In Search of Fire- and Climate-Resilient Reforestation for Butte County Woodlands

Wolfy Rougle

Butte County woodlands are in transition. Thanks to climate change, high-severity fires, and 20th-century land use decisions, some Butte County woodlands face a real possibility of permanent type conversion to brushland (chaparral). While chaparral is beautiful and biodiverse, it is a less socially acceptable vegetation type than pine forest or oak woodland. Our communities face a crossroads where we have to decide what kind of vegetation type we want to live in, whether our desired landscape is even achievable, and what we are willing to sacrifice to get there. “Letting nature decide” is not an option because Butte County forests have been human-maintained since time immemorial. The only question is how we will manage our woodlands.

As a response to the Camp Fire, the Butte County Resource Conservation District (BCRCD) embarked on several collaborative projects to help local communities answer that question. The Concow Resilience Project is a post-Camp Fire restoration vision based on a collaborative consensus of what a fire- and climate-resilient forest might look like. (Sneak peek: it has more oaks.) The Butte Forest Plan will be a county-scale written inventory of forest conditions that doubles as a roadmap of projects to help us get to the forests we want to live in. Finally, BCRCD is also assisting the City of Chico with the development of its “Vegetative Fuels Management Plan,” a programmatic EIR document that will help the City more efficiently manage its parks and greenways, protect its botanical resources, and return good fire to the parks where it belongs.

Wolfy Rougle is Forest Health Watershed Coordinator with the Butte County Resource Conservation District. She will speak about her work on these projects. Wolfy is a longtime botany geek and holds a master’s in public administration from CSU, Chico.