



SSA Speaker Series

The Secret Life of Bees in the Santa Cruz Mountains

PRESENTER: AIDAN WING

A broad, engaging talk about how dramatically the landscape changes over relatively short distances—and how those changes affect bees, flowering plants, honey, and bee genetics.



Aidan Wing has been keeping bees in the Santa Cruz Mountains since 2008. A longtime resident of the La Honda Pescadero and the South Skyline area, Aidan runs Wings of Nature Bees, a local beekeeping and honey company with more than 200 hives throughout the farms and wildlands of San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. His approach to beekeeping combines science, observation, traditional knowledge, and a deep respect for the land and the people who care for it. When he's not tending bees, Aidan is a musician, naturalist, gardener, cook, teacher, and writer—and he especially enjoys sharing what he has learned about bees, pollinators, and the remarkable agricultural and natural communities of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

www.wingsofnaturebees.com

Friday, October 30, 2026

TIME 7:00 pm – Refreshments
7:30 pm – General Meeting
announcements followed by the
featured presentation and Q&A

PLACE Saratoga CDF Summit Fire Station
12900 Skyline Blvd.

Directions: Located on the west side of Skyline Blvd. approximately .6 of a mile north of the intersection of Skyline Blvd. and Highway 9.

All South Skyline residents are welcome! Bring the family. Please bring a sweet or savory dessert to share. SSA will provide beverages.



IN THIS ISSUE

SSA Speaker Series.....	1	Rich's Ditch Saga.....	4	The Call of the Hills.....	10
SSF&R News.....	2	What Do You Mean, Fire Safe?.....	6	Dry Wells, Part 2	11
SPUG Report.....	2	Contacting Caltrans	7	Midpen News	14
Water Tank Project.....	3	Durango Root	8	Classified Ads	15
Las Cumbres Holiday Bazaar	3	Take a Hike	9		

South Skyline Fire & Rescue News

BY ANDY SEIGEL, CAPTAIN, SSF&R

It's been a quiet summer with just a few key incidents in the area. In late June, a large smoldering wood chip pile was eventually flattened by Dozer 1743. Although this pile did not get hot enough for free burning, ignition is possible when biological decomposition traps extreme internal heat deep inside the pile.



In early August, we had a vehicle fire with a small extension into some brush. A quick response from Santa Clara County Fire, Santa Cruz County Fire, and two CAL FIRE units (CZU and SCU) kept the fire from spreading.

We've been working with the South Skyline Firesafe Council on their remote water storage project. Check out their column for details.



New Water Tender Update

Back in March, some of you may have seen the news that our sister company Bonny Doon's water tender was effectively destroyed by a suspected arson fire in their station. The vehicle was eventually declared a total loss. After considerable deliberation, County Fire has decided to have Rosenbauer build twin water tenders: one for us and one for Bonny Doon.

Visit us at: southskylinefire.org

SPUG Quarterly Report

Month/Year	Amerigas	Ferrellgas	Kamps	Suburban/SV
September 2026	2.750	2.820	3.180	4.500
August 2026	2.750	2.820	3.180	4.500
July 2026	2.750	2.896	3.177	4.500
June 2026	2.750	2.924	3.297	4.500
May 2026	2.750	2.981	3.297	4.450
April 2026	2.750	2.930	3.275	4.450
March 2026	2.750	3.060	3.411	4.500
February 2026	2.750	3.074	3.412	4.520
January 2026	2.750	2.998	3.412	4.520
December 2025	2.750	2.944	3.362	4.520
November 2025	2.750	2.911	3.190	4.520
October 2025	2.750	2.849	3.190	4.520
September 2025	2.750	2.742	3.190	4.520

Skyline Propane Users Group (SPUG) was formed to benefit SSA members. For information about joining, or current information on the SPUG agreement go to our website: www.SouthSkyline.org/spug/. If you have questions, please email propane@southskyline.org.

SSA has agreements with Amerigas, Ferrellgas, Kamps, and Suburban Propane Scotts Valley. The open market price is more than \$1.00/gallon higher than the SPUG price. **Please note:** Prices are subject to change as frequently as wholesale prices change. The prices SSA posts are for the first of the month. Our SPUG rate is based on a keep-full basis, not will-call service.

You are not required to pay sales tax on propane if you do not have natural gas available where you use propane. If you get your propane from Amerigas, you will need to submit a sales tax exemption form. Contact Amerigas for the form.

South Skyline FireSafe Council Water Tank Project

BY JOHN DELONG, SSFSC

The South Skyline FireSafe Council (SSFSC) is making some headway on a long-term goal that we began years ago. Our intent is to install water tanks at strategic locations throughout our area to provide water for Cal Fire and other local fire agencies during a wildfire. The first of those tanks was installed in August at the top of Oak Ridge Road.

During a wildfire, wildland fire engines have limited water capacity, usually 150 to 500 gallons, in order to make them maneuverable over rough terrain. Water tenders, tank trucks holding 1500 to 3000 gallons of water, are dispatched to make water available to the attack engines. During the 2020 CZU Lightning fire, the water tenders would sometimes have to drive close to an hour to refill. The lesson learned was that more strategically placed water tanks, for exclusive use by firefighters, could, in some cases, reduce acres burned.

SSFSC is hoping to install one tank per year, with a long-term goal to have fill sites or tanks about every 5 miles, combining these new tanks with pre-existing tanks. This first new one is on land owned by San Jose Water Company. They were very enthusiastic and quick to agree to host a tank on their property. The South Skyline Association gave SSFSC a \$5000 grant toward this project, which should cover about 40% of the initial cost. The SSFSC board approved covering the remaining costs from our general fund.

