

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors
501 Low Gap Road, Room 1010
Ukiah, CA 95482

June 6, 2021

Honorable Members of the Board of Supervisors:

The County has conducted a series of workshops to develop an Oak Woodland Protection Ordinance, under Section 1. Chapter 20.248 of the Mendocino County Code.

The Mendocino County Climate Action Advisory Committee (MCCAAC) wholeheartedly agrees with the stated intent of the Oak Protections, which reads as follows:

It is the purpose and intent of this Chapter to protect oak woodlands and individual oak trees as sensitive and unique natural communities within the County of Mendocino. California native oak trees are a culturally integral part of the County of Mendocino identified in the General Plan as diverse habitats for wildlife. The goal of this Chapter is to retain and manage the oak resources of the County and provide adequate regulation to ensure perpetuity of oak trees and oak woodlands within Mendocino County.

MCCAAC would like to emphasize the urgency of adopting and enforcing a comprehensive ordinance and applying it to every project on Oak Woodlands as soon as possible.

The draft ordinance is a good start, and we urge the County to apply to all ownership types, without exemptions for lands in Agricultural or Timberland Preserve.

Please be aware that in the State of California there are NO legal protections of oaks except at the local level (city, county). The Dept. of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire)'s jurisdiction is commercial timberland. Fish and Wildlife and other state agencies only regulate habitat modification when permits require their input.

Following are five key reasons to move forward with protections as soon as possible.

1. Cultural Resources and Native American heritage is closely aligned with Oak Woodlands and must be recognized and preserved.
2. Oak woodlands are THE most important habitat type for the most numbers of wildlife species, especially avian species. Wildlife are important in preserving oak woodlands with its important effect on carbon sequestration, by distributing the oak mast, grazing to reduce ladder fuels, and creating trails to slow water runoff and erosion/loss of hillslopes. Wildlife species diversity is an important element in nutrient recycling, stabilizing the food chain, and ultimately our economy and quality of life.
3. Tree cover, especially oaks, is our most important natural mitigation tool to combat global warming. Carbon Sequestration is key to mitigation for Climate change, because trees create the best carbon sink on land. California's iconic oak ecosystems have great capacity to store atmospheric carbon in tree biomass and soil.

4. Oak woodlands soils are among the most fragile soil types in terms of watershed stability... and there is no erosion control ordinance in Mendocino County to protect the integrity of Oak Woodlands from rangeland developments involving tree removal.
5. Oak trees create islands of enhanced fertility through organic matter incorporation and nutrient cycling. Compared to adjacent grasslands, soils beneath the oak canopy have a lower bulk density, higher pH, and greater concentrations of organic carbon, nitrogen, total and available P, and exchangeable Ca, Mg, and K, especially in the upper soil horizons. Removal of oak trees results in loss of soil fertility over a 10 to 20-year period.

Mendocino County has approximately 374,000 acres of oak woodlands according to Cal Fire. Oak woodlands are disappearing at an alarming rate in highly populated areas of California due to urban sprawl -- we are actually adding to our carbon footprint. Rural oak woodlands are mostly privately owned rangelands utilized for ranching, and benefit from little or no legal protection.

More and more, the oak woodlands have been devastated by firewood harvests, disease, climate change, and conversion to vineyards, orchards, and residential development.

As stated before...there are no statewide protections for Oak Woodlands. It's under local control if any. Because there are so many good arguments to move forward, we encourage the County to adopt comprehensive rules to protect all species of oaks and to regulate cutting, burning, and land conversion, and to require erosion control plans for any land-use change proposed.

The MCCAAC will stay involved as the county refines the regulation and policy affecting oak woodlands. Please keep our committee in the loop and feel free to ask for our assistance to review and help develop additional rules.

Sincerely,



Tess Albin-Smith, Member
*Submitted on behalf of the
Mendocino County Climate Action Advisory Committee*