

# Opinion: Forest mismanagement bad for everyone

By Larry Weitzman

Recently several large wildfires burned up thousands of acres of coastal forests in several areas of California. While this is a disaster in and of itself, it also killed many people and burned down thousands of homes. The damages were so great that some insurers have chosen to leave the home and fire insurance business as losses were in the billions of dollars. Homeowners in the aftermath were left scrambling to acquire new insurance even if their homes were not in dangerous areas.

There are two issues. The first is maintaining safe forests and the second is the risk of building homes in “unsafe” fire areas and maintaining property in a safe manner. It’s like building homes in areas of flooding where rivers have a history of flooding and the continued rebuilding in those very areas that flooded so they can flood again with the same attendant damages for which the federal government, meaning you and I get to pay for again through heavily subsidized federal flood insurance and FEMA grants.



Larry Weitzman

But we have tied our own hands in handling this fire problem whether the main fuel is from oak trees or pine trees. We have passed laws “protecting” them; mostly the result of tree hugger types perhaps thinking if they save a tree, they will

live forever. How does a tree hugger ever justify mowing their own grass? There are state laws, local ordinances and even an El Dorado County General Plan policy (7.4.2.8, sometimes known as the Oak Resources Management Plan and Oak Woodland Management Plan) that “protects” oak trees and costs you lots of money.

These laws and ordinances place a large and expensive burden and restrictions on your property. If you have property of an acre or more, it can cost you tens of thousands of dollars in oak tree hoops you will have to jump through to develop your property, with the filing of forms, hiring of experts, mitigations costs and the list goes on. If you violate the law, the penalties can be horrendous, running into the tens of thousands of dollars. We probably lost more oak trees in the last year from fires than private property owners could ever cut down in 20 years.

But let’s look at what saving the oak trees has cost us in just the last year. According to CalFire, these fires which appear to be naturally caused, burning over dense underbrush and wild grasses which eventually ignite the dense oak trees. The oak trees then “crown” or the tops of the trees explode with fire. And then the worst happens, the spread of the fire by “crowning” oak trees as their embers from the leaves travel in the fire created windstorm and ignite fires miles away.

This kind of fire recently burned through the Wine Country area of California including hundreds of homes in Santa Rosa. The damages from these northern coastal California fires last year are reported to exceed \$9.4 billion in insurance claims alone (many people were underinsured) with some estimates going as high as \$180 billion in total economic losses. And I haven’t even discussed billions of dollars in losses and damages from the Southern California Thomas Fire of nearly 300,000 acres.

Residential properties reported about 6,000 total loses and

almost 20,000 homes received some damage. The over 6,000 vehicles destroyed are mere pocket change. And then there were the mudslides. It was a horrendous event. And I haven't even touched on the loss of life, human and animal and the destruction of the lives of those who survived.

And we spent several billion dollars in fighting these fires and lost some brave firefighters in the process. One more "cost" that is never talked about is the release of uncontrolled pollution. We spend billions on smog checks and equipment for our automobiles (over \$40 billion annually) and one big fire wipes out any gains. "Carbon banking" through trees has huge risks.

And the main fuels for these fires are brush, weeds and oak trees. The very trees we protect in which oak trees take on more importance than people.

Forest mismanagement has been a problem in this country and is similar to the Endangered Species Act, which has been used to hurt humans. Some "scientists" considered the small pox virus an endangered species. Our forests, whether pine or oak, have been burning as a result of this mismanagement for decades. Any forester worth his photosynthesis will tell you there are too many trees in our forests, double and triple a fire safe amount. But we pass laws to prevent their harvesting and pass laws making property owners pay huge fees to remove them. As a result, we have big deadly and damaging fires and a dead lumber industry. Brilliant.

*Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.*

---

# Opinion: California and Taiwan, renegade nation-states

By Joe Mathews

Is California becoming another Taiwan?

Taiwan is an independent nation—in its ambitions, its economy, its democracy. But many countries refuse to recognize it as a separate nation, deferring to mainland China, which claims Taiwan as a possession and responds with threats whenever Taiwan goes its own way.



Joe Mathews

California shares some aspects of this conundrum. Our state has the ambitions, economy, and democracy of a leading nation. But it remains very much a part of the United States, which responds with threats whenever California goes its own way.

Yes, Californians fervently hope that our current conflict with the American government is temporary. But the hard truth is that California's differences with America predate President Trump, and so our status as a halfway country will likely outlast him.

I spent last week in Taiwan, and the major lesson I learned is how exhausting it is being a smaller country in the shadow of a larger power. The challenges there resemble those of

California, and of younger siblings everywhere. When you must constantly defend yourself against a bullying big brother, how do you develop into a success, much less a global model?

Of course, comparisons only go so far. While Californians suffer verbal and legal attacks from the federal government, the Chinese government threatens to attack Taiwan militarily, seizing the island nation by force if it becomes too independent.