To keep costs down, this first tank is being installed with all volunteer labor, including some generous residents who live on Oak Ridge Road.

SSFSC is seeking people who may be willing to host one of these 5000-gallon emergency water tanks on your property in the future. The tank would need to be within 15 feet of a driveway or road accessible to fire vehicles. Please let us know, and we can give you more details about what is required and how we can make that happen. Send an email to ssfsc.treasurer@gmail.com.



Company 29's water tender with the new Oak Ridge Road water tank.

Las Cumbres Holiday Bazaar

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2026

10 AM–3 PM

Support Our Local Wildfire Safety Organizations and Our Mountain Artisans

The Las Cumbres Holiday Bazaar returns on Sunday, November 15, from 10 AM to 3 PM, in the Las Cumbres Community Center just off Skyline Blvd, 18260 Las Cumbres Road, Los Gatos, 95033. The Bazaar benefits Emergency Services, Wildfire Safety & Community Needs.

Shop for the holidays while supporting wildfire safety and local artists. You will find high-quality handmade items including jewelry,



wearable art, purses, all-natural soaps and lotions, wood bread boards, paintings, pottery, local honey, kitchen accessories, and more.

If you are interested in being a vendor, email bazaar@lascumbres.org and we will send you an application form.

Applications are due October 1st.

Enjoy complimentary wine tasting from local vineyards. Café Las Cumbres will be serving breakfast and lunch featuring homemade scones, muffins, quiche, soup, bread, and cookies, along with coffee and tea. The Las Cumbres Pantry features local jam, homemade candy, fudge, applesauce, and other goodies.

We hope to see many of our South Skyline neighbors on Sunday, November 15th!

“Rich’s Ditch” Saga of an On-going Road Failure on Skyline Blvd.

BY RICH LEE

2019 was a fairly light year for rain in the Santa Cruz Mountains with the exception of February that year, which had the highest rainfall exceeding over 1 foot of rain in just a few days.

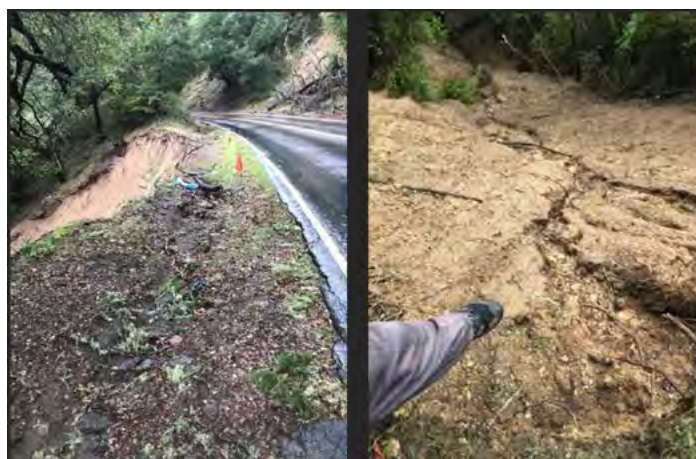
December, 2019	51.4	44.6	58.2	10.05
November, 2019	55.0	42.0	68.0	2.14
October, 2019	61.8	45.4	78.2	0.00
September, 2019	68.4	53.9	82.9	0.11
August, 2019	68.7	55.6	81.8	0.02
July, 2019	66.1	54.0	78.0	0.05
June, 2019	64.1	52.3	75.8	0.05
May, 2019	57.7	48.5	66.9	3.52
April, 2019	57.8	47.2	68.4	0.87
March, 2019	52.3	42.2	62.3	7.73
February, 2019	47.2	39.6	54.8	12.63
January, 2019	52.3	43.8	60.9	8.87

In early February of 2019, local residents became acutely aware of a failure on Highway 35 just south of the Skyline Christmas tree farm. The east side of the road had collapsed, and the rest of it was about to, due to water runoff that had eroded around a culvert beneath the road.



For six weeks, the road was closed for repairs and only emergency vehicles could use a temporary mud and gravel bypass through the Christmas tree farm. This event also brought our attention to other areas of the road that may be prone to failure, including a rapidly eroding shoulder leading to a cliff, just north of the Skyline Chestnut Farm. This cliff is hardly noticeable if you’re driving by but if you stop and

take a look at it, it’s very imposing with a nearly vertical drop-off of over 100 feet before ending in the trees below.



During the rains in February, the entire runoff on both sides of Highway 35 from the Chestnut Orchard gate for the next 800 feet all ran to and over the edge of that cliff, causing very rapid erosion that would soon take out the road if it continued at the same pace.



Among the many residents who commute that section of road every day, and having to do a 30 mile detour already, this would be a disaster, even worse than the closure to the north, which did have a means of emergency travel around

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the washout and construction. To prevent this, I started digging a ditch between the edge of the cliff and Skyline Boulevard to channel all the water past the cliff edge and onto more level ground where it wouldn't threaten the roadway anymore.



The challenge was the narrow space between the road, and the edge of the cliff. This left me with only 3 feet of shoulder to dig a channel. Fortunately, it was during a rainy season, and years before the explosion of social media promoted racing on our roads so there were very few street

racers or cars speeding by to leave me contemplating my survival chances of either being hit by a car or jumping off the cliff. I did place some traffic cones on the blind curve up the road, but that was no guarantee of my safety.

