

# Arcata gets bigger with forest annexation

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ARCATA – Arcatans woke up April 19 to a town that was about one-half square mile larger than it was the day before.

The City of Arcata's footprint is now about 9.6 square miles, thanks to the just-approved annexation of the 10 parcels that comprise the 325-acre Sunny Brae Tract of the Arcata Community Forest.

Environmental Services Director Mark Andre said he received word of final approval from the state Board of Equalization on April 18. The annexation had previously been approved by the county's Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo).

Also brought into city limits is the 2.4-acre Humphry property that will link the north and south segments of the Arcata Ridge Trail at Fickle Hill Road.

As with the original Arcata Community Forest to the north, the newly annexed Sunny Brae Forest Management Unit (SBFMU) will be managed for trails, public access, recreation, sustainable timber har-

vest, wildlife conservation and to host water storage facilities.

The expansion of city boundaries also gives Arcata Police jurisdiction in the Sunny Brae Tract, and allows enforcement of the Arcata Municipal Code there.

According to a LAFCo staff report, most of the SBFMU was zoned Natural Resource-Timber Production (NR-TP), a legacy designation from the core 175 acres' years as a regularly-logged forest owned by Sierra-Pacific Industries.

The adjacent 114-acre Morris property, also now city owned and part of the SBFMU, was also NR-TP. Zoning amendments adopted as part of the annexation plan redesignate the land as Natural Resource (NR).

Two single-family residences also occupy one portion of the SBFMU known as the Davis property; that area is one Residential Very-Low Density (R-VL).

Interestingly, the annexation means that about 50 privately-owned parcels up Fickle Hill Road are now surrounded by City of

Arcata property, but not within city limits. These "island" parcels don't receive any of the city's urban services, such as water and wastewater service, and the city isn't seeking annexation of those properties due to the additional burden it would place on existing infrastructure.

Andre said the city has been paying substantial taxes on recent acquisitions that expanded the SBFMU, including the Morris, Schmidbauer and Humphry properties. No more – as city-owned property, it's now tax exempt.

"The benefit to the city is that those taxes will go away," said Finance Director Janet Luzzi.

The 175-acre Sunny Brae Tract was sold to the city in 2006 following a determined effort to preserve it from logging. That and a successful fundraising effort, spearheaded by the Sunny Brae Neighborhood Association, was led at the time by now-Third District Supervisor Mark Lovelace.

He first learned of SPI's Timber Harvest Plan (THP) via a legally required "door

hanger" notice to adjacent property owners, which set him in motion to head off the harvest, presaging his subsequent political career. At the time, he thought his involvement in the THP comment process would be wrapped up in about a month.

Now, 16 years later and with many daunting milestones achieved, Lovelace was glad to hear of the ultimate consummation of the process.

"When the whole thing started in 2000, I don't think that I or any of the neighbors know how it would resolve," he said. "This was kind of a dream at that point. It's nice to think that the original 175-acres spurred this whole process of adding properties and linking all that together."

Historically, annexations have been key to Arcata's growth. It started in the 1850s as the town of Union, and grew from what was basically the current downtown area via annexations of Northtown, the Sunset and Westwood neighborhoods, Valley West, suburban Sunny Brae and other outlying areas.