Still, Taiwan and California have much in common. Both are overachievers. California has the world's sixth largest economy, though with just 40 million citizens, it ranks 35th by population. Taiwan has the world's 22nd largest economy, with just 23 million people, making it 55th most populous worldwide.

Even in an era of rising nationalism, both Taiwan and California remain stubbornly internationalist, committed to free trade and immigration. Despite struggling to forge diplomatic relations, Taiwan stays close to other China neighbors—especially Japan—for self-defense. California, in a similar spirit, works with other states in legal defense against the federal government, and makes alliances with other countries to address climate change.

Both Taiwan and California see themselves as defenders of democratic values that are at odds with the increasingly authoritarian governments of their national big brothers. Taiwan and California each have independence movements—two former Taiwan presidents are campaigning for an independence referendum, and multiple ballot initiatives seek California independence.

Both movements pose the same question: how much must we suffer from Beijing or Washington before enough is enough?

There are many Taiwanese answers. The mainstream response is, stay the course. "We don't want to be in conflict with China,"

Taiwanese premier Lai Ching-te says. "But we won't bend to pressure either."

But I also heard more robust answers.

First, be opportunistic in building solidarity. Whenever the Chinese issue threats, use them to develop a shared identity. Taiwan has been adept at this. A generation ago, most Taiwanese told pollsters they saw themselves as Chinese. Now, after decades of Chinese bullying, most Taiwanese see themselves as primarily Taiwanese.

Second, never miss an opportunity to expand your autonomy when the larger power leaves an opening. Consider President Trump's recent threat to remove federal immigration enforcement from California. Our state's political leaders mostly disregarded the comments as Trumpian nonsense. Perhaps, they should have taken his statements as an offer—and accepted it, declaring the state would happily take control of immigration enforcement.

Finally, success is the best revenge. Conflict is competition, so you must be friendlier, more democratic—and more attractive than the larger power menacing you. The most interesting conversations I heard were about whether Taiwan should respond to China's militaristic behavior by declaring itself officially a neutral country, like Switzerland, unwilling to participate in wars outside its boundaries. Such a stance might make it harder for China to attack, and win Taiwan more international support. (Just imagine California, by ballot initiative, declaring that it would no longer support America's endless wars.)

It's possible to take the California-Taiwan comparison too far. "The mainland has missiles pointed at us," one Taiwanese journalist reminded me. "Does American have missiles pointed at you in California?"

No. But I took heart that Taiwan and California are pursuing

strategies based on a similar faith: that a smaller country, through the power of its own example, can change a larger place.

California's history of defining the American future demonstrates the wisdom of this approach. Taiwan's economic revival—which inspired China to open itself to foreign investment—also proves the point.

In Taichung's Literature Museum, I encountered one of the most magnificent trees you'll see outside Sequoia National Park. It's a banyan that has grown so different roots and trunks, that it now appears to be many trees.

"In this way," said a guide, "a tree becomes a forest."

*Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.*

---

## **Opinion: Most panhandling laws unconstitutional**

**By Joseph W. Mead, The Conversation**

Thousands of U.S. cities restrict panhandling in some way. These ordinances limit face-to-face soliciting, including interactions that occur on sidewalks and alongside roads, whether they are verbal or involve holding a sign.

According to a growing string of court decisions, however, laws that outlaw panhandling are themselves illegal. In light of rulings that found these restrictions to violate the freedom of speech, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver and dozens of other cities have repealed laws restricting panhandling in

public places since 2015.

As a professor of law and urban studies, I study how local ordinances can harm the poor, particularly people experiencing homelessness. I volunteer with the American Civil Liberties Union and other nonprofits to help fight for more equitable local policies. And I have brought together nonprofits and individuals to successfully change unconstitutional anti-panhandling laws across Ohio, my home state.

### **Charitable solicitations**

Over the past 30 years, cities have increasingly adopted laws to reduce or eliminate panhandling. Although a few jurisdictions simply ban panhandling outright, most ban the practice in certain areas, such as parks, near roads or near bus stops. Cities also regulate what they call “aggressive solicitation” – a term defined broadly to include behavior like asking for a donation twice, in pairs, or after sunset – on the basis that it can make passersby feel physically threatened or vulnerable to mugging.

The First Amendment protects everything from distributing pornography to waving hateful signs outside military funerals. So it is should not be surprising that it also protects fundraising pitches of all kinds.

In a trilogy of opinions issued in the 1980s, the Supreme Court struck down several state laws that restricted charitable solicitation, including laws that prohibited requests from nonprofits that, according to regulators, spent too much money on fundraising.

In ruling against charitable solicitation limits, the justices established two important precedents. First, charitable solicitation is constitutionally protected speech.

Second, local and state authorities can’t dictate which causes may or may not solicit donations within their borders. A



regulator's paternalistic belief that a cause is unwise or inefficient is not a valid reason to limit speech seeking support for it. The listeners can make that decision for themselves.

