

# Northern Exposure

BY JANE BRAXTON LITTLE

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## **Straight shooters needed in Redding**

Residents of the Mary Lake community have been complaining for months about stray bullets whizzing through their neighborhood from an adjacent shooting range used exclusively by cops. After taking their anxieties to the Redding City Council, some are convinced their government representatives aren't straight shooters, either.

With the Record Range and its pistol practice area pointed directly toward the subdivision, local homeowners asked the council for protection. Instead, it directed Redding Police Chief Rob Paoletti to work with them.

“A classic fox guarding the henhouse,” fumed Patrick Fowler, a trauma surgeon who regularly bikes on the trails west of the range.

City and Shasta County planners know shooting and subdivisions make lousy neighbors, but they have allowed residential development willy-nilly. And it's convenient for Redding police to step across the city line to conduct their mandatory firearms training on the range, located on county land.

Moving to another facility would increase annual city costs by \$36,240, Paoletti said in his report to the council. Besides, since Mary Lake residents have reported finding bullets on their property, he has documented only one incident of someone being hit.

Absent a serious injury or fatality, the City Council remains more concerned about “money and the chief than me and my neighbors,” said Peter Bohatsch, a Mary Lake homeowner who brought a bucket of bullets to a March City Council meeting.

As shots continue to fly, he and others are seeking a temporary restraining order to halt Record Range shooting until public safety is assured.

## **Unlikely alliance opposes nickel mining**

It's a shocker worthy of the earthquakes that plague this Triple Junction region.

California's normally contentious northwest corner (loggers vs. tree huggers, everyone vs. government) has reached consensus: no to a nickel mine proposed for the upper Smith River watershed.

Even this unlikely alliance of back-to-the-landers and local, state and federal agencies may not have enough clout to halt plans to drill up to 59 test mine shafts on 3,980 acres along a tributary to Northern California's last major undammed river. Not only is the proposed project across the border in southern Oregon, it's also on federal land protected by the Mining Law of 1872, which allows extraction with scant regard for water quality or any of the environmental protections enacted in the last 140 years.

The London-based Red Flat Nickel Corp. has put a state permit for water on hold while it waits for permission to drill exploratory holes in a roadless area of the Rogue River National Forest.

Opponents of what could be the largest nickel mine in the West are taking advantage of the hiatus. Following in the footsteps of the patriots and flag-bedecked dogs who marched against the mine in Crescent City's July Fourth parade, they are rallying behind a bill introduced by state Sen. Mike McGuire, D-Healdsburg. It calls on Congress to permanently safeguard the Oregon section of the Smith River watershed from mining activities, adding to protections already enacted in California.

With a Forest Service decision not expected until summer, it's a race to see how long the shaky consensus will hold.

## **Elephants roaming near Red Bluff?**

The open ranchlands near Red Bluff may soon be a home where the deer and the elephants roam.

In a well-financed project proposed by venture capitalists Roger and Ann McNamee, Silicon Valley will meet the sticks on a 4,900-acre cattle ranch repurposed for African

elephants. As many as 50 porky pachyderms now in zoos will relocate to the Tembo Preserve, the renamed ranch the McNamees' foundation bought for \$5 million.

Part fat farm and part laboratory, the elephants will be able to move around to keep healthy – physically, socially and emotionally – while scientists study how they forage and maintain matriarchal family groups.

Tehama County Supervisor Steve Chamblin is enthusiastic about hosting the international experiment in his district famous for the Red Bluff Roundup. “The eyes of the world will be upon us,” he said.

Not everyone is welcoming the project with an open handful of alfalfa. Steve McCarthy, president of the Tehama County Cattlemen's Association, worries about disease, the effects on local wildlife and oak savannahs. And with water “more valuable than gold right now,” how will 50 elephants guzzling 40 gallons daily affect neighboring cattle operations?

Where McCarthy sees obstacles Chamblin sees opportunities, especially for local kids. He envisions high-tech hookups using unmanned surveillance for observing elephants in a near-wild environment.

McCarthy's educational alternative? “Put kids on buses and take 'em to the zoo.”

The project, dubbed “the Dumbo Preserve,” will go to county supervisors once planners complete an environmental review, expected later this year.

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