Needless to say, I was digging as fast as I could. I remember one Caltrans pick-up truck slowing down and giving me a thumbs up, but that was about as far as there was any official notice. Sometime later, I did discover and relocate a few of the green sand-filled "sausages" left in the area. One of our neighbors also attempted to place some sandbags and plastic tarps on the edge, but they deteriorated and blew away fairly quickly. I have done some spotty maintenance on the ditch since then, but will make a big effort over this weekend and before the real floods of El Niño arrive. So far, only one vehicle, a VW golf driven by a 19-year-old male went over the cliff and survived in July 2024. But if that edge collapses, it's going to be potentially many more vehicles with more severe results.

At least once since 2019, online reports and "tickets" have been filed with Caltrans about the urgency of stabilizing the cliff but so far there's been no response. Until they do respond, I will try to get together an informal "work crew" and possibly get some traffic control from either the Sheriff, CHP or CalFire to give us at least a couple hours of safety while we make an attempt to stabilize it as best we can. I welcome anyone and everyone reading this article to contact Caltrans at this web address: <https://csr.dot.ca.gov/> and tell them you are echoing the request to respond to Caltrans Customer Service Request ticket #:1186980.

Drive safe, have fun

Rich Lee MD

Medical Director/Cofounder, South Skyline Emergency Preparedness Organization (SSEPO)



What Do You Mean, Fire Safe?

BY LARRY WATSON, BOARD MEMBER SOUTH SKYLINE FIRE SAFE COUNCIL (SSFSC)

In This Article

1. SSFSC News
2. Managing your Defensible Space through Fall and Winter

1. South Skyline FireSafe Council News

As reported in a separate article in this issue of Skylines, SSFSC has installed the first water tank along Skyline near the Oak Ridge community. Hopefully, this is the first of many providing water for CAL FIRE and other local fire agencies during a wildfire.

Are you looking for a flexible volunteer opportunity? The South Skyline FireSafe Council is seeking Board members and project volunteers; please contact our President at SouthSkylineFiresafe@gmail.com. We want every community/neighborhood to be represented.

2. Managing your Defensible Space in the Remainder of the Year.

Personally, I suggest three activities to improve wildfire safety for next year's fire season regarding the biomass you remove from your defensible space:

1. Burn legally
2. Burn safely
3. Burn cleanly

If we don't burn it strategically, Nature will, sooner or later.

Wildfire in either forests or grasslands is a natural process in Earth's carbon cycle. When a wildfire occurs not all the carbon dioxide contained in the burning vegetation is returned to the atmosphere, much remains as charcoal. Charcoal in the soil can

sequester carbon for hundreds or even thousands of years.

In addition to making your defensible space safer from wildfire, why is burning good for you, the neighborhood, and the planet? Nature creates biomass (which roughly contains 50% carbon) through photosynthesis, providing us the basis of all our food to eat and our oxygen to breathe.

And as part of the Earth's carbon cycle, the processes of respiration, combustion, and composting can return carbon to the atmosphere or

carbon reservoirs: the atmosphere, oceans, soil, rocks, sediment, and biomass. Humus (60% carbon) from composting and charcoal (90% carbon) created by oxygen-deprived combustion (pyrolysis) are the primary ways that Nature moves carbon from the air to the soil. You can mimic that process with what you prune or thin.

If we look at the 99% of the carbon in the air represented by carbon dioxide over the last 800,000 years in this [graph](#), the data is astonishing and should convince anyone we have too much carbon in the air.



possibly sequester it into the earth or oceans for much longer than the lifetime of the biomass that originally held the carbon.

It is understood that the number of carbon atoms on Earth has been almost constant since the Earth was created. A little has arrived in meteors and some carbon-containing gases have escaped. What has changed through millennia is where the carbon is located. These are called

In the graph, the carbon dioxide minima typically represent the end of ice ages, e.g. the most recent around 12,000 years ago when the first people entered California. The previous ice age ended around 130,000 years ago. We're now in uncharted territory. From the NASA site displaying this graph is this statement: "Today, we stand on the threshold of a new geologic era, which some term the "Anthropocene", one where the climate is very

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different to the one our ancestors knew.”

What can we do in our daily habits and seasonal biomass management activities to transfer carbon to (positive), or from (negative), the atmosphere, or at least approach being “carbon neutral”. Replacing fossil fuels like gasoline, propane, and diesel whenever possible with renewable power (solar, wind, biomass, hydroelectric, geothermal) would be carbon neutral rather than carbon positive. Making compost or biochar (charcoal placed into or on the earth) are carbon negative for decades, centuries, or even thousands of years.

Making charcoal or biochar from your harvested defensible space biomass has been discussed in previous Skyline articles: making biochar in a kettle charcoal grill ([July 2025](#)) and making biochar by permitted pile burning (October 2025). Heating your home with wood from your defensible space is carbon neutral as was discussed in the [January 2026](#) issue.

Burn Legally, Safely, and Cleanly

Few things are more regulated than burning biomass in the South Skyline area. CAL FIRE and CARB regulations apply statewide but our residents are also subject to the regulations of three different counties, two different air quality control districts, and some have city or community regulations with which all must comply. Different regulations apply whether you are burning indoors or outdoors. Please check the regulations for your location.

Almost anyone in our area is allowed to cook on outdoor grills by the rules. And from my investigations, once the cooking is complete, it seems legal to quench the remaining charcoal and place it on the ground. But note that all the regulations agree “NO burn barrels”.