Panhandling is a basic form of charitable solicitation with a long history. Almsgiving dates back to the days of ancient Greece and the Bible.

Instead of asking for help on behalf of an animal shelter, food pantry or any other kind of nonprofit, the panhandlers ask for help satisfying their own personal need. In case after case, the courts have clearly ruled that the Constitution safeguards the right to make personal pitches the same way that it protects the ability of organizations to make their own asks.

The First Amendment guarantees free speech in public spaces like sidewalks, streets and parks. This freedom is extremely broad but is not without limits.

Even constitutionally protected speech can be somewhat regulated in public areas if the government can justify the restriction. Only rarely, however, can the government restrict protected speech in public spaces based on what is being said, as the Supreme Court reminded us in a 2015 ruling on street signs.

Governments primarily try to justify their restrictions on panhandling by saying they benefit most passersby, who consider expressions of poverty and desperation a nuisance, and nearby businesses, which fear losing customers.

But there's no freedom from speech, as the Supreme Court unanimously ruled in *McCullen v. Coakley*, a 2014 case about the rights of protesters to congregate near abortion clinics. The fact that someone within earshot cannot "turn the page, change the channel, or leave the Web site" to avoid hearing a message they don't like is "a virtue, not a vice," wrote Chief

Justice John Roberts.

### **Down and out but not silent**

No panhandling bans have made it to the Supreme Court. But in recent years, all lower courts ruling on this issue have found that laws imposing restrictions on sidewalk and roadside solicitation are unconstitutional.

While cities have some legitimate public safety concerns, focusing on a category of speech misses the point. It is at once too broad and too narrow, covering innocent behavior that isn't threatening and missing much behavior that is problematic.

Instead, cities remain free to regulate problematic behaviors directly, such as prosecuting suspected cases of assault and trespassing or making blocking the sidewalk illegal.

Even better, they can try harder to meet the needs of people who are seeking help rather than attempting to silence them. Portland, Maine, for example, is now hiring panhandlers to clean up public spaces after the courts threw out its restrictive ordinance.

Despite the spate of legal precedents, plenty of these laws remain on the books. Advocates like the American Civil Liberties Union are challenging anti-panhandling laws in Albuquerque, Houston and other places that still enforce this kind of law.

With these measures on their way out, cities now have a good chance to refocus their energies on helping, rather than arresting, their homeless residents.

*Joseph W. Mead is an assistant professor at Cleveland State University.*

---

# Opinion: Enough with the podium girls



The Amgen bike race that rolls through South Lake Tahoe has podium girls. Photo/LTN file

**By Latria Graham, Outside**

If you've ever seen a pro men's cycling race, you know the image: a lycra-clad athlete clambers onto the stage flanked by two beautiful women—so-called “podium girls”—in slinky dresses and heels. As he accepts his flowers and a signature colored jersey, he receives a kiss on both cheeks from his female escorts.

On March 1, organizers of the Tour de France announced to The Times their intention to end this antiquated practice in the 2018 race. This decision makes the Tour the second Grand Tour event to stop hiring podium girls—Vuelta a España was the first, in 2017.

That leaves just the Giro d'Italia, where presumably we'll still see scantily clad, well-heeled women kiss the male athlete du jour this summer.

**Read the whole story**

---

## **Opinion: Losing my kids to Calif.'s overcrowded trains**

**By Joe Mathews**

If California's train deniers are right—that no one ever rides trains here, that Californians prefer to drive or fly, and that high-speed rail is a boondoggle that won't attract riders—then how do you explain my wife's public humiliation?

Recently, our family was on Amtrak from San Diego to L.A., when an announcement came over the sound system: "Mrs. Mathews, we have two of your children here in the café car. Mrs. Mathews, you should never let your children walk unaccompanied on an Amtrak train."



**Joe Mathews**

Mrs. Mathews, upset at the scolding, looked for someone to blame: me.

Her accusation was based on an overly limited reading of the facts. True, I had been nominally in charge of our two older children when they went to the café car. But she missed the larger context, which absolves me and debunks the idea that Californians are train-phobic.

The Pacific Surfliner that day was mobbed, with every seat taken and passengers standing in the aisles and stairwells. So when I took those two hungry boys in the direction of the café car, the crowds were so thick I couldn't squeeze through. The boys, now 9 and 7, are very skinny and insisted on continuing on, despite my pleas, beginning a memorable adventure.

Our story may be singular, but the situation is not. Crammed Amtrak trains are commonplace in California. California is now home to three of the busiest intercity train lines outside the Northeast Corridor of the United States. The Pacific Surfliner has 3 million riders annually on trains from San Luis Obispo to San Diego, America's second busiest passenger rail corridor.

