

Important Community Mill Site Cleanup Meeting
6 p.m. Tuesday 25th, Town Hall

1. Show up and make your concerns heard.
2. Serious toxins have been identified in the mill pond. G-P wants to leave them “as is.”
3. Leaving them in place is not acceptable. We must plan for sea level rise, earthquake, and tsunami.
4. Without an excellent cleanup of the mill pond our community’s health is at risk and we will never have the opportunity to daylight the creeks.

We have learned a lot about G-P through the years. We learned that they never do the right thing unless forced to. We have also learned that they will only be required to do the right thing if the community demands it.

Everyone in Fort Bragg knows the mill pond is polluted. G-P has gotten away with leaving many spots on the former mill site not fully cleaned. With land use controls and deed restrictions, they are permitted to leave areas this way. G-P demanded it and our questionable laws have allowed it. This was a mistake on our community’s part and will have consequences going forward. In this final phase of the cleanup, however, we are talking about wetlands and the opportunity to restore historic creeks and create an environmental showcase.

Once again our coastal community must educate G-P. Since the closing of the mill in 2002 this has been the pattern. They have pursued a short sighted policy. It has always been about money, and it has missed many opportunities. They ignore the value of improving the health of our environment. Their best long term interest and our community’s best interest are now served by a thorough cleanup and a restoration of all the wetland areas on the Headlands. The old mill pond is central to this effort. To be clear about the important question of funding, it is G-P’s job to clean the mill pond. It will be our community’s task to raise the funds for daylighting creeks and parkland development. Without a cleaned mill pond these community desires will never come to pass.

Every coastal community in California is mandated to begin climate change adaptation. This process is expensive and state funds are being made available to restore wetlands and prepare for sea level rise. The old beach berm, made up of rip rap and industrial garbage must be removed. This should be part of the cleanup. The city, for its part, will be required to develop a plan for storm water management. The coastal community has always wanted and been promised a thorough cleanup. Yet, now G-P is trying to walk away from this obligation.

DTSC will put more pressure on G-P if we are clear and timely. This is not the end of the process, but it is a very important part. DTSC is requiring some small dig and haul actions. This is good. We should all acknowledge and support these moves. They frame this as an opportunity to connect the north and south trail. We welcome this recent announcement, as long as it doesn’t interfere with a full clean up of the mill pond.

Signage making clear that the mill pond is not safe is necessary. Additional remediation will be necessary. It is hoped that this work can begin soon, and it is going to require closing the center part of the trail when it occurs. This will be an educational opportunity and a chance to show that our community prioritizes human health and environmental recovery.

Environmental successes are happening on our coast. There is an active group of environmental professionals at work in Mendocino County. Over the last several years, restoration specialists, including those at the Mendocino Land Trust, Trout Unlimited, The Salmon Restoration Association, Jackson State Forest, the Conservation Fund, the Redwood Forest Foundation, the Nature Conservancy and more have carried out a number of important projects restoring creeks, removing barriers to fish passage, and cleaning up abandoned logging roads. These efforts are helping endangered coho salmon return from the brink of extinction. Bringing better health to our forests sequesters carbon in the effort to combat climate change. By uncovering buried creeks and restoring wetlands in Fort Bragg, we also sequester carbon. We have the skills and know how in our own community to do this on the former mill site. There are economic as well as environmental benefits for our community in following this vision. As a final note, an exciting development is the interest shown by local Pomo tribal environmental officers in the creek daylighting vision.

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<http://www.noyoheadlands.org/>
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