How to Report a Problem on a State Highway

BY ANN WALDHAUER

Everybody loves to complain about Caltrans, but here is some good news. Last year I used a Caltrans web portal to report a terrible pothole on Skyline Boulevard near Skyline Ridge OSP, and guess what: I got confirmation back that the problem would be fixed, and it WAS fixed within three days. Maybe it helped that I told them that the pothole was deep enough to eat my Honda Fit. To report a problem like a pothole on state highways like 9, 35, and 84, you submit a Customer Service Request on the Caltrans web site.

Here is a link to the web portal:

<https://csr.dot.ca.gov/>

If this link doesn't work, you can search for Caltrans Customer Service Request.

Be ready with the following information:

- Situation type: This is a pull-down menu. Select from the list pothole, litter, graffiti...
- Location: This is a map interface. There is a button for “current location” which might or might not help. Otherwise, zoom in on the map to the right place, and click.
- Direction of Travel: This is a pull-down menu. This is intended to identify which side of the road has the problem.

- Nearest cross street.
- Mode of transportation: Pull-down menu (which includes car, motorcycle, and ...boat!)
- Date and time you noticed the problem.
- A description of the problem (just type it in the box).
- Geographic location: Describe it in words. It is best to include the number on the nearest mile marker if you can. You can say something like “at the Christmas tree farm,” or “a little north of Page Mill Road,” or whatever.
- Your email address
- Name and phone number are optional

After you submit the form, you should receive an email acknowledgement. In my case I had an email reply the next day saying the problem would be addressed, and then another email two days later saying the problem had been fixed. And the pothole HAD been fixed that day!

BY SARAH SCHOEN, PHOTOS BY DAVID SCHOEN

Durango Root Leaves

Durango root is an herbaceous perennial, 1½ to 6' tall. Stems are clustered and branched. Leaves are long and pointed with serrated edges along pinnate lobes. They grow alternate from the stem above and near opposite or whirled below. On casual glance they are somewhat reminiscent of *Cannabis* leaves, but their overall pinnate (feather) shape is different from *Cannabis*'s palmate (hand) shape.

Inconspicuous yellow-green flowers bloom without petals in the leaf axils from May to July or August. The flower arrangement is rare with male-only flowers on some plants and bisexual flowers on others. Plants with this type of arrangement are called androdioecious. Male flowers have 4 to 9 uneven calyx lobes and 8 to 12 stamens on short filaments. Bisexual flowers have

Fruits are ¼" capsules containing many tiny, light brown seeds. The seeds are pitted and arranged in rows. When ready, the capsules open at the top, releasing the ripened seeds.

Durango root is a nitrogen-fixer. Roots contain bacteria in the genus *Frankia*, the same group responsible for nitrogen fixation in alders, *Ceanothus*, and mountain mahogany. This is especially useful in nutrient-poor soils, including those following a fire. And Durango root can crown sprout after a fire, giving it a further competitive edge.

All parts of this plant are considered toxic and should not be consumed. That said, some indigenous people did use Durango root medicinally. Ohlones used a decoction of the plant to treat sore throats and swollen tonsils. Miwok used a decoction of the pulverized root as a wash both for rheumatism and treatment of sores.

Durango root is the sole North American member of the Datisca Family Datisacaceae. Its closest relative is *Datisca cannacina* found in Turkey, Crete, and the Himalayas. Durango root is



native to California, Nevada, and northern Baja California. It is found below 6000' along creek banks, dry stream beds, and in springs that are active all or most of the year.



Why did the mummy go on vacation?
He really needed to unwind.



Take a Hike: San Gregorio Ranch

BY KIM BORICK

This summer, two long-awaited beach areas of southern San Mateo County opened to the public: the Don Horsley County Park at Tunitas Creek Beach, highly visible from Highway 1, and the second, further south, San Gregorio Ranch, with access somewhat “tucked in” from the highway and hidden from view. Let’s take a closer look at San Gregorio Ranch (SGR).

This 238-acre property connects with and more than doubles the size of San Gregorio State Beach. The SGR straddles Highway 1 at its junction with Highway 84, rising from sea level to 500’ and features rolling hills, grasslands, riparian habitats, coastal bluffs, and a wide beach with more than a half mile of coastline. At San Gregorio Beach, the mouth of San Gregorio Creek empties into the Pacific Ocean, providing habitat for an abundance of wildlife, including some rare and endangered species.

Located 10.5 miles south of Half Moon Bay on Highway 1, the low-profile entrance leads the visitor onto a ranch road where the ocean is not even visible. Here we drive past ponds thick with cattails and birdlife. Across the road from the ponds is the trailhead of the connector trail that leads to San Gregorio Beach. This is an important alternative to walking between the two beach areas when high tides make it unsafe or completely blocks access.

Soon the road drops down into a bowl-shaped area with a staffed pay station, picnic, restroom, and parking area. The \$8 parking fee is good for the day both here AND at any of the other fee state beaches on the day of your visit. There are approximately 15 spaces for cars plus a few ADA-designated spots. At the time of our visit it looked like they are making an effort but still working on a few larger vehicle/RV parking spaces.

The views from the bluffs in all directions are stunning, especially on a clear day. There are picnic tables and viewing spots; one could happily spend a couple of hours here and not even go down to the beach. Dogs on leash are also allowed up here (but not on the beach). A rustic but wide path with reinforced “steps” leads down to the inviting sandy expanse of the shoreline. This beach offers plenty of space to set up your picnic lunch and umbrella, take out your sketchbook or just walk the length of the



beach. Even at high tide, there is usually beach above the water line (except where it connects with San Gregorio Beach).