Two others are in the top 10: Capitol Corridor, from San Jose to Sacramento, has 1.6 million yearly riders, and the San Joaquins, serving Central Valley cities that train deniers claim have no taste for rail, tops 1.1 million annually.

All told, Amtrak carries 12 million riders in California each year. Amtrak would like to accommodate more of us, but service is limited by the lack of tracks and the fact that Amtrak must share tracks with commuter rail and freight. Amtrak even publishes guidance on its website on how to avoid the crowds. Among the advice for the Pacific Surfliner: avoid riding on Fridays and Sundays, when trains are especially crowded.

While train deniers have dominated the public conversation about rail's future in California, the sardine-like state of Amtrak California suggests that high-speed rail would be popular.

Studies in other countries suggest that high-speed rail draws people away from cars and planes, and inspires people to take trips they otherwise wouldn't. And why not? Riding trains in California offers unsurpassed beauty. Over the holidays, I was on a Pacific Surfliner along the Santa Barbara coast just as the sun set over the Channel Islands. Even the off-shore oil platforms looked beautiful.

Amtrak is far from perfect; the inside of the cars could be cleaner, the trains are slow, the Wi-Fi unsteady, and then there are those crowds. But that argues for more rail, not less.

After her public shaming, Mrs. Mathews ordered me to retrieve her two older children from the café car. But I couldn't physically break through the crowds of passengers standing in the aisles and stairwells. I couldn't even reach a conductor until I started climbing on top of armrests and over seats to reach a business class car, where people pay extra to guarantee a seat.

A conductor there tried to clear a path through the crowds, too, but they were too thick. So he radioed to the café car that we would wait until the next stop, where I could get off the train and then re-board directly into the café car. (My children communicated over the radio that I shouldn't hurry—they were having a great time.)

I asked the conductor how often the train was this crowded; he said this was standard for evening trains on weekends. And on late summer weekends when horses race at Del Mar, things are even more jammed, he said.

The next station was only 10 minutes away, but the train stopped because we were near a stretch of single track, and we waited for two trains to pass. It was a half-hour before we got to the station and I could get to the boys, who I found covered in chocolate chip cookie crumbs. From there, with a

conductor's assistance, we got back off the train again and sprinted up to re-board at the car where my wife and their little brother were. It took us five minutes to navigate the 40 feet to their seats.

Don't let the train deniers win. More train service—including high-speed rail—can't get here fast enough.

*Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.*

---

# **Opinion: Why real estate is still a good investment**

**By Ana Bourne**

The stock market has always attracted those who want to make large profits, but many prudent investors are wary of its instability—the recent 1,300-point drop of the Dow Jones Industrial Average for the week of Feb. 5 is a classic case in point.

Fortunately, the market bounced back recouping some of its losses, serving as a stark reminder of Wall Street's volatility. Luckily for us, the stock market is not the only place we can invest. In fact, a strong argument can be made for another time-honored, wiser and safer method to make money: real estate.

There are a few key reasons why real estate is currently and always will be a more stable investment than the stock market.

First, as a long-term, tangible investment, real estate values increase over time, naturally keeping pace with inflation.

Those who are patient and hold onto their investments during a real estate downturn are ultimately rewarded. This isn't necessarily true for the stock market, where the risk never changes and stocks can suffer unpredictable hits in value or even decrease to zero value over time.

Secondly, for those who are in a position to rent property, real estate is a certain source of stable, cash-based income. This allows a property owner to generate higher rental income during times of higher inflation, often proving to be a more lucrative investment than bonds when hedging against inflation.

When you purchase property, the mortgage rate, which remains the most expensive cost of maintaining a property, is typically locked in at a fixed-rate over a long period of time. This enables a property owner to borrow against their property's equity to make additional investments while recovering some of the cost of ownership through multiple tax benefits. While a property owner can rely on the stability of fixed-rate loans, as the landlord, they also can increase the rent to keep pace with the market.

Thirdly, the use of leverage in real estate is double that of investing in stock portfolios. What is leverage? It's simply using borrowed money in order to buy or finance something. For example, with a standard mortgage, a typical 20 percent down payment gets you 100 percent of the house in which you want to live (or rent). Some financing programs allow you to put even less money down, still granting you the same house.

Even if your real estate properties appreciate more slowly than stocks do, after a five-year period, often times you come out ahead, because of the combination of tax breaks and leverage. In the long-term, it has the capacity to generate years of consistent revenue, as the property itself will likely appreciate with value.



Real estate investments can be a good alternative to investing in stocks. If you prefer lower risk, hands-on investments, multiple tax benefits, and tangible assets...then real estate is where you want to keep your money.

*Ana Bourne is a Tahoe-area real estate investor, and owner and president of Global Alliance International.*

---

## **Opinion: When LA ruled the music scene**

**By Kent Hartman**

It was 1962, and the rock 'n roll record business was on the rise after the multiyear slump that had followed the debuts of artists like Elvis, Chuck Berry, and Little Richard. The industry's savior, in large part, was a manic, diminutive, wig-wearing, Hollywood-based record producer (and future convicted murderer) named Phil Spector.

