

San Juan Ridge Taxpayers Association

Spring News

March 2016
Volume 5, Issue 1



Celebrate our success
at Annual Membership
Meeting!

Please renew your
membership!

Finish up your defensible
space and fire clearances
now

Thank you to all our
volunteers and donors

Support SJRTA- buy a
T-shirt
(see back cover)

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WE DID IT! San Juan Ridge Mine Application CLOSED

As we go to press, we have just learned that the Nevada County Planning Department has closed the application for a use permit for the San Juan Ridge Mine. Planning Department Director Brian Foss has issued a letter to San Juan Mining Corporation (SJMC) CEO Timothy Callaway informing him of the closure.

In a letter dated December 15, 2015, the Planning Department notified SJMC that they had until March 1 to resume requirements of the Baseline Groundwater Monitoring Program, or have the use permit application closed.

Earlier this month SJRTA delivered petitions with approximately 300 signatures to the Planning Dept. urging them to close the application. Our District 4 Supervisor Hank Weston also asked the Planning Dept. to immediately rescind the permit, and county counsel concurred.

After four years of having the prospect of this mine re-open hanging like a black cloud over our community, we can all sigh a deep breath of relief. Inhale, exhale! Pat yourselves on the back—we did it! Together

we put up a great fight. We strategized, attended hearings, made impassioned speeches, wrote letters, signed petitions, tabled, got media attention, held workshops and benefits, and a documentary video was made and released by local folks to great acclaim.

A deep bow of gratitude to this community, and to our strategic partners—SYRCL, The Sierra Fund, CLAIM-GV, Synergia, and to our members, volunteers and funders for supporting this effort.

BUT—it's now time to think about and act upon a means to take this historic mine property out of consideration as a gold mine. It seems that every decade, there is a new scheme to extract the gold from deep below the North Columbia Diggings, and the community rises each time to meet the challenge. We need a new plan. Please join us to celebrate our victory and consider other options at the Annual Membership Meeting on **Sunday, April 10, at 2 p.m., North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center**. See articles about the meeting and alternative proposals in the following pages.

Are You Ready For Summer?

While winter rains and snow have been very welcome, fire season is just around the corner. Don't get lulled into complacency by wet weather—if you haven't done so, now is the time to finish up work on defensible space around your home and to improve fire clearance on roads and driveways. May 1 is normally the date when burn permits are required and burn piles are restricted in size, so if you plan to burn large piles, you should definitely do so before then.

A good alternative to burning is chipping. The Fire Safe Council offers a chipping program, defensible space inspections and special needs assistance for low-income folks. See the Council's website at www.areyoufiresafe.com for details.

Kudos to the Yuba Watershed Institute and Ananda Meditation Retreat volunteers for renewing the Bald Mountain fire break

on BLM land. A work day was held in November to cut manzanita that had grown up in the shaded fuel break that was created there years ago. Another project, currently in the planning phase, is Cal Fire's plan to create a 100 foot fuel break along upper Sage's Rd., on BLM and private property. Cal Fire anticipates the work will be done by fire season 2017. This encompasses a large section of one of seven main evacuation routes identified in the Ridge's 2005 Community Fire Plan.

The North San Juan Fire Protection District has initiated the process of updating all of its documents, to include the 2005 Community Fire Plan. SJRTA looks forward to this important update, the Fire plan is an essential blueprint of the steps necessary to making our community more fire safe..

What Next for San Juan Ridge Mine Lands? - by Brian Bisnett

As of this writing, it appears that the permit application for the San Juan Ridge Mine can now be considered “dead.” This is no small accomplishment for the SJRTA and for the community, and those of you who worked so persistently for so long are to be congratulated.

The question that must now be answered is “What happens next?” The current permit application may be dead, but the gold values remain in the gravels, and the “Mineral Extraction” overlay on the County zoning map still establishes mining as a viable use of the property. At some point in the future, perhaps at a time when gold prices are higher, a Board of Supervisors more receptive, and the community less vigilant, it is quite possible that a new application could come forward and this same battle will need to be fought all over again.

So now is the time for the community to ask itself, what is “the highest and best use” of the property, if not for mining? Are there economically viable alternative uses for the land that will enhance rather than erode the fabric of the North Columbia community, and which might provide the mine property owners some return on their investment?

A survey conducted by SJRTA showed community support for additional housing on the Ridge – cohousing, assisted living, or simply smaller, more affordable homes suitable for first-time buyers or for downsizing adults seeking to age in place. There are a couple of constraints to changing the property’s land use from mining to housing, however: The first constraint is political – the property is currently zoned for 40-acre minimum parcel size. A change in zoning to permit significant residential development of the property would require the support of the Board of Supervisors, as well as the community. The second constraint is physical – housing requires access to water and sewage disposal. Although the property has ample groundwater, its fast-draining, sparsely vegetated placer gravels are not appropriate for conventional septic systems. Though technologies exist which could provide sewage treatment to a neighborhood of homes on the property, County policy (following the failure of the Cascade Shores system several years back) does not permit their use. Therefore residential development on the property would likely be limited to the vegetated areas around the perimeter of the property which have soils which can accommodate conventional septic systems, and may not support denser development such as cohousing or assisted living.