For a longer stroll along the bluffs, one can walk the road back to the trailhead (closer to the park entrance), and dogs on leash may accompany you. It’s a 15–20 minute walk along the bluff down to the San Gregorio Beach, with some nice perspectives of the mouth and its lovely marshy areas.

If you are planning a day at any of our coastal beaches, it’s wise to “Know Before you Go.” Check your weather app with your beach destination for any Beach Hazard Statements (advisory of sneaker waves, rip currents, large breaking waves, etc.) and tide tables. These Beach Hazard Statements do not happen mostly in winter or inclement weather; they actually occur year-round, even on beautiful sunny days along the Pacific Coast. The San Gregorio Ranch is open daily from 8:00 am to Sunset.

The Call of the Hills

BY RUBY SODHI, PH.D.

Whiz. Zip. Hum.

The hummingbird began its morning ritual early, its tiny wings moving so fast it seemed suspended in the air—hovering from flower to flower, gathering nectar pooled deep within their petals. Nearby, a squirrel traced its restless path across the rooftop, its chatter so familiar it had long since crossed into affectionate annoyance.

Still, the day unfolded in a quiet glow, rising with warmth and sunlight.

Sitting on my deck, I breathe in the earthy freshness of the mountain air, feeling my lungs open with each breath.

Sunrise and sunset, the slow unfurling of fog across the hills—all of it echoes a stillness that asks for nothing more than presence. The reddish-maroon hues of the redwoods reveal themselves not in full daylight, but as the sun dips toward the horizon, especially after rain, casting a warm glow across their ancient trunks.

Such is life in the Santa Cruz Mountains. For over fifteen years, I have lived within this almost ethereal landscape, and its everyday gifts have never lost their quiet magic.

The call of the hills has been nothing short of a dream come true for me.

I was ten when I was sent to boarding school, nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas in India, at an altitude of about 7,500 feet, in the hilltop city of Shimla—once the summer capital of the British Raj. I was homesick for months. I spent my free time at the edges of the school's seven playgrounds, overlooking an expansive valley layered with endless mountain ridges.

There were days when my eyes searched that landscape for something familiar, something that felt like home. Scattered across the terrain were rooftops in shades of red, green, white, and slate. From some, thin trails of smoke rose into the air, carrying the distant scent of wood fires and cooking. It felt warm and comforting.

I longed for a home like that—a quiet place nestled in the mountains, its rooftop barely visible among the trees. Three decades later, that is exactly where life brought me—and the mountains have been teaching me ever since.

Here in the Santa Cruz Mountains, each season brings its own character. On intensely hot days, the Redwoods release soft spatters of seeds into the air. On windy days, their mighty trunks sway as if in a slow waltz. Other days, fog rolls in to cradle the trees and the valley in a blanket of soft white cloud.

To pass through on a winding road is to glimpse only the surface of this place. While visitors gather at its familiar parks and attractions, those who live here discover a quieter world—hidden trails and shifting landscapes that reveal themselves slowly, and only over time.

There is also a rich community of mountain dwellers who have chosen to make their lives within the folds of these peaks, valleys, and crevices. From the valley below, mountain dwellers are often misread—dismissed as hippies, isolationists, or simply eccentric. But those who live here have chosen something far more deliberate: a life balanced between connection and solitude, close enough to neighbors, yet deeply held within the embrace of nature.

That balance shapes daily life in quiet, thoughtful ways—from the size and structure of a home to its light, water, and relationship to the land. Living here is not accidental; it is an ongoing act of design, a careful tending of both space and self.

In the city, one has neighbors; in the mountains, we have community—people who genuinely care, who show up without being asked, and sometimes without even announcing themselves. That kind of quiet camaraderie feels increasingly rare in cities, where neighbors often know little about those living just next door.

And then there are the other neighbors. The quiet, constant presence of wildlife—the deer, bobcats, wild turkeys, skunks, foxes, coyotes, partridges, and, on occasion, a mountain lion. Here, adults and children alike don't just read about these creatures; we live alongside them. There are moments—unexpected, almost surreal—when our human lives brush gently against theirs, and for a brief instant, we share the same space, aware of one another in a way that feels both humbling and extraordinary.

From the mountains of Shimla to Santa Cruz, their quiet call has traced an arc through my life. Perhaps that is their promise—that they do not draw us away from life, but deeper into it. Into stillness, into presence, into a way of being that cannot be hurried. The longing I carried as a child, looking out across distant mountains, was never just for a home, but for a feeling. And somehow, over time, that call was answered—softly, patiently—until I found myself living inside the very dream I once watched from afar.

The Skylines team encourages creative contributions from our readers, such as the memoir/short story above. If you wish to share experiences of life in these mountains through stories, artwork or photos send them to skylineseditor@yahoo.com

Part 2, Dry Wells from the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake—

SSA Organizes the Community

BY DICK SCHWIND

This is the continuation from the last issue of the “Skylines” of ‘Dry Wells from the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake. It is my hope that when the next large earthquake hits our area or this side of the bay (in 25, 50, 100 years?) and many of our wells again go dry, the Skyline community will remember these communiques and again act as a community spearheaded by the SSA (South Skyline Association, which hopefully still exists) to work together to use what was learned from the 1989 earthquake—still likely the best advice you can get. Specific advice will be in the next, the final, Part 3, in the next issue of the “Skylines.”