The mastermind behind such throbbing, multi-instrumental hits as "He's a Rebel," "Da Doo Ron Ron," and "Be My Baby," Spector was a gesticulating wunderkind on the other side of the control room glass. And the effects of his so-called "Wall of Sound" were immediate and profound; 14 Top 40 singles from 1962 through 1963 dwarfed that of Spector's competition. Soon, seemingly everyone wanted to work with the tiny titan, or copy him, or both. Rock 'n roll had found its bombastic rebirth—and L.A. had solidified its place at the center of the action.

The late '50s and early '60s represented a time and place like no other in American history, particularly in sun-drenched Southern California. Convertibles, palm trees, bikinis,

surfboards, and ever-present transistor radios advertised a post-war optimism that reigned supreme among teens and twentysomethings. And the record business's rebound into a new kind of hot-sounding (and selling) style of rock and roll, exemplified in the simultaneous rise of many of Los Angeles' vaunted recording studios, was a critical part of the story.

Starting during Spector's heyday, one iconic studio after another came to prominence in the city: Gold Star, at the corner of Santa Monica and Vine; Crystal Sound, just two blocks south; TTG, about a mile away from them both, near Hollywood High; and a few dozen more. The windowless, nondescript buildings, jammed with expensive recording gear, would become the epicenter of America's musical universe, humming with activity 24/7, for the better part of almost four decades. They generated an unprecedented string of million-seller singles and albums, and attracted all the hottest musicians: Neil Young. Steppenwolf. Joni Mitchell. Three Dog Night. Paul Revere and the Raiders. Van Halen. Tina Turner. Fleetwood Mac. Sam Cooke. The Doors. Cheap Trick. REO Speedwagon. Madonna. Earth, Wind and Fire. Steely Dan. The Eagles. Guns N' Roses. Sly and the Family Stone. Even Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones made frequent pilgrimages.

Producers like Spector fueled the studios' rise. Picking the right studio for the right project was a crucial task, and—at least at first—was a producer's domain. Many record labels, including A&M, Motown, Liberty, Paramount, MGM, Warner Bros., and CBS maintained their own L.A. recording studios, which their artists were expected to use. But stature had its privileges, and successful producers found ways to get back to their favorite haunts.

Spector, who mostly worked with artists on his own Philles Records label (until 1966 when he faded from the business after the stinging, much-publicized failure of "River Deep, Mountain High," sung by a young Tina Turner), liked recording at Gold Star. Brian Wilson, the Beach Boys' production

mastermind, loved the cozy confines of Studio 3 at Western Recorders—even though the Beach Boys' label, Capitol Records, had a world-class, in-house studio nearby that the band could have used for free.

Sometimes a producer's preference came down to superstition, not wanting to mess with a good thing. If a producer had recorded a big hit or two at a certain studio, then the odds were good that he (in those days, producers were virtually all male) would be back for more. Paul Rothchild, the Doors' producer, only wanted to record at Sunset Sound after the surprise chart-topping success of the band's second single, "Light My Fire," in 1967. Peter Asher stuck with the Sound Factory after he scored a No. 1 hit there with Linda Ronstadt's "You're No Good" in 1974.

By the '70s and into the '80s, when album rock became the dominant force in popular music, the power balance in picking where to record began to tilt even further from label executives—this time, in favor of musicians, who also had pet studios. Jackson Browne initially favored the Sound Factory, then later Record One, on the other side of the Hollywood Hills in Sherman Oaks. Though the '80s version of the light-rock hit-makers Chicago were signed to Full Moon Records, distributed (and eventually owned) by Warner Bros., the band recorded at West Hollywood's Record Plant, in part because of its "artist-friendly" policies concerning in-studio partying.

Costs of making an album in Los Angeles could get hefty, but it really made little economic sense to set up shop anywhere else. It was still cheaper to record in a city where everybody knew everybody, nobody needed a plane ticket or a hotel room, and there were plenty of well-known local session musicians at the ready. Great recording gear also set the Los Angeles studios apart. The incessant push for better sound led, by the early '60s, to the creation of some of the most revered equipment in the business.

David Gold, the co-owner and co-founder (with Stan Ross) of Gold Star, hand-built that popular studio's coveted microphone preamps and world-famous echo chamber. Nearby, at Western Recorders, owner and technical wizard Bill Putnam built most of his own equipment, too—from mixing consoles to EQ units to limiters and compressors—and started a separate business to sell his gear to other studios around the world.

Also distinguishing L.A. studios was the “hang,” a shorthand word among musicians for the vibe, accommodations, and/or people in any given recording studio. Smart owners knew how to cater to the specific, if sometimes decadent, demands of their clientele. Niceties varied from studio to studio: sumptuous lounge areas, gourmet kitchens with chefs, private bedrooms, hot tubs, waterbeds, 24-hour personal assistants known as runners. Sunset Sound, the Village Recorder, and Cherokee were all known for the quality of their hang.

