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Recreation roundtable

Congressman hears about Tuolumne River access issues in Groveland

By GUY McCARTHY
The Union Democrat

Damage from winter storms to access routes for lucrative white-water rafting deep in the Tuolumne River canyon below Yosemite National Park has proven so costly that outdoor recreation advocates and four rafting companies hosted a roundtable meeting Wednesday in Groveland to bring their concerns directly to Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove.

The nonprofit organizations Outdoor Alliance, California, American Whitewater, and Tuolumne River Trust, and the collective Tuolumne River Outfitters hosted the Tuolumne River Recreation Roundtable to discuss the area's outdoor recreation economy and the Tuolumne River's economic impact in the region.

Prominently displayed were maps to the Tuolumne River watershed, from its headwaters below Mounts Lyell and Dana to the Central Valley, as well as winter storm damage locations on Lumsden Road, a primary access route for rafting outfitters to reach the Tuolumne River canyon bottom and put-in points on the river.

The whitewater rafting business owners who helped organize the roundtable with McClintock hope the federal government will continue to work on solutions to repair the damage on Lumsden Road, help Don Pedro Recreation Agency clear tons of logs and other debris that washed into the Tuolumne River canyon and Don Pedro Reservoir, and reopen Ward Ferry Road, the primary take-out for whitewater outfitters.

Their goal was to bring members of the outdoor recreation community together to amplify work and collaboration that's been done so far to enhance access to public lands and waters, said Katie Hawkins, California program director for Outdoor Alliance.



Hawkins said the river provides outdoor experiences that attract hundreds of thousand visitors, drive the economy and create new jobs.

The use and management of the river requires collaboration and cooperation of a broad group of community members, outfitters, land managers, and partners, including Hatch Hetchy Water and Power, which controls dams and river flows below Cherry and Hatch Hetchy reservoirs.

Rafting on the Tuolumne River, pioneered in the 1960s, has been big business since the early 1970s.

Unlike many Highway 120 tourists who are keen on getting straight to Yosemite and its attractions, Tuolumne River rafting clients patronize Groveland area businesses and stay overnight at local campgrounds and hotels. Peter Drekeimer, policy director for the Tuolumne River Trust, said in a presentation



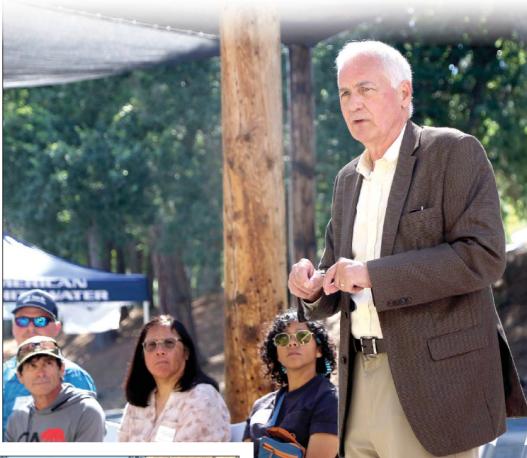
on how rafting attracts tourists to Tuolumne County. A typical couple who come to Groveland to raft the Tuolumne River can spend more than \$1,800 during a two-night stay. Lisa Mayo, president and chief executive officer of Visit Tuolumne County, said during the roundtable.

As many as 3,000 commercial rafting customers and 1,500 to 2,000 noncommercial rafting enthusiasts come

to the Tuolumne River annually. For the Central Sierra region, the outdoor recreation economy comprises a \$2 billion industry annually, Mayo said.

McClintock represents California's 5th Congressional District that encompasses all or part of Tuolumne, Fresno, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Madera and Mariposa counties, as well

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Courtesy / Sierra Mac River Trips (left); Guy McCarthy / Union Democrat (others). Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove (top) speaks at the Tuolumne River Recreation Roundtable hosted by several nonprofit organizations and the collective Tuolumne River Outfitters on Wednesday in Groveland. Beth Martinez, deputy supervisor for the Stanislaus National Forest, speaks at the event (above). William Heaps, with Groveland-based Lasting Adventures Inc. (below), asks McClintock a question. Access to the Tuolumne River for rafting and other activities has been hampered this year by lasting damage from last year's winter storms (left).