My Part 1 article was in the July 2026 ‘Skylines’ issue. It is available online at https://southskyline.org/wp-content/uploads/newsletters/Skylines_2026_07.pdf

Please read it, but summarizing it here:

The October 17, 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake (energy level was initially listed as magnitude 7.1, but several years later it was downgraded to 6.9) collapsed the Bay Bridge and also the freeway Cypress structure elevated highway in Oakland, and many unreinforced brick commercial buildings in Santa Cruz, etc. It lowered the water level in about half of our wells, resulting in greatly reduced flow and some drying up. This was when water levels were at their lowest at the end of the dry season and after three years of below-average rainfall.

On our next trip to town, we probably all saw “our” lost water flowing out into the nearby streams, where the water level increased from the summer low to a winter high! Obviously, the earthquake had greatly cracked up the rocks, allowing the water to leak out into the streams. We would soon learn that some well water depths had eventually fallen anywhere from 20 to 100 feet as nearby stream flows jumped from 4 to 24 times greater than their summer lows. These stream flows needed to drop to normal for the water tables to return to normal.

My immediate check of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) library in Menlo Park yielded no studies of groundwater changes due to an earthquake. Through our local communications, we were quickly learning of the many dry wells in the area. Talking to my neighbor, Steve Wolf, a geologist at the USGS, led to the decision to ask the USGS to come study this phenomenon since we could help identify essentially all the affected wells in the Skyline area. They agreed to do so, assigning Steve Wolf to be the field scientist, primarily for measuring well water levels using their instrumentation. This turned into a great

boon for us, as his observations would become available immediately and spread by word of mouth before being published months/years later. We who were affected needed answers: How long will the water in my well keep falling, and how far? How long will it take to recover, and is it likely to return to its previous level? The hydrogeologist, Stuart Rojstaczer, was also assigned to the project. He confirmed that none of that information was available, possibly even in the world! We needed the data that Steve was going to collect!

So, what did we learn from Steve and Stuart? The subsequent investigation was centered on the intersection of Skyline Blvd and Highway 9. Additional data available to Steve were drilling reports for all water and oil wells in state records. From these, he could get the original water height when drilled for each well together with the driller’s record of the layers of rock encountered while drilling.

Steve Wolf checked and rechecked most wells in the Skyline area. With homeowners’ permission, he shared these findings with neighbors on a daily basis. His information is preserved in two forms. First are articles in the SSA “Skylines” quarterly newsletter, which can be found online on the SSA website, southskyline.org. Second, information from the [USGS Open-File Report 91-567](#) by Rojstaczer and Wolf, 1991, is described below.

Important results of Steve Wolf’s well surveys as recorded in the quarterly “Skylines” newsletter in chronological order are:

- April 1990: Over half of the wells he surveyed were either ‘dry’ or with ‘reduced flow.’ ‘In some areas the groundwater had stabilized, while in other areas the levels were still dropping. ‘Best wait for that well to stabilize before drilling a new well if really needed—one such new well had already run dry.’ Many homeowners with inadequate water had already added a 5,000-gallon water tank and were having water trucked in to fill it. No reports in July or October.
- January 1991: Steve estimates that 95% of the affected wells have stabilized, not falling anymore, but not recovered, even after the ‘89–‘90 rainfall year and the start of the next rainy season. The excess flow in the San Lorenzo River at the gaging station in Felton (‘Big Trees’) was down to roughly twice normal flow. For wells with marginal flow, adding a storage tank and using controls for the well pump that frequently runs the pump but turns it off before it runs dry, ‘harvesting’ the water, helped many. Rainfall since the earthquake (maybe 1 1/3 seasons worth) had helped wells that were less than

about 175 ft deep but not helped those more than about 175 ft deep. He warned, if drilling, read the well driller's contract carefully and ask questions before signing!

- April 1991, Steve Wolf reports shallower wells (to 175 ft) water levels have risen moderately (up to 15 ft) since the March rains. Deeper wells have shown some, but less effect.
- That was the end of Steve's reports in the 'Skylines.' After his 16 months of fieldwork, he apparently had to return to his office to work with Stuart on the USGS report, which came out later in 1991.

We also learned from the well drillers that the earthquake didn't just cause the ground to snap to a new location. After the initial jump(s), it crept, first fast, so it was very difficult to successfully drill a new well, then slowly but generally still active 2 years later when I drilled a new well.

The following are the important results for us from the USGS report (see reference above). The report concentrates on Steve's data first in the uppermost portion of the San Lorenzo River basin. This is in the Indian Rock Ranch development immediately south of the Highway 9–Skyline Blvd junction and on the opposite side of the San Lorenzo River headwaters, over to Highway 9 to Boulder Creek and up to Saratoga Gap. Secondly, his data along a one-mile section of Skyline Blvd centered 2.5 miles north of Saratoga Gap. This latter area is along the top edge of the Pescadero Creek drainage.