Coffee, tobacco, liquor, and depending on the artist, marijuana all were standard issue during recording sessions; sometimes harder drugs were, too (particularly cocaine, which some saw as a good tool to help stay awake). Liquor bottles might be everywhere. Ashtrays routinely overflowed with butts. About the only real no-no was spilling anything on the mixing console. That could actually get a person in trouble.

By the mid-'80s, the record industry was modernizing. Vinyl albums started falling out of favor, supplanted first by analog cassette tapes and then by digital CDs. At the same time, studios began moving away from analog recording equipment, which required engineers to use a razor blade to slice out a section of magnetic recording tape when they wanted to alter a portion of a song. Suddenly, a few clicks of a computer mouse could achieve the same result.

Despite the obvious benefits of digital technology, some classic L.A. studios, such as Sound City in the San Fernando Valley, didn't want to make a hefty investment in new

equipment and decided instead to ride out what they hoped would be a passing fad. It was a losing gamble; the demand to record on digital equipment only increased. Sound City managed to remain open for a time, bolstered by the success of Nirvana's "Nevermind" in 1991. But the studio never regained its previous level of popularity and ultimately closed for good in 2011. (Note: an effort to revive Sound City, by the daughter of its late owner, occurred in 2017.)

The introduction of ProTools recording software in the '90s further sped the old studios' decline by lowering barriers to entry. Today, spare bedrooms and garages are routinely used to cut "professionally" recorded songs.

A full-throttle phase of record industry mergers and acquisitions during the 1980s, involving some very big companies, had an impact, too. The bottom line became far more important. Gone were the warm-and-fuzzy late '60s and early '70s, when labels—largely run by hustlers, dreamers, and music lovers—frequently covered the cost for fledgling acts to cut two or three albums before seeing a hit record out of the deal, if ever.

Inadvertently ushering in the new era of fiscal responsibility, in 1979 Fleetwood Mac—with the colossal success of 1977's "Rumours" still reverberating—got their label, Warner Bros., to provide a custom, million-dollar rebuild of the Village Recorder's Studio D in Westwood to record a follow-up album. When Tusk didn't sell as well, Warner Bros. began taking a much harder look at album-related expenditures, no matter how big the musical act. As did most of the other labels in town.

Today, some landmark recording studio buildings in Los Angeles remain standing—a few with functioning studios still inside—but gentrification has rendered many nearly unrecognizable. At the corner of Sunset and Gower, in the heart of old Hollywood, sit the remains of the celebrated CBS

Columbia Square facility, birthplace of hit singles such as Simon and Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water." Now a mixed-use complex called Columbia Square, the site features an upscale sushi bar, a high-end jewelry store, and about 200 high-rise condos.

Gone too are Wally Heider, Record One, RCA, Cherokee, Larrabee, Motown, Goodnight L.A., Crystal, TTG, Kendun, American Recording, Rumbo, Davlen, Clover, Amigo, Grandmaster Recorders, and more—names that were once commonplace on the jacket backs of scores of gold and platinum albums.

Radio Recorders on Santa Monica Boulevard, where Elvis cut many of his hits, is now an art exhibition space. Gold Star mysteriously burned to the ground in 1984, and is now a strip mall. Even A&M Records' venerated in-house studios on La Brea Avenue in West Hollywood—the birthplace of Carole King's "Tapestry," Bruce Springsteen's "Tunnel of Love," Aerosmith's "Get a Grip," and "We Are the World," the 1985 anthem that helped raise money for African famine relief—has morphed, becoming the headquarters of the Jim Henson Company, home of the Muppets.

Most of L.A.'s irreplaceable temples of sound have gone silent, leaving only a handful of still-intact studios—Capitol Records' in-house facilities, Sunset Sound, the Village Recorder (now the Village Studios), the Record Plant, the Sound Factory and a few more. The glory days in the '70s or '80s of seeing Linda Ronstadt, Mick Jagger, and Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers laying down tracks at the same time, in the same building, are long gone.

Yet there may be hope. RCA's historic Studio A in Nashville recently escaped the wrecking ball with the help of some well-heeled philanthropists. So did the revered Power Station in New York. A visionary local businessman saved Sun Studio in Memphis, where some very cool cats called Elvis, Johnny, Jerry Lee, and Carl all got their start. Perhaps the same kind of

preservationist efforts could emerge in the City of Angels, to save the literal building blocks of its rich musical heritage.

*Kent Hartman is the author of two books about the glory years of the Los Angeles music and recording scene during the '60s, '70s, and '80s: "The Wrecking Crew" and "Goodnight, L.A." He lives in Portland, Ore.*

---

## Opinion: SF vs. L.A.: A contest of contempt

By Joe Mathews

Which city—San Francisco or Los Angeles—do you love to hate more?

