "migration out across the freeways" and "one or more pumas were hit by cars," Vickers says. Wildfire can also reduce deer herds, which are lions' primary prey. This "no doubt affects lions," but "as burned areas regenerate, they will support a growing deer herd over the next 5-10 years, which benefits the lions." Conversely, Vickers adds, "Fire at too high a frequency leads to vegetation converting to grassland, which is not as good for lions due to reduced ambush cover."

Steve Lee, senior scientist and research program manager with the ecology center, explains how steelhead trout "depend upon abundant, cold, clean water. If you have steelhead, you know the conditions remain healthy. Lack of steelhead means something is out of balance." While limited funding has hindered gathering comprehensive data, Lee notes that ecology center researchers have "never found any signal of increased toxicants in the creeks following the 2017 fires. So the direct impacts on steelhead were probably minor." However, climate change-driven drought is a major concern. "In the dry season, low streamflow usually means elevated water temperatures, which the fish can't handle, and decreased dissolved oxygen, which also kills steelhead," Lee says.

Changes in precipitation pose other challenges as well. With "rain coming during shorter, more intense events," and people creating hard surfaces, like roads, that shunt water to creeks rather than absorb it, "storm peaks erode stream banks and degrade streambeds," negatively impacting habitat. Like steelhead, yellow-legged frogs, orange-bellied newts and other residents of our riparian zones also need lots of cool, clean water to thrive, according to Lee.

The 'New Abnormal'

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Phil Eagles, another vineyard manager, has worked on the mountain since 2002. He has a rain gauge at his home at the foot of the mountain near Madrone Road. Before 2010, annual rainfall usually measured in the "high 40s or 50 inches." Supporting Coturri's observations, in the winter of 2019–2020 he got less than 19 inches. Eagles also talks of how the grasslands at the Sonoma Mountains' southern tip, by Sears Point, are "browning earlier and quicker than they used to" in the spring.

Careful to say his evidence is anecdotal rather than scientific, Eagles describes how shifting weather patterns have changed the rhythms of agriculture. "When I first started," he says, "you could hardly get out in the field with an ATV from January to March because of the rain and the mud. We expected to lose three weeks to the weather back then." Recently it's been no problem working at that time of year; in fact, sometimes he's had to put up shade structures for his workers because of the heat. Until ten or fifteen years ago, the rain would taper off in April and be mostly done by May. Now significant rain often falls in May. "At the other end of the season," he observes, "harvest was a race against the rain in October. Sometimes it would be too muddy to drive trucks into the vineyard and we'd have to carry the grapes out." Now it's often dry well into November.

Coturri has twice had his grape harvest cut in half by what are likely secondary effects of climate change—a hailstorm in 2015 and smoke taint in 2017. This year his entire vintage was wiped out by wildfire smoke. Both Coturri and Eagles note the warming climate has made growing Chardonnay on the mountain more of a struggle. Eagles sees Sauvignon Blanc as a good choice these days—it grows well in many places and ripens early, meaning the grapes are usually off the vines while the risk of wildfire and smoke taint is still low.

As for wildfire, Coturri is especially concerned about the east side of Sonoma Mountain. In the event of a catastrophic burn, "climate change may limit the land's ability to recover. And that would affect the environment of the whole valley."

Looking to the future, Coturri expects Sonoma Mountain's water supply to become more limited and precious; innovative approaches will be needed to maintain agricultural and domestic supplies. Reducing wildfire risk will require prescribed burning, maintaining fire roads and fuel breaks, strategic pruning and more. Adapting to the "new abnormal" is quickly becoming an urgent necessity. "There's really no choice," he muses. Considering recent events, "2020 has to open everyone's eyes."

A few ideas to help wildlife cope with climate change:

- Support conservation efforts for lions and other species;
- Support prescribed fire as a management tool;
- Build wildlife-friendly road crossings and fencing;
- Reduce groundwater pumping during the dry season,
- Support stream and habitat restoration efforts;
- Begin "habitat gardening," creating a wildlife-and-pollinator-friendly defensible space around your home.

To the Top of Taylor Mountain

Tracy Salcedo

I can't tell you firsthand what you'll see from the top of Taylor Mountain on a clear day. Apparently, the views are superlative, east to the Mayacamas and west across the Santa Rosa plain toward the sea. I can't tell you because the day I hiked the 1,380-foot summit, a soup of fog and drizzle enveloped the highest slopes. I was soaked by the time I reached trail's end, and what the clouds didn't obscure the condensation on my glasses did.

After weeks of autumn heat and smoke, it was glorious.

What I can tell you is that, regardless of the weather, the hike is worth the effort. I can also say that, with very little shade on the broad tracks leading to the top, walking in cool, wet weather might be an optimal choice. A summer sun would be relentless and, without water, a sun hat, and sunscreen, perhaps even dangerous.

Thankfully, Taylor Mountain Regional Park and Open Space Preserve offers options. On hot days you can stay low, hiking easy footpaths through creek bottoms shaded by massive oaks.

My exploration began at the Kawana Terrace trailhead. I began on the Western Route, which heads past the disc golf course and then climbs the east-facing slopes of the mountain. Some of the trees here are grandmothers, with gnarled trunks and limbs that bend to touch the ground. The Todd Creek Trail and Red Hill Trail are options on the lower slopes.

The Western Route follows a service road, allowing mountain bikers to share the trail with other users and families to pass comfortably, even during the pandemic. Leashed dogs are also allowed.

As you climb, trail signs grow fewer and farther between, but getting to the summit is not difficult. You might wander from your planned route—the Sky Lupine Trail intersects at various points—but you'll get to the top. Just keep climbing.

The ascent gets serious about a mile in, steep pitches interspersed with more moderate inclines. Vistas open across the decidedly urban landscape of the Santa Rosa plain. The soundscape is urban as well, with the rumble of traffic ever-present. Cattle graze on the park's former ranchland, and you'll pass through a couple of stiles. Treat cattle like wildlife: Keep your distance, mind your business, and the bovines will mind theirs.

After a good bit of thigh-pumping climbing—you'll gain about 1,100 feet in two miles—the pitch mellows as you join the Eastern Route, passing into the shade of oaks and bay laurel. Round a switchback and keep climbing, passing a historic fieldstone fence line as you reach the grassy summit ridge. One more bend and one last hill brings you to trail's end, with a bench, wheels and cairns built of fieldstone, and a fence (the summit proper is on private land).

In clear weather, the bench and stones provide space for summiteers to take it all in. But when I made the climb there wasn't much to do but get wetter, so I tapped the high point and headed down.

I chose the Eastern Route on the return and made a lollipop loop. Another service road, it offers good footing despite the steep terrain. Where Eastern meets Western, stay right. The trail circles two water tanks before it dumps you just below the trailhead parking area.

Taylor Mountain Regional Park and Open Space Preserve: Open sunrise to sunset. Parking fee. Picnic facilities/restrooms at both trailheads (other is on Petaluma Hill Rd). Visit https://parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov/Visit/Taylor-Mountain-Regional-Park-and-Preserve/, or call (707) 539-8092 for more info.

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