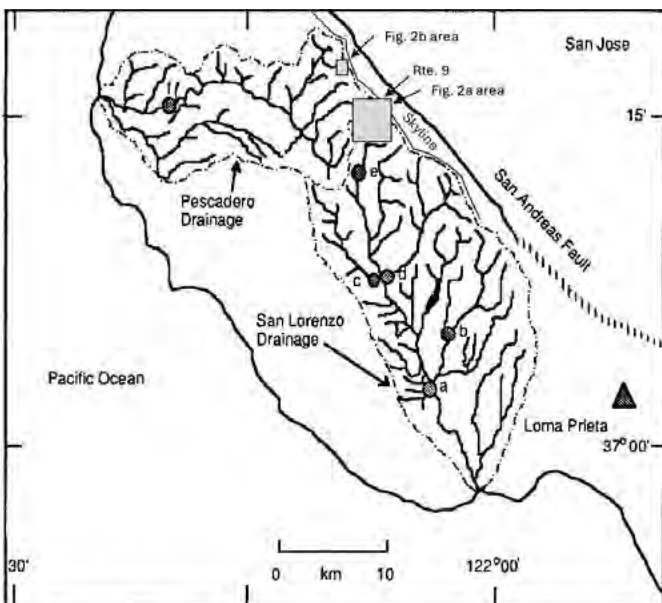
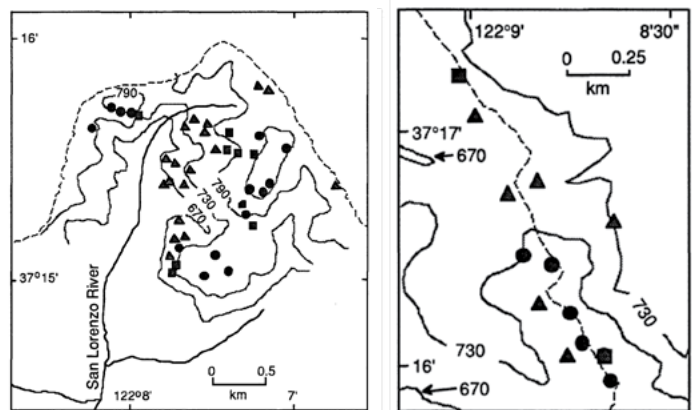


Figure 1. Location of study area in relation to San Andreas fault, the Loma Prieta epicenter (triangle), and the northern portion of the Loma Prieta rupture zone (heavy dashed line). Stream gaging stations (circles) are: a - Big Trees, b - Zayante, c - Boulder, d - Bear, e - San Lorenzo Park, f - Pescadero.

Figure 1 from the USGS report shows the entire drainage areas for the San Lorenzo River basin and the Pescadero Creek basin. I have annotated the figure with a small box at each study area and the approximate local locations of Skyline Blvd and Highway 9. Conveniently, it also shows the earthquake epicenter and the biggie, the San Andreas Fault, with a hashed line where that fault ruptured. This end of the rupture is about 25 miles from our upper San Lorenzo study area. (Will we be next with the San Andreas rupturing on north in the next big earthquake?)



Pescadero Creek drainage. (One of the dry wells being mine, which went dry within a day or two of the quake). Not reported is the adjacent drainage area, upper Stevens Creek canyon, with the USGS gaging station being at the bridge into the Stevens Creek County Park. I was then commuting down Stevens Creek and could see the great increase in its flow—some I imagined as being ‘my’ water!

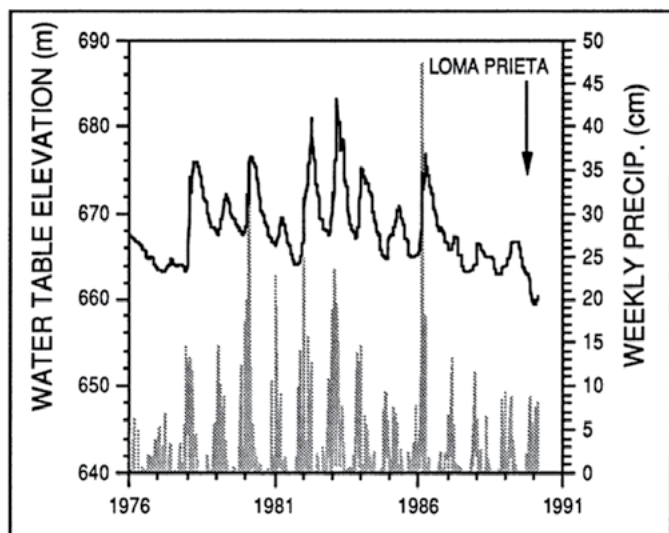


Figure 3. Water table elevation as a function of precipitation over the time period 1976-1990 in a well on the eastern edge of the Pescadero basin. Well is the northern most well in the map of Figure 2b.

Figure 3 shows one homeowner’s dedicated well measuring efforts with his 15-year record, greatly condensed, of a well in the Figure 2b Pescadero Creek drainage study area. The figure shows weekly water elevations and precipitation. The effect of the previous three years of below-average precipitation from 1986–1989 is clear. This well was affected by the earthquake but did not go dry.

Included in the report is an extensive study of groundwater chemistry showing its excess of calcium and bicarbonate. It is suggested that the healing of the new cracks the earthquake created was due to calcite cementation.

In 2010, two hydrogeologists, C-Y Wang and M Manga, professors from UC Berkeley produced the comprehensive, very technical book, ‘Earthquakes and Water’ (Springer-Verlag, Berlin, Heidelberg, 2010). It is a collection of worldwide data and studies. Chapter 4, ‘Increased Stream Discharge’, includes results from ‘our Skyline’ well-regarded Rojstaczer and Wolf 1991 USGS report.

As an editorial bit, the outstanding contribution of Steve Wolf’s ‘field studies’ needs to be noted. Besides the well surveys he did, he helped so many of us understand what was happening to our wells. It helped many affected well homeowners make the decision whether to add a 5000-gallon tank if they didn’t have one and purchase water for maybe two or more years as their well would hopefully recover, versus drilling a new well as soon as it was safe to do so. Then Steve was there to sit in on the well drillings to advise on what was happening and how deep it was best to go! In my case, he advised me to locate my new well as far north as I could, having a long, narrow lot, to possibly get into a better aquifer not much affected by the earthquake, advice I followed with happy results. The good fortune of even having the USGS study was due to the South Skyline Association with its connection to so many locals, many willing to allow access to their wells and sharing of the data and lending a helping hand. Heavy grade rolls of mostly 3/4 inch polyethylene tubing were rolled out for hundreds of yards through the woods to supply a neighbor (200 yards to my neighbor; heavy tubing, as mice, gophers, etc. may sense the water flowing inside and may nibble through thinner walls to get to the water). I hope this community spirit and generosity will happen again when needed. (Note that even now SSA is too short of volunteers to function the way it could).