This is shaping up to be California's question for 2018. Each of the top contenders for governor is a former mayor of one of those cities, and each embodies certain grievances about his hometown. And backers of both candidates are already playing to resentments about these two places.



Joe Mathews

Gavin Newsom, like San Francisco, is derided as too wealthy, too white, too progressive, too cerebral, too cold, and so focused on a culturally liberal agenda that you might call him

out of touch. Antonio Villaraigosa, like Los Angeles, is derided as too street, too Latino, too instinctual, too warm, and so unfocused in his economically liberal agenda that you might say he lacks a center.

The interesting news of this contest of city loathing is that there is a contest at all.

For decades, Los Angeles has been second to none in the amount of contempt it feels from other Californians. The City of the Angels—with its smog and traffic and gangs and phony Hollywood stars—represented everything the rest of the state was determined not to be. “Beat L.A.” was such a unifying chant—heard in stadiums and arenas from Sacramento to San Diego—that it could have replaced “Eureka” as the state motto.

San Francisco, on the other hand, was a place that Californians preferred to love. It was small and beautiful—the perfect weekend getaway.

But over the last generation, the relative positions of the cities have changed. Los Angeles has weakened—especially since the early 1990s recession—while San Francisco has become unimaginably wealthy and powerful.

In their study, “The Rise and Fall of Urban Economies: Lessons From San Francisco and Los Angeles,” UCLA’s Michael Storper and other researchers showed that the Bay Area and Greater L.A. were similar in the 1970s in household income, innovation, investment, education and creative jobs. But they have since diverged so that the Bay Area’s household incomes are 50 percent higher, and L.A. now lags in educational attainment and investment.

The study found that San Francisco’s open culture encouraged the exchange of ideas that drives growth, while L.A.’s top-down economy, dominated by a few key players, translated into less intellectual ferment, and too much investment in the old economy.



But this new, advanced, San Francisco Bay Area has stirred more resentment. It is too expensive for most Californians to even contemplate living there. Its technology companies now reach into our intimate lives, disrupting our livelihoods.

San Francisco also has taken over the state's politics. One of our U.S. senators, Dianne Feinstein, is a former San Francisco mayor, while the other, Kamala Harris, is a former San Francisco district attorney. This power is not just the product of a tough San Francisco political culture that breeds competitive candidates; it also reflects a public that participates more. Though the Bay Area has a million fewer voters than Los Angeles County, in elections the Bay Area often records more votes.

San Francisco, once famously open-minded, now faces the slur that it is unrepresentative—too narrow in its thinking. Peter Thiel, the conservative billionaire tech investor who backed Donald Trump's presidential campaign, is relocating his residence, business and foundation to L.A., because "Silicon Valley is a one-party state" that only tolerates liberals.

Of course, both cities are liberal places and have much in common, as do the two former mayors. Newsom and Villaraigosa are among America's most progressive politicians, representing two of America's most progressive places—though both have been friendly to business and development. Both are extraordinarily bright men who, perhaps because they struggled as students, sometimes betray insecurity about their intellectual faculties. Both endured personal scandals for which their cities have forgiven them.

And both come from cities facing similar challenges: sky-high housing prices, unrelenting homelessness, outdated infrastructure, and unbalanced economies that don't produce high-enough working-class wages. Both cities have a power to create their own alternative realities—and spawn some pretty daft ideas.

Ideally, California would get a governor who brings lessons from both cities.

Newsom, having run San Francisco, has experience navigating freakishly Byzantine politics and governing in a one-party place, which is what Sacramento has become. And Villaraigosa, having run a sprawling state-sized city, understands how to seize the attention of an apathetic public in a place with weak civic institutions, which describes much of California.

I wish Antonio had more of Gavin's Bay Area jones for data. And I wish Gavin had some of Antonio's L.A. groundedness and horse-sense. But what I most wish is that, during this year's political fight between two cities, we don't forget just how lucky California is to be home to both.

*Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.*

---

## **Letter: Barton crews serves at Bread & Broth**

**To the community,**

Sponsoring their first Bread & Broth Adopt A Day of Nourishment on Feb. 26, Barton's pharmacy department sent a wonderful group of young health care professionals to help with the sponsorship dinner. Acting on behalf of their fellow pharmacy department members were Cathy Deering, Jeff Koeck, Chrissy Robertson and Celeste Taormina.

According to Dana Tucker, B&B's sponsor crew coordinator, "This wonderful group did an amazing job. They wanted to help

with everything and anything. They loved working with the dinner guests and had a smile on their faces the entire evening.”

The opportunity to participate and bring food and fellowship to the Monday diners is always a rewarding experience and for the pharmacy department members the evening was just an extension of their caring and concern for those who are experiencing difficult life situations.