Another land use that could provide economic value to the property as well as benefit to the community would be as a business park and “incubator.” There is a tremendous amount of intellectual capital and entrepreneurial zeal on the Ridge, and in the past several local businesses have

outgrown their locations and been forced to relocate to Grass Valley because of zoning conflicts. A small business park, with access to high-speed internet and properly zoned, could generate much-needed jobs for Ridge residents (including those who might live in the housing built on the property) and be of significant benefit to the area’s economy.

Another potential land use might be a small commercial center, which could provide a small grocery store, hardware store, laundromat or other services that are currently not accessible to Ridge residents without a long drive down the hill.

The goal here, beyond simply providing non-mining related economic value to the property, is to provide a community-serving mixture of uses, with homes, jobs, and services which are close to one another and less dependent on the automobile. Such a mixed-use development could potentially be made even more sustainable by having a significant portion of its power generated on-site, by a solar “farm” which takes advantage of the property’s excellent solar exposure and which could significantly reduce the development’s reliance on PG&E. Sustainability could be further enhanced by providing area for Community Supported Agriculture, to improve residents’ access to locally sourced produce. A vineyard/winery on a portion of the property might be a viable use as well, enhancing the reputation of the Ridge for growing something besides the noble herb.

Additionally, though more difficult to quantify economically, the property undeniably has tremendous recreational potential. There are miles of trails and potential trails on the property, which could be of tremendous benefit to Ridge residents and visitors alike, for hiking, biking and horseback riding. Proximity to the trails and open space areas could in turn enhance the value of housing built on the property. The trails would provide access to significant open space areas, designed around the property’s wetlands, riparian corridors and cultural resources, which could potentially be protected and preserved in perpetuity by a conservation easement, financed through grant funding.

The Ridge community has made it abundantly clear that it does not want a mining operation in its midst. Now it’s time to answer the harder question – what does the community want? How can we build a vision for the property that will be of benefit to both its owners and the community that surrounds it? That is the work that needs to be done next.

Brian Bisnett is a landscape architect and planner, and the founder and principal of Bisnett Design Associates (BDA.) SJRTA has contracted with BDA to develop alternative use proposals for the SJR mine lands.

It's Time to Celebrate! SJRTA Annual Membership Meeting – Sunday, April 10

Please come help us celebrate our victory at SJRTA's Annual Membership Meeting. It will be take place at the North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center, from 2 to 4 p.m. on Sunday, April 10. Join us for a talk and discussion about potential alternative uses for the mine property, to vote for the four seats up for election on the Board of Directors, and for an update from the NSJ Fire Dept. Finger foods and libations will be provided. We welcome you to bring hors d'oeuvres, desserts, or a bottle of wine to share.

All voting members in good standing are eligible to vote for the directors' seats. Not sure of your membership status? You can join or renew your membership for 2016 when you arrive (\$5 per person). Voting memberships are open to persons who reside or own land on the San Juan Ridge. All others are welcome to join as a non-voting member in our Friends of SJRTA membership category.

There are currently four positions up for election on our board. Current board members Sol Henson, Nancy Lorenz and Sara Greensfelder are up for re-election for a two-year term, and we are

seeking a fourth candidate for a one-year position vacated by the resignation of Lars Ortegren. Any voting member may run for the board. If you wish to be included on the ballot, please submit a letter of intent to SJRTA by April 3. Please provide a brief statement of your experience and what you feel you would bring to the board. Prospective board members will be asked to make a statement at the membership meeting. A letter of intent may be sent by email to info@sjrtaxpayers.org, or mailed to SJRTA, PO Box 421, North San Juan, CA 95960.

**RENEW OR JOIN
THE SJRTA**
Check your mailing label for expiration date
**MAKE OUR
VOICE STRONG**



**Our membership goal for 2016 is 400
We are at 124
Can you help?**

Volunteer Consultant Needed



Occasionally our website manager (ahem, me) gets in a bind and needs help with the website. Are you a WordPress mastermind? Do you like to volunteer? Well you are the right person for the job...please email Alexa Wondergem, alexawondergem@hotmail.com, to sign up.

2016 San Juan Ridge Taxpayers Membership Application

- VOTING – Must be a San Juan Ridge resident or landowner (resident or non-resident). Jan 1-Dec 31, 2016.
- NON-VOTING – Not a Ridge resident nor landowner. Jan 1-Dec 31, 2016.

Member 1	Email Address
Member 2	Email Address
Member 3	Email Address
Member 4	Email Address

Mailing Address		
City	State	Zip
Phone		

Membership is \$5 per person per year.
Anything above is a donation.

- \$5
- \$10
- \$25
- \$35
- \$50
- \$75
- \$100
- Other \$ _____

I would like to volunteer for:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tabling	<input type="checkbox"/> Phone Tree
<input type="checkbox"/> Mailing	<input type="checkbox"/> Helping with events
<input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising	
<input type="checkbox"/> Special Skills _____	

Date _____

V.5.1

Please return to SJRTA, PO Box 421, North San Juan CA 95960
info@sjrtaxpayers.org ♦ www.sjrtaxpayers.org
 SJRTA is a registered 501(c)(3) organization, tax ID #32-0374207
 ~Thank you for your membership~

Rec _____
 DB _____
 TY _____
 TL _____

**San Juan Ridge
Taxpayers Association**

*Serving the Greater
San Juan Ridge
Since 1975*

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info@sjrtaxpayers.org

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Newsletter editor: Sara Greensfelder

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