City council OKs first pay increase in 40 years

By ALEX MacLEAN
The Union Democrat

Sonora City Council members are giving themselves a pay increase for the first time in 40 years.

At a public meeting on Monday, the council voted 3-2 to boost the monthly compensation for council members and the mayor by about 75% beginning July 1 next year.

Council members will see an increase from \$125 to \$218.75 per month under the newly approved ordinance. The mayor's pay will increase from \$150 to \$262.50 per month.

Mayor Mark Plummer and Councilwoman Suzanne Cruz were opposed to the raises, while council members Ann Segerstrom, Andy Merrill and Matt Hawkins voted to approve them.

The total cost to the city for all five council members combined will go up \$5,850 per year, from \$7,800 to \$13,650.

Chris Gorsky, the city's administrative services director, said it's the first increase to the council's monthly pay since 1984.

It's also the first time the council's monthly pay has changed since 2009, when members took a voluntary reduction that cut their compensation in half.

The council's new monthly compensation starting next July is equivalent to a 5% increase each year since 2009.

California law allows council members and mayors in cities with 35,000 or fewer residents to receive a maximum of \$950 per month.

For comparison, Tuolumne County supervisors receive annual salaries of \$53,517 per year.

The council spent about 40 minutes debating the increases Monday before taking the vote.

Council members who supported the raises argued the current rate of compensation is inadequate for the amount of work that goes into the job.

Merrill, the youngest member of the council, said he was concerned that the current compensation effectively allows only "those of us from an incredible place of privilege" to serve.

"I don't see that as being, dreaded word here, very equitable for the people of the City of Sonora," he said. "I don't see that as being a true representation of the people who live here."

Having a good-paying job shouldn't be a requirement for participation in local government, Merrill said.

Segerstrom agreed with Merrill and said that the only people currently interested in serving on the council are retired or have the means to take on the extra work for minimal compensation.

Council members can also choose to not take their pay or donate it, Segerstrom said.

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McCLINTOCK

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as most of Stanislaus County east of Highway 99. He also serves as a senior member of the House Natural Resources Committee, the Subcommittee on Federal Lands, and on the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries.

McClintock told the roughly 40 invited guests at the roundtable Wednesday that he's had three objectives he believes should be central to federal lands policy: restoring public access to public lands, restoring good management to public lands, and restoring the federal government as a good neighbor to communities impacted by public lands.

"Access to public lands, not just river access, is important for all mountain

communities," McClintock said. "We know how to protect our forests. We did so throughout most of the 20th century, until these environmental laws made it impossible to continue to manage our forests, and we're dealing with the results now."

McClintock and other members of the House Committee on Natural Resources intend to host an outdoor field hearing later this week in Yosemite Valley.

The hearing, titled "Conservation in a Crown Jewel: A Discussion About Wildfires and Forest Management," is billed by McClintock's staff as an opportunity to address "the real-world consequences of failed forest management policies and catastrophic wildfires," scheduled at 11 a.m. Friday in the Curry Village Amphitheater, and it's open to the public.



Courtesy / Sierra Mac RiverTrips (above);

Guy McCarthy / Union Democrat (left)



Access to one of Tuolumne County's most popular and lucrative summer attractions, the mainstem Tuolumne River, has been especially limited this year due to significant winter storms damage. In June, Sierra Mac and All Outdoors outfitters had to try to paddle through tons of debris washed into Don Pedro Reservoir to try to take out at Moccasin Point (above). Tom McDonnell (left photo, left) and Marty McDonnell, owners of Sierra Mac RiverTrips, chat with Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove, the congressman for the Mother Lode, Wednesday in Groveland.

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