“We enjoyed coming and meeting the community” said Robertson. “The people we served were so grateful of us being here. Thank you for inviting us to come and help support at our sponsorship dinner.”

B&B is also grateful to have the support of the Barton pharmacy department for our mission of easing hunger and their important service in our community.

**Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth**

---

## **Opinion: TRTA, USFS partners more important than ever**

**By Chris Binder**

Nonprofit partners of government agencies play a critical role in managing trails, recreation, planning and other essential activities taking place on public lands. Locally, the Tahoe Rim Trail Association is the region’s largest nonprofit trail organization and has the primary responsibility for managing and maintaining about 200 miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails in and around the Tahoe basin in partnership

with the U.S. Forest Service and Nevada State Parks.

The Tahoe Area Mountain Bike Association, another regional nonprofit, maintains close to 100 additional miles.

With only about 300 total miles of non-motorized trail in the Tahoe basin, these numbers confirm the significance of agency/nonprofit partnerships in managing the recreation resources that are vital to the quality of life and economy of the Tahoe region. While USFS firefighting costs consume a rapidly growing portion of already tight budgets and staff hours, the role of the TRTA and other nonprofit partners in managing resources on National Forest lands has become more important than ever.

As Randy Moore, USFS Pacific Southwest Regional Forester, noted in his **op-ed late last month**, "More fires mean less funds for local Forest Service projects." The Forest Service is the only federal agency required to fund its entire emergency management program through its regular appropriations budget. This means that the more the agency spends on the essential work of fighting large, devastating fires, the less it has to spend on other programs, like maintaining and constructing trails and upgrading recreation facilities. While the importance of the USFS firefighting program is undeniable, it comes at a great cost to other crucial work the USFS has traditionally accomplished. Moore and countless others both in and out of government have been working to fix this broken budgeting system for years, but so far no solution has been able to pass both houses of Congress. In the meantime, the USFS has its hands tied as more and more of its staff and budget are dedicated to fighting increasingly intense and widespread fires. This leaves fewer people and less money available to maintain and construct trails and other recreation infrastructure or plan for future recreation projects. Such functions are vital on our public lands, particularly in the Tahoe basin where 56,000 permanent residents and 5.7 million annual visitors rely on them.

A 2015 USFS publication titled "The Rising Cost of Fire Operations: Effects on the Forest Service's Non-Fire Work" notes that the loss of staffing and funding for non-fire work on National Forests has a "debilitating impact [on] ... programs and infrastructure that support thousands of recreation jobs and billions of dollars of economic growth." This is particularly true in communities, such as ours, that are dependent on outdoor recreation and pristine public lands. USFS staff dedicated to managing National Forest lands decreased by 39 percent between 1998 and 2015, while fire staffing increased 114 percent over the same time period (the overall number of staff remained largely unchanged at around 23,000). Similarly, the report projected that 67 percent of the national USFS budget would go toward wildland fire programs by 2025, up from just 16 percent in 1995. It's troubling to note that only three fire seasons after the publication of the report that projection has been revised. The USFS now expects to reach the 67 percent benchmark by 2021, with no data to suggest that the cost of firefighting will be curbed any time soon. Between 1998 and 2015 USFS funding (adjusted for inflation) fell 35 percent for inventory and monitoring programs, 64 percent for land management planning, and 68 percent for capital improvement and maintenance of facilities. USFS money for planning, building and maintaining recreation infrastructure is literally disappearing in a haze of smoke.

A shift of staff and money within a federal agency on a national scale does not necessarily equate to a shift in priorities for local agency staff. Our local USFS personnel recognize the importance of recreation in the Tahoe region. We have dedicated and talented individuals in our local and regional USFS offices who work hard to find creative solutions to managing trails and other recreation facilities that do not rely on dwindling funding from the agency's budget. However, each passing year brings longer absences by agency staff pulled from other duties to fight fires, more key non-fire

positions left vacant and unfilled, and a reduction in the agency's ability to produce funding for non-fire projects. In the USFS's "National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System" published late last year, the agency cites a need to shift to "a model of shared stewardship" that embraces "a community driven and locally sustainable trail system model" led by volunteers and nonprofits. Members of the trails community are recognizing that the USFS is increasingly more reliant on local non-profit partners to maintain and expand recreation opportunities than at any time in the past.

The TRTA and the Tahoe region's other nonprofit trail organizations are up the task, and have been expanding to plug the holes left by diminished agency resources. However, now more than ever, local nonprofit groups working on public land need public support to lead the charge. These groups are building, maintaining and improving the valued recreation infrastructure that helps to make the Tahoe region one of the best places to recreate in the country. If you value outdoor recreation on public lands and its effect on our community's quality of life and economy please consider becoming a member of a local trail organization or joining one of the scores of volunteer events hosted around the lake each year. Our forests and trails need us, now more than ever.

*Chris Binder is the director of trail operations for the Tahoe Rim Trail Association.*