

Letter to the Editor
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A Stupid Idea for Its Time

Has anyone stopped to think that building houses in substantial numbers on rural mountain land, such as the Sonoma Developmental Center's (SDC) land currently for sale, is a really stupid and dangerous idea? This land is a welcome target for wildfires. For that matter, so is the whole Sonoma Valley, redolent with that history and certainly bound to come around again.

The bright idea of selling the Sonoma Mountain lower land to house 2,500 to 3,500 permanent residents, plus a large hotel/resort, and 460,000 sq. ft. of "space" for commercial enterprises – a small new town – was the state's concoction and the county has gone along for the ride.

Wildfire is known to this region. History has warned us. Whether coming south and west through Sonoma Mountain or east from the Mayacamas range, these low-lands are an easy target due to drought and global warming. This can't be news to the geniuses that manage PG&E after monstrous lawsuits from prior devastating fires. All one has to do is think about the 2018 Paradise fires, aka the Camp fire, where evacuations failed, 85 people died, and an estimated 9000 homes and 18,000 structures were destroyed. That's eighty-five human beings that perished in a blazing fire!

If that isn't enough to give one pause, I don't know what is.

In fact, a locally financed comprehensive wildfire evacuation study centering on the Sonoma Valley was commissioned and conducted by an internationally renowned firm, KLD Associates in San Antonio, TX. This shocking study, "found that evacuation of the Valley involves 27,000 people, 25,000 evacuating vehicles, and an additional 9,000 other vehicles traversing the Valley. This includes residents, tourists, workers and other visitors who may be in the Valley at the time of evacuation.

This raises a serious question, re: Why is the drive to make the selling of SDC land for development a very profitable transaction for the sellers – that's the state, and the county, and all those entities involved? Where is it written that it is incumbent on government to make a profit from a sale of its land, and to assure prospective buyers of this land an enormous profit from its use? After all, the State of California never maintained the maintenance or the viability of that land, and it has never worked this land or lifted a finger to increase its potential value.

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