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TRUSTED BY LOCALS AND LOVED BY VISITORS SINCE 1915

Bald eagle sighting reminder of group's role in bird's recovery

By CHRIS COUNTS

WHILE THE Ventana Wildlife Society has received widespread recognition for reestablishing the California condor along the Monterey County coast, the nonprofit's first mission was doing the same for the bald eagle.

A local man recently captured a striking photo of a bald eagle in Carmel Valley — a reminder of the success of a program Ventana Wildlife Society kicked off in 1986. The nonprofit worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game to bring back the majestic birds to the wild.

"We released 70 individual birds from 1986 to 2000," executive director Kelly Sorenson told The Pine Cone. "All were young birds collected from viable populations up north in Alaska and Canada and brought down here as nestlings."

A devastated population

The bald eagle reintroduction effort reached a milestone in 1993 when the first successful nest was established locally in nearly 60 years. The widespread use of DDT during the mid-20th century is blamed for causing the bird's decline. "The last breeding pair was seen in Torre Canyon in Big Sur in 1934," Sorenson noted.

It's uncertain precisely how many bald eagles live in the region, but researchers can say how many breeding pairs exist

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PHOTO/ROBERT EGGLESTON

This bald eagle, recently photographed along Carmel Valley Road, is a living reminder that the iconic bird has reestablished itself locally.

Height limits could doom valley treehouse

By CHRIS COUNTS

UNLESS SHE appeals a decision Wednesday by the Monterey County Planning Commission, a Carmel Valley woman who built a treehouse in her backyard for her grandkids will probably have to tear it down.

The planning commission voted unanimously not to approve an after-the-fact permit for the treehouse because its highest point is 18 feet above the ground, while the limit for such a structure, according to the county's building code, is 15 feet.

In March 2015, Donna Buchholz of 17 Ring Lane hired a contractor to build a 238-square-foot treehouse in her backyard. The structure was built so it would appear to be supported by the branches of oak trees, but it would actually be supported by 6-foot piers.

In July, work was stopped by the county after a neighbor, Tracy Call, complained, and a code enforcement case was opened.

In response, Buchholz applied for a design approval, which was granted in March 2016. But during the 10-day appeal period for the approval, Call raised objections.

Wastewater treatment project to start delivering

■ Peninsula's first new supply in 'forever'

By KELLY NIX

THE GOVERNMENT agency that was created more than four decades ago to augment the Monterey Peninsula's water

supply is expected to deliver its first major water project by the end of June.

Pure Water Monterey — a collaboration between the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District and the Monterey Peninsula wastewater treatment district — will use advanced treatment to convert sewage and other contaminated water into 3,500 acre-feet of potable water per year. California American Water will inject the water into the Seaside Basin for storage, extract it and distribute the purified water to its customers.

"The project is 85 percent done, and it's looking good," water district general manager Dave Stoldt said Tuesday. "It's the first significant addition to the local water supply in forever."

The \$123 million project, which is expected to undergo testing beginning June 22 and start delivering water in July, will reduce pumping from the Carmel River, which has been the Monterey Peninsula's primary water source for almost 100 years but is now off limits because of environmental concerns.

While the new project will make it possible to curtail pumping from the river, none of the water will be available for home remodeling projects, business expansions, or infill development on vacant lots.

At the Feb. 21 water board meeting, sewer dis-

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PHOTO/COURTESY MONTEREY ONE WATER

This advanced purification facility to convert wastewater into drinking water is expected to begin operating at the end of June. Water from the facility — which is adjacent to composting and solar operations in Marina — will be stored underground for six months before being delivered to consumers.

CITY WANTS TO HELP FILL VACANT STOREFRONTS

By MARY SCHLEY

IN LIGHT of the numerous empty shops downtown, including several on Ocean Avenue, planning director Marc Wiener and other city staffers are planning to map out all of the ground-floor commercial spaces in town that are empty. Downtown tenants are supposed to notify the city when they close up and leave town, he said Thursday, but they never do.

Armed with that information, along with the types of businesses that are allowed in those various storefronts, city officials might then be able to help connect potential tenants with the property owners.

"It's going to be a team effort. It won't take long if there are six of us doing it," he said of the mapping. "We're going to see how many ground-level spaces we have, and of those, how many vacancies. And then we'll start tracking that," including noting when an application comes in for a new business to fill an available space.

The information and accompanying map "can be used for an economic development/marketing effort on the part of the

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Cal Am takeover fans: Savings can come later

By KELLY NIX

IT COULD take several decades after a public takeover of California American Water for customers to see savings on their water bills — if ever — and the people who sponsored the voter-approved ballot measure are fine with that, according to statements made at last week's Monterey Peninsula Water Management District meeting.

Last November, voters passed Measure J, which calls for the water district to acquire the Cal Am system if it's "feasible" to do so. A group called Public Water Now was the sponsor of Measure J, and its campaign featured promises of "affordable water."

But Cal Am says it's not for sale, which means a takeover might have to be done by force, and last week an attorney hired by the water district warned that for such a takeover to hold up in court, savings to Peninsula customers would have to be "shown very early on." However, backers and supporters of Measure J said this week it's fine if savings don't come for many years.

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Almost lifelike because it is



Is it a painting, or a photo, or a living scene? The answer can be found in an exhibit that opens Saturday at Sunset Center. See page 8A.