Finally, what should/can individuals do when the next big earthquake strikes? Preferably, before it strikes, become familiar with the behavior of your well with water height measurements, and know your closest streamflow USGS measurement station (visit USGS streamflow for a listing of their gaging stations for your county or surrounding counties).



Ha Ha!

What do you get when you cross
a vampire and a snowman?

Frostbite.

10,000-year-old fossilized mastodon tooth discovered in Midpen preserve

Fossil discovered in a creek within the forests of San Mateo County

Los Altos, CA— An exceptionally preserved fossilized tooth belonging to an ancient Pacific mastodon (*Mammot pacificus*) was recently discovered in a Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen) preserve in San Mateo County.

The fossil was discovered in a creek bed by Brigid Lynch, a geomorphologist with Balance Hydrologics, during field surveys for a Midpen habitat enhancement project supporting the threatened California red-legged frog. What initially appeared to be an oddly shaped rock was later confirmed by paleontologists to be an intact, adult Pacific mastodon molar.

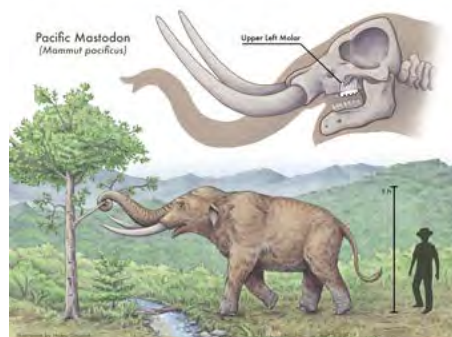


Tooth in Creek—Balance Hydrologics

“As a geologist, I’ve gone out and seen stuff in the field, but definitely nothing as exciting as this,” said Lynch.

Wayne Thompson, paleontologist and owner of Pacific Paleontology, described the extraordinary discovery for the region. “The tooth itself is in immaculate condition. It’s the most complete mastodon molar from our area, and the most spectacular mastodon molar that I’ve ever seen. I had chills and shivers up and down my spine,” Thompson noted. “It’s another

puzzle in the Ice Age saga that we can put into place.”



Rendering of a Pacific mastodon by Haley Grunloh for Midpen. Researchers believe mastodons would wrap their trunks around branches, stripping the foliage off the tree to feed.

The Pacific mastodon is the newest species of mastodon to be recognized and is distinguished from the American mastodon (*Mammot americanum*) by its narrower teeth, thicker leg bones, and difference in tusks. Researchers believe Pacific mastodons’ range included the areas of what is now California, Oregon, the northern Rocky Mountain region of the western United States and parts of Mexico.

These massive herbivores roamed local ecosystems during the Pleistocene epoch, spanning 2.5 million years ago until their extinction around 11,700 years ago. Unlike mammoths, which were also present in the region and fed on grasses, mastodons were considered browsers, using their massive trunks to strip leaves, soft shoots or fruits of high-growing, generally woody plants.

These ancient landscapes of what is known now as the San Francisco Bay Area shares many of the same iconic wildlife and plants we see on our trails today. Mountain lions and bobcats may

have stalked prey alongside extinct saber-toothed cats and dire wolves, adapting to smaller game as the large herbivores vanished. Tule elk, coyotes and American badgers likely roamed the valleys inhabited by mastodons and bison-sized Jefferson’s ground sloths.

To support ongoing scientific research, Midpen donated the fossilized tooth to Stanford University’s Doerr School of Sustainability. Researchers plan to utilize carbon dating on the molar to determine its exact age. The team at Stanford will perform a 3D-scan and print a copy of this specimen for Midpen’s to use for public outreach and education.

“Fossils are our only opportunity to see into past biodiversity,” explained Christine Garcia, Curator and Manager of the Geoscience Specimen Collection at Stanford. “We can study fossils to better understand Earth’s past, past wildlife and the ecosystem they were a part of, and to help us make better predictions and better decisions about how to help our ecosystems and biodiversity thrive into the future.”

For Midpen staff, discovering the ancient remains during a modern restoration effort emphasizes Midpen’s mission to protect and restore the natural environment and its wild inhabitants.

“This highlights for me that the presence of mastodons wasn’t that long ago, in geologic time,” said Midpen biologist Matt Sharp Chaney. “That mastodon were out here in the same landscape that we’re in today really drives home how important the work that we do is to keep species from winking out forever.”

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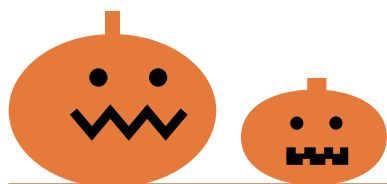
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SSA Calendar 2027 Monthly SSA Board Meetings 7:00pm

November 12
December 10
January 14

For further updates
contact Udy Gold:
president@southskyline.org

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Board positions are available.

Contact Udy Gold – president@southskyline.org

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The deadline for submitting ads and articles for the next issue is **December 6, 2026**

Skylines is published once a quarter: January/April/July/October

Skylines invites individuals to submit articles